A Commentary on
The Book of Hebrews
A Commentary on
The Book of Hebrews
Volume 1
Chapters 1–8

by
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Tacoma WA
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Foreword

In 1995 I began teaching through the Book of Hebrews for our mid-week Bible study at Beit Hallel in Tacoma, WA. We spent nearly three years working our way through the thirteen chapters of the book, and each week I would write out notes for my own use as I taught through that week’s portion. As people saw that I was using prepared notes for the study, they asked if they could have a copy, and thus what began as notes for my own use ended up as weekly handouts. When we finished our study, these note pages eventually comprised a semi-commentary on the Book of Hebrews, resting on a shelf in my library in a large, 3-ring binder.

I had chosen the Book of Hebrews for our weekly Bible study for an obvious reason: it seems to be one of the first books in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) to which our detractors turn to prove that the “New Covenant” has forever replaced the “Old Covenant.” Based upon their understanding of Hebrews, they are quick to point out that Torah observance is therefore no longer God’s will for His children. In fact, one does not need to look very far among the many commentaries on the Book of Hebrews to find well known Christian scholars who essentially interpret Hebrews in this way as well. So my reason for choosing the Book of Hebrews for our Bible study was to look carefully at the text, interpreting it in its own context as well as in the context of the Bible as a whole, to debunk this errant theological perspective by showing that it could not stand if one would allow the text of Hebrews to speak on its on terms.

But there was an even more significant reason why I personally desired to study through Hebrews. This grand book is full of great encouragement for believers in Yeshua to persevere in their faith and in so doing, to bring glory to the One Who has redeemed us and Who “always lives to make intercession” for us (Heb 7:25). Hebrews speaks to the very issues that Messianics face as we seek to honor our LORd and Savior Yeshua by obeying His commandments and walking in His footsteps. This is because the Book of Hebrews consistently speaks to the core issues of what constitutes “saving faith,” the object of which is Yeshua Himself, our great High Priest ministering on our behalf in the heavenly tabernacle.

It was for these same reasons that in October, 2013, I once again chose the Book of Hebrews for our ongoing weekly Bible study. We finished our study through Hebrews in May of 2016, and these years of study gave me the opportunity I desired to rewrite my notes on
Hebrews with a view to publishing them as a verse-by-verse commentary. By God’s grace, and through the strength He provides, this has now become a reality.

Some practical issues regarding the commentary are worth mentioning. First, in lieu of printed indexes (Scripture, Greek words, Hebrew words, Rabbinic literature, Subjects, etc.), we have chosen to provide a pdf file of each volume to those who purchase the commentary. As you know, a pdf file is very searchable via computer and very efficient. Second, when searching for Scripture references or for references from Rabbinic Literature, please refer to the Abbreviations page.

I must admit that it seems strange to me that so few commentaries written from a thoroughly Torah-perspective have been forthcoming from the pool of Messianic teachers in our times. One is hard pressed to find even a few commentaries that deal with the text itself on a verse-by-verse basis and to do so from a pro-Torah perspective. Why this is I do not know, but I hope that in some ways, this commentary will help fill a gap and that God’s people—those who hunger for the truth of His inspired word—will be helped and encouraged by the insights this commentary might offer in understanding, appreciating, and applying the eternal message of this inspired book of the Scriptures.

Finally, I want to voice a special “Thank you!” to those of you who were part of our Hebrews weekly bible study for the past three years. Your questions, comments, and dialog in our weekly on-line gatherings were especially encouraging and helpful. And a special thanks to my dear wife, Paulette, who sat with me each week as we aired the on-line study, and who likewise helped me edit and proof the written copy week by week. Of course, all final content is mine, including (unfortunately) whatever typos and other various mistakes might remain.

My primary hope in publishing this commentary is that those who may use it to help elucidate the Book of Hebrews as they read and study it, will grow in their understanding and appreciation of the excellencies of our Messiah and Savior, Yeshua. And that as a result they will be strengthened in their faith to serve Him, to sanctify His Name, and to rest in His work as our exalted heavenly High Priest.

Tim Hegg
Tacoma, WA
### Abbreviations

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#### Apostolic Scriptures
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### Rabbinic Literature

Tractate name preceded by:

- m. = Mishnah
- b. = Bavli
- y. = Yerushalmi

Mid. Rab. = Midrash Rabbah
Introduction

Title

The Biblical text nowhere includes the title “Epistle to the Hebrews.” The oldest manuscripts of the book (א, B, C, D²) do, however, add the title “to the Hebrews” or begin the first verse with “To the Hebrews.” Later manuscripts show evidence of the title being enlarged to “The Epistle to the Hebrews” (Peshitta Syriac) and even “The Epistle to the Hebrews of Paul the Apostle” (Harclean Syriac, and similarly ℃² and ℓ²). Other titles or introductory notes in the ancient manuscripts reference Timothy as the one through whom the epistle came, as written by Barnabas and sent to the Laodicenes or the Alexandrines and even as an epistle specifically directed against the heresies of Marcion.

The writer calls the book a “word of exhortation” (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως, 13:22) and notes that he has written briefly, the Greek term ἐπέστειλα, epesteila, (“written”) being the word from which our English “epistle” is derived. Though there is no formal opening or greeting as is normally the case in epistles, Hebrews bears other characteristics of the 1st Century epistle: the author obviously knows the readers, is aware of their problems and issues, has mutual friends (Timothy, cp. 13:23), and closes with a typical salutation. We may safely conclude that Hebrews was written as an epistle by a leader of the followers of Yeshua to a group of believers who were not strangers to him, and who had reason to respect the author’s authority.

The Original Language of the Epistle

The earliest notice of the epistle is to be found in Eusebius, itself a quote from Clement of Alexandria (who lived approx. 150-220 C.E.)

Thus Ignatius has done in the epistles which we have mentioned, and Clement in his epistle which is accepted by all, and which he wrote in the name of the church of Rome to the church of Corinth. In this epistle he gives many thoughts drawn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and also quotes

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verbally some of its expressions, thus showing most plainly that it is not a recent production. Wherefore it has seemed reasonable to reckon it with the other writings of the apostle. For as Paul had written to the Hebrews in his native tongue, some say that the evangelist Luke, others that this Clement himself, translated the epistle. The latter seems more probable....

This belief, that the epistle was originally written in Hebrew and later translated into Greek, was held fairly consistently by the medieval Western Church.

While some continue to hold this position, the majority of scholars today have come to the conclusion that the original letter was written in Greek, and that Clement was voicing an opinion for which he, in fact, had no material basis. No physical evidence of a Hebrew original exists (no manuscripts, not even scraps of such), and the Greek of the present text reads like an original composition, not a translation. For instance, the word order is very Greek and many Greek compounds used in the text of Hebrews have no equivalent in Hebrew or Aramaic.

It is, of course, quite possible and perhaps even probable that the author of Hebrews utilized documents known to himself which were written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and that these may have influenced his choice of words and phrases as he wrote this epistle in Greek. There seems to be some evidence, for instance, that a document in Hebrew or Aramaic may have existed in the early 1st Century which contained sayings of Yeshua and descriptions of His miracles and teachings. But remember, no physical evidence has yet been found to support the idea of a Hebrew or Aramaic original for the book of Hebrews.

The bottom-line in this discussion, however, must be the recognition that God, in His infinite wisdom, superintended the text we now have so that the inspired message is intact. We dare not (as some have) attempt to explain away difficulties in the text by suggesting that a supposed translator did not understand the original. Our view of inspiration must extend to the providential preservation of the text as well.

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2 See James Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel & the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Eerdmans, 2009), who presents a good argument for a Hebrew or Aramaic document used by the Gospel writers as they wrote their respective Gospel accounts.
**Date of the Epistle**

The specifics which surround the Epistle to the Hebrews are cloaked in the silence of history. The author does not identify himself, nor does he specify who the readers are, their location, or the specific purpose of the epistle. Therefore, the date of the letter can be only estimated on the grounds of suggestive data. For instance, an epistle written by Clement of Rome, called 1 Clement, shows clear literary dependence on Hebrews.

...for he, being the radiance of his majesty, is as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent. For so it is written: “He makes his angels winds and his ministers flames of fire.” But of his Son the Master spoke thus: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the Gentiles for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.” And again he says to him: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Who, then, are these enemies? Those who are wicked and resist his will. (1 Clement 36:2–6, italics indicate parallels to Hebrews)

If 1 Clement is dated to 95-6 CE (as it generally is), then that date would be the terminus ad quem for Hebrews. However, some scholars would place the writing of 1 Clement early in 70 CE, and if that is the case, then Hebrews could likewise be dated before the destruction.

The earliest date for its composition is not so easily determined, however. The author describes himself as among those who have received the message of salvation second hand (2:3). His addresses have been believers for a considerable time (5:12). They have previously experienced persecution, reproach, and imprisonment (10:32-34). All of this indicates that some time had elapsed since their initial coming-to-faith in Yeshua (6:4).

Those who opt for a pre-70CE date rely primarily upon two things: 1) the manner in which the author refers to sacrifices in the present tense (9:6-10; 10:1-4) and 2) the lack of any mention of the Temple’s destruction. However, these are not, in and of themselves, conclusive, since works written well after the destruction of the Temple also speak as though the Sanctuary still stood (e.g., Josephus, Clement of Rome, and the Mishnah).

While a pre-70 CE is possible, there are reasons to believe that the

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epistle was written a decade or so after the destruction. First is the persecution against the followers of Yeshua under Nero (64–68 CE), which was followed by 12 years of relative peace and prosperity, which ended with the persecutions under Domitian, the persecution that may have caused the exile of John to the isle of Patmos (Rev 1:9). History has shown the periods of peace and prosperity often mark a decline in religious fervor. Such a period of peace may have resulted in some “drifting away” from the gospel they had heard (2:1), or becoming hardened “by the deceitfulness of sin” (3:13), while others apparently were no longer attending services at the messianic synagogues (10:25). It seems reasonable that such references in our epistle may indicate that it was written during the years of peace and prosperity, while the reference to persecutions in the “former days” (10:28) may well refer to those endured under Nero.

Second, our author rebukes his readers for failing to learn the teachings of the Apostles (5:12), for by the time of his writing they should have been teachers but were still in need of being taught. This might well indicate a lapse of time from the era in which the Apostles taught.

Third, Hebrews was written after the destruction of the Temple, the author would be offering to the Messianic believers a reasoned response to the question of how they could continue their life of faith without the Temple and priesthood. Likewise, it seems quite clear that rabbinic Judaism, which emerged in the post-destruction era, was developed not only as an ideological necessity to maintain a viable Judaism without Temple and priesthood, but also a polemical response to the growing influence and power of the emerging Christian Church.

Our author’s argument is that believers in Yeshua still had a “heavenly tabernacle” as well as a High Priest, and that the reality of the Temple and its services had come to fulfillment in the work of the ascended Messiah. Thus, “that which is growing old and ready to disappear” (8:13) could well reference the Temple services and Levitical priesthood, which were disappearing even though some sought to maintain them (in part) even after the destruction.¹

Finally, one wonders why the heavenly High Priesthood of Messiah garners no major emphasis in the epistles of Paul and the other Apostles. Paul mentions the fact that Yeshua “intercedes for us” (Rom 8:34) and that Yeshua is only the “mediator” between God and man (1Tim 2:5). Likewise John describes Yeshua as the believer’s “Advocate with the Father” (1Jn 2:1). Yet one questions why the High Priestly work of

¹ See the commentary on 8:13.
Yeshua does not receive greater attention in Paul and the other epistles. The answer may be that the author of our epistle was writing at a time when the Temple and priesthood were a thing of the past, so that when he speaks of their having been set aside, he had the freedom to make such statements without incurring the wrath of the Jewish community and their leaders.

For these reasons, I favor putting the date of Hebrews a decade or so after the destruction, somewhere between 80 and 85 CE.¹ But this dating can only be speculated. The best we can say with confidence is that the Epistle of Hebrews was written sometime between 60 and 95 CE.

**The Author**

A great deal of material has been generated over the issue of authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the early centuries authorship was foundational to the acceptance of a letter or book as canonical, i.e., divinely authoritative. Books in which the author’s identity was not clearly stated therefore lagged behind in being widely accepted. What is more, the early Church was hesitant to accept the work of someone who was not recognized as within the circle of the apostles. We know that pseudepigraphic works (letters or books written by someone who falsely attributed them to one of the apostles or a close acquaintance of an apostle) were motivated by a desire to find credibility for one’s own writings among the established, Christian communities.

**PAUL** – An early tradition attributed the Epistle of Hebrews to the Apostle Paul. Ψ⁴⁶, a papyrus manuscript dated to c. 200 C.E., includes the Epistle to the Hebrews among Paul’s other epistles. Eusebius, quoting a tradition apparently held by Clement and Origen, notes that he too was aware of a tradition that Hebrews was written by Paul in Hebrew or Aramaic:

> ...the Epistle is Paul’s, and that it was written to Hebrews in the Hebrew language, and that Luke translated it with zealous care and published it to the Greeks; whence it is that the same complexion of style is found in the translation of the Epistle and in the Acts. [Further] that the [ordinary] phrase ‘Paul an Apostle’ was not placed at the head of the Epistle for good reason; for, he says, in writing to Hebrews who had

formed a prejudice against him and viewed him with suspicion, he was wise not to repel them at the beginning by setting his name there.¹

Most biblical scholars today dismiss Pauline authorship on the basis of style, language and content. For instance, Paul spends a good deal of time on the issues of circumcision, the Torah and the works of the Torah, justification, and sanctification (to name a few). These themes are not stressed in Hebrews. What is more, in an epistle which focuses on Jewish themes, it seems highly unlikely that Paul would, for example, avoid the issue of circumcision, something not mentioned at all in Hebrews. And, these issues of style and theme were also noticed by ancient authorities. Eusebius himself suggested that Hebrews was the work of Clement since it matched the style and theme of his first epistle.

A further consideration is the notice (2:3) that “the word” (presumably referring to salvation in Yeshua) was first proclaimed by “the Lord,” and then given to the author by those who had heard Him. This appears to contradict Paul’s strong position in Gal. 1:12ff that he did not receive the gospel from man, but directly from God. Paul heard the voice of Yeshua on the Damascus road (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). And Yeshua spoke with him afterward (Acts 18:9-10; 22:18-21). It seems almost impossible that Paul wrote the words in Hebrews 2:3.

Still, the KJV of 1611 followed the tradition of Pauline authorship, and printed the title “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews,” a line which is still included in the KJV editions (though in some printings a marginal note alerts the reader to the question of authorship).

BARNABAS – Tertullian (an early church father, ca. 225 C.E.) suggested that Barnabas was the writer of Hebrews. He explained his reasons for holding this view: Barnabas was a Levite (Ac 4:36-37) and would thus be very acquainted with the priestly functions. He was from Cyprus where he learned Greek very well. Furthermore, he was familiar with the Christian community and their needs, and thus was in a perfect position to write Hebrews.

Until the early 4th century C.E., the Epistle of Barnabas and the Epistle to the Hebrews circulated together in some communities, and were thus reckoned as both by Barnabas, the companion of Paul in his first missionary journey (Ac 13). Furthermore, since the Epistle of Barnabas²

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¹ Westcott, Hebrews, p. lxvi.
² Most scholars dismiss the idea that Barnabas, the companion of Paul, ac-
Introduction has as its subject the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, some felt the two letters so similar in content as to warrant their singular authorship by Barnabas. (Codex Sinaiticus has both the Epistle of Barnabas and the Epistle of Hebrews at the end of the manuscript, after Revelation.) However, a comparison of the Epistle of Barnabas (dated between 70 C.E. and 132 C.E.) with Hebrews shows many differences, not the least of which is the consistent spiritualization of the Torah commandments in Barnabas which are, in Hebrews, accepted as divinely given, and therefore viable for the followers of Yeshua Who is the very goal of the Torah itself (cf. Rom 10:4).

**APOLLOS** – Martin Luther suggested that Apollos wrote Hebrews. He felt Apollos was a good candidate since he was knowledgeable in the Scriptures (Ac 18:24-26) and persuasive in his teaching abilities; he was from Alexandria where there was much Greek education, and where the Greek translation of the Tanach (Old Testament) was made and widely used; and, the church flourished in Alexandria. Since the Septuagint (abbreviated Lxx) was the “Bible of choice” in Alexandria, and since it is used in the quotes from the Tanach in Hebrews, Luther felt this added weight to his suggestion of Apollos.

But what deals a fatal blow to this suggestion is the simple fact that Clement of Alexandria ascribes the epistle to Paul. If Apollos were, in fact, the author, it seems highly unlikely a church leader from the same city would not have known it.

**PRISCILLA** – Some modern scholars have suggested that Priscilla, who together with her husband instructed Apollos (Ac 18:26), is a good candidate for the author of Hebrews. But 11:32 tells against this idea: the author uses a masculine participle when he refers to himself in the phrase “I do not have time to tell about Gideon….” The author could not, therefore, have been a woman.

**CONCLUSION** – The authorship of the Hebrews cannot be determined absolutely. What can be determined is that the author knew his readers, that he was acquainted with the problems they were facing, and that he felt some measure of authority in calling them to maintain the faith they had previously confessed. He recognizes the persecution which they had undergone, a persecution which appears more and more ominous in their future, and that some, no doubt because of persecution, had withdrawn from the public gathering for worship. Yet the author is separated from the community to which he writes (13:19),

tually wrote this work. See Jay Curry Treat, “Barnabas, Epistle of” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [here after *ABD*] (Yale, 1992), 1.611–14.
though reasons for his absence are unknown. It may be that he, along with others, were sent out on a mission (note the plural “us” in 13:18) or even that he or some of his group had been imprisoned (note the “release” of Timothy, 13:23).

He felt a great need to substantiate his claims and exhortations from Scripture, as seen by the many quotes in the epistle. This is even further seen from his use of the Tabernacle in his exposition of the priest and his office. The regulations of the Tabernacle are specifically outlined in the Torah, while those of the Temple were, for the most part, simply carried over from the Tabernacle, but were not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures.

The author is knowledgeable of more than the written Scriptures, however. The early traditions related in the Gospels and echoed in the much later rabbinic materials are subtly interwoven into the author’s polemic. For instance, the notice regarding oaths as ending the dispute of almost everything (6:16; 7:20) suggests that he was aware of the debates (reflected in the later rabbinic literature) regarding the high priority of taking an oath in a disputed litigation. Additionally, our author knows the process priests undergo as they enter their office, i.e., that it did not require an oath (7:21) as well as the daily routine of first sacrificing for the sins of the priest, and then for the sins of the people (7:27).

Perhaps more to the point is the description in 9:19 of Moses at Sinai. Here our author goes far beyond the Exodus account (Ex 24), adding calves and goats, water, scarlet wool, and hyssop to the sprinkling ceremony. For a writer who bases his arguments on the written Scripture, here is evidence that he also knew some of the standard traditions which had become well entrenched in some of the Jewish communities. He thus shows himself to be part of a Jewish community with such traditions and interpretations of the biblical text.

The Purpose & Recipients of the Epistle

Seeking to ascertain the addressees of the epistle can be a great asset in the process of interpreting the author’s intention and meaning. But the only data we have for such an inquiry is the epistle itself, which offers us no specific information on this matter.

Primarily two opinions have been held regarding the destination to which the epistle was originally sent: 1) Palestine in general, and Jerusalem specifically,1 and 2) Rome. The majority of modern scholars

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1 This was the “common opinion of ancient commentators”: Chrysostom,
opt for the second option. But other locations have also been suggested, including “Samaria, Antioch, Corinth, Cyprus, Ephesus, Bithynia and Pontus, and Colossae.”

Those who consider Rome to be the destination of our epistle usually appeal to 13:24 in which greetings are sent from “those from Italy,” which is thought therefore to indicate that they were sending greetings to those “back home,” but such an inference is by no means certain. It is just as likely that “those from Italy” (for example, Aquila and Priscilla) were sending greetings to friends anywhere in the Mediterranean. Further appeals for a Roman destination is the fact (already mentioned) that Clement of Rome was familiar with the epistle, as well as the close affinities between Hebrews and 1Peter, which was written from “Babylon,” an obvious circumlocution for Rome.

But the destination of the epistle is not nearly as significant as is the ethnic identity of the group being addressed. They were obviously messianic believers since our author exhorts them to remain true to their confession of faith in Yeshua (4:14; 10:3). But much debate surrounds whether the community being addressed was primarily made up of ethnic Jewish believers, a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, or primarily Gentile believers.

The tradition of the early commentators (which is still quite prevalent among modern Christian scholars) was that the recipients were “Jewish-Christians” who, from our author’s perspective, had failed to distance themselves completely from Judaism and, as a result, were edging toward a relapse into Judaism and thus abandoning their faith in Yeshua as Messiah. The draw “back into Judaism” was thought to be a longing for the temple and its services, which would explain the emphasis upon the “heavenly Tabernacle” and the superiority of Messiah as the heavenly High Priest.

Modern scholars have suggested other motivations which were drawing these “Jewish-Christians” back into “Judaism.” Since the author speaks of persecutions which his addressees have undergone, some have suggested that they were considering a return to “Judaism” in order to enjoy the protection it had as a religio licita (legitimate religion within Roman law). Others have suggested the draw of Hellenistic

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1 Ibid., p. 10.
Jewish theology or the desire to identify with sectarian piety or belief known through specific halachic practices, or some combination of all of these.

This traditional view, that the purpose of the book was to rescue a community of “Jewish-Christians” from returning to “Judaism,” sees the epistle as “a polemical or apologetic tract arguing for the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, its ‘fleshly ordinances’ (7:18; 9:10), and its ‘diverse and strange teaching’ (13:9).” But such a view falters by the simple fact that, while the author clearly argues for the superiority of Yeshua in all things, he never argues for His being the promised Messiah as though his readers are questioning His messiahship. In other words, he does not view the community he addresses as in danger of abandoning their belief that Yeshua of Nazareth is the true Messiah promised by the prophets.

Nor does the author reprimand his readers for observing Torah commandments (washings, food regulations, etc.) and he does not take a negative view of sacrifices (9:8-15; 10:1-4). He rather wants them to understand the fuller sense of these rituals, i.e., as pointing to Yeshua Who would, in an ultimate sense, fulfill their eternal realities. He thus emphasizes a high “Christology” as a corrective to what appears to be an errant view of Yeshua’s divine nature which may have been gaining traction among the messianic group to which he writes his epistle.

Further, the traditional Christian view of our epistle fails to reckon with the fact, now well established in modern scholarship, that one simply cannot speak of a “normative Judaism” in the pre-destruction era but must admit of an array of multifaceted “Judaisms.” This being the case, the early followers of Yeshua saw themselves not outside of but within the circle of “Judaism.” It was not until the late 1st and on into the 2nd Centuries that the emerging Christian Church identified itself as “other” vis-à-vis the traditional synagogue.

It seems to me that the author was concerned, not with the “Jewishness” of the believing community to which he wrote, but rather that they were on the brink of being persuaded to follow teachings which he characterized as possessing serious error. This errant teaching was apparently one which, while recognizing that Yeshua was Messiah, nonetheless wavered on the issue of His deity and divine authority, considering rather that “legal Jewish status” (maintained by specific

1 Attridge, Hebrews, ABC, 3.104-111.
2 Christian commentators often refer to such Torah commandments as “Jewish ritual practices.”
Torah observance) was the necessary requirement for retaining covenant status within the family of God. This would then be similar to “another Gospel” which Paul was combating in his Epistle to the Galatians, but with this difference: while Paul is primarily exhorting Gentile believers in his epistle to the Galatians (and their being persuaded to undergo “conversion” through proselytism), our author appears primarily to addresses ethnic Jews. What both epistles conclude, however, is that Yeshua as Messiah has made a full and sufficient atonement for sin, and that He alone is the avenue through which one may enter the family of God as a bona fide member of the covenant, whether Jew or Gentile. Thus, our author’s emphasis upon the deity of Yeshua is foundational for his soteriological arguments, for only the sacrifice and priestly work of an infinite, eternal Messiah could win eternal salvation for those who are His. Thus, to deny the eternal divine nature of Yeshua was, in our author’s mind, to deny that He is the true Messiah. To think that one could continue to affirm Yeshua as Messiah but deny His being God in the flesh was, to the author of Hebrews, an impossibility.

General Outline of the Epistle

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      c. The earthly priesthood was constantly changing because priests died, but Yeshua lives forever and thus His priesthood is permanent, 7:23–24
      d. Thus, the outcome of Yeshua’s High Priestly intercession is the complete salvation of all who are His, 7:25
      e. Yeshua’s priesthood is superior because He offered Himself once for all time, 7:26–27
      f. The Levitical priests were weak, i.e., unable to effect complete salvation, but Yeshua, the Son of God is perfect,
and thus able to effect eternal salvation for His people, 7:28

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enant, 10:1–18
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      those who brought sacrifices, 10:1–3
   2. The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin, 10:4–10
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      b) Application of the Quote:
         1) first (earthly) Mishkan supplanted by the second
            Mishkan (heavenly), 10:8–9
         2) Yeshua’s sacrifice is complete (He sat down) and
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A. Yeshua enters the most holy place in heaven for us, 10:19–21

B. We may have confidence and full assurance that His sacrifice on our behalf has been accepted, 10:22

C. Exhortation: remain firm in your faith in Yeshua, 10:23–25
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   2. Torah requires death in regard to sin, and anyone who disregards the Torah is condemned to death, 10:28
   3. Denying Yeshua is an even more severe transgression against God, 10:29–31

E. Exhortation: Consider how God has already sustained you through trials and persecutions, 10:32–39
   1. you endured suffering, humiliation, tribulations, 10:32
   2. you identified with others who were being mistreated, 10:33–34
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   2. Pre-flood: Abel, Enoch, 11:4–5
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   1. Even as the faithful of old focused on the promise, so we too must focus upon the promise, i.e., upon Yeshua, 12:1–3
      a. He is the author and perfecter of faith
      b. He endured the cross in order to obtain the joy set before Him
      c. He sat down (completed His work)
      d. set your hopes and eyes upon Him
   2. Consider your current struggles as God’s tool to train you in faith, 12:4–13
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   2. to one’s spouse: fidelity, faithfulness, morality

B. Do not be entangled in materialism, 13:5–8
   1. be free from the love of money; God will supply your needs, 13:5–6
      a. Quote: Deut 31:6; Josh 1:5
      b. Quote: Ps 118:6
2. Walk in the footsteps of your leaders, 13:7
3. Yeshua, Who never changes, is the ultimate model to follow, 13:8
C. Do not be carried away by strange teachings, 13:9
D. Be confident of Yeshua’s effectual intercession in the heavenly Mishkan, 13:10–14
E. Offer up sacrifices through Yeshua, our High Priest, 13:15–16
   1. sacrifices of praise, the fruit of lips
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F. Obey your leaders and submit to their leading, 13:17
G. Pray for us, 13:18–19
H. Salutation, 13:20–25
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Chapter One

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

In the Greek, the verse begins with “in many portions and in many ways.” Its literal order (in the Greek) would be: “By many ways and various ways formerly God, having spoken to the fathers in (by) the prophets....”

In many portions – (at many times, NIV; in many...ways, NRSV). The two terms (πολυμερῶς, ploumerōs; πολυτρόπως, polutropōs) are used only here in the Apostolic Writings. In the Lxx the word translated “in many ways” (πολυμερῆς, polumerēs) is found in Wis. 7:22 –

“For in wisdom there is a spirit intelligent and holy, unique in its kind yet made up of many parts; subtle, free-moving, lucid, spotless, clear, invulnerable....”

πολυτροπῶς is the basic adjective, and means “much-turned,” i.e., “much traveled, wandering,” “turning many ways,” “versatile, ingenious, changeable, manifold.” The adverb (the word in our text) thus means “in divers manner.” Note IV Macc 3:21.

“...just then certain men took repressive measures against the communal harmony and implicated us in various disasters.”

The two words may be used together as an hendiadys¹ to mean simply “in many ways.” If there is a contrast or distinction in the words, the translation “in many different parts and in many different ways” would highlight the differences. The translation of the NIV is interpretive, since neither of the words themselves specifically mean “many times.”

The point is that throughout the history of Israel, God gave His revelation through events (particularly the exodus and wilderness wanderings), through direct revelation to the prophets, and especially in

¹ “Hendiadys” (from Greek “one through two”) is an term describing a phrase which utilizes two words to express one thought, as in English “good and plenty” or “well and good.”
the Sinai event where He spoke audibly and gave written revelation mediated through His servant Moses.

Long ago – the word πάλαι (palai) can mean “long ago” or simply “in the past.” (Cf. 2Pet 1:9; 2Cor 12:19).

God, after He spoke - This reminds us of the central focus of this opening paragraph, namely, that God actively revealed Himself to His people through the prophets and through their written prophecies, that He is still actively revealing Himself. The message of the prophets was not their own but was and is the revealed truth of God.

The form λαλήσας (lalēsas from λαλέω, laleō, “to speak, talk”) is an aorist participle which gives rise to the NASB “after He spoke.” An aorist participle usually denotes action which occurs before the action of the leading verb, which, in this case is “has spoken” in verse 2. Thus, “… having spoken … He has now spoken.…”

to the fathers – this term usually denotes the primary figures in the Torah. These would include Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. But it is contrasted in the next verse with “us” and thus is used simply to refer to those righteous ones who came before, who received God’s revelation in a primary sense from the prophets.

in the prophets – Sometimes the Greek preposition ἐν (en, “in”) bears the sense of “through,” or “by means of,” but not always. Here it seems possible that the phrase carries both the sense of “by the life of the prophets” as well as “by means of their words.” God, through His Ruach (Spirit), made His message known as He empowered the prophets to announce His will through direct revelation to them. The term “prophets” is definite (τοῖς προφήταις, “the prophets”) to denote the well-known office of the prophet within the Israelite community.

2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Some translations begin the verse with “but,” to emphasize the obvious contrast being made between God’s revelation to the prophets of old and His ultimate revelation in Messiah Yeshua. The Greek, however, contains no such contrastive conjunction.

in these last days1 – The phrase is commonly found in the Lxx (e.g., Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Jer 23:20) and corresponds to the Hebrew בְּאַחֲרִית.

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1 Literally “upon these last days” or “in regard to these last days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων).
The Jewish Sages distinguished the “present age” (עָלָם הַזֶּה, ‘ôlam hazeh) from “the age to come” (עָלָם הַבָּא, ‘ôlam haba’). The present age is imperfect, while the age or world to come is perfect because of the reign of God. The “days of the Messiah” denotes the period which would end the “present age” and usher in the “world to come,” that is, the perfect reign of God. The author of Hebrews appears to take this viewpoint. The present age has come to its final chapters since the Messiah has come—the present age is at the end of its days. The fact that he writes “these days” shows clearly that he considered his time to fall within the “end of days.” Cf. Is 2:2; Jer 23:20; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1; Ac 2:17; 2Tim 3:1; James 5:3; 2Pet 3:3.

He has spoken to us - The word “spoken” (ἐλάλησεν < λαλέω) is in the aorist tense, effectively gathering together all of the work of Messiah and viewing it as the definitive Word spoken to reveal the Father. But note that this revelation was specifically directed “to us,” that is, God’s perfect revelation was destined for the ears of His people. In this the perspective of Yeshua is reiterated, for we hear Him in conversation with the Father saying:

At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.” (Lk 10:21; cf. Matt 11:25)

in His Son - So NASB. The RSV, NET, ESV translate “…has spoken to us by a Son,” taking the preposition ἐν (en) with the dative as “dative of means,” thus “by a Son.” Further, since the Greek does not have the article with the word “Son” (ἐλάλησεν ὡς ἐν υἱῷ), these translations have “by a Son.” The NASB has added the word “His” (“in His Son’”), feeling that the context warrants this interpretive addition.

What should we understand by the anarthrous1 construction, “in/ by a Son”? When the article is missing in the Greek (where one might otherwise expect it), the emphasis is very often upon the quality or the nature of the noun rather than upon a specific identification. In other words, the emphasis here is upon the contrast between the prophets

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1 “Anarthrous” is the technical term meaning “without the article,” i.e., without the definite article “the.”
of old and the One who came with the quality of sonship, Who is the Prophet *par excellence*. This “son-type” revelation is complete and full, while the revelation given to the prophets is necessarily incomplete and was progressive, i.e., constantly being expanded as God revealed more and more of His will to the prophets. “The story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ, but there is no progression beyond Him.”¹

*whom He appointed heir of all things* – The aorist verb “appointed” (ἔθηκεν < τίθημι, tithēmi) points to a legal reality (which easily links to the rights of inheritance). Paul uses the same term to describe his apostolic appointment (1Tim 2:7; 2Tim 1:11) by which he possessed apostolic authority. Thus, for Yeshua to be “appointed” heir is to reckon with His rightful and legal ownership of all things. This anticipates the quote of Psalm 2. God sets (installs, coronates) His king (Messiah) Who then becomes heir of the nations and of the “very ends of the earth.” Note Col 1:15–16:

> And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Col 1:15–16)

*through Whom also He made…* – Yeshua is constantly the agent of creation in the Apostolic writings (Jn 1:3, 10; 1Cor 8:6; Col 1:16). The dominion originally promised to Adam (Gen 1:28) is established by Messiah (Ps 8), for the One who creates becomes also the heir of all things. Thus, the purpose of the creation must ultimately be found in the heir of all things. Indeed, it was for Him that the world was created in the first place. Here, as often, the Son is the executor of the Father’s designs. The universe is created “through” Him, i.e., by His agency.

“…the world” – The Greek (τοὺς αἰῶνας, literally “the ages”) no doubt reflects the common Hebrew יָמִים (yomim), which can mean “ages, eternity” as well as “universe, world.” Note, for example, m.Avot 4.16 –

> This world (יָמִים עַלָּם) is like a vestibule to the world to come (soon:准备工作 to enter into the banqueting hall.’

The point is this: using this term (“ages”) focuses the attention upon

¹ F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 3.
the sum of the periods of time including all that is manifested in and through them. Yeshua is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, which, from a Hebrew perspective, encompasses much more than the physical realm. It includes also the events and the ages in which these events take place. Yeshua is heir and creator of the universe, and all things and events are to be finally summed up in Him and by Him.

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

*And He is the radiance of His glory* – The Greek word translated “radiance” (ἀπαύγασμα, apaugasma) can mean either (1) radiance, i.e., “a shining forth from within” or (2) reflection, i.e., “a shining forth because of a brightness from without.” Both are obviously true of Yeshua. He revealed His own glory on the mountain (Matt 17:1f; Mk 9:2f; Lk 9:28f) but also was the revealer (reflector) of the Father’s glory (cf. 2Cor 3:18-4:6).

*the exact representation of His nature* – In the Greek, one word represents the phrase “exact representation,” χαρακτήρ (xaraktēr, from which we derive our English word “character”). This word is found in non-biblical Greek in the sense of “to mint or stamp a coin,” i.e., to impress the image of a ruler on the metal. Some early Greek fathers used the term to refer to the “image of God” in man (1Clement 33:4). The word is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. It is also found in the Lxx of 2Macc 4:10 –

> The king agreed, and, as soon as he had seized the high-priesthood, Jason made the Jews conform to the Greek way of life.‘

Clearly the author intended his readers to be reminded that the best representation they could ever have of the Father was to be found in the incarnate Son. He, like the minted coin, was and is an exact representation of the nature or essence of God.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) The Greek word ὑποστάσεως (hupostaseōs), translated “nature,” literally means “a standing under” which came to mean “foundation” or “ground,” and thus “substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality” (see BDAG, ὑπόστασις). It was from this Greek word that the fathers of the
and upholds all things – The Greek word for “uphold” (φέρων < φέρω, pherō) is a participle and emphasizes the present, on-going reality of the verbal action. Yeshua is constantly upholding, bearing, or guiding all things, i.e., the entire universe, to its appointed end and purpose. He is not a passive burden-bearer (as the Greek mythological Atlas), but rather guides and sustains the universe.¹ Paul teaches the same truth in Col 1:17.

by the word of His power – The Greek has ἔρμα (hrēma, “spoken word”) rather than λόγος (logos, “communication whereby the mind finds expression,” “thing,” “word”). While the two Greek terms clearly overlap in meaning, the emphasis here might well be upon the providential decree of God which is represented by His speaking a word. Thus, the world was created by a word (“and God said…”) and it is thus sustained by the same active providential care and direct utterance of the Messiah. He “speaks” and it is accomplished: dictum factum.

“Power” is the Greek word δύναμις (dunamis), “ability, strength, power,” which in this case is attributed to Yeshua. He possess the same omnipotence as does the Father with Whom He is one.

made purification of sins – The picture is clearly that of the Tabernacle or Temple, and the purification of the sinner as accomplished by the sacrificial ritual. Purification was the major concern of the 1st Century pious Jew, and is introduced here as a foreshadowing of the detailed study of Yeshua’s own sacrifice expounded later in the epistle.

The aorist participle ποιησάμενος (poisamenos), “made,” stresses that the purification of sin was completed without need for further purification.

He sat down… – The obvious contrast is with the Levitical priests. No furniture for sitting (chairs, benches, etc.) is mentioned in the descriptions of the Tabernacle or Solomon’s Temple, and for good reason: the work of the priests was never completed. Anticipating his more full exposition of Yeshua as the Great High Priest, our author’s statement that “He sat down” emphasizes from the very beginning of the epistle that Yeshua’s salvific work in His death and resurrection is finished and needs no further offering of Himself as a sacrifice for sin.

at the right hand of the Majesty on high – In the Semitic cultures, the early Christian Church derived the theological term “hypostatic union” which formed the crux of the early Christological debates. See my God’s Self-Revelation: A Course in Theology Proper (TorahResource, 2012), pp. 116ff.

¹ The later rabbinic literature regularly ascribes the sustaining of the universe to God, e.g., Mid. Rab. Exodus §36.
right hand was understood to be the place of honor and authority. Thus Jacob crosses his hands so that his right hand rests upon Ephraim (Gen 48:14, 17) and Solomon sets a throne for Bathsheba “at his right hand” (1Ki 2:19). The metaphor of the “right hand” and its sense of “authority” and “power” is regularly used of God in the Psalms.

The word “majesty” (the Greek has the article, τῆς μεγαλωσύνης < μεγαλωσύνη, megalōsunē) is not infrequent in the Lxx as a periphrasis for God and was used in the rabbinic literature to refer to the Temple (b.Berachot 58a) and to the Messianic Age (Mid. Rab. Genesis 67.5). The only other occurrence of the word in the Apostolic Scriptures is in Heb 8:1.

4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

having become – “Having become” translates the single Greek word γενόμενος (genomenos), the aorist participle of γίνομαι (ginomai) which has the basic sense of “to come into being through process of birth or natural production,” “to come into existence,” “that which happens or takes place,” and “to indicate entry into a new position, to become.” But ginomai can also simply have the sense of “to be” or “to exist,” as in Rom 3:4 –

May it never be! Rather, let God be found true (γινέσθω δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἀληθής), though every man be found a liar… (Rom 3:4)

The obvious sense of Paul’s phrase in this verse is that God is true, the verb ginomai expressing what is manifest and real, but certainly he is not suggesting that “God became true.”

Yet the point our author intends to make (as seen in the larger context of our passage) is that what made the superiority of Yeshua manifest and plain to the entire universe was the victory He won over death through His incarnation and suffering. Thus, though Yeshua, from all eternity, was more excellent and preferred than any being which He would create, the manifestation of His superior position was most

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1 Likewise, Aaron and his sons are initiated into their duties as cohenim by having blood placed on the right earlobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe (Lev 8:23–24; 14:14, 17, 24, 28). The use of the “right hand” as a metaphor for power, authority, strength, etc., is found throughout the Psalms, e.g., 16:8, 11; 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 21:8.

2 E.g., 1Chron 29:11; Wis 18:24. Note also Heb 8:1; Jude 25.
clearly seen in His triumph over death through the cross and resurrection. Paul writes similarly when he states:

> Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Yeshua Messiah our Lord... (Rom 1:4)

As Owen affirms:

> The resurrection from the dead did not make him to be the Son of God, but evidently manifested and declared him so to be.¹

—as much better—Our author likes the word “better” or “superior,” for of the 19 times the Greek word κρείττων (kreittōn) is found in the Apostolic Scriptures, 13 of these are in Hebrews!² Its use, therefore, in the opening verses of the epistle, marks a major theme of our writer, namely, the superiority of Yeshua in His person and work over all mankind as well as over the angels.

—than angels—Early Jewish literature shows an increased interest in and awareness of angels, ascribing a greater importance to their role vis-à-vis Israel. In some cases they take on the role of intercessor³ for Israelites, as well as functioning in the capacity of teachers or mediators of God’s will.⁴ In apocalyptic literatures, angels function as “tour guides” and as a dialog partner in heavenly journeys.⁵ The obvious point here, however, is that Yeshua is greater than the angels (which He created), for He has inherited a greater name.

We see that in nascent Gnosticism, which Paul appears to be combating in his epistle to the Colossians, angelic beings were worshiped, thus degrading the esteem which should rightly be accorded only to God. Thus Paul writes:

> Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his

³ 1Enoch 100:5; 1QM 13:10; 4QTobit; T. Dan 6:5; T. Naph. 8:4; T. Jud. 3:10, see also Ps. Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 38:3; 59:4; 3Macc 6.18.
stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind... (Col 2:18)

Was this same thing happening in the messianic community to which our author writes? Some have considered this to be the case. But the problem with this perspective is that nowhere in Hebrews does our author mention anything regarding the worship of angels.

It was not until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls that the role of angelic beings within sectarian Judaism was made evident, and the parallels to Hebrews seem quite obvious, though not all scholars agree.¹

In the opening chapter of Hebrews, our author appeals to a number of quotes from the Tanach (all taken from the Lxx). In the first two quotes (Ps 2:7; 2Sam 7:14), the superiority of Yeshua is seen in that only He, in contrast to the angels, is the Son of God. One can only “infer from this that our author is arguing against a belief which ascribes similar qualities to the angels.”²

The last four quotes from the Tanach (Ps 104:4; Ps 54:6–7; Ps 102:25–27; Ps 110:1) are given to show that the angels are servants without ruling power and that their role in the heavenly realm is to serve the Son.

As the epistle continues, our author is intent on showing the superiority of Yeshua to Moses (ch. 3) and then, of prime importance, that Yeshua is the Priestly Messiah (chs. 4–7). But he does not stop by only asserting that Yeshua is the heavenly Kohen Gadol, but that He is, in this office, superior to the priesthood of Aaron, for He is the royal High Priest, combining both the role of King and Priest. Our author proves this by showing that Yeshua is a High Priest “after the order of Melchizedek,” who was priest of El Elyon and king of Salem (Gen 14:18). Why did our author feel the need to emphasize this? What was it that his readers were prone to believe, which he felt in such need to correct?

The Dead Sea Scrolls have brought to light the fact that this sectarian group (at some point in their history) considered the Archangel Michael (identified as the Angel of Light) to have a strategic saving role in the eschaton. The following quotes bear this out.

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¹ For a thorough study of this aspect of the Dead Sea Scroll sect, see Y. Yadin, “The Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews” in *Scripta Hierosolumatana*, vol. 4 (Magnes Press, 1965), pp. 36–55. [Hereafter, Yadin, *Scrolls*]. Not all scholars would agree, however, that clear parallels to Hebrews can be found in the writings of the Qumran sectarians. See, for example, F. F. Bruce, “‘To the Hebrews’ or ‘To the Essenes’?”, *NTS* 9 (1963), pp. 217–32.
² Yadin, Ibid., p. 40.
And You, [O God,] created us for Yourself as an eternal people, and into the lot of light You cast us for Your truth. You appointed the Prince of Light from of old to assist us, for in [His] lot are all sons of righteousness and all spirits of truth are in his dominion. (IQM 13.9–10)

The authority of the Prince of Light extends to the governance of all righteous people; therefore, they walk in the paths of light. (IQS 3.20)  
Yet the God of Israel and His Angel of Truth assist all the Sons of Light. (IQS 3.24–25)

By eternal light He shall joyfully light up the covenant of Israel; peace and blessing for the lot of God, to exalt the authority of Michael among the gods and the dominion of Israel among all flesh. Righteousness shall rejoice on high, and all the children of His truth shall rejoice in eternal knowledge. (IQM 17.6–8)

Here we see clear evidence that the Jewish sectarians of Qumran believed that Michael, the “Angel of Light,” would take up the role of Ruler in the eschaton. In direct counter to this, our author states, “For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking” (Heb 2:5). And therefore, it seems quite possible that the group to which our author addresses his concerns had, to one measure or another, adopted a similar view of the role of angels (or even perhaps Michael as the Archangel) in the eschatological victory of God, a role which threatened the superiority of Yeshua as the ruling and reigning High Priest and King.¹

It is interesting to note how, in the later rabbinic literature, discussions regarding the position of angels is often encountered. It would seem that the growing appeal of Gnosticism was viewed by some of the Sages as a theological threat to the emerging rabbinic Judaism even as it was to the emerging early Christian Church. As I have shown above, the immediate issue addressed by our author was most likely the teaching, exemplified in the Qumran documents, that angels, and particularly Michael the Archangel, would be exulted to a primary position of authority and ruling in the world to come. It appears that the repeated

¹ We will see that the Qumran sect also taught dual Messiahs, one priestly and one kingly, and this may very well parallel our author’s emphasis upon Yeshua as both the Melchizedekian and Royal High Priest.
discussion about angels in the rabbinic literature might indicate that the exultation of angelic beings was a growing issue as post destruction rabbinic Judaism was being formulated. Moreover, the exultation of angels in sectarian Judaism (as seen at Qumran) not only threatened a clear emphasis upon monotheism (at least in the view of some of the rabbis), but also became a theological issue as rabbinic Judaism sought to define its own view of the Messiah in light of the growing influence of emerging Christianity with its emphasis upon Yeshua as the Messiah promised by Israel’s prophets. Note the following:

1. The Sages were intent on teaching that Israel was more precious to God than the Ministering Angels. Expounding on R. Akiva’s statement, “Beloved are Israel” (m. Avot 3.14), his disciples said:

O Israel, you are more beloved to me than the Ministering Angels...you are more honored in My sight than the Ministering Angels...you are greater in My sight...holier in My sight...more praiseworthy than the Ministering Angels.

2. Some of the Sages placed all of mankind as higher than the angels (b. Sanhedrin 38b) though others considered the Ministering Angels to be superior to mankind.

There are seven created things, on superior to the other:... Superior to man are the ministering angels He created: for the ministering angels go from one end of the world to the other, while human beings are not like that. (Avot de-R. Nathan, ch. 373)

3. R. Joshua b. Levi taught that the angels argued with God when He was about to give the Torah to Moses. They felt a human unworthy of such a gift. God challenges Moses to argue why mankind should receive the Torah, upon which Moses showed the angels that they were unable to keep the Torah. As a result, the angels retracted and glorified God for His decision. (b. Sanhedrin 67b)

4. As the liturgical traditions of rabbinic Judaism evolved, angels are viewed as intermediaries transporting the prayers of man to

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1 Mid. Rab. Deut 11.9.
God. This aspect of angelology was particularly emphasized by the mystics of Safed in the 16th Century led by Isaac Luria and later by Ḥayyim Vital.

This group ascribed to the daily prayer a special redemptive significance, for it was the prayer that achieved the perfection of world order; it regarded the angels as the leaders of the heavenly spheres who would accept only those prayers which are consecrated to a certain name of God, by means of a prescribed preparations and concentrations. This implies a special appeal to the angels.¹

But the mystical movement, and the exultation of angels in particular, was opposed by leading rabbinic scholars, such as Rambam, Joseph Kimḥi, and Isaac Abrabanel. Kimḥi wrote:

True penitence does not stand in need of intervention by the saints; feigned penitence will not be helped by either the dead or the saints, by man or angel.²

While the role of angels is clearly taught in the Scriptures, it is also clear that both in the history of rabbinic Judaism as well as in various sects of Christianity, the mystical attachment to angels prescribed to angelic beings a role well beyond that which is taught in the Scriptures. The exaltation of certain angels (e.g., Michael, Gabriel, Raphael³) often detracts from the central place which ought always to be given to Yeḥshua. Thus, the exhortations found in this opening section of Hebrews remains relevant in our times, not only in giving Yeshua preeminence above all others, but also in warning us to ascribe to the angelic host the servant role for which they were created.

as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. – The concept of inheritance is applied to Yeshua in the sense that what had always belonged to Him (i.e., a more excellent name) is made evident or proclaimed following His mediatorial work upon the earth. This corresponds to the hymn in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians (2:5–11). Having completed His saving work via the cross and resurrection, the inspired hymn states:

² Ibid., quoting from Sefer ha-Berit in Milhemet Hovah, p. 33a.
For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9–11)

While our author uses the word “inherited” to denote the possession of the “name,” Paul uses “bestowed” (χαρίζομαι, charizomai), having the same emphasis, namely, that what always belonged to Yeshua by way of His eternal, divine nature, is made evident to all. Even as the medal given to an Olympic athlete does not make him the victor but acknowledges what he has already accomplished, so the name “inherited by” or “bestowed upon” Yeshua acknowledges what is already true and has always been true of Him. Thus, in our Hebrews text, the word “inherited” (κληρονομέω, klēronomeō) is in the perfect tense, stressing that the Name owned by Yeshua has been, is, and always will be in effect. In the context of Phil 2, that Name is κύριος (kurios), “Lord,” the Greek word most often used in the Lxx to translate יהוה.

The Quotes from the Tanach in 1:5–13

Following verse 4, the author of Hebrews launches his arguments for a “high Christology” on the basis of the Scriptures. He immediately quotes a number of passages from the Tanach which introduce and support his viewpoint that Yeshua is the divine Messiah promised of old, and that His present position is an exalted one.

An investigation of the quotes surfaces a number of important questions. First is the obvious fact that our author quotes from the Lxx (Greek translation of the Tanach) and not directly from the Hebrew. It should not surprise us that our author quotes from the Lxx, however, since it was the common translation used in the late 2nd Temple period by the Jewish community.1 Second, it is clear that the Lxx used by our author diverged in a few instances from the Hebrew text we now have. The first order of business, therefore, is to list the quotes and note the differences, and then to discuss the questions which these differences raise. Finally, the goal of studying these quotes is to understand the

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message of the author and his teaching about Yeshua.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrews</th>
<th>Lxx</th>
<th>MT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:5</td>
<td>Ps 2:7</td>
<td>Ps 2:7</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are my son, today I have begotten you. υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε</td>
<td>You are My son, today I have begotten you. υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε</td>
<td>Your are My son, today I have begotten you. בְּנֵי אָתָה אֲנִי הַיּוֹם</td>
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Notes: The quote is verbatim from the Lxx, which is an accurate translation of the MT including word order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1:5</th>
<th>2Sam 7:14</th>
<th>2Sam 7:14</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will be a Father to Him and He will be a Son to Me. ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν</td>
<td>I will be a Father to Him and He will be a Son to Me. ἐγώ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτός ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν</td>
<td>I will be a Father to Him and He will be a Son to Me. אֲנִי אָבֵי הָיוָה לָאָבָיו יִשְׂכְּרוּ לִבּוֹ</td>
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Notes: The quote is verbatim from the Lxx, which is an accurate translation of the MT including word order.
<table>
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<th>MT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:6</td>
<td>Deut 32:43 / Ps 96:7</td>
<td>Deut 32:43 (DSS) / Ps 97:7</td>
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</table>

And let all the angels of God worship Him. και προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ. (Deut 32:43) And let all the angels of God worship Him. (Ms A) και προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ. And let the sons of God worship Him. (Ms B) και προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ υἱοὶ θεοῦ. (Ps 96:7) Worship Him, all you His angels. προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ, πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ. (Ps 96:7) Worship Him, all you gods. προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ, πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ.

Notes: Many, based upon the 3rd pl. aor. act. imperv. προσκυνησάτωσαν, consider this quote to be from the Lxx of Deut 32:43. One difficulty with this is that the Lxx Ms themselves contain a variant, Alexandrinus having ἄγγελοι θεοῦ and Vaticanus having υἱοὶ θεοῦ. A fragment in the DSS (4Q44), which clearly contains Deut 32:43, has a line not represented in the MT: וַיַּחְשְׁבוּ לוֹ כָּל-אֶלֹהִים, which resembles the reading of Lxx Ms B. (The note in BHS at Deut 32:43, suggesting that the Qumran fragment be read as “בִּנְיָמִין...” should be disregarded. Note the apparatus of BHQ.) It is possible, however, that Hebrews quotes Ps 97:7 (Lxx 96:7). The only difference is that the Lxx of Ps 96:7 has προσκυνήσατε (2nd pl. aor. act. imperv.) rather than the 3rd pl. aor. act. imperv. as it is in Hebrews. It is possible that our author is not quoting either text verbatim but is giving the general sense which both passages affirm, (see Attridge, Hebrews, p. 57, n. 77), or that an early liturgical tradition utilized this form of the saying. In this regard, we should note Odes 2:43, which has this line: και προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι θεοῦ, exactly as it is in Hebrews except that the article is found with ἄγγελοι (text quoted from Gert J. Styen, A Quest for the Assumed Lxx Vorlage of the Explicit Quotations in Hebrews [Vandenhoeck & Rupert, 2011], pp. 65f). See Rahlfs, ed. Septuaginta, 2 vols. (Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuggart, 1935), 2.169.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:7</td>
<td>Ps 103:4</td>
<td>Ps 104:4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire. ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα,</td>
<td>Who makes his angels wind, and his ministers a flaming fire. ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πῦρ φλέγον.</td>
<td>He makes His angels winds, His ministers fiery flames. ἥρασα ἀγαλμάτων ῥόδον ὁ ποιῶν αὐτῶν πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτῶν πῦρ φλέγον.</td>
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**Notes:** The quote is verbatim from the Lxx with the exception of an additional καί, and that in the Lxx φλέγον is a participle, while in the quote, φλόγα is an adjective. The Lxx is an accurate translation of the MT.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1:8</th>
<th>Ps 44:7</th>
<th>Ps 45:7</th>
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<tr>
<td>Your throne, o God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of His kingdom. ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου.</td>
<td>Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, ῥάβδος εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου.</td>
<td>Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος ὁ θεὸς ἀλών καὶ ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου.</td>
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**Notes:** Only small differences exist between Hebrews and the Lxx it quotes: 1) the addition of καί ἡ before the first ῥάβδος; 2) the article τῆς before εὐθύτητος; and 3) the lack of the article with the second ῥάβδος, all of which may be simply stylistic differences. Other than these, the quote is verbatim from the Lxx which accurately represents the Hebrew.

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<tr>
<th>1:9</th>
<th>Ps 44:8</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions. ἡγάπησας δικαίοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν· διὰ τούτο ἔχρισεν σε ὁ θεός ὁ θεός σου ἐλαιὸν ἀγαλλίασεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου.</td>
<td>You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions. ἡγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν· διὰ τούτο ἔχρισεν σε ὁ θεός ὁ θεός σου ἐλαιὸν ἀγαλλίασεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου.</td>
<td>You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. ἡγάπησας δικαίοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν· διὰ τούτο ἔχρισεν σε ὁ θεός ὁ θεός σου ἐλαιὸν ἀγαλλίασεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου.</td>
</tr>
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**Notes:** Only small differences exist between Hebrews and the Lxx it quotes: 1) the addition of καί ἡ before the first ῥάβδος; 2) the article τῆς before εὐθύτητος; and 3) the lack of the article with the second ῥάβδος, all of which may be simply stylistic differences. Other than these, the quote is verbatim from the Lxx which accurately represents the Hebrew.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrews</th>
<th>Lxx</th>
<th>MT</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Notes:</strong> The quote is verbatim from the Lxx, which accurately translates the MT.</td>
<td><strong>Notes:</strong> Only minor differences occur between Hebrews and the Lxx it quotes, none of which are significant: (Hebrews: σὺ κατ᾿ ἀρχάς; Lxx: κατ᾿ ἀρχὰς σύ; Hebrews: ἐλίξεις; Lxx: ἀλλάξεις; Hebrews: addition of ὡς ἵματιον καὶ). Once again, the Lxx is an accurate translation of the MT.</td>
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### 1:10–12

| **You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and they all will become old like a garment, and like a mantle you will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.** |
| **In the beginning, Lord, You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.** |
| **Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.** |

σὺ κατ᾿ ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσίν οἱ οὐρανοὶ· αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις, καὶ πάντες ὡς ἰμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται, καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἑλίξεις αὐτοὺς, ὡς ἵματιον καὶ ἀλλαγήσονται. σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἐτη σου σὺν ἑκλείψουσιν. 

κατ᾿ ἀρχὰς σύ, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσίν οἱ οὐρανοὶ· αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμενεῖς, καὶ πάντες ὡς ἰμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται, καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἑλίξεις αὐτοὺς, ὡς ἵματιον καὶ ἀλλαγήσονται. σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἐτη σου σὺν ἑκλείψουσιν. 

латинская речь: 

латинская речь: 

לְפָנִים הָאָרֶץ יָסַדְתָּ וְמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ שָׁמָיִם׃ הֵמָּה יֹאֵבֵדוּ וְאַתָּה תַעֲמֹד וְכֻלָּם כַּבֶּגֶד יִבְלוּ כַּלְּבוּשׁ תַּחֲלִיפֵם וְיַחֲלֹפוּ׃ וְאַתָּה־הוּא וּשְׁנוֹתֶיךָ לֹא יִתָּמְמוּ׃
Hebrews | Lxx | MT
---|---|---
1:13 | Ps 109:1 | Ps 110:1
Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for Your feet. | Κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, ἕως ἂν δῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου | שֵׁב לִימִינִי עַד־אָשִׁית אֹיְבֶיךָ הֲדֹם לְרַגְלֶיךָ׃

Notes: The quote is verbatim from the Lxx, which is an accurate translation of the MT.


Having looked at some of the technical aspects surrounding the quotes used by our author, we will now seek to understand the significance of these quotes used to substantiate his teaching regarding the superiority of Yeshua as the promised Messiah.

The quotes which our author brings to his opening argument for the superior nature of Yeshua are clearly designed to gain the attention of his readers by founding his argument upon the unmovable bedrock of the Tanach. He does not appeal in the first case to the experiences of the apostles (as does John in his first epistle) nor to the miraculous works of Yeshua during His earthly sojourn. He rather appeals to the authority of the Scriptures, the written revelation, a sure and impressive foundation in the eyes of the Jewish community (cf. 2Pet 1:16–19). We likewise do well to consider the inspired word of God to be our primary foundation and witness to the faith which we have in our Messiah.

A brief analysis will allow us to see the overall structure and pattern of our author’s argument in the opening of this epistle:
1. Yeshua: Rightful King & Heir to the Throne
   • Psalm 2 – The Enthronement Of The Son.
     A covenant was enacted between God & Yeshua in which
     a decree of kingship was granted to Him
   • 2 Sam 7 – The Davidic Covenant and Promise Of Eternal Dynasty.
     The kingship of David is promised as an eternal dynasty
     and David recognizes that this transcends his own family
     and speaks of the eternal reign of the Messiah
   • Ps 97:7 (Deut 32:43) – The Universal Recognition of Yeshua as King.
     The Father and His Messiah are recognized as the One So- 
     vereign of the universe

2. Yeshua: Eternal & Eternally King
   • Ps 104:4 – Angels were Created to Serve the King.
     They were not created to be the King.
   • Ps 45:6-7 – Yeshua is the Eternal, Righteous King.
     Yeshua has been exalted to a place above all (given a name
     above all names) because He is Messiah, proven by His
     obedience to do all of His Father’s will. His authority is
     forever.
   • Ps 102:26-28 – Yeshua is Himself Eternal.
     Yeshua, since He is the Creator, will never change even
     though all else will. He is able, therefore, to maintain His
     kingship forever. And, since Yeshua became incarnate, His
     eternal kingship secures the everlasting nature of His king-
     dom and subjects.

3. Yeshua: Ruling Now & Subduing His Enemies
   • Ps 110:1 – Yeshua has Taken His Rightful Place of Honor at the
     Right Hand of God in Heaven.
     The invitation to sit at the right hand of God presumes a
     number of things:
     (1) that Yeshua’s death, resurrection, and ascension were all
         marks of His victory and thus a procession to His place
         of honor;
     (2) that there would be a period of time after His ascension
         in which evil would be extant and only later would be
         subjugated;
     (3) that He would eventually gain victory over the last
         enemy and rule without opposition.
5 For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

In order to understand our author’s intention in the first quote (from Ps 2:7), it will be helpful for us to look at the structure of Psalm 2 in order to locate the line being quoted and see its meaning within the Psalm as a whole.

Psalmist speaks

1 Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against יהוה and against His Anointed, saying,

Pagan kings speak

3 “Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!”

Psalmist speaks

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, יְהוָה scoffs at them.

Psalmist speaks

5 Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying,

Great King (יהוה) speaks

6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

Vassal (Davidic King) speaks

7 I will surely tell of the decree of יהוה: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.

Great King (יהוה) speaks

8 ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

Psalmist speaks

9 ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’”

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth.
11 Worship יהוה with reverence and rejoice with trembling.
12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

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1 For the parallels from the Lxx and Hebrew, for this and the following quotes, see above, pp. 44–48.
Psalm 2 is a royal Psalm describing poetically the enthronement of HaShem’s Vassal King. As the Great King, HaShem installs His Vassal King to rule in His stead and to maintain His kingship over the people. In this regard, the Psalm contains the verbal decree of the Great King as well as the response of His enthroned Vassal. The Psalmist himself acts as the narrator, setting the scene (vv. 1-2). He exposes the rebellion of the subdued, conquered kings against the Great King’s Vassal by including their own words—their plan to overthrow the Vassal and free themselves from the rule of the Great King (v. 3). But then the Psalmist, narrating the scene, gives us a glimpse into the throne room of the Great King, where He laughs and mocks the puny attempts of the conquered kings to rebel against His rule (vv. 4–5). Then we hear the words of the Great King, reminding everyone of the covenant He has made with His Vassal (v. 6), and the Vassal Himself affirms the validity of the covenant (v. 7). The promise of the Great King (vv. 8–9) is reiterated, giving the Vassal universal rule over the nations and subduing any who would rebel against the Great King (vv. 8–9). The Psalm ends with the Psalmist himself admonishing those who are subjects of the Great King, that they should submit to His Vassal and pay Him the homage He deserves. Otherwise, if they persist in their rebellion, they will perish. Conversely, if they submit to the rule of the Great King, administered through His Vassal King, they will experience true refuge and peace (vv. 10–12).

In its original setting, the Great King is HaShem and His Vassal is King David. But in a prophetic sense, the ultimate Vassal is the greater Son of David, Yeshua, Who is the Davídic Messiah and King.

If we investigate Psalm 2 in its historical setting as a Royal Psalm, we will realize that it is cast in the language of Ancient Near Eastern Royal treaties, which were common in the Ancient Near East. Very often when a Great King installed a Vassal to rule on his behalf, he legally adopted him. The concept is simple: the Great King proclaims his vassal to be his son, thus making rebellion against him treason against the royal family. The use of הַיּוֹם, hayôm, “today,” in the phrase “...today I have begotten you,” is characteristic of the covenant language of such royal treaties, denoting the formal initiation of a covenant or contract.¹ Note these examples of adoption in Royal Treaties from the Ancient Near East.

[A covenant between Shuppiluliumash and Mattiwaza]
“(The Great King) grasped me with [his ha]nd...and said: when I will conquer the land of Mittanni I shall not reject you, I shall make you my son, I will stand by (to help in war) and will make you sit on the throne of your father....”

[A treaty of Hattusilis I] “Behold, I declared for you the young Labarna: He shall sit on the throne, I, the king, called him my son...he is for you the offspring of my Sun” (=he is for you the offspring of his majesty).

We thus see that the language of sonship, of “begetting” in Psalm 2, is molded from the Ancient covenant language characteristic of royal installations. Adonai has declared who His King will be, and has further clarified that He is the legitimate heir to the throne, the one of His appointment, to whom the kings of the earth must pay homage.

All of this is not lost by our author. He applies this Psalm directly to Yeshua and opens his argument with this strong statement of His legitimate kingship. Surely his readers knew the Psalm and would thus have also understood that the final exhortation to “kiss the Son” applied directly to Yeshua, the Messianic King Who would fulfill the Davidic covenant by reigning on His throne forever.

It is with the Davidic covenant in mind that our author offers the second quote of v. 5, from 2Sam 7:14. Interestingly, we find another parallel between our Hebrews text and Qumran. In a text originally labeled 4QFlorilegium (4Q174), 2 Sam 7 is also quoted in reference to the “shoot of David” who would come in the last days.

יהוה declares to you that he will build you a house; and I will raise up your seed after you, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom [for ever]. I [will] b[e] his father, and he shall be my son. (2 Sam 7:11-14) He is the shoot of David, who is to stand up with the Expounder of the Law...in Zi[on in the l]ast days, as it is written: “And I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen” (Amos 9:11). That is David’s fallen booth, [but herea]fter he will stand up to save Israel. (4Q174 f1_2i:10–13)

What has obviously linked the two quotes together (Ps 2:7 and 2Sam

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In our author’s mind is the common theme of “sonship.” Here, as in Psalm 2, the kingship of Messiah is given under the title of “son” and 2 Sam 7 offers the historical narrative in which the royal covenant was enacted with David and extending to his offspring.

In 2Sam 7 there is a play on the term “house” (bayit). David originally expresses his desire to build a house for the Ark of the Covenant, a Temple befitting the sacred place of God’s Shekinah. He is informed, eventually, that God does not permit him to build the house, but that his son (Solomon) would build it. In contrast, God would build David a “house” (= dynasty) which would be eternal. When David contemplated the ramifications of this promise, he realized that it would be the ultimate fulfillment of the overarching declaration that God would bless all mankind through the seed of Abraham. Apparently, David recognized that this promise would touch all of mankind, for in 2Sam 7:19 he declares:

And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord God. You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the Torah for mankind, O Lord GOD.

He realized that the covenant promise God had given him was therefore much bigger than himself. He doubtlessly saw that this was the promise of Messiah.

Indeed, the Davidic covenant continued to be a source of hope, especially in times of exile, as Psalm 89 so clearly shows. Here, the Psalmist pleads to the Lord to hasten the fulfillment of His faithful promises to David. In like manner, Peter (Ac 2:22-36) argues that the resurrection of Yeshua proves beyond doubt that He is the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, for His ascension assured His eternal reign, fulfilling that promise that David would not lack a man to sit upon the throne established by God.

Both of these quotes (from Ps 2:7 and 2Sam 7:14) were offered to answer the opening question, “To which of the angels did He ever say...?” In other words, “to which of the angels did He ever proclaim them to be His Son?” The answer to the rhetorical question is clear: no angel was ever given such a status, for only the Messiah, Yeshua, owns the position of God’s Son Who is able, therefore, to be His appointed Messiah and Royal King. He alone is without beginning and without end and therefore able to effect complete salvation for His elect (Heb 7:25).
6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.”

This third quote from the Tanach (Deut 32:43/Ps 97:7) is introduced by an intriguing phrase: “And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says,...” The first question revolves around the use of the word “again” (πάλιν, palin). The following options have been suggested:

1. “Again” simply introduces another quote, as in v. 5.
2. “Again” has the sense of “on the other hand,” “in contrast to.”
3. “Again” is adverbial, modifying the verb “brings” and therefore is referring to the second coming of Yeshua.

Though it is a bit unusual (since the word πάλιν is rarely used with a term like “when” [ὅταν, hotan] to mean “and the next point is...,” but note Wisdom 16.1), I tend to think the most natural sense is that the term merely introduces another quote.

Those who take no. 3 above point to the fact that Yeshua’s first coming did not convince the world of His real station (i.e., King), but His second coming will. Thus, the quote from Deut 32 or Ps 97 points to the adoration and worship He will receive at His second coming.

The second suggestion (above) is similar to the idea that “again” introduces a quote, with the added dimension that the introduction forms a contrast. This is possible, but I favor no. 1 for the simple reason that this is the way “again” is used in the previous verse.

The question of which text our author quotes is intriguing and a good deal has been written on this by the commentators. We know that very early on verses from the Song of Moses (Deut 32–33) were interpreted as pertaining to the Messianic age. For instance, Paul in Rom 15:10 (the context focuses on the ingathering of the Gentiles as the fruit of Yeshua’s salvific work) quotes from the same verse (Deut 32:43) as our author: “Rejoice, O Gentiles with His people,” and it appears that he is quoting from the Lxx since he includes the word “with” (μετά, meta) which is not present in the Hebrew. Likewise, Targum Pseuo-Jonathan interprets Deut 32:43 as pertaining to the messianic age, as the last line shows: “... and he will atone for the sins of his land and his people by his Word.”

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1 See p. 47 above for notes on the quote.
2 נרות נזר שאו / εὐφράνηθε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ
3 In the Targumim, אמרה, meimra is used as a hypostatized substitution for
The whole of Deut 32 is a prophetic treatise on the glory of Israel in the last days, and the Targum adds the obvious Messianic phrase in the spirit of that prophecy. It seems very likely, then, that the additional phrase in v. 43 included in the Lxx and DSS exists on similar bases. Whether it is original or not cannot be determined. It is possible that the Lxx, DSS, and the epistle to the Hebrews has restored a line that was lost in the Masoretic text.

If, on the other hand, our author is quoting from Ps 97:7 (where the Hebrew has “Worship him all you gods” rather than “…all you angels”), this could be explained by the fact that the Lxx commonly substitutes “angels” when translating “sons of God” or where the plural אֱלֹהִים (elohim) clearly is not speaking of the one true God. 1 It would not be surprising, then, for the Lxx to have translated “all you gods” by “all you angels.”

While we cannot be certain, it seems to me that our author had the Song of Moses in mind as he wrote this verse and that he quoted the text as he knew it and as it was commonly known (or commonly quoted) in his day.

And when He again brings the firstborn into the world – What is the event to which our author points when he introduces the quote with this line? It seems very likely that he had in mind the birth of Yeshua, when a host of angels did, in fact, give honor and worship to Him, cf. Lk. 2:8-14. At the birth of Yeshua, the angels demonstrated that the One who had been born in Bethlehem was indeed the Son of God and thus they offered worship to Him, as the Scriptures prophesied.

This same fact is emphasized by the term “first-born” with which our author introduces the quote. Yeshua is “first-born” in the sense of having preeminence, which is the meaning Paul applies to the term in Col 1:15, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,” meaning that Yeshua is the rightful owner of all creation.

Likewise, this concept of “first born” links the present quote with the former two, for Yeshua is heir (cf. Gen 43:33; Deut 21:17; Ps 89:27) to the throne as the “first born” son of the King. He, as “first-born” has precedence over all others who, in a secondary and non-essential sense, may at times be addressed as sons, whether angels or men. Moreover,

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1 E.g., Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 8:6[5].
the “first born” belongs to God in a special way (cf. Ex 13:1-2), marking a full and complete dedication and consecration to God.

Thus, in applying to Yeshua the words of the Tanach which command worship, our author has declared Him to be equal in glory with the Father, and thus God Himself, Who alone is worthy of our worship. Indeed, if Yeshua were anything less than divine, to worship Him would be idolatry, for God alone is to be worshiped (Deut 6:13; Matt 4:10).

7–9 And of the angels He says, “WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE.” But of the Son He says, “YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.”

The first quote (from Ps 104:4, quoted from the Lxx1) is given to prove that the angels were created to serve, not to “be served.” We should also note that “serve” from a Hebrew perspective often takes on the sense of worship. Thus Yeshua quotes Deut 10:20 in rebuking Satan, a text that combines the ideas of “worship” and “service.”

Then Yeshua said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY. (Matt 4:10)

In the traditional Siddur, Psalm 104:1–2 is repeated when the tallit is first draped over the head for prayers. It is a reminder of God’s awesome power in creating the universe, the heavens and light being, as it were, His tallit.

Psalm 104 is not quoted elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures, but its choice in our present context is understandable, since angels, fire, and wind were a unified topic in early Jewish writings. We find this combination in The Life of Adam and Eve.

And Adam said to Seth, Hear, my son Seth, that I may relate to you what I heard and saw after your mother and I had been driven out of paradise. When we were at prayer, there came to me Michael the archangel, a messenger of God. And I saw a chariot like the wind and its wheels were fiery and I was

1 See p. 46 above for details regarding the quote from Ps 104:4.
caught up into the Paradise of righteousness...\textsuperscript{1}

Likewise, in Jubilees 2:2, the “angels of the spirit of fire and the angels of the spirit of wind” are mentioned.

This same motif continued in the later rabbinic literature. Note Mid. Rab. Exodus 15.6, commenting on Ex 12:2.

...The angels are called ‘fire’, for it is written: \textit{The flaming fire Thy ministers} (Ps. 104:4), and Israel is also so called, as it is written: \textit{And the house of Jacob shall be a fire} (Obad 1:18). The angels renew themselves each day, praise the Lord, and then return into the river of fire from which they emerged, and the Lord renews them and restores them to their former condition; for it says: \textit{They are new every morning} (Lam 3:23).

Note also Mid. Rab. Genesis 78.1 (commenting on Gen 32:27) where the view is given that God creates angels (with the exception of Michael and Gabriel) anew everyday.

It is written, “They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness” (Lam 3:23)... R. Helbo said: The Holy One, blessed be He, creates a new company of angels every day, and they utter song before Him and then depart [evermore]. R. Berekiah observed: I objected to R. Helbo: But it is written, \textit{And he said: Let me go, for the day breaks}. But he retorted: Stranger! think you to strangle me? It was Michael or Gabriel, who are celestial princes; all others are exchanged, but they are not exchanged.

These data would indicate that at least some within the emerging rabbinic Judaism held that angels had a transitory existence and that the purpose for their existence was to serve God in order to accomplish His directives.

Our author likewise applies Ps 104:4 in a similar manner, showing that far from possessing an exulted, kingly position, the angels were created to be ministers to God and to serve Him. In contrast, the Son is enthroned as the King, the very One Whom the angels serve.

\textit{But of the Son He says...} – In contrast to the angels, the Son is viewed as the scepter (cf. Gen 49:10) of God, the One sitting upon the throne.

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Vita Adae et Evae}, 25.1-3, from R. H. Charles, \textit{Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha}, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1913), 2.139. The \textit{Life of Adam and Eve} is dated by Charles between the 1st and 4th Centuries CE.
Our author quotes Ps 45:7–8, applying it to the Messiah, Yeshua.

Psalm 45 is a royal Psalm picturing the enthronement of God’s king. While applying in the first place to the Davidic dynasty, it clearly is prophetic of the Davidic Messiah.

The Targum on Psalm 45 considered it in this light. Verse 3 states:

You are fairer than the sons of men; Grace is poured upon Your lips; Therefore God has blessed You forever.

And the Targum renders this verse:

Your beauty, O King Messiah (מלכה משיחא), is greater than the sons of men; the spirit of prophecy has been placed on your lips; because of this the Lord has blessed you forever.

Other rabbinic commentators also took this Psalm to be prophetic of the Messiah. Note the comments of Eben Ezra:

This Psalm speaks of David, or rather of his son, the Messiah, for this is his name, Ezek 34:34, “And David my servant shall be Prince over them forever.”

Later rabbinic commentary, however, considered the Messianic interpretation of the Psalm to be difficult because though it appears to be speaking of the Messiah (as the Targum and earlier Sages contended), the Hebrew clearly indicates that God is being addressed. Thus Cohen writes:

The Hebrew is difficult. A.V. and R.V., ‘Thy throne, O God,’ appears to be the obvious translation but does not suit the context.

Other rabbinic commentaries take Elohim in these verses to refer to “judges” or to the Davidic kings who acted as judges. Thus Hirsch translates vss. 7–8 as:

Your throne, O Ruler, is forever and ever, because the scepter of equity is the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness by hating lawlessness, therefore God, your God,
has anointed you with gladsome consecration above your fellows.¹

Feuer² follows the same line of interpretation, translating “Your throne, O judge, is forever and ever.”

But the obvious reason that these commentators refuse to take the text as it stands is because to accept a messianic interpretation of the Psalm would require that the Messiah be divine, as Hengstenberg has shown.³

The issue is simply to whom the words are addressed:

Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever;  
A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom.  
You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; 
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You...

It appears quite clear that the One Who has been anointed (for kingship) is addressed in the opening line as Divine. The Messiah, reigning upon His throne, is God with us, Immanuel (Is 9:6). Indeed, the Psalm ends with an affirmation that the peoples will render homage and praise to the King forever.

As noted above, some have suggested various translations to overcome such a blatant statement of Messiah’s deity, but in the end the simple translation, as the Hebrew makes clear, prevails.

Clearly the author of Hebrews considered Ps 45 to be a messianic prophecy, and particularly the verses he quotes (vv. 7–8). He has, therefore, once again, shown from the prophetic Scriptures that Messiah is the rightful heir to the throne, the eternal heir to the throne, that He is preeminent above the angels, and now, that He is Immanuel, God with us. Since, as I pointed out in the introduction, there is no argument marshaled by our author to persuade his readers that Yeshua is Messiah, we should conclude that this was an accepted fact by the group to which he writes. Thus, the purpose of our author in the verses under consideration must be to show that Yeshua, as Messiah, is the divine King and that therefore He is worthy of our worship and unflinching allegiance.

But our brief discussion of this quote cannot conclude without mentioning that the text also establishes Messiah’s humanity. He is exalted above His companions, which are clearly not angels, at least in the context of Psalm 45. He loves righteousness and hates lawlessness, and it is upon this basis that He proves Himself to be the perfect Son, the Messiah. That He is anointed “above His companions” clearly necessitates the incarnation.

And, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; and they all will become old like a garment, and like a mantle you will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not come to an end.”

The divinity of Messiah firmly declared in Ps 45 leads our author to proclaim Him as Creator by quoting from Ps 102 and applying the words to Him.

The quote is essentially verbatim from the Lxx, except that one phrase, “and they will also be changed” is left out of the quote. The substance, however, is the same. The creation is viewed as a garment (a link to Ps 104 where God wraps Himself, as it were, with the tallit of the heavens and light) which, in the end wears out and is discarded. Like the angels which are transitory, so the creation will change and cease to be. In contrast, God endures forever, unchanged and unchanging.

Most striking is that our author has no difficulty at all applying these words to Yeshua, even though in their original context they begin with an address to יהוה. Nor, apparently, does he foresee an argument from his readers that such a text should be interpreted as speaking of Messiah. For certainly the easiest foil against his argument would be to claim he had mis-applied the text. Yet the strength of his argument for us lies precisely in the fact that the text is applied to Messiah as an undisputed, accepted fact.

In the original Psalm, the speaker is not God, but an individual who addresses God out of a circumstance of woe and suffering (note the Hebrew superscription, “A Prayer of the Afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint before יהוה”). It opens with a plea for God to listen, then proceeds to outline the suffering of the supplicant. He contrasts his own transitory life to the eternal, unchanging person of the Creator, and moves from a personal to a national application in calling upon God to save and deliver. The Psalm ends with a confident ac-
knowledge that God will deliver and will establish Israel and Zion as His chosen nation and city.

Like the Song of Moses, the eschatology contained in the text inspires and necessitates a Messianic application. To the exiled worshiper, the hope of restoration rests squarely upon the shoulders of the Messiah. Thus, the words of this Psalm are appropriately applied to Yeshua, "through Whom He made the world."

The point of our author is clear: Yeshua is worthy of our faith and trust, for He endures forever, and His years know no end. He is able, as the Creator, to bring forth from nothing that which He determines and desires, and as the Creator, He is eternal. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said, “sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

The final quote of the chapter is the zenith of our author’s argument. Ps 110 figured as the most important Messianic Psalm of the Apostolic era, if the number of times it is quoted in the Apostolic writings is any indication, for we find either direct quotes or clear allusions to Ps 110:1 applied to Yeshua 17 times in the Apostolic Scriptures. In Hebrews alone it is found five times.

According to the later Talmud, Akiva interpreted Ps 110 as Messianic (b.Sanhedrin 38b), teaching that the throne of Messiah was to be set next to God’s throne, though this was rejected by other Sages. Later Sages (2nd & 3rd Centuries) interpret the Psalm as Messianic, including R. Hama b. Hamina (ca 260), R. Eleazar b. Pedat (ca 270), R. Levi (ca 300), R. Abbahu (ca 300), and R. Huna b. Abbin Hakohen (ca 350). Our author therefore offers an early interpretation and application of Ps 110 which is reflected in the later tradition of the Jewish scholars who likewise applied this Psalm to the Messiah.

The repeated use of Ps 110:1 as a central messianic text in the Apostolic Scriptures no doubt rests upon the fact that Yeshua applied this text to Himself (Matt 24:41ff). Yeshua, in query to the Pharisees, applies inescapable logic to interpret the meaning of the text: David is speaking, and announces that the Lord (יהוה) spoke to someone whom

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David calls “my Lord” (אֲדֹנִי, *adoni*). The command to sit at the right hand is therefore not to David, but to David’s Lord. How could this one, Who would conquer His enemies as He reigned at the right hand of the Almighty, be both the son of David (for so the Messiah would be), and at the same time David’s Lord? In this argument from Yeshua’s own lips we have the mystery of the incarnation encapsulated. Yeshua was, indeed, the “son of David” and was yet David’s Lord. This understanding, which was written by David under the inspiration of the Spirit (as Yeshua specifically states, Matt 22:43–44), informed and built the early teaching of the Messianic Jews as to who Yeshua was—fully man and fully God. Having understood this by faith, they were able to ascribe the same faith to David (Acts 2:33–34), for being a prophet he looked ahead and saw the fulfillment of these things in Yeshua.

Thus, the author begins this chapter and ends it with the Kingship of Messiah Yeshua. The angels, on the other hand (v. 14), are sent to aid those for whom Messiah toils as King and Priest.

A closer look at the Psalm reveals a simple structure: verses 1-3 contain a Divine oracle proclaimed to David concerning the rule and reign of Adonai’s King; verses 4-7 contain a Divine oath concerning Adonai’s Priest and His role in the reign of Adonai.

What sets the Psalm apart as Messianic is its opening line:

Decree of YHVH to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

David is relating the scene (the Psalm is attributed to him) in which יהוה makes a decree to “my Lord.” To whom is the decree made? This opening and obvious question sets the tenor of the Psalm as Messianic. What is more, as the Psalm unfolds, it is clear that the scene here narrated is that of final victory and triumph, bringing an eschatological (end-times) perspective to the overall message.

But perhaps even more significant is the startling fact that the Psalm seems clearly to combine the office of King and Priest, something for which the Torah makes no provision. Throughout Leviticus, the priests are those who make atonement for the people, who draw near to the altar to offer the sacrifices to the Lord. In Deut 17, the instructions for the king do not include any provision for a priestly function. Yet Psalm 110 combines the King and Priest in close proximity.

This is paralleled in the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah 6:12–13:
Then say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.”’

The same picture appears in Ezekiel, where the Prince is the one who offers the sacrifices in the rebuilt Temple (e.g., Ezek 46:1-7), a passage consistently interpreted among the Sages as Messianic.

Following the death and resurrection of Yeshua, His disciples understood in a greater way the application of Psalm 110 to Yeshua’s work. Offering Himself as the substitutionary sacrifice for His people, He acted within the role of a Priest. But as conqueror of death, He also established His eternal kingship. The combining of blessing (a priestly function) with ruling (a kingly function) was to understand the interconnectedness of the Abrahamic covenant (“in you all the nations/families of the earth will be blessed”¹) and the Davidic covenant (“I will build you an eternal house [dynasty]”²).

These two themes are central to the epistle to the Hebrews. Psalm 110, while used in this first chapter to emphasize Yeshua’s kingship, will in subsequent sections be employed to substantiate His priesthood through the figure of Melchizedek.

The particular issue which our author wishes to emphasize in our immediate text is the seating or enthronement of Yeshua at the right hand of God. His point is obvious: to be enthroned at the right hand of the Almighty is to fill a position reserved for the Son alone. This kingship simply cannot be shared or distributed and thus the angels cannot participate in it. What is more, to be enthroned on the right hand is to fill a position of universal sovereignty, ruling over the angels and all created beings.³

The enthronement of Yeshua is stated to be “until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” It is important to understand the range of meaning in the word “until” (עַד, ’ad) in this quote. “Until” is usually taken as denoting time, as in the sentence “You can’t get up from the

2 2Sam 7:11.
3 For “right hand” cp. Gen 48:13-18; Ex 15:6, 12; Deut 33:2; 1Ki2:19; 1Chr 6:39; Ps 16:11; 17:7; 21:8; 80:17; for authority given to Yeshua, cf. Matt 28:18£1; Eph 1:21; Phil 2:5-11; Col 2:10; Jude 1:25.
table until you finish your vegetables.” It points to a future time when certain conditions are fulfilled, and therefore a change of circumstances occurs. But clearly this understanding of the word “until” cannot be the meaning in this Psalm. It cannot mean “Sit…until and then you will no longer sit.” The Psalm cannot be teaching that Yeshua will reign as king until His enemies are subdued, and then He will cease to reign!

Some might give to the metaphor of “sitting” in this Psalm a meaning of relative inactivity, so that the sense is “Sit, i.e., wait here until I subdue your enemies, and then go on to finish your task.”

But the Hebrew word עַד, “until,” can have other meanings. In some cases the word means “to the point that” or “to the extent that”, or indicating “result, fulfillment.”¹ Note, for instance, Joshua 17:14:

Then the sons of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, “Why have you given me only one lot and one portion for an inheritance, since I am a numerous people whom the LORD has thus far blessed?

The sense of the word here is “I am a numerous people because Adonai has up to this point blessed.”

This use of the preposition עַד fits far better in our text. If Yeshua’s sitting at the right hand pictures His enthronement to a place of universal sovereignty, then it is His enthronement which brings about the subjugation of His enemies: “Sit at My right hand with the goal of making Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” In other words, the subduing of the nations who rebel against the authority of the Father and His Messiah is the inevitable outcome of Yeshua’s exulted, heavenly enthronement. It is the very honor that He deserves and will receive that is the concluding proof of His eternal kingship.

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

The final verse of chapter 1 reiterates the claim previously made (v. 7) that the angels were created to serve Yeshua in His work of saving mankind. The rhetorical question assumes a positive response: “Yes, the angels are all ministering spirits who have been sent out with a

commission to serve those who will inherit salvation!” Thus, our author in no way demeans the role of angels in the whole scope of salvation. On the contrary, he notes their vital role in serving those who are part of God's family. But this affirmative note only strengthens the argument thus far advanced: these angelic beings are sent to do Yeshua's bidding, not to be worshiped by mankind or given a place of lordship.

Those whom the angels serve are designated by the phrase “those who will inherit salvation.” The use of the term “inherit” (κληρονομέω, klēronomeō) shows how natural it was for our 1st Century author to view the saved community as a single entity—a unified family. Inheritance is the fruit of lineage, of family ties. Only those in the family have any chance of receiving a share of the inheritance. The idea of “inheriting the kingdom” (Matt 25:34) was clear in Yeshua's teaching, as well as in Paul's (Eph 3:6; Tit 3:7). To be part of the family of God is to have a secured claim of inheritance in the world to come. But whether Jew or Gentile, the only way into the family of God is through Yeshua, through the new birth by which one becomes a new creature in Messiah's family.
Chapter Two

1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

Having laid the foundation of Yeshua’s absolute kingship in the opening chapter of his epistle, our author presses his readers with an exhortation to “pay attention.” “For this reason”– what reason? The undeniable fact of Yeshua’s absolute divine kingship must now come home to the hearts of those who confess Him as Messiah. If what the prophets have stated about the Messiah is true (for so our author bases his argument), then we must personally commit ourselves to worshiping Him and submitting to His rule in our lives. The author includes himself (“we must pay closer attention”) – he is in no way above his readers.

One cannot help but hear the Shema (Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21) in this first exhortation by our author. To “listen,” both in the Hebrew and Greek, has the sense of “pay close attention to,” “to act upon what one has been told.” We know the difference between merely “hearing” someone and listening with intend to know and understand what is being said. It is clear that we can “hear” without “listening.” The Greek term here translated “pay close attention” (προσέχω, prosechō) is often used in the Lxx of the Torah (Pentateuch) to translate שָׁמַר (shāmar), “to guard,” especially in the sense of “guard yourself.”

In the same manner, our author admonishes his readers to “listen” and to “guard themselves” lest they might “drift away” (possibly a nautical term) from the truth which they have been taught. This familiar strain runs throughout the Torah, for even the outward signs of tephillin, mezzuzot, moedim (festivals; appointed times) and milah (circumcision) were given as signs so as not to forget, i.e., to leave or neglect the centrality or foundational role of the covenant established between God and His people. In fact, the verb זָכַר (zachar, “to remember”) is a technical term in covenant language meaning “to be loyal or obedient” to the covenant. In like fashion, זָכַח (shachah, “to forget”) is used to

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1 Gen 4:5; 24:6; Ex 19:12; 23:21; 34:11, 12; Deut 4:9; 6:12; 11:16, etc.
2 Note the use of zachar in covenant contexts of the Tanach: Gen 9:15; Ex 2:24; 6:5; Lev 26:42; Jer 14:21; Ezek 16:60; Amos 1:9.
describe violating the stipulations of the covenant.\textsuperscript{1}

“Paying close attention” may thus be very similar to the admonition to “remember,” to take stock of what one knows to be true and to commit oneself to this truth.

The term translated “drift away” (NASB, NIV) is παραρρέω (pararreō) and is used in other Greek literature of a ring dropping from the finger, of food slipping into the windpipe, and of an object being introduced at the wrong time or in the wrong place (like our modern “how’d that get slipped in?”). Interestingly, the word is used twice in Greek translations of Proverbs (Symm. 4:21; Lxx 3:21). In both cases the context is warning the “son” not to let the instruction being given to “slip away” from his attention. Obviously, the word is used in the same way here in Hebrews.

2–3 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

The parallel is now made between the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and the revelation of Yeshua as Messiah. Two other verses in the Apostolic Scriptures speak of angels being ministers in the giving of the Torah: Gal 3:19 and Acts 7:53. Josephus gives some evidence that this was a common belief among the 1st Century Jewish communities.\textsuperscript{2} Though dated much later,\textsuperscript{3} we may also note Midrash Rabbah Exodus 29.2.

Rabbi Abdimi of Haifa said, “Twenty-two thousand [angels] descended with God on Sinai, as it says, ‘The chariots of God are twenty thousand, thousands of shin’an’” [often translated “angels,” cf. Ps 68:18 (17)]. The very best, the choicest (sh’na’an) went down.

On the other hand, some of the Sages disputed the role of the angels in the giving of the Torah, most likely in their polemic against Gnosticism and Christianity.

\textsuperscript{1} Note Deut 4:23, 31; 26:13; Prov 2:17.
\textsuperscript{2} Ant. xv. 5, 3.
\textsuperscript{3} Most would put the date of Mid. Rab. Exodus in the 10th or 11th Centuries CE, though it may contain vestiges of earlier teachings.
When [God] gave the commandments on Mount Sinai, at first he uttered them loudly all at once, as it is said, ‘And God spoke all these words [simultaneously] saying…’ (Ex 20:1). Then [the angel] Mikha’el said, ‘He will commission me to explain his words.’ And [the angel] Gavri’el said, ‘He will commission me to explain them.’ But as soon as he continued, saying, ‘I am Adonai your God’ (Exodus 20:2), they said, ‘As he gives his children the Torah he is committing his commandments fully explained, directly to his son Israel.’ (Pesikta Rabbati 21:5)

In the Song of Moses we also have notice that angels accompanied the Divine presence when He gave the Torah at Sinai:

He said, “The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them. (Deut 33:2)

The point which our author wishes to make is simply this: the Torah was given by God and everyone agrees that it was steadfast, i.e., unchangeable. It meted out a just recompense for every transgression and act of disobedience, and this just reward or punishment did not change from era to era. Thus, the word from Sinai, which came with the aid of angels, was established as the unalterable word of God. If this is the case, then surely the very Son of God should be given even greater attention, since in His incarnation He came to reveal the Father in His fulness and did so directly, without angelic intermediaries. Moreover, if the word of the Torah given at Sinai is unalterable, then how much more is the exalted, divine position of the Son and His eternal, universal authority to be received without question. For the Son, being one with the Father and the Executor of the Father’s will and the One to Whom the Torah pointed, is likewise unchangeable in His salvific role of establishing the rule of God throughout the universe. “Yeshua Messiah is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

The unalterable nature of the Torah is thus clearly acknowledged by our author as foundational for his argument regarding the superiority of Yeshua. We must keep this in mind as we move into later sections of the epistle where many have sought to interpret our author’s words as teaching that the Torah has been altered or even abolished.

The Greek word βέβαιος (bebaios) is translated by the NASB as
“unalterable.”\(^1\) The NIV translates the word as “binding.” The Greek word ἑβαίος has the basic sense of “strength” indicating that which is “firm” and thus “permanent.”\(^2\) It is used also in Heb 6:19 of the “anchor of the soul” which is characterized as “sure” (ἀσφαλής, asphalēs) and “steadfast” (βέβαιος, ἑβαίος). In other words, this same term is used to describe the unchangeable hope of the believer regarding the eternal welfare of his or her soul. Thus, when this same word is used to describe the Torah, it clearly is establishing our author’s viewpoint that the Torah remains steadfast and unalterable as God’s self-revelation and standard of righteousness for His people.

The proof of the permanence of the Torah in the mind of our author is the simple and obvious fact that the same punishment for the same crime continued to be administered from age to age. “Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense.” The two terms, “transgression” and “disobedience” correspond to the negative and positive commands of the Torah. A “transgression” (παραβάσις, parabāsis) is an overt offense (i.e., doing what the Torah specifically prohibits) while “disobedience” (παρακοή, parakoē) is failure to follow what the Torah commands.

The Sages detailed a total of 613 laws (referred to in abbreviation as תַּרְיַ׳׳ג, taryag), consisting of 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands. This number was derived midrashically as corresponding to (1) the number of days in a solar year and (2) the number of limbs in the human body (as defined by the rabbis\(^3\)) and is not an actual numbering of all the commandments in the Torah. The terminus a quo for the 613 enumeration is much debated. The earliest mention is in Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael,\(^4\) for which the earliest date suggested by some scholars is in the 3rd Century CE though many would put it somewhat later, and others much later, as late as the 8th Century CE.\(^5\) Thus, while certain oral traditions had, to one extent or another, become established halachah for various sects of Judaism in the pre-destruction era, the more widely confirmed classification of the oral traditions (as compiled

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1 The marginal note of the NASB has “steadfast.”
3 b.makkot 23b, cp. b.Yevamot 47b.
4 Yitro, Ba Chodesh, 5.
in the Mishan) awaited the rise of rabbinic Judaism in the centuries following the destruction of 70 CE.

...*how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?* – We see, then, that the argument of our author is *qal v’chomer*, “light and heavy.” It would be constructed this way: if the Torah, which was administered by angels (whom we’ve already proven to be inferior when compared to the Son) is seen to be unalterable in the way it deals with sin, *how much more* would this be the case with the revelation of the truth by Yeshua! If disregarding the Torah brings negative consequences and condemnation, *how much more* severe would be the result of disregarding the revelation of God spoken in Yeshua!

The message of the gospel in Yeshua calls for a necessary response. The opening line of this verse could as well be cast this way: “Having neglected so great a salvation, how will we escape?” It is not as though the author judges that such neglect has already occurred, but he recognizes that unless some of them would change their current course, they would inevitably end up denying the full significance of Yeshua’s person and work and thus prove themselves to be without salvation.

Our author uses the term “escape,” “how shall we escape...?” The obvious question is “escape from what?” The contextual answer is: “from the wrath of God” — “How shall we escape from the wrath of God if we neglect so great a salvation?” In fact, the same word “escape” (*ἐκφεύγω*, ekpheugō) is found in 1Thess 5:3 in the context of the final judgment.

While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.¹

This salvation, found only in the person and work of Yeshua, is described as “so great” (*τηλικοῦτος*, tēlikoutos), a Greek term found only three other times in the Apostolic Scriptures.² In our context, the greatness of the salvation proffered by Yeshua is seen in that it overcomes the infinite debt of sin under which fallen man stands guilty before the omnipotent, infinitely holy God. The description of “so great” emphasizes that there is no other means by which the guilt of sin could be expunged in the eyes of the Almighty.

But the salvation made for the elect by Yeshua’s self-offering and

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¹ Cp. Matt 23:33; Rom 2:3; Heb 12:25.
² 2Cor 1:10; James 3:4; Rev 16:18.
intercession is not only the payment of a debt beyond the ability of sinners to pay. It also is great for the positive benefits, that is, the restored and eternal relationship with the Creator that is the eternal possession of all who are saved.

What, then, does our author fear for his readers? He fears that they might neglect (ἀμελέω, ameleō) the gospel as found in Yeshua. It is not as though they are overtly rejecting Him at this point (there is no argument added to prove that Yeshua is the promised Messiah). What is of concern is that within the community there were those who were attempting to diminish the uniqueness and singular importance of Yeshua as Immanuel, “God with us.” Their attempts to put Yeshua in an acceptable but non-essential place would ultimately result in the true gospel message being despised.

After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard – This gospel message is characterized as “first spoken through the Lord” and then as “confirmed to us by those who heard.” The meaning, especially in context, seems obvious. Yeshua, through whom God has now given His final and complete revelation, came to declare to mankind the fulfillment of the prophets’ promise of salvation. As the previous chapter has argued, this final revelation in Yeshua is superior to all others, for though it did not contradict the former revelation given through the prophets, it nonetheless completed it and informed it in a way never before imagined.

John’s witness in the early part of his gospel is that Yeshua has come from above (i.e., from the Father) and that “what He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness…” (Jn 3:32). But the witness of a single voice is not sufficient. “By the mouth of two or three witnesses a thing is established,”¹ and so our author continues by noting that the words of Yeshua were confirmed by those who were themselves eyewitnesses. They confirmed not only the message, but also the “salvation” (the word which is actually the subject of the context) was confirmed in their lives and deeds.

God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

As if two witnesses were not enough, a third is added: God Himself bears witness to the message borne by His Son by giving miraculous

signs and wonders to confirm the message.

The Sages of the Talmud argue about the use of signs for confirming a message, a possible reaction to the claim of the early Messianic believers that the miracles of Yeshua confirmed Him to be the Messiah. Even in our times, M. Schneerson of the Lubavitch was considered and proclaimed by some within that hasidic sect to be the messiah on the basis of his apparent ability to foretell events.

But the following story from the Bavli seems plainly to describe an anti-Yeshua bias by attempting to discount miracles as a divinely given confirming witness.

On a certain occasion R. Eliezer used all possible arguments to substantiate his opinion, but the Rabbis did not accept it. He said, ‘If I am right, may this carob tree move a hundred yards from its place.’ It did so … They said, ‘From a tree no proof can be brought.’ Then he said, ‘May the canal prove it.’ The water of the canal flowed backwards. They said, ‘Water cannot prove anything.’ Then he said, ‘May the walls of this House of Study prove it.’ Then the walls of the house bent inwards, as if they were about to fall. R. Joshua rebuked the walls, and said to them, ‘If the learned dispute about the halakah, what has that to do with you?’ So, to honor R. Joshua, the walls did not fall down, but to honor R. Eliezer, they did not become quite straight again. Then R. Eliezer said, ‘If I am right, let the heavens prove it.’ Then a heavenly voice (bat qol) said, ‘What have you against R. Eliezer? The halakah is always with him.’ Then R. Joshua got up and said, ‘It is not in heaven’ (Deut 30:12). What did he mean by this? R. Jeremiah said, ‘The Law was given us from Sinai. We pay no attention to a heavenly voice. For already from Sinai the Law said, “By a majority you are to decide” (based on Ex. 32:2). R. Nathan met Elijah and asked him what God did in that hour. Elijah replied, ‘He laughed and said, “My children have conquered me.”’ (b.Bava Metzia 59b)

Even so, there exists some evidence that among the Rabbis the ability to perform miracles was a evident sign of true piety. Note the following:

    R. Phinehas b. Jair went to a place, and they said, ‘Our fountain no longer yields us water.’ He said, ‘Perhaps you are not particular [about your tithes].’ They said, ‘Pledge yourself to us’ [that if we do so, all will be well], and he pledged himself to them, and the fountain yielded its water.

    Once R. Phinehas was going to the House of Study, and
the river Ginai which he had to pass was so swollen that he could not cross it. He said, ‘O river, why do you prevent me from getting to the House of Study?’ Then it divided its waters, and he passed over. And his disciples said, ‘Can we too pass over?’ He said, ‘He who knows that he has never insulted an Israelite can pass over unharmed.’

R. Hagai in the name of R. Nahman told this tale. There was a pious man who was wont to dig wells and cisterns for passers-by and travelers. One day his daughter, who was about to be married, was drowned in a river. Everybody went to console him, but he would not receive their consolations. Then R. Phinehas went to console him, and he too was not received. He said, ‘Is that your man of piety?’ They said, ‘These are his deeds, and this is what befell him.’ Then R. Phinehas said, ‘Is it possible that he who has honored his Maker through water should be overwhelmed in affliction through water?’ Then the rumor ran through the city that the daughter had returned. Some said, ‘She was saved by a projecting peg’; others said, that an angel came down in the likeness of R. Phinehas and delivered her. (y. Demai. 1, §3, f. 22a)

Stories such as this were no doubt told in order to establish the authority of the earlier Sages. That miracles were ascribed to them shows that when the later rabbis were not in polemic against the emerging Christian Church, they gladly accepted miracles as authenticating the piety of earlier Sages.

And so it was in the time of Yeshua. Those whose eyes were opened by the work of the Ruach were moved to belief in Yeshua as they watched Him perform miracles. Consider the question of John the Baptist from his prison cell:

Are You the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else? (Matt 11:2)

The answer Yeshua returns is straightforward:

Go and report to John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” (Matt 11:4–6, quoting Is 35:5ff).

In other words, the prophets foretold how the Messiah would come
doing miraculous works and that these would be confirming signs to authenticate Him. In our text, the miracles are noted by a three word formula: “signs, wonders, and works of power” (σημείοις τε καὶ τέρασιν καὶ ποικίλαις δυνάμεσιν). Each of these designations give an essential characteristic of the miracle itself. First, its function was that of a sign, to point to a reality which otherwise might be missed. In this case, the reality was simply the coming of the promised Messiah. Second, as a wonder, the miracle evoked awe in those who looked on. It must, therefore, have been irrefutable, for any natural explanation would not have brought a sense of wonder or awe. Finally, as a work of power, the miracle demonstrated the relative weakness of mankind, and the unlimited, sovereign power of God.

But these miraculous signs were not limited to Yeshua Himself. Having sent His own disciples out to continue the expansion of the Kingdom, He endowed them with the Spirit by Whose power the miracles continued. Yet their continuance was primarily to confirm the messiahship of Yeshua, that He is the focal point upon which the Gospel light proclaimed by the prophets focused and that the salvation promised by the prophets was forever established by His life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Yet we know from the accounts in the Gospels that miracles performed by Yeshua did not, in and of themselves, bring all those who observed the miracles to faith that He was the true and promised Messiah. Indeed, apart from the work of the Ruach opening the eyes and heart to receive the witness of the miracles, they were attributed to the power of Satan\(^1\) and only functioned to harden the heart rather than imbue it with faith.

... and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. Literally the Greek has “distributions of the Holy Spirit according to His will” (πνεύματος ἁγίου μερισμοῖς κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ θέλησιν).\(^2\) Paul uses similar language when describing the gifts of the Ruach (1Cor 12:4–10). After listing the various gifts, he concludes:

> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing (διαιρέω, diaireō) to each one individually just as He wills. (1Cor 12:11)

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2 The Greek word translated “distributions” is μερισμός (merismos) and is found only one other time in the Apostolic Scriptures, Heb 4:12, where it is translated as “to divide.”
These “distributions” of the Ruach were likewise given to confirm the message and person of Yeshua by enabling the *ekklesia* He promised to build to function in such a way as to give Him glory and praise. Here, as elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures, the gifting or enabling of the Ruach HaKodesh is for the good of the whole body of Messiah in order that by the exercise of these distributed gifts, the community of believers would remain a living witness to the risen Messiah throughout every generation until He returns.

5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.

Having given his readers an exhortation regarding the superiority of Yeshua and the salvation He brings (2:1-4), our author goes on to discuss additional proofs of His high position. First in his list is the administration of the “world to come” versus the administration of the present world. His point is simply that, while the present age has been, to one extent or another, entrusted to the administration of angels, this is not the case with the world to come, for in the world to come Yeshua, now enthroned, will reign in every administrative detail. Deuteronomy 32:8 of the Lxx gives the basis for angelic administration of the present age:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of men, He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the angels of God. (Deut 32:8)

The Hebrew text is identical except for the final line. It reads “according to the number of the sons of Israel” (יַצֵּב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) instead of the Lxx’s “according to the number of the angels of God” (κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ). It is likely that the Lxx reading reflects the general Jewish belief of guardian angels assigned to specific nations. In Daniel 10:20-21, for instance, the angelic “prince of Persia” and “prince of Greece” may be compared to Michael the “great prince” who champions Israel (cp. also 12:1).

Whatever the basis for the belief, our author certainly considered it valid. What he wants to point out, however, is that the divinely estab-

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1 One fragment of the DSS (4Q37) has בני אלהים, “sons of God” rather than the MT בני ישראל, “sons of Israel.” In Job 1:6; 2:1 the Lxx translates the MT by οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ and it may well be that the Lxx translators saw בני אלהים in their vorlage and translated with ἀγγέλοι.
lished angelic administration of this world will come to an end when the world-to-come is ushered in. Thus, our author intends to prove from the Scriptures that the world-to-come will be ruled exclusively by Yeshua. He does this by quoting Psalm 8:4-6.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MT</th>
<th>Lxx</th>
<th>Hebrews</th>
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<tr>
<td>הָמַּה אֱנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֶ</td>
<td>τί ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος, ὅτι μιμνῄσκῃ αὐτοῦ, ἢ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, ὅτι ἐπισκέπτῃ αὐτόν; ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχύ τι παρ᾿ ἀγγέλους, δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφάνωσας αὐτὸν καὶ κατέστησας αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου πάντα ὑπέταξας ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ,</td>
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<td>תַּחַת־רַגְלָיו׃</td>
<td>וַתְּחַסְּרֵהוּ מְּעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר</td>
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What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands: You have put all things under his feet,

What is man that You remember him? Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him? You made him a little less than angels, You crowned him with glory and honor; and have set him over the works of Your hands: You have put all things under his feet.

The quote in our Hebrews text is verbatim from the Lxx, though the Greek manuscripts of our verse contain a variant. Some include the underlined phrase “and have set him over the works of Your hands” while other manuscripts do not.¹ Even though there is good external manuscript support for including the phrase, the fact that it is absent in other early manuscripts must be accounted for. The best explanation is

¹ In the Hebrews column, the variant is presented in gray letters, both in the Greek and English. Manuscripts which include the phrase: א C D* P Ψ 0243. 0278. 6. 33. 81. 104. 365. 629. 1505. 1739. 1881. 2464 lat (ṣvph*) co. Manuscripts lacking the phrase: Ψ B D² K L 630. 1175. 1241. M. vgms.
that scribes added the phrase in order to bring the text into conformity to Ps 8:7.

It is important to note that the Lxx corresponds with the MT except in the interpretive translation of “angels” for the Hebrew “Elohim.” The translation of “Elohim” by “angels” in the Lxx, however, is not far fetched. Often the phrase בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים (bnei Elohim) “sons of God” is used in the sense of angels. Note, for instance, Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 29:1; 89:6. Furthermore, the word אֱלֹהִים (Elohim) by itself can be used to refer to angels (Ps 97:7; 138:1). Nearly all of the major Jewish commentators likewise interpret “Elohim” in Ps 8:6[Eng. v. 5] to mean “angels” (Rashi, Kimchi, Aben Ezra) as does the Targum.

The Psalm itself was not interpreted as referring to the Messiah by the early Jewish commentators and Sages, though in the Apostolic writings it is used in a number of texts with a messianic interpretation (Matt 21:16; 1Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22). The early followers of Yeshua recognized that His work was not only to redeem mankind from sin, but also to restore to mankind the dignity and purpose of his creation, something marred by the fall. In so far as the incarnation was considered from this vantage point, Yeshua was seen as the last Adam, the man through Whom all men could realize their created purpose. He was, in this sense, therefore, all that man wanted to be—the zenith of human-kind. As Hughes writes:

Psalm 8 relates to the whole of mankind, but it finds its true focus per-eminently in him who is uniquely the Son of man and in whom alone the hurt of mankind is healed. Only in union with him can man become man as God meant and made him to be.2

The structure of the Psalm is easily noted by the major themes presented as well as the literary conventions. As to theme, the following are noted:

1-2 God’s majesty and might
3-4 Mankind’s insignificance when compared to God
5-8 God gives mankind significance by ordaining his role in creation
9 God’s majesty and might praised

The literary structure is chiastic:

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2 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 84.
1-2 God’s might (revealed through His majestic Name)

3 Created things are all under God’s rule (stars, etc.)

4–6 Mankind’s position in creation

7–8 Created things under man’s rule (cattle, etc.)

9 God’s might (revealed through His majestic Name)

Often, the purpose of a chiastic arrangement is to emphasize the center or apex of the chiasmus, which in this case would be mankind’s position in creation. Indeed, the Psalm centers on this theme, but with an attitude of amazement that God, Who created all things, would entrust His creation to mankind! And, it is even more amazing to consider this fact in light of the rebellion of man against his Creator. In point of fact, as v. 2 suggests, such a thought does not square with human reason or strength. God’s majesty, encapsulated in His name, is more powerful than any enemy, and even on the lips of babes (a symbol of the most vulnerable of mankind) is more powerful than all the efforts of the mighty warrior and enemy. Thus, the one who would “sanctify the Name”, i.e., take upon himself all that the Name implies, is the only one able to accept and experience the divine, creative purpose for mankind.

From the Apostles’ perspective, such submission to the Name is only possible by accepting Yeshua as Immanuel, the promised Messiah and Savior of mankind. As such, the role of mankind as ordained by God is realized first in the incarnation, and then by all who, through the redemptive work of Yeshua, sanctify the Name of God.

We can now see how the author of Hebrews views Psalm 8. This Psalm proclaims mankind to be ruler over the creation. But presently (our author reasons), such a rule is not seen, meaning the fulfillment of the Psalm must be eschatological—for the last days. Yeshua, Who became part of mankind through the incarnation, stands as the first man to realize in its fulness the purpose of God for mankind, His created image-bearer. What is more, it is only through the Messiah Yeshua that fallen mankind could be restored to fulfill their created purpose. The point our author is stressing is clear: Yeshua is superior to all and has shown this even through His incarnation in which He humbled Himself. It was through His humility that He conquered death (cf. 2:14) and in doing so, gave life to all who are in Him.

6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, “What is man, that you
REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?

Why does our author make no effort to name the prophet or section of Scripture from which he quotes? In fact, our author regularly by-passes the human author and simply attributes the Scriptures to God, introducing them by “He said”, or “the Holy Spirit says” (3:7). All the Tanach is viewed by our author as divine oracle, the voice of the Ruach HaKodesh.

The term “remember” in our verse (so NASB; NIV has “mindful,”) means more than simply “recalling to memory.” The Hebrew word in Ps 8:5[Eng v. 4], the text being quoted, is זָכַר (zachar, “to remember”), a term which often was used in a technical sense related to the language of covenant. Indeed, in the Ancient Near East, the semitic concept of “remember” was used to denote loyalty to a covenant, and its antonym, “to forget” (שָׁכַח, shakhach) signified breaking the covenant or disregarding one’s covenant obligations. The point is simply that when one considers the covenant relationship into which God has entered with mere mortals, one immediately wonders “Why?” What possible advantage was there for God to do such a thing? Clearly God did not see in man a desirable covenant partner. What then did He see? He saw fallen man redeemed by the sacrificial work of the Man Yeshua, and one can only, therefore, conclude that disparity between God’s greatness and mankind’s lowliness, is entirely overcome by God’s sovereign love.

The word in poetic parallel to “remember” (translated “concerned” by the NASB, “care for” by the NIV), is פָּקַד, paqad, “to attend to, to visit,” and thus the KJV translates “that thou visiteth him.” This word moves from the legal, covenantal “remember” to the personal relationship God establishes with His covenant partner. He comes to “visit,” to “attend to” the needs of His covenant partner, and to assure that the covenant obligations are being fulfilled.

All of this baffles the Psalmist. He is amazed to think that God should move into relationship with man. Yet David, the author of Ps 8, knows and understands the redemption which God has planned through His Messiah (cf. 2 Sam 7:19ff; Ac 2:30-31). The structure of the Psalm, therefore, suggests that though mankind is insignificant in relation to God’s glory, yet in the end he will give to God all the glory He

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deserves, and fulfill the role for which he was created.

The same idea is expressed in the Bavli, where the angels, upon seeing Moses ascending Sinai to receive the Torah, ask of God,

“Sovereign of the Universe! What business has one born of woman amongst us?” “He has come to receive the Torah,” answered He to them. Said they to Him, “That secret treasure, which has been hidden by You for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created, You desire to give to flesh and blood?! What is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You visit him? 0 Lord our God, How excellent is Your name in all the earth! Who has set Your glory [the Torah] upon the Heavens!”

Following this challenge by the angels, Moses is encouraged by God to respond to the angels, and give good reason why he, a mere mortal, should receive the Torah. Upon which Moses rehearses the acts of redemption in the Exodus, asking the angels if they were enslaved in Egypt, and if they were redeemed by God’s power. The story has an obvious moral: man is worthy of relationship with God, indeed, to be His trusted servant, for one simple reason—God has redeemed him and in this redemption has set him as His covenant partner.

The word “man” and the phrase “Son of Man” are not strictly synonymous. While it is true that the parallelism would link them together, our author has doubtlessly connected the term “Son of Man” with the phrase in Daniel and interpreted the verse to speak first of mankind and then of the Messiah, savior of mankind. Indeed, the concept of Messiah as the Last Adam is fully developed by Paul.

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1 b. Shabbat 88b.
2 For a more in-depth study on the use of “Son of Man” as a messianic title in the late 2nd Temple period, see my The Messiah: An Introduction to Christology (TorahResource, 2006), pp. 53–68.
3 Cf. Phil 2:5–8 in which Paul utilizes a known hymn which emphasizes the victory of Yeshua through His death, resurrection, and ascension. For Paul’s teaching regarding Messiah being the “last Adam,” note Rom 5:14; 1Cor 15:22, 45–47.
7 you have made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of your hands; [Quoted from Ps 8:6–7 [Eng. vs. 5–6]]

The first question to be answered is: who is being addressed in this quote from Ps 8? About whom does the Psalmist speak: of man or Messiah, when he says, “You have made him for a little while…”? Actually, the point is a minor one, for one could make an equally valid case for either. Mankind is given dominion over the creation (Gen 1:27–28), yet because of the fall into sin, the final and complete rule over creation by mankind can only be realized in an ultimate sense in Yeshua’s reign as the sovereign over all.

Still, in the original setting of Ps 8, the Psalmist appears to have mankind generally in mind and most commentators take this view. Yet it also seems clear that the Psalmist recognized that in an ultimate or final sense, it would be through the reign of the incarnate Messiah, the Man par excellence, that mankind would be restored to their rightful place as ruling over the created world. That such a restoration had not yet taken place was particularly evident to our author’s audience since they had recently undergone persecution for their faith. Thus, the Psalmist’s description of mankind being “crowned with glory and honor” and “appointed over the works of God’s hands” hardly matched their current situation. For them, as well as for us, such victorious language must therefore await fulfillment in the future reign of the Messiah.

You have made him for a little while lower than the angels… – The term βραχύς (braxus) means “little, short, small” and can be used in regard to space (“a short distance or length”), quantity (“a small amount or number”) or time (“a short duration”). NASB chose to translate “for a little while”; NIV, “little lower” (with marginal note allowing “for a little while”); ESV, “little while lower”; and NET, “lower...for a little while.”

The Hebrew term used in the Psalm is the verb חָסַר (chasar), “to decrease, to lessen; to lack something.” In Psalm 8, the verb is used in the Piel, which is causative in this instance. The only other use of the Piel

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1 See p. 77 above to see the table in which the quote from Psalm 8 is parallel with the Hebrew and Lxx texts.
2 On the Lxx use of “angels” to translate Elohim, see above pp. 54–55.
3 So BDAG, “βραχύς.”
4 This is the same verb used in the Birchat haMazon, וְאַל יֶחְסַר לָנוּ מָזוֹן לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, “and may He not cause us to lack food forever.”
in this verb is Ecc 4:8, "...and for whom am I laboring, depriving myself of pleasure?" The most apparent meaning of the phrase in Psalm 8 is simply "You made him a little less than God" or "You made him a little less than the gods [or heavenly beings]."

The Lxx, however, in translating the phrase, added a small Greek word (τίς, tis) meaning "any, some, a certain, several," and when used with the word "a little" usually means "a little while" (cf. Lxx of Is 57:17, cp. Lk 22:58). This fits our author's point: man, before the fall, was immortal—death had not yet entered into the universe. He was, then, like the angels in terms of being immortal—not subject to death. However, following the fall into sin, mankind became marked by mortality and in being so marked, became, for a time, lower (in terms of partaking of death) than the angels. Yet for those who are "in Yeshua," mortality will give way to immortality, and victory over death will be theirs. In our world, all mankind suffers under the reign of death (Rom 5:14–21) but for the innumerable company of the elect who participate in the eternal redemption secured for them by Yeshua, mortality will give way to immortality in the eternal life of the world to come.

Even as mankind now exists in a fallen position lower than the heavenly beings, so Yeshua endured a lowly role for a little while as He humbled Himself by being made in the likeness of sinful flesh and being fashioned as a servant. He did this in order to bring about the final redemption and to bring to fruition the creative purposes of God in mankind, that is, the full subjugation of the created world as proof as his (mankind’s) exalted, appointed position. Yeshua’s resurrection and subsequent ascension revealed the victory He had won, and thus the ultimate victory for all who are His. That this victory is not yet fully realized by those who are His followers is, of course, the subject to which our author proceeds.

In all of this, we dare not lose the primary point of our author—indeed, the very reason for his quoting from Psalm 8, namely, that mankind was appointed by God to this exalted, ruling position and not the angels. But further, that the exalted position of mankind is yet to be realized because it can only become actual when the full and complete victory of Yeshua is universally recognized, when all evil is subdued and the world to come is established in eternal, unending righteousness.

And Adonai will be king over all the earth; in that day Adonai will be the only one, and His name the only one. (Zech 14:9)
Thus, the eminent position of mankind as the image bearer of God is to be realized only through the work of the preeminent One, Who is superior to all, that is, Yeshua HaMashiach. Though we now experience in part the reality of this eternal life, it is the promise of the full restoration of all things that forms the focal point of our sure hope in Messiah.

8–9 You have put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Yeshua, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

The first line of our verse completes the quote from Ps 8, stating that God has appointed mankind, His image bearer, to rule over all things in the created universe. Our author’s inspired interpretation of the Psalm is that all created things and beings are subjected to the rule of mankind, and this would include the angels. Even though in the present era we do not see all things being subjected to mankind (or to saying it differently, we do not see mankind ruling over all things), we know that in the world to come, through the victory won by Yeshua, redeemed mankind will rule and the angels will serve them. Our author’s point is this: if everything is to be subjected to mankind in the end (as Ps 8 teaches), then we may say with certainty that we have not yet reached the end!

Some commentators, seeing the close relationship between the quote from Ps 110:1 (in 1:13) and the subjugation of Yeshua’s enemies under His feet, have considered it possible that our author has taken an entirely messianic interpretation of Ps 8 and thus take the meaning to be that all things have been subjected under the feet of the Messiah, Yeshua. But given the fact that the Psalm, in its original setting, is clearly referring to mankind, it seems best to stay with the interpretation given above, that God has put all things in subjection under His feet, i.e., mankind’s feet, but that the full reality of this is made possible only through the redemptive work of Yeshua.

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1 The break between vv. 7 and 8 is unfortunate since it separates the final line of the quote from the preceding context.  
2 E.g., Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 86–7,
But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely Yeshua... – By God’s grace we “see Him,” that is, we recognize Yeshua as the One through Whom God’s plan for mankind is realized and brought to completion. One cannot help but be mindful of our author’s admonition in the closing chapters of the epistle, in which He writes: “…fixing our eyes upon Yeshua, the author and perfecter of our faith...” (12:2). From the beginning of this book until its end, the author is emphasizing the need to “see Yeshua”—to have the eyes of our heart focused upon Him. And so here, the failure of mankind to attain to the purpose for which they were created prompts us to look to another—to Yeshua—through Whom redemption has been accomplished.

The Lxx, the text utilized by our author, allows him to make an interesting application: the Psalm in its original setting praises the glorious position of mankind as God’s image bearer, reiterating the fact that God has set mankind as His appointed vassal to rule over all the creation. Yet in realizing that this created purpose is to come about only through the incarnation of Yeshua—His humbling Himself to come as a man—the phrase “for a little while lower than the angels” can be nicely applied to reference Yeshua’s condescension rather than mankind’s exultation. As Westcott notes:

The thought expressed in the original [of Ps 8] ... is that of the nobility of man’s nature which falls but little short of the divine. The words on the contrary as applied to Christ describe a humiliation. This application is facilitated by the Lxx rendering, but does not depend upon it. The essential idea is that the true destiny of man described by the Psalmist, which experience teaches us that man himself has missed, was fulfilled otherwise than had been expected. Words which were used of man in himself became first true of One Who being more than man took man’s nature upon Him. In such a case the description of dignity was of necessity converted initially into a description of condescension.¹

...because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor... – It was through the incarnation, the cross, His burial and resurrection that Yeshua was revealed and proclaimed to be the conquering, victorious Messiah (cf. Rom 1:4). As our author states in v. 14 of our chapter, “…that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

¹ Westcott, Hebrews, p. 43.
The Greek phrase διὰ τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου (could be literally rendered “on account of (or) as a result of the suffering of death….”) This reminds one of the hymn used by Paul in Phil 2:

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Yeshua every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yeshua Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:8–11)

...so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. – ὅπως χάριτι θεοῦ, “In order that by the grace of God…,” in other words, He suffered unto death so that God’s grace could be given to those who deserved His wrath. God’s grace is, by analogy, one and the same with His elective love. As Calvin notes:

...the cause of redemption was the infinite love of God towards us, through which it was that He spared not even His own son.

The precise expression “taste death” (γεύσηται θανάτου), though not found in the Lxx, is clear as to its meaning, i.e., “to experience death,” “to undergo the suffering which finalizes in death.” The verb γεύομαι (geuomai, “to taste”) is used by the Lxx in its literal sense of tasting food (e.g., 1Sam 14:24; Job 34:3) but also in the metaphoric sense “to experience something.”

1 A variant occurs in the later manuscripts on the phrase “by the grace of God” (χάριτι θεοῦ), reading χωρὶς θεοῦ, “without (or) apart from God.” This most likely occurred as a marginal gloss, explaining (as does 1Cor 15:27) that while all things were subjected to Yeshua, the “all things” excluded the Father (i.e., “apart from God”). The marginal gloss was then copied into the text as a correction to the original χάριτι θεοῦ. See Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the New Testament, p. 664. See also the Excursus in Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 94ff.

2 By “elective love” I distinguish between the “love of God” which secures eternal life for those He has chosen (e.g., Rom 8:35–39), and the “love of God” which is described in the Scriptures as His universal benevolence for all mankind (e.g., Matt 5:45).

3 John Calvin, Commentary on Hebrews, p. 61.
O taste and see that Adonai is good; How blessed is the man
who takes refuge in Him! (Ps 34:8)
γεύσασθε καὶ ἴδετε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος· μακάριος ἀνήρ, δὲς ἐλπίζει ἐπ’ αὐτόν. (Lxx: Ps 33:9)

We find Yeshua Himself using the phrase “taste death,” and it seems quite likely these ipsissima verba influenced our author’s choice of words:

Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (Matt. 16:28; cp. Mk 9:1; Lk 9:27)

The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.’ (John 8:52)

Thus, “to taste death” means to die, and this Yeshua did, not in some metaphorical or allegorical sense, but in experiencing that to which fallen humanity is destined (cf. 9:27).

...for everyone. – ὑπὲρ παντὸς, literally, “on behalf of each one,” παντὸς (pantos). The adjective pantos can be read as either masculine or neuter singular, yielding the sense of either “everyone” or “everything.” While the neuter could offer the idea that Yeshua’s salvific work accrues to the restoration of all things (i.e., the new heavens and earth), the context seems clearly to favor the masculine, thus referring to people. Further, while the singular is often nearly equivalent with the plural of this adjective, the singular may emphasize “the individual members of the class denoted.”¹ In the wider context, the “class denoted” are those who are eternally saved, for the following verses, each grammatically connected to our verse with the particle γάρ (gar, “for”), make this clear. The suffering of death which Yeshua underwent was for the purpose of “bringing many sons to glory” (v. 10), sons who are further identified as “brethren” who are “sanctified” (v. 11). Thus, for our author, those for whom Yeshua “tasted death” are those who are eternally saved. This same idea is reiterated in 13:12.

Therefore Yeshua also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. (Heb 13:12)

¹ So BDAG, “πᾶς,” 1.a.a.
As in our text, so in this verse it is clear that the shedding of Yeshua’s blood sanctifies those for whom He died.¹

In these verses, then, our author utilizes Psalm 8 as his backdrop, applying its ultimate fulfillment to the work of Yeshua. The language of the Psalm is too obvious for our author to pass it by without mention. In his mind, the words of the Psalm must ultimately apply to the Last Adam, Who, on behalf of all who believe in Him, has obtained the means by which mankind can be “crowned with glory and honor.”

And who is this One, this Messiah? Our author takes great joy in naming His name: Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעַ, from יָשַׁע, “to save”), thus “Savior.”

His name will be called Yeshua, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matt 1:21)

Thus, Psalm 8 prophesied Yeshua’s incarnation as the means through which God would bring His covenant partner into close, intimate fellowship with Himself. The Psalmist has traced the path of Messiah, from the depths of humility (death upon a cross) to being crowned with glory and honor. And as the victor, all who are in Messiah participate in His glory, for each one is given eternal life.

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

The obvious connection with the previous paragraph (which the word “For” indicates) is the seeming incongruity and the question it raises. Yeshua, in being the zenith and crowning example of true mankind, and the One to whom all things will be subjected, came to earth in humiliation, and was finally crucified by His enemies. If He is the Messiah, the promised One, and if all things and people are to be subject to Him, why did He come in such humble circumstances? Why did people treat Him so badly? Why, ultimately, did His life end in such a horrible death?

The previous verse has given the general answer: Yeshua suffered as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of the elect. The current paragraph goes on to expand this line of reasoning, to show that the death of Messiah was definitely within the overall plan of the Father and that

¹ Cp. Rom 8:32, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”
it would therefore bring about His ordained purpose, that is, the eternal redemption of those for whom Yeshua died.

For it was fitting for Him...1 – How do we discover what is or what is not “fitting” for God? All that He does is just and righteous (Ps 145:17), so all that He does is fitting. Why, then, does our author reiterate the obvious? Because to the Jewish community, death by crucifixion was particularly odious, so it was necessary to emphasize that the Son’s suffering by the hand of His Father was, in fact, a fitting thing to do, though at the outset it appears cruel and unrighteous. Indeed, while God in His mercy provided a substitute so that Abraham’s son Isaac would be spared, He Himself did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up as a guilt offering (אָשָׁם, āshām, Is 53:10) for us all (Rom 8:32).

The argument of our author is a “one-for-the-many” type, the same argument employed by the high priest Caiaphas (Jn 11:49-50), whereby he reasoned that the death of Yeshua as a representative for the nation would keep the many from having to die, and was therefore justified. So here, the suffering of Yeshua is justified on the basis of what this suffering would accomplish, namely, bringing many sons to glory, i.e., saving many. From this we may infer that Messiah’s suffering and death did, indeed, effect salvation, i.e., it was through His suffering that He secured the inevitable passage of many sons to glory, into the very presence of God.

for Whom are all things, and through Whom are all things...– Who is doing this “perfecting”? It is most certainly the Father. In the mystery of the incarnation, the Father was perfecting the Messiah, Who here is referred to as the “author” (NASB, NIV; “founder,” ESV; “pioneer,” NET) of salvation. Thus, the Father is identified as the One “for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things,” a phrase very reminiscent of Paul’s words in Rom 11:36. “For Whom” emphasizes the ultimate purpose of creation, while “through Whom” speaks to the omnipotence of God in the act of creating from or into nothing. Clearly, in our author’s mind, the universe was created for a purpose, i.e., the purpose was well fixed in the mind of God prior to creation. And this purpose was none other than that God should receive the glory from His creation, which leads to the reason for Messiah to suffer, namely, that many sons should be brought to behold His glory and stand forever as trophies of

1 The NIV has added the word “God” in order to make the dative pronoun αὐτῷ (“It was fitting for Him...”) explicit: “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.”
His grace.

in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. – The Greek word translated “author” by the NASB and NIV is ἀρχηγός (archegos) and its range of meanings includes “pioneer,” “leader,” “founder,” “originator.” It is used four times in the Apostolic Writings, the other times being Heb 12:2; Ac 3:15; 5:31. In each of these cases the term has the meaning (in context) of a champion or leader in battle–some one to be followed. As the “pioneer” of our faith, Yeshua is the One who leads us in the path of faith as we emulate His life and thinking.

But if the Messiah is the pioneer or leader of our faith, then He is first into the battle. We follow Him bravely because He is our Leader, our Commander—a position He holds because He was victorious in battle. And so it was fitting that the Father should work out His eternal purposes for the creation by sending His own Son into the battle (as it were) that we might follow Him into the fray, a Commander worthy of being followed.

The term “to perfect” (NASB) is τελειώ (teleio) which has as its base idea “to complete,” “accomplish a task or duty,” “to bring something to its proper conclusion.” The obvious question which confronts us is how the Son, Who is the complete outshining of the Father’s glory (1:3), and thus in every way perfect, could be made more perfect. The answer, undoubtedly, is that as Son He is and always has been perfect, but as Savior it was necessary for Him to accomplish and complete His task through suffering. To put it simply, while the Son was perfect in His holiness from all eternity, He had not yet suffered death, the requirement for payment of sin, and thus necessary for Him to be the Savior of the elect. This He would do through the incarnation and the sufferings attached thereto. The battle in which the chosen would engage and eventually win must first be fought by their Captain. To put it in the context of the priestly intercessor, the high priest must bear the burdens of the people before God, and in order to do this he must himself feel and know their burdens. What is more, he must offer atonement on their behalf. For the Pioneer of Faith, this atonement was none other than His own life, for only this death would suffice. In short, suffering of this kind was the only way for Yeshua to be the accomplished Savior and High Priest Who alone could effect the salvation of His people.
For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

The explanation continues: a priest (the one who sanctifies or cleanses) and those he represents (the one who is sanctified or cleansed) are all of one stock. The Greek simply has “are all out of one” (ἐξ ἑνὸς; the word “Father” in the NASB or “family” in the NIV are translator’s additions). Thus, our author annunciates the primary premise regarding true and honest representation: a representative must be part of the group he represents. Thus, if Yeshua were to function as a priest representing His people, He must be like them, i.e., human.

Note carefully that our author’s argument presupposes the efficacious character of Yeshua’s sacrifice. What our text takes for granted is that the inevitable result of Yeshua’s suffering is the sanctification of those He calls “brothers.” Nothing of their own doing contributes to their being chosen by God to be members of His family. It is all of Him and all of grace. And thus Yeshua is not ashamed to call them “brothers,” those for whom He suffered, and who by God’s grace become part of His family. Indeed, Yeshua and all who are set apart for God have the same Father, He being the Son of God and they being sons of God.

This is the first occurrence of the verb ἁγιάζω, hagiazō in the book of Hebrews but it will be found five more times in the subsequent chapters (9:13; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12). Most English versions tend to translate hagiazō with some form of the English word “sanctify.” Typically, the theological term “sanctification” or “to be sanctified” is viewed as the on-going work of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) through which the child of God becomes more and more like Yeshua. This is distinguished from “justification” or “to be justified” which is the declaration of God that the one who has received Yeshua as their Savior is just, that is, no longer guilty in His sight.

However, it is clear when one looks at the places in Hebrews where

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1 Remember that in the Hebrew mindset, the word בן, “son” and the plural בנים, “sons” can just as well mean “child” and “children.” Thus, from an Hebraic perspective, our author’s use of “brothers” should be understood as “children” or “siblings” and thus of both male and female.

2 The verb hagiazō literally means “to make holy,” which likewise has the sense of “set apart as sacred,” thus the English “sanctify” (from Latin sanctus, “consecrated,” “holy,” etc.). For this reason, some English translations (e.g., NET Bible) utilize “holy” or “make holy” to translate this verb.
the verb *hagiazō* is used that our author is using the word to mean “complete redemption.” Thus, in 10:10, 14 it is the once for-all-time offering of the body of Yeshua Messiah by which we are sanctified (*hagiasmenoi*):

> By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Yeshua Messiah once for all. (10:10)

> For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (10:14)

Likewise, in 13:12, the substitutionary death of Yeshua on behalf of His “brothers” sanctifies them.

> Therefore Yeshua also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. (13:12)

Thus, our author uses *hagiazō* as it is sometimes used in the Lxx, where we find it translating the Hebrew verb כִּפֵּר (*kippēr*), “to wipe clean,” “to atone.”

> We therefore should read the word “sanctifies” and “sanctified” in our verse as indicating complete and eternal redemption.

12–13 saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.” And again, “I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM.” And again, “BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.”

Two quotes from the Tanach are given to substantiate the claim that Yeshua considered those for whom He died as “brethren.” The first is from Ps 22:22 [Hebrew v. 23] and the second is generally taken to be from Is 8:17–18.

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1  Cf. Ex 29:33, 36.

Psalm 22:22[23]

<table>
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<tr>
<td>אני שלחתי שמותיך לאחתי אהלך</td>
<td>διηγήσομαι τὸ ὄνομα σου τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς μου ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας ύμνήσω σε</td>
<td>ἀπαγγελῶ τὸ ὄνομά σου σοῦ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς μου ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας ύμνήσω σε</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will relate Your name to My brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.</td>
<td>I will describe Your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing Your praise.</td>
<td>I will announce Your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing Your praise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Lxx is a direct and worthy translation of the Hebrew MT, and except for the opening verb, the author of Hebrews quotes verbatim from the Lxx. Some have suggested that our author’s choice of ἀπαγγελῶ (apangelō, “to announce”) in the place of the Lxx’s διηγήσομαι (diegesomai, “to describe, explain”) might indicate his direct use of the Hebrew text, but apangelō does not offer a more accurate translation of שִׁפֵּר (sipēr, “to relate, tell”) than διηγέομαι (diegeomai, “to describe, explain”), the word used by the Lxx. It is more likely that our author has substituted apangelō for diegeomai of the Lxx because this Greek verb formed the basis for the noun ἐπαγγελία (epangelia), meaning “to promise” or “to declare that which one intends to do.” The concept of “promise” formed a central component of the “gospel of the Kingdom” with “the promise” being fulfilled in the coming of Yeshua, “the promised One” (e.g., Acts 13:32–33).

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1 See Owen, Hebrews, 2:410; Attridge, Hebrews, p. 90, n. 126.
2 In fact, in the Lxx, diegeomai regularly translates the verb שִׁפֵּר (sipēr). On the other hand, apangelō, the verb chosen by the author Hebrews, regularly translates Hebrewו (in the hifil) and only twice is used to translate the verb שִׁפֵּר (Ps 78:4, 6).
The second quote is not so straightforward as the first. But if it is remembered that often the snippets from the Tanach found in the Apostolic Scriptures stand as markers for the larger context from which they were taken, then we are given further insight into our author’s intentions for quoting from Isaiah 8.

The context of Isaiah 8 is the nation’s disregard for the message of Isaiah. Seeing that neither king nor people receive his oracles of salvation and judgment, Isaiah seals up the prophecies and hands them to his disciples for safe keeping, so that when the events therein foretold come to pass, his prophetic word will be vindicated. In the meantime, so the prophet says, “I will wait for HaShem, who hides His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him” (8:17).

The “hiding face” motif provides the link to the previous quote, for in Ps 22 God appears to have hidden His face from the suffering Messiah, Who bears upon Himself the sin of His people, the house of Jacob. Yet, in the end, the suffering One confesses that God has not hidden His face but has heard and responded. This sets up the parallel thought between Ps 22 and Is 8, emphasizing the willingness to entrust oneself to God, awaiting the future when vindication of the righteous will take place. If Isaiah, a recognized and respected prophet of the nation, committed himself to trusting God for the time when his words and actions would be vindicated, how much more fitting for the Messiah Himself to commit His soul to the Father, waiting for the time when, in the ekklesia He would gather about Himself those brethren for whom He suffered, indeed, at whose hands He suffered!

This act of committing oneself to God when one’s actions and words are righteous but despised by the people, is likewise found in Ps 22. There the taunters jeer, “Commit yourself to HaShem!” (Ps 22:8, cp. Matt 27:43). Yet the righteous one knows full well that if one indeed
commits his way to Adonai, He will rescue him out of all the distresses. And so the Psalmist writes, “For he has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hid His face from Him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard.” (Ps 22:24)

The sentences quoted from Isaiah 8:17-18, while continuous in the original, are broken into two distinct quotes by our author’s well used phrase, “And again.” Why would he punctuate the quote in this manner? Several reasons may be offered. Is it possible that the opening “I will put my trust in Him” was a section title for reading this part of Isaiah in the synagogue? If this could be substantiated, then the opening line would simply have been given to alert the readers from which section of Isaiah he is quoting. Unfortunately, there is not a specific haftarah from Is 8 in the extant lists of either the annual or triennial cycles of Torah readings. Most probably, then, our author simply wished to make two distinct points, and so he breaks the quote into two parts.

The first half of the quote represents the heart of Isaiah as his message was rejected by the people. The second half details the inevitable witness he would bear as he and his family traversed Jerusalem. He, “Isaiah,” would constantly be a reminder that “HaShem is salvation,” the very meaning of the name “Isaiah.” And his children, each with a prophetic name, would herald their particular message: Shʿaryashuv (שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב), “a remnant will return” and Mahershalalhashbaz (מַהֵר שָׁלָל חָשַׁב), “hasten the booty, speed the spoil.” By their names, the message was clear: trust in HaShem for He alone will bring salvation. Trusting in anyone else would seal the destruction of the city.

So how does this relate to the argument and context of Hebrews? Yeshua, David, and Isaiah all have this in common (among other things): they were all rejected by their brothers for doing righteousness, they all suffered at the hands of their brothers, and they all entrusted themselves to God to bring about their vindication which He would accomplish one day by bringing their brothers to accept them and their message of righteousness. But even more to the point is this: both David and Isaiah, in their sufferings, foreshadowed the suffering Messiah Who would accomplish this vindication through His own death and triumphal resurrection. Ultimately, Yeshua would stand in the midst of His brethren to declare His indisputable Messiahship, and would, by such an act, vindicate Himself and all those who proclaimed the prophetic message of His person and work.

It is evident that our author quotes Ps 22:22[23] as being the words of Yeshua, and this was undoubtedly how the Psalm was understood by the early communities of The Way. For not only did Yeshua quote
the opening verse of Psalm 22 from the cross (cf. Matt 27:46; Mk 15:34), but John (19:24) explicitly refers to the casting of lots by the soldiers over Yeshua’s tunic as a direct fulfillment of Ps 22:17[18]. Moreover, it is clear that the prophetic victory ascribed to the suffering one of Ps 22 is not realized, nor could it be realized completely, in the reign of David. For the Psalm ends with a vision of the final consummation when the blessing promised to Abraham is fulfilled in bringing divine blessing to all of the families of the earth:

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to Adonai, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is Adonai’s and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, all those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, even he who cannot keep his soul alive. Posterity will serve Him; It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it. (22:27–31)

Yet we do a certain hermeneutical violence to the Psalm if we fail to reckon with the fact that the Psalmist himself, King David, speaks first of his own suffering at the hands of the unrighteous. Yet having been given the revelation of the Messiah by Whom the Torah would, in that ultimate sense, come to all of mankind (2Sam 7:19), and having been given revelation of His victorious resurrection by which He conquered death (cf. Acts 2:29–32), the Psalmist sees his own suffering and divine deliverance as prophetic of the Messiah Who would likewise suffer but be given the final victory. Thus, as Hengstenberg notes:

With all this the Psalm retained, on the whole, till the coming of Christ, the character of an unfulfilled prophecy. According to the proportion of righteousness was the proportion of deliverance, and of blessed results for the kingdom of God. Every temporary fulfillment pointed forward to a perfect one yet to come. By those in whom hope in the Messiah was in general a living one, this could be expected only of Him. The

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1 Cf. Matt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:34.
2 Greek χιτῶν, xitōn, “shirt or tunic worn next to the skin,” cf. BDAG, “χιτῶν.”
most perfect righteousness belongs so necessarily to the idea of the Messiah, that it could not be present to the mind without the most distinct recognition thereof.¹

The primary point, however, which our author intends to make through utilizing the quotes from Ps 22 and Is 8 is clear: the incarnation of the Son was and is an absolute necessity if He would save a host of humankind beyond number who would be reckoned as His brothers and sisters. Yet those that He would redeem are characterized by more than their common humanity with Him. They, like Him, have put their trust in God so that when they suffer at the hands of the unrighteous, they entrust themselves to the Father believing that He, according to His promise, would vindicate them in due course. It is this salvific vindication that forms our author’s emphasis in the concluding verses of this chapter.

14–15 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

The true humanity of Messiah is thus asserted as the necessary reality if He would have real solidarity with mankind. If He should represent them as high priest, He too must partake of “flesh and blood” (the Greek text actually has the order reversed, “blood and flesh”²) and this by the same gateway of humanity, the gateway of birth. There is no room for a docetic or gnostic Messiah here. Yeshua is fully man—there was no other way.

And here, in this almost poetic verse, we are given the concrete purpose for His incarnation: “He...partook...that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

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² The hendiadys “flesh and blood” meaning “human” is used four other times in the Apostolic Scriptures: Matt 16:17; 1Cor 15:50; Gal 1:16; Eph 6:12. As in our verse, so in Eph 6:12 the order is reversed, “blood and flesh,” though the English translations generally do not represent this reversal but maintain the more common “flesh and blood.” The phrase is also common in the rabbinic literature (e.g., m. Nazir 9.5; b. Berachot 10a; b. Pesachim 75b) and Pseudepigrapha (e.g., 1Enoch 15:4; Sirach 14:18; 17:31).
The singular purpose for the incarnation as far as our author is concerned in this context, is simply that He might die as a substitute for His people and by His death forever undo the curse brought about by the nefarious schemes of the evil one.

The language is emphatic: “He himself likewise ...” (NASB) (which well represents the Greek καὶ αὐτὸς παραπλησίως μετέσχεν τῶν αὐτῶν) as though to affirm that Yeshua, and no one else, is the subject at hand. The death of the divine Messiah was so difficult a concept in the minds of 1st century Jews (cf. 1Cor 1:23) that this historical reality must be emphasized over and over again.

The majesty of the verse is the wisdom of God revealed! Who would have considered that death, through death, should be conquered? As the hymn writer says,

He hell in hell laid low; Made sin, He sin o’erthrew;
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so;
And death, by dying, slew. (S.W. Gandy)

The picture of Moses in the wilderness, raising the bronze snake, gives ample illustration (cf. Num 21; Jn 3:15-16). The people were dying of snake bites—they were, by all estimations, as good as dead. What is it that could heal them? The very thing by which they were dying becomes the object upon which they must gaze. And this look of faith healed. There, the bronze serpent was put on a pole, itself a symbol of death. The means of healing would be the death of death—rendering powerless the poisonous serpent itself. So Yeshua, crucified upon a pole, became the sin offering for us, the One who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2Cor 5:21). Through death, He conquered death for all who would believe.

He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil – The verb employed here, καταργέω (katargeō), can mean in various contexts “to render of no effect,” “to nullify,” “to subdue,” or “to destroy.” The NASB has “render powerless” while the ESV, NIV, and NET all use the word “destroy.” The obvious sense is that Yeshua’s death and resurrection, through which He secured victory over death for His people, forever destroyed the kingdom of the devil—a kingdom marked by death itself.

1 The translation “fade” or “fading” for katargeō in 2Cor 3:7, 11, 13 by the NASB, NIV, and HCSB is unfortunate, for the word never has this meaning in any other context, biblical or extra-biblical.
The devil is here said to have the power of death. The NASB’s past tense “had the power of death” is inaccurate. The verb is a present active participle yielding “…him who has the power of death….” How is it that the devil currently has the power of death? This goes back to the beginning, as we read in Jn 8:44, “…He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning…” meaning that his successful beguilement of Adam and Chavah was the channel through which death entered the world (cf. Rom 5:12–14). Moreover, the devil is active in blinding the minds of those who do not believe (2Cor 4:4), a blindness which, if not overcome by the merciful power of God, will result in eternal death. Yet we should be careful to remember that this power is delegated and not something the evil one has autonomously. He and his workers cannot act outside of the realm of God’s all encompassing providence.

The word “devil” translates the Greek διάβολος (diabolos) which has a basic sense of “slander,” “falsehood,” or “a lie.” Long before the writing of the Apostolic Scriptures, διάβολος (the Greek word for “devil” in our text) was used by the Lxx to translate הַשָּׂטָן (hasatan), a transcendent being who is portrayed as an adversary to God and His people. In the Gospels, the devil is portrayed as the father of unbelievers and a murderer (Jn 8:44), the ruler or prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30), and the enemy of Yeshua’s disciples (Jn 12:31). In the Epistles he is the “god of this world” who blinds the minds of unbelievers (2Cor 4:4) and is called “the prince of the power of the air,” and “the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). He snaresthe unrepentant (2Tim 2:26) and walks about like a roaring lion seeking those he might devour (1Pet 5:8). A close parallel to our text is found in 1Jn 3:8 –

the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1Jn 3:8)

As Sampson notes:

He [Yeshua] became man in order that he might die, and thus lay the foundation for the destruction of Satan’s power and kingdom. Here, again, the full benefits of redemption are included in the Apostle’s meaning.2

… and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slav-

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1 Cf. 1Chr 21:1; Esth 7:4; 8:1; Ps 109:6; Job 1:6–7, 9, 12; 2:1–4, 6–7; Zech 3:1–2
2 Sampson, Hebrews, p. 102.
The defeat of death naturally sets free those held in its bondage. Satan, the devil (the deceiver and slanderer), holds people captive through the bonds of sin. The fear of dying is, as it were, the noose around their necks. How appropriate to describe Satan as the fountain of death, for he is other than God, Who is the source of life.

But why is death so much feared? It is not the dying so much as it is the finality of death—the inward recognition that after death comes a final judgment (Heb 9:27, cf. Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 21:8). Inwardly every person, by virtue of being created in God’s image, knows that there will come a day of reckoning—a day of judgment. The very fact that mankind is endowed with a conscience means that the unbeliever constantly labors under a sense of the inevitable consequences for his sin. This causes fear to spring forth, a fear that controls, dominates, enslaves and imprisons, and sends fallen man into all manner of attempts at overcoming that fear. Yet there is no subduing the fear of death unless and until one gains eternal life through the gift of God’s grace in Messiah Yeshua.

Thus, our author is not speaking of some ethereal, merely theological concept. He is speaking out of experience, for he knows the shalom which only Divine forgiveness brings, a peace which the Apostle Paul describes as beyond comprehension:

> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension,  
> will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua.  
> (Phil 4:7)

This deliverance, though only fully enjoyed in the world to come, is nonetheless a reality in this life, and the fountain head of much joy and contentment for those who are in Messiah, regardless of life’s circumstances.

> My sins—oh the joy of this glorious thought  
> My sins, not in part, but the whole  
> Are nailed to the cross, and I bear them no more,  
> Praise the Lord; Praise the Lord, oh my soul!"}

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1 Horatio Spafford, “It is Well with My Soul.”
16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham.

This deliverance, our author goes on to teach, is for mankind only, not for angels. Why would he feel compelled to make such a statement? Did anyone think that Yeshua came to redeem those angels who had fallen? The answer may rest in understanding his line of reasoning at this point.

The conclusion to which our author proceeds is the fact that Yeshua is our high priest, and that as such, it was necessary for Him to become fully human, since one cannot represent others who differ entirely from himself. Now, if Yeshua were to redeem angels, it would be necessary that He take upon Himself the nature of an angelic being. Likewise, if He is to redeem people through paying their sin-penalty of death, then He must become a mortal Himself. Since we know that He became a man and not an angel, it is obvious that He did not come to redeem angels.

The phrase (NASB) “...He does not give help to angels”; (NIV) “...it is not angels He helps” is literally (from the Greek) “He does not take hold of angels.” Likewise, the phrase “He gives help to the descendants of Abraham” is literally “He takes hold of the seed of Abraham.” This term “take hold of” (ἐπιλαμβάνω, epilambanō) has been variously understood. The word itself means “to lay firm hold of” or “to appropriate.” It is found in Matt 14:31; Lk 9:47; 14:4; 23:26; Acts 9:27; 16:19; 17:19; 18:17; 21:30, 33 where its sense is sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, of taking hold of a person. Three times it refers to taking hold of someone’s hand either physically or figuratively (Mk 8:23; Acts 23:19; Heb 8:9, cf. Jer 31:32). In 1Tim 6:12, 19 it is used of taking hold of eternal life and in Lk 20:20, 26, of taking hold of the words of Yeshua.

We may sum up the use of the word itself under two primary meanings: (1) to give help to someone by taking hold of them, or (2) to take hold of something so as to make it one’s own.

The early commentators (especially the early Church fathers) almost unanimously accepted the latter, i.e., taking hold of something in order to make it one’s own. Thus, they interpreted the passage as affirming the manhood of which Yeshua “took hold,” emphasizing that...
He took upon Himself human nature and not the nature of angelic beings. This was how the KJV translators understood our text:

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

But there are a number of factors that weigh against this interpretation and favor giving the verb “to take hold” (ἐπιλαμβάνεται, epilambanetai) the meaning “to take hold of in order to help,” thus “to render aid.” First, we find ample evidence that this verb is used with this meaning in other contexts. Note, for instance, Matt 14:31 and Lk 14:4.

Immediately Yeshua stretched out His hand and took hold (ἐπελάβετο) of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matt 14:31)

But they kept silent. And He took hold (ἐπιλαβόμενος) of him and healed him, and sent him away. (Lk 14:4)

Note also the Lxx of Jer 31:32.

not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand (ἐπιλαβομένου μου τῆς χειρὸς) to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares Adonai. (Jer 31:32, Lxx 38:32)

Clearly in all of these texts, the verb epilambanō, “to take hold” of a person or persons, means to come to their aid or to give them help, indicating that such a meaning is a viable option in our text as well.

A second factor is that the verb epilambanetai in our text is in the present tense which far better suits the idea of presently giving aid than to speak of Yeshua having taken on human nature when He was conceived by the Ruach in the womb of Miriam, regarding which we would expect a past tense verb.

Third, and perhaps most persuasive, is the fact that our author refers to Yeshua “taking hold of the seed of Abraham.” Had he meant to emphasize that Yeshua “took hold of human nature” in the sense of “acquired human nature for Himself,” we surely would have expected “seed of Adam” rather than “seed of Abraham.” What is more, the phrase is anarthrous (without the definite article “the”), so that the text literally has “a seed of Abraham” rather than “the seed of Abraham.”
The anarthrous construction often emphasizes a general character of the thing rather than a specific item of a given category, and it would seem that this is the case here as well. Yeshua takes hold of Abraham’s seed in the sense of bringing to fruition the covenant promises made to Abraham.

Here, then, we see emphasized once again a reoccurring theme of our epistle, namely, that Yeshua came to procure the salvation of His people, those given to Him by the Father (cf. Jn 10:29; 17:2,6). His purpose was to bring many sons to glory; (v. 10), a purpose which He accomplishes through His priestly work (which includes His sacrifice, resurrection, and His intercessory work). Likewise, the apostles affirm in their writings (particularly Paul, cf. Rom 4:13-17) that all believers, whether Jew or non-Jew, may rightly call Abraham their father, not by means of physical descent (for not all Israel is Israel, Rom 9:6), but by means of God’s election and saving grace. Thus, our author’s use of the phrase “seed of Abraham” brings to mind the concluding covenant promise that “in your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (cp. Gal 3:8 where this is defined as the “gospel”), where the “blessing” is nothing less than participation in the faith which Abraham had, a faith with Messiah as the object.

Finally, the following context gives strong evidence that our author’s intended meaning was that of “giving help” to the seed of Abraham, for he concludes the pericope by stating this directly: “He is able to come to the aid (βοηθῆσαι, boēthēsai) of those who are tempted.”

17–18 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren... – Since the coming

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1 Cf. also John 8:39–44
2 For modern commentators who take this view, i.e., that “take hold” means “give help or aid,” see Westcott, Hebrews, pp. 54–5; Attridge, Hebrews, pp. 94–5; Sampson, Hebrews, pp. 104–5; Delitzsch, Hebrews, 1.137ff; Luke Timothy Johnson, Hebrews, p. 102; Kistemaker, Hebrews, p. 76; Alford, Hebrews, p. 51; Montefiore, Hebrews, p. 66f. For the argument that “take hold” should be understood to mean “take upon Himself humanity rather than angelic nature,” see Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 115–19.
of Yeshua to earth was for the express purpose of saving those whom
the Father had given Him (cf. Jn 17:1–2, 6, 24), our author continues the
logic of his argument, namely, that in order to “give help” to those who
would, like Abraham, exercise saving faith, it was necessary that He
should function as their high priest, for only in so doing could He make
propitiation for their sins. This means that it would be necessary for
Him to take upon Himself the penalty of sin, that is, death, and thus He
had to become mortal—able to die.

But the phrase before us offers further insights. Not only was it nec-
essary for Yeshua to become man in order to effect the redemption of
mankind, but the language used here is quite strong, indicating the
absolute necessity of the incarnation—there was no other way. There
was only one way for God to redeem sinners, and this was through
the incarnate work of His Son. We may conclude that this flows from
His very character which demands that justice be fully satisfied. Those,
therefore, who would be saved from their sin must have the debt in-
curred by their sins fully paid: “the soul who sins will die” (Ezek 18:4),
“the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Thus, the death of the infinite
One could alone be payment for an infinite transgression enacted
against the infinitely holy God.

When our author states that “He (Yeshua) had to be made like His
brethren...,” he is not suggesting that He was similar but something
different. In other words, in His incarnation Yeshua was not play-
acting, and thus the words “in all things” (κατὰ πάντα) are added to em-
phasize the genuine humanity of our Lord.

“He became like His brethren not only in the community of
nature, ...but also by all the consequences which flow from
the nature he assumed and by all the manifestations of hu-
man life....” This likeness is nothing less than complete iden-
tification: assimilation, not simulation.2

This is, of course, the great mystery of the incarnation, yet nonetheless
true. The eternal Son has, forever, become man.

1 Note the use of ὤφειλεν, ὄpheilen, “to be obligated,” translated by the NASB
as “had to.”
2 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 119, n. 120, quoting Teodorico. This same concept ob-
tains in Paul’s use of the phrase that Yeshua “came in the likeness of men”
(ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἄνθρωπων)” (Phil 2:7).
For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Messiah Yeshua, (1Tim 2:5)

so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God... – The verse continues by giving us a precise purpose for the incarnation: Yeshua became like His brethren “so that (ἵνα, hina) He might become a merciful and faithful high priest.” This is the first time the term “high priest” is directly applied to Yeshua in our book,¹ and it emphasizes not only the necessity of Yeshua taking human nature upon Himself, but even more the requirement that He “become a merciful and faithful high priest.” His human nature, therefore, was not only necessary for Him to suffer as a guilt offering for the sins of His people. It was also necessary to give assurance to those He represents that He qualified in His priestly duties. And even more, that through His testing and suffering, those for whom He intercedes would be given proof of His unending mercy and faithfulness. After all, one does not identify with a representative unless one is confident the he knows first-hand the issues involved (as our author will go on to explain in the next verse).

The two adjectives in this phrase chosen by our author are important: “merciful and faithful.” “Merciful” (ἐλεήμων, eleēmōn) conveys the sense of being able to sympathize (cp. 4:15). A high priest must come to God with the sins of the people, not as one who is disgusted with those he represents, but as one who is motivated from a heart of mercy. How could we have believed He possessed such mercy if He had never “lived in our shoes” in the sense of experiencing the suffering and temptations of our fallen world?

“Faithful” (πιστὸς, pistos) may be understood as expressed in two directions when considering the work of a priest. He must be faithful in regard to the people He represents, and also faithful toward God before whom He ministers. While both are necessary, the context here would emphasize the faithfulness of Yeshua toward those He represents—faithful toward His brethren. A merciful high priest who does not faithfully discharge his duties is, in spite of his good heart, unworthy as a priest. It is the duty of the priest to represent the people

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¹ Interestingly, while Yeshua’s heavenly high priesthood is a central theme in the book of Hebrews, we do not find the title “high priest” used of Yeshua anywhere else in the Apostolic Scriptures. For a discussion of this topic, see H. H. Meeter, The Heavenly High Priesthood of Christ (Eerdmans-Sevensma, n.d.), pp. 29–31.
before God in order to expiate their sins. If he is remiss in his duties, the people remain in their guilt. But Yeshua is both merciful and faithful, sympathetic toward us and diligent to perform His sacred duties as our intercessor.

The verse goes on to say that He is a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God. This, at first, may seem superfluous. In what other duties is a high priest engaged but in things pertaining to God? But if we consider the late 2nd Temple period, and what we know of the Temple priesthood in the decades before the destruction, we might better understand why the office of “high priest” may not have evoked a sense of mercy and faithfulness in the minds of our author’s audience. Indeed, the actions of Yeshua Himself in the Temple precincts as He drove away the money changers (Matt 21:12–13) give evidence of the dishonor to which the priesthood had fallen. Indeed, the priests were those who paid Judas the blood money to betray Yeshua, and it was from the priests that Paul received authority to imprison people of The Way.

Thus, our author seeks to show a marked contrast between Yeshua as high priest and the high priesthood of the pre-destruction era. As Hughes notes:

Christ’s faithfulness in service of God...was in striking contrast to the remoteness, arrogance, and formalism of the sacerdotal officialdom of His day....

The addition of the phrase “in things pertaining to God” therefore emphasizes that in Yeshua’s work as a high priest on behalf of His people, He would serve them faithfully in order to secure their right-standing before the Father.

But the phrase “in things pertaining to God” not only contrasts the work of Yeshua with the self-serving manner of the Temple priests. It also highlights the fact that Yeshua would accomplish everything necessary to establish the full and eternal salvation of all who are His. His high priestly work is therefore comprehensive, as it must be if we are one day to stand before Him complete in His righteousness.

The final phrase of this key verse describes in short yet precise terms the ultimate mission of the high priest: “to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” The term “propitiation” translates the Greek

1 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 121, italics his.
2 NIV and NET have “atonement”; NASB, ESV, HCSB have “propitiation.”
word ἱλάσκομαι (hilaskomai) which carries the basic meaning of “propitiate,” “expiate,” “conciliate,” “make gracious,” and “be gracious.” The nouns related to this verbal root are ἰλεως, (hileos), “gracious, merciful”; ἱλασμός, (hilasmos), “propitiation,” “propitiatory sacrifice”; ἱλαστήριον, (hilasterion), “that which expiates or propitiates,” “a means of propitiation, mercy-seat.”

The Greek verb hilaskomai is most often employed in the Lxx to translate the Hebrew verb הָלָךְ, salach, “to forgive.” A related verb, ἐξιλάσκομαι, exhilaraskomai, common in the Lxx but not found in the Apostolic Scriptures, often translates the Hebrew קִפֵּר (kiper) “to make atonement, to wipe, to wipe clean.” It is interesting to note that the verb hilaskomai (the verb we have in our Hebrews text and found only one other time in the Apostolic Scriptures, Lk 18:13) occurs in the Lxx with God as the subject (i.e., God forgives or shows mercy), while exhilaraskomai most often is used in the Lxx of the priest as the subject and God as the object, thus the priest effecting conciliation between the guilty person and God. We may therefore see a subtle distinction in these terms: the one [hilaskomai] (usually translated by the term “propitiation” or “reconciliation”) is directed toward God, while the other [exhilaskomai] (usually translated by “atonement” or “expiation”) is directed toward the sinner.

Such a distinction emphasizes the two essential aspects of communion with God. One is the calming of God’s righteous and just wrath against sin and the sinner. A second is the cleansing of the sinner himself. What is obvious in the work of the priest is that he accomplishes both through the avenue of sacrifice. The death of the sacrificial victim satisfies the justice and righteousness of God, thus extinguishing His wrath. But the sacrifice (ultimately Yeshua’s death) also cleanses the sinner, and renders him or her spotless before God’s pure and holy eye. This is the full meaning of “propitiation.” It flows from God’s mercy, for apart from God’s initiation in the process, it never would be possible. But it moves from mercy to reconciliation, a satisfying of the price to be paid, and a renewing of the soul and life of the sinner, making him or her ready for unending communion with God.

For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. – The primary picture of propitiation is the making of peace between those who are enemies. Thus, in the case of God and the sinner, the enmity is established by the sinner’s rebellion against God and God’s righteous wrath—His infinitely holy character making friendship with sinners an impossibility. But why would God, Who is in need of nothing, desire to be reconciled to sinful mankind? The only answer is that He desires to do so of His
own sovereign will, which flows from His infinite love and mercy. For our author, the mercy of God is that which initiates and sustains His plan to save the elect. And this leads our author to note the sympathetic heart of Yeshua toward sinners, for He came to earth in order to accomplish the will of His Father (cf. 10:7) by accomplishing in His death and resurrection the inevitable salvation of His people.

But here, once again, we are confronted with a Christological issue: how could Yeshua, the eternal, holy Son of God, without sin and without a sin-nature, be tempted? In answering this question, it is helpful to remember that the Greek verb πειράζω (peirazō), here translated by the NASB as “tempted,” can also mean “to test, to prove something.”¹ Note the following texts.

This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. (John 6:6)

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Yeshua Messiah is in you — unless indeed you fail the test? (2Cor 13:5)

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; (Heb. 11:17)

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials... (James 1:2)

We will consider in greater depth the question of whether Yeshua could have been tempted by sin when we study Heb 4:15, but it is obvious that Yeshua did not share with us the experience of sin. Rather, in His being fully man yet entirely without sin, He experienced the intensity of temptation by fully resisting it. More to the point, if we take into consideration the wider context of our current verse, it seems best to understand the primary emphasis of peirazō to be that of “testing” or “being tried” rather than “tempted.” Thus, taking the phrase to be “For since He Himself was tested...,” our author intends to emphasize that Yeshua experienced life as we know it, with all of the suffering, disappointments, struggles, and trials that this fallen world possesses. The point our author intends to make is that since Yeshua suffered in this world, we can be fully convinced that He understands and even sympathizes with our deepest needs and feelings since He too expe-

¹ See BDAG, “πειράζω,” entry #2.
rienced the afflictions of common life in our fallen world. Moreover, since He underwent testing similar to that which we experience, we find it all the more reasonable to look to Him as the model for how to persevere during times of testing. As Westcott notes:

The power of sympathy lies not in the mere capacity for feeling, but in the lessons of experience. And again, sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain.¹

He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. — Our author is conscious of the suffering his readers have undergone because of their faith in Yeshua (cp. 10:32) and he here reminds us all that we can depend upon Yeshua to aid us in our current struggles and times of suffering. This is because Yeshua, in His own sufferings, proved Himself the victor, and He therefore is able to lead us to that same victory—victory over sin and death.

The help, moreover, which Christ offers to him who is struggling in the midst of temptation is offered not merely as man to man, but as Redeemer to sinner. This help is indeed bound up with the fellow feeling for us and with us of him who has himself endured temptation through to victory, but it is also founded on the atonement he procured for us on the cross and the triumphant power of his resurrection (thus the apostle Paul desired to know not only the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings but also, and first, the power of his resurrection: Phil. 3:10).²

Here, then, is the aid which our Savior is able to give: through His own suffering, even to death, He has taken away the guilt and condemnation of sin for those who are in Him, and through the victory that He won, He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father so that through the work of the Spirit, we too are able to overcome temptation. It is by His work as our great High Priest that we are strengthened through His Spirit to live righteous lives and thereby to sanctify His name upon the earth.

¹ Westcott, Hebrews, p 59.
² Hughes, Hebrews, p. 124.
Chapter Three

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Yeshua, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

The new paragraph opens with the linking word “therefore” (γάρ) which connects us back to the preceding exposition, that is, the manhood of Yeshua, the incarnation of God’s Messiah. The essential mission of Messiah is the work of reconciling sinners to the Father. This was to be done through a mediatorial, substitutionary sacrifice—in other words, through the work and office of a priest who, mediating between sinful man and righteous God, would offer sacrifice as the payment for sin.

To fulfill this role, the mediator had to be human, for a priest must himself be a fit representative of those for whom he intercedes. Thus, our author has clearly established the necessity of the incarnation. Given this necessity, and the historical fact of Yeshua’s birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, our author goes on to exhort his readers (and us) to give full attention to Yeshua, for He alone is able to act as a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.

Our author refers to his readers by two “titles” and follows with an exhortation. He calls them “holy brethren” and “partakers of a heavenly calling.” The appellation “holy brethren” is unique, found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures, though the terms “holy ones” (usually translated “saints”) and “brethren” are often used independently. This title, “holy brethren,” may emphasize a number of applications:

a. It reveals the destiny of all true believers, i.e., that they should be finally and fully holy—set apart for God.

b. It speaks of the nature of a true, believing community, i.e., that it is set apart from worldly or sinful characteristics and rather noted for its Messiah-like qualities.

c. It speaks of the manner in which union with Messiah creates union with all who are redeemed, so much so that familial language is appropriate. Those united by faith in Messiah are brothers and sisters—family indeed.

The second title our author applies to his readers is “partakers of
a heavenly calling.” Often, in Christian circles, the term “calling” is understood to apply to those in leadership positions, i.e., “called to be a pastor,” “called to the mission field”, etc. Interestingly, the verb “called” (καλέω, kaleō) is most often used in the Apostolic Scriptures of the divine summons of elect individuals to embrace God’s salvation in the Messiah and the life of righteousness which is the fruit of salvation.

The use of the verb kaleō to denote a “call to salvation” is first found in the Apostolic Scriptures on the lips of Yeshua:

And hearing this, Yeshua said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. (Mark 2:17)

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32)

This idea of a divine call to salvation is picked up by the Apostles, and becomes a regular motif in their epistles:

and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom 8:30)

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Yeshua Messiah our Lord. (1Cor 1:9)

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Messiah, for a different gospel; (Gal 1:6)

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Gal 5:13)

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, (Eph 4:1)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; (Eph 4:4)

Let the peace of Messiah rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:15)
so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1Thess 2:12)

For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. (1Thess 4:7)

Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1Thess 5:24)

It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Yeshua Messiah. (2Thess 2:14)

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Yeshua Messiah will be abundantly supplied to you. (2Pet 1:10)

Thus, salvation in general, and the life of obedience (sanctification) in specific, is understood by the Apostles as a divine calling, God having called those He chooses to the specific vocation and privilege of righteousness in Yeshua.

The fact that our Author refers to the calling as a “heavenly” calling may highlight two aspects: both the source of the calling and its inevitable outcome. That is, since “heaven” may at times be used as a circumlocution for the divine Name (e.g., Lk 15:18, 21), a “heavenly calling” may be understood as “a divine calling,” that is, a calling that is initiated and brought to fruition by God Himself.

Secondly, the phrase “a heavenly calling” may designate that to which we are called, that is, to God and to eternal life with Him and to the righteousness which we have in Messiah. Our author makes this calling specific toward the end of his epistle when he speaks of “a better dwelling, that is, a heavenly one” which is the very dwelling God is preparing for those who confess Him as their God (11:15–16). In similar manner, Paul speaks of the “upward call” (Phil 3:14) and admonishes us:

1 Likewise, in the common phrase “kingdom of Heaven” used throughout Matthew’s Gospel, the word “heaven” does not designate the place of the kingdom but is equivalent to “Kingdom of God,” “heaven” being a circumlocution for the Name.
Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Messiah in God. (Col 3:2–3)

It is unfortunate these references to a “heavenly calling” and to a life that focuses upon “heaven” have been misinterpreted to mean that we are to despise our earthly life, putting all of our hope into escaping this world for some celestial dwelling. But this is not the teaching of the Scriptures and surely not that of Yeshua and His Apostles. To set one’s mind on the “things above” is to have one’s life in this world become conformed to the life of Messiah Who now dwells in heaven but Who will return to reign upon the earth, and we with Him. Indeed, the “city” about which our author will teach us (11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) is the “heavenly Jerusalem” to which we have already come but which we also anticipate in the future.

... consider Yeshua, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. – After affirming that those believers in Yeshua to whom he is writing were “holy brethren” and “partakers of a heavenly calling,” he gives an important exhortation: “consider Yeshua” (NIV, “fix your thoughts on Yeshua”; NET, “take note of Yeshua”). The Greek word which lies behind these translations is an intensive or perfective form (κατανόεω, katanoeō) built upon the common word for “mind,” and therefore meaning “to apply one’s mind diligently to something.” 1 Having shown that Yeshua is far superior to angels, and that He has taken on the form of a man as the necessary step to functioning as the ultimate priest for His people, our author admonishes us to “apply our minds diligently to Him.”

The text focuses our attention upon two aspects of Yeshua’s work, namely, that He stands before us as an Apostle and as High Priest. Nowhere else in the Apostolic writings is Yeshua referred to as an apostle, but the name is clearly appropriate. It means “one sent with authority.” The function of an “apostle” was common in the early Jewish community, especially as the Jews were more and more dispersed away from Jerusalem and the Land. In order to keep these distant communities tied to the hub of Jerusalem, emissaries made regular trips to render halachic judgments and give instruction. Such an emissary was called a נָשִׁיאֵב (shaliach), “one who was sent,” which was translated into the Greek as ἀπόστολος (apostolos), “apostle.”

Yeshua was sent by the Father (cf. 1:6) and as such stands as the Apostle par excellence. Likewise, we remember the words of Yeshua

1 Cp. Lk 6:41 which uses the same verb.
when He said to His Apostles, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21, cp. 17:18). Thus, the apostleship of Yeshua is prior to and the grounds of their apostleship. But beyond this, the thing that our author intends to stress is that Yeshua was sent, that is, that He came from the Father. This is something Yeshua Himself stressed as He revealed Himself and His mission during the years of His public, earthly ministry.

for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father. (Jn 16:27–28)

Thus, Yeshua’s coming in His incarnation is at the very heart of the Father’s plan to save an innumerable host of people and that the Father sent Him makes this clear. Moreover, His coming was necessary to bring the Gospel to fruition, i.e., to accomplish all things necessary for the salvation of His people.

If referring to Yeshua as the “Apostle…of our confession” emphasizes His being sent by the Father, then the title “High Priest” highlights Yeshua’s ascension back to the Father as the victorious Savior Who conquered death and by Whose life the redeemed will be eternally saved.

The fact of Yeshua’s priesthood (after the pattern of Melchizedek) will be the focus of subsequent chapters (particularly 4-9). Here, in anticipation of the comparison with Moses, our author simply reminds us that, like Moses, Yeshua was sent by the Father to the people, and that He represents the people to the Father as a priest would. Thus, Yeshua coming from the Father and returning to Him is pictured in Moses coming down from Sinai and returning to be Israel’s mediator in the cloud of God’s holiness.

The dual designation (apostle and high priest) is viewed as a unified whole in the original Greek, where a single article (“the”) governs both nouns. For our author, the commission of Yeshua is ultimately to be

1 Note this emphasis in John’s Gospel (Jn 5:23, 36, 37; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 42; 10:36, etc.)

2 Referred to as Granville Sharp’s rule: “When the copulative kai connects two nouns of the same case, if the article ho, or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person or thing that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle.” This is the case in our verse: κατανοήσατε τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν.
summed up in His role as high priest. In short, He was sent (“Apostle”) in order to accomplish the tasks of a “high priest.”

What is the meaning of the next phrase, “of our confession”? How is Yeshua the “apostle and high priest of our confession”? Some have understood this to mean “the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess,” but though this may capture the central thought, the idea is actually more expansive. He is the “apostle and high priest of our confession” in that our entire faith rests upon His being sent from the Father, (i.e., that He is who He said He was) and His having accomplished the work of redemption for which He was sent. What is more, the word “confession” ὁμολογία (homologia), besides denoting the body of truth which we believe (cf. 4:14; 10:23; 1Tim 6:12-13), also pictures our active witness to others—we “confess” Yeshua as the Apostle and High Priest in Whom we trust. In a sense, then, these two terms define two essential aspects of the person of Yeshua as the center of our faith and thus the core truths we desire to share with others as we seek to be witnesses of Yeshua to others.

2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.

In the Greek, our verse opens with a present participle (ὁντα, onta) of the verb “to be” (ἐιμί, eimi), meaning there is no break between this and the preceding verse. To show the continuation from v. 2, one could translate: “...consider Yeshua, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession Who is faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.” The emphasis, then, is upon the faithfulness of Yeshua: “...consider Yeshua...Who is faithful.” Moreover, the present participle would indicate that Yeshua’s work as High Priest did not terminate when His earthly task was complete, but that it continues in His exalted position at the right hand of the Father where He continues to intercede for His people.

Having already noted the faithfulness of Yeshua in 2:17, our author here focuses upon Yeshua’s faithfulness to accomplish the mission for which the Father sent Him. This theme will likewise be expanded in later chapters (cf. 10:7, 9), but here our author’s purpose is to show that Yeshua, having completed the sacrificial work given to Him by the Father (cf. Jn 17:4), has proven Himself to be worthy of our trust and confidence.

The NASB (along with the NIV, ESV, NET, and HCSB) translates the next clause as “who appointed Him.” The Greek utilizes the verb ποιέω
(poieō) which generally has the sense of “to make” or “to create.” Indeed, the Lxx uses poieō to translate Hebrew בָּרָא (bārā‘), “to create” in the creation narrative of the opening chapters of Genesis.\(^1\) It was on this basis that early Arians (those who denied the deity of Yeshua) seized upon our verse, translating it “He was faithful to Him who made Him,” claiming the Scriptures clearly taught that Yeshua was a created being and therefore not eternal. Those who defended the divinity of Yeshua argued that the verse spoke only to His manhood, not His eternal deity.\(^2\)

But the Greek verb poieō has a broad semantic range and need not be limited to the sense of “make” or “create.” For instance, this same verb is used in Mk 3:14\(^3\) of Yeshua appointing the Twelve, and the Lxx (which our author uses throughout this epistle) has a similar construction in 1Sam 12:6 –

> Then Samuel said to the people, “It is Adonai who appointed (poieō) Moses and Aaron and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. (1Sam 12:6)

Thus, the Greek verb poieō functions similarly here, meaning: “He (the Father) appointed Him (Yeshua) as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”\(^4\) That is, Yeshua was sent by the Father to accomplish a specific task, a mission which required Him to function in the role of a High Priest.

The idea of a “faithful” high priest was no doubt something for which the people of the late 2nd Temple period longed. If the picture of the 1st Century Temple we have is accurate, then it is clear that the priesthood in the time of Yeshua was very corrupt. The much later Talmud purports to record the feelings of the Pharisees toward one sect of the Sadducees who controlled the high priesthood:

> Woe is me because of the house of Boethus! Woe is me because of their staves! Woe is me because of the house of Hanim! Woe is me because of their whispering! Woe is me because of

\(^1\) cf. Gen 1:1, 21, 27; 2:4.
\(^3\) cf. also Acts 2:36.
\(^4\) The verb “to make” is commonly used to mean “appoint” in our language as well, as when we say that someone is “made a judge,” or so-and-so “made the rank of General,” etc.
With the demise of the priesthood after the destruction of the Temple, and with its increasing corruption even before the destruction, one must presume that there were those within the wider Jewish community who longed for a high priest with true, God-fearing integrity and faithfulness. They hoped for an intercessor like Moses, sent by God who faithfully discharged his duties by approaching God with the burdens and requests of the people.

Note carefully how our author puts it: Yeshua was “faithful to Him who appointed Him.” Here we see the priority of service, first to the One Who appoints and then to the people one serves. If we are to be faithful servants we must first have our eyes and hearts focused upon God and His precepts and only then will we be properly prepared and equipped to serve others.

... as Moses also was in all His house. – In light of the demise of the priesthood in the late 2nd Temple period, one could imagine that the figure of Moses may have become the high watermark against which the current priesthood was being evaluated. This “works” for our author, of course, because he will inevitably show that Yeshua not only matches the successful work of Moses but actually is superior to Moses, for in being a mediator between God and Israel, Moses foreshadowed the Messiah Who would be the mediator par excellence.

In speaking of Moses being faithful “in all His house,” our author is using language directly from Num 12:7. The context of this passage is the dispute raised against Moses by Aaron and Miriam, who spoke against Moses for having taken a “Cushite” woman for a wife and raised the complaint: “Has Adonai indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” (12:2). The text goes on to say that “Adonai heard it” and He responds to Aaron and Miriam by appearing in a pillar of cloud at the doorway of the Mishkan and saying:

Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, Adonai, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses,

1 b. Pesachim 57a.
He is faithful in all My household (לא多く עבדי משל יdescripcion); with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of ADONAI. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses? (Num 12:6–8)

The phrase “faithful in all’ My household” utilizes the common noun תַּבָּר, bayit, “house,” which can embrace a wide circle of meanings, including a physical building, a city, a family (whether immediate or extended), a dynasty, a tribe, etc. In the context of Num 12, “My house” refers to the people of Israel with whom God dwells, as the Targum renders the phrase “he is faithful among all my people.” So Hughes notes:

“My servant Moses...is faithful in all my house.” Here God’s “house” means the sphere of Moses’ stewardship, the household, in this case comprising the whole “family” of Israel.

The comparison, then, is between Moses and Yeshua, for just as (ὡς, hos) Moses was faithful to discharge his duties as representative for the people of Israel, so Yeshua is faithful to perform His role as the Apostle and High Priest to and for His people. This concept of a family or nation being a “household” is picked up and used by Paul as well, who refers to the ekklesia or assembly of Messiah as the “household of faith” (Gal 6:10) and “God’s household” (Eph 2:19).

We hear from Yeshua Himself the manner in which He was faithful:

... My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. (Jn 7:16)

For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. (Jn 12:49)

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own ini-

1 There is a textual variant in the manuscripts here, some of which omit the word “all” (ὅλῳ, holō). It is possible that those which do contain the word “all” have done so to conform the Hebrews text to the Lxx of Num 12:7. But the author of Hebrews is concerned to emphasize the idea of faithfulness which does not itself absolutely depend upon the inclusion or absence of the word “all.”

2 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 130.
tiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. (Jn 14:10)

[Speaking to the Father:] I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. (Jn 17:4)

and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (Jn 17:26)

And we hear John’s own commentary on Yeshua’s faithfulness as He approaches the day of His crucifixion:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Yeshua knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. (Jn 13:1)

But the idea that Moses (and by comparison, Yeshua) was “faithful in all My house” may also have the sense of “trusted,” “established” or “secure.” In the case of Moses, his secure and established position rests not upon his own abilities or actions but upon God’s sovereign appointment. If Aaron and Miriam have a dispute with Moses, it should be recognized as a dispute with God Himself, for it was God Who chose Moses as His appointed representative.

In similar (though, as we shall see, not entirely the same) manner, Yeshua is also the appointed Son sent to do the Father’s will and work. Thus, even though He was despised and forsaken by His own and humiliated to the point of death upon an execution stake (Phil 2:8), He is nonetheless the Father’s appointed Messiah and in conquering death is actively at work as the risen Savior and High Priest interceding for His people.
3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

Here we see that while Moses and Yeshua may share similarities in their being divinely appointed to their office and by their faithfulness in fulfilling their role as mediator and intercessor, there is a distinction in terms of glory. Yeshua is given greater glory than Moses on the analogy of the builder of a house receiving more praise than the house itself. If the “house” in view is the kingdom, then Moses, like us all, are part of that house, while Yeshua is the one who builds it. In this our minds immediately turn to Yeshua’s words to Peter as recorded by Matthew:

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My ekklesia; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (Matt 16:18)

As builder of the Temple which is His body, then, He receives greater glory than Moses who is himself part of that “building.”

Some (as is usual) find in this comparison to Moses a sense of the lackluster character of the Torah and the “old administration,” as though Yeshua is counted as more glorious because He builds a house which is superior to the Torah.

But this is to misconstrue the comparison, which is positive, not negative. Our author notes that Moses was faithful in His (i.e., the Father’s) house or kingdom. In the same way, he argues, Yeshua is faithful and secured in the position of Apostle and High Priest of the household of God. If, as some have argued, the administration of Moses was fraught with the negative burden of the Torah, one would hardly have thought that our author would make this comparison to Yeshua! Rather, the very comparison shows that the Torah which Moses mediated is considered good and holy, and to show Yeshua’s glory as surpassing that of Moses is only to show that Yeshua is the builder of the kingdom of which Moses is one of the building blocks.

Some might retort that Yeshua is also viewed as a “building block” of the ekklesia, for Paul refers to Yeshua as the “cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). But this is to mix metaphors. In referring to Yeshua as the cornerstone (ἀκρογωνιαῖος, akrogōniaios) of the ekklesia, Paul most likely has Is 28:16 and/or Zech 4:7 in mind, in which the “cornerstone” or the “top stone” is viewed as that which either gives a structure its proper shape or which is the crowning completion or fulfillment of the structure. Regardless,
the metaphor our author uses is one of comparison: most surely Moses is viewed as having great honor, for he alone entered the cloud after ascending the mountain, and God spoke with him “as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11). Yet even such glory is surpassed by the glory accorded to Yeshua, for we have come to realize that Yeshua was the One with whom Moses spoke, and by whom the Torah was given. Thus, Paul concludes his exposition on the shining of Moses’ face (2Cor 3:7ff), which was hidden by a veil, by writing:

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Messiah. (2Cor 4:6)

Obviously, the metaphor our author is using, of a “house” being built, fits very well with the Apostolic picture of the ekklesia as the “household of God” (Eph 2:19; 1Tim 3:15; 1Pet 4:17) or the “household of faith” (Gal 6:10), or even the metaphor of a house built with living stones (1Pet 2:4–5). In fact, the Greek word translated “house” (οἶκος, oikos) can also mean “household” or “family.” It seems clear that in this illustration, our author not only utilizes an obvious argument, but also uses a metaphor that was in common use among the apostolic community.1

4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

Some take this parenthetical verse to be speaking of God as creator of the universe, for the Greek verb “to build” (κατασκευάζω, kataskeuazō) used here also translates the Hebrew verb בָּרַא (bara’), “to create,” a number of times in the Lxx.2 Others restrict the scope of this verse to the subject at hand, i.e., the kingdom of God as expressed in the ekklesia Yeshua promised to build. Thus Calvin writes:

Though these words may be extended to the creation of the whole world, yet I confine them to the present subject. We are then to understand that nothing is done in the Church which ought not to be ascribed to God’s power; for He alone has founded it by His own hand, (Psalm 87:5) and Paul says

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1 Contra Attridge, Hebrews, p. 110.
of Christ that He is the head, from whom the whole body, joined together and connected by every subservient juncture, makes an increase according to what is done proportionally by every member (Eph 4:16). Hence he often declares that the success of his ministry was God’s work. In a word, if we take a right view of things, it will appear that how much soever God may use the labors of men in building His Church, yet He himself performs everything — the instrument derogates nothing from the workman.¹

Regardless, the point our author intends to make is that there are no competitive “builders” when it comes to the ekklesia. Our author has already confirmed that Yeshua is God come in the flesh, that He is the Creator, and that He is likewise the One Who builds the ekklesia—the house or family of God.

The author of Hebrews thus far has shown that he does not make a clear distinction between God and the Son. Rather he teaches that God works through the Son; for example, in creation (Heb 1:2). Also, God makes Jesus perfect through suffering (Heb 2:10). God, the Father, then, builds everything through His Son. And because Christ constructs God’s house, He is worthy of greater honor than Moses.²

5–6 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Messiah was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

The parallel between Moses and Yeshua is now taken a step further. The comparison is two-fold:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moses</th>
<th>Yeshua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>servant</td>
<td>Son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the house</td>
<td>over the house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The characteristics attributed to Moses are not lowly. To be desig-

¹ Calvin, Hebrews, pp. 80–81.
² Kristemaker, Hebrews, p. 86.
nated “the servant of the Lord” is a high honor (cp. Ex 14:31; Num 11:11; 12:7; Deut 3:24; Josh 1:2, all of Moses; Deut 9:27, of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; Is 42:1; 52:13, of Messiah). What is more, the Greek word used to describe Moses as a “servant” (θεράπων, therapōn) is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures (though it is found numerous times in the Lxx). This word differs from the more common words used to denote a house servant or slave1 in that the therapōn wishes to serve in contrast to a house servant or slave who has no choice but to serve.

Thus, the Greek text makes it clear once again that the comparison between Moses and Yeshua is a positive one. Verse five, introducing Moses, has the particle μέν (men) which usually introduces a comparison. Verse six follows with δὲ ὡς (de hos), which indicates a similarity. In English we might represent this construction as “On the one hand… in the same way.” The same message is repeated: Messiah is “faithful” regarding His house in the same way as Moses was faithful regarding his.

The opening clause of v. 5 is translated by the NASB as “Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant,” capitalizing the “H” on “His” to indicate the translators understood the text to refer to “God’s house.”2 The NIV (along with the RSV, ESV, and NET) wanting to remove any ambiguity simply inserted the word “God” in place of the masculine pronoun αὐτοῦ, autou: “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house.” The KJV, adopting the practice of not capitalizing divine pronouns leaves the text ambiguous: “And Moses verily was faithful in all his house....” In fact, the grammar of the Greek text is ambiguous, so the phrase “his house” (τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) technically could refer either to the house of Moses, perhaps referring to the priestly dynasty for which Moses functioned as the prime example, or to God’s house, that is, to His covenant people Israel and all the elect of the nations who would become fellow heirs in the covenant, being grafted into the remnant of Israel.

Quite clearly a “son” holds a higher position than a “servant,” particularly as one considers a household in the Ancient Near East. This is because the son partakes of the very nature of his father, and being related by this nature, also shares in authority by way of inheritance. Likewise Yeshua as the Son of God is one with Father and in His eternal, uncreated being, holds all authority in heaven and earth.

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1 δοῦλος, παῖς, οἰκέτης, νεανίσκος.
2 The NKJV likewise capitalizes the “H” in “His” to denote that the house spoken of is “God’s house.”
for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later – The primary emphasis which our author intends us to see is that Moses himself functioned as a servant, that is, he served others rather than being served. The service of Moses was not, in the ultimate sense, to his own generations, however. The work he did had a greater, far more expansive purpose: to establish a witness for things which would be spoken of after his time, in which he likewise would stand as a witness. Thus, Moses acted as Israel’s mediator before the Almighty and pleaded on their behalf. But though the work of Moses on behalf of the nation of Israel was necessary, to an even greater degree his work as Israel’s mediator foreshadowed the ultimate and eternal salvation of the elect which would be accomplished by the greater Servant and Mediator—the Messiah, the coming Son, Yeshua. We therefore should be encouraged to read and study the Torah with an eye on the work of Moses in order to see the many ways in which He as the intercessor for Israel teaches us about Yeshua’s present work of intercession.

There is one more aspect in which Moses was faithful as a witness of things yet to be spoken. He proclaimed the gospel (cf. Heb 2:3)! The gospel is none other than salvation through the atoning work of God on the behalf of His people. In proclaiming the gospel, Moses gave witness to Messiah upon Whom the gospel rests. Thus, on the road to Emmaus, Yeshua interprets Himself to the disciples “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” (Lk 24:27). In this instance Yeshua was able to point to Moses as a witness of Himself, and of the accomplished work of redemption through His own death and resurrection.

In verse 6 the contrast is made by the term “Son” (in place of “servant,” though Yeshua was certainly the Servant of God) and the preposition “over” (as contrasted with the preposition “in”). The contrast is therefore one of authority. Yeshua, like Moses, has a trustworthy appointment as mediator for His people. He has, however, authority never enjoyed by Moses. He is the promised Son upon whose shoulders the government would rest (Is 9:6), and following His humiliation, He was bestowed a name above every name, and endowed with all authority (Phil 2:9-10; cp. Matt 28:18). In fact, to rightly understand Moses is to understand that he wrote of Yeshua, and thus was giving to Him a place of higher honor: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me” (Jn 5:46).

whose house we are... – Verse 6 goes on to inform us about the author’s intention by using the word “house” (οἶκος, oikos) in this passage: he is

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using the term to reference the community of believers in Yeshua, the *ekklesia* which is comprised of the remnant of Israel and all those chosen from the nations who are brought together with that remnant. Our author makes this very clear: “whose house we are....”

We may note similar terminology in Paul:

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Gal 6:10)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household.... (Eph 2:19)

but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the *ekklesia* of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1Tim 3:15)

Peter uses similar language:

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1Pet 4:7)

In addition, “house” was used in the later rabbinic literature to denote a particular “school” of a leading teacher. Most popular in the rabbinic literature are the “house of Shammai” and “house of Hillel.” In similar fashion, to be of the house of Moses or Yeshua would be to identify as disciples and adherents of their teaching.

Interestingly, the Targum on 1Chron 17:14 uses the metaphor of a house to speak of the royal dynasty of David as well as the restored Temple and God’s kingdom which is established: “I will maintain him faithful in My people, in My house of holiness, and in My kingdom forever. Note also CD 3.18-19:

But God in His wonderful mysteries atoned for their iniquity and forgave their sin and built them a sure house (בית נאמן) in Israel, such as never stood from the earliest times until now.¹

Here, it would appear that the Qumran sect considered themselves to be the “sure house” that replaces that of Israel, which has been “cut off” just as the “sure house” of the promised new “Zadokite” priesthood replaced the wicked Elides, who were “cut off” (1Sam 2:33–35; 1Ki 2:27).1

Our author, on the other hand, does not consider the followers of Yeshua to have “cut off” the people of Israel (as many commentators on this epistle contend), but that in the “house” where Yeshua has the greater glory, the Abrahamic promise is fulfilled, bringing blessing not only to the physical descendants of Jacob (the believing remnant) but also to those chosen from the nations who join them by attaching themselves to the God of Israel and to His Messiah, Yeshua. Thus, what our author is emphasizing in this final phrase of v. 6 is that far from standing in opposition to the work and message of Moses, the Gospel that is centered in and upon Yeshua and His work is foreshadowed, expressed, and anticipated by Moses—both in his work and in the Torah he wrote under the superintending guidance of the Ruach HaKodesh.

if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. – The house” spoken of by our author is the community of believers in Yeshua, defined as those who persevere in their faith. This theme will be repeated throughout our epistle, namely, that true faith is evidenced by a steadfast continuance in living according to the principles of Messiah. Yeshua Himself taught this when He said “if you continue in My word you are truly My disciples” (Jn 8:31). It is, in fact, this concept of the perseverance of all true believers that prompts the line of reasoning in the next section (vv. 7-19). The interplay between covenant promises and covenant responsibilities were not always understood or accepted by Israel as a whole, for at times she neglected her obedience in light of the faulty notion that “because God has made a covenant with us, He is obligated to act favorably toward us regardless of what we do.” Clearly, one theme our author wishes to emphasize is that those who are truly chosen, those who are genuinely the household of God, are those whose lives conform to His standards.

He characterizes true believers along two lines: they hold fast to (1) confidence or courage, and (2) the boast of our hope (or perhaps a better translation would be “hope in which we boast”).

1 Ibid., n. 26.
The term translated “confidence” or “courage” is παρρησία (parrēsia), a word often used in the Apostolic era to denote the “boldness” of spirit to witness for and about Yeshua as Messiah.\(^1\) The confidence thus spoken of here refers to the inner compulsion to both live and speak as a witness for Yeshua. One who is ashamed of Him is not worthy to be considered one of His disciples. Paul’s confession (Rom 1:16) is thus that he was “not ashamed of the gospel” which is centered in Messiah.

The second phrase, “boast of the hope” (τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος), which could also be understood as “the hope in which we boast” (as the NIV has it) seems best understood as reaffirming and defining the word “confidence” or “courage.” The “boast of the hope” is the bold, public expression of faith in Yeshua as the One upon whom our hope is cast. This public confession, especially in the face of persecution, marked the vibrant faith of the Jewish believers in the 1st Century. True believers could temporarily deny their Lord (as Peter did), but this was never considered normative. True faith brought inward boldness which inevitably evidenced itself in public confession that Yeshua was the Messiah. Thus Peter confessed Yeshua in the end, which resulted in his execution as foretold by Yeshua (Jn 21:18–19).

7–11 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “today if you hear his voice, .... [vv. 8–11 are a quote from Ps 95:7–11, see below]"  

This section (vv. 7–11) continues the theme of the previous paragraph, namely, that perseverance is the ultimate mark of true faith. And this is especially important to affirm when it appears likely that remaining faithful to God would bring suffering or cause one to be ostracized from one’s community. It seems likely that our author fears his readers might be questioning their confession of Yeshua, considering whether they could still be His disciples while retracting their belief that He was the promised Messiah. It appears that our author saw his readers as precariously perched between their open confession of faith in Yeshua as Messiah on the one hand and the pressure of non-believing Jews who were threatening to disenfranchise them unless they were willing to lower their view of Yeshua.

He therefore brings Scripture to bear upon the subject, both to comfort as well as to exhort his readers. He comforts them by showing that even the forefathers in ancient Israel faced the same challenges, indicating that the trials they were facing were not uncommon, and that

\(^1\) Cf. Ac 28:30-31; 2Cor 3:2; Eph 6:19; Phil 1:20; 1Thess 2:2.
they could persevere as did the faithful of bygone generations. The exhortation comes, however, in the summons not to repeat the faithless behavior of the people in the wilderness of Sinai, behavior which brought the severe discipline of God upon the nation. As far as our author is concerned, the people he addresses were, like Israel of old, at a crossroads, and the path they chose would prove the reality of their faith.

His method of introducing the quote is revealing: “just as the Holy Spirit says…” (καθὼς λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον). This is yet another clear statement of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and similar language is found in the later rabbinic dictum that true prophecy is the work of the “Spirit of prophecy,” i.e., the Ruach HaKodesh. It was the position of rabbinic Judaism that the “Ruach HaKodesh ceased out of Israel” with the death of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, a viewpoint that may well have been developed in order to deny any divine authority of the writings of Yeshua’s Apostles. But surely no one within the Jewish communities of the pre-destruction era would have argued about the divine origin of the Torah, nor of the Prophets. Here, the Psalms (the largest part of the Writings) are specifically attributed to the inspiration of the Ruach, even as Yeshua Himself attributed the character of divine inspiration to David’s words. It is well established that by the time of the 1st Century, the Torah, Prophets, and Writings were accepted as canonized, divinely inspired Scripture and our author emphasizes this divine authority in order to strengthen his exhortation which he bases on Psalm 95:7–11 [Lxx 94:7–11].

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2 Cf. Matt 22:43; Mk 12:36; cp. Ac 1:16; 4:25. Also note Josephus, Ant. 6.8.2 – “But the Spirit of God departed from Saul, and removed to David, who upon this removal of the Divine Spirit to him, began to prophesy.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MT</th>
<th>Lxx</th>
<th>Hebrews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 הַיּוֹם אִם־בְּקֹל֥וֹ תִשְׁמָֽעוּ׃</td>
<td>7 σήμερον, ἐὰν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ ἀκούσητε,</td>
<td>7 σήμερον ἐὰν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ ἀκούσητε,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 אֲלִיל־חַקְשֵׁהּ לֶבַבָּכֶם כִּ֣י־יָ֖גַעֲּנָֽנֶנְּ֑ךָ</td>
<td>8 μὴ σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς ἐν τῷ παραπτηρεύματι κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ πειρασμοῦ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ,</td>
<td>8 μὴ σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς ἐν τῷ παραπτηρεύματι κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ πειρασμοῦ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 בַּחַנְנִי גַּם־רִיבָ֑ה כְּי֥οֹומַֽה בַּמִּדְבָּר׃</td>
<td>9 οὗ ἐπείρασαν οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν, ἐδοκίμασαν καὶ εἴδοσαν τὰ ἔργα μου.</td>
<td>9 οὗ ἐπείρασαν οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν ἐν δοκιμασίᾳ καὶ εἶδον τὰ ἔργα μου</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 בְ֧דוֹר וָאֹמַ֛ר עַ֝מּוֹ תֹּעֵ֣י לֵבָ֣ב הֵֽם וְ֝הֵ֗ם לֹא־יָדְע֥וּ דְרָכָֽי׃</td>
<td>10 τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη προσώχθισα τῇ γενεᾷ ἐκείνῃ καὶ εἶπα· Ἀεὶ πλανῶνται τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰς ὁδούς μου,</td>
<td>10 τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη· διὸ προσώχθισα τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτη καὶ εἶπον· ἀεὶ πλανῶνται τῇ καρδίᾳ, αὐτοὶ δὲ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰς ὁδούς μου,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּ֥עְתִּי בְּאַפִּ֑י</td>
<td>11 ὡς ὤμοσα ἐν τῇ ὄργῃ μου Εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου.</td>
<td>11 ὡς ὤμοσα ἐν τῇ ὄργῃ μου εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου.</td>
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7 Today, if you would hear His voice,
8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as in the day of Mas
dah in the wilderness,
9 when your fathers
tested Me, they tried Me,
though they had seen My work.
10 For forty years I
loathed that generation,
and said they are
people who err in
their heart, and they
do not know My ways.
11 Therefore I swore in
My anger, Truly they
shall not enter into My rest.

In nearly all respects, the quote in Hebrews is directly from the Lxx, which is itself an accurate translation of the Hebrew. The only changes are minor (and interpretive). (1) Like the Lxx, our author uses the names supplied in the MT (מריבּה, Meribah; מַסָּה, Massah) as charac-
teristic of the situation, i.e., “contention, provoking,” and “testing.” (2) Our author inserts the word “Therefore” in v. 10, breaking the line in a different place than either the MT or Lxx. Both the MT and Lxx have “And saw My work(s). For forty years....” Our author attaches “forty years” as the time when the people “saw His work(s),” while the MT and Lxx have “forty years” as the time that God was angry with Israel. (3) Thirdly, our author, most likely in an attempt to make the Psalm text all that more applicable to his readers, changes “that generation” to “this generation.” But in spite of these minor differences, the quote in Hebrews is nearly verbatim from the Lxx and accurately represents the Hebrew MT in translation.

An outline of Psalm 95 will aid us in understanding the message our author intends us to receive by his quoting from this text.

I. Call to Worship Adonai, vv. 1–6
   A. Who is God?
      1. He is our Rock
      2. He is a Great God
      3. He is a Great King
      4. He is our Maker
      5. He is our Shepherd
   B. Who are we?
      1. We are His people
      2. We are the sheep of His pasture
   C. What is the proper response in light of these truths? Worship Him!

II. Warning About Unbelief, vv. 7–11
   A. Listen (=Obey) – God is calling
   B. Do not harden your heart
      1. Like the fathers in the wilderness
      2. They tested God rather than worshiping Him
      3. They erred in their hearts
      4. They did not know His ways
   C. God’s anger comes upon such people

The Psalm is an excellent text for our author’s purposes. He shows first that the issue is one of the heart, and secondly that this has always been the case. If there is a sense in his readers’ minds that a competition exists between Moses and Yeshua, this comes from their own misunderstanding or the contrary teaching of those outside the faith. Furthermore, by introducing this Psalm our author has cast the discussion
into the realm of belief versus unbelief (where the battle honestly exists) and not in pitting Moses against Yeshua. Long ago, in the days of the fathers, the issue was the same—it was and is one of faith—believing that what God says is true, and acting upon it.

The Messianic believers to whom our author appeals are not that different from their ancestors who came out of Egypt. Both had witnessed the miracles and wonders wrought by the hand of the Almighty, both had seen the enemy subdued, both had witnessed redemption, and both had come to a place where it appeared they would fall under the hand of those who were against them. By quoting this Psalm, our author places his readers at their own Meribah—their own place of contention, and their own position of having to commit themselves in faith to the God who had delivered them. What is more, our author has clearly delineated his position: to draw back from confessing Yeshua to be the promised Messiah is equal to unbelief, the same kind of unbelief which kept the fathers from entering the promised land, the very place of rest to which God was leading them.

Furthermore, our author’s choice of Psalm 95 helps him go directly to the core issue, i.e., that of a hardened heart. Our author is intent on warning his readers, who are his friends and family in the Lord, that hardness of heart can occur in small increments, evidenced in hardness toward each other, but that it inevitably leads to resisting God Himself. The Psalm is clear: to go astray in heart inevitably leads to this conclusion: “they did not know My ways.” Here, in one sense, we have the Shema (Deut 6:4ff ) woven into the argument. What does it mean to love Adonai? To walk in His ways? To keep His covenant? These are the very things that are bound up with our author’s message, the themes that will continue to be expounded as the epistle unfolds.

But the conclusion of the Psalm must not be skipped over. Israel, her slavery, her redemption, her subsequent sin and rebellion, and her failure to enter the Land as a nation have much to teach us about God’s method of saving sinners. The point is not whether those individuals who died in the wilderness were “saved” in the sense of “born again.” Doubtlessly many were. Rather, Israel’s redemption from Egypt, their being rescued through the Red Sea, receiving the covenant at Sinai, and the wilderness journey all function as a type or illustration of God’s plan to save eternally those who are His. Ultimately, the salvation God has fashioned brings His chosen ones to a place of rest, where the turmoil and death brought into the world by sin is overcome and where true, eternal rest is established.

But how does the history of Israel from Egypt to Kadesh Barnea
reveal important truths about God’s plan of salvation? Among many things, it makes one principle clear: God does not honor or reward unbelief, nor does He tolerate it. To have rewarded Israel by bringing her into the promised land after she displayed a rebellious, wicked heart toward God, would have been to give a picture muddied beyond repair. Instead, of those men who left Egypt, only those who demonstrated faith in the face of unbelief (as did Caleb and Joshua) were allowed to enter the promised land. This story thus demonstrates the very point of our author, and the exhortation he is giving to his readers: perseverance in faith (i.e., faithfulness to God and thus to His Messiah, Yeshua) is the true mark of those who have eternal salvation and who will therefore enter into the rest purchased for them by the death and life of their Redeemer and Messiah, Yeshua.

12–13 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Having quoted Ps 95 and its mention of hardened heart as they grumbled against God and Moses, our author now exhorts his readers (including us) to be on the alert lest a similar hardness of heart befall them. Apparently he thought it a real possibility that some of them could, like their fathers of old, fail to enter into the rest secured through saving faith because of an “evil, unbelieving heart.” The word for “evil” here is πονηρός (poneros), a word that can be applied both to the physical as well as the non-physical realm. Physically, it means “be sick, ill, in poor condition” or “spoiled, worthless.” In a non-physical sense, the meaning is “degenerate, wicked, evil, base” and generally denotes that which is morally or ethically wrong, being ungodly and contrary to the standards of righteousness revealed by God.

But in our text, this wickedness is further defined by the word “unbelieving” (ἀπιστία, apistia), “a wicked, unbelieving heart.” The term “unbelieving” in the Greek is simply the word for “believe” with the alpha-privative attached, which functions like our English prefix “un” on the word “unbelief.” This wickedness, then, is characterized as a failure to believe what God has said and to adopt a contrary way of thought and action. In fact, this is the core characteristic of all sin: a refusal to accept as true what God has said, believing falsehood instead, which results in living contrary to God’s will.

How is such a wicked, unbelieving heart recognized? The next
phrase tells us: “in falling away from the living God” (ἐν τῷ ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζῶντος). The Greek text here is revealing. Literally, it could be translated “in having apostasized from the living God.” This word “apostasized” is found only here in the Book of Hebrews. In the other places where it occurs in the Apostolic Scriptures, it has the basic sense of “leave,” “depart,” “fail,” etc. In the parable of the sower, the seed sown on rocky soil sprouts quickly but because there are no firm roots, they soon “fall away.” Paul, in 1Tim 4:1, uses the word in a similar way as does our author.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.… (1Tim 4:1)

Here then is the mark of an unbelieving heart: in an ultimate sense, it makes itself known when it turns from God in Whom it had formerly confessed belief and denies any allegiance to Him and to His Messiah. Some might argue one could deny that Yeshua is Messiah and still confess the God of Israel to be their God. But, of course, our author would not agree, nor would Yeshua or His Apostles! To deny Yeshua is to deny the Father Who sent Him. And this may be at the heart of our author’s exhortation: the strong emphasis throughout this epistle upon the divine nature of Yeshua and His equality with the Father in terms of authority and power, strongly suggests that some within the community to which this epistle is addressed may have been hedging toward diminishing the place of Yeshua in order to regain acceptance in the wider Jewish community that had rejected Yeshua.

But our author’s position is clear: failure to enter into God’s rest is the result of turning away from Yeshua, and this is nothing less than “falling away from the living God.”

Referring to God as the “living God” (θεοῦ ζῶντος) is a favorite of our author, no doubt because it is not uncommonly used in the Tanach to distinguish sharply between the one true God and the idol gods of the nations. In similar fashion, Paul and Barnabas, while exposing the idolatrous superstition of the people of Lystra, exhort them to “turn from

3 E.g., Jn 3:36; 8:42; 15:23.
these vain things to a living God Who made the heavens, the earth, and sea, and all that is in them” (Acts 14:15). Thus, in using the phrase “living God” in our current text, our author is reminding his readers that they have only two alternatives: to worship the God of Israel through accepting His Son, Yeshua, or to give way to the worship of idols, which are actually demons. There is only one Living God, and Yeshua is His Messiah.

The issue of “apostasy” (falling away) is central to this passage. “Apostasy” may be defined as “a resolve of unbelief by one who formerly confessed to believe to the extent that repentance is no longer possible.” The Greek word (ἀποστασία, apostasia) from which the English “apostasy” is derived, has as a root or base meaning “to abandon one’s post or station in life.” It is used in the Lxx (Josh 22:22) of “revolt against the Lord.” In the Apostolic era the word group was used primarily of “passing over to unbelief” with the added sense of “rebellion” or “abandonment.”

The Epistle of Hebrews will return to this issue of apostasy again and again (cf. 4:1; 6:6; 10:25-27; 12:15). If we look at each of these passages in order to gain an overall perspective on the subject of “apostasy,” we may note the following contrasts:

<table>
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<th>Lost</th>
<th>Saved</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unbelieving</td>
<td>faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>disobedience</td>
<td>hearing; obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neglect</td>
<td>steadfastness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apostasy–turning away</td>
<td>entering into life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardening</td>
<td>reception – salvation</td>
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But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today.” – Verse 12 opened with the imperative “See to it, brethren...,” emphasizing that it was the responsibility of the whole community to guard against a hardened heart of unbelief settling in any one of the members. The current verse goes on to describe positive activities by which the community could guard against an unbelieving heart. These activities are summed up in one word: “exhort.”

The word “exhort” (παρακαλέω, parakaleō) literally means “to call along side,” as in the Greek word paraklete, often translated “comforter” when referring to the Ruach HaKodesh. Someone who is “called along side” comes to “encourage,” to “help,” and to “strengthen.” This same
word group is also used in 10:25; 13:19, 22. This command, “to exhort,”
must be carried out by each member of the body, not just a few, for the
text reads “but exhort each other.” It is the responsibility of each mem-
ber within the believing community to be on guard against a heart of
unbelief and to encourage and help others within the community not
to give into a hardened heart.

Such guarding through exhortation is to be done “while it is still
called ‘today,’” a reference to the previous quote from Psalm 95. In the
wilderness there came a time when God called the people to act in
faith. This “time of decision” is labeled “today” by the Psalmist, for a
decision of this import cannot be put off. In the same way, our author
sees the community to which he writes as standing at the point of de-
cision—they have come to their “today.” As such, he exhorts them to
urge each other to a positive faith and confession of Yeshua.

The trap which our author sees hidden in the path of his readers is
the deceitfulness of sin which inevitably hardens the heart. In fact, it is
this very thing, the deceitfulness of sin, which absolutely requires the
presence of and participation in community.

Deception is, more often than not, a matter of perspective. A single
line of sight may appear to give the beholder a true picture of reality,
until the object is seen from another angle. What appeared flat turns
out to be round; what appeared curved ends up being straight. The
same may often be true of sin. When sin finds a welcomed repose in
our lives, we find very rational explanations to explain why it isn’t sin,
and why it is therefore “okay” for us. What’s more, the longer we allow
this sin to dwell within us, the more convinced we are of its rightness.
As our hearts are becoming hardened (which means our hearts become
convinced that what God calls sin is actually not sin after all, or to
put it another way, a re-play of the serpent’s question “has God said?”)
our hope is that those with whom we share community will objective-
ly see the situation and bring it convincingly to our attention. Thus, a
believer existing outside of working community may well fall prey to
the deceitfulness of sin, and often with dire consequences. God never
intended that His children should live in isolation, but that being knit
together in the body of faith, each would aid the other to mature in
their faith and their service to God and His Messiah, Yeshua.

The word “hardened” is the Greek σκληρύνω (sklērunō), which means
“to make stubborn” and in the passive (which we have in our text) “to
be stubborn, hardened.” The Lxx uses the active form to describe God’s
action in hardening the heart of Pharaoh (Ex 7:3 ;9:12, etc., cf. Rom 9:18).
An example of the passive usage is Ac 19:9, where those who were
speaking out against “the Way” are described as “becoming hardened.” The obvious characteristic of a hardened heart is the unwillingness to listen and reason with those who are giving exhortations to change. A hardened heart is the result of unbelief.

14–15 For we have become partakers of Messiah, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me.”

The opening “For” (γαρ, gar) connects our verse with the previous verses and the admonition of v. 12 to guard against apostasy, for perseverance is that which marks our true interest in Messiah and His work.

The author of Hebrews has already voiced his assurance that those to whom he is writing are “partakers of a heavenly calling” (3:1). In v. 14, he returns to this same theme, now using the phrase “partakers of Messiah” as offering a further explanation of “partakers of a heavenly calling.” The import is obvious: being partakers of a heavenly calling means to be in union with the Messiah, which likewise means to be united with Him in His death, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of the Father. This corresponds with Paul’s words in Colossians:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Messiah, keep seeking the things above, where Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Messiah in God. (Col 3:1–3)

Thus, while our author was convinced of the genuine, saving faith possessed by the recipients of his epistle, the sure proof would be their perseverance—remaining faithful to their confession of Yeshua as the risen Messiah Who has ascended to the right hand of the Father and Who now is the true High Priest Who intercedes for His people.

Indeed, the final proof of genuine faith for all believers is nothing more or less than perseverance. Thus, in John’s Revelation, it is the one

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1 The same word, μέτοχος [metoxos], “partaker” is used here as in v. 1. It will be used also in 6:4 and 12:8.

2 Note the Peshitta’s translation: אַחֲרֵי מִשְׁמַרְתָּם מִשְׁמַרְתָּם שֶׁאֵם אָמַר (אֹמָרָה לְךָ אַתְמַחֵל אֶלָּא אָנַּהוּ לְךָ מֹשֵׁה), “For we are mingled with Messiah....”
who overcomes\(^1\) who is saved.\(^2\) And here in our text we are taught that those who are truly partakers of Messiah are those whose lives are marked by perseverance in the faith.

Persevering in the faith is described here as “holding fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως μέχρι τέλους βεβαιωθομεν). In this phrase we are met again with the Greek word ὑποστάσις, *hupostasis*, which we encountered in 1:3, there referring to the very “nature” of Messiah, i.e., the foundational character of His being. This is the primary meaning of the Greek word: “foundation, support,” and by extension “confidence, assurance.” Thus, one’s confidence or assurance is expressed in what one confesses to be true, and this is the meaning in our verse: we know that have become partakers of the Messiah’s work as we continue faithfully to proclaim Him as our Lord and Savior and to live in accordance with that confession.

We see again that the person of Yeshua—the very heart of the Gospel—stands as the bedrock of saving faith. True faith in every age has had the Messiah as its object. What the Apostolic message did in advancing the faith, however, was to proclaim that Yeshua, born to Miriam, was in fact the Messiah foretold by the prophets. Whereas in ages past a true believer would place his or her faith in the promised Messiah and the work He would accomplish on behalf of His people, the Apostolic message made specific the identity of this Messiah. True faith from that point on must have as its object Yeshua ben Yoseph, born of a virgin, crucified, risen, and ascended to the Father. Thus, what our author enjoins upon his readers is that they maintain the confession they had at the beginning, i.e., their confession that Yeshua was, and is, the Messiah and that salvation, i.e., being accepted as righteous before God, is possible only through Him. He must be confessed as Immanuel—God with us, even as the prophet Isaiah foretold (Is 7:14).

Moreover, attempting to diminish His unique and eternal status as the Son of God likewise makes salvation through Him an impossibility. To maintain the confession they had from the beginning of their faith in Yeshua meant that they confess Yeshua to be one with the Father, having all authority in heaven and earth, and thus the only One by Whom salvation is possible. As Yeshua Himself proclaimed:

1 The Greek word John uses, which is translated as “overcome,” is νικάω, *nikaō*, “to conquer, be victorious.” This corresponds in concept to “persevere” in the sense of not running from the battle, nor surrendering to the enemy, but remaining valiant in faith in order to gain the victory.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (Jn 14:6)

**TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME** – Our author repeats the first verse of his previous quote from Ps 97:7–11, only now with an application to his own exhortation: “Today! Now! This message comes to you as it came to the Israelites of old.”

So the story of the wilderness rebellion comes again to the writer’s aid. Like the Israelites, themselves the symbol of redemption, it appears possible in our author’s mind that members of this Messianic community could likewise shrink back from believing what has been revealed and acting upon what they know to be true. He exhorts them to be on guard lest they turn from the truth to unbelief and deny the fullness of Yeshua’s person and work. To own Him as one of many messiahs, or to consider Him to be less than Immanuel would bar them from entering the rest which, like their forefathers, has been promised to those who persevere in faith.

The message has been sounded—the voice of God must be heeded. Here our author equates his message with that of God’s voice. His exhortations at this point come to the readers as God’s own message, and they, like the ancient nation, stand at the crossroads of decision. It was fear and rebellion which governed the choice of the nation before so that they failed to enter into the promised Land, symbolic of rest.

“Today”– once again this word links the text together. Our author presses the urgency of the moment. “Today”—the present time, now is the period in which the writer’s community of faith will evidence their “holding fast” or their rejection of Yeshua as Immanuel. He sees the deceitfulness of sin working its evil craft upon the hearts of his brothers and sisters, no doubt flourishing in the fertile ground of fear. Persecution has opened them to question the veracity of their faith and their heads are turning back, longing (as it were) for “Egypt.”

16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?

The exodus and wilderness wanderings, providing as they do such an excellent example for our author’s exhortations, become now the focus of attention. What happened there, and what lessons can be learned?

Nearly all of the modern English translations (including the NKJV)
take this verse as beginning a series of questions which continues through v. 18. The older translations (Geneva, Bishops Bible, Tyndale, KJV), however, translate this verse as a statement, emphasizing that while *most* of those who left Egypt rebelled, there were some (i.e., Joshua & Caleb) who did not. Note the KJV, for example:

For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. (KJV)

The Greek, however, would indicate quite conclusively that this verse contains a question,¹ and we can only presume that the older translations were influenced by the Vulgate, which translates the verse as a statement rather than a question.²

The first question offered by our author to his readers relates to the identity of those who provoked God in the wilderness. Who were they? First, they were those who “had heard,”³ most likely a reference to Sinai when the people heard the thundering voice of HaShem and pleaded with Moses that such a frightening experience not be repeated lest they die (Deut 5:22–27; cf. Heb 12:19). Thus, they knew that God Himself was the One Who spoke to them and gave to them the Torah, the very instrument which has as its goal the person and work of the Messiah (Rom 10:4).

Second, they were those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, those who made up the nation as a whole (i.e., “all those who came out…”). They had experienced the bitter bondage of Egypt, as well as the miraculous hand of God in rescuing them and delivering them from their bondage, setting them free.

The comparison to the original recipients of this epistle is clear. They too have witnessed the mighty hand of God in their own redemption. They have believed in Yeshua, the incarnate One, and trusted that His death and miraculous resurrection and ascension are for their own eternal salvation. Some may well have witnessed the mighty works done by His hand, the miracles and wonders which He performed and by these confirmed that He was the Servant of God sent to proclaim the truth of God. How could they deny what they had themselves received by incontrovertible testimony?

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1 The opening τίνες (nom. m.pl. of τίς) is an interrogative, thus initiating a question: “Who?”, “Which (one)?”, “What?”
2 quidam enim audientes exacerbaverunt sed non universi qui profecti sunt ab Aegypto per Mosen – “For some who heard did provoke: but not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.”
3 ἀκούσαντες, aor. participle.
17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

The second question in this series focuses upon God’s righteous anger toward His wayward people: “And with whom was He angry for forty years”? The period of forty years is often symbolic of a period of divine long-suffering or of a period of testing which culminates in judgment for the unrepentant. The provocation of God by their lack of faith has issued in His anger upon them. They wondered in the wilderness for forty years, awaiting that generation’s demise. It is not that every individual of the nation participated in the rebellion: Moses is an obvious exception, as were Caleb and Joshua. Still, while Israel as a corporate unity stands symbolically as God’s people, so Israel as a whole failed to receive God’s reward, for He rewards obedience and punishes disobedience.

Having asked the second question, our author supplies the answer: “Was it not with all those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?” God was not angry with them over some capricious, peripheral preference. God’s wrath came as a result of their sin, their sin of unbelief.

It is clear that God does not reward unbelief. Rather, unbelief brings His discipline or punishment. The wages of their sin was death, not only physical death, but (by way of metaphor) spiritual as well, for they failed to enter into the rest God had promised them—they failed to possess their inheritance in the Land. Surely there were those who died in the wilderness who had repented of their unbelief and therefore received God’s forgiveness.

But the lesson of the wilderness wanderings is what our author intends for us to understand: true rest comes through persevering in faith by which the destination is eventually reached. We may at times feel as though we are traveling through the desert, and we may even wonder why God appears to be unconcerned about our needs. But if we are to enter the promised Land of rest, we must not waver in unbelief but we must continue strong in faith, confessing what we know to be true and living in the reality of that truth.

1 The Greek has κώλον which is literally “corpse,” thus giving an even more dreadful description: “whose corpses fell in the wilderness.” See Owen, Hebrews, 2.179–81.

2 E.g., Gen 7:4, 17; Deut 2:7; 8:2; Josh 14:10; Neh 9:21; Amos 2:10; Jonah 3:4; Matt 4:2; Acts 1:3; 7:30, 36.
18–19 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Here we have the final question in the triad: “To whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest?” The answer is given in the form of a rhetorical question: “…if not to those who were disobedient?” (εἰ μὴ τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν). The words used here have brought the issue into clearer focus.

The demise of those who perished in the wilderness began with unbelief (v. 12), characterized by hardened hearts (v. 13), which act in disobedience (v. 18), now seen as the essence of unbelief (v. 19). The point our writer is making is obvious: watch out for unbelief! It will inevitably lead to sinful actions. Bad doctrine is the seed that brings forth disobedience.

We likewise see in this pericope the full circle of unbelief: once a person has entertained unbelief and allows it to take residence in one’s life, it brings about a hardening of heart. This is a metaphor for an unwillingness to listen—to reconsider and make an honest appraisal of the facts being presented. The hardened heart is moved by emotion rather than truth and therefore refuses to be confronted or even encouraged to rethink that which has been accepted. The hardened heart, then, leads to disobedience. Once the truth is rejected, there remains no reason to live in accordance with that truth, so that sin is no longer considered to be sin. This, in turn, leads to further unbelief and the cycle starts over.

What are the means by which we as believers can safeguard ourselves against the deceitfulness of sin and the destruction it brings? The first safeguard is to practice keeping short accounts with God. Lingering sin in one’s life is an open door to unbelief. What is more, harboring bitterness (which is the withholding of forgiveness) gives way to the devil and therefore is an open door to being deceived by the father of lies. Thus, we must make it our regular practice to seek God’s forgiveness for our sin as well as the forgiveness of those who may have been touched by our sin. A soft heart toward God is ready to ask forgiveness. It is the hardened heart that sees no need to make things right with God and one’s fellowman, to forgive as we have been forgiven (Matt 6:12–15; Eph 4:32).

Second, we must make meditating upon the Scriptures and spending time in prayer a daily reality. Reading and meditating upon the word of God is the necessary food for the soul for everyone who intends to
walk in the footsteps of the Messiah. Moreover, in prayer we commune with the Almighty through His Ruach. Prayer that incorporates both praise and request, the pouring out of one’s heart in true thanksgiving, whether in times of hardship or comfort, builds strong faith to trust God for the present and the future.

Third is the importance of community. As our author emphasized in v. 13, we must take seriously the need to encourage one another in the sense of building each other up so that together we will not be turned to the left or the right but will walk in the straight path following in the footsteps of our Messiah, Yeshua. It is common, when someone is struggling in their faith, to feel that attendance at community functions is less and less necessary. This is the deceitfulness of sin, that the one who labors under a heart that is becoming hardened not only is unaware of the hardening, but often denies it when confronted. Learning to be challenged, exhorted, and encouraged within one’s own community of faith is therefore vitally important in order to foster an environment where the truth can be espoused and where one who is gently yet firmly corrected will receive that correction and be spared the hardness of heart that might otherwise result.

But if we are to take our cue from the wilderness wanderings of Israel, as our author has done, then we will see where the downward spiral begins, which ends in unbelief. For the nation of Israel, it began with a refusal to accept what God had said. And this is where it begins for all who fail to enter into the rest God has provided: a refusal to believe that what God has said is true. This remains the challenge before us today as well. Perhaps as never before, the battle to dismiss the Bible is being waged. For many, not only among the liberal theologians but also among those who consider themselves “evangelicals,” the Bible is being presented merely as ancient literature containing myth, legend, wisdom sayings, and pseudo-history. Of course some want to retain some of the Bible as having divine sanction, but whenever its inspired words go contrary to current social and cultural norms, they find a convenient way to marginalize its timeless words by contextualizing its message, making it no longer applicable to our modern world.

But the message of our author is that the word of God is alive and active, and that we therefore do well to pay close attention to it, to take it heart, to let the word of God be the source of our understanding and hope, and the basis for our faith and practice.
Chapter Four

The section of the Epistle which began with 3:1, the primary focus of which is the superiority of Yeshua to Moses and Joshua, continues through 4:13. This opening section of the fourth chapter (vv. 1–13) is an exhortation to be faithful to Yeshua since He has proven Himself to be the promised Messiah.

4:1-13 (from the complete outline of the Epistle)

   A. Exhortation: give attention to Yeshua, 3:1–19
   B. Exhortation: be faithful to Messiah, 4:1–13
      1. entering into the rest proclaimed in the gospel, 4:1–2
      2. true faith in Messiah means entering into His rest, 4:3-6
      3. the Sabbath rest proclaimed in the gospel is both present and future, 4:7–11
         a. The Bible (the written word) is able to penetrate the innermost being, revealing what is truly in one’s heart, 4:12
         b. Nothing is hidden from Yeshua, 4:13

1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

The fourth chapter continues the theme of “God’s rest” and the call for His people to enter into it. We may begin our study of this passage by taking time to consider the meaning of this “rest” to which our author points, and the theological aspects which surround it.

---------- Excursus: The Biblical & Theological Concept of Rest ----------

Generally, the Christian Church has had little to say about the theology of “rest.” Few scholarly articles are written on the subject and fewer books or significant sections of books. Walter Kaiser has bemoaned this state of affairs in a fine article, “The Promise Theme and the Theology

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1 See the outline of the Epistle on pp. 19–21 above.
of Rest.”

Such is not the case in the writings of the Jewish scholars. Since Sabbath marks a distinctive of Judaism, one is not surprised to find much in the writings of the Sages, both ancient and modern, on the issue of “rest.” For example, in the book Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought, Arthur Waskow writes an essay on “Rest.” In comparison, the recent six-volume Anchor Bible Dictionary, proclaimed the most comprehensive Bible Dictionary to date, has no listing for “rest”!

The answer to the question of why the modern Christian theologians and teachers have neglected the theology of “rest” may simply lie in the fact that the contemporary Christian Church has, by and large, jettisoned the Sabbath and even the concept of Sabbath. With Sabbath no longer part of the Christian culture and practice, the emphasis shifted from “rest” to “work.” In this scenario, biblical “rest” becomes entirely allegorized as symbolic of eternity and therefore of no current consequence. In contrast, the Scriptures teach the concept of “rest” as of central importance.

Two words in the Tanach generally encompass the concept for “rest.” First is the verb שָׁקַט, shaqat, and its cognates, meaning “to have peace, be quiet, be at peace,” and in the hifil “to provide peace, quiet,” “to have unworried ease.” A second verb is נוּחַ, nuach, “to settle down,” “to take a rest” and in the hifil, “to provide rest.” Neither of these are used in the foundational text of Gen 2:1-3 where the seventh day is set apart from the other six because “He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done.” The verb used here is שבת, shabat, which has a basic meaning of “to stop, to cease from work, to rest.”

A brief study of the these words and their semantic ranges yields a number of interesting and important ideas. Most important is the fact that the “rest” which God promises His people is associated with two things: 1) His very presence with them, and 2) the inheritance of the promised Land.

Consider the request of Moses prior to the exodus:

Then Moses said to Adonai, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But You Yourself have not let me know whom You

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1 BibSac 130 (Apr-June, 1973), pp. 135–50. (Hereafter Kaiser, “Rest”)
3 Ibid., pp. 795–806,
will send with me. Moreover, You have said, ‘I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.’ Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.” And He said, “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?” (Ex 33:12–16)

Along with the presence of God as the place where rest occurs, Kaiser has noted that

…one of the great ideas dominating the theology of Deuteronomy is that future moment when God will cause Israel to possess the land of Canaan. Possession, inheritance, and rest function almost as synonymous ideas here.¹

It is significant that the giving of the Land to Israel is connected with the concept of rest for the obvious reason that the Land belongs to the Lord, and thus He has the right and authority to give it to Israel, His “first born” (Ex 4:23). The land is His inheritance (Ex 15:17; 1Sam 26:19; 2Sam 21:3; 1Ki 8:36) and His possession (2Chron 20:11; Josh 22:19). As such, it is the place of His abode, the place where He “rests.” He has chosen Jerusalem as His city, and the place where His eyes and heart abide forever (1Ki 9:3; 2Ki 21:7)—where He has caused His name to dwell perpetually (Neh 1:9; Jer 7:12; 2Chron 6:20; 33:7).

Thus the picture comes full-circle: God intends to give Israel the promised Land, the Land which is His own inheritance, His own dwelling place, the place of His resting, so that they might rest with Him. The inheritance of the Land, so tied together in Deuteronomy with the concept of rest, is emphasizing the very essence of this rest, that is, the shalom which comes from dwelling in the presence of God. Thus we read in Deuteronomy:

You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every

man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which Adonai your God is giving you. When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which Adonai your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, then it shall come about that the place in which Adonai your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to Adonai. (Deut 12:8–11)

But has this not already taken place? Surely God has already given Israel the Land and they entered it, took possession of it, and settled in it. Could we not say, then, that the promise of rest has been fulfilled? Consider the following texts.

And Adonai gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; Adonai gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass. (Josh 21:44-45)

A first reading of this text would cause one to believe that the rest promised by God in Deut 12:8-11 was realized by Israel when they came into the Land under the leadership of Joshua. The meaning seems plain and apparent, with one obvious exception: the rest does not last. The enemies of Israel arise and the rest Israel once enjoyed disappears in war. Indeed, the period of the Judges is characterized by years of strife and war interrupted by rest and peace at the hands of God-appointed judges (e.g., Jud 3:1, 30; 5:31; 8:28). The rest spoken of in Joshua 21 was therefore short lived indeed!

Interestingly, we read of “rest on every side” again in the story of David. After ascending to the throne of the Kingdom, the historian records that God had given David victory, subdued the enemies, and Israel once again dwelt in safety and she rested.

Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and Adonai had given him rest on every side from all his enemies.... (1Sam 7:1)

This too, however, was only a temporary rest, as the history of Israel
makes clear. The harmony of the Davidic and Solomonic eras gives way to the divided monarchy and the continuation of civil and international war. The rest envisioned in Deuteronomy is thus picked up by the prophets and spoken of as yet future, as yet to become a reality in the reign of the Messiah.

And it will be in the day when Adonai gives you rest from your pain and turmoil and harsh service in which you have been enslaved, that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, “How the oppressor has ceased, and how fury has ceased! (Is 14:3–4)

For thus says the Lord Adonai, “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord Adonai. (Ezek 34:11–15)

Indeed, the context of the Apocalyptic Psalms (Ps 93-100) makes it clear that these are speaking of the millennial age when the Messiah reigns upon the earth.

Adonai reigns, He is clothed with majesty; Adonai has clothed and girded Himself with strength; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved. (Ps 93:1)

Say among the nations, “Adonai reigns; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity.” (Ps 96:10)

Adonai reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many islands be glad. (Ps 97:1)

Adonai reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! (Ps 99:1)
And, Psalm 95, situated in the middle of these Millennial Psalms and the very text which the author of Hebrews utilizes, is itself prophetic of the reign of Messiah in the millennium.

When the full picture is seen, one comes to realize that the rest promised to Israel in the Torah is nothing short of the completed purpose of God in redemption by which He takes His chosen ones for Himself, subdues their enemies, dwells in their midst, and establishes peace and rest for them through the victorious reign of His Messiah King.

This, in fact, is the essential meaning of the Shabbat. God rested from His work, not because He was tired or needed rest, but because He had finished the work He had planned, work which had as its goal the establishment of a family with whom He might dwell. His rest is the goal to which all His work was focused, i.e., a time to dwell with His people when His eternal purposes for them would be realized. And so the Shabbat remains for us not merely a day to mimic God by resting from our work as He did from His, but far more: combining the concept of “rest” with that of “relationship.” He rested so that He could dwell with us, and we rest in order to anticipate, desire, prepare for our dwelling with Him. In the temporal world we begin and end Shabbat, for we cease from our work to which we return following Shabbat. But this taste of eternity is that which characterizes our hope—our certainty of faith by which we anticipate יומ שׁכֶלֶל שַׁבָּת, yom shekulô shabbat, “a day that is all Shabbat,” a day that never ends, or as Paul notes: “…and so we will always be with the Lord” (1Thess 4:17)!

If the rest promised in the Torah is, as I have suggested, ultimately fulfilled in the millennium and ultimately in the world to come, how is it offered to the generations of the patriarchs and those generations following them? And further, did they not actually possess the Land (Ex 33:14; Deut 12:9)?

It is true that the patriarchs and their families lived in the Land and even possessed burial plots. But these were merely “down payments” or the “earnest” for the full inheritance. Though they were in the Land, it is regularly referred to as “the land of their sojourning” and not as their actual “possession.” Stephan makes note of this very thing. He says that Abraham, though promised the Land, did not receive even a foot of it (Ac 7:4-5). Furthermore, even though some generations following Abraham actually did live in the Land and claim it as their own, their enduring claim to it depended entirely upon their faith in God as

1 Gen 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1; 47:1; Ex 6:4.
evidenced by their obedience to His commands.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love Adonai your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that Adonai your God may bless you in the Land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the Land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving Adonai your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which Adonai swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them. (Deut 30:15-20)

The crux for understanding the conditional “if” in light of the unconditional promise of the Land (as given to Abraham) is in differentiating the obedience of a given generation and the overall security of the covenant. To put it simply, whether or not a given generation enjoyed the blessings of possessing the Land depended upon the obedience of that generation. But the disobedience of one generation does not negate nor foil the covenant for future generations. Ultimately, the Land will be the possession of Israel, for God will pour out His Spirit upon them in the last days, writing the Torah upon their hearts, and they will obediently return to the Lord in faith.

When we bring these thoughts into the context of Hebrews 3 and 4, the meaning is profound. Several obvious points must be emphasized:

1. The rest which our author enjoins upon his readers is exactly the same rest which God offered to Israel after He redeemed them from Egypt, a rest described in Ps 95 as “My rest.”
2. This means that the rest offered to ancient Israel is yet to be fulfilled and the author of Hebrews is exhorting his readers and us to enter into that rest.
3. The writer to the Hebrews is not “spiritualizing” or
“allegorizing” the texts he quotes. Psalm 95, when studied in context, is clearly a prophetic text speaking of the future millennial reign of Yeshua. When our author brings this text into his argument or exhortation, he establishes the fact that those who embrace true faith in Yeshua may well be those who will experience the millennial reign of Messiah Yeshua, and who will therefore take possession of the Land as God promised. Possession of the Land is conditioned upon obeying God, something which can only be done by those whose heart has been made new, who have accepted Yeshua as the promised Messiah, and who thus have the Torah written upon their heart by the Ruach HaKodesh.¹

4. The observance of the weekly Shabbat and the rest which God commands has as it purpose to teach us about our relationship with God. God rested so that He might share His rest (His Sabbath) with His people. Thus, the focus of the Shabbat is fellowship with God, something which requires faith in His Messiah. “Keeping the Sabbath” means participating in His rest, that which we enjoy in part now but will experience its fullness in the millennium and ultimately in the world to come.

5. The Shabbat rest which remains for the people of God is therefore the already-not-yet promises of rest revealed throughout the Scriptures, a rest which is pictured as dwelling with Messiah, in the Land, with complete peace from enemies and war, where righteousness reigns, and where God will tabernacle forever with His people (cf. Rev. 21:3). It is a day, but it is much more than a day. The Shabbat day stands forever as the enduring symbol of God’s desire to dwell with His people. For the author of Hebrews, this rest has been made possible through Yeshua, Who is Immanuel (“God with us”), and Who therefore revealed in the fullest of ways the great desire of God to dwell with His people.

6. This “rest” is the heart of the Gospel or Good News, which was preached to ancient Israel (Heb 4:2, 6) and is preached today as well. Thus, the “rest” is the same, en-

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¹ Cf. Is 11; Ezek 36:16ff; Jer 31:31–34.
tered into the same way, by faith, and enjoyed the same way, through faithful obedience.

7. The concept of “rest” is thus comprehensive. In its broadest sense it is nearly synonymous with “shalom,” the ultimate realization of God’s full redemptive work in and through Yeshua, our risen, victorious, and reigning Messiah.

------- End of Excursus -------

1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

These first verses which comprise the opening paragraph of chapter four continue the theme of chapter three, namely, that they (the readers) were standing at a crossroads of faith, and he (the author) was fearful that some would make a wrong choice, forsaking the superiority of Yeshua in order to regain acceptance by that part of the Jewish community which had rejected Him. This choice, as I have stated before, was not (in my opinion) one of whether or not Yeshua was Messiah. Rather, it was a choice between Yeshua as one of several Messiahs, or Yeshua as the promised Messiah of the prophets, i.e., Immanuel, “God with us.” What these opening verses in chapter 4 make clear is the viewpoint of our author, that to take a low view of Yeshua’s person and work would result in failure to enter the rest which God has prepared for His people. In other words, the author of our epistle has once again made a full acceptance of Yeshua as the only way for salvation—the only way to enter into the fullness of God’s rest.

Furthermore, it is emphasized again in this section that our author fears there are some of his readers who are on the verge of abandoning a full embrace of Yeshua as Immanuel, and who therefore are close to failing in their faith, as the Israelites of old did at Kadesh Barnea.

For our author, Psalm 95 is the bridge between the nation of Israel who failed to enter Canaan and the recipients of his epistle. Historically, Israel was given a Land, a place which offered “rest” from their enemies and from their wanderings. But because they lacked faith to believe that God was able to give them victory over the people who possessed the Land, that generation failed to enter into it and were thus forever blocked from doing so. The extent of God’s displeasure with the people is revealed in His taking an oath that they would never enter into the Land.
This fact is recorded in Psalm 95, obviously written many years after the events of Kadesh Barnea. On this basis, our author reasons that the “rest” offered that first generation of exodus Israelites was still extant and available. Moreover, the psalm identifies the “rest” as “My rest,” which our author reasons could only be referring to Sabbath, since it was on the Sabbath that God rested from His work. Therefore, a logical link may be made between the rest offered the Israelites of old and the Sabbath itself. What God was offering Israel at Kadesh Barnea was nothing more nor less than the kind of rest which He Himself enjoyed when He ceased from His work “and was refreshed” on the seventh day (Ex 31:17).

What has captivated the attention of our author is the “promise” that remains of entering into God’s rest. This term “promise” (ἐπαγγελία, epangeloia) is a very important word for our author as seen by the fact that he uses it 14 times in this epistle.¹ In the Apostolic Scriptures the word “promise” is most often found in connection with the covenants made with the fathers, especially the Abrahamic covenant. Note the following:

And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this to our children in that He raised up Yeshua, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.’ (Acts 13:32–33)

And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; (Acts 26:6)

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Rom 4:13)

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Messiah. (Gal 3:16)

What I am saying is this: the Torah, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. (Gal. 3:17) remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to

¹ 4:1; 6:12, 15, 17; 7:6; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9, 13, 17, 33, 39. The verbal form (ἐπαγγ-γέλλωμαι) is found once, 10:23.
the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:12)

In our text (Heb 4:1), we should therefore understand that the word “promise” also carries a covenant association, the blessing of the covenant made with Abraham and the promise of blessing via the Seed of Abraham. Furthermore, since the larger context of our passage emphasizes that Yeshua is the One by whom the covenant promises are fulfilled, it follows that the promised “rest” comes only through faith in Yeshua and the salvation He accomplished for His people. Failure to enter into the promised rest is the result of unbelief.

The primary concern of our author is that some of his community might “come short” of entering into the rest. Using the plural he writes: “We ought to fear...,” i.e., we ought to be concerned lest we follow the same pattern of unbelief demonstrated by our forefathers in the wilderness. As Calvin remarks:

But the fear which is here recommended is not that which shakes the confidence of faith but such as fills us with such concern that we grow not lethargic with indifference. Let us then fear, not that we ought to tremble or to entertain distrust as though uncertain as to the issue, but lest we be unfaithful to God’s grace.\(^1\)

The term translated “come short” (NASB) is ὑστερέω, hustereō, “to lack, have need of, fall short of.” The tense of the verb (perfect) would indicate that our author’s fear was that some should have “come so far” and then failed to take the final steps of faith “into the land of rest,” that they should presently be wandering in the “desert of disobedience.” The verb, in denoting arriving late, could envision the athletic races in which one fails to complete the race or comes across the finish line in a losing position. The verb is also used of arriving late for an appointment in the sense “missing the boat” and therefore “left behind.” Of course, the language, regardless of how nuanced, deals primarily with the issue of Yeshua as the One through Whom the covenant promise of “rest” is realized. To “come short” or to “be late” is to be like Israel of old, that endured the sojourn through the desert but then at the border of the Land refused to believe the word of God. Likewise, to turn from a full acceptance and acknowledgment of Yeshua as the Promised Messiah Who alone could effect salvation is to “die in the desert” rather

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\(^1\) Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 93.
than enter into the shalom prepared for God’s children.

The NASB renders the final phrase “…any one of you may seem to have come short of it.” The words “may seem…” translate the Greek ὀπίσθεν, dokē (from ὀπίσθη, dokeō, “to think, suppose, consider”). But who is the subject of the verb? Many understand the subject to be the community at large, meaning that the author hopes no one would be thought by the community to have come short of full faith in Yeshua.¹ Other’s consider God to be the subject, so that the assessment is final in the sense of God’s having judged a person to have come short, i.e., as unbelieving and therefore not allowed to enter into His rest. This is the view of Sampson:

…it seems to us more proper to take it [dokē] as expressing a constituent part of the Apostle’s idea, “lest any of you be judged to have come short,” i.e., in the verdict of God.²

We may note as well the all inclusive nature of those who are truly God’s children, namely, that all of them accept by faith what God has promised, and in that faith are able to enter into His rest. Thus our text reads “…any one of you may seem to have come short of it.” All who are truly members in the family of God are united by their faith in God’s promised Messiah, Yeshua.

How might one “come short” of entering into God’s rest? The following verse gives us the answer.

2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

The gospel is at the heart of the issue at hand: “For indeed we have had good news (the gospel) preached to us, just as they also…. The message is the same, whether for the nation of Israel in ancient time or for our author’s audience—yes, and for us as well. The message of the gospel centered upon the Promised One, and the need for repentant sinners to place their faith in Him. It was at the announcement of the Promised Seed that Moses first mentions Abraham’s faith which God reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Our own author plainly states that Moses believed in the Messiah (Heb 11:26) and Peter makes

1 E.g., Westcott, Hebrews, p. 93.
2 Sampson, Hebrews, p. 146.
the same assertion about David (2Sam 7:19; Ac 2:22-31). Thus, the message of the gospel is the same and the object of faith is the same, that is, the person and work of the Messiah, Yeshua.

Thus, our author does not suggest that his audience has been given a new gospel or a different gospel than that which was proclaimed by the prophets to Israel. What our author emphasizes to his readers is a difference in the manner in which that gospel message is received. Israel as a nation refused to believe, to lay hold of the promise by faith.

At this point in our verse the Greek texts show two different readings, allowing various interpretations of the verse.¹ The different translations below indicate how the sense of the verse changes with the variants. The question is simply what is the object of the verb “not united” (οὐκ ὠφέλησεν).

But the mere hearing did not profit them because they were not united by faith with those who truly heard (i.e., Caleb, Joshua, Moses, etc).

But the word did not profit them because it (i.e., the word of God through Moses) was not united by faith in those who heard.

Note the difference between the NASB and the NET translations:

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (NASB)

For we had good news proclaimed to us just as they did. But the message they heard did them no good, since they did not join in with those who heard it in faith. (NET)

Actually, the reading represented by the NET Bible has the greater textual weight, and is the more difficult reading, which best explains how the variant reading would have occurred. But regardless of which reading is accepted, the essential meaning is the same. What was lack-

¹ The question revolves around whether the participle translated “united” (συγκεράννυμι, sugkerannumi) is accusative, thus functioning as the object of the verb ὠφέλεω, “to benefit, gain something” [𝔓¹³, 46 A B C Dgr * Ψ (33) 81 1739 al] or nominative [א 57 (102) (itᵀ) syr* cop* Ephraem Lucifer al].
ing in those who failed to enter into God’s rest was the element of faith.

And so the main point our author is making is clear: The issue of accepting the claims of Yeshua by faith is the key. There is little doubt that some of the readers of this epistle were wrestling with the person of Yeshua and His claims. It seems likely that some had been persuaded to regard Him as a messiah, but not the Messiah. How could they test the genuineness of His person and work? They would have to rely upon the word of others (cf. 2:3); they would have to receive the message of the Gospel by faith. This is not to say the message was less than credible and lacked verifiability. But ultimately the Gospel can only be received by faith, a faith which is solely and ultimately the work of the Spirit in the heart of the elect, and a gift of God’s grace.

3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, “as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

In contrast to those who failed to believe and thus did not enter into God’s rest, those who have believed, i.e., have exercised true faith in God and His promise, are those who enter His rest. This is the simple statement of verse 3, introduced by the connective “For” (γάρ, gar). The failure of Israel to enter into the Land and the rest God promised for them there, was not because God had failed to procure their rest, for even as He finished His work of creating in six days and rested on the seventh, so He had accomplished everything necessary for Israel’s victory, and had done so through His sovereign providence before the world began! The only conclusion that may be reached, therefore, is that Israel’s failure to enter into the rest prepared for them was the result of their own unbelief. In contrast, those who accepted God’s word as true and acted upon it (e.g., Joshua and Caleb) did enter His rest.

The verb “enter” (εἰσερχόμεθα, eiserxometha) in our verse is in the present tense indicating that the author, along with the believers to whom he writes, considered themselves as already entering into God’s rest. Granted, in an ultimate sense, this rest is still future. But these future aspects are, in some measure, already being experienced. Surely our rest from sin and its effects is not yet complete. But by faith we are assured that such complete rest will be ours and as such we now experience a foretaste of this ultimate rest. Moreover, the abiding presence of the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh is our guarantee1 that the rest we now

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1 ἀρραβών, arrabōn; וַעֵרָבוֹן, ‘eravon, cf. 2Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14.
experience in part will be one day be complete and eternal.

Our author refers again to his previous quote from Ps 95,\(^1\) emphasizing the fact that the rest to which he exhorts his readers is none other than God’s rest, i.e., the rest He entered into after the six days of creation. Moreover, the failure of Israel to enter into the rest of God was not because God had failed to prepare this rest. Not only had He prepared it, but He had entered into it Himself. Thus, the work of preparing the rest was finished in the first week of time, i.e., “since the very foundation of the world.” The seventh day rest was and is an enduring symbol and message of the eternal rest which God has prepared for His people. He finished His work and He therefore calls His people to rest in what He has completed, not in what they have done or will do.

What our author intends us to understand is that Shabbat, initiated at the creation week, and later utilized as the sign of the Sinai covenant (Ex 31:16–17), has as its ultimate purpose to reveal God’s work of eternal redemption for His people through His Son, Yeshua our Messiah. This means that the Sinai covenant, marked by the giving of the Torah, has as its ultimate goal the restoration of God’s creation (cf. Rom 8:19–22) and the final redemption of His people in the world to come.

In a final sense, then, our author’s point is that entering into God’s rest is done by believing in Yeshua, for it was by Him that all things were created, and it is by His work that redemption is accomplished and applied. He has accomplished redemption through His death and resurrection, and is applying it through His mediatorial work as High Priest on behalf of those for whom He died.

4–5 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; and again in this passage, “They shall not enter my rest.”

In these verses, our author gives further substantiation for his previous assertion, that God’s rest is the Shabbat which concluded the creation week, and that He offers this kind of rest to believers. That Israel failed to obtain God’s rest because of unbelief proves that those for whom God’s rest is given are those who believe, who have faith in Him and His promise. As Calvin notes:

To define what our rest is, he reminds us of what Moses relates, that God having finished the creation of the world, im-

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\(^1\) Cf. 3:7–11 and the comments on this quote above, pp. 128–133.
mediately rested from his works and he finally concludes, that the true rest of the faithful, which is to continue forever, will be when they shall rest as God did.... This he proves, because God who is said to have rested, declared a long time after that he would not give his rest to the unbelieving; he would have so declared to no purpose, had he not intended that the faithful should rest after his own example. Hence he says, It remains that some must enter in: for if not to enter in is the punishment of unbelief, then an entrance, as it has been said, is open to believers.¹

Our author quotes from Gen 2:2, but he introduces the quote in a vague way:² “He has said somewhere...” (εἴρηκεν γάρ που). Kistemaker (following many other commentators, both ancient and modern) believes he does this “deliberately to focus attention not on the precise location of the reference, but on the words themselves.”³ This may be the case, or it may also be that our author rightly presumed that the community to which he was writing would have surely known the text he was quoting⁴ so there was no need to add “as Moses wrote” or “in the Torah it says,” etc.

The point of the quote is, once again, to identify God’s rest as that which concluded the creation week. But this rest should not be understood as inactivity but rather as ceasing from a particular activity, and in this case, that of creating the universe. That God continues to “work” is clear, as noted (for example) by the participles in Ps 135, which is incorporated in the daily synagogue liturgy.⁵ Further, Yeshua specifically states that the Father continues to work in John 5:17.⁶

But He [Yeshua] answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” (Jn 5:17)

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1 Calvin, Hebrews, p. 96.
2 Note a similar vague introduction of a quote in 2:6.
3 Kistemaker, Hebrews, p. 108. See also the remarks of Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 83–4.
4 Was this text (Gen 2:2) part of an early Shabbat liturgy as it is found in the later rabbinic liturgy? This may well be the case, and if so, would have been recited weekly and thus known well.
5 “Who makes the great luminaries,” in the morning prayers. Note also Ps 135:7, “Who makes lightnings for the rain” and Ps 147:8, “Who makes grass to grow on the mountains.”
6 On the matter of continuing divine work, see Michael H. Burer, Divine Sabbath Work (Eisenbrauns, 2012).
What, then, are we to understanding when the Torah states that God “rested on the seventh day from all of His works?” It means that He ceased from the work of creation, of making from or into nothing that which was previously non-existent. To say (as some do\textsuperscript{1}), that God continued to create in successive or progressive “bursts” over billions of years is thus to deny and entirely dismiss the argument of our text. God’s rest, as our author describes, is a ceasing from His creation activity by which He made the universe out of nothing in six days as Moses wrote. Thus, God’s rest is complete and eternal, for having completed the creation of the universe in six days, He never again takes up this same work.

Thus, our author puts side-by-side the quotes from Gen 2:2 and Ps 95:11 in order to show that the Psalmist had in mind the same rest which Moses references in the creation narrative, namely, the very kind of rest which God Himself entered when He finished creating the universe. As Sampson writes:

> The comparison of the two quotations, which the Apostle wishes his readers to view side by side, evinces this fact, that God’s rest (concerning which the implied offer is made through David to believers), is the same with the rest of the seventh day, which immediately succeeded creation; and from this fact it is plain that the rest offered to believers is like that which God enjoyed—perpetual and spiritual.\textsuperscript{2}

Consider as well that our author has now twice repeated the reference to God’s oath, stated in Ps 95:11, that He “swore in His wrath, truly they shall not enter into My rest.” This is a solemn reminder that God keeps His word, meaning in this case that those who fail to believe and obey (which is evidence of the genuine quality of their faith), are not allowed to enjoy the rest He provides. Once again, the final conclusion our author will draw is that entering into God’s rest is available only to those who place their faith in God’s Messiah, Who alone has paid the penalty for sin and Who ever lives to assure that the accomplished redemption He has procured is applied to those who have been given to Him.

\textbf{6–7 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who}

\textsuperscript{1} E.g., Hugh Ross, who teaches a “progressive creation” theory, that God created in successive stages over billions of years.

\textsuperscript{2} Sampson, Hebrews, pp. 151–52.
formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”

There is an implied conclusion which is not stated in these verses, and in fact will not be stated until v. 11. Thus,

1) since it remains that some will enter God’s rest, and  
2) since the Psalmists states “Today...”  
3) [v. 11] “Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest....”¹

What further attracts the attention of our author is the word “today” in Psalm 95: הַיּוֹם אִם־בְּקֹלוֹ תִשְׁמָע, “Today, if you will hearken to His voice.” This word takes the offer of rest given to the previous generations and makes it current. Again our author reasons like this: “The failure to enter into the rest which the Land provided was experienced by our forefathers in time past. Yet the Psalmist, speaking God’s words, exhorts the people to enter ‘Today.’ Thus, the offer of entering God’s rest is still valid—still a bone fide offer.”

What is more, since the offer is made by the Psalmist who spoke by means of the Spirit, and since he wrote his inspired words long after the wilderness wanderings, it stands to reason that the offer must be viable to any and all subsequent generations. The exhortation in Hebrews, therefore, comes full force not only to the first recipients of this epistle but also to all who would read it throughout the centuries.

Further, our author puts the emphasis upon two words: “Today” and “you”: “Today, if you will hear His voice....” The emphasis upon today is heightened by the addition of the verb ὁρίζω (horizō), “to determine, appoint, fix, set,” “He again fixes a certain day....” In the same way that God brought Israel through the desert to the day of decision at Kadesh Barnea, so He has fix or appointed a day in which people in every generation are confronted with the truth of God and whether He will be received or rejected.

The exhortation comes personally to each of us and requires our response as well. Will we, in our generation, in our times, in our cultures, and in our particular circumstances, respond “today” rather than waiting for tomorrow? Will we respond in faith, accepting what God has said as true, and committing ourselves to enter His rest through the

power of His grace in Yeshua? Will we “hear” His voice or will we harden our hearts as did Israel of old?

Quite obviously the concept of “hearing” in Ps 95 and in our text is that of obeying, and this our author makes explicit. For having previously stated that Israel of old failed to enter their rest because of “unbelief” (3:19), now in our text he says that they “failed to enter because of disobedience.” To “hear” in a Hebraic sense often means “to obey” (as in the Shema, Deut 6:4ff; 11:13ff) and this is surely its meaning in Ps 95 from which our author has been quoting.

What was the voice of God saying when the people refused to enter the Land? He was giving them instructions (through Moses) for how they were to conquer the Land and take it for themselves (Num 14). He further spoke through Caleb and Joshua, assuring the people that He would fight for them and give them the victory. In short, He called the people to trust Him for what they knew they could not do in their own strength—He called them to faith.

Instead, they hardened their hearts against the truth and, relying only upon their own abilities, shrunk back from doing what God had commanded. For in regard to each of the 10 words (commandments) the people had tested God (cf. Num 14:22), a symbolic rejection of His kingship and the covenant which He had promised to them. Their refusal to enter the land was the final act of their hardened hearts, and constituted a full disobedience, for which God took an oath that they would not enter the promised Land, the Land of rest. For each of the 40 days the spies were gone, the people would spend one year wandering in the desert, the place where they would be afflicted and die. Of the men who were fighting age, only Caleb and Joshua would actually enter the Land of promise.

For our author, the tragedy is that a company of chosen people made a long, difficult journey only to falter and fail in the last “mile.” His community had likewise undergone harsh persecution, and had come to their own Kadesh Barnea. Would they follow in the footsteps of that former generation who lacked faith? Or would they fully espouse Yeshua as Messiah and by this faith enter the rest God had prepared for His chosen nation?

This is the same burden that Overseers and Shepherds of God’s people carry as well. Will those under their care—those they regularly lead, teach, counsel, and bear up in prayer—will they remain faithful to the end or will they, when the day of testing comes, fail the test, refuse to believe, and be shut out from entering into God’s rest? In the end, we all console ourselves by remembering that the souls of the people we
shepherd are ultimately in God’s care and Yeshua, the Chief Shepherd, will lose none of those who are His (Jn 6:39).

Finally, it is interesting that our author attributes Ps 95 to David. In most of the English translations used today, the Psalm is not attributed to David nor to any other author. This is because in the major Hebrew codices, (Leningradensis and Aleppo), Psalm 95 is unattributed. However, in the Lxx the Psalm is attributed to David,¹ and (as noted above) our author almost exclusively quotes from the Lxx. He therefore likewise considers David to have been the author of Ps 95. It is possible, of course, that the Hebrew codices have left off the title for Ps 95 and that the Lxx has retained an older tradition.

8–9 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Our author is well aware of the historical narratives in the Torah and in Deuteronomy specifically. Behind his emphasis upon rest (as noted above) is Deut 12:10 in which God specifically promised that He would give Israel “rest from your enemies around you so that you will live in safety,” and Joshua 22:4 (cp. 1:13, 15; 21:44; 23:1) specifically states that Israel enjoyed the promised rest once they entered the Land.

So what does our author mean, then, by his words in v. 8? He means that if the rest given to Israel by Joshua leading them into the Land was the fulfillment of the divine promise stated by Moses in Deut 12, then what was the rest to which the Psalmist refers in Ps 95? The answer is obvious: the rest which was promised to Israel and which they experienced once having entered the Land, was not the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise. It was, rather, a foreshadow and illustration of the eternal rest which the redeemed people of God would have in the world to come—the world that will be fully restored through God’s redeeming power. Moreover, this promised rest is both spiritual and physical (for the two cannot be finally separated), and thus is experienced in part now by those who place their faith in Yeshua and will be experienced in fullness in eternity. Thus, “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,” envisions what we now enjoy in part and what we will experience fully when we enter into the eternal Sabbath—the world to come which never ends.

Thus, the phrase “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people

¹ Αἶνος ὀδήσ τῷ Δαυίδ, “A Song of Praise, by David”
of God” considers the weekly Shabbat as the continuing revelation of God to His people of that eternal rest which He promises to those who, by faith, lay hold of the salvation which Yeshua has procured for His people. The attempts of many Christian commentators to prove via our text that the author of Hebrews has transformed the Shabbat from a weekly observance into a non-time oriented “spiritual Sabbath” is to miss entirely the point of this text. While surely our author’s focus is on a much larger scope than only the observance of the weekly Shabbat, there is no sense whatsoever that he has thought to change or in some measure redefine the Torah’s Sabbath commandment, which requires one to cease from their ordinary work on Shabbat and to sanctify it as distinct from the other six days of work. Nor is there any suggestion in our text that the author has diminished the necessity to obey the fourth commandment in observing the seventh day of the week as a Shabbat unto Adonai.

But rather, in line with what is often reiterated in the rabbinic literature, our author is simply indicating that our observance of the weekly Shabbat ought to have a far-reaching significance—one that has eternity in view. Indeed, the weekly Shabbat which we celebrate should, among other things, continually be a reminder of eternity and a means by which our faith is strengthened as we anticipate the return of our Messiah. As we recite in the *Birchat HaMazon* (Blessing after the Meal) for Shabbat:

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יַנֶחִילֵנוּ יוֹם שֶׁכֻּלּוֹ שַׁבָּת וּמֶנוּחָה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָמִים

The Merciful One, may He cause us to inherit the day which is all Shabbat and a rest reflecting the life of eternity.

Clearly, then, this text of Hebrews, far from dismissing, or reinterpreting, or somehow re-appropriating the Torah commandment of Shabbat into something which is entirely personal, inward, and without outward observance is in every way foreign to our author’s meaning and purpose. Rather, even as God promised rest to those who would trust in Him, so He gave the Shabbat as a sign of the covenant in which He not only promised rest for His people but also revealed the means by which this rest would be realized. For the priestly and sacrificial services prescribed in the Torah are the very revelation of how God would make sinners righteous, and through their redemption would be enabled to enter the very rest which God Himself enjoys.
10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

Verse 10 forms a bridge between this section with its emphasis upon “rest” and the subsequent pericope with its focus on God’s word and its inevitable fulfillment in Yeshua.

Thus, having emphasized the rest which God offers His people, our author now exhorts his readers to enter that rest through exercising faith in what God has said.

“For the one who has entered His rest…” – As argued in the previous verses, the rest which God offers His people has not ceased or been “used up,” for the rest is nothing less than the rest which God Himself enjoyed when He rested from the work of creation—it is a Sabbath rest which reflects eternity. The Sabbath itself has eternal qualities (Ex 31:13-17) and thus establishes the eternal rest into which God Himself entered. Since this Sabbath rest is the same rest which He encourages His people to enter, it must still exist.

Furthermore, our author notes that to enter the rest of God is to do precisely what He did, i.e., cease from one’s works. What does it mean to “cease from one’s works”? One commentator answers this way:

…the labors from which the people of God rest in the heavenly sabbath are the toilings, trials, and tribulations of their present pilgrimage . . . the sabbath rest will be for them an eternity of joyful service and unclouded worship performed in the glory of Him who is their Creator and their Redeemer.”

So we read in Rev 14:13,

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, ‟Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”

Here, to rest from one’s labors is to be free of the fallen world and the fallen nature, and to “forever be with the Lord.” Thus, we anticipate, yes long for, the shalom of eternity in which Yeshua will be King over all the earth, and He will be (the only) one and His name will be (the only) one (Zech 14:9).

1 Hughes, Hebrews, pp. 161–62.
11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

Our author has explained that the rest which God offers His people today is the very same kind of rest which God Himself entered at the conclusion of the creation week. He has also described how the ancient nation failed to enter that rest because of hardness of heart. With these in mind, our author now gives a direct exhortation, returning to the first person (“us”) as he did in the opening verse of the section (4:1):

“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest....”

The word translated “diligent” (σπουδάζω, spoudazo) can mean “to make haste, to be in earnest, to spare no effort, to work hard.” The ancient Israelites decided to take the comfortable way, to avoid the rigors of war, and thus forfeited the rest which was rightfully theirs. The author of this epistle fears that some of his community might fall into the same trap of apathy, fear, or weariness, and lose sight of the victory which Yeshua has already obtained for His people. So he exhorts them not to a “rely-and-relax” sort of theology, but to take up the challenge of faith and to put all effort into pursuing the truth about Yeshua. But not only pursuing it, but laying hold of it so as to make it one’s own.

The phrase “lest anyone fall” indicates that our author did not envision the entire community, or even the bulk of it, to be wavering in their belief but only a few. He recognizes, however, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump, and thus he is concerned that those who might be straying from a full belief in Yeshua would drag others down with them.

...so that no one will fall following the same example of disobedience. – It is “disobedience” that is the issue. A few manuscripts¹ have “unbelief” rather than “disobedience,” no doubt owing to the fact that the two concepts are intertwined in this passage, and that the two Greek words look somewhat alike.² What was the disobedience of ancient Israel that kept her from entering the land? That answer is clear: an unwillingness to trust God for what He had promised—refusing to act on the basis that He would do as He said. He had promised to bring them into the land, to subdue the enemies before them, and to dwell in their midst. What He required of the people was that they act upon His promises—that they live by faith and trust His word. Our author encourages his readers to precisely the same thing—to believe the word of God, partic-

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¹ Ψ, 104 (ἀπιστία, apistia); lat (incredulitatis); cf. also sy⁵. ² τῆς ἀπειθείας / τῆς ἀπιστίας
ularly what the inspired words of the prophets had foretold regarding the person and work of the Messiah, Yeshua.

We see in our text, then, something that is emphasized throughout the Scriptures, namely, that faith and obedience are inextricably bound, for true faith is known when one’s actions or deeds are in concert with God’s revealed truth, which in turn is received by faith. Notice how “believing” (i.e., exercising faith) and “obeying” are interchanged elsewhere in Scripture. Yeshua calls the people to “believe” the Gospel:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; re-pent and believe in the gospel. (Mk 1:15)

Yet both Paul and Peter write about “obeying” the Gospel:

…when the Lord Yeshua will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Yeshua. (2Thess 1:7–8)

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1Pet 4:17)

And we see the same interchange between “believe” and “obey” in John’s gospel:

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn 3:36)

In the same way, our author begins this section with the notice that Israel of old failed to enter into the rest prepared from them because they failed to believe the word of promise which was given to them (4:2). Here, in his conclusion, he easily describes faith as obedience, and the lack of faith as disobedience, exhorting his readers not to follow the example of disobedience portrayed by the nation at Kadesh Barnea. From this we learn a very important lesson: all disobedience comes from a failure to believe what God has revealed; all disobedience is connected in some way to unbelief.
12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

For the word of God is living and active... – The connection to the previous verses is clear: God’s word was the issue at Kadesh Barnea, and it continues to be the issue in each generation. Will we believe God’s word, the truth He reveals to mankind? In fact, it is God’s word which constantly divides between those who believe and those who do not. What is more, God’s word is not limited—it knows no boundaries. Whether of the physical or non-physical, the word of God presents the acid test for truth and for commitment to the truth, for it presents God’s definition of both.

We may begin our investigation of this verse by seeking to know what is meant by the phrase “word of God” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ). The early church fathers, remembering that the term “word” (λόγος, logos) is used by John as a title for Yeshua (Jn 1:1), thought to apply that meaning here. But while Yeshua as the Word of God is a clear biblical concept, the context here would seem to demand that “word of God” refer to His revelation to man by way of promise and commandment. In a sense, of course, all that God has spoken is summed up in Yeshua:

For as many as are the promises of God, in Him [Yeshua] they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. (2Cor 1:20)

But in the context of our passage, it seems quite clear that we should take “word of God” as referring to His revelation to man, ultimately gathered and contained in the written Scriptures, the prophetic and inspired word of God.

Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that the “word of God” and God Himself are not to be disconnected. Rather, the “word of God” is personified so that when our author speaks of the word of God he

1 Do not then, when hearing the Word, think of it lightly. For “He is sharper,” he says, “than any sword.” (Chrysostom, The Epistle to the Hebrews, on 4:12). Note the words of Delitzsch: “It would therefore be to pervert and confuse the sense to interpret, with the ancients..., ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ as designating Christ the personal Logos, whereas both the heavenly Sabbath and Christ Himself the Saviour (comp. v. 14 with iii.1) are here conceived of as the subject of the word.” (Delitzsch, Hebrews, 1.202f)
equates this with the living, active work of God Himself in the lives of His children. Even as in the creation narrative the word of God is the means by which He creates the universe, so in our text the subject is God and His Son, Yeshua, and the work accomplished by the Spirit in the lives of believers as the Scriptures bear fruit in their lives.

The “word of God” is described by three adjectives: living, ζάω, zaō; active, ἐνεργής, energēs; sharp, τομός, tomos, and by two verbs: piercing, διϊκνέομαι, diikneomai; able to judge, κριτικός, kritikos.

“Living” gives the picture of God’s word as personal, dynamic, and contemporary. Note Stephen’s words, referring to Moses as God’s appointed leader for Israel as they left Egypt and received the Torah at Sinai:

This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles (λόγια ζῶντα) to pass on to you. (Acts 7:38)

Describing God’s word as “living” likewise brings into focus the active work of the Ruach (Spirit) in connection with the Scriptures. The Spirit is the One who brings the word to life and breathes it into the soul. Apart from the Spirit, the word of God is lifeless. Moreover, though the meaning of the Scriptures is carried by the language itself (vocabulary, grammar, syntax) and thus may be grasped by anyone who has knowledge of the language and the historical context in which the text was written, the proper application of the author’s meaning can be acquired only through the illuminating work of the Ruach HaKodesh. Thus Paul writes:

just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1Cor 2:9–10, quote from Is 64:4, cp. 65:17)

The second adjective used to describe the word of God in our text is “active” (ἐνεργής, energēs), which means that the word of God, being alive even as God is alive, brings about or causes to happen that which God intends. Like the common phrase dictum factum (“no sooner said than done”), the word of God energizes or puts into motion His will. To put it simply, when God speaks, something always happens!
So shall My word which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (Is 55:11).

The Greek word translated here as “active” (energēs) forms the etymological basis for our English word “energy” and its verbal form, “energize.” We might say that the word of God has divine energy by which He accomplishes His sovereign will. Thus Peter writes in his first epistle:

for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. (1Pet 1:23)

The third adjective describes the word of God as “sharp,” comparing it with the μάχαιρα δίστομος, machaira distomos, literally “a two-mouthed sword.” The machaira generally describes a short sword or dagger, and in this case, one upon which the blade is sharpened on both edges.

In our text, the Greek word “sharp” (tomōteros) is in a comparative form, thus “sharper than a two-edged sword.” The interpretations of this phrase have often been fanciful. For instance, Tertullian interpreted the sword metaphor to mean that “the divine word of God [is] doubly sharpened with the two Testaments of the ancient law and the new law”1 and Augustine followed this interpretation: “Scripture says the word of God is a doubly sharp sword, on account of the two edges, the two Testaments.”2 Some have suggested other dualities: physical vs. non-physical or temporal vs. eternal, but the obvious meaning is simply that the word of God has the ability to “cut both ways,” that is, to always be cutting. The advantage of the two-edged sword was simply that it was ready to cut regardless of what position it might be in. So it is with the word of God: to the believer it brings joy, while to the scoffer it brings anger; to the believer it brings solice and shalom, but to the unbeliever it agitates and stirs up; to one it brings life, to the other death; it is a sweet smelling savour to one, but a stench to the other.

The Apostle Paul, speaking of his own epistles (which would become part of the inspired word of God), wrote:

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Mes-

1 Adversus Judaeos 9.
2 De Civitate Dei xx.21.
siah, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Messiah to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? (2Cor 2:14–16)

And so it goes, the word of God pierces at every angle.

Beyond the three adjectives used to describe the word of God, our author incorporates two verbs. The first is “able to pierce” (διϊκνέομαι, diikneomai) in the form of a participle, which describes the active, living, and sharp word of God as in the on-going activity of piercing. This pictures the word of God as having a dynamic which far exceeds the actions or words of any person. The word of God can reach the inner recesses of the heart and slay the most stubborn of wills. It can make worshipers of those who previously were mockers, humble souls from the most arrogant, and loving servants out of those filled with bitter hatred. It reaches where no one else is able to reach, and it performs the purpose of the Lord in the hearts of His elect.

This piercing is described as going to the deepest recesses of man’s being: “as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow....” It is primarily on this verse and one other (1 Thess 5:23) that Christian teachers have (almost universally) taught the tripartite view of man, that we are essentially made up of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. This view, which holds that a human being is made of three parts, usually describes the three parts in this basic structure:

1. The **body** is the material part of man, that which eventually dies and which will be resurrected in the last day.
2. The **soul** is the non-material part of man which relates to the fallen creation in general, often spoken of as one’s horizontal or “this-world” relationships. Some describe this as being “worldly,” attracted to the physical rather than the spiritual.
3. The **spirit** is that part of man which, before salvation, lies dormant, and which at the point of salvation is brought to life by the Holy Spirit. Like the soul, it too is non-physical, but its function is to have a relationship with God.

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1 In theological terms, this view is Trichotomy as opposed to the view that a human being has two parts (soul/spirit and body), called Dichotomy.
That is, it is the means by which a personal relationship with God is possible. The spirit is therefore viewed as focused upon vertical or heavenly relationship as opposed to the soul which relates only to earthly, worldly things.

If we look at the broad stroke of biblical teaching on the subject of soul and spirit, we find the following: the primary words in the Hebrew scriptures used to denote soul and spirit are נפש, nefesh and רוח, ruach respectively. In the Greek Scriptures, the primary words used to denote soul and spirit are ψυχή, psuxē and πνεῦμα, pneuma respectively. While all four of these terms have a wide semantic range and their meanings in any given context can only be determined by that context, it will be helpful for us to survey texts which identify “soul” and “spirit” and give us some sense of the biblical definitions.

1. In the Bible, “soul” denotes an individual living being, whether human or animal.

Then God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures נפש חayah... [literally, “a living soul”] (Gen. 1:20)

Then Adonai God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [literally, “a living soul”]–. (Gen. 2:7)

All the persons [literally כל נפש, “every soul”] who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt. (Ex 1:5)

Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul נפש and with all your might. (Deut 6:4–5)

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul נפש: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. (Jonah 2:5)

and said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives [literally, “our souls” τῶν ψυχῶν ημῶν]. (Acts 27:10)
2. In the Bible, “soul” also denotes the inner life where decisions, intentions, and feelings reside.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deut 6:5)

For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; (Prov 2:10)

He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is careless of conduct will die. (Prov 19:16)

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matt 11:29)

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mk 10:45)

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; (Phil 1:27)

3. In the Bible, “soul” sometimes stands for one’s entire existence which proceeds from one’s inner self.

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (Matt 6:25)

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt 16:26)

not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Messiah, doing the will of God from the heart [literally, “from the soul”]. (Eph 6:6)
4. The word “spirit” means “wind” or “breath,” and thus denotes the inner life.

Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath [רוּחַ] of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. (Gen 6:17)

Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit [רוּחַ] moved him came and brought the LORD’s contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. (Ex 35:21)

For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath [רוּחַ] and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is a vapor. (Eccl 3:19)

How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit [רוּחַ] there is no deceit! (Ps 32:2)

Blessed are the poor in spirit [πνεῦμα], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:3)

Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit [πνεῦμα] is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matt 26:41)

God is spirit [πνεῦμα], and those who worship Him must worship in spirit [πνεῦμα] and truth. (Jn 4:24)

They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Yeshua, receive my spirit [πνεῦμα]!” (Acts 7:59)

5. The word “spirit” can be used to denote one’s inner feelings, thoughts, beliefs, etc.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit [πνεῦμα] was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. (Acts 17:16)

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit [πνεῦμα] that we are children of God (Rom 8:16)
Summary

- The “soul” is one’s essential life, the unity of material (body) and immaterial (spirit). The “soul” is used in Scripture to denote the individual person, with their unique physical form (appearance) as well as their own personality, talents, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Both “soul” & “spirit” denote the inner self where thoughts and intentions are formed; where wisdom and knowledge reside; where faith resides.
- One is able to serve God with one’s “soul” and with one’s “spirit.”
- The “spirit” is the inner life of man (“breath”), but the soul also speaks of that inner life where one’s thoughts and intentions reside.
- Both the “soul” and the “spirit” survive after death.
- Conclusion: “soul” and “spirit” are near synonyms; they are two terms to describe various aspects of the inner life. Thus “soul and spirit” should be seen as a hendiadys, that is, a single concept expressed by two words joined together with the conjunction “and.”

In our current passage (Heb 4:12), the text is often understood to mean that the word of God is able to divide between soul and spirit, from which it is reasoned that there must therefore be a difference between “soul” and “spirit.” A closer look at the verse raises serious questions with this interpretation, however:

a) The word “divide” (μερισμός, merismos) and its associated verb are never used of distinguishing between two or more entities, but rather taking that which is homogeneous and dividing it or distributing it into parts. The word itself is used only one other time in the Apostolic Writings, in Heb 2:4.

God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts [literally, “distributions” or “dividings”] of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. (Heb 2:4)

Here, the term cannot mean a distinguishing between two things that are different. It rather means a distribution of something that has a common source, in this case, the work of the Holy Spirit as He gifts individuals to accomplish His will.
The same is true with the use of the related verb (cf. Rom 12:3; 1Co 7:17; 2Cor 10:13). In each case the term refers to dividing something that is whole, not marking out the differences between various entities.

What, then, would the meaning be in our text? The “dividing of soul and spirit” would be the manner in which the word of God apportions the soul/spirit, the inner self, to the tasks of life. To put it in simple terms, the word of God is able to convict even the deepest recesses of our inner being, drawing us to obey and to repent which leads to obedience. Thus, the Ruach HaKodesh empowers the word of God, enabling its ministry to the deepest recesses of one’s being in order to convict, encourage, instruct, and enable, i.e., to walk a life of faith and obedience to God in honor of His Son, Yeshua.

b) The interpretation that has the word of God dividing between two distinct entities, i.e., the soul and the spirit, falters in its attempt to explain a similar division between joints and marrow. The text does not say “bones and marrow,” as we might expect, as though it would take a sharp sword indeed to separate those things so closely bound together. Instead, it uses “joints and marrow” as typical of those body parts that are at the most inner recess of one’s physical existence. “Joints and marrow” ought likewise to be taken together (as a hendiadys), not as denoting two things which are separate, but as denoting the most inaccessible regions of the body.

c) Those who see in this verse the basis for the three part makeup of mankind ought actually to find four parts: soul, spirit, body, and heart, for the verse goes on to speak of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Thus, very often the Scriptures use “soul” and “spirit” as synonymous terms. While in some cases the two terms may embrace slightly different nuances, in general they each speak of the inner, immaterial and eternal part of mankind, and when used together as a hendiadys (as in our text), the dual term denotes the entirety of a person’s non-physical being.

Plummer has summed up Heb 4:12 this way:

…the lesson of our text is that joints and marrow represent the most hidden part of our physical frame, while soul and spirit represent our inmost spiritual being, and thoughts and intents of the heart our inmost mental activities. The Word searches all. All is naked and open to God.

The Word of God confronts us, and of the Word is predicted the judgment which belongs to God in His omniscience.
There is no discrepancy between the judgment of God and that of His Word.¹

13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Our verse begins with the connective “and” (καί) indicating that the author is carrying forward the thought of the previous sentence, namely, that the inspired, written word of God is able, through the sovereign working of the Ruach, to effect God’s will in the lives of those whom He saves. Indeed, since God is omniscient and “nothing is hidden from His sight,”² by His Ruach HaKodesh the Scriptures can be applied to accomplish precisely what He intends.

This is affirmed by the second clause of our verse: “all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him.” The NASB’s “laid bare” translates the Greek γυμνός (gumnos) which has a literal sense of “naked,” “without covering.”³ The following description, “laid bare” translates the Greek τραχήλιζω (trachēlizō) which is only found here in the Apostolic Scriptures and not at all in the Lxx. Since the verb appears to be cognate to the Greek noun τράχηλος (trachēlos), “neck, throat,” Sampson suggests that the verb in our text “contains the idea, ‘laid bare,’ like the neck of the sacrifice for the knife.”⁴ Delitzsch takes the primary sense of the word to be “head thrown back and throat exposed” and here indicating that the one who hides his face (by looking downward) will have his head lifted so that he will be unable to hide himself from the eyes of God.⁵ Montefiore⁶ notes that the only attested meaning for the word is “gripped by the neck” which metaphorically means “to prostrate,” and thus he understands the phrase to mean “everything is naked and prostrate” and notes 1Cor 14:25,

... the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

Surely the context itself is sufficient to make the primary meaning plain: nothing can be hidden from God. As Hughes so forcefully notes:

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¹ Quoted from The Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. 2, p. 31.
² Literally, “nothing is hidden before Him,” ἀφανὴς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ.
³ E.g., Mark 14:51; John 21:7; Acts 19:16; 2 Cor 5:3; James 2:15; Rev 3:17.
⁴ Sampson, Hebrews, p. 161.
⁵ Delitzsch, Hebrews, 1.215-16.
⁶ Montefiore, Hebrews, p. 89.
...God sees all things, as man never can, in the ultimate light of their undisguised reality; his gaze penetrates beneath the surface and beyond every specious façade to the radical heart of our being (cf. 1Sam 16:7). Indeed, a man’s knowledge even of his own self is faulty and inadequate; and wisdom begins in his recognition of this fact and in the prayer that God therefore will search him and know him and reveal to him the true depths of his depravity and also the wonders of divine grace (cf. Ps 139).\footnote{Hughes, Hebrews, p. 168.}

...to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. – The Greek underlying this translation contains a nice word play on the word λόγος (logos), for the Greek has πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος, literally “to whom to us (is) the word.” It is a nice play on the term since the previous verse speaks of “the word (logos) of God” and now our author speaks of being confronted by or standing before “the word.” In context, the meaning of the phrase seems quite clearly to be “…to the eyes of Him to Whom it is necessary for us to give account,” for the Greek word logos can surely have this meaning, as we see from Matt 12:36–

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting (logos) for it in the day of judgment. (Matt 12:36)

And this is the sense given in the Peshitta: “...but all things are naked and open before the eyes of him to whom we are to give an account.”\footnote{ܰܘܗ݈ܝ ܕܠܶܗ ܝܳܗܒܺܝܢܰܢ ܦܶܬܓܳܡܳܐ ܥܰܪܛܶܠ ܘܰܓܠܶ ܩܕܳܡ ܥܰܝܢ, cf. Matt 12:36.}

The point of our text is that in the final day, an account will be given by everyone and no one will be able to hide or cover their life’s activity. Everything will be scrutinized by the Judge of all the earth and the standard by which the judgment will be made is the word of God, the Scriptures.

The clause “to whom we must give account” is rather interesting. The books must be audited, and all the bills, payments, and receipts handed over to be checked. Man must give an account of himself before God, the auditor. The books of man’s conscience are open before God’s eyes. Nothing escapes him. ...In the final judgment, everyone must give an account of
himself. Only those who are in Christ Jesus will hear the liberating word “acquitted.”

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Yeshua the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Beginning with this verse and continuing through 5:10, our author begins an exhortation based upon the heavenly priesthood of Yeshua. In fact, the work of Yeshua as HaCohen HaGadol (High Priest) is the main focus of all that is said from this point through 10:18.

What is the force of the opening “Therefore”? What is the connection between the exhortations to enter God’s rest (along with the statements about the activity of God’s word) and this comparison of Yeshua with the office and work of the High Priest? The answer is immediate and apparent! Yeshua, as our high priest has Himself passed through the heavens, that is, has Himself entered into his rest. As such, He stands not only as our primary example of how we too will enter God’s rest, but also that our rest is assured, for He “ever lives to make intercession for us” (7:25). This is the force of the opening phrase: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens…” To pass through the heavens refers to more than His ascension. It compares the passing of the earthly High Priest through the veil on Yom Kippur with Yeshua’s having gone directly to the very presence of God (cp. Eph 4:10). What the one did as symbolic, Yeshua did in reality, fully completing the offering of Himself as the eternal sacrifice for the sins of the elect.

But not only has Yeshua’s ascension and return to the Father indicated that He has completed His work (entered His rest) of offering sacrifice, but it also demonstrates His ability and willingness to intercede for His people as their high priest. For those who are yet struggling to enter the rest, there remains the need to exercise faithful obedience and to strengthen oneself against the natural tendency of self-reliance and faithlessness. Clearly, those who strive to enter the rest are in need of an intercessor, a mediator. Thus, this section begins with the assertion that Yeshua is, indeed, our High Priest Who, through His intercession, will likewise enable all those for whom He intercedes to enter into His rest.

Note the list of characteristics ascribed to Yeshua by our author.

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1 Kistemaker, Hebrews, p. 119.
Yeshua is:

(1) High Priest
(2) Great – This does not merely speak of His superior activity as our heavenly “high priest” but rather indicates an attribute of His essential character (see below).
(3) One who has passed through the heavens
(4) Son of God

It is upon the basis of these qualifications that, as our High Priest, we are exhorted to “hold fast the confession” of our faith, a theme first introduced in 3:1.

This is the first use of the title “son of God” in our epistle, but it will be used three more times before the book is finished (6:6; 7:3; 10:29). Its wide use in the gospel of John, as well as in Acts, attests to its popularity during the early first century. Against the backdrop of Daniel 3:25 and 7:13, “son of God” and “son of Man” became well accepted messianic titles. That Yeshua applies the titles to Himself attests to His own self-realization and understanding that He was, indeed, the Messiah promised by the prophets. The fact that His followers also used the title “son of God” of Yeshua (cf. Matt 16:16) shows their expectation as well that He was the long-awaited Messiah. Here, our author describes Yeshua as the “son of God” to remind us that the work of the high priest was the very goal for which Messiah came, fulfilling the work of redemption as described by the prophets. Yeshua’s fulfillment of the priestly duties is therefore in perfect harmony with the very mission for which He was sent, for it required that God’s Messiah be Himself divine.

The title “son of God” (בן אלהים, ben Elohim) is not found in the Tanach, but equivalent terminology may suggest the basis for its repeated use in the Apostolic Scriptures (ὑιός τοῦ θεοῦ, huios tou theou) found some 43 times. Thus, in 2Sam 7:14 the promise is made to David that his descendant (Solomon) would reign after him, described in this way: “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me.” Similarly, in Ps 2:7 the Father/Son language is employed in reference to the in-

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1 For the debate regarding whether “Son of God” and “Son of Man” were early messianic titles, see my The Messiah: An Introduction to Christology (TorahResource, 2006), pp. 47ff.
2 Matt, 7x; Mk, 3x; Lk, 6x; John, 9x; Acts, 2x; Rms, 1x; 2Cor, 1x; Gal, 1x; Eph, 1x; Heb, 4x; 1Jn, 7x; Rev, 1x.
stalled King: “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” And in the final verse of Ps 2, the admonition is given: “Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way....” Likewise, the sonship of the Davidic royal line is seen in Ps 89:26–27, “He will cry to Me, ‘You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.’ I also shall make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” Interestingly, 4QFlorilegium (4Q174) of the Qumran scrolls interprets 2Sam 7:14 to be speaking of the Messiah:

10 “Moreover the Lord declares to you that He will make you a house,” and that “I will raise up your offspring after you, and establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he will be My son.” This passage refers to the Shoot of David, who is to arise with 12 the Interpreter of the Torah, and who will [arise] in Zion in the Last Days, as it is written, “And I shall raise up the booth of David that is fallen” (Amos 9:11).

Thus, the Davidic king is portrayed as having a unique relationship with God as His “son,” representing the reign of God upon the earth. The fact that one pre-Christian Judaism (Qumran) understood this “son of God” terminology to apply to the coming Messiah is significant for the use of the title as applied to Yeshua.

...since we have a great high priest – The adjective “great” (μέγας, megas) would be superfluous to the ears of a Jewish community in the first century if modifying the title “high priest.” This is because the title “high priest” in the Hebrew of the Tanach is הכהן הגדול (hakohen hagadol), literally, “the great Priest,” where our common English “high priest” has rendered gadol, “big, great” as “high.” Since, then, the word “great” or “big” is actually part of the priestly title, to have “great” in our text function as an additional adjective would result in the redundancy “a great great priest.” Rather, the phrase in our verse should be understood to mean “a high priest Who is great.” In this way, the adjective “great” relates to Yeshua’s essential character or person and not specifically to His role as high priest. In other words, He did not attain greatness by offering Himself as the sacrifice for sinners. Rather, He was able to offer an acceptable sacrifice for sinners because of His essential greatness, and this essential greatness is, as our author has already explained, His divine nature. Though a mystery beyond our ability to comprehend, the fact that Yeshua is divine and thus has an infinite life means that His death on behalf of sinners was likewise
infinite, and only an infinite sacrifice could atone for sin. For sin, when reckoned against the infinite holiness of God, is therefore itself infinitely unholy. Only an infinite sacrifice could pay the debt of sin. This required a high priest Who could offer an infinite sacrifice, that is, a high priest Who was Himself “great” in the sense of infinite.

...let us hold fast our confession – Once again we see an indication that one of the prime concerns our author has is that people within the community to which he is writing not give up their confession of Yeshua as the “son of God,” as the promised Messiah by Whom and through Whom salvation is alone made possible. His point is that if one considers both the very character of Yeshua as proven not only by His works but also by His death and resurrection, then there is every reason to hold fast to one’s initial confession that Yeshua is, in fact, the promised Messiah and the One upon Whom eternal salvation rests. The author’s exhortation is that we “hold fast our confession,” and the Greek word translated “hold fast” is the verb \(\text{κράτεω} (\text{krateō})\) which generally conveys a sense of “to overcome obstacles,” “to grasp something,” “to take control,” and “to hold onto something in order to make it last.”

The point is that maintaining one’s hold upon the truth and thus remaining firm in one’s confession of Yeshua as God’s Messiah is something that requires one’s own disciplined life of faith in which the means of grace are constantly appropriated. Granted, God is the One Who enables us to remain steadfast in the faith, but we also must do our part. Remaining faithful is a cooperative work between the renewed, redeemed individual and God. God strengthens, encourages, comforts, supplies our needs, and leads us, yet we must run the race; we must subdue the flesh; we must yield our will to His will, and we must fight the good fight of faith. Our author has no place for what in our times is referred to as the “Prosperity Gospel,” that God promises us a life of wealth and comfort when we “accept His gift of salvation.” It is true that in Yeshua we enter an abundant life and obtain a hope that cannot be taken from us and that in many ways we are “rich” beyond measure. But it is likewise true that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The life of sanctification is one that involves a constant awareness that the battle is not yet over even if the outcome has been determined. Though we are assured of victory, we are still called to engage in the battle, fully protected by the armor which God provides, the very armor which is Yeshua Himself.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Note that every piece of armor referenced by Paul in Eph 6:14ff is an attribute of Yeshua: truth (Jn 14:6); righteousness (Jer 23:6); peace (Eph 2:14);
15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

The final exhortation of v. 14 is that we should hold fast the confession, i.e., the confession of our faith in Yeshua the Messiah. Though He has ascended into the heavens and now dwells in the very presence of God, yet He is able to fully sympathize with us as one who has been touched by the same temptations and testings which enter our lives. The difference, of course, is that there is nothing within Yeshua which corresponds with or is in any way attracted to sin.

The earthly priests during the time of the Second Temple (from the time of Nehemiah and Ezra to the destruction in 70 CE) were divided into three general groups: Levites, Priests, High Priest, where the Levites were the lowest and the High Priest the most powerful. Levites were primarily responsible for singing and music in the Temple, along with sentry duty. The priests were divided into twenty-four divisions called mishmerot (מִשְׁמְרוֹת), each of which served for one week. The divisions were divided in turn into fathers’ houses (בֵּית אָבֹת) each of which served on a prescribed day. Most of the priests during the time of Yeshua did not live in Jerusalem, but traveled up to the City for their appointed time of service, sleeping in the Temple precincts.

Generally, the people thought well of the priests (but not so of the High Priests). Josephus\(^1\) indicates that the priests were generally loyal to the Temple and faithful in their duties, both to the Temple service and to the people. Particular notice is made of their great devotion during the difficult times which came upon the Temple.

The High Priesthood, however, controlled as it was by the Sadducees, was held in great contempt during the time of Yeshua and after, if the later Talmud can be received as giving at least some semblance of history.

Woe is me because of the house of Boethus! Woe is me because of their staves! Woe is me because of the house of Hanim! Woe is me because of their whispering! Woe is me because of the house of Kathros! Woe is me because of their pens! Woe is me because of the house of Ishmael son of Phiabi! Woe is me because of their fists! For they are high priests, their sons treasurers, their sons-in-law trustees, and their slaves beat

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faith (Gal 2:20); salvation (Matt 1:21); word (Jn 1:1).

1 Ant. xiv, 65-67; III, 321.
The High Priesthood was political, self-serving, and ultimately robbed the people of their right to worship and of their tithes and offerings. In the Gospels and Acts, the term “chief priests” (plural) refers to the High Priestly families who controlled the Temple and who were the very cause of Yeshua’s own consternation as He viewed the Temple as a place thieves congregate (Matt 21:12–13).

In stark contrast to the money-hungry High Priests of the 1st Century, Yeshua is here portrayed as One who was and is sympathetic to the woes of the people. The term “sympathetic” is made up of two Greek words: συν, sun (it becomes συμ, sum in compounds) meaning “with” and παθέω, patheō meaning “to feel, to suffer,” from which we derive our English word “pathos.” The meaning is obvious: Yeshua “feels with” us in our struggles and temptations.

It is provable to us that He is just such a sympathetic mediator when we consider that He underwent life on our planet and therefore dealt with the same struggles we have. He was “tested, tempted” (from the verb πειράομαι, peiraomai, “to test, try, attempt”) in the same manner in which we are tested and tempted. The verb here is in the perfect tense, which denotes action which is past, but has on-going effects or results. He was tested and so now He continues to sympathize with the tests and temptations with which we are confronted. In other words, He knows by His own experience what we now face in our daily lives.

The fact that Yeshua did not sin, and indeed, that He could not sin, does not detract from the fact that He could be tempted or tested. “What kind of test is it if you know you can’t fail?”, many might ask. But if a temptation or testing is viewed as a force—as a kind of pressure, then we may understand this issue better. A force is fully felt by the one who is able to withstand its full strength without being moved. Yeshua felt the full force of testing and tempting because He never gave in to it. When we sin, however, we feel the force of the temptation only to the point where we give in. On this analogy, the one who sins has not felt the full force of the temptation. Somehow, in the marvelous expanse of God’s wisdom, Yeshua was able to know and understand the draw of sin without ever succumbing to it. In this way, we may understand that He felt the full force of sin and therefore we can understand that He sympathizes with us in the very struggles we face.

To say that Yeshua could have sinned would seem to impugn His

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1 b.Pesachim 57a.
divinity, while to say that He could not have sinned seems to undermine His true humanity. This question divided the Church Fathers and became an issue of debate at some of the Church Councils. The question, however, is one asked from a purely theological or philosophical perspective. The fact of the matter is that the Scriptures clearly state He did not sin, and thus did not yield to temptation. In other words, as noted earlier, He felt the full force of the temptation but did not yield to its power. But it will not do for us to try to explain this further, as some did by suggesting that He was tempted in His humanity but not in His deity. Once again, the Scriptures do not speak in such terms, but in each case presume a perfect unity of the human and divine natures in Yeshua without giving further descriptions or explanations.

We should not, however, label as heretical those who hold that Yeshua could have sinned but did not. No less a renown figure as the reformed theologian Charles Hodge held this view:

This sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability. It was not a *non potest peccare* [no potential to sin]. If He was a true man He must have been capable of sinning. That He did not sin under the greatest provocation; that when He was reviled He blessed; when He suffered He threatened not; that He was dumb, as a sheep before its shearer, is held up to us as an example. Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with his people.¹

Yet we should be reminded that this question is not asked by the Apostles. It is a question, rather, that follows from the inquiry of the divine and human natures of Yeshua, and the mystery of their union. Since, however, such ontological inquiry seems to be foreign to the Hebrew perspective of things, we should not be surprised to find that the Apostles gave no significant attention to it. What is affirmed by them is that Yeshua did not sin; that He was, in every way, pure and holy; and that as a result, He is in every way fit to be not only the Lamb of God as sacrifice for sins, but also the High Priest for His people. It is upon these truths that the Prophets and Apostles wish for us to be well grounded in our faith.

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

It is not uncommon to find Christian commentators who use this verse as proof that, following the death, resurrection and ascension of Yeshua, those who believe in Him have access to God in a way that believers before the coming of Yeshua did not. Hughes may be taken as representative of this view:

In the levitical system that had prevailed up till the time of Christ’s advent only the high priest was permitted to approach into the sanctuary of God’s presence, and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when he passed from sight into the holy of holies. The people, however, were excluded from the divine presence because of their sinfulness and prohibited from drawing near. But the atonement effected by Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross opened the way that had hitherto been closed. This was dramatically symbolized by the rending of the temple curtain from top to bottom at the time of the crucifixion, indicating that through an act of divine grace access into the holiest place was now available to all the people (Mk 15:38; Matt 27:51; Heb 10:20).  

But this interpretation fails at a number of points. First, the idea that believers before the coming of Yeshua did not have direct access to the presence of God cannot be sustained. We repeatedly find individuals in the Tanach drawing close to God in prayer: Abraham (Gen 20:17); Jacob (Gen 32:11); Hannah (1Sam 1:10ff); Samuel (1Sam 8:6). And though Moses might be considered an exception, still he clearly came into the presence of God without the assistance of one of the sons of Aaron.

Moreover, if the priestly service outlined in the Torah and practiced in the Tabernacle and Temples was to inform the people that they had no access to God, how could David have written these lines in Ps 139?

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence [מִפָּנֶי, from Your face]? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. (Ps 139:7–10)

1 Hughes, Hebrews, p. 173.
Rather than contrasting the access to God’s presence before and after the incarnation of Yeshua, our author has tied his exhortation in this verse to the previous verses, emphasizing that we constantly have access to God through our High Priest, Yeshua, even as did those believers who lived before His coming, for they likewise placed their faith in the “Coming One” and in the saving work He would accomplish on their behalf.

But what the priestly service (including that of Moses before the priestly instructions of the Torah were given) did reveal and foreshadow was that access to God is always through a divinely appointed mediator, a role that would ultimately and finally be fulfilled in the Redeemer Messiah. Moreover, in the yearly festival cycle, the entrance of the high priest into the most holy place only one time in the year, foreshadowed the single time in the whole scope of history when the High Priest par excellence, Yeshua, would offer Himself once for all time, the offering which forms the basis of His continual intercession to the Father on behalf of His people.

It is this concept (though the details will be explained in the subsequent chapters) that our author intends his readers to have in mind. So when he begins our verse with “Therefore,” he is tying his exhortation back to his statement of verse 14 where he states that “we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Yeshua the Son of God....” Our author’s first exhortation based upon this glorious fact is: “let us hold fast our confession” (v. 14). The second exhortation, once again based upon the fact that Yeshua has ascended to the right hand of the Father as the heavenly high priest, is: “let us draw near with confidence.” Our confidence to “draw near” to God is because we have a High Priest Who has ascended to the very right hand of the Father and Who therefore lives forever to intercede on our behalf. Moreover, since Yeshua Himself experienced the woes of this fallen world, we may have every confidence that He has Himself experienced the weaknesses we ourselves experience, and therefore He is sympathetic to our needs.

The opening word of our verse is a present participle (προσερχόμεθα, proserchōmetha), suggesting a continuous action: “Let us regularly draw near....” Further, the verb itself (προσέρχομαι, proserxomai) is used in the Lxx to describe the unique duties of the Aaronic priesthood who alone could “draw near” to offer sacrifices upon the altar or burn incense on the altar of incense (Lev 9:7-8; 21:17–23; 22:3; Num 17:5[16:40]; Deut 21:5). This emphasizes the fact that all who are in Messiah draw near to God through Yeshua, Who has taken up His duties as the heavenly High Priest. That is, we have both the right (or authority) and the ability to
draw near to God because we are in Yeshua Who constantly resides in the very presence of the Almighty, and we have been given the abiding presence of the Ruach HaKodesh through Whom our prayers are made acceptable in His sight (cf. Rom 8:26–27).

Further, our author exhorts us to draw near “with confidence” (NASB, “boldness,” HCSB). The Greek word is παρρησία, parrēsia which has a range of meanings, including “openness, frankness; boldness, and confidence.”¹ It is used in Col 2:15 of making something “public,” that is, expressing something openly. Given the word’s range of meanings, it could suggest a number of things in our text. It could mean that we are to come to the “throne of grace” with personal boldness, that is, without fear that we will be reject. We come confidently knowing we will be accepted. It could also mean that we come to the “throne of grace” openly, that is, publicly, without being ashamed of the fact that we pray to God through faith in Yeshua. The use of this same word for “confidence” elsewhere in the book may well suggest that both meanings are intended by our author.

We are admonished to approach the “throne of grace” (τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος). What exactly are we to understand by this description? What does “throne of grace” describe? Or to ask the question a bit differently: What, in the author’s mind, as well as in the minds of his readers, was the “throne of grace”?

It is important, first of all, to note that there is no specific term in the Hebrew Scriptures for “throne.” Rather, the common word for “seat” or “chair” (כסא, kissē’) in context would be understood to mean “throne.” Therefore, the Greek phrase “throne of mercy” may just as well be considered as meaning “seat of mercy,” and thus the picture forms a perfect parallel with 10:19f, which clearly has the mercy seat (קַפֹּרֶת, kapporet) of the Ark in view, the very place where the blood was sprinkled by the cohen gadol each year in order to effect atonement on Yom Kippur. In fact, every time קסא (kissē’) is found in the Tanach, it is translated by the Greek θρόνος (thronos), the word translated “throne” in our verse.

Thus, the “throne of grace” is the “mercy seat,” that place where atonement was made and which prophetically spoke of Yeshua, for He is our “propitiation,” our English word which translates the Greek ἡλαστήριον (hilastērion), which in turn was used by the Lxx translators to translate kapporet which described top of the Ark of the Covenant. What, then, is the “throne of grace?” It is our Messiah, Yeshua, for He is the very “place” where the blood was sprinkled—the very “place”

¹ Parrēsia is used three other times in Hebrews: 3:6; 10:19, 35.
where our atonement was accomplished. The foreshadow presented by the cohen gadol year after year at the Yom Kippur festival is finally and completely realized in the finished work of our Messiah Yeshua.

But we should note that our author emphasizes that our atonement, secured for us by Yeshua through offering Himself as sacrifice for our sin, is the result of God’s grace. Yeshua is the very “throne of grace” before Whom we come and through Whom we obtain mercy. All that we have, and all that we are in Him, is the result of God’s grace and nothing we deserve nor that which we could earn.

But we can also see in the language our author employs that Yeshua, pictured as sitting at the right hand of God, is not only the very means of grace to all who are His, but that He dispenses this grace as the King Who possesses all authority and power in heaven and on the earth. Therefore nothing is beyond His ability and authority to grant. God is able to supply all of our needs according to His own riches in glory through the work of His Son, Yeshua (cf. Phil 4:19).

Interestingly, the later rabbinic literature also notes the attribute of God’s mercy in connection with Yom Teruah, the festival which begins the seventh month, the very month in which Yom Kippur is celebrated:

*God is gone up amidst shouting, the Lord amidst the sound of the horn* (Ps 47:6). When the Holy One, blessed be He, ascends and sits upon the Throne of Judgment, He ascends with intent to do [strict] judgment. What is the reason for this statement? ‘God is gone up amidst shouting.’ But when Israel take their horns and blow them in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, He rises from the Throne of Judgment and sits upon the Throne of Mercy, for it is written, ‘The Lord amidst the sound of the horn’—and He is filled with compassion for them, taking pity upon them and changing for them the Attribute of Justice to one of Mercy. When? In the seventh month.¹

... and find grace to help in time of need. – The Greek phrase is εἰς εὐκαιρίαν βοήθειαν, and the preposition εἰς (eis) defines the goal or end of both verbs: “…that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely assistance.”² The point is that by God’s grace and mercy, expressed in the heavenly high priestly work of Yeshua our Messiah, the grace and mercy we receive through approaching His throne of grace via prayer and supplication is precisely that which fits both the need and the time

¹ Mid Rab Lev 29.3.
² So Sampson, Hebrews, p. 170.
of the need. How often we wonder how our needs will be met, and we see God’s gracious supply come just in time to meet our need! Such reliance of faith is that which strengthens our resolve to cast all of our cares upon Him, fully knowing that He cares for us (1Pet 5:7).

Indeed, the combination of “grace” and “mercy” (χάρις, charis; ἔλεος, eleos) is reminiscent of covenant language used in the Tanach, particularly the Hebrew word ḥesed, often translated “lovingkindness,” but actually carrying a sense of “covenant loyalty” or “covenant faithfulness.” We find the word chesed most often translated in the Lxx with our Greek word eleos, “mercy,” and Hebrew חֵן, chen most often translated by our word charis, “grace.” Thus “grace and mercy” may well carry the sense of God’s covenant faithfulness to His elect through the work of His Messiah, Yeshua.¹

¹ Note the use of this pair of words in 1Tim 1:2; 2Tim 1:2; 2John 1:3.
The chapter break in our English Bibles (as well as in the traditional Greek text) is unfortunate, for as we noted earlier, this section began in 4:14 and continues through 7:28.\textsuperscript{1} The primary theme of this pericope is the heavenly high priestly service of Yeshua, a theme that continues into chapter 10. Thus, chapter five simply continues to expound the fact of Yeshua’s high priestly position as well that which He accomplishes in fulfilling His role as the high priest of His people.

1–3 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

One reason we should feel free to approach the throne of grace or the “seat of grace” with boldness (4:16) is simply that a high priest is, by nature and office, one who understands and sympathizes with those who bring the offerings and sacrifices.

The primary posture of a priest in general is that he has his face toward God and his back to the people. This is the picture drawn for us by our author: “...taken from men...appointed in things pertaining to God....” The priest must therefore be a representative of the people for whom he intercedes. He concerns himself both with sacrifices and offerings as they are required at the hand of the sinner. “Gifts” (δῶρον, dōran) is the more comprehensive term of which “sacrifices” (θυσία, thūsia) is a subset. Most likely, our author uses the two terms together to signify the broad scope of sacrifices and offerings prescribed in the Torah.

What is most on the heart of our author is the issue of sin and how the sinner is made clean or righteous before God. For him, the particular work of the high priest on Yom HaKippurrim (Day of Atonement) is the focus, as chapter nine makes clear. He is therefore particularly concerned with the sacrifices and offerings which are “for sins,” even though there were both sacrifices and offerings (e.g., the thank offer-

\textsuperscript{1} See the outline, pp. 21-23 above.
ing, and the freewill or votive offering) which were given apart from the issue of expiation or atonement.

Thus, in this context, the function of the high priest, viewed as it is against the background of sin and its severe penalty, is of utmost importance. This is a “life and death” issue, and the function of the high priest stands at the apex of success or failure. It is, therefore, a most strategic work.

But what is obviously in the mind of our author is to outline the basic requirements of a high priest in order to show both how Yeshua Himself must conform to these requirements but even more how He is unique in regard to His high priesthood, i.e., after the order Melchizedek rather than having His priesthood as a matter of physical lineage, i.e., being from the family of Aaron. Yet even though Yeshua is obviously not from the family of Aaron, it was still the requirement of a high priest that he be “taken from among men.” The point is obvious but nonetheless important: a high priest represents those for whom He offers sacrifices and gifts. As such, he must be like those he represents.

An essential characteristic of high priesthood is that the holder of this office is chosen from among men: only one who is himself man is fitted to serve as the representative of his fellow men before God. No angel, for example, would be capable of assuming such an office. It is particular as man that a high priest is qualified to act on behalf of men.¹

Our verse goes on to state what would have been obvious to any Jewish community, that the high priest is selected “from men” and “appointed on behalf of men.” But the emphasis our author wishes to give is seen in that both of these verbs are passive. The point is clear: a high priest does not select himself nor does he appoint himself. This bespeaks an attitude of humility.

Once again, we can see how our author is portraying Yeshua as in stark contrast to the priesthood of the late 2nd Temple period. The greed and the misuse of authority which characterized the high priests in the Apostolic era was not the model prescribed by Moses, nor that which was revealed to him on the mountain.

If we ask how Yeshua qualified in these two respects, i.e., taken from man and appointed to serve, the answers are ready at hand. Our author is showing why the incarnation was necessary, for in Yeshua

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¹ Hughes, Hebrews, p. 175.
becoming man, He qualified to serve as a high priest. What is more, that He came as a servant, having set aside the glory He had with the Father, speaks to the depth of His humility in receiving the duties of a high priest. And, at Yeshua’s mikveh, we hear the heavenly voice proclaiming: “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased,” clearly a public appointment of Yeshua by the Father to the tasks for which He was sent.

he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided… – The function of the high priest on behalf of sinning people flowed from a realization that he himself was a sinner. It was for this reason that he was to be taken from among his own people (Ex 28:1). It was utterly necessary that he not “put down” the sinner as he brought sacrifices for sin. On the contrary, he would deal gently with those who were bringing sacrifices for their sins, since he himself regularly sacrificed on behalf of his own failings.

The people are characterized as “ignorant” and “misguided.” “Ignorant” (ἀγνοέω, agnoeō) refers to lacking knowledge while “misguided” (πλανάω, planao) talks of being mis-taught or even deceived. It was the priestly function not only to intercede for the people, but also to teach them the truth about how God intends for His people to worship Him in all phases of their lives. It seems very probable that our author is giving these qualification in order to show the stark contrast to the priesthood which served in the final days of the Temple. This priesthood was besmirched by appointing men in no way qualified to function in such a strategic position. From the assassination of Onias III in 171 BCE (which constituted the end of the Zadokite high priesthood) onward to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the high priesthood was in the hands of rogues who discharged their functions as priests with little or no regard for the laws which God had prescribed. This demise of the priesthood in the 2nd Temple era is perhaps best exemplified by Alexander Jannaeus who declared himself both high priest and king from 103 to 76 BCE. So egregious were his actions that Josephus recounts how, on one Sukkot, the people pelted him with etrogs during the water-pouring ceremony!

This same mistrust and suspicion of the high priest generally characterizes the perspective of the early Messianic Jews as well, at least as their history is recorded in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Inevitably, it is the “chief priests and scribes” who stand against the righ-

1 Matt 3:17; Mk 9:7.
2 Josephus, Ant. xiii.372f; cp. also b.Sukkot 48a.
tuous teachings and works of Yeshua. Even a wise saying of Caiaphas (Jn 11:47-53) is attributed to prophecy, not to a spiritual understanding of a man who knew God.

But the high priesthood of Yeshua is in great contrast to the fallen office of the late 2nd Temple period. Yeshua, Who clearly “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows” was well known to have experienced the woes of life and the sorrows they bring. He is able to sympathize because He too was “beset with weakness.” The incarnation therefore silences all who might claim that Yeshua does not know our woes because He has never experienced them. Taking upon Himself our weaknesses, and walking in our fallen world has marked Him forever as One Who is “acquainted with grief.”

and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. – Having qualified and been appointed to the office of high priest (the Greek text begins this verse with “on account of this...”, καὶ δι᾿ αὐτὴν), the officer himself was obliged to perform for the people what no one else could perform. Sins, if they were to be cleansed (i.e., atoned), required that the high priest faithfully fulfill his sacred duties. It was not a matter of choice but of obligation. There was one way and only one way that sin could be wiped away, that this was through the sacrifice of the Great High Priest, Who was constantly foreshadowed by the tabernacle and Temple sacrifices. As the priest offered up to God the sacrifice, it looked forward to, and even symbolized in every detail, the final sacrifice of Yeshua, Who, by His death, would offer the infinite payment which alone could satisfy the righteousness of the Father and obtain eternal atonement for those He would save.

The identification of the high priest went one step further than merely participating in weakness with those he represented. He was also, himself, a sinner. It is at this point that our author will make a parallel in contrast with Yeshua rather than one of similarity. While He is, in every way, a gentle and understanding high priest, He is, nonetheless, entirely pure and without spot. Not so with the earthly high priest. Though he was selected from the people, he was nonetheless one of them. He was himself a sinner, and therefore in need of the same cleansing sacrifice that any commoner required. It was in the course of his own spirituality (i.e., his recognition of sin and the need to deal with his own sin as God had commanded) that he was able to sympathize with those who came regularly to the Temple seeking their on cleansing. Indeed, it was out of his own sense of weakness that he was to minister to the needs of the people.
4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

Having noted that one qualifying attribute for a worthy high priest is that he would have empathy for the common sinner, our author goes on to consider a second qualification, namely, that he does not usurp his own authority to acquire the office but is rather divinely called to his station of service. This, of course, raises the question: “How was the high priest chosen in the 1st Temple and early 2nd Temple?” Who made the choice and how did they make it?

We know how this was accomplished at the beginning—Aaron was appointed and confirmed by God Himself (Ex 28:1ff; Lev 8:1ff; Num 16:5; 17:5; 18:1ff; Ps 105:26). The same was true of his heirs and successors (Num 20:23ff; 25:10ff). Exactly how the appointment of the high priest was determined in the 1st and early 2nd Temple periods, however, is not delineated in the biblical text. It even appears that in times of emergency, some who were not descendants of Aaron took up the intercessory and sacrificial ministry assigned to the priests, Samuel being an obvious example.¹

What we do know is that in the late 2nd Temple period, those appointed to the office of high priest were not even from the line of Aaron! Josephus gives the primary data² and Bruce offers a clear summary:

After the deposition of Onias III in 174 B.C., Jason and later Menelaus were appointed to the high priesthood by Antiochus IV; Alcimus was appointed by Demetrius I in 162 B.C.; the Hasmonaean Jonathan was appointed by Alexander Balas, putative son of Antiochus IV, in 152 B.C.; his brother Simon and his successors were appointed by decree of the Jewish people in 140 B.C. (1Macc 14:41). With the fall of the Hasmonaean house the high priests were appointed successively by Herod the Great (37–34 B.C.), Archelaus (4 B.C.–A.D. 6), Roman governors (A.D. 6–41), and members of the Herod family (A.D. 41–66). The last high priest, Phanni, son of Samuel, was appointed by popular ballot during the war against Rome (c. A.D. 67).³

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¹ It is interesting to note the parallel between Samuel and Moses made in several biblical texts: Jer 15:1; Ps 99:6 (Lxx 98:6), and note Heb 11:32.
² Ant 20.10.
³ F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, p. 92, n. 19.
Once again, it is clear that our author is seeking to establish the fact that the heavenly high priesthood of Yeshua fulfills the picture foreshadowed in the original Aaronic priesthood which stood in direct contrast to the degraded high priesthood in the final centuries of the 2nd Temple.

The primary point our author intends for us to see is that even as Aaron was appointed by God to his office and ministry, so those who followed him were likewise to be divinely appointed. As such, a genuine high priest was not someone who usurped the office, but one who received it legitimately, as the appointment of God Himself.

The issue of the legitimacy of the high priest was an important one in the time our epistle was written. There is strong evidence that at least one fact that caused the Qumran society to leave Jerusalem to live in the desert of the Dead Sea was their disgust over the deeply corrupt priesthood which controlled the Jerusalem Temple. So corrupt was the Levitical priesthood, that, in the view of the Qumran society, it rendered all of the Temple and the sacrifices offered there unclean and unfit for the pure in heart. They awaited, therefore, the coming of the eschaton when righteousness would return to the office of priest, and the Temple worship would once again be restored to its proper place and function.

Our author likewise upholds the biblical standards of the high priesthood, using these to judge the validity of Yeshua’s office. He has shown that Yeshua qualified on the first account through His incarnation through which He is one with those He represents, sharing in the same sorrows and testings which they experience. Now our author points to the fact that Yeshua qualifies in a second category, namely, that He was appointed to the office of high priest and did not “take1 the honor to Himself.”

5–6 So also Messiah did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”; just as He says also in another passage, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

To prove the divine appointment of Yeshua to act as a high priest, our author quotes two texts from the Psalms: 2:7 and 110:4. Psalm 2 has

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1 The use of λαμβάνω (lambanō), “to take” in v. 4 forms an inclusio with the use of the same verb in v. 1, “For every high priest taken from among men....”
already been used by our author in his opening chapter (1:5\(^1\)) where the coronation of God’s king is clearly messianic, and thus significantly applicable to Yeshua. The reiteration of Ps 2:7 in this context is clearly done to stress the royal office of Yeshua, that is, His kingship. Psalm 110 is also incorporated into our author’s opening statements (1:13) where the text stresses the reigning rule of Messiah.

Interestingly, the Judaisms of the 1st Century evidence the belief that there would be more than one Messiah. The Pharisees (at least as they are represented in the later Bavli) refer to “Mashiach ben Yosef” and “Mashiach ben David.”\(^2\) Messiah the son of Joseph was considered the suffering Messiah, while Messiah son of David was the ruling or kingly Messiah.

The Qumran society, which may have left Jerusalem for the desert region of the Dead Sea to separate themselves from the apostate priesthood of the Temple, indicate in their writings that they awaited two messiahs, one from the line of David and the other from Aaron’s line:

> And they shall be governed by the first ordinances in which the members of the Community began their instruction, until the coming of the Prophet and the Anointed (Messiah) of Aaron and Israel. (IQS 9.110-11)

Here, the sectarians of the Qumran society speak of two Messiahs, and the age when both will be ruling—one as a priest and the other (apparently) as king.

Our author, however, wants to make it clear that Yeshua fulfills both of these roles, and that it is impossible to consider a second messiah. Once again, the person of Yeshua as Immanuel must be in our author’s mind. To admit of two messiahs is to negate that Messiah is Immanuel, God in the flesh. For our author there is one and only one Messiah, and He is the very Son of God. Thus, that Yeshua is the King Whom God has installed upon Mt. Zion (Ps 2:6-7) means that He is likewise the great High Priest Who alone can abide in the very glory of the Father’s presence and not be consumed. He is, like Melchizedek, both king and priest.

> … just as He says also in another passage, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.” – Psalm 110:1, like Ps 2:7, was quoted in chapter one as referring to Yeshua. Here, verse four of the

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1 For a fuller discussion of the use of Ps 2:7 in the context of Yeshua’s Messiahship, see the remarks there, pp. 34–37.

2 E.g., b.Sukkah 52a-b.
Psalm is highlighted and is the first mention of Melchizedek in our epistle but by no means the last! In fact, he will be named seven more times by the end of Hebrews. As we will see, our author brings the Melchizedekian priesthood forward in order to establish Yeshua’s legitimate claim to the office of high priest.

Furthermore, Ps 110 is clearly a favorite of our author, seeing that he quotes from it no less than 7 times in our epistle: Heb 1:3, 13; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21. This not doubt has to do with the fact that Psalm 110 reveals the Davidic Messiah to be both a king and a priest.

Traditionally Psalm 110 is considered a Davidic Psalm, as attested by the Psalm heading and confirmed by the words of Yeshua (Matthew 22:44) and the Apostles (Acts 2:34). Therefore, King David is appointed as a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (v. 4). The Hebrew phrase, however, utilizes a term not often found in the Tanach:

אָתַּה כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל דִּבָּרְתִּי מַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק

The uncommon Hebrew word is *divarti* from the root *divrah* meaning “a legal plea,” “manner,” or “with regard to.” How is it used in our text? Since the word *divarti* has the same consonants as the Hebrew word meaning “word” (*dabar*), the rabbis understood the verse to mean: “after the words of Melchizedek” rather than “after the manner of Melchizedek.” Since Melchizedek blessed Abram, the rabbis took this to mean that Abraham was his superior, and that he had therefore transferred the priesthood to him through the “words” of his blessing. But such an interpretation does not fit the Psalm, for the One who gives enthronement to David in the opening verse, is the same One who divinely appoints him as priest in verse four. David’s priesthood is “after the manner” of Melchizedek, not something given to him by Melchizedek. Moreover, if the Psalmist had intended “after the words of Melchizedek,” he would have used the plural construct of דָּבָר, i.e., דִּבְרֵי, not דִּבָּרְתִּי. As the Hebrew stands, it must be translated “after the manner of Melchizedek.”

JPS’s translation is possible from the Hebrew of the MT. “You are a priest forever, a rightful king according to my decree” takes מַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק, “king of righteousness,” not as a proper noun, but as a substantive, interpreting צֶדֶק, “righteous/righteousness” as an adjectival absolute of the construct מַלְכִי, “king.” In theory this is possible (consider Lev 19:36, “just balance” [אֹזְנֵי צֶדֶק], “just weights” [אַבְנֵי צֶדֶק], etc.). Obviously, the JPS follows the Targum here, which has:

The Lord has sworn and will not turn aside, that you are appointed leader in the age to come, because of the merit that you were a righteous king.
But in light of the fact that the JPS translates מַלְכִי־צֶדֶק in Gen 14:18 as “Melchizedek,” one has to presume that the translation of the current text by the JPS has been heavily influenced by the Christian application of Melchizedek to Yeshua.

As noted, the rabbinic interpretation of Psalm 110 is applied to David as an admonition not to usurp the throne from Saul. But this interpretation misses the irony contained in the narrative of David’s rise to the throne. The contrast is between Saul, who acted as priest and was punished as a result, while David as king does the same thing (acts as a priest) yet is blessed.

David’s rise to the throne of Israel followed the demise of Saul. The kingdom was taken from Saul because in acting as a priest, he failed to destroy the Amalekites and all their belongings. Since Saul had offered sacrifices instead of waiting for Samuel, and because he kept in his possession those things that were “under the ban” (i.e., dedicated to God), he was stripped of the throne and it was given to David (1Samuel 13:14ff). Saul, as king, had acted as a priest, and this was not allowed.

We are stunned, therefore, when David, duly crowned as king over all Israel, dons a linen ephod as he brings the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, offering whole burnt and peace offerings (2Samuel 6:14ff). Yet though his predecessor had met with stern judgment for acting out the part of a priest, David is blessed! Why the difference? The only answer available, given to us by Psalm 110, is that like Melchizedek, David was appointed to the offices of both king and priest (and cf. 2Sam 8:18 where David’s sons are called כֹּהַנִים, kohenim, “priests”). In like manner, Yeshua, son of David, yet the Master of David, was appointed as Priest to His people. With the ability to see the whole picture, we recognize that both Melchizedek and David foreshadowed the Messiah. Messiah was the goal to which these unique historical figures pointed. And this is the argument of the book of Hebrews.

Obviously, claiming a legitimate high priesthood for Yeshua on the basis that He is one like Melchizedek, raises a number of questions, and these our author will address in the subsequent chapters. But the one that is most often considered a major difficulty is simply that priests must come from the tribe of Levi and high priests must descend from the family of Aaron. Clearly, Yeshua is related to neither of these, being from the tribe of Judah and the family of David.

In an attempt to overcome this seeming difficulty, some have attempted to derive the lineage of Yeshua from both Levi and Judah, thus giving Him a direct claim to the Aaronic priesthood. According to Hippolytus, an early church father, Yeshua is descended both from Levi
and Judah, based upon Gen 49:8 and *The Testament of Simon* 7:2, as well as Moses’ blessing of Levi (Deut 33:8–9).

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father’s sons shall bow down to you. (Gen 49:8)

And now, my children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves above these two tribes, [because from them will arise the Savior come from God]. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as high priest and from Judah someone as King. (*Test. of Simon* 7.1-2)

Of Levi he said, “Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, whom You proved at Massah, with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; and he did not acknowledge his brothers, nor did he regard his own sons, for they observed Your word, and kept Your covenant. (Deut 33:8–9)

But this attempt to link Yeshua to Levi, and other similar strategies (such as those put forward by the Seventh Day Adventists) misses the mark completely, for our author, recognizing the lineage of Yeshua as from Judah, makes His priesthood to rest upon the Melchizedekian order, a priesthood which is itself above that of Aaron, which does not depend upon lineage but upon God’s specific and sovereign choice and appointment.

The implications of Yeshua’s priesthood as based upon the Melchizedekian office are taken up in the subsequent chapters. For now, our author simply wants us to recognize that Yeshua is functioning in the office of high priest not because He usurped the office, nor even that He received it as the normal progression of a generational office, but because He was chosen and appointed by God Himself in like manner to Melchizedek. Thus, Yeshua’s high priestly office is the result of direct appointment even as was the case with Moses and Aaron.

7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

Having dealt with the issue of legitimate appointment to the high priestly office, our author proceeds to the qualification of Yeshua’s
ability to represent His people by fully being one with them. Quite sim-
ply, the high priest must be able to sympathize with the woes of those
he represents. Already we have learned that Yeshua was able to sympa-
thize with His brethren because in His incarnation He experienced and
felt all the tests and trials that they had to endure (2:17f; 4:15f).

It is upon these aspects that our author now elaborates. The trials
Yeshua endured occurred during the “days of His flesh,” an expression
which denotes Yeshua’s life upon this earth and thus all of the human
weaknesses which He took upon Himself in becoming man. This is not
to imply that after His ascension He no longer was “in the flesh,” for
if such were the case, He could not be a sympathetic high priest to His
people now. The “days of His flesh” refer to His incarnation, but the ar-
gument requires that His incarnation be an eternal reality. He is, today,
a sympathetic high priest precisely because He is yet today a man. He
accepted the form of humanity for all eternity, for Paul writes:

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and
men, the man Messiah Yeshua... (1Tim 2:5)

The simple sentence which begins in v. 7 is: “In the days of His
flesh...He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” This
should not be missed, for the simple sentence reminds us of the author’s
intent, that is, to prove that Yeshua as our high priest can be sympathet-
ic to our troubles because He Himself has experienced them. This, of
course, is a great mystery, how the Creator Himself could remain the
Creator, and still subject Himself to the sufferings of the creation. But
such is the truth, and as such we may be confident that He understands
our own suffering since He has personally participated in it.

Considering the language of our verse, it seems most likely that our
author is referring specifically to the Gethsemane event, and the subse-
quent crucifixion. The Gospel accounts record that Yeshua prayed with
great agony (Mk 14:33ff) and our author must have been acquainted
with this event. Some have pointed out an apparent difficulty, namely,
that the text here refers to Yeshua’s prayer as a cry to save Himself from
death, a cry which was heard and answered by the Father. But Yeshua’s
Gethsemane prayer did not save Him from the cross.

The answer is simply to understand that our author views the agony
of Messiah from the vantage point of the resurrection. Perhaps Psalm
22 forms the great backdrop to the interpretation of Messiah’s agony
in our author’s mind, as it no doubt did in the minds of many early
believers. The Psalm opens with the psalmist crying out to God, but
fearing he is not being heard (v. 2). By the end of the Psalm, God has indeed heard (v. 24) those who fear His name (v. 23). These verses were interpreted early in the Christian church as referring to the resurrection. The resurrection of Messiah was the enduring proof that victory had been won, that death did not, indeed, have a sting. Thus, Yeshua cried out to the Father, and He was heard because of His piety, and He was therefore delivered from the defeat of death. Additionally, it is possible that the phrase “who was able to save Him from death” is simply a metonym for “God,” Who is characterized as the One Who is able to save from death (cf. Ps 33:19; 89:48; Hos 13:14; 2Co 1:10).

Yeshua’s prayers were heard “because of His piety.” Our Lord’s devotion and submission to the Father is here in view. The “cup” of suffering which He was called upon to bear was not removed from Him—He endured it as one who trusted God fully. As such, He is well fitted to sympathize with those who likewise undergo suffering at the hands of the wicked. Had He escaped from this hour of trial by supernatural means, He could never have been believed to be sympathetic. In the end, His passion was necessary not only to expiate the terrible wrath and justice of the Father, but also to put to rest any notion in the minds of those who would believe that He simply could not sympathize with their suffering because He had not, Himself, so suffered.

Thus, His “piety” (ἐυλάβεια, eulabeia, “fear of God,” “awe”, “reverence”) was manifested by His submission to the Father in all things. Indeed, obedience (as the next verse teaches) is first and foremost the ability to submit to the one who must be obeyed. Putting His own agenda aside, He performed the will of the Father even to the point of death (Phil 2:8).

8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

In the phrase “though He was a son”, an important question to ask is whether or not the word “son” should be capitalized. The Greek would indicate it should, not because Greek used capitalization for proper names (in fact, it did not), but because the word “son” is without the article, giving it the sense of “sonship.” A paraphrase would be: “even though He possessed sonship.” Indeed, it is natural for sons to learn obedience through suffering, a point our own author makes in 12:5ff. But the point in this verse is that even though Yeshua is the Son of God, He nonetheless underwent suffering as the means by which He would learn obedience. The point is simple yet profound: Son of God though
He was, He did not escape the universal principle that all members of the human race learn through suffering.

What exactly did Yeshua “learn” from His suffering? It could not be the same for Him as it is for us, i.e., that we learn to be obedient because we experience the suffering or because we are punished when we disobey. For Yeshua, He began His life with a perfect heart and soul for obedience. What He learned from the path of obedience which He walked from the beginning was what suffering such obedience might bring in the human arena. As a man, He suffered as a man, and thus experienced the suffering that obedience might bring in a fallen world. This was the “learning” experience of our Lord. He learned how obedience “felt” in the sphere of unrighteous mankind.

The word for “learned” here is μανθάνω (manthanō), a general word meaning “to learn,” but used of halachic learning as well in Jn 7:15, and usually refers to learning which comes by way of instruction from a teacher. Here, our author considers “suffering” to be the instructor in this school of piety.

9–10 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The use of the word “perfect” (τελειόω, teleioō) in the opening phrase of v. 9 might seem a bit strange to the ear of an English speaker. Why would Yeshua need to be “made perfect” since He was (and is) entirely without sin? What we need to understand, however, is that this is just a good semitic way of stating things, and the Hebrew word that corresponds to teleioō, the word used in our verse, is שלם, shālam from which שלום, shalom is derived. Thus, the word “perfect” denotes that which is “complete,” “fully qualified,” “having attained the goal.” Yeshua stands as a “perfect” high priest because He passed the test, He endured the examination and passed with flying colors. The point which stands out in our author’s mind is that in the midst of the suffering, Yeshua continued to manifest a life of true piety, faithfulness, and holiness. His faith, trust, morality, and integrity—these did not depend upon the circumstances. In the worst of situations, facing an imminent, undeserved death, He fully committed Himself to the One Who is both giver and taker of life.

Having voluntarily set aside the use of some of His divine attributes, Yeshua grew and learned as a man. As such, He underwent the life experience of suffering while remaining obedient and by doing so,
not only proved Himself to be the Messiah sent from the Father, but also as worthy of honor and trust. He stands therefore, not only “perfect” before the Father, but also in the eyes of all who follow Him as priest and king. It was through the proving of His life that He showed Himself worthy of faith—worthy of life commitment. His perfection is therefore proclaimed both by the Father (in His appointment as priest after the order of Melchizedek) and by His disciples (who have found in Him the source of eternal salvation, cf. Is 45:17). For our author, obeying Yeshua (“those who obey Him”) is one and the same as obeying the Father.

In this text our author describes Yeshua as “the source of eternal salvation” (αἴτιος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου). In 2:10 Yeshua is called the “author of salvation” (τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας) and in 12:2 He is called “the author and perfecter of faith” (τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν). In many ways, these terms function nearly as synonyms, for being the “source” of salvation means that salvation is obtainable only from Him. And that He is the “author” of salvation means that He is not only the source but also the One Who plans and initiates salvation. But He not only plans, establishes, and initiates salvation, as the “perfecter of faith,” He enables the child of God to persevere in faith and thus to enjoy the full reality of salvation, meaning one’s eternal place with Him in the world to come.

But notice also how our author puts it: “He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” This means that only those who obey Him share in the eternal salvation Yeshua has procured. Thus, the salvation of which our author speaks encompasses the whole picture: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Obedience is the genuine mark of having obtained true salvation. As Bruce notes:

The salvation which Jesus has procured, moreover, is granted “unto all them that obey him.” There is something appropriate in the fact that the salvation which was procured by the obedience of the Redeemer should be made available to the obedience of the redeemed. Once again the readers are encouraged to persevere in their loyalty to Christ, in whom alone eternal salvation is to be found—in whom also they have a high priest designated for them by God Himself, “after the order of Melchizedek.”

We should also note the emphasis our author puts upon the fact that

1 F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp. 105-06.
God is the One Who designated Yeshua to be a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. This has direct correlation to Ps 110:4 in which the words are the oracle of God Himself: “Adonai has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” Yeshua is thus presented to us by the author of Hebrews as being the fulfillment of the Davidic dynasty and directly the fulfillment of Psalm 110, being both King and Priest.

The theme of Yeshua’s high priestly service, as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, will be the primary topic our author will address, beginning in chapter seven. In the remainder of this chapter and the whole of chapter six, he admonishes his readers to take seriously their need to grow in maturity—to give themselves to learning and practicing their faith in Yeshua.

In 5:11–14 he reproves his readers for their failure to deepen their spiritual knowledge and in 6:1–12 he seeks to enliven them to appreciate the greatness of the salvation they have been granted.

11–12 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

It is the design of our author to expound upon the Melchizedekian priesthood, that is, upon Yeshua specifically as the fulfillment of this priesthood, for the edification and instruction of his readers, but the final paragraph of this chapter bemoans the demise of their spiritual awareness to receive such teaching.

Our author uses the 1st person plural here (“we have much to say”) as he does in many places in the epistle (cf. 2:5; 6:9, 11; 13:18). He does, however, use the 1st person singular (“I”) as well (cf. 11:32; 13:19, 22, 23). This might indicate that the writer is himself one of several leaders in the community, and that he writes, as it were, on behalf of them all, as though together they agree about what is being written and together urge it upon their readers. The presence of the singular “I” in the epistle in matters of exhortation would not rule out the possibility that “we” in this and other passages is rhetorical, but it seems to me it would render such a possibility less likely.

The difficulty in explaining the correlation between Melchizedek and Yeshua is not in the subject itself but because the community to which this epistle is addressed has become “dull of hearing” (νωθροί
γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς). The phrase “dull of hearing” may rely upon Is 6:10 (cf. Matt 13:15; Acts 28:27) where Israel is likewise characterized:

Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull (τοῖς ὠσὶν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν), and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed. (Is 6:10)

In contrast, the Lord is not “dull of hearing”:

Behold, Adonai’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull (ἐβάρυνεν τὸ οὖς αὐτοῦ) that it cannot hear. (Is 59:1)

“Dull of hearing” is a condition produced by lack of faith. It is, according to Isaiah, the characteristic of unbelieving Israel. Therefore the phrase in our text is quite pointed, for our author says of his readers that they have become dull of hearing, that is, they are falling into a pattern that characterizes those without faith. The perfect tense of the Greek verb (γεγόνατε) indicates that they were not always this way, but that they became dull of hearing and have continued in this state. Ezekiel connects this condition with “rebellion”:

Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house. (Ezek 12:2, cf. also Jer 6:10; Zech 7:11f)

Often we do not think of apathy or being spiritually lethargic as constituting an act of rebellion. But the Ruach constantly urges us to “cling to Him” (Deut 10:20; 13:4), to follow His leading (Rom 8:14), and by His strength to produce the fruit of righteousness (Gal 5:22f). The life in the Spirit requires our active participation, and so to be disengaged is to be disobedient to the very urging of the Ruach. To be apathetic to spiritual pursuits is to grieve the Spirit Himself, which is a form of rebellion.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers… – It seems likely that what has occurred in the community to which our author writes is that some of the fundamental principles of the faith have either been neglected or even jettisoned as unnecessary or non-essential. If so, the fundamental principles which were being set to the side undoubtedly related to Yeshua and the central place He must be given in all aspects
of genuine saving faith. For he writes: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers....” Apparently some time had elapsed between their initial acceptance of Yeshua as Messiah and Lord and the writing of this epistle. It is not as though they should by now, each of them, stand in some official teaching office, about rather that they ought to be helping others who have recently come to faith in Yeshua to understand the fundamental issues regarding His messiahship and His current service as the High Priest of His people. Instead, they have to be re-taught the fundamentals themselves.

... you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God – A number of suggestions have been given regarding what our author means by the phrase “the elementary principles.” Some, based on the fact that in other places\(^1\) the phrase “oracle(s) of God” refers to Scriptures (i.e., the Tanach), think the “oracles of God” refers to the basic teachings of Tanach—that they have neglected to remain faithful in the study of the inspired word (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) are therefore unable to understand how Yeshua is the goal to which these Scriptures pointed.

Others suggest that the phrase refers more to the ABC’s of the Messiah-centered Gospel. As such, they had become vulnerable to those who were teaching that Yeshua and His work was not essential for gaining a right-standing before God, though being a disciple of Yeshua might be helpful. It could obviously be a combination of both of these. Whatever the case, it is clear that he is not telling them they need to start at “Chapter 1.” Rather, he’s saying they need to go back and learn the aleph-bet!

Those of us in the Messianic Movement might have a first-hand understanding of how these two aspects fit together. It is not uncommon to have people join our communities who simply are not grounded in the fundamentals of the faith. They profess a belief in Yeshua as the promised Messiah, and as the only way to obtain eternal salvation, yet the fact that they are unable to defend their faith and to know how their faith is founded upon the Scriptures, leaves them vulnerable to those preaching a different message. It becomes a very real necessity within our messianic communities not to take for granted that those who have grown up in the Christian Church have a mature knowledge of the Scriptures and are therefore able to give a strong, biblical defense for their faith in Yeshua. Many, in fact, are just the opposite—they come into a messianic community without ever being grounded

\(^{1}\) E.g., Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2.
in the Scriptures. Unless they are taught and apply themselves to learn
what is being taught, they are very vulnerable to errant teaching and
even to be lured away from faith in Yeshua for that which promises a
“group-identity” with greater prestige.

I think it is also possible that the author of Hebrews and the other
leaders of this messianic community might have been facing some of
the very issues we face in our communities, namely, that some want to
put a great emphasis upon peripheral issues (calendar, ethnic identity
markers, signs and wonders, minutia in *halachic* debates, etc.) and in
doing so lose sight of the fundamentals. Perhaps current teachers in the
community had shifted their emphasis to these peripheral issues and
were therefore neglecting to remain steadfast in teaching the people
the fundamental principles of the faith in Yeshua.

...*and you have come to need milk and not solid food.* – In using this
second metaphor, our author describes the community he addresses as
feeding on “milk” and not on “meat.” The picture is obviously one of
immaturity.

To go on living on milk, mere baby food, is indicative of ar-
rested development, and the recipients of this letter have evi-
dently failed to advance beyond, or have relapsed into, a state
of spiritual infancy.¹

Paul employs a very similar metaphor:

> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men,
> but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Messiah. I gave you milk
to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it.
> Indeed, even now you are not yet able .... (1Cor 3:1–2)

13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the
word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

Such a spiritually underdeveloped individual who can tolerate only
a diet of milk is described as “not accustomed to the word of righteous-
ness.” Once again, a number of interpretations have been given to ex-
plain this phrase.

(1) That “not accustomed to the word of righteousness”
means “unable to clearly explain the gospel of Yeshua.”
This explanation takes its cue from the term for “child”

¹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 190.
or "babe," νήπιος (nēpios), which, by the very makeup of the word means "one who cannot yet talk."

(2) That "not accustomed to the word of righteousness" means "unable to discern between the good or evil in moral and ethical decisions." This is based primarily upon v. 14 and the phrase "trained to discern good and evil."

(3) That in the phrase "not accustomed to the word of righteousness," the "word of righteousness" means "the message about how God declares a person righteous." Thus, what they were unable to do was to clearly define the righteousness which is by faith as over against a self-righteousness—a so-called "righteousness by (or out of) the Torah" (cf. Rom 3:21; 4:13; 9:31; Gal 2:21; 3:21; Phil 3:9). This would be a righteousness based upon people-group identity (legal Jewish status) maintained by observance of the Torah.

It seems to me that the third interpretation given above falls closest to the overall sense of the passage. Here was the fundamental issue to which our author has come, namely, that God declares a person righteous, not on the basis of maintaining a "Jewish status" by observing the commands of the Torah, but entirely through the work of His Son, Yeshua. It was to this foundational issue that our writer felt the recipients of his letter had lost ground and were in need of learning the "ABC's" all over again. Surely, if they had given way on this most fundamental doctrine (i.e., justification by faith in Yeshua alone), they could hardly have appreciated the need for a High Priest such as Yeshua. If righteousness comes by ones own flesh (people-group status), then there is no absolute need for an on-going, intercessory work on their behalf.

One wonders if the influence of the rabbinical framework of worship following the destruction of the temple might not be manifesting itself in our text. After the destruction, and the loss of the sacrificial ritual and priesthood, the Sages determined that the mitzvot (good deeds) would substitute for the sacrifices. Thus, prayer and worship, along with study and giving of charity, were equal to bringing a sacrifice, and in every way substituted for it. If my good deeds are in themselves equal to the sacrifice on the altar, then I have no need for the sacrifice of another. I can bring my own. Once again, the date of the epistle may preclude such a thing (see introduction) but a post-destruction date is
possible. If such is the case, then it may be understandable why this Jewish community was being influenced by the teachings of emerging rabbinic Judaism, pulling them away from their vital need of Yeshua, both in His once-for-all sacrifice and in His on-going work as high priest in the heavenly tabernacle.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

In contrast to the immature person pictured in the previous verse, the mature (τελειός, teleios, same word translated “perfect” in v. 9) show their maturity by their ability to “discern between good and evil.” Though this surely applies to the moral or ethical realm, “good and evil” may just as well mean “true and false.” These mature ones can distinguish between that which is of God and that which is not, that which is true as over against that which poses as truth but is actually false. They are able to “see” (note the idea of “senses”) what the immature overlook or mistake for something else. The “solid food” is no doubt the kind of teaching our author intends to give them via this epistle. It is teaching beyond the first steps of justification by faith, going on to the fuller picture of the ultimate goal and reality which justification procures, that is, sanctification and glorification. It involves the ability to see how Messiah has been the focus of the ages, and how all of the promises of God are “yes and amen” in Him (2Cor 1:20).

How does one obtain such maturity of the spiritual senses? Through “practice” (γυμνάζω, gymnazō) as an athlete who trains for the race, so must the believer “practice,” i.e., put to the test the doctrines of Messiah. The Greek word gymnazō is used of athletes who train, repeating the same exercises over and over again so as to become proficient and skilled in their particular area of expertise. One is reminded of the admonition in the Shema:

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently (שִׁנַּנְתָּם, shinan-tam) to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (Deut 6:6–7)

The verb שָׁנָן, shanan, literally means “to sharpen,” and envisions the passing of a metal blade over a sharpening stone time and time again give a honed edge. It is the repetition that is required to make the edge sharp. Thus, making the mitzvot a consistent part of one’s life inevitably deepens one’s understanding of them and brings a deep appreciation for God’s infinite wisdom in giving the Torah as the pattern of living He has ordained for His children.
Chapter Six

Introduction

Our author has exhorted his readers regarding their need to move from “milk” to “meat”—from the elementary or beginning words regarding Messiah to the deeper realities of His person and work. In the course of this exhortation (5:11-14) he rebukes them for being “dull of hearing” (v. 11), a phrase that characterized the nation of Israel during the days of the prophets (Ezek 12:2; Jer 6:10; Zech 7:11f).

Thus, our author begins an extended treatise on the person and work of Yeshua by which he hopes to awaken his readers to their need to learn, understand, and embrace the centrality of Yeshua as the promised Messiah and the only One through Whom right-standing before God can be obtained. This will then take our author to his primary subject, namely, that Yeshua is currently working on behalf of all who are His as their intercessor—their High Priest Who appears before the Father on their behalf.

Our chapter falls within the larger context of 4:14–7:28 in which the author of Hebrews explains how Yeshua is superior to Aaron as High Priest. The immediate pericope begins in 5:11 and concludes with 6:20. Here is an excerpt of the epistle’s outline.¹

D. Believers in Yeshua must lay hold of the assured salvation accomplished by Yeshua’s propitiation, 5:11–6:20
1. The recipients of the epistle have not progressed in their understanding of important, biblical truths, 5:11–14
2. Exhortation to grow in spiritual understanding, 6:1–8
   a. the intent of the author to help deepen his readers understanding, 6:1–3
   b. those who have forsaken Yeshua are destined for destruction, 6:4–8
3. Encouragement regarding the true faith of the readers, 6:9–12

¹ For the complete outline of Hebrews, see pp. 19–27 above.
E. The promises of God are sure and give unshakable assurance to those who have true, saving faith, 6:13–20
   1. The Abrahamic covenant and God’s oath, 6:13–15
   2. The certainty of God’s oath and promise, 6:16–17
   3. All believers are heirs of the promise and thus have a sure and certain hope of eternal salvation, 6:18–20

1–2 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Messiah, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

*Leaving the elementary teaching about the Messiah* – Our author intends to go beyond the elementary teaching regarding Yeshua, the Messiah. A literal translation of the Greek would be: “leaving behind the of-the-beginning-things-of-Messiah word (or matter).” What exactly is this “beginning” word or matter? The following phrases outline our author’s understanding of the elementary principles about Messiah, that is, core doctrinal issues which stand as the foundation of true, saving faith.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Comments &amp; References</th>
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<tr>
<td>repentance from dead works</td>
<td>cf. Heb 9:14; James 2:17, 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>faith toward God</td>
<td>cf. 1Thess 1:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructions about washings</td>
<td>Literally, “teaching about baptisms” or <em>mikva’ot</em>. Cf. Matt 28:19-20; Eph 4:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laying on of hands</td>
<td>Describing admission into the believing community and perhaps commissioning of leaders, cf. Ac 19:6; 1Tim 4:14; 5:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resurrection</td>
<td>The keystone of the Apostolic Gospel, cf. Ac 4:33; 17:18; 23:6; 26:23; Rom 1:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eternal judgment</td>
<td>Note the role Yeshua plays in the final judgment, cf. Matt 25:31ff; Jn 5:22, 27; Ac 17:31.</td>
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In seeking to find a structure for these phrases, it appears that they are
grouped in pairs, which together give the complete picture of faith.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>repentance from dead works</th>
<th><strong>Beginning</strong></th>
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<td>resurrection</td>
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<td>eternal judgment</td>
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**repentance from dead works** (μετανοίας ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων) – Repentance is a turning from that which is wrong and returning to what is right. The use of the Hebrew verb שׁוּב (shûv, “to return”; שׁוּבָה, “turning back,” e.g., Is 6:10) as the primary term for “repentance” in the Tanach makes this clear. For James, faith is “dead” if it is not accompanied by the doing of the mitzvot:

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (James 2:17)

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:26)

From this we may deduce that works are dead when they are not joined by faith. In this sense, “dead works” might well be when one observes the Torah as mere ritual and not out of a heart of faith to please God. F. F. Bruce suggests that dead works are those works which inevitably lead to death. Thus, they are the deeds of the flesh which characterize the life of an unbeliever.²

The Didache, an early Christian document of the late 1st Century CE, in describing “the two ways,” catalogs some of the deeds which characterize the “way of death.”

“…murders, adulteries, lusts, fornications, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, sorceries, robberies, false depositions, hypocrisies, a double heart, fraud, arrogance, malice, obstinacy, covetousness, filthy language, envy, audacity, haughtiness, boastfulness…” (5:1)

¹ Note also the words of Sampson, Hebrews, p. 198.
² F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, p. 113.
Either interpretation is possible, but I think the former one fits best, for it describes the attempt to keep Torah apart from faith in Yeshua. Such “Torah observance” would yield “dead works,” that is, mitzvot which do not fulfill their purpose and therefore remain unrecognized by God, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb 11:6). Thus, even though observing the outward rituals of Torah may have significant temporal benefits, such observance has no ability to garner God’s favor or secure right-standing before Him and are, in that sense, equivalent to “dead works,” i.e., works that result in death.

Repentance from dead works, then, would be a commitment to live in obedience to the Torah, no longer as a means of gaining favor with God, but as an expression of love to Him for His grace in Messiah Yeshua.

and faith toward God (καὶ πίστεως ἑπὶ θεόν)- The Apostolic message of the gospel could be summed up in the phrase “repentance from sin and faith toward God” (cf. Ac 20:21) which is very close to “repentance from dead works and faith in God.” Yeshua Himself spoke in similar terms:

Now after John had been taken into custody, Yeshua came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mk 1:14–15)

The issue of faith is well grounded in the Tanach, as our author has already shown. It was the lack of faith which kept Israel from entering into the Land; Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6); and Habakkuk likewise teaches that “the just one shall live by (on the basis of) his faith” (Hab 2:4). It is also important to recognize that genuine faith in God is one and the same with faith in God’s Messiah, as Yeshua Himself taught:

And Yeshua cried out and said, “He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. (Jn 12:44)

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. (Jn 13:20)

He who hates Me hates My Father also. (Jn 15:23)

Thus, faith in God has always included faith in the One He promised to send, and this is the consistent message of Israel’s prophets.
Thus, on the road to Emmaus Yeshua rebukes the two disciples as being “foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Lk 24:25f).

_instruction about washings (βαπτισμῶν διδαχῆς)_ – Older commentators have predictably interpreted this to mean “Christian baptism”¹ including the catechism required before one is allowed to be baptized and enter the believing community. But besides the fact that such initiatory use of baptism was a later phenomenon in the emerging Christian Church,² this interpretation seems highly unlikely for at least a couple of additional reasons:

(1) The Greek term always used in the Apostolic Writings when referring to being baptized as a follower of Yeshua is βάπτισμα, βαπτισμάτων (baptisma, baptismatōn; neuter gender), while the word here is βαπτισμῶν, baptismōn, the plural form of βαπτισμός, baptismos (masculine gender). In fact, this is one of only four times the word is found in this form in the Apostolic Scriptures (the others are Mk 7:4, 9; Heb 9:10). Most interesting for our study is that in these other occurrences of the word, it always refers to ritual washings or the mikveh (plural, mikva’ot).

(2) Further, that the word in our text is in the plural speaks against interpreting this as a mikveh of initiation into the body of Messiah, which is spoken of by Paul as being one:

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:4–6)

Thus the phrase “instruction about baptism” must be speaking about something different than simply the mikveh which later became known as “Christian baptism.”

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2. It is interesting to note that in the Qumran documents, there is no indication that the mikveh was used as an initiation ritual for those who entered the Yachad (community) even though it is clear that ritual washings were a priority within the Qumran sect. See Lawrence Schiffman, _Who Was a Jew?_ (KTAV, 1985), p. 26.
I think there is every warrant to interpret this phrase to be referring to the *mikveh* in general, including instruction about the requirements of the Torah as to ablutions and how these requirements offer a prophetic revelation of the eschatological cleansing of Israel by the Ruach as prophesied by Ezekiel (36:25). Such instruction may have included explanation of the significance for the on-going use of the *mikveh* and why the cleansing of the flesh was not, as apparently some Jewish teachers held, a means of cleansing the soul. Thus, the whole issue of ceremonial or ritual purity must have became an important matter of discussion in the early assemblies of The Way, and no doubt the teachers made every effort to instruct those new in the faith about how obedience to the Torah in matters of ritual purity were in concert with being a disciple of Yeshua.

Moreover, given the fact that the question of “conversion to Judaism” had become such a topic of discussion in the early Apostolic era (as evidenced by the controversy raised in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem council), it seems very possible that those who were new believers in Yeshua were given clear, initial instructions about why “legal Jewish status” was not the basis by which a sinner is made righteous before God. Since the earliest historical documents we have consistently indicate that a *mikveh* was required at the conclusion of the proselyte ritual, it makes sense that “instruction regarding baptisms” would include teaching of the fundamental truth that “the proselyte *mikveh*” was not how one gained right-standing before God.

Though taken from the much later Talmud, the following may have some relevance to our discussion:

> If he [the proselyte] accepted [the requirements stated for becoming a proselyte] he is circumcised forthwith. Should any shreds which render the circumcision invalid remain, he is to be circumcised a second time. As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects. (b. Yevamot 47a-b)

It is interesting to note that even as late as the Apostolic Traditions by Hippolytus (c. 170–236 CE), a *mikveh* was required a few days before a convert to Christianity was baptized. F. F. Bruce notes:
...baptism, as the central act of Christian initiation, took place on a Sunday, but on the preceding Thursday the candidate was required to have a ritual bath for the removal of impurity.1

This might indicate that even as late as the 3rd Century, traditions surrounding the use of the mikveh in Christian circles continued to be passed on.

In summary, it seems most warranted to interpret “instruction regarding washings” to mean instruction regarding the mikveh and how the baptism enjoined upon the Apostles by Yeshua Himself (Matt 28:19–20) differed in meaning and significance from the emphasis put upon ritual purity among pre-destruction Judaisms as well as in the later emerging rabbinic Judaism.

...and laying on of hands (ἐπιθέσεώς τε χειρῶν) – The concept of “laying on of hands” is found in the Torah. For example, it is connected with the sacrificial ritual when the offerer laid his hands upon the head of the animal, symbolically transferring his guilt to the innocent victim (cf Lev 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 8:14; 16:21, etc.). The Levites were also commissioned by the laying on of hands (Num 8:10) as was Joshua as he was commissioned to lead Israel as successor to Moses:

So Adonai said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; ... Then he [Eleazar the priest] laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as Adonai had spoken through Moses. (Num 27:18, 23; cf. also Deut 34:9)

In the early assemblies of The Way, the laying on of hands was associated with the enabling work of the Ruach HaKodesh.

Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17)

So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17)

1 F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, p. 116; cp. Hippolytus Apostolic Traditions 16.15; Ps.-Clem. Hom. 10.1; 11.1.
And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. (Acts 19:6)

For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. (2Tim. 1:6)

The two aspects associated with the positive sense of “laying on of hands,” i.e., the commissioning of someone to a specific task and the enabling work of the Ruach HaKodesh, are clearly intertwined in the early experience of the assemblies of The Way. For, being followers of Yeshua, they were empowered or commissioned to make disciples of all the nations and the abiding presence and enabling work of the Ruach energized them to the work to which they had been commissioned.

Thus, while the “laying on of hands” in our text may involve the recognition that a new believer in Yeshua was endowed with the indwelling Spirit, it was most likely also a public recognition of membership within the assembly of The Way. This then would be a public commitment of the one upon whom hands were laid, that he or she was both willing to submit to and support the established leadership and use his or her spiritual gifting in service to the whole assembly. It is not difficult to see how such an initiatory ritual would have been listed by our author as foundational for new believers in Yeshua.

…the resurrection of the dead (ἀναστάσεώς τε νεκρῶν) – The final resurrection was a well-founded teaching in the Tanach (e.g., Is 26:19; Dan 12:2) and was one of the hallmarks of the Pharisaic sect in the 1st Century (cf. Acts 23:8). Yeshua, confronting a group of Sadducees (cf Mk 12:26ff), points to the words of Ex 3:6 (in the burning bush episode) to prove the resurrection.

He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

The phrase “I am the God of your father…” is a noun sentence without a finite verb and thus without specific time sequence or verbal tense. Thus it would be proper to understand the phrase as “I was, am, and always will be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Since God is the

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1 The phrase is used negatively of seizing someone to arrest them or do them harm, e.g., Matt 26:50; Mk 14:26.
God of the living and not the dead, this must indicate that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still live even after dying (cp. Ex 3:6; Mk 12:26f) and thus the resurrection must be a reality.

Clearly the resurrection of Messiah formed a keystone in the arch of the Apostolic message, and this foundational truth therefore formed a significant and essential aspect of the Gospel. As such, it was no doubt a significant apologetic taught to new believers as they were discipled as followers of Yeshua. Moreover, the resurrection under-girded the Jewish hope that God’s promises to Israel would be realized in the world to come.

...and eternal judgment (καὶ κρίματος αἰωνίου) – In a Jewish context, the resurrection and judgment often go together. Indeed, the judgments of God throughout the ages will be summed up in the eternal judgment, meaning judgment which is for all time. This will take place at the resurrection (cf. Dan 7:9ff). But an added reality of the judgments of God is revealed in the coming of Yeshua, for He is the “one like unto a son of man” (Dan 7:13) through Whom the eschatological judgment will be carried out (cf. Matt 25:31ff; Jn 5:22, 27; Ac 17:31; 2Tim 4:1). The hope of God’s people has always been that in the last days the nations would come to know and confess that God is One, i.e., that He is the only One—the only true God. Those who refuse to bow to this truth will be judged by God. Thus, in this way, the scales of justice will be leveled and God’s people will be vindicated. Such a confession at the final judgment is deemed fundamental by our author.

Moreover, in terms of a fundamental doctrine of the faith, “eternal judgment” has both a positive as well as a negative connotation. Positively, those who are in Yeshua will be judged as righteous and brought into their eternal rest. Negatively, those who reject Yeshua will be judged eternally.

3 And this we will do, if God permits.

The demonstrative “this,” in the phrase “And this we will do...,” refers back to the primary subject given in v. 1, “let us press on to maturity.” Our author exhorts his readers not to be satisfied with only the beginning or foundational truths regarding Yeshua as the promised Messiah, but encourages them to press forward in the things necessary to attain a maturing faith.

Some have taken the “we” to be simply a rhetorical plural, a common literary convention in which the speaker or author refers to himself or herself in the plural in order to identify more closely with the group
being addressed. But it is also possible that our author is speaking of his role as teacher and shepherd whose work will be to help lead the people to a mature faith in Yeshua. Yet he realizes that for the work of the leaders and teachers of this community to be successful requires the mercies and grace of God through His Ruach to illumine the minds of those being taught to receive the teaching, and to endow them with spiritual strength necessary to grow in their faith.

In the phrase “if God permits,” the Greek word translated “permits” (ἐπιτρέπω, epitrepō) can mean “to permit” or “to allow,” but can also have the sense of “to entrust something to someone” or even “to command.” The point is clear: spiritual growth, while requiring the efforts of the child of God, is ultimately predicated upon God’s work. Apart from God supplying the spiritual understanding necessary to make proper applications of the Scriptures to one’s life, spiritual growth would be impossible.

Thus, we must never take God’s work for granted. All that He does for us flows from His infinite mercy and grace, and this includes the work of the Ruach Who continues to lead and guide us in the ways of righteousness (cf. Rom 8:14), encouraging, edifying, and correcting so that we will become conformed to the image of Yeshua. So our author agrees with James who wrote:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” (James 4:13–15)

So in the phrase “if God permits” we may also understand “if God has committed Himself to this or that,” which is not too far removed from the phrase common in our day, בְּעֶזְרָת הַשֶּׁם (b’ezrat haShem), “with the help of God.”
4–6 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Here we come to one of the crux passages of the epistle, at least in the realm of attempting to understand its purpose. The community to which our author addresses himself was apparently contemplating a move away from the full confession of faith in Yeshua. We are not given enough data to know exactly what the situation entailed, but for our author it is a matter of life and death, of salvation and damnation. What he outlines here seems to be more an observation on life than a theological treatise. Nothing is impossible for God, and certainly He could, if He so intended, draw any heart to Himself and endow any person, regardless of how stubborn, with true faith. But experience shows that those who join the believing community by confessing faith in Yeshua but later turn away from it and reject Him—more often than not never repent and return to the faith they once confessed. We might say, from strictly a human perspective, that in such a scenario, repentance is impossible.

Our author builds his case on the fact that if, after experiencing the realities of the believing community and witnessing all of the evidences of God’s blessing upon the community—if after this they reject Yeshua, it is no different than those who rejected Him after they witnessed His life and His miracles, and even His resurrection from the dead. Such people evidence the same hardened heart as possessed by those who sought to have Yeshua crucified. But even worse, they crucify Him again, putting to open shame the very One Who conquered death and Who now reigns at God’s right hand.

Our author characterizes such persons with six descriptive phrases:

1. They have been enlightened (φωτισθέντας)
2. They have tasted of the heavenly gift (γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου)
3. They have been partakers of the Holy Spirit (μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου)
4. They have tasted the good word of God (καλὸν γευσαμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα)
(5) They have tasted of the powers of the age to come
(γευσάμενους δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος)
(6) They have fallen away (παραπεσόντας)

It will be important for us to look at each of these descriptive phrases as we seek to understand the author’s intention in this pericope. But we first should note that the verbal component in each of the phrases is an aorist participle, indicating an action that has taken place and is therefore something well confirmed. Thus the person or people described by these phrases are those who have definitely had sufficient exposure to the truth, both intellectually and experientially.

They have been enlightened (φωτισθέντας)

The word φωτίζω (phtizō) means “to function as a source of light,” “to shine.” From this basic sense of the word came a metaphorical usage, “to make known in reference to the inner life or transcendent matters and thus enlighten, give light to, shed light upon.” It is used again in Heb 10:32 and 8 more times in the Apostolic Scriptures outside of Hebrews (Luke 11:36; John 1:9; 1 Cor 4:5; Eph 1:18; 3:9; 2 Tim 1:10; Rev 18:1; 21:23; 22:5). By the 2nd century CE, the Church fathers were using this term to refer to baptism, and so it is translated in the Peshitta.

But they who have once descended to baptism, and have tasted the gift from heaven, and have received the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the world to come... (Heb 6:4–5, Syriac Peshitta)

Justin (c. 100–165 CE) uses it this way in his First Apology (61:12f; 65:1) which would indicate that “being enlightened” was commonly used to describe Christian baptism in his day. This may have come from the common use of Ps 34:5a (Lxx 33:6a) recited at baptisms: “They looked to Him and were radiant” (or “were enlightened,” using φωτίσθητε, the same word used in our text).

The tense of the participle (aorist) as well as the addition of the word “once” in our verse emphasizes that such enlightenment had taken place in the past, most likely relating to the person’s initial confession of faith in Yeshua. Whether in our text it refers to baptism or not, the point is simply that these people had come to understand and publicly espouse and confess the truth about Yeshua, that He is the promised Messiah of Israel’s prophets and that eternal salvation is to be found only in Him.
They have tasted of the heavenly gift (γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου)

Some, convinced that “enlightened” refers to baptism, find the later Eucharist (Lord’s Table) referred to in the phrase “tasted of the heavenly gift.” But this is reading too much 3rd Century Christianity back into our 1st Century epistle. Even if the so-called “Lord’s Table” was a weekly occurrence early in the apostolic era (which I doubt), it most certainly was not the “Eucharist” of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries which viewed the elements (bread and wine) as mystically connected to the physical body and blood of Yeshua and therefore possessing salvific powers.¹

I would rather be inclined to see in this phrase a reference to the manna of the wilderness and the parallel to Messiah as the “bread from heaven” (Jn 6:31ff). Paul, in 1Cor 10:3, refers to spiritual food and spiritual drink which Israel ate in the wilderness. Interestingly, he also combines this with the concept of “baptism,” speaking of Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea under Moses’ leadership.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Messiah. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. (1Cor 10:1–5)

They, like the Jewish community to which our author addresses himself, had all been redeemed from Egypt, and should have appreciated the multiple manifestations of God’s power on their behalf. Yet, the fact that they so easily wandered from God and disobeyed Him underscores the possibility that even those who have tasted of the “bread from heaven” might yet deny Him. This is the second time that our author has referred to the wilderness wanderings and the lack of faith evidenced by the people. Their refusal to enter the Land and to obtain

¹ I continue to hold the view that the later Eucharistic service evolved during the early years of the emerging Christian Church as a replacement for the Pesach Seder practiced in the Apostolic era. See my essay “A Study of the Lord’s Table,” available at www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/LordsTableComplete.pdf
the rest God promised, was a clear indication of their lack of faith. As a result, God refused to allow them to enter the Land (4:1ff). There was no “second opportunity”—all of the adult men who left Egypt died in the wilderness except for Caleb and Joshua.

They have been partakers of the Holy Spirit (μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου)

The word “partakers” (μέτοχος, metochos) has a range of meanings including “one who shares or participates in something,” “a business partner,” “a companion,” or “a comrade.” The word is found only six times in the Apostolic Scriptures, five of which are in Hebrews (1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8).

Interestingly, “Holy Spirit” in this phrase is without the article (πνεύματος ἁγίου). In the fives times that “Holy Spirit” appears in Hebrews, three are articular (e.g., τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου) and two are anarthrous (2:4; 6:4). Some have suggested that when our author uses the anarthrous form of “Holy Spirit,” he is not so much speaking of the person of the Holy Spirit but rather of the manifestations of the Spirit, i.e., His gifts and operations. This surely is the case in 2:4.

God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. (Heb 2:4)

Since Paul teaches us that one who is indwelt by the Spirit of God is truly born again (Rom 8:9–11), it is impossible that what our author is describing are those who possess true, saving faith, who were therefore truly born from above, and then who denied Yeshua and lost their salvation. What our author must therefore be describing are those who professed faith in Yeshua as the true Messiah, who became part of the believing community and thus witnessed the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit manifested within the community, but eventually turned from their confession and denied Yeshua. As such, they acted against the clear evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work as they witnessed the inner workings of the community of faith.

Some have pointed to Simon Magus as an example of that to which our author refers. In Luke’s account (Acts 8:9ff), we see that Simon had professed faith in Yeshua, had been baptized, and had witnessed signs and great miracles that were taking place (v. 11). Yet he later seeks to buy the power of the Spirit with money and in Peter’s assessment, is
clearly not right with God. He is initially identified as a magician and seems to have acted accordingly in the biblical account. It seems possible (though the text does not make this explicit), that Simon was an individual who made an outward confession of faith in Yeshua, yet in the end showed himself to be an enemy of the gospel rather than its champion.

**They have tasted the good word of God** (καλὸν γευσαμένους θεοῦ ρήμα)

To “taste of the good word of God” must mean to have access to the Scriptures, to be taught them and thus to understand their meaning. Philo¹ wrote concerning the manna and God’s instructions about it:

> The divine radiance both enlightens and sweetens the soul that has vision, flashing forth the beam of truth, and with persuasion, that sweet virtue, imparting sweetness to those who hunger and thirst after nobility of character.²

In the context prior to this quote, Philo has explained the manna as being the “utterance of God and divine Word.” One is immediately reminded of Yeshua’s words when He referred to Himself as the “bread from heaven” (Jn 6:31ff). Thus, to “taste of the good word of God” is to ingest the sweetness of the Word incarnate to Whom the eternal word of God gives revelation. Once again, if the wilderness experience is in the mind of our author, the nation feasting upon the manna paints the picture vividly. How could one eat the manna and not believe in the God who provided it?

**They have tasted of the powers of the age to come** ([γευσαμένους] δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος)

The most common use of this term “power” (δύναμις, dunamis) is its reference to miracles, sometimes translated “miraculous powers” (e.g., Matt 13:54). Yeshua, in describing His works as proof that the kingdom of God had arrived, emphasized the promise of the prophets of old that the messianic kingdom would be characterized by miracles (cf. Matt

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¹ Philo was a prominent member of the Jewish community of the 1st Century in the pre-destruction era. He was a philosopher and teacher who wrote in Greek rather than Hebrew.

² *On Flight and Finding*, §139.
According to Yeshua (Matt 7:22), in the final judgment day some will attempt to find favor with God by pointing to their ability to perform miracles. In the end, however, they will be rejected as having never been “known” by the Master (v. 23). Thus, performing works which may, on the outward appearance seem to be miraculous and therefore possible only by the Holy Spirit, does not validate that the so-called “miracle worker” actually possesses genuine saving faith.

In our verse, however, the meaning most like is not that these have necessarily performed miracles but that they have witnessed them as they were manifest within the believing community. To “taste of the powers of the age to come” thus would mean to have witnessed the miraculous work of the Spirit, works that once again pointed to Yeshua as the true Messiah and thus of the fact that the messianic age had arrived.

... and then have fallen away – People have erred in two ways regarding this text. On the one hand, wanting to erase any sense that a person could “lose their salvation,” this text has been minimized as presenting an hypothetical case but one which could never actually occur—a kind of straw-man for the sake of getting the attention of the readers. The popular commentator Kenneth Wuest is an example of this. He tries to label the participle “having fallen away” as a “conditional participle here representing a hypothetical case, a straw man.”

Interestingly, the verb translated “having fallen away” (παραπεσόντας < παραπίπτω, parapiptō) is used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. The noun form of this word is found often, however, meaning “trespass,” which has led to the second error. This is to follow some of the early Church fathers (e.g., Tertullian) who believed that certain sins (most often adultery or fornication) committed after one was baptized could never be forgiven. The Peshitta translation reads this way:

... and have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the world to come, cannot again sin, and a second time be renewed to repentance; or a second time crucify and insult the Son of God. (Heb 6:4–5, Peshitta Syria)

2 Note the Peshitta translation of v. 6: “cannot again sin, and a second time be renewed to repentance...,” where the meaning “transgression” is retained from the root verb πιπτό.
For this reason some logically waited until they were quite old before they were baptized. It seems very likely that the theology of the early Christian Church heavily influenced the translation of the Peshitta at this point.

But what our author wishes to teach is neither of these errant interpretations, but rather a stern warning about the deceitfulness of the heart, and the danger of entertaining error within the believing community. He is not talking about sin in general, but about the willful sin of denouncing Yeshua—of setting one’s course of life to “live down” what one previously confessed. People who commit this act of willful apostasy cannot be brought back to repentance. As Bruce writes:

People who commit this sin, he says, cannot be brought back to repentance; by renouncing Christ they put themselves in the position of those who, deliberately refusing His claim to be the Son of God, had Him crucified and exposed to public shame.¹

It seems warranted, then, to understand the meaning of parapiptō to be a perfective form of piptō, “to commit a trespass,” and thus meaning “to commit the ultimate trespass,” i.e., to deny God by denying His Son, Yeshua. Note the use of this verb in the Lxx of Ezekiel:

But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die. (Ezek 18:24)

Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me.”’ (Ezek 20:27)

You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and defiled by your idols which you have made. Thus you have brought your day near and have come to your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations and a mocking to all the lands. (Ezek 22:4)

¹ F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, p. 124.
Here, the picture is of Israel who, as a nation, has turned away from God by worshiping idols, which clearly is one and the same with denying that Israel’s God is truly the one and only God. It would seem warranted, then, especially in the context of our pericope, to give a similar meaning to the word here. To “fall away” means to turn away from Yeshua by denying that He is the promised Messiah of God.

... it is impossible to renew them again to repentance – The word translated “impossible” (ἀδύναμις, adunamis) is introduced at the very beginning of the pericope, in v. 1. It is simply the alpha-privative appended to the word for “power” or “ability.” Many have found it impossible to connect such a thought to God. Surely God is able to do all things and nothing is impossible for Him (Matt 19:26). But this line of thinking misses the point. Our author is not saying something is impossible for God, for surely He is able to grant repentance to whom He desires, and may do so through whatever means He chooses. When Paul refers to himself as the “foremost of sinners” (1Tim 1:15), he is putting himself forward as proof that God is able to save anyone regardless of the harshness of his or her heart.

Rather, what our author is saying is that there comes a time when God may withdraw His hand and allow the sinner to go their own way. We see this in Rom 1 when, referring to those who despise even the natural revelation of God, Paul states that God “gave them over to their own lusts” (v. 24), that is, He lets them go their own way, worshiping the creation rather than the Creator. Francis Sampson, having shown that the word adunamis means “impossible,” offers this commentary:

There is no reason for departing, in the place under discussion, from the usage first stated [i.e., that adunamis means “impossible”]. The reason of the impossibility must always be sought in the nature of the case. Here it is found, not in any natural contradiction and impossibility, such as that ‘a part cannot be equal to its whole,’” but in the unchangeable ordination of God as to the dispensation of His grace. He can restore from any apostasy, or subdue any obstinacy; but the Apostle teaches us that there are defections which God will not heal, but leave to terminate in merited perdition.¹

The conclusion is this: those who deny Yeshua should reckon with

¹ Sampson, Hebrews, p. 203.
the fact that their decision may well be final without any way to reverse it. This is because repentance is a gift of God and unless He grants it, the rebellious sinner has no hope.

7–8 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

Our section closes with an analogy, one which helps us understand our author’s viewpoint in the previous verses. People who commit the sin of apostasy are likened to land which, in spite of all the care given it in cultivation, refuses to produce a good crop. Like Israel, whom Isaiah likens to a vineyard, who was cared for and nurtured (Is 5:1–7), but who turned from God and played the harlot, so is the one who is nurtured under the gentle rain of the gospel and the sweet food of the Messianic community and then turns against Messiah and denies Yeshua in both word and deed. This one is compared to land which brings forth thorns and thistles rather than good food, where thorns and thistles remind us of the ground which was cursed when sin entered the world (Gen 3:18). When a field becomes overgrown with thorns and thistles, the only recourse is to burn the field with fire in order to stop the growth of what would otherwise spread to all the land.

In the analogy, the rain is the word of God, and it falls upon the ears of all who gather within the community. Yet in one field it produces fruit, while in the other only thorns. Our author is concerned that some in this community were listening to and even entertaining the false teachers’ notions that Yeshua, while an important person, was not worthy of one’s life, and certainly not worthy to be worshiped. Giving such heretical teaching a place within the community was in our author’s viewpoint not only dangerous but also wrong. He warns them about the deceitfulness of their own hearts, urging them to make sure of their true commitment to Yeshua—that they fully affirm Him to be the promised Messiah and the only one through whom a sinner can stand righteous before the Father. To borrow Peter’s words, our author is urging his readers to make their calling and election secure.¹

¹ 2Pet 2:10.
9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

The stern warning which our author gives in the previous section flows from the passion of his heart as he understands the dire circumstances the community to which he writes finds itself. He recognizes that one's full acceptance of Yeshua as Messiah and Immanuel is crucial to all that pertains to salvation, and that any talk of disowning Him in whatever measure is talk which leads to destruction. From his vantage point he sees the danger into which his community is heading, and he warns them with appropriately stern measures.

A full assessment, however, acknowledges that presumably the majority of the community has shown real faithfulness to Yeshua, proven by the tangible acts of loving service to one another. These “marks of grace” cannot be ignored by the author because genuine works which are pleasing to God flow from genuine faith, and are likewise the characteristic of perseverance in the faith.

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you… – The plural “we” may be more than rhetorical. As noted above, our author may, in fact, be one of several leaders who watched over the spiritual welfare of this community. As such, he, along with the others, hastens to affirm that his faithful readers are not to be classed with those just mentioned, i.e., those who “fall away” and have no opportunity for repentance. The life of service which they have demonstrated assures the author that their faith is real.

This underscores, once again, the manner in which the perspective of the Bible is at variance with the contemporary Church. Nowadays, it seems that all too often “orthodoxy” is determined by what a person says far more than by the character of their life. To be assured of one’s faith, the modern Church settles for a signed confession in alignment with a creed or a liturgical admission to “orthodoxy.” But the early Messianic community could never sever “orthodoxy” from “orthopraxy.” What was true in a person’s life was determined by their actions, not merely by their words.

Our current verse actually begins with the perfect tense verb, “we are convinced” (Πεπείσμεθα, pepeismetha). The perfect tense speaks of past action but centers attention upon the present results of that action. This would indicate that the confidence our author has regarding the

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1 pp. 151–52.
genuine faith of his readers is based upon a past record of righteous living which has continued into the present—they continue to persevere in the ways of grace. Thus, after a section of stern warning, this section of our chapter opens with a very encouraging statement by our author.

But his being “convinced” is not a matter of talking one’s self into believing what the facts would otherwise disavow. No, he is convinced on the basis of tangible evidence which is objectively verifiable in the lives of these, his readers. This is demonstrated by the next words in the Greek order, namely, “concerning you” (Πεπείσμεθα δὲ περὶ ὑμῶν), “But we are convinced concerning you....” Putting the object of the verb at the beginning of the sentence helps to emphasize the distinction between the readers of this epistle and those referred to previously who have fallen away.

“Beloved” (ἀγαπητοί, agapētoi) is very much an endearing term, and cements the author’s perspective as being one of hope and assurance. These people are his close friends, those he appears to shepherd and care for deeply. “Beloved” likewise marks out the close community bonds which have been forged through living the life of faith together.

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you… – “Better things” (τὰ κρείσσονα, ta kreissona) is in contrast to the dismal description of those who fall away. Our author is certain of this reality: Those who have begun with faith will persevere in faith. This is because the One Who has given the gift of repentance and faith is also the One who works within the believer to conform them to the very image of Yeshua.

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Messiah Yeshua. (Phil 1:6)

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom 8:29–30)

... and things that accompany salvation – The phrase “things that accompany salvation” has been variously understood. The Greek phrase itself can mean (1) things which precede salvation, i.e., actions, attitudes, mannerisms—particularly seeking the truth and demonstrating repentance, which are the marks of having exercised faith in Yeshua, or (2) things which follow salvation, i.e., actions, attitudes, mannerisms,
those things which are the inevitable fruit of saving faith and become more and more the characteristic within the lives of those who have been born from above.

... in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. – This phrase makes it clear that the second option above is meant by our author, that “things accompanying salvation” refers to the righteous fruit in a believer’s life. Their love for fellow-believers (which the next verse characterizes as “shown”) is reinforced later in our epistle when our author mentions that those to whom he is writing were willing not only to suffer for their own faith in Yeshua, but also to suffer with others who were likewise being persecuted. True saving faith is always accompanied by the fruit of the Spirit in one’s life, not merely as occasional good works, but rather as a life characterized by love for God and love for others, that is, characterized by a faithful doing of the mitzvot.

10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Works of love done in the service of God, that is, for His Name, are in reality deeds done to God Himself. As such, they cannot be forgotten by Him, since He is righteous. The perspective of our author in this verse emphasizes again the mindset necessary in fulfilling the mitzvot, that doing the mitzvot is first and foremost for HaShem, and that therefore the privilege and ability to perform them for the Almighty is reward enough.

It is a very biblical concept that mitzvot are done “for His name.” This enters into the concept of “sanctifying the Name,” by which is meant that it is our duty to demonstrate to the world at large that HaShem is ‘echad, that He is the One and only God, as the Shema states:

Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai is one! (Deut 6:4)

The word “one” (אֶחַד, ‘echad) in this case means “unique,” or “the only one.” All the false gods are simply that, “false,” no gods at all. They simply do not exist. They are the imaginations of the godless heart—figments of the depraved imagination tricked by demons (cf. 1Cor 10:20f). It becomes the duty, then, of those who are “enlightened” by the Ruach, to make known the reality and uniqueness of the God of Abraham,

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1 Cf. 10:32–33.
Isaac, and Jacob, the Holy One of Israel. And how is this done? By keeping His commandments; by doing the *mitzvot*. Thus, each commandment that is kept, each righteous deed which is accomplished, is done with His Name in view. This is what our author means by “Love which you have shown toward His name,” and this becomes the primary motivation for living righteously, that we may fulfill the very purpose for which were redeemed, that is, to sanctifying the very person of God–His Name–in the world in which we live.

Now our author combines two thoughts: “works” and “love.” “God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and love....” Once again, the terminology underscores the Hebrew perspective: love is known, not primarily by words (though loving words are important), but most assuredly by one’s deeds of love.

But even as Yeshua taught, that ministering to people in His name was equivalent to ministering to Him,¹ so the “works” and “love” demonstrated by these people were “to the saints” but ultimately “toward His name.”

The rabbinic Midrash speaks of this concept when commenting on the phrase in the Siddur, “Sower of acts of righteousness.”²

Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair was given two measures of barley for safekeeping. The owner forgot about it for a number of years. Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair planted the barley seed, and each year replanted the previous year’s harvest until it grew to be a substantial crop. After seven years, the owner returned to claim his two measures of barley, and Rabbi Pinchos told him, “Come, I will show you the great fortune you have accumulated.” God does the same with the good and righteous deeds of man. He sows each righteous deed, and when the person is ready to receive his reward, God returns the original righteous investment plus all the accumulated dividends.³

But even in addition to the rewards awaiting the righteous in the world to come are the sanctifying aspects of the *mitzvot* today, that is, the manner in which they demonstrate the reality of God’s existence and uniqueness to a watching world. Yeshua Himself said that “all men will know that you are my disciples when you have love one for

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¹ Matt 18:5; 25:34ff.
another” (Jn 13:35). He further taught that one’s righteous deeds would be the proof of one’s claim to a place in the ‘Olam HaBa (world-to-come). And such a text is certainly not lost on our author, for he recognizes that righteous deeds can only flow from a heart made righteous by faith in Yeshua. He is therefore convinced that his readers have genuine faith, at least the majority of them.

... in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. – The words translated “ministered” (διακονήσαντες, aorist participle) and “ministering” (διακονοῦντες, present participle) are both from the same Greek verb, διακόνεω (diakoneō) from which our English word “deacon” is derived. The tense of the participles indicates that not only had they demonstrated a life of service in the past, but their serving was still on-going. They were persevering in the very actions which marked them out as true believers. And such faithfulness is not overlooked or considered of little value by the Almighty, for as our author states, “God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown.”

The word “saints” simply translates the Greek word ἅγιος, hagios, “holy” and in the plural ἅγιοι, hagioi, “holy ones.” The word itself offers no sense of a group of believers who attain a higher level of holiness as the later Roman Catholic Church taught but identifies those who, by faith in the Messiah, stand righteous and holy before the Almighty.

11–12 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence... – Once again, our author apparently speaks for a group of leaders who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of this community of Yeshua followers. Together, they want each one in the community to grow in their faith and to demonstrate that growth by remaining steadfast in a life of righteousness toward God and each other.

But to do this will require diligence on the part of each one. The phrase “show diligence” translates the Greek ἐνδείκνυσθαι σπουδὴν (endeiknusthai spoudēn) which might more literally be translated as “to demonstrate eagerness” or “to show earnestness.” This is obviously not an “on-again-off-again” approach to faith, but rather a full-hearted

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1 Matt 25:31ff.
desire to please God through one’s words, thoughts, and deeds. It requires a deep yet always growing commitment to please God in all aspects of one’s life.

On the one hand, such a growing faith is an individual responsibility. Each person, born again and indwelt by the Spirit, must discipline themselves in the ways of holiness. Yet though the responsibility ultimately rests upon the shoulders of the individual believer, no one can grow as God intends, nor fulfill the mitzvot as God commands apart from community. The “one another” emphasis of the Apostolic Scriptures reinforces the necessary part that a community of faith plays in the sanctification process of each believer.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; (Rom 12:10)

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Torah. (Rom 13:8)

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. (Rom 14:19)

Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the Torah of Messiah. (Gal 6:2)

... speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (Eph 5:19)

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1Thess 5:11)

Thus, while each individual is responsible before the Lord to do the mitzvot, the community as a whole plays an essential part in the maturing process of each member (cp. Eph 4:14–16).

... so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end – The life of righteousness lived out to the glory of God not only helps to convince a watching world that God is truly “there,” but it also is a present witness to the child of God that his or her faith is genuine. Thus, it issues in the “full assurance of hope.” But we may rightly ask, “assurance of what hope?” That what He has begun, He indeed will finish. Like Israel of old, who, as she journeyed in the wilderness was constantly reminded of God’s faithfulness and of the covenant that He had sworn to her, so
the child of God, in making the *mitzvot* the pattern of their life, gains a growing, personal assurance that HaShem is indeed at work within and that He is “sowing acts of righteousness.” Nothing is more devastating to the soul than the deep fear that one has deceived oneself. If I claim to be a follower of Yeshua, yet I do not keep His commandments, I am constantly wrestling with the fear that I am just a fake—claiming to be something I’m not! But a life of righteousness stills the soul in the full assurance of hope—hope for the completion of His work in my redemption which He has clearly begun.

Paul speaks to this in his epistle to the Colossians.¹

> For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Messiah Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2:1–3)

Thus, “assurance of hope until the end” speaks of complete and final perseverance in faith, remaining faithful until death or until Yeshua returns.

*so that you will not be sluggish*… – The fear is of becoming “sluggish.” Our author has used very picturesque language, for the Greek word (νωθρός, nōthros) translated “sluggish” may also mean “lazy” as well as “hard of hearing.” It is found only here and in 5:11 in the Apostolic Writings.

How does one fall into such a state? It is by neglecting the two vital areas of the spiritual life: the personal pursuit of holiness by a diligent commitment to live out the *mitzvot*, and regular involvement within the community of faith where edification, encouragement, as well as loving rebuke, takes place.

The doing of the commandments with a heart to honor God’s Name provides a constant reconditioning of our faith for two obvious reasons. First, living in obedience to the *mitzvot* requires the regular exercise of faith. This is particularly true in those cases where doing the *mitzvot* would (humanly speaking) result in some form of loss. For example, a competing business which is open on Shabbat seems to have a clear

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¹ Our author will likewise return to this theme, cf. 10:22; 11:1.
advantage over a business that closes in order to honor the Shabbat. Yet the one who honors the Shabbat must trust that HaShem will meet his needs and that it is only his requirement to be diligent as well as obedient. So like the human body, neglect of such “faith exercising” will result in “sluggish” or “lazy” faith.

Secondly, living out the mitzvot requires a regular study of the inspired Scriptures, for it is only in the word of God that we are able both to know the mitzvot and, through the Ruach, to understand their application. Thus, if our life goal is to bring glory to God, then we are constantly digging into the word of God to understand more and more about Him and the commands He has given to us. This “mining of Scripture” enables us all the more to know God and thus to trust Him in greater ways.

The opposite of a spiritual “sluggishness” is the demonstration of faith through actions, actions which flow from a life of disciplined perseverance. Our writer speaks of those who “through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Both faith and patience are active words in this context. They require personal effort and initiative. We must mimic those whose lives demonstrate these qualities. Patience asks one’s soul to wait for what it knows to be true, but what cannot yet be seen. And so faith is the evidence of that which is hoped for, the substance of things not yet seen (Heb 11:1). Faith waits patiently upon God to fulfill His word, His promises to those with whom He is in covenant. Such promises are “yes” and “stand firm” in Messiah (2Cor 1:20) and thus rest upon His person and work. Once again, Yeshua stands as the object of our faith, and the only One through Whom we are saved eternally.

imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises – The phrase “inherit the promises” (κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας) lays stress on the fact that no one can earn “the promises” or somehow acquire them through payment. That which is inherited is that for which one does not himself work. An inheritance is owned by way of family relationship and is set in place by the will of the benefactor.

13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

For when God made the promise to Abraham… – The verse begins with “For” (γάρ, gar), linking it with the previous section, and setting Abraham forth as a primary example of faithfulness and perseverance.
Indeed, according to Paul, Abraham is the father of all who believe, meaning he stands as a preeminent example of what true faith looks like in day-to-day life. As one who demonstrated genuine faith in God, he received Isaac back as though from the dead showing God’s faithfulness to His covenant promise. Thus, in the story of Abraham, the primary elements of the previous verses convene, for our author admonishes his readers to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

The covenant which God made with Abraham is first outlined in Gen 12, and reiterated in chapters 15, 17, 18, and 22. But it is the *akedah*, the binding of Isaac (Gen 22), which our author has in mind in particular, for it is at this time when God specifically takes an oath based upon His own Name.

and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares Adonai, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.” (Gen 22:16–17)

Note that the word “promise” in our verse is singular (contrasted with the plural in the previous verse [6:12] as well as in 11:33). Here, as in other places (cf. Eph 2:12), the central and all-important aspect of the covenant is summed up in the singular “promise,” which refers to the coming Messiah, the Seed, the Promised One. God had made a promise to Abraham that he would have a son of his own loins (Gen 15:4), a promise which evokes this theological statement of Moses whose words are inspired: “and Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Indeed, Isaac, the son of promise, was to be the proof-positive that God was keeping His word. Moreover, the success of the covenant promises given to Abraham depended entirely upon this promised son, Isaac, for God had said that He would establish the covenant through Isaac (Gen 17:19). It is therefore understandable that for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was, for all intents and purposes, to see the covenant as ended. But Abraham, even in the face of what appeared to be an insurmountable contradiction, believes that God is able to raise Isaac from the dead (11:19) and thus keep His word to establish the covenant through him. In a very real sense, when God

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provides a substitute in the ram, Abraham receives his son a second time, and the promise of God to give Abraham a son through whom the covenant would continue is once again a reality and the covenant is secure.

since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself… – Now the whole issue of oath taking becomes the focus of our author’s argument. The taking of an oath was a very serious matter in ancient Israel, for the Torah reveals that God considers oaths to be fully binding.

If a man makes a vow to Adonai, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Num 30:2)

Indeed, in judicial disputes where confirming evidence to decide guilt or innocence was lacking, requiring the disputants to swear an oath became the final factor by which the judges would determine the verdict (e.g., Num 5:19–21). Likewise, the mishnaic tractate Bava Metzia deals with the taking of oaths and the legal matters which are attendant to oath taking as pertains to settling financial disputes or other monetary judgments. Indeed, for a community or society which honestly believes that the God of Israel, the God of the Torah, is active in the lives of men, taking an oath in His name carries heavy consequences if the oath is disregarded. It is this very perspective which initiated the requirement in our own country that witnesses in a court of law take an oath before giving testimony, and until recently, such an oath concluded with “…so help me God.” It was intended by the founders of our nation that taking an oath in God’s name would help to deter the giving of a false witness.

It is customary to have one’s oath witnessed by someone who has the power to enact penalties if the one who takes the oath reneges. However, in the event which took place on Mt. Moriah, in which Abraham was ready to offer up his son Isaac, in which the One taking the oath is God Himself and thus could not take it in the name of someone greater. He therefore swears by His own name. This parallels the time when God dramatically portrayed the taking of an oath in the symbolism of the fire pot and smoking torch which passed between the slain pieces of the sacrificial animals (Gen 15:17). Thus, when God takes an oath in His own name, it signifies that He is basing His oath on the full compliment of His own character by which He promises to fulfill that which He has sworn. In short, the very character of God is at stake in the Abrahamic covenant, meaning that the covenant promises are as sure
as God Himself.

In the specific context upon which our author wants us to focus, i.e.,
the binding of Isaac and Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, we
should note that God reveals His oath to bless Abraham only after he
had demonstrated his willingness to obey what God had commanded.
Thus, God’s oath is in response to Abraham’s demonstrated faith, not as
a means to overcome some doubt or lack of faith with which Abraham
was struggling.

It is the token of God’s approval and pleasure that his servant
has come through this most grievous testing without giving
way to doubts and questionings.¹

As we will see, the oath taking in regard to the Abrahamic covenant
also sets the stage for our author to make the parallel with Melchizedek,
to whom God also took an oath regarding his priesthood (ch. 7). In this
way, our author connects Abraham and Melchizedek in the covenant
activities of God, and ultimately in the overarching plan of salvation.

14–15 saying, “I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.”
And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

In the story at hand (the binding of Isaac), God reiterates two of the
major promises given to Abraham: (1) that He would multiply Abra-
ham’s offspring, and (2) that He would bless Abraham. Our author
quotes from Gen 22:17 to show that the covenant made initially with
Abraham and his descendants would be established with Isaac and his
descendants. Here is the larger context of the quote:

and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares Adonai, because
you have done this thing and have not withheld your son,
your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will
greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as
the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall pos-
sess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations
of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My
voice.” (Gen 22:16–18)

Quite clearly, neither the multiplying nor the blessing would have
been possible apart from Isaac, and thus we see the essential role Isaac

played in the covenant, for God had previously promised that the covenant would be carried forward by him.

The wording itself marks this emphasis: “I will surely bless you…” (כִּי־בָרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ). One of the ways that Hebrew marks emphasis is by using an infinitive followed by an imperfect verb which are cognate to each other, and this is what we find in Gen 22:17. Interestingly, the Greek of the Lxx (ἡ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω) followed closely by the author of Hebrews (εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω) imitates the Hebrew by using a participle followed by a future indicative verb, both of which are cognate to each other. This intensification is conveyed in some translations by the addition of an intensifying adverb: “I vow that I will bless you abundantly…” (NEB); “Assuredly I will bless you…” (Weymouth).

In short, in taking an oath, God rewards Abraham’s faith with additional assurance of His unfailing promise, which in turn strengthens Abraham’s faith. And this teaches a principle that applies to each of us: growing in faith is the result of obeying by faith what we already know God has revealed and commanded.

And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. – Abraham waited for the promised son, though he did not always wait well. During the wait he faltered into the “Hagar plan,” but God remained faithful to His promise. The Genesis text tells us Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born (Gen 16:16) and that he was 100 years old when Isaac was born (Gen 21:5). It is not certain how much time elapsed between the covenant ceremony as recorded in Gen 15 and the birth of Isaac, but we know it was at least 14 years, and most likely more than that. Even 14 years is a long time to wait when God has given you the promise of a son.

The most important thing to see in the example of Abraham, however, is that through those years of waiting, and even in his attempt to bring the promise in his own power, he learned the lessons of faith. Having received the promised son, he faced an ultimate test when God required him to give up that son. And in clinging to the word of God, His promise regarding the covenant and that Isaac would be the one through whom the covenant would continue, Abraham received his son a second time (as it were). Thus, Abraham stands as a supreme example of what it means to grow in faith—faith that clings to God and cannot be dissuaded even by the most bitter of life’s trials.

Our text states that Abraham “obtained” the promise. The word

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1 The Greek of Hebrews (εἰ μὴν) is simply the updated spelling of koine Greek for the older ἢ μὴν. See BDAG, εἰ μὴν.
“obtained” translates the Greek verb ἐπιτυγχάνω (epitungxanō), used also in Rom 11:7 of Israel who is characterized as seeking righteousness but not obtaining it. This verb speaks of actually possessing what one has been promised and is, in this sense, not equivalent with “receiving” the promise. A promise may be given but never obtained. Yet in our text, Abraham obtained the promise, the word of God which he had received earlier. It seems that our author is contrasting these two concepts when he writes in 11:17,

> By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received (ἀναδέχομαι, anadexomai) the promises was offering up his only begotten son; (Heb 11:17)

This, then, is another way to express the essence of faith: to patiently wait for and to live in the reality of that which God has said (that which He has promised).

We now see the line of reasoning our author is following: Israel received the promises in the covenants made with the fathers. Yet throughout the history of the nation, the majority failed to obtain the promises because of the hardness of their hearts. Our author fears that his community, those to whom he is addressing this epistle, are in danger of failing in a similar way unless they imitate the faith and perseverance of Abraham.

And so we too must take stock of the matter, that it is through patient obedience that our faith grows and becomes strong in order to face whatever, through God’s good providence, may come our way. Like Abraham, we must lay hold of the word of God and make it our own, not only having received the promises contained therein, but also obtaining them for ourselves as we strive to walk in the footsteps of our Messiah, Yeshua.

16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

As noted above, the oath as a means to end disputes is clearly a part of the ancient Hebrew culture. The supreme oath formula in ancient Israel was “As Adonai lives…” (חַי יְהוָה) found 35 times in the Tanach. It was unthinkable that anyone would swear an oath on the basis of “as Adonai lives” and then renege on that oath. The fear of God was too great to think that disregarding an oath taken in His name would go unnoticed. It was for this reason that entering into an oath was to be
considered a solemn occasion, and one for which there was need for ample preparation and consideration. Hasty oaths were therefore the sign of a fool (cf. Prov 20:25).

Thus, in legal disputes, when other avenues have been exhausted, and the matter still remains unresolved, the parties in dispute would be required to swear an oath that what they were claiming was indeed the truth. Of course, certain circumstances might prohibit such a practice, as, for instance, when one of the parties was known in the community to be liar. For such a person, an oath was of no value. But in general, those who were recognized as God-fearing people, an oath was considered the end of the dispute. The opening of m.Bava Metzia demonstrates this:

Two lay hold of a cloak. This one says, “I found it!” And that one says, “I found it!” This one says, “It’s all mine!” And that one says, “It’s all mine!” This one takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than half, and that one takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than half. And they divide it up. (m.Bava Metzia 1.1)

This, then, is a qal ve’chomer argument put forward by our author: if people take an oath by evoking the name of one greater than they (i.e., God), and if such a practice settles all disputes, then how much more should one trust the oath of the Almighty Himself, Who is greater than all.

17–18 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

God’s word is enough to warrant valid and enduring faith. Yet, to accommodate the weakness of mankind, in this instance He makes the promise doubly sure by imposing an oath in addition to His word of promise, thus giving “two unchangeable things” as secure and infallible guarantee of His promise. God intends that the heirs of the promise be certain in their understanding and stable in their faith as it pertains to the covenant promise made to Abraham. For this covenant promise is nothing more nor less than the promise of the Messiah, the redeemer of Israel, and the work of eternal salvation which He, Yeshua would
accomplish and bring to complete fulfillment.

The “heirs of the promise” are the “seed” (descendants) of Abraham to whom the covenant promises were given:

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. (Gen 17:7)

More specifically, our author has himself and his readers in mind, who have experienced in the gospel the fulfillment of the oath which God swore to Abraham.

Once again we have a clear biblical statement as to the unchangeable nature of God’s covenant with Abraham. This is particularly the case since this covenant is founded securely upon God alone and is not in any way dependent upon the obedience or faith of Abraham and his family. Thus, it is not only contrary to Scripture to suggest that God’s covenant with Israel has been annulled by Israel’s disobedience, it calls into question the very holy character of God Himself. In short, it makes Him a liar. The argument of our author is, once again, a simple qal ve’echomer. If it is true that with mere mortal man an oath makes certain the veracity of his statement, how much more with God Himself. The promise to Abraham is thus just as secure as is the very existence of Israel’s God Who is holy and cannot lie.

The utter integrity and surety of the promise is doubly secure, for God’s oath incorporates two “unchangeable things”, namely (1) God’s word, and (2) God’s oath. Since it is impossible for God to lie, His word alone is sufficient. But in this case, due no doubt to the extremely important nature of this promise (for it finds its fulfillment in the coming of Messiah), God, wanting to show the heirs of the promise the absolute unchangeable nature of His promise, added an oath to the promise as additional guarantee.

The result of this added measure is nothing less than “strong encouragement” for those who have come to faith in Yeshua, which our author characterizes as “having fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.” Our hope, based upon God’s promises, is our spiritual anchor. This hope reaches forward to that which lies before, while it is, at the same time, attached to that which comes after.

Thus, the “hope set before us” is the settled belief and conviction, which brings assurance, that at last we will be with Yeshua our Messiah and “see Him as He is” (1Jn 3:2). But we will not only be with Yeshua,
we will be like Him, for that is the work He has promised to accomplish in us, that we would be conformed to His image. This hope, then, rests upon the word of God as true, and this is the foundation of our faith, that God has revealed Himself in the inspired words of Scripture and that we therefore, through His word, might “seize the hope set before us.”

In this we understand more clearly the tactics of the evil one, for where does he wage his strongest attacks but against the very holy character of God and against His word. This was the strategy he employed in *gan Eden* when he asked Chavah: “Has God said...?” In that question he intended for Chavah to question God’s motives in giving the commandment as well as whether one could trust His words at all. And this continues to be where the battleground exists: the character of God and the integrity of His revealed word.

19–20 This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Yeshua has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The picture our author gives turns now to maritime. The ship in a storm looks only for the safe haven. Yet often it is impossible to reach the harbor before the storm is upon her. Mixing the pictures of the storm-laden ship with the picture of the Tabernacle, our author views the most holy place as the sanctuary of peace from the storm, the place of atonement, the locus where God and man meet in harmony and reconciliation. Such is the awaited home of the redeemed. Yet, in the storm of life (and for his readers, the present persecution), the ship of our existence feels the full blows of the gale. The anchor, then, is the person of Yeshua Himself, who, as High Priest, has entered “the veil” (the holy of holies, the place of priestly service) and has secured our position there by His intercession. Thus, in this section of rebuke and encouragement, our author moves us to the all important subject of Yeshua’s high priesthood, the subject to which he has been moving all along (cf. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14–15; 5:1, 5–6, 10).

The NASB as well as other English translations\(^1\) insert the word “hope” in v. 19 (which is not in the Greek) in order to supply the obvious referent for the word “This” in our verse. “This (that is, the hope previously mentioned) we have as an anchor for the soul.”

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\(^1\) NET, NIV, HCSB, NRSV. Note that the ESV,
The hope (ἐλπίς, elpis) previously mentioned (v. 18) is the assurance we have of God’s faithfulness, for He cannot lie. And even added to this is the fact that He took an oath regarding the covenant promise made to Abraham, which stands as additional, confirming revelation of His eternal commitment to fulfill the covenant He has made.

we have as an anchor of the soul … – The metaphor of an anchor is directly connected with the concept of “hope,” and was used as a symbol for hope, stability, and virtue in the ancient world. As mentioned above, our author’s metaphor may connect to the fact that shallow harbors in the Mediterranean Sea made it difficult for larger boats and ships to enter. As a result, the boat or ship would remain outside of the harbor while its anchor rope would be taken into the harbor and attached to a large stone set up for this purpose. The larger vessel would then be safe from drifting out to sea, and could, in some cases, be pulled into the harbor itself.

Thus, like the anchor that is inside the harbor and cannot be seen, so we do not now see Yeshua but we are attached to Him by the “rope” of faith, secured to us by the Ruach.

Note that the text states that we have this hope—it is not something that we will only possess in the future but what we possess in the here and now. The certainty of our salvation, secured through the gift of faith and made certain by the indwelling presence of the Ruach HaKodesh, is ours now by God’s grace.

Our author speaks of our hope in Yeshua as being an “anchor of the soul.” The reference to the “soul” (ψυχή, psuchē) is not to the immaterial part of humankind, but (as is generally the case in the Scriptures) speaks of the whole life of a human created in the image of God. Thus, an anchor for the soul means an anchor for all aspects of life—for life as a whole.

both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil… – Two characteristic of the hope we now possess are given, taking “sure and steadfast” as a hendiadys describing one aspect. The word “sure” (ἀσφαλής, asphalēs) means “stable,” “unmovable” while “steadfast” (βέβαιος, βέβαιος, 1 See Attridge, Hebrews, p. 183, ns. 69–70 for references to various Greek writers. Note also that in the early centuries of the emerging Christian Church, the sign of the anchor was combined with symbol of the fish on gravestones, no doubt relating to our text. See Westcott, Hebrews, p. 163.
2 Note the different way Paul uses the concept of “hope” in Rom 8:24, “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?”
bebaios) adds the dimension of “unchanging” or “having validity over a period of time.” One only need consider the function of an anchor employed by a ship in stormy weather. It must take hold of that which cannot be moved, and it must remain in that position even during the worst gale.

The second characteristic given of the anchor makes it clear that the anchor we have is none other than Yeshua Himself, for the “anchor” has entered within the veil, speaking no doubt of the most holy place in the Tabernacle and subsequently in the Jerusalem Temple. As noted above, the holy of holies is the place of atonement, the place where, on Yom Kippur, the smoke of the incense filled the air and the blood was put upon the mercy seat. It symbolizes the place where God and man are reconciled. It is likewise the place where the glory of God shone forth and thus where man is not only welcomed but also enabled to fellowship with his Creator in awe and praise of His greatness.

The use of the “veil” imagery by our author will be used again and made clearer in chapter 9, but it is important to note that he looks at the two parts of the Tabernacle, the holy place and the most holy place, as representing Yeshua’s life on the earth (the outer sanctuary) and His resurrected life with the Father in heaven (the inner sanctuary). Thus, Yeshua’s ascension to the Father is one and the same as entering into the most holy place in the Tabernacle not made with hands, i.e., the heavenly tabernacle.

where Yeshua has entered as a forerunner for us – Thus, since Messiah has ascended into the inner sanctuary, and since we are in Him, we too are assured of entering where He is. This coincides with Yeshua’s prayer as recorded by John:

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:24)

This, then, helps us understand the fuller aspects of what our author intends by using the word “hope.” Even as Yeshua has ascended to the very throne room of God, there to interceded for us, so we are fully assured that one day we too will be with Him in that very place. Hughes has emphasized this when he wrote:

The entry of the ascended Christ into the heavenly sanctuary means also the penetration of our hope into the presence-chamber of God himself, for Christ is our hope (1Tim
1:1): he and our hope are identical, so that on the Christian pilgrimage it is precisely Christ in us who is the hope of glory (Col 1:27).\footnote{Hughes, \textit{Hebrews}, p. 236.}

The word “forerunner” (πρόδρομος, prodromos) is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. The word is found three times in the Lxx,\textsuperscript{2} twice of “first-ripe” fruit, and once (in Wisdom 12:8) of soldiers going in advance of an army that follows. This meaning of “forerunner,” i.e., advanced armed forces, was the common usage of the word in the later Greek literature as well.\textsuperscript{3} The common emphasis in the use of the word outside of biblical literature is that those who are “forerunners” make preparation for those who are to follow. This is expressed in our text by the addition of “for us” (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν).

Even though we find no example of prodromos (“forerunner”) being used to describe the taking of the anchor rope into the harbor in advance of the ship entering, it surely seems to fall within the overall semantic scope of the word, and I would suggest that this is how it is being used in our text. Yeshua having entered into the very presence of the Almighty secures our eventual entrance as well. In fact, this may well be a significant part of what Paul intends us to understand in his characteristic phrase “in Messiah.”

\textit{having become a high priest forever}...– The verb “having become” is an aorist participle in the Greek (γενόμενος, genomenos) which would indicate action completed before that of the leading verb “has entered” (εἰσῆλθεν, eisēlthen). The point is simply that in Yeshua’s death and resurrection He proved Himself to be worthy of the heavenly priesthood and thus qualified to make intercession on behalf of those for whom He offered Himself. He did not become a priest only after His ascension, but was fully carrying out the function of the high priest when He offered Himself as a guilt offering for His people (Is 53:10).

\textit{after the order of Melchizedek}. – The author of Hebrews has already twice mentioned Melchizedek (5:6, 10), indicating that Yeshua functions as a priest “after the order” of Melchizedek.\textsuperscript{4} Here, in our present text, he has introduced the subject again but this time in order to bring us into a more complete explanation of the doctrine. Indeed, the subject of Yeshua’s heavenly priesthood after the order of Melchizedek will be the primary subject of 7:1–10:18.

\textsuperscript{1} Num 13:20; Is 28:4; Wis 12:8.
\textsuperscript{2} See Liddell-Scott, “πρόδρομος.”
\textsuperscript{3} For a more detailed discussion of “after the order,” see pp. 200-01 above.
Melchizedek is first encountered in Gen 14:18, unannounced and unknown. Indeed, the name Melchizedek is found only 1 other time in the Tanach (Ps 110:4), while in the Apostolic Scriptures his name is found only in the Epistle to the Hebrews (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17). His enigmatic encounter with Abraham is only briefly described in the Genesis narrative and he never enters the narrative again. His mention in Ps 110 centuries later seems to come out of nowhere. Thus from a biblical standpoint Melchizedek is shrouded in mystery. Who is he? From where did he come? How was it that he functioned as כֹּהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן, “priest of El ‘Elyon, priest of God Most High”? It is to these and other questions revolving around Melchizedek and his prefiguring of Yeshua that our author will give his attention in the upcoming chapters of the epistle.

Even though none of the other authors of the Apostolic Scriptures give any mention of Melchizedek, this does not mean they considered the subject of his priesthood or the manner in which he stood as a fore-shadow of Yeshua unimportant. In many ways, the theme of Yeshua’s heavenly priesthood must have become a focus of attention as the followers of Yeshua grew and matured following His ascension, and as the Jewish leaders became more and more antagonistic toward the assemblies of The Way. Further, if the Epistle of Hebrews was written shortly after the destruction of the Temple as I have previously suggested, this would most certainly have given the impetus to see Yeshua’s ongoing work as a continuation in fulfillment of the Temple priesthood.

Melchizedek at Qumran

It is interesting to find that Melchizedek was an important figure to the Qumran sect. It appears that he may have a connection with the messianic expectations of the sect. The name Melchizedek shows up several times in fragments (1Q20 22:14; 4Q401 f11:3; f22:3; 4Q544 f2:15; f3:3) but it is in 11Q13 (sometimes labeled as 11QMelch) that Melchizedek is seen as functioning within the messianic expectations of the Dead Sea Scrolls community.

This manuscript is dated to the 1st Century BCE and “takes the form of an eschatological midrash in which the proclamation of liberty to the captives at the end of days (Is 61:1) is understood as being part of the general restoration of
property during the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:13), seen in the Bible (Deut 15:2) as a remission of debts.”

Some have equated the figure of Melchizedek at Qumran with the archangel Michael based upon similar roles (cf. 1QM 9:14–16), but the two are never explicitly equated in the Qumran literature. Moreover, in 11Q13 clear divine functionality and titles are assigned to him, which appears to place him above the ranks of the holy angels. Some consider the use of Elohim and El in this text to parallel the usage of Elohim in Ex 22:7–8 [Hebrew 22:8–9] to designate judges (cp. Ps 82:6; Jn 10:34), and the presence of מִלָּחַר (mīlaḥār) in line 14, if taken as a plural construct of מִילָה, El, thus, “gods of . . .” (as many do), would seem to support this interpretation. Yet 11Q13 appears to go beyond the idea of Elohim as judges, for the Melchizedek of 11Q13 acts in far greater ways, and is given far greater honor than that of a judge. It seems possible to me that the word מִילָחַר (translated “divine beings” in Wise, Abegg, and Cook) in line 14 should be read as an alternate spelling for מִילָה (mīlaḥār), “mighty trees, oaks” as it is found in Is 61:3 (וְקֹרָא לָהֶם אֵילֵי הַצֶּדֶק, “and He will call them oaks of righteousness”). In Is 61:3, the “oaks of righteousness” is metaphorical language describing the faithful who remain steadfast in their obedience to God.

Since 11Q13 contains midrashic comments on Is 61:1-2 in the early part of the text, it seems warranted to interpret line 14 as continuing that midrash on 61:3. Interestingly, in the Second Rabbinic Bible, compiled and edited by Jacob ben Chayyim and published in 1524–25, the word under discussion is spelled without the middle yod in Is 61:3 (וְקֹרָא לָהֶם אֵילֵי הַצֶּדֶק, just as we find it in 11Q13. Whether this spelling in Jacob ben Chayyim’s text represents one masoretic tradition, I cannot tell. But it does seem possible. I would opt, therefore, to translate מִילָחַר in line 14 as an alternate spelling of מִילָה, found in Is 61:3, and this is reflected in the translation below.

[The interpretation] is that it applies [to the L]ast Days and concerns the captives, just as [Isaiah said: “To proclaim the

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3 The Isaiah Scroll has the full spelling מִילָה as does the Leningrad Codex.
Jubilee to the captives” (Isaiah 61:1). ... just] as 5 [...] and from the inheritance of Melchizedek, f[or ... Melchize]dek, who 6 will return them to what is rightfully theirs. He will proclaim to them the Jubilee, thereby releasing th[em from the debt of all] their sins. [He shall pro]claim this decree 7 in the fir[s]t [wee]k of the Jubilee period that foll[ows nine ]Jubilee peri-
ods. Then the “D[ay of Atonement]” shall follow after] the [te]nth [ju]bilee period, 8 when he shall atone for all the Sons of [Light] and the peo[ple who are pre]destined to Mel[ch]i-
zedek. [...] upo[n the]m [...] For 9 this is the time decreed for “the year of Melchiz[adek]'s favor” (Isaiah 61:2, modified), [and] by his might he w[i]ll judge God’s holy ones and so es-
br[i]tablish a righteous ki[n]gdom, as it is written 10 about him in the Songs of David, “Elohim has taken his place in the council of El; in the midst [of the council] Elohim will judge” (Psalm 82:1). Scripture also s[ays] about him, “Over [it] 11 take your seat in the highest heaven; El will judge the peoples” (Psalm 7:7–8). Concerning what scripture s[ays, “How long will you judge unjustly, and sh[ow] partiality to the wick[ed]? [Selah” (Psalm 82:2)].] 12 The interpretation applies to Belial and the spirits predestined to him, becau[se all of them have rebe] lled, turn[ing] from God’s precepts [and so becoming utterly wicked.] 13 Therefore Melchizedek will thoroughly prosecute the veng[ea]nce required by Go[d's] statu[tes]. [Also, he will deliver all the captives from the power of B]elial, and from the power of all [the spirits predestined to him.] 14 Allied with him will be all the [“righteous mighty ones” (Isaiah 61:3). [The ...] is that wh[ich ... all] the sons of El. This vi[sitation] 15 is the Day of [Salvation] that He has decreed [through Isaai]ah the prophet [concerning all the captives,] inasmuch as scripture sa[ys, “How] beautiful 16 upon the mountains are the fee[t of] the messen[ger] who [an]nounces peace, who brings [good] news, [who announces salvation, who [sal]ys to Zion, ‘Your [G]od [reigns’” (Isaiah 52:7). ] 17 This scripture’s interpreta-
tion: “the mounta[ins] are the] prophet[s], they w[ho were sent to proclaim God’s truth and to] proph[esy] to all I[rael.] 18 “The messenger” is the [An]ointed of the spir[it,] of whom Dan[iel] spoke, “[A]fter the sixty-two weeks, an Anointed one shall be cut off” (Daniel 9:26). The “messenger who brings] 19 good news, who announce[s salvation’”] is the one of whom it is wr[i]tt[en, ["to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, the] day of vengeance of our God;] 20 to comfo[rt all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:2). This scripture’s interpretation:] he is to inst[r]uct them about all the periods of history for eter[nity ... and in the statutes of] 21 [the] truth. [...] 22 [... dominion] that passes
In this remarkable text, a number of things stand out. First, Melchizedek is clearly connected to the final restoration and redemption of Israel, both in a physical as well as spiritual way. He proclaims “Jubilee to the captives,” understood as a release from the debt of their sins. He is able to do this because, viewing this eschatological day of redemption under the rubric of Yom Kippur, “he will atone for all the Sons of Light and the people who are predestined to him.” The “favorable year of Adonai” found in Is 61:2 is interpreted here as “the year of Melchizedek’s favor.”

Secondly, Melchizedek will establish a “righteous kingdom” because he will act as the righteous judge. Ps 82:1 is then offered as proof, interpreted to be speaking of Melchizedek: “it is written about him in the Songs of David, “Elohim has taken his place in the congregation of El.” Here the meaning seems inescapable, that Melchizedek is referred to as Elohim. Then Ps 7:7–8 is added as additional corroboration: “Over it (i.e., the congregation of El) take your seat in the highest heaven; El will judge the peoples.” Thus, in 11Q13, Melchizedek is the divine judge who sits in the highest heavens, and who executes divine justice upon the righteous and the unrighteous. In so doing, he saves the righteous and condemns the wicked (Belial and those with him), bringing in the “Day of Salvation” prophesied by Isaiah.

Thirdly, the “messenger of good news” (מְבשָׂר, mevaseir, line 18) of Isaiah’s prophecy in 52:7 is also equated with the messiah of Daniel’s prophecy (9:24) who is stated to be “anointed of (by) the Spirit” (note the definite הָרוּחַ). The messiah is the messenger who announces the arrival of Melchizedek, as seen by the fact that the phrase “your God reigns,” quoted from Is 52:7, is interpreted thusly: “‘Your God’ (Elohim) is Melchizedek.” While this text is based upon a restoration, a majority of scholars believe this restoration to be the most plausible. Apparently, then, a similar diarchic arrangement (noted in the texts studied above) is anticipated: the messiah of Daniel’s prophecy announces the arrival of the reigning Melchizedek. Yet Melchizedek, while viewed as reigning (thus the royal messiah) is known in the biblical texts as a priest, and even in 11Q13, Melchizedek functions as a priest in affecting atone-
ment for all the Sons of Light.

Collins notes:

The *Melchizedek Scroll* from Qumran presents Melchizedek as a heavenly being and gives no indication that he was ever a mortal man.... We do not know whether the Dead Sea sect at all associated the priest of El Elyon [Gen 14] with the heavenly Melchizedek. It is quite possible that they regarded the Melchizedek of Psalm 110, at least, as a heavenly being. In the *Melchizedek Scroll*, in any case, he is *Elohim*, god or divine being, and not *adam*, or human.¹

**Melchizedek in Rabbinic Literature**

Targum Yonaton and Yerushalmi, along with the Bavli identify Melchizedek with Noah’s son, Shem.² Since these references are in the later strata of the literature, it seems quite reasonable to suggest that the initial impetus for this identification may well have been an attempt to counter the Christian message which saw Melchizedek as a type foreshadowing Yeshua.³

What is interesting, however, is that this identification of Melchizedek with Shem gained a considerable degree of acceptance within the Christian Church. While Epiphanius mentions this as an opinion of the Samaritans, Jerome sees no problem with the chronology of the suggestion and appears to favor it.⁴ Even Luther favored the view that Melchizedek was Shem.⁵ Calvin rejected the notion,⁶ though for other reasons than what appears to be the obvious: the genealogy of Shem is recorded and thus well known, whereas one of the main points of the author of Hebrews is that the genealogy of Melchizedek is not known, being absent from any and all genealogical listings in the Torah. Hughes adds another reason why the rabbinic invention cannot stand:

> [the identification of Melchizedek as Shem] would also invalidate the conception of Levi, as yet unborn but in the loins of Abraham, paying tithes to Melchizedek as though to

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² Targums on Gen 14:18–20; Mid. Rab. *Gen* 46.7; b.*Nedarim* 32b, etc.
³ See Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 244.
⁴ See Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* II.i.35ff; Jerome, Epistle 73, to Evangelius.
⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, on Gen 14:18.
⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, on Gen 14:18.
a priesthood of a different order, because, if Melchizedek is
Shem, then Levi was no less in Melchizedek’s loins than he
was in Abraham’s, and the distinction which is proposed falls
to the ground.¹

In some of the later rabbinic literature, Melchizedek has become less
venerated and even shown some hostility. According to Hughes, the
lack of genealogy is accounted for by postulating that he was the child
of a prostitute.² A common rabbinic teaching held that the priesthood
was taken away from Melchizedek because (in Gen 14:19f) he blessed
Abraham before pronouncing a blessing upon God Most High.³ Inter-
estingly, in Hertz’s notes, he writes “Melchizedek was evidently a con-
vert of Abraham’s”⁴ But this goes contrary to other rabbinic teaching
that Melchizedek (i.e., Shem) had a school in which Abraham was a
student⁵ and that this school was one of the three places where the Ru-
ach HaKodesh manifested Himself.⁶ Other rabbinic legends taught that
Melchizedek was born circumcised⁷ and that he was the progenitor of
Tamar.⁸

Once again, it would seem that in many ways, the impetus for the
rabbis to deal with the person of Melchizedek was in large measure the
use of Melchizedek as prefiguring Yeshua in the Epistle to the Hebrews
and that the early Christian Church used this as a strong polemic to
prove the messiahship of Yeshua.

Melchizedek in Early Christian Literature

In the early Christian centuries of the emerging Christian Church,
Justin Martyr (c. 100–165 CE) was the first to use Melchizedek as a po-
lemic in the Jewish-Christian debates. In his debate with Trypho the
Jew, he dismisses circumcision and the Sabbath by the argument that
before Abraham, those to whom God showed favor neither were cir-
cumcised or kept the Sabbath, and he includes Melchizedek as one of
the prime examples:

¹ Hughes, Hebrews, p. 244.
² Ibid., p. 245.
³ b.Nedarim 32b; Mid. Rab. Lev 25.6;
⁵ Gen. Rab. Gen 43.6.
⁶ b.Makkot 23.b.
⁷ Mid. Rab. Gen 43.6.
⁸ Mid. Rab. Gen 85.10.
Excursus: Melchizedek

Even you, who are the circumcised according to the flesh, have need of our circumcision; but we, having the latter, do not require the former. For if it were necessary, as you suppose, God would not have made Adam uncircumcised; would not have had respect to the gifts of Abel when, being uncircumcised, he offered sacrifice and would not have been pleased with the uncircumcision of Enoch, who was not found, because God had translated him. Lot, being uncircumcised, was saved from Sodom, the angels themselves and the Lord sending him out. Noah was the beginning of our race; yet, uncircumcised, along with his children he went into the ark. Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High, was uncircumcised; to whom also Abraham the first who received circumcision after the flesh, gave tithes, and he blessed him: after whose order God declared, by the mouth of David, that He would establish the everlasting priest. Therefore to you alone this circumcision was necessary, in order that the people may be no people, and the nation no nation; as also Hosea, one of the twelve prophets, declares. Moreover, all those righteous men already mentioned, though they kept no Sabbaths, were pleasing to God;¹

Justin’s argument is that Yeshua, being a priest after the order of Melchizedek, represents those who have no need to be circumcised in the flesh (Gentiles) as well as those circumcised in the flesh (Jews) so long as they are circumcised of heart. That (according to Justin) Melchizedek was uncircumcised while functioning as a priest of the Most High God was to reveal that when the priestly function was fulfilled in Jesus, circumcision of the flesh would be abolished. This, of course, flows from the supersessionism or replacement theology proposed by many of the early Church fathers.

While this perspective, that Melchizedek was an uncircumcised priest, finds no voice in the Epistle to the Hebrews itself, it did win wide acceptance among the early Church fathers. Tertullian (c. 160–225) appears to have held it² as did Epiphanius (c. 315–403).³

Another widespread teaching from the early Christian centuries, which continued through the medieval period and even to our day, was that the bread and wine which Melchizedek provided when he encountered Abraham, foreshadowed or anticipated the institution of

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¹ Justin Maryr, Dialogues with Trypho, §19.
² Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem v. 9; Adversus Judaeos 2f.
³ Epiphanius, Adversus Haereses II.i.35ff.
the sacrament of the eucharist of Christ. We hear this teaching from Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215),\(^1\) Cyprian (c. 200–258),\(^2\) Epiphanius,\(^3\) Chrysostom (c. 347–407),\(^4\) Jerome (c. 342–420),\(^5\) and Augustine (c. 354–430).\(^6\) It received recognition at the Council of Trent\(^7\) and it still is a common teaching in the Roman Catholic Church today. As one would expect, the Reformers rejected this analogy because they found no support for it in Genesis 14, and that it was being used by the Catholic Church to support the notion that Melchizedek offered the bread and wine as a sacrifice to God and thus as prefiguring the Roman mass.\(^8\)

Some, even to the present day, continue to hold that Melchizedek was a theophany or an appearance of the pre-incarnate Messiah.\(^9\) But as far back as Epiphanius, the weakness of this interpretation is obvious:

If Melchizedek resembles the Son of God he cannot at the same time be the same as the Son of God; for how can a servant be the same as his master?\(^{10}\)

John Brown, having encountered in his day (1784–1858) those who held to the view that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate appearance of Yeshua, countered with these words:

To us it appears very plain, that Melchisedec and the Son of God are two different persons. Melchisedec is said to have been “made like unto the Son of God;” and the Son of God is said to have been “made a High Priest after the order of Melchisedec.” It is scarcely possible to conceive two persons more clearly distinguished. Besides, to the exercise of the priesthood on the part of the Son of God, the possession of human nature was absolutely nec-

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1 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* iv.25.
2 Cyprian, *Epistle* 63 to Caecilius.
3 Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* II.i.35ff.
4 Chrysostom, *Homily on Psalm* 110.
5 Jerome, *Epistle* 73 to Evangelus.
6 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xvi.23.
8 See Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* (14:18).
10 Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* II.i.35ff.
necessary, according to the Apostle: and further, to argue from the superiority of the priesthood of Melchisedec to Aaron and his sons to the superiority of the priesthood of Christ, supposing Melchisedec and Christ the same person, is obviously a paralogism.¹

Conclusion

While the person of Melchizedek remains a mystery within the pages of inspired Scripture, we should take the text of Genesis 14:18f in its historical, grammatical sense just as the author of Hebrews did. We therefore understand that Melchizedek, in ways not revealed to us, was chosen by God to function as a priest even before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and that he did so as a human whose genealogical records went unrecorded. Thus, his priesthood was the result of direct, divine choosing and appointment. It is with this in mind that our author now goes on to explain how Yeshua functions as our heavenly high priest after the pattern of Melchizedek.

¹ John Brown, Hebrews, pp. 324–25; “paralogism” – a piece of illogical or fallacious reasoning, esp. one that appears superficially logical or that the reasoner believes to be logical.
Chapter Seven

Our author’s aim as we come to this chapter is to teach us about the high priestly office and work of Yeshua. He introduced this theme in seed form back in 5:10. But feeling that his readers might be slow to hear his message, he took the occasion to warn them and to encourage them not to deny their faith, but to follow strong after Yeshua the promised Messiah. Having finished this exhortation (chapter 6), he now returns to this very central and important topic, the priestly function of Yeshua as He now resides at the right hand of God (cf. 1:3, 13).

The question, of course, which drives this teaching is whether or not Yeshua could legitimately hold the office of high priest. The Torah teaches clearly that only those who trace their lineage back to Aaron could stand in the place of the high priest, and only those of the tribe of Levi could hold any priestly office. But Yeshua is not of Levi’s tribe. He belongs to the tribe of Judah. How is it possible, then, that He could function as a priest on behalf of His people?

The purpose of our author, then, is to show (1) that from ancient times there was a recognition that something greater than Levi existed, and that the high priesthood as established by God in Aaron and his sons was only foreshadowing a greater reality yet to come; (2) that Melchizedek stands as the prime example of just such a greater priesthood, and (3) that Yeshua was declared via oath to be a priest according to the Melchizedekian priesthood, not the Levitical. Obviously, if our author succeeds in proving his thesis, he has won the day.

1–2 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

king of Salem – The identification of this city with Jerusalem was widely held in 2nd Temple Judaisms. Note the following statements from Josephus and the Targum:

So Abram, when he had saved the captive Sodomites who had been taken by the Assyrians, and Lot also, his kinsman,
returned home in peace. Now the king of Sodom met him at a certain place, which they called The King’s Dale, where Melchizedek, king of the city Salem, received him. That name signifies the righteous king; and such he was without dispute, in somuch that, on this account, he was made the priest of God: however, they afterward called Salem Jerusalem.¹

Targum Onkelos on Gen 14:18 simply translates “Salem” as “Jerusalem”:

Then Melchizedek, the king of Jerusalem, brought out bread and wine, and he was serving before God Most High.

Some of the church fathers in the time of Jerome attempted to identify the city with Salem near Scythopolis, where the remains of Melchizedek’s palace were said to have been found.

Obviously, the root שָלָם (shalom) is closely tied to שָׁלֵם (shalem), “peace.” The text of Gen 14:18 has שָלֵם (shalem) with the Lxx transliterating the name as Σαλήμ, Salem. That the city of Jerusalem historically was known as שָלֵם, Shalem or Salem is corroborated by Ps 76:2[^3]

His tabernacle is in Salem (Σαλήμ, Lxx, εἰρήνη, “peace”); His dwelling place also is in Zion. (Ps 76:2[^3])

Thus, Melchizedek, as king of Salem (Jerusalem), was also “king of peace,” שָלֵם (cf. v. 2).

He is כֹּהֵן אֶל עֶלְיוֹן (kohēn ‘el ‘elyôn), “priest of God Most High.” In Gen 14:18, this fact is, like the person of Melchizedek, announced without explanation. That כֹּהֵן אֶל עֶלְיוֹן (el ‘elyôn) is to be identified with יהוה is made explicit in v. 22, for Abraham identifies the God he serves by that name:

Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to יהוה God Most High (אֶל עֶלְיוֹן, el ‘elyôn), possessor of heaven and earth…” (Gen 14:22)

Modern critics have found in this name (as in all other names of the Holy One), some veiled reference to the polytheism which Israel was supposed to have abandoned in her religious evolution. On the contrary, El ‘elyon is one of many names by which the God of Israel has re-

[^3]: Josephus, Antiquities 1.10.2.
vealed Himself and from earliest times. But the point that is to be made in the narrative of Genesis 14 is that the very God Whom Melchizedek served is One and the same God of Abraham.

... who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils – Melchizedek blessed Abraham as he returned from pursuing the kings who had conquered Sodom and Gomorrah and taken Lot and his family as captives. With only 318 men, Abraham had been able to overtake the victorious kings and conquer them completely, returning with Lot, his family, all their possessions, as well as a good deal of spoils taken from the defeated kings. The victory was obviously God-given, a matter which Melchizedek emphasizes in his blessing, for he calls God “the Possessor of heaven and earth” (קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ), a merism meaning “Possessor of everything.” In the act of blessing Abraham, Melchizedek acted in the position of a superior, a status which Abraham acknowledged by giving to him a tenth of the spoils. These facts become an important part of our author’s teaching about Melchizedek and the manner in which Yeshua functions in a similar way as high priest.

...was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. – The translation of his name is obvious: “king of peace” and “king of righteousness.” In both cases it is clear that our author wants us to see how these two titles prefigure the work of Yeshua as our high priest, for He has made peace for us with the Father, and we have been declared righteous on the basis of His sacrifice on our behalf. But these two words likewise characterize the Messianic kingdom which is a kingdom of righteousness and peace—the restoration of the world to its created purpose. And thus, these two words likewise characterize the King Who rules this everlasting kingdom, for He is the “Prince of peace” and the increase of His government and peace there will be no end (Is 9:6f). He will speak peace to the nations (Zech 9:9f). He is “the righteous Branch” (Jer 23:5; 33:15) whose name is “Adonai our Righteousness” (Jer 23:6). Moreover, as King He is just, not judging by the sight of His eyes or the hearing of His ears, but with righteousness based upon His divine omniscience (Is 11:3f). Thus, as King He will administer righteousness and as priest He will justify or declare and make righteous all who trust in Him.

being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Yeshua; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of
God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Yeshua. (Rom 3:24–26)

3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

The question is whether or not this statement regarding Melchizedek is to be taken literally, i.e., that he was not born as a normal human would have been, or if it is to be understood figuratively, i.e., that though he obviously had parents and a family line, there simply is no recorded genealogy for him in the biblical record, a fact that would work well for our author’s teaching.

Those that claim Melchizedek to be a pre-incarnate appearance of the Messiah (a “christophony”) have a grave difficulty to overcome, namely, that in no other case of a pre-incarnate appearance of Yeshua do those people to whom He appears approach Him and interact with Him as they would with a common person. Rather, in each case the very presence of the Messiah occasioned either gestures of worship or a subsequence reference to the One who had appeared in terms reserved only for deity. Yet in the Gen 14 account, Melchizedek, while standing in a very high position, is nonetheless treated as a man, not worshiped or even reverenced as possessing a divine nature.

The lack of recorded genealogy is an important point in our author’s argument, for it proves that one may be a priest of the highest order even though there is no connection to the tribe of Levi, and no lineage to Aaron. Furthermore, since there is no record of the death of Melchizedek, it stands to reason that he continues to function in his priestly office, since for the high priest, his office was secure, passed on to a successor only at his death.

Such a remarkable omission by the Torah (the genealogy of an important figure like Melchizedek) parallels the eternal life of the Son of God, whose goings are “from ancient times” (Mic 5:2), whose being is eternal even though He took upon Himself a human body at a point in history. The parallels of Melchizedek and Yeshua are too remarkable to be a mere coincidence. They no doubt mark Melchizedek out as a divinely sculptured foreshadowing of the Messiah who would Himself fulfill the office of high priest in a perfect way. And this is the point: such an idea was not new, but was well in place since the time of
Abraham, the one to whom God announced the gospel in Messiah (cf. Gal 3:8).

Regarding the silence about Melchizedek’s genealogy, Hughes remarks:

The description *without father or mother or genealogy*, accordingly, should not be taken literalistically.... The point is that these assertions apply positively to Christ, not to Melchizedek. The significance of the biblical silence is that it marks Melchizedek out as a type who in these respects *resembles the Son of God*, who alone exists eternally, from eternity to eternity. Surrounded by this silence, Melchizedek is the figure, but Christ is the reality. The incarnate Son, it is true, insofar as he was one with us in our humanity, had a human mother and human genealogy...and a human birth as well as a human death (of which our author has much to say). But as the Son of God he is eternally the same and his years will never end (Heb 1:12; 13:8).  

4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.

The stature of Melchizedek is now brought into the discussion, and particularly the manner in which Melchizedek is superior in rank to the priests descended from Levi. The argument for Melchizedek’s superiority is based upon the following premises:

(1) Abraham, seen as the patriarch of Israel, gives the tithes of the choicest spoils to Melchizedek. That is to say, if someone so great as Abraham gives tithes to one, Melchizedek, then clearly this Melchizedek occupies a status superior to that of Abraham.

(2) The Levites, who themselves receive tithes from their brethren (that is, their countrymen, those who have genealogical unity with them), and who also live and die and are therefore replaced by their descendants, paid tithes to Melchizedek (who has a perpetual priesthood since there is no record of his death or of anyone except Yeshua succeeding him in the priestly office). They paid this tithe by proxy through Abraham, since Levi would, in time, come from the loins of Abraham.

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1 Hughes, *Hebrews*, pp. 248–49.
(3) Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Gen 14:19) with a priestly blessing, proving that he was superior to the patriarch, for it is an accepted fact that the lesser is blessed by the greater.

The obvious conclusion of such an argument is that the priesthood which derives from Melchizedek must be superior to that which derives from Abraham, since Melchizedek is seen to have a superior rank when compared to Abraham.

5–6 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office have commandment in the Torah to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.

The Torah does not prescribe that a tenth of war spoils be given to the priests, but rather that all material captured in war is qerem or “under the ban” (cf. Deut 20:16-18; Josh 6:21, 24). The practice of tithing war spoils was common in the Greek culture but not in Israel.

The general laws of the tithe related to agricultural materials, which were to be tithed yearly to the tribe of Levi, and then this was tithed (a tithe of the tithe) and given directly to those of Levi who served as priests (Lev 18:21; cf. Num 18:26ff).

The point our author intends to make, however, is not to demonstrate the law of tithing but to show that Abraham voluntarily paid tithes to Melchizedek and therefore acknowledged his superior ranking.

In Nehemiah’s time the Levites received the tithes under the supervision of the priests and brought the “tithe of the tithes” to the temple to be handed over to the priests (Neh 10:38ff). In the first century, however, it seems most likely that the administration of the tithes themselves was handled by the priests.

The necessity to verify genealogy in order to function as a priest

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1 The Greek τὴν ἱερατείαν λαμβάνοντες, “receive the priest’s office” utilizes the noun ἱερατεία, “priestly office/service” and is found only here and in Lk 1:9 in the Apostolic Scriptures. The noun is commonly used in the Lxx (17x). More common is the noun ἱερωσύνη, “priestly office, priesthood,” found three times in Hebrews (7:11–12, 24). While ἱερωσύνη is more abstract than ἱερατεία, the two terms are essentially synonymous.
was obvious in the first century. What makes our author’s case so strong is that no one would deny that Melchizedek functioned as a priest, and that Abraham himself acknowledged this priestly office by paying tithes. Thus, it is established that a non-Levitical man, Melchizedek, fulfilled the duties of a priest, was honored as a priest by Abraham, and pronounced a blessing over Abraham proving his superiority.

Abraham is described as “the one who had the promises” (τὸν ἔχοντα τὰς ἐπαγγελίας). The Greek would be more literally translated as “the one having the promises” (τὸν ἔχοντα being a present participle) and thus identifies Abraham as the one with whom God made a covenant which contains promises of divine blessing. Moreover, since the covenant with Abraham is clearly monergistic, God alone securing it and bringing it to completion, and since it is also eternal (Gen 13:15; 17:7, 19), the blessings remain as the covenant is established from generation to generation. This, in fact, is the point Paul makes in Gal 3 when he writes:

> Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Messiah. What I am saying is this: the Torah, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on Torah, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. (Gal 3:15–18)

**7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.**

We find this axiom substantiated by the Torah itself: Isaac pronounces a blessing upon Jacob (Gen 28:1), Jacob blesses his sons (Gen 49:28), and Moses blesses the Israelites (Deut 33). Our author takes it as self-evident that the one with greater honor bestows a blessing upon one less than himself, and not vice versa.

Thus, since God made an eternal, unilateral covenant with Abraham which contains promises of blessing, and since Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, tithes which were not obligatory but voluntary, this proves that from Abraham’s own perspective, Melchizedek deserved to be honored as one greater than himself.
8–10 In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Our author now returns to his initial argument for the superiority of Melchizedek, namely, “having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (7:3). He has shown that Melchizedek must be superior to Abraham since he blessed Abraham, but here Melchizedek’s superiority is evident because there is no record of his death and therefore no record that he passed his priestly office to someone in the next generation.

Concerning Melchizedek and his immortality, our author writes “of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.” The “witness” is that of Scripture which is frequently described in Hebrews as providing testimony,¹ and though (as we have seen) the Qumran society apparently held Melchizedek as a heavenly being, this is not the point of our author and not something he believed.²

Another token of Melchizedek’s superiority to the Levitical priesthood is this: nowhere is it related that Melchizedek lost his priestly office by death, whereas we have the record, generation after generation, of Levitical priests who died and had to hand on their dignity and duty to their heirs. The tithe prescribed by Israelite law is paid to mortal men; the tithe which Abraham gave Melchizedek was received by one who, so far as the record goes, has no “end of life.” So far as the record goes, for our author is not interested in anything that might be known or inferred about Melchizedek outside the biblical narrative.³

Indeed, those who have derived from this text the idea that Melchizedek never died have missed the point of our author, which is that the biblical text must be received as the substantiating witness, and that the biblical record is silent regarding his death. As Calvin notes:

He takes the silence respecting his death, as I have said, as an evidence of his life. This would not indeed hold as to others,

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² Contra Attridge, Hebrews, p. 196.
³ F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, p. 141.
but as to Melchisedec it ought rightly to be so regarded, in as much as he was a type of Christ. For as the spiritual kingdom and priesthood of Christ are spoken of here, there is no place left for human conjectures; nor is it lawful for us to seek to know anything farther than what we read in Scriptures. But we are not hence to concluded that the man who met Abraham is yet alive, as some have childishly thought, for this is to be applied to the other person whom he represented, even the Son of God. And by these words the Apostle intended to shew, that the dignity of Melchisedec’s priesthood was to be perpetual, while that of the Levites was temporary.\(^1\)

And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. – The Hebraic concept of corporate solidarity is fully in play here. We see this idea fully in play when one considers that Adam is portrayed as the father of all mankind and thus his fall into sin affects all of mankind as well (Rom 5:12). Similarly, the promise made to Abraham accrues to all of his descendants. With this concept in mind, it is easy to see the manner of our author’s argument: Levi was Abraham’s great-grandson. An ancestor is regarded in biblical thought as containing within himself all his descendants (cf. Gen 25:23; Mal 1:2ff; Rom 9:1).

Thus, on the basis of corporate solidarity, when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek it was as though Levi was likewise paying the tithe since he was to be one of the descendants of Abraham. It was not as though Levi physically gave tithes but that he did so under the umbrella of corporate solidarity. Our author realizes that he has made a logical argument based upon what the biblical text says as well as what it does not say, and that it therefore might appear far-fetched to some. As a result, he adds “so to speak” (καὶ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν) to alert the reader to this “corporate solidarity” line of reasoning.

In summary of these verses, the obvious purpose of the whole argument is to show the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over that of the Levitical priesthood and office. It is superior on essentially two grounds: first, that there is no record of the death of Melchizedek, which means he never relinquished his priestly office to one who would succeed him. Does this mean that his priesthood ceased? No, for we have already seen that David’s Lord is a priest “after the order Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). From this it is clear that Melchizedek’s priesthood foreshadowed that of the heavenly Messiah Who would, like

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\(^1\) Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*, pp. 162–63.
Melchizedek, have this priesthood in perpetuity.

The second way that Melchizedek is seen to be superior to Levi is that, in one sense, Levi gave tithes to him. This indicates that Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to that of Levi for the lesser pays tithes to the greater.

11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Torah), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?

The term “perfection” in this verse is the Greek term τελείωσις (teleiosis) which is cognate to the verb τελέω (teleō), “to complete an activity or process”; “to carry out an obligation,” “to reach the goal,” “to conclude.” This word family has the sense of “bring to completion” or “obtain a goal,” and is often translated with the English term “perfect” or “perfection” in the sense of “grown up” (=mature). Here, as in many cases, the original sense of “reaching the goal” should be understood.

First, we should remind ourselves of the goal, the point to which all of God’s redemptive work is heading. This goal is nothing more nor less than God dwelling among His people, He being their God, and they being His chosen people.

With this goal in mind, it is clear that the Levitical priesthood in and of itself could never bring about this goal, nor was it ever designed to do so. This point is most important, for if God instituted the Levitical priesthood and the institutions of the Tabernacle and Temples which they maintained, along with the service which they performed, to make sinners righteous, then this creates a host of insurmountable theological problems. First is the obvious fact that given such a scenario one would have to conclude that God failed in His original plan of redemption. For if the sacrifices and the priestly rituals actually made sinners righteous in God’s eyes, then why would there be the need for a priest after the order of Melchizedek as promised to David? Second, and even more egregious, is the fact that if it were possible for the Levitical priesthood to have rendered sinners righteous before God, then

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1 All of the English translation I checked used the English word “perfection” to translate τελείωσις in our verse (NASB, NIV, ESV, NET, RSV, NRSV, KJV, ASV).
2 This phrase is common in covenant contexts, cf. Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; Ezek 36:28; Joel 2:26–27.
the death and resurrection of Yeshua was not absolutely necessary. Which leads to the third major difficulty: if the sacrificial system was designed by God to render guilty sinners innocent, then there are various methods of salvation, not just one.

On the contrary, our author proceeds on the premise that there is, and only can be, one way of salvation. Thus, the priesthood and all of the laws pertaining to it were initiated by God through Moses and the Torah in order to foreshadow the final, redemptive work of Yeshua Who alone can bring redemption and a rebirth of the soul. The Scriptures are replete with evidence that salvation is by faith alone—faith in the Promised One and His work—and that all people in all generations who are eternally saved have been given eternal life by God’s grace.\(^1\)

The Levitical priesthood is in every way bound up with the Torah. Not only did the Torah prescribe the exact manner in which they were to perform their duties, but it was also because the Torah was so regularly broken by the people that the sacrificial system was in constant demand. If, therefore, the Torah prescribes the duties of the Levitical priesthood and yet Psalm 110 describes a priesthood which is other than Levitical, we may conclude two things: first, the Levitical priesthood was not designed to bring in the goal, i.e., the redemption of all the elect, and thus another priesthood has been established. Second, that this other priesthood has been established must indicate that it operates under different laws since it does not conform to the Torah requirements that priests be of the house of Aaron. And this is clear since this other priesthood is seen to be established before the giving of the Torah and that it has no end.

Indeed, the very fact that the Melchizedek priesthood is spoken of in Psalm 110:4, hundreds of years after the Levitical priesthood was ordained and initiated, proves that the Levitical priesthood was not sufficient to reach the final goal and that something different was therefore necessary. It further proves that God never intended the Levitical priesthood to bring about the redemption of the elect, but that its ultimate function was to foreshadow and reveal the final redemption in the promised One, the Messiah.

The mention of Aaron, of course, alerts the reader to the fact that the office of High Priest is the focus of our author’s attention.

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\(^1\) E.g., Gen 6:8; 15:6; Is 53; Joel 2:32; Hab 2:4; Ps 32:1–2.
12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of Torah also.

The obvious change to which our author points is this: Melchizedek and Yeshua, Who is priest after the order of Melchizedek, are clearly not from the tribe of Levi and therefore not from the family of Aaron. He has already emphasized that Melchizedek lived two generations before Levi, and quite obviously David is from the tribe of Judah, not Levi. Therefore, since the Torah clearly states that those who function as priests must be from the line of Aaron and that the priests’ assistants must likewise be from the tribe of Levi, neither Yeshua nor Melchizedek qualify on the basis of physical lineage. The only conclusion that one can reach, if in fact Melchizedek and Yeshua are bone fide priests, is that the requirement for physical lineage has been waived and this appears to mean that there has been a change in the Torah regarding the requirements for priests.

But first let us note specifically what our author is stating and the obvious premise from which he makes his assertion. If he were teaching that the Torah has been abolished and is no longer applicable, then he would not be teaching that a change of the Torah must take place. One would never consider that a law which has been decommissioned ever needs to be changed! Once a law ceases to be law, it no longer is enforceable and is therefore no longer considered viable or necessary to be administrated. So, the fact that our author speaks of a change taking place means that he considers the Torah to be active and viable. Indeed, the viability of the Torah is why he feels the necessity to speak to the issue of priestly lineage in the first place.

Secondly, the “change” (μετατιθημι, metatithēmi) of the priesthood “necessitates” (ἐξ ἀνάγκης, ex anagnēs) “a change” (μετάθεσις, metathesis) of Torah. Christian commentators from ancient times have viewed this verse as proof that the coming of Yeshua brought about a fundamental amending of the Torah with some parts being entirely abolished. This viewpoint, in turn, brought the question of whether a future Temple could be established (as prophesied by Ezekiel) and became one of the compelling forces for an allegorical interpretation of Ezekiel 40–48 which posited that the “Temple” he prophesied was the non-physical “temple” of the Christian Church. The reasoning is quite obvious: if the realization of Yeshua’s heavenly priesthood established the fact that the Torah’s requirement of physical lineage from Aaron was abolished,

1 E.g., Ex 28:41; Num 3:10.
then to reestablish the Aaronic priesthood in a future millennial Temple would be an impossibility. For that which Yeshua abolished by His death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly intercession could not again be reinstated. In point of fact, those who hold that Yeshua abolished the “old legislation” (i.e., the so-called “ceremonial” part of the Torah) likewise reason that if the Temple and Aaronic priesthood were to be reestablished in a future millennial Temple, this would be akin to blasphemy, for it would indicate that Yeshua’s sacrifice was not, in and of itself, sufficient for the salvation of sinners.

This whole issue, i.e., what exactly the sacrificial and priestly service in the Tabernacle and Temples accomplished, is of utmost importance for understanding our author’s teaching in this and subsequent chapters. Let us therefore consider this question more closely.

----- Excursus: the Sacrificial Offerings in the Tabernacle & Temples¹ -----

What Did the Animal Sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temples Accomplish?

The first question that confronts us when we discuss animal sacrifices in the Tabernacle and subsequent Temples is what they actually accomplished in terms of the salvation of sinners. Many Christians believe that before the coming of Yeshua, people who were true believers in God had their sins forgiven on the basis of bringing a sacrifice as commanded in the Torah. They further believe that once Yeshua was crucified on the cross as the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin, there was no longer any need to bring animal sacrifices since His death was the ultimate and final sin sacrifice.

But the author of Hebrews surely did not believe that God forgave sins on the basis of the animal sacrifices offered by priests in the Tabernacle and Temple. Note Hebrews 10:1–4:

> For the Torah, since it has a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Heb 10:1–4)

¹ This Excursus is taken from my book Why We Keep Torah: Ten Persistent Questions (TorahResource, 2009), pp. 25ff.
The first thing to note is that some of the English translations add a pejorative term to the first verse, suggesting that the Torah is “only” or “merely” a shadow of the good things to come. Here are two examples:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come… (ESV)
For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come… (NASB)

But neither the word “but” nor the word “only” of the above translations is represented in the Greek. The point of the author is not that a shadow is bad or unimportant, but that it portrays the existence of something, yet is not the thing itself. In other words, the sacrifices functioned to substantiate the method by which God forgives sins, but they did not provide the very means for this forgiveness.

This is precisely the point he makes in the next verses. If an animal sacrifice could actually function to remove forever the sin of the one who brought the sacrifice, then there would be no need to keep bringing sacrifices. The yearly Yom Kippur sacrifice would suffice for all of one’s sins. But the very fact that the Yom Kippur sacrifice was required every year made it clear that it did not remove the sins of Israel. This is because the sacrifices were never given by God to bring about the removal of sins in a final and ultimate sense. It is not because there was something wrong with sacrifices in general, or the Yom Kippur sacrifice (the yearly sacrifice) in specific, but because the animal sacrifices commanded by God in the Torah were never given for that purpose. As the author of Hebrews states, “It is impossible (ἀδύνατος, adunatos = “unable,” “powerless,” “impossible”) for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The animal sacrifices could never “make perfect” (τελειῶ, teleioō) those who “draw near” (to “draw near” is a technical term for “bring a sacrifice” since the Hebrew קָרְבָּן, qorban, “a sacrificial offering,” is based upon the verb קָרַב, karav, “to draw near”).

Some might argue that the animal sacrifices simply “covered” the sins of those who brought them, awaiting the time of the Messiah’s appearance when, by His own sacrifice, the sins would be removed. But this does not match up with the Scriptures. For instance, David writes in Ps 32:1–2,

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! (Ps 32:1–2)
David speaks of sins actually being “forgiven,” and the parallel term, “covered,” does not mean simply “set aside” or “overlooked,” but actually paid for. This is made clear by the second line, which pronounces blessing upon the person “to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.” If the Lord does not impute iniquity to a person, it means that the iniquity has been entirely removed. This is precisely how Paul interprets Psalm 32:1-2 when he quotes it in Romans 4:6–8,

...just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.” (Rom 4:6–8)

Note carefully how Paul interprets David’s words. He states that when lawless deeds are forgiven or sins covered—when the Lord does not take into account one’s sins—it is equivalent to having righteousness credited to one’s account. As Cranfield notes:

...his appeal to the psalm-passage has an inward and substantial validity, for God’s reckoning righteousness to a man “apart from works” is, in fact, equivalent to His forgiving of sin.2

David was not under the impression that his sins had simply been “covered” in the sense of “overlooked” for a time! Rather, he understood that God had actually removed his sin on the basis of His promise to send the Messiah as the sin bearer, the very Messiah in whom David had placed his faith. This accords with David’s words in Psalm 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Indeed, according to Peter in his Shavuot sermon, David knew not only that the Messiah would come, but also that He would die and be resurrected (Acts 2:30–31):

And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS

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1 Here, the verb “to cover” is כסה, kasah. For a short study on the Hebrew verb כפר (kafar), see my article entitled “Thoughts on the Meaning of the Hebrew Word Kafar, ‘To Atone,’” available in the Articles section of TorahResource.
2 C.E.B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans, 2 Vols (T & T Clark, 1975), 1.233.
This is Paul’s main point in Romans 4 where he quotes the Psalmist, namely, that the manner of salvation (including the forgiveness of sins by faith in the work of Messiah Yeshua) was the same for David as it was for the Romans. That means it is impossible that salvation in the “Old Testament” was based upon the forgiveness of sins via animal sacrifice, while salvation in the “New Testament” was via faith in Yeshua as the sacrifice for sins. Neither David nor Paul believed that there were two ways of salvation, one before the incarnation of Yeshua, and a different one after His incarnation.

“But,” someone might argue, “doesn’t the biblical text itself state that offering an animal sacrifice actually atoned for sin?” Yes, it does. Note the following examples:

**in regard to the sin offering:**
All its fat he shall offer up in smoke on the altar as in the case of the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him in regard to his sin, and he will be forgiven. (Lev 4:26, cf. Num 15:28)

**with regard to the guilt offering:**
The second he shall then prepare as a burnt offering according to the ordinance. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin which he has committed, and it will be forgiven him. (Lev 5:10)

**with regard to individual transgression**
He shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him. (Lev 19:21–22)

At first reading, these texts seem to contradict what the author of Hebrews clearly states. Here, in the few examples given from the Torah (and there are many more), the animal sacrifice atones for the transgressor and his sin is forgiven. But in Hebrews we read that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Since we begin with the premise that the book of Hebrews is part of the inspired word of
God, we proceed on the basis that there must be a way to reconcile what at first appears to be contradictory. And there is.

When we look further at the use of atonement language in the Torah, we see that atonement is said to bring about ritual purity. Note the following examples:

*in the consecration of the altar*
For seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it; then the altar shall be most holy, and whatever touches the altar shall be holy. (Ex 29:37)

*in a return to the status of ritual purity for someone who has become ceremonially unclean, e.g., for a woman after childbearing*
Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female. (Lev 12:7)

*for a person with skin disease*
The priest shall next offer the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Then afterward, he shall slaughter the burnt offering. The priest shall offer up the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be clean. (Lev. 14:19–20)

Surely the altar had no sin of its own, nor is it a sin to give birth to a child. Moreover, one could not say that contracting a disease is necessarily connected with one’s own sin. This was specifically taught by Yeshua when He healed the man who was born blind:

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” Yeshua answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:1–3)

What do we learn from this? We learn that atonement as spoken of in the Scriptures functions on two levels: one related to the sanctity of

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1 Note also Deut 32:43 where the text speaks of making atonement for “the land.”
the earthly Tabernacle or Temple (we may designate this as “temporal atonement”) and one related to one’s eternal standing in righteousness before God (we may designate this as “eternal atonement”).

This may be illustrated by reconciliation between people, and reconciliation between God and a sinner. If a person sins against another person causing a breach in their friendship, the person sinned against may forgive the offender, bringing about reconciliation between them. But this does not necessarily mean that the sin has been forgiven by God. If the offender seeks both to be forgiven by his neighbor as well as by God, then both temporal and eternal forgiveness is established.

Now let’s apply this to the issue of ritual purity. In the administration of the Tabernacle and Temple, there was to be a clear distinction between those who were ritually pure or clean, and those who were not. In short, ritual impurity or being ceremonially unclean resulted from some connection to death. For instance, the flow of blood following childbirth appeared as a small death (as did the monthly flow of blood in menstruation). Likewise, a skin disease or bodily discharge had a connection to death, since in severe cases, such conditions could bring about physical death. Since the dwelling place of God (Tabernacle or Temple) was to be a demonstration of the fact that God is the God of life and not death, all connection to death, including one’s own sin, barred a person from participation in the activities carried on in the sacred space of the Tabernacle or Temple. As we know, sin is connected to death from the very beginning: “…for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). Thus, the bringing of the appropriate sacrifice functioned in two significant ways: 1) it cleared the way for the person to return to a status of ritual purity so that person could come to the Tabernacle or Temple and participate in the worship prescribed by God, and 2) it demonstrated the divine method of forgiving sins eternally, that is, through the death of an innocent victim dying in the place of the one who had sinned. In this way, all of the sacrifices were signposts pointing forward to the Messiah, Yeshua, Who would come and, in fulfillment of the words of the Prophets, make full and eternal payment for the sins of His people, all who would believe in Him. Those genuine believers who lived before the coming of Yeshua had their sins eternally forgiven by placing their faith in the Messiah Who was yet to come.

The author of Hebrews himself makes it clear that the sacrifices did have a temporal function:
For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:13–14)

Here, he states that the sacrifices did bring about the “cleansing of the flesh,” meaning that they effected ritual purity. His point is that these animal sacrifices could not cleanse the conscience (v. 9) but they could cleanse the flesh. His comparison is that the sacrifice of Yeshua is so much better because through His work, the conscience can be cleansed. He sees the animal sacrifices as functioning in the temporal realm to effect ritual purity and Yeshua’s sacrifice (to which the animal sacrifices pointed) as effecting eternal cleansing, that is, the cleansing of the conscience or the heart.

But there is another important distinction that our author makes between the temporal effect of the animal sacrifices and the eternal atonement secured by the sacrifice of Yeshua: the animal sacrifices needed to be repeated in order to bring about ritual purity, but the sacrifice of Yeshua was accomplished once for all time:

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, (Heb 10:11–12)

It is the purpose of Hebrew’s author to show the utter superiority of Yeshua’s sacrifice to those of the animal sacrifices. He does this primarily by showing that 1) Yeshua’s sacrifice has eternal consequences since by His sacrifice eternal payment is made for one’s sins and therefore their sins are eternally forgiven, whereas the animal sacrifices effect only temporal cleansing/forgiveness, and 2) that Yeshua’s sacrifice was once-for-all-time whereas the animal sacrifices must be continually repeated (since a person may often contract ritual impurity).

In making his point that the sacrifice of Yeshua was a once-for-all-time event, He states: “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin” (Heb 10:18). This has often been read by Christian commentators to mean that once Yeshua offered Himself as the eternal sacrifice for sin, there is no longer a need for the animal sacrifices known as sin offerings. But this interpretation fails to take into account the larger context. The author’s point is that unlike the animal sacrifices that are offered day after day and year after
year, Yeshua’s sacrifice was a once-for-all-time event. Thus, he quotes Jeremiah 31:34, “and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more,” and uses this as the final substantiation for his argument: since God will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds, it is clear that there is no need for Yeshua to offer Himself time and time again as the sacrifice in payment for their sins. Our author has already stated (10:4) that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin, so he cannot be teaching here that the sin offerings of the Temple did take away sin at one time, but since the death of Yeshua they are no longer needed as they were before. Rather, he is making an obvious observation: once a transgression has been cleared, there is no longer any need for sacrifice in relationship to that transgression. This was demonstrated by the animal sacrifices as well. If a woman gave birth to a child, she was required to bring the appropriate sacrifice if she were to return to the status of ritual purity. But once she brought her sacrifice for that event, she no longer needed to bring another one for that same event. Thus, since the sacrifice of Yeshua cleanses the conscience, forgiving all of one’s sins in the court of Heaven, there is no need for Yeshua to ever offer Himself again as the sacrifice for sinners.

This fact, that the Tabernacle and Temple services and ordinances along with the priestly administration of the animal sacrifices revealed God’s way of forgiving sins, is emphasized by Paul as well. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he raises the question why the Torah was given in the first place, especially since he has emphasized the promise made to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant. We read this in Gal 3:19.

Why the Torah then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

Once again, many have read this verse to mean that the Torah, with its sacrificial service, was given because of Israel’s transgressions, and that it ceased to have any purpose when the Seed (Who is Yeshua, cf. 3:16) came Who was the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham. Some with this in mind have suggested that the Torah was given as punishment to Israel because of the sin of the golden calf. But this idea can be immediately dismissed when we remember that Paul considers the Torah to be righteous, holy, and good: “So then, the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12). Moreover, Paul considers the Torah to be spiritual, meaning endowed
with the power of the Spirit: “For we know that the Torah is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Rom 7:14). So Paul agreed with the Scriptures, that the Torah is pure, right, good, clean, enduring forever, and that it is to be desired far more than even precious gold—that it is sweeter than honey because it brings not only temporal but eternal blessings (cf. Ps 19:11ff).

So what did Paul mean when he wrote to the Galatians that the Torah was given “because of transgressions?” First, in the context, Paul is giving a positive, not a negative reason for why the Torah was given. His point in the prior context is that the Torah, given four hundred and thirty years after the giving of the Abrahamic covenant did not annul or somehow replace the promises given to Abraham. This means that the giving of the Torah must be complimentary to, or in harmony with, the former covenant. Thus, when he answers the question “Why the Torah, then?”, he is expressing how the Torah works together with the Abrahamic covenant to bring the promise of blessing.

Secondly, the phrase translated “because of transgressions” (τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη) could be better understood to mean “for the sake of transgressions.” The Greek word translated “because” by the NASB is χάριν, charin, which often indicates the goal to which something proceeds.¹ The point is that one primary function of the Torah was to show how God could remain just and still forgive sinners. On the basis of the Greek phrase itself, we could paraphrase the verse this way: “Why the Torah then? It was given (added to the revelation already given in the Abrahamic covenant) to reveal the divine method of dealing with transgressions.” It was given “for the sake of” transgressions—to show Israel how God would deal with transgressions, i.e., through the sacrifice of an innocent victim dying in the place of the guilty sinner. This reinforces that besides offering the means to obtain ritual purity and reconciliation of the sinner to the corporate worship of Israel, the sacrifices, indeed, the entire sacrificial system, functioned to reveal God’s way of forgiving sin, foreshadowing the sacrifice of Yeshua by Whom eternal forgiveness would be purchased for all who believe.

But how then are we to understand Paul’s statement that the Torah was given “for the sake of transgressions…until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made”? Does the Torah only function to teach about God’s method of dealing with sin until Yeshua arrived, and

¹ So BDAG, ad loc. χάριν, which gives “indicating the goal” as the first definition for χάριν.
then did it cease having this function? Here is where we get tripped up with our English word “until.” Generally, “until” means “up to a certain point and no further.” For example: “you’ll sit at this table, young man, until you finishing eating your peas!” That means the child sits there until he finishes his peas, and then (and only then) he leaves the table and no longer sits at it. But neither the Hebrew word עַד (ad, which is often translated “until”) nor the Greek word ἕχρι (axri) translated “until” in our verse, is bound to this meaning. Both words may have the sense of “marking a continuous extent of time up to a point”¹ but without necessarily implying that something ceases at that point.

A good example of this is the use of axri, the very word in our text, found in Job 32:11 of the Lxx:

> Hearken to my words; for I will speak in your hearing, until (axri) you shall have tried the matter with words.

These are the words of Elihu who had remained silent because of his youth. When he did speak, he asked the “friends” of Job to listen to his words until they understood his point. Now this does not mean that after they had come to understand his argument they would no longer listen to his words. Rather, the use of the preposition axri² means “listen to my words with a view to understanding what I am saying.” The preposition axri designates the goal to which his words proceeded, namely, that they should understand his argument.

Axri is used the same way in Galatians 3:19. Paul’s meaning is that the Torah was given as a revelation of how God would deal with sin, a revelation that always had the Messiah and His saving work as the goal. It is not that the Torah ceases to function in this way once Messiah has come, but simply that the Torah’s revelation of God’s method of forgiving sin always had Yeshua in focus. In other words, the revelation

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¹ BDAG, ad loc, ἕχρι.
² In Job 32:11, the Greek ἕχρι translates the Hebrew preposition עַד, ‘ad, often translated “until.” This Hebrew word may also have the sense of “with a view towards” or “marking continuous time up to a particular time or event.” Note Ps 110:1, “Sit at My right hand until (עַד) I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” This verse, referring to the session of Yeshua in the heavenlies, does not mean that once His enemies are subdued, He no longer sits at the right hand of the Father. Rather, it emphasizes the fact that Yeshua, in His high priestly work, secures both the blessing of His own people as well as the destruction of His enemies. His “sitting” (session) is “with a view toward” the subduing of His enemies.
of the Torah in terms of how God forgives transgressions functioned throughout the millennia as a witness to Messiah’s sacrifice for sin. This is exactly what Paul means when He writes in Rom 10:4 that Yeshua is the “goal (τελός, telos) of the Torah with regard to righteousness.” Thus, one of the main reasons that the Torah was given was to demonstrate God’s way of dealing with transgressions, ultimately pointing to the Seed through Whom the promise of blessing given to Abraham would be realized.

**Summary – What Did Animal Sacrifices Accomplish?**

We have seen that the animal sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temple did have a valid function, namely, effecting ritual purity and thus allowing the person or object that had become ritually impure to return to an acceptable status for participation in worship at the Tabernacle or Temple. In this sense, the animal sacrifices made atonement for the ritual impurities or personal event that separated a person from participation in the Tabernacle or Temple services. We have also noted that the sacrifices offered divine revelation about how God would forgive sins eternally (the innocent One paying the penalty for the guilty sinner), and how a person’s heart or conscience could be cleansed from the guilt of sin. We have seen the distinction between temporal and eternal atonement, the former dealing with the earthly Tabernacle, Temple, and membership in the Israelite community, while the latter having to do with God’s declaration of a sinner as eternally and completely forgiven in His presence on the basis of the coming Messiah’s sacrifice for sin.

**What Does This Mean for Us?**

Once we have seen how the Scriptures describe what the animal sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temple actually accomplished, we can see that they never detracted from the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Yeshua. Since the animal sacrifices were never given to make the infinite payment for sin which God requires, a payment only the infinite and eternal Son of God could accomplish, we recognize that offering a sacrifice at the Tabernacle or Temple could in no way diminish the value of Messiah’s death. Only if the Scriptures taught that animal sacrifices actually did make eternal payment for sin before the coming of Yeshua, could offering them after Yeshua’s death signal a disregard for what He had accomplished. In fact, the offering of sacrifices, rather than detracting
from Yeshua, point to His work of redeeming sinners.

We know that the Apostles never considered that offering sacrifices at the Temple might be construed as a disregard for the high and eternal value of Yeshua’s death. For instance, when Paul returned to Jerusalem after being sent out by the assembly at Antioch, it was told to him how many of the believing Jews in Jerusalem had heard false rumors about him, that he was teaching the Jewish people to forsake the Torah (Acts 21:20–21). James and the other Apostles knew this was entirely false and so they made a plan to prove to the Jerusalem community that Paul did live in accordance with the Torah himself, and that he taught others to do the same. The plan they agreed upon was to have Paul go to the Temple to participate with four other men who were completing their Nazirite vows as well, and to pay for their expenses in the whole matter (Acts 21:23–24). Obviously, the completion of a Nazirite vow required the offering of a sacrifice (Num 6:13ff). Clearly the Apostles could not have encouraged Paul to undertake this duty if they had the slightest notion that offering a sacrifice was an affront to the death of Yeshua.

The same is true of all believers in Yeshua who lived before the destruction of the Temple. If they traveled to Jerusalem for Passover, as the Torah commanded, they would have brought their Pesach sacrifice, offering it at the Temple and eating it at their Seder. The same would have been true for the other pilgrimage festivals (Shavuot and Sukkot), regarding which the Torah requires that the adult men of the family not come “empty-handed,” by which is meant that they were to bring the appropriate sacrifices and tithes (Deut 16:16). What is more, those believers living near the Temple would have doubtlessly participated in the Temple services, as did Peter and John (Acts 3:1), celebrating the daily services which were marked by the offering of the daily sacrifices. Had they thought that the sacrifices somehow diminished the glory and finality of the death of Yeshua, surely they would not have participated.

Moreover, if the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temple actually did make an eternal and acceptable payment for one’s sin, there would have been no need for Yeshua to die. Does anyone really think that God would have given His own dear Son to be sacrificed for the sins of His people if the sacrifice of an animal would have sufficed to do the same thing? But the reality is, as we have shown, that the animal sacrifices never did take away sin in an eternal or ultimate sense. This is because sin is an infinite transgression against the infinite holiness of God, and therefore only an infinite sacrifice, the death of the eternal and sinless Son of God, could make such payment.
Will There Be Sacrifices in the Millennium?

The notion that the death of Yeshua did away with the sacrifices is also controverted by the description of the millennial Temple in Ezekiel’s prophecy. In Ezekiel 40–48, he describes in great detail a Temple that has yet to be built, and also describes many of the activities that will take place in this Temple. Note the following examples:

In the porch of the gate were two tables on each side, on which to slaughter the burnt offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering. (Ezek 40:39)

Then he said to me, “The north chambers and the south chambers, which are opposite the separate area, they are the holy chambers where the priests who are near to the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall lay the most holy things, the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering; for the place is holy.” (Ezek 42:13)

It shall be the prince’s part to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the drink offerings, at the feasts, on the new moons and on the sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel; he shall provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel.” (Ezek 45:17)

Here we see that in the millennial Temple, the sacrificial system is re-instated. We do not have sufficient time or space to discuss all of the issues relating to Ezekiel’s Temple, but the point that is relevant to our current study is that a Temple, which by all accounts is yet future, will see the return of all of the sacrifices, including the guilt and sin offerings. Moreover, the Prince (whom many think represents Yeshua), is also involved in the sacrificial service.

What will be the purpose of these sacrifices? I would maintain that their purpose is precisely the same as was the purpose of the sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle and former Temples: 1) as part of what the Torah requires for a purifying objects and people in order that they might be ritually pure and therefore able to participate in the Temple service. In short, to effect temporal atonement in relationship to the Temple itself, and 2) to be God’s revelation of the method by which He forgives sinners, that is, through the death of an innocent victim paying the penalty for the one who has transgressed. Even as the sacrifices in the Tabernacle and 1st and 2nd Temples foreshadowed the sacrifice
of Yeshua, the “Lamb slain before the foundations of the earth,”\(^1\) so the sacrifices in the millennial Temple will point back to Him and His saving work on the cross as an infinite sacrifice. The former sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temples constituted a foreshadowing of Messiah’s work; the sacrifices in the millennium will be a memorial of the saving work He accomplished.

Some would argue that once the reality has come, there is no longer any need for that which illustrates the reality. In terms of our current topic, once Yeshua, the complete and infinite sacrifice, has come, there is no longer any need for the animal sacrifices that illustrate or point to His death. Yet this is to misunderstand the function of an illustration or a picture. A picture freezes in time an important event or person. This is why we look through wedding albums for years after the wedding took place. Using the logic of those who argue that once Yeshua has come, there is no longer any need for the picture of His death portrayed in the sacrifices, one might also think that a wedding album is useless to a man and his wife who have been married for many years. Yet we know that is not the case. The pictures in that album bring to one’s mind the specifics of that very important event. Similarly, only a relatively few people actually saw the crucifixion of our Messiah, Yeshua. The agony and supreme price that He paid to set us free from our sins is known to us only through the words of others. We can seek to envision what it must have been like, and even enact dramas to appreciate more fully what our Lord underwent in His death. But I have a sense that the re-instituting of the sacrificial system in the millennial Temple, pointing as it will to the death of Yeshua, will enable those who participate to appreciate in a very real and substantial way the manner in which He gave His life for us. Like the pictures in the wedding album that bring the very moment of that grand event so clear to the memory, so the slaughter of an innocent animal on behalf of one who needs to return to ritual purity will bring in vivid relief the price that was paid for their eternal redemption.

Moreover, in the time of Yeshua’s life upon this earth, the majority of Israel were blind to who He was and to the work He accomplished on the cross. In the millennial Temple, regathered Israel will not only look upon the pierced One, but will also have a new appreciation for

\(^1\) Cf. Rev 5:6; 13:8 (though whether the phrase “from the foundations of the world” modifies the verb “written” or “slain” is disputed. See the NIV and the explanation in the NET Bible). That the salvation of the elect was secured even before the coming of Yeshua is clearly taught by the Apostles, cf. Eph 1:4; 2Tim 1:9.
the message previously missed in the sacrifices. Having come to con-
fess that Yeshua truly is Israel’s Messiah, the opportunity to participate
in the sacrifices as a memorial to His death as the Lamb of God will be
meaningful indeed!

---------- End of Excursus ----------

12 (con’t.) For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there
takes place a change of Torah also.

Having reckoned with the fact that the animal sacrifices as offered
in the Tabernacle and Temples in no way compete with the once-for-
all-time sacrifice of Yeshua on behalf of His people, we are in a much
better position to interpret our author’s statement regarding a “change
of Torah” (μετατιθεμένης γὰρ τῆς ἱερωσύνης). As the following verses (vv.
13–17) make clear, the obvious issue is quite simple: the Torah limits the
priesthood (those who “approach the altar,” v. 13) to the tribe of Levi
and the family of Aaron. Since Yeshua is of the tribe of Judah, for Him
to function as a priest appears to go contrary to the Torah itself. Yet,
as we have already seen, our author in no way teaches that the Torah
has been abolished. Indeed, his somewhat lengthy explanation of how
Yeshua could legitimately carry out the duties of a priest is necessary
only because he considers the Torah to be active and authoritative.

The point is this: our author wants his readers constantly to re-
member that the earthly Tabernacle was representative of the true and
ultimate Tabernacle which is in heaven, and that the ceremonies and
sacrifices which took place in the earthly Tabernacle were therefore re-
velatory of the ultimate priestly activity in the heavenlies, carried forth
by Yeshua. Our author’s explanation, then, is that the regulations for
the priesthood contained in the Torah given to Moses pertain to the
earthly Tabernacle, itself a shadow of the heavenly Tabernacle (8:5; 10:1).
But these regulations do not obtain in the heavenly Tabernacle. Thus,
one must recognize that there is a different law, that is, a change in the
law which governs the heavenly Tabernacle when compared to the law
which governs the earthly.

Moreover, our author reasons from the reality of Yeshua’s priest-
hood to the necessary change of law when comparing the earthly and
heavenly Tabernacles. For since it is clear that Yeshua functions as
priest in the heavenly Tabernacle, it is clear that the requirement of
being from the tribe of Levi obtains only in the earthly and not the
heavenly Tabernacle. Thus, in 8:4 our author states:
Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Torah; (Heb 8:4)

Here, once again, we see that the author of Hebrews surely considers the Torah to be authoritative and active, not something abolished by the death of Yeshua. Moreover, he makes a clear distinction between priests who serve on the earth and Yeshua as priest in the heavenly Tabernacle.

Given these considerations, the conclusion seems obvious: those laws given in the Torah to regulate and define priestly service upon the earth do not apply to the priestly service of Yeshua in heaven. The laws given to govern the earthly priesthood and Tabernacle were so given in order to make the earthly a revelatory “shadow” of the real Tabernacle, the one in heaven. But the heavenly Tabernacle and Yeshua’s priestly intercession there functions within a different set of criteria, as the following verses make clear.

13–14 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Our author continues, now, to show proof that laws governing the earthly office of high priest do not likewise govern the role of the heavenly High Priest, or, to state as he does, that there is a change (μετάθεσις, metathesis) with regard to the laws regulating the priesthood of heaven as compared with the priesthood which is upon the earth.

For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe – Our author continues to have Ps 110:4 well in view and the phrase “concerning whom these things are spoken” refers to the declaration in the Psalm text.

The first proof he brings forward to show that there is a change in the laws governing the heavenly high priesthood is that the One to Whom the Psalm refers is Yeshua, Who is from the tribe of Judah and not Levi. Moreover, since the Torah specifically limits the earthly priesthood to the tribe of Levi, and the high priesthood to the family of Aaron (e.g., Num 3:10; 16:40), for Yeshua to be the “priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” as the Psalm states means that lineage to Levi is clearly not a requirement in the heavenly realm.
Some, wishing to establish both the priestly and kingly offices of the Messiah, have sought to find a dual lineage for Yeshua, one from Judah and the other from Levi.\(^1\) They do this on the basis that Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias (a cohen), is said to be Mary’s relative (Lk 1:36). We see attempts to develop Yeshua’s dual lineage in some of the early Church fathers.

Clement (150–215 CE) hints at this in his epistle to the Corinthians:

> If any one will consider, he may see what blessings God showers on the faithful. What great honors did He confer on this patriarch Jacob! From him was derived the priestly tribe of Levi: from him came the great High-priest, the Lord Jesus; from him are descended kings and rulers through Judah. And by the other tribes also he was the father of countless multitudes. It was God’s will, not their own righteous doing, whereby they were glorified. And by His will also, not by our own piety or wisdom, are we and all men justified through faith by His Almighty will to whom be glory for ever.\(^2\)

Clement does not teach in this section that Yeshua was actually descended from the tribe of Levi. His fondness for the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the direct statement in our present text that Yeshua was of the tribe of Judah, would have prohibited Clement teaching otherwise. But the placement of Yeshua as High Priest sandwiched between Levi and Judah show a growing tendency in the late 1st and early 2nd century, on the behalf of a minority, to see Yeshua as the link between the priestly office and royalty.

Why would late 1st and early 2nd century messianic groups attempt to show that Yeshua was a descendant of both Levi and Judah? It seems possible that the impetus might have been apologetic, seeking to prove that Yeshua fulfilled the offices of priest and king, something foretold of the Messiah (cf. Zech 6:13).

Note, for instance, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a document which came to its final form most likely in the 2nd Century CE. Much debate has surrounded this text as to whether it originated from a Jewish context in the last two centuries BCE reworked or edited by Christians, or if it is a Christian work of the 2nd Century CE.\(^3\) Regard-

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1 See the previous discussion at 5:5-6, pp. 201-02 above.
2 *Epistle to the Corinthians*, xxxii.
3 Note the remarks of F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 146, n. 50: “If the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* speaks of a priest of the tribe of Judah (Testament of
less, in this text the messianic figure who would arise in the last days is specifically said to come from the tribes of Judah and Levi.¹

You, therefore, my children, keep the Lord’s commandments; honor Levi and Judah, because from their seed will arise the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world, and will save all the nations, as well as Israel.²

In the same way, Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 200) asserts “Christ was begotten as king and priest from Levi and Judah according to the flesh.”³

Yet these are clearly later attempts by the emerging Christian church to establish Yeshua as having replaced the levitical priesthood with a new priesthood and doing so legitimately since He was Himself a Levite.

Levi, your posterity shall be divided into three offices as a sign of the glory of the Lord who is coming. The first lot shall be great; no other shall be greater than it. The second shall be in the priestly role. But the third shall be granted a new name, because from Judah a king shall arise and shall found a new priesthood in accord with the gentile model and for all the nations.⁴

Nor does the argument that Mary, the mother of Yeshua, was related to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and therefore of the tribe of Levi, hold any weight. For a woman was not obliged under the Torah to marry only within her clan. So it is very understandable that Mary’s father, who was of the tribe of Judah, may well have married a woman from the tribe of Levi. The tribal identification, however, followed the father, not the mother. Of course, in the case of Yeshua, Who had no earthly father, His physical lineage could only be traced through His mother, Mary, a Judahite. Legally, Joseph, Mary’s husband, would have determined the tribal affiliation of Yeshua, and Joseph is called “son of David” (Matt 1:20), denoting that he was also of the tribe of Judah.

¹ *Levi* 8.14, that is one of the clearest signs of Christian influence in the extant recensions
² *Dan* 5.4, 7; *Gad* 8.1; *Joseph* 19.11; cf. *Reuben* 6.7; *Simeon* 7.1.
⁴ Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: *Levi* 8.11.
The Apostolic authors consistently consider Yeshua to be of the tribe of Judah. He is regularly referred to as the “son of David” (Matt 15:22; 21:9; Mk 10:47f; Jn 12:42). Paul refers to Yeshua as a descendant of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8), and both genealogies (Matt 1; Lk 3) trace Yeshua’s lineage to Judah.

Thus, the argument of our author is clearly based upon the established truth both of the Tanach and the Apostles’ writings, and emphasizes the linkage to Melchizedek as the key to Yeshua’s priesthood. As King, He is the rightful descendant of David, but as priest, He functions after the order of Melchizedek. In so doing, He fulfills the foreshadowing, placing His own priestly work as the conclusion of the redemption foretold by the mysterious figure Melchizedek. Like bookends which encompass the volumes between them, so the opening chapters of God’s covenant with Abraham, and the blessing of Melchizedek, are completed by the work of the Davidic priest, Yeshua, Whose priestly intercession brings to completion (τελείωσις, teleiosis) the redemptive plan. For our author, the finality of Yeshua’s work is the obvious meaning of His Melchizedek order, for His priesthood has no end, even as Melchizedek’s office is never noted in the biblical text to have finished.

15–17 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

What has captivated the mind of our author at this point is the undeniable reality of Yeshua’s resurrection. The priestly work of Yeshua is clearly put on a higher plane than all others by the fact that He conquered death in His own person, having offered Himself as the sacrifice to the Father yet returning to life on the third day. Nothing is more paramount in our author’s mind than this: the resurrection of Yeshua from the dead proved for all time the absolute efficiency of His death at the bar of God’s justice. His having conquered death by death (cf. 2:14) is proof that He is the priest par excellence, for only through His work has the sinner been received by the Father as justified. Thus the entire priestly order and service at the altar throughout the history of ancient Israel was given to point forward to Him.

For what other goal does a priest have than to bring the worshiper into communion God? Yet the Levitical priesthood was never establish in order to attain this goal. For though he could perform the ritual, he
could never actually cleanse the heart of the worshiper. What is more, the priest’s efforts were inevitably brought up short by the very fact of his own weaknesses and sinful nature. He, like the worshiper whom he represented before God, was to be the target of death itself, the penalty for sin. And, try as he might, he could neither overcome death for himself, nor for the worshiper he served. In short, the results of sin, i.e., death, could in no way be overturned by the Levitical priest.

But Yeshua has overturned death for all those for whom He intercedes. He, being the first fruits of the dead, proved to all that He had conquered death, and thus fully satisfied the penalty of sin. He had proven to all by His resurrection that He and He alone could effect a true communion between the Holy One and the sinner. He is, then, the fulness to which the sacrificial services pointed, being the very object of their prophetic message.

Thus, the primary qualification for the heavenly priest is not one of physical lineage but the “power of an indestructible life” (δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου). Yeshua attains the position of a priest in the same manner in which Melchizedek did—chosen and appointed directly by the Father. And, since the genealogy of Melchizedek is not found in the biblical record, thus making him appear as without beginning and without end, this foreshadowed in a prophetic way the eternal One Who would conquer death, fulfilling in every way that true role of the high priest.

Now what is of particular importance for our author at this point is the time-frame in which Yeshua came as High Priest. As he stated before (v. 11), Melchizedek came into the picture well before the establishment of the Levitical priesthood as mandated by the Sinai covenant. One might have thought that the Levitical priesthood therefore replaced the priesthood of Melchizedek. But David, superintended by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit), speaks of yet another priest who is given His priesthood as a matter of oath by God Himself, and this after the Levitical priesthood had already been established! One can only conclude, therefore, that the Levitical priesthood was never established in order to accomplish the ultimate task of bringing a sinner into fellowship with the Holy One of Israel. Rather, the service of Levites and Cohenim in the mishkan and heical (tabernacle and temple) was to be received as a revelation of the ultimate and final Priest Who would effect eternal salvation for His people.

Thus, the undisputed fact that Yeshua is a priest after the order Melchizedek brings into clarity the accompanying fact that the require-
ments for an earthly priest are not nearly equal to the requirements for the heavenly Priest. For the physical lineage alone issues in death. Our High Priest, Yeshua, however, meets the qualifications for the heavenly High Priest, since He conquered death and thus has established the fact that He has the power of an indestructible life. He therefore is able to give eternal life to all who draw near to the Father through Him (Heb 7:25).

Our author has already quoted Psalm 110:4 (in 5:6) and has clearly alluded to it in 6:20. That he is quoting it in our text again shows that it is a pivotal scripture for our author’s thesis. Psalm 110 was recognized as messianic by the early sages and rabbinic commentaries. Clearly the argument presented by Yeshua which was based upon a messianic interpretation of this Psalm (Mt 22:44; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:42-43) was not countered by a claim that the Psalm was speaking of someone other than Messiah. Apparently those He addressed agreed that it should be interpreted messianically. Likewise, the Dead Sea Scrolls have confirmed the fact that Melchizedek was an important figure in the theology of the sect who produced the scrolls. A document labeled as 11QMelch [11Q13] deals with the figure of Melchizedek and the messianic/ eschatological implications attributed to him.

2 See the information on p. 43 above, and Ibid., p. 28.
Our author quotes the Lxx directly, which is a worthy translation of the Hebrew text at this point.\(^1\)

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<td>7:21 ὤμοσεν κύριος καὶ οὐ μεταμεληθήσεται· σὺ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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It is apparent that our author quotes directly from the Lxx and does so in every instance in the book of Hebrews.

Psalm 110 is a Davidic Psalm, as attested by the Psalm heading and confirmed by the words of Yeshua (Matthew 22:44) and the Apostles (Acts 2:34). Therefore, King David gives the words of יהוה directed to David’s Master, Who is Yeshua. The Hebrew phrase,\(^2\) however, utilizes a term not often found in the Tanach: אתָּתָ הוֹ לְעָלָם עַל דִּבְרָתִי מַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק, ‘ata cohen l’olam al devarti malki-zedek. The uncommon Hebrew word is divarti from the root divrah meaning “a legal plea,” “manner,” or “with regard to.” How is it used in our text? Since the word divarti has the same consonants as the Hebrew word meaning “word” (dabar), the rabbis understood the verse to mean: “after the words of Melchizedek” rather than “after the manner of Melchizedek.” Since Melchizedek blessed Abram, the rabbis took this to mean that Abraham was his superior, and that he had therefore transferred the priesthood to him through the “words” of his blessing. But such an interpretation does not fit the Psalm, for the One who gives enthronement to David’s Master in the opening verse, is the same One who divinely appoints Him as priest in verse four. The priesthood of David’s Master is “after the manner” of

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1. The inclusion of the verb εἶ in the Lxx (Σὺ εἶ ἱερεὺς) and its absence when quoted by Hebrews seems obviously to be a hebraism (ellipsis). That manuscript Alexandrinus likewise leaves out εיך most likely reflects influence from the Apostolic quotes.

2. I have repeated this section on the quote from Ps 110 from the previous commentary on 5:5–6 (p. 200) in order to make it available in both places where Psalm 110:4 is being utilized by the author of Hebrews.
Melchizedek, not something given to him by Melchizedek. Moreover, if the Psalmist had intended “after the words of Melchizedek,” he would have used the plural construct of דָּבָר, דִּבְרֵי, not דִּבָרְתִי. As the Hebrew stands, it must be translated “after the manner of Melchizedek.”

JPS’s translation is possible from the Hebrew of the MT. “You are a priest forever, a rightful king according to my decree” takes מַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק, “king of righteousness,” not as a proper noun, but as a substantive, interpreting צֶדֶק, “righteous/righteousness” as an adjectival absolute of the construct מַלְכִי, “king.” In theory this is possible (consider Lev 19:36, “just balance” [אֹזְנֵי צֶדֶק], “just weights” [אַבְנֵי־צֶדֶק], etc.). Obviously, the JPS follows the Targum here. But in light of the fact that the JPS translates מַלְכִי־צֶדֶק in Gen 14:18 as “Mechizedek,” one has to presume that the translation of the current text by the JPS has been influenced by the application of Melchizedek to Yeshua in the Apostolic Scriptures themselves.

18–19 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Torah made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

In these verses, our author makes some obvious and important contrasts between the “former commandment” and the “better hope.” We might list them this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former commandment</th>
<th>Better hope</th>
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<tr>
<td>setting aside --------------------------</td>
<td>bringing in</td>
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<td>weakness</td>
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<tr>
<td>uselessness</td>
<td>better hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>makes no one perfect</td>
<td>we draw near to God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contrasts are obvious: the “former commandment” (προαγούσης ἐντολής), which is the Torah requirement that a priest be from the tribe of Levi, and that the high priest be from the family of Aaron, is set aside (ἀθέτησις, athetēsis) as pertains to Yeshua’s priesthood. It is set aside because the heavenly High Priesthood functions at a different level and

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1 ἀθέτησις is found only twice in the Apostolic Scriptures: here and in 9:26.
in a different realm, a realm in which lineage is not the qualifying factor, but rather an indestructible life.

Moreover, it is set aside as regards the heavenly High Priest because while it functioned to maintain the earthly priesthood, this priesthood was never designed nor purposed to bring about eternal salvation. Thus, while the earthly priesthood was given to reveal the ultimate and eternal High Priest, describing the essence of His work in dramatic revelation, as pertains to eternal salvation, the earthly priesthood was both “weak” and “useless” (ἀσθενὲς καὶ ἀνωφέλές), meaning that the offering of the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, for the sacrificial system was not given by God for that purpose.

Indeed, the Torah which governed the earthly priesthood and established the requirements for functioning as a priest could not establish a priesthood that would make a person “perfect” (τελειώ, teleioō), that is, fit to commune with God Who is holy. The parallels given above show what our author means by “perfect.” To be “perfect” means to be in a position acceptable by God Himself so that there might be true communion together: “we draw near to God.”

Most interesting, however, is that the “former commandment” is not paralleled by a “recent or current commandment.” Instead, we find the term “better hope” (κρείττονος ἐλπίδος). Our author wants us to see that the Levitical priesthood, rather than being an end in itself, or the goal to which redemptive history proceeds, had as its primary function the pointing-of-the-way to Yeshua. The priesthood, with all of its sacrifices and oblations, could only cause the worshiper to hope for the promised Messiah who would Himself offer the true sacrifice by which sins could actually be forgiven. It was just such hope which fixed the eyes of faith of the ancient believer upon the coming Messiah. Indeed, this was the hope which faith produced.

Note carefully that this “better hope” is not a commandment, not a regulation, not even a ritual governed by law. This “better hope” is found to be a person, the person of Yeshua Himself, Who is our hope. For it is in and through the person of Yeshua our Messiah that we draw near to God, as v. 25 makes clear (cf. Jn 14:6).

This was, of course, the whole purpose of the sacrificial system, the very focus of Yom Kippur—man drawing near to God. The cleansing of the body and soul was necessary because God is a holy God and cannot dwell in the midst of uncleanness. The sinner must be purified if he or she would “draw near to God.” The Levitical sacrifices were sufficient to do this only as they symbolically pointed to the ultimate sacrifice and aided the offerer to lay hold by faith of the sacrifice Messiah would offer.
That David understood this seems clear, for he, being a prophet, looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah (Ac 2:30). As such, he knew of Messiah’s death and no doubt connected this to the promise God made to him that He would seat one of his descendants upon the throne forever (cf. 2 Sam 7:18-19; Ac 2:30ff).

20–22 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, “Adonai has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘you are a priest forever’”); so much the more also Yeshua has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

The first line of v. 20 has “a better hope” of v. 19 as its antecedent. This “better hope” is now seen to be the fruit of Yeshua’s heavenly priesthood as He is a priest “after the order of Melchizedek.” In connecting to the “better hope,” our author now stresses the fact that Yeshua’s priesthood was confirmed with an oath in distinction from the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood.

Indeed, the initial giving of the priesthood to Aaron (cp. Ex 27) did not include an oath. God simply made the arrangement known to Moses and the children of Israel. The inclusion of an oath by God in connection with the priesthood which is after the order of Melchizedek is therefore of great significance. Yeshua’s priesthood is based upon a solemn oath by God Himself rather than merely upon physical lineage.

The oath spoken of in Psalm 110 is rightly interpreted as a covenant oath (for all ancient covenants or treaties were confirmed through some form of an oath). Yeshua, the object of God’s oath, is therefore the guarantor of the covenant itself, which is a “better covenant” (κρείττονος διαθήκης). But if our author speaks of a “better covenant,” it is clear that he has at least one other covenant in mind by way of comparison. We may rightly ask, then, what are the covenants with which our author is dealing? It would seem quite obvious that we are contrasting two covenants of priesthood, one Levitical and the other that of Melchizedek. Was the Levitical priesthood given in the form of a covenant?

Consider the covenant made with Phinehas, the son of Aaron (Num 25:10-13). Here, a “covenant of peace” (בְּרִית שָׁלוֹם) is promised to Phinehas as a perpetual covenant of priesthood (בְּרִית כְּהֻנַּת עוֹלָם). Yet our author is very keen in regard to what the Torah says and what it does not say. While we might surmise that a covenant required some kind of oath, there is nothing in the Torah text itself which specifically mentioned an oath which ratified the covenant with Phinehas. In contrast,
the mention of an oath in Psalm 110 establishes the priesthood of David’s Lord (Yeshua) as a covenant forever (אִתָּה כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם). Once again, the contrast is between the Levitical priesthood and that of Melchizedek. As long as there is a functioning priesthood in the “earthly tabernacle,” it will be legitimate only when those who act as priests are from the lineage of Aaron. Thus, in the millennial Temple, we see the Zadokite priests functioning in their priestly role (Ezek 43:19ff).

“Adonai has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever’” – For our author, the fact that Ps 110 describes the high priesthood of David’s Lord (Yeshua) as being confirmed with an oath, adds yet another proof that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to that of the Levitical priests, for the earthly priests gain their office by way of physical lineage, but the heavenly high priest qualifies only on the basis of an indestructible life. Thus, the oath described in Ps 110 promises a given individual, David’s Lord, that He would be a priest forever. Phinehas, on the other hand, was promised a perpetual priesthood passed on from generation to generation of his family. The one relates to an individual, the other to multiple descendants. So here again the contrast is made between the Levitical priests who function only for a life-time and then must pass the office to their successors, and the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in which a single individual, Yeshua, is Himself the eternal heavenly high priest, without beginning and without end.

so much the more also Yeshua has become the guarantee of a better covenant. – What is the “better covenant” to which our author now refers? It surely is the “new covenant” spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, for in the next chapter our author quotes directly from Jeremiah to describe this “better covenant.” It will be beneficial, then, to consider the texts of Scripture which speak directly of the “new covenant.”

Excursus: The New Covenant

The term “new covenant” is found one time in the Tanach (Jer 31:31) and six times in the Apostolic Scriptures.
Excursus: The New Covenant

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:15)

and to Yeshua, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:24)

What exactly is the “new covenant” and how is it “new”? We might first begin with a brief study of the word translated “new.” In Jer 31:31, the Hebrew term translated “new” is חֲדָשָׁה (chadash, fem. sg. of the adj. שָׁחַד, chadash). The Greek term used in all of the Apostolic texts except for Heb 12:24 is the fem. sg. form of the adjective καινός (kainos). In Heb 12:24, however, the word for “new” is νέος (neos). Of the six times the phrase “new covenant” is used in the Apostolic Scriptures, two relate to the words of Yeshua at His final Pesach seder (Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25), three occur in our Epistle (the first in the quote from Jer 31 and the other two referring back to this quote), and one occurrence is found in Paul’s teaching on the new covenant in 2 Cor 3:6.

The fact that our author uses two different words for “new” in the phrase “new covenant” (kainos in 9:15 and neos in 12:24) has sometimes been taught to mean that he was emphasizing the recent appearance of the “new covenant,” suggesting that the Greek neos has been interpreted to mean “new” in the sense of “young,” or “something which has only recently appeared.” But such a conclusion is based upon the fallacious assertion that the two words are distinct in their meaning. A thorough study of the two terms, however, reveals that by the 1st century CE, the two words were being used interchangeably, and that neos did not mean “recent” or “newly formed” as over against kainos which
had a wider definition.\(^1\) We should conclude that our author uses *neos* as a stylistic synonym of the more widely used *kaiinos*.

In Paul’s epistles, the contrast between “new” and “old” is clearly a contrast between “saved” and “lost,” or to use the terms he rather employs, “justified” and “condemned.” The “old man”/“new man” contrast which Paul teaches (cf. Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9) is clearly that of faith contrasted with unbelief.

Further, we have every reason to believe that our author was familiar with Paul’s teaching and that he agreed with it. It should not be a surprise, then, that our author should adopt the same terminology. Thus, when our author juxtaposes “new” and “old,” he may well be contrasting that which brings eternal salvation and that which is unable to do so.

This leads us to consider the phrase “old covenant.” Having looked at all the biblical texts which contain the phrase “new covenant,” we should consider where the phrase “old covenant” occurs. Judging by how often the phrase “old covenant” is used in Christian theological discussions and literature, we might presume that the phrase “old covenant” would be something which occurs frequently in the Apostolic Scriptures. But to our surprise, we find it only one time in the whole of Scripture, at 2Cor 3:14.

> But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant (*palaias diathēkēs*) the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah. (2Cor 3:14)

Here, Paul refers to the Tanach as the “old covenant,” for when it is read with a veil covering the glory of Messiah (even as the veil worn by Moses covered the glory shining in his face), the Tanach is unable to lead the reader to its ultimate goal, which is to reveal the true Messiah and His work of accomplishing salvation for His people. Paul goes on in 2Cor 4:3–6 to say:

> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded

\(^1\) Note Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 376, n. 88; See the more extensive remarks in Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 551, n. 162.
the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the
light of the gospel of the glory of Messiah, who is the image
of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Messiah Yeshua
as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Messiah’s
sake. For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,”
is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the
knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Messiah. (2Cor
4:3–6)

Thus, in this text Paul uses “old” as he does elsewhere, of a life devoid
of the Ruach and therefore a heart or mind which cannot see the glory
of Messiah when the Tanach is read, for it is by the Ruach that Messiah
is revealed and received for Who He is. For Paul, those who read the
Tanach every Shabbat in the Synagogue but did so without the illu-
minating work of the Spirit, were reading an “old covenant,” that is,
the covenant which by itself is powerless to save. If the Spirit of God
does not illumine the eyes of faith to the truth of the Scriptures, then
the Scriptures are simply letters upon parchment—letters engraved on
stone—rather than written on the heart.

In short, then, “old covenant” is not to be identified with the Torah
of Moses or the (so-called) “Old Testament,” nor is the “new covenant”
to be viewed as the (so-called) “New Testament.” Rather, as our author
shows clearly, the contrast is between righteousness granted by God
through faith in His Messiah (new covenant) as over against relying
upon one’s people-group status as counting for righteousness in God’s
eyes (old covenant). This is the very point of our author’s argument:
Israel, in unbelief, failed to obey God and enter into the rest He had
provided for them. Furthermore, the majority of the nation, rather than
seeking God through faith in His promised Messiah, sought rather to
establish their own righteousness through observance of ritual. The
Temple, established for true worship, had (as Yeshua Himself showed),
become a place of thieves who, for their own gain, often prevented the
sincere believer from worshiping as God had commanded. The priest-
hood had become corrupt, as was the service they rendered. It was not
as though these rituals were somehow intrinsically bad. On the con-
trary, they were given by God for righteous worship. But in the hands
of those who were attempting to establish their own righteousness, the
rituals of divine origin had taken on an “old covenant” posture. They
were not of faith, but of the flesh.

It was in the face of these realities that our author appeals to the new
covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. This covenant would be of faith, for
the Torah would be written on the heart by God Himself. The contrast,
then, between the new covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah, and the old covenant (the belief that simply being part of the people-group called Israel would render a person acceptable to God) was one of a changed heart, something only God could accomplish. In every era, whenever the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) wrote the Torah on the heart of a believer, that person became a member of the new covenant. The eschatological reality of the new covenant, then, is simply the national redemption of Israel in precisely the same manner in which individuals (who make up the remnant in every generation) have been born-from-above. It is when, by God’s sovereign work, the nation of Israel as a whole turns in faith to God through confessing Yeshua to be the true Messiah and the only One through Whom true forgiveness of sins and righteous standing before God is possible.

------------ End of Excursus -------------

[vv. 20-22 continued]

…so much the more also Yeshua has become the guarantee of a better covenant. – Before we move on to the next verses, it is important that we consider the word translated “guarantee” by the NASB in v. 22. The Greek word here translated “guarantee” is ἔγγυος (enguos) and is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. Though the noun form is found only here, its cognate verb and other forms (ἐγγύη, ἐγγύησις, ἐγγυάω) found outside of the Apostolic Scriptures make it clear that the noun carries the meaning of “guarantor” or “one who stands surety for another.” In our context, the primary issue at hand is that of covenant, in which two parties covenant with each other to uphold their mutual part of the covenant. A person who therefore pledges himself as “surety” does so for one of the covenant members, promising that if he or she is unable to fulfill their promised part of the covenant, the “guarantor” will step in and fulfill that person’s obligations. As Sampson so well describes:

A surety is one who engages for another, so as to secure the performance of that for which he is bound, with the understanding that he shall perform for him, where he fails.3

2 E.g., note the Lxx use of the verb ἔγγυω in Prov 6:1, 3; 17:18; 19:28; 28:17; Sir 8:13; 29:14.
3 Francis Sampson, Hebrews, p. 276. (emphasis in the original)
In the case of the covenant made between God and Israel, there surely is no need for a surety to stand by the Almighty Himself, for the Father has no deficiencies, but is infinite in all of His attributes, including faithfulness, grace, and mercy. Thus Yeshua’s High Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (which is the primary focus of our author at this point in his epistle) stands as surety for those who are chosen. As such, He is Himself the pledge for those who are His, that they will receive all that which the Father has promised by way of covenant blessing. Moreover, because we who are chosen in Him were unable to pay the debt owed for our breaking of the covenant, He has secured our covenant position by paying our debt to the Father.

Paul speaks to this very point when he writes:

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (Rom 8:32)

For as many as are the promises of God, in Him [i.e., Yeshua] they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. (2Cor 1:20)

Owen’s comments on this subject go to the same point:

He undertook, as the surety of the covenant, to answer for all the sins of those who are to be and are made partakers of the benefits of it;—that is, to undergo the punishment due unto their sins; to make atonement for them, by offering himself a propitiatory sacrifice for their expiation; redeeming them by the price of his blood from their state of misery and bondage under the law and the curse of it, Isa 53:4–6, 10; Matt 20:28; 1Tim 2:6; 1Cor 6:20; Rom 3:25, 26; Heb 10:5–10; Rom 8:2, 3; 2Cor 5:19–21; Gal 3:13. And this was absolutely necessary, that the grace and glory prepared in the covenant might be communicated unto us. Without this undertaking of his, and performance of it, the righteousness and faithfulness of God would not permit that sinners, such as had apostatized from him, despised his authority, and rebelled against him, falling thereby under the sentence and curse of the law, should be received into his favour, and be made partakers of grace and glory. This therefore, the Lord Christ took upon himself, as the surety of the covenant.1

1 John Owen, Hebrews, 4 vols., 1.507-508, (emphasis in the original).
It is clear, then, that the author of Hebrews saw the death of Yeshua as the necessary requirement for the maintenance of the covenant, for He stands as the surety to fulfill the covenant obligations for His people. In this we see clearly that Yeshua died for those for whom He had pledged Himself as a surety—as the guarantee that the covenant promises would accrue to those He represents. He paid the penalty of death dramatized by the sacrifice in the covenant ceremony at Sinai.

So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which **Adonai** has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Ex 24:8)

As the guarantor, He took upon Himself the curse which the covenant prescribed for the one who would break the covenant, the one for whom He acts as guarantor. And it was to this work of the Messiah that the sacrifices enacted in the Tabernacle and Temples pointed.

23–24 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Yeshua, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

Our author has now given two reasons why Yeshua’s priesthood is superior to that of the Aaronic priests. First, in contrast to the Aaronic priests who received their office on the basis of lineage, Yeshua received His by divine oath, making His office of greater authority and unique to His person. The second way in which Yeshua’s priesthood is seen to be superior is that He is able to offer Himself as a surety, something the Aaronic priests could not do, for they required atonement for themselves and were not fit, therefore, to be surety for others. Now, in these verses, our author gives a third measure by which Yeshua is seen to be superior: that He is a priest forever, not being prevented by death as were the Aaronic priests.

The fact that the Aaronic priesthood had to be established on the basis of lineage is obvious, and the reason for this was simply that the sons of Aaron died. Death is the result of sin, and our author will make a point of this below, in v. 27.

Yeshua, on the other hand, was not governed by death as are all those who descend from Adam. Thus, Paul writes of Yeshua:

> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:8)
Note carefully his wording: “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death….” Death did not “rule over him” as it does over the descendants of Adam. Rather, He chose to die as surety for His people. In contrast, all who descend from Adam exist under the reign of death, as Paul writes:

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (Rom 5:14)

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Yeshua Messiah. (Rom 5:17)

The point which our author is making is therefore clear: the earthly high priests were themselves sinners and were subject to the reign of death, for the penalty prescribed to Adam was imputed to all of his offspring. Therefore, “it is appointed to men to die once…” (Heb 9:27). Thus he writes that they were “prevented by death from continuing,” meaning that they had no ability to forestall or to withstand death but were subject to it.

But Yeshua, born of a virgin, did not partake of Adam’s sin, and thus, following the pattern of Melchizedek, has a priesthood in perpetuity—without end. This is clearly a great advantage for those He represents and is in stark contrast to the demise of the priesthood in the late second Temple period.

Indeed, if we consider for a moment the Temple in the time of Yeshua and the Apostles, we are confronted with a picture of the priesthood characterized by greed, self-service, and man-centered religion in which the poor were effectively excluded from worship at the Temple and the high priestly office was actioned off to the highest bidders. Successive generations of the priesthood, rather than maintaining the sacred office for the glory of Israel’s God and a revelation of His Messiah, had turned it into a money-making business bereft of spiritual power and blessing.

It would seem, therefore, that when our author speaks of the many priests which held the office throughout the history of Israel, his audience (especially if the epistle is written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE) would have very much understood how one High Priest, Who would forever serve in this priestly function, would be a great improvement over the devolution of the Temple priesthood which they had experienced.
25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Our verse begins with “Therefore” (ὅθεν, hothen), which implies a direct connection to the premise just stated, i.e., that Yeshua holds His High Priestly office in perpetuity. The result is straightforward: since Yeshua is a priest forever, He is able to save eternally all those for whom He intercedes. Not only does He possess life that never ends—He is able to give eternal life to those for whom He intercedes.

The precise meaning of the Greek at this point is debated, and the issue revolves around the word translated “forever” by the NASB (as above). The Greek has: σῴζειν εἰς τὸ παντελὲς δύναται, literally, “to save unto the every end He is able.” The question is how we should understand the phrase εἰς τὸ παντελὲς, “unto the very end.” Does it describe the infinitive “to save” (σῴζειν) so that the meaning is “to save eternally” or does it modify the power or ability of Yeshua (i.e., δύναται) so that the meaning is “His ability to save is without end”?

The only other place where we have this same phrase is Lk 13:11.

And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all.
καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας ἔτη δεκαοκτὼ καὶ ἦν συγκύπτουσα καὶ μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακύψαι εἰς τὸ παντελὲς. (Lk 13:11)

In the Luke text, the meaning is clearly that of “completely” or “to the full extent.” Further, in our Hebrews text, the phrase would most naturally attach to the infinitive “to save.” Thus, we have the well known KJV translate “to the uttermost,” which does capture the sense of the Greek word παντελὲς, made up of παν + τέλος (complete + end), thus, “to the very end.”

In reality, either interpretation comes to the same conclusion, for if our author is stating that, because of Yeshua’s endless life, His ability to save never diminishes, then He is able to save those for whom He intercedes forever, meaning that their salvation is secured for eternity. And this is the overall point of our author: the salvation procured by Yeshua as the eternal High Priest is a salvation that is secure for all eternity. Never will any one of those for whom He stands as surety be at risk of losing favor with God, for all who are “in Messiah” are loved by the Father even as the Son is loved.
Moreover, Yeshua’s intercession as the heavenly High Priest is able to accomplish that which the earthly high priests could never accomplish, nor were they expected to accomplish, namely, that ability to change the heart of the worshiper, or as our author will express it, to “cleanse the conscience” (9:14). For until the heart is changed—the heart of stone removed and a heart of flesh put in its place (Ezek 11:19; 36:26)—the Torah cannot be written upon it as promised in Jeremiah’s “new covenant” (Jer 31:31–34). Indeed, Yeshua not only knows the heart, but He is able to change it, to imbue it with faith, and to therefore sanctify the repentant sinner. In this He fulfills that to which the high priesthood constantly pointed.

In our verse we have one of two explicit mentions in the Apostolic Scriptures of Yeshua’s intercessory work at the right hand of the Father. The other is what F. F. Bruce rightly calls “one of Paul’s great lyric outbursts,” namely, Rom 8:33–34.

Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Messiah Yeshua is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom 8:33–34)

Other texts in the Apostolic Scriptures which give implicit mention or theological suggestion of Yeshua’s heavenly intercession are:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Yeshua Messiah the righteous; (1Jn 2:1)

For Messiah did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; (Heb 9:24)

but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. (Lk 22:32)

And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; (Lk 12:8)

1  F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, p. 154.
and he [Stephen] said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56)

In John’s epistle, the fact that Yeshua is said to be an “Advocate with the Father” implies mediation or intercession. Likewise, the words of our Lord to Peter, that He had prayed for him, gives us a picture of Yeshua’s role as intercessor. Further, as Stephen was being stoned and leaving this life for life in the presence of Yeshua, he sees the Messiah “standing,” which is symbolic of activity. Since Yeshua is also said to “sit at the right hand,” a picture of work completed, the standing must represent His on-going work as intercessor while His sitting emphasizes that His self-offering as a sacrifices is forever finished and need never to be repeated.

These texts from the Apostolic Scriptures undoubtedly flow from the words of Isaiah in His description of the Servant.

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors. (Is 53:12)

Paul, in Rom 8:24, lists “intercession” as one of the four pillars of salvation, the other three being Messiah’s death, resurrection, and His session or sitting at the right hand of God. It is typical in believing communities of our times that most are able to give some good explanation why the death and resurrection of Messiah are necessary in order to gain salvation for sinners. Unfortunately, precious few are able to give definitive answers as to how the session and intercession of Messiah are equally necessary. A study of the whole concept of “atonement” and the manner in which God declares a person righteous will offer the best background for understanding the session and intercession of Messiah as they relate to our own salvation.

“Intercession” means “to intercede, mediate, plead, or pray on behalf of another or others.” As our High Priest, Yeshua intercedes for us through His prayers on our behalf. This position of High Priest is not granted to Him only on the basis of His being divine, that is, being one with the Father. Rather, He has proven His right to be High Priest through His obedience to death, His resurrection by which He conquered death, His ascension, and His session.

As sacrifice, He offered Himself up as the spotless lamb before God,
taking upon Himself the sins of those for whom He died. His substitutionary death paid the penalty for all who believe, satisfying the absolute justice of God, Who, by His very nature, must exact the prescribed penalty for sin, i.e., death. His resurrection on the third day, on the other hand, proves the full acceptance of the price paid by His death, assuring all that the Father was entirely satisfied with the payment which was made. Indeed, it was by the resurrection that Yeshua was declared to be the “Lord with power” (Rom 1:4), that is, power over sin and death.

The “session” of our Messiah refers to His being “seated” at the right hand of God (cf. Heb 1:3; 10:12; 12:2). Now this posture of sitting is full of symbolism as it pertains to His work as High Priest. Sitting implies that His sacrificial work is finished—the sacrifice has been offered once and for all time.

Unlike the Tabernacle or Temple, in which there were no articles of furniture for sitting, the true Tabernacle in heaven has a throne and a place for the King to be seated. In the Tabernacle and Temple there were no places to sit, for the simple reason that the work was never finished. When one sacrifice was offered, another was waiting to be offered. The work of the priests was never finished. But Yeshua, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice, once for all time, sat down as a demonstration of the complete and finished nature of His sacrifice. Clearly, any religious ceremony or ritual which pretends to re-enact the death of Messiah, or teaches that Messiah is sacrificed many times over is a blatant disregard for the glory of Yeshua’s current session in heaven.

The “right hand” is a symbol of honor and power in Hebrew thought (cf. 1Ki 2:19; Ps 45:9; 110:1). Yeshua’s sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high is simply to teach us that He carries out His work for us in an entirely efficacious manner. Being seated at the right hand means He is in the position of privilege and power, and this means that His requests are not only heard but they are likewise always granted.

The session of Messiah implies His ascension. If He is now seated at the right hand of God but was, at one time, living here on the earth, this necessitates His leaving our sphere and moving into the heavenly realm. This we call the “ascension.” Luke, in the book of Acts, clearly declares the ascension of Yeshua into heaven:

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood
beside them; and they also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Yeshua, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9–11)

Paul also teaches this doctrine explicitly in Ephesians:

Therefore it says, “When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men.” (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Eph 4:8–10

As noted above, Paul combines these four “pillars of salvation”:

who is the one who condemns? Messiah Yeshua is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom 8:34)

Here, the session of Messiah (which implies His ascension) and His work of intercession are put on equal footing with the death and resurrection of Messiah. Yet neither here nor elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures do we find the session or intercession of Messiah clearly spelled out as to what it is or why it is so essential. The Apostles simply presume that all will be acquainted with the Tabernacle and Temple, and understand that the ceremonies commanded therein spell out both the meaning and the value of Yeshua’s work as High Priest. When the people of God are deprived of teaching from the Tanach, they no longer have the very foundation upon which a proper understanding of Yeshua’s saving work is founded.

In the plan which God gave to Moses on the mountain, the altar upon which the sacrificial animal was slain was the first ceremonial object one encountered when entering the courtyard of the Tabernacle. Here the animals were slain, the blood poured out, and the meat burned upon the fire.

Furthest from the single opening of the courtyard, and enclosed in an elaborate tent of gold-laden pillars and ornately woven fabrics was the Ark of the Covenant, the very place where God manifested the outshining of His glory and met with man (as represented by the High Priest). It becomes apparent that if the goal of atonement is to commune with God, the sacrifice of the outer altar must somehow make its way
into the Most Holy place.

Of the various ceremonies enacted, the ritual of Yom Kippur, “Day of Atonement,” is the most significant for our present study. The High Priest, on that day and that day alone, entered the Most Holy place, there to apply the blood from the Altar of Sacrifice to the Ark of the Covenant, upon the top of that box, called the Mercy Seat.\(^1\) Constructed above this “mercy seat” were golden figures representing Cherubim, angelic guardians of God’s holiness.

Peering down into the Ark, as it were, they gazed upon the objects within, the tablets of the Torah, Aaron’s rod which budded, and the memorial pot of manna. Each of these three objects symbolized at once the faithfulness of God and the rebellion of Israel. For the first tablets were smashed as Moses descended the mountain and saw the idolatry of the people. Likewise, Aaron’s rod that budded was given as a sign to those who were rebelling against God Who appointed him as priest. And finally, the manna was given as test to Israel and in time, Israel grumbled about it. Thus, the sin of Israel was constantly before the watchful eye of those who guard God’s holiness.

It was on this day of Yom Kippur that the High Priest brought the blood and, sprinkling it seven times upon the mercy seat, symbolically wiping Israel’s sin, symbolized by the objects in the Ark. Instead of the Cherubim seeing the sin of God’s people, they rather gazed upon the blood, itself the cleansing agent of atonement. And in seeing the blood, they likewise saw the righteousness of God fully met, so that those made clean by the blood were fully welcomed to commune with their God.

But it was not merely that the High Priest came into the Most Holy place with the blood and the blood alone. Let us consider the text itself which describes the High Priest’s activities on this most holy day:

> Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself. And he shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before Adonai, and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring (it) inside the veil. And he shall put the incense on the fire before Adonai, that the

\(^1\) The Lxx used the Greek word ἱλαστήριον, hilastērion, meaning “means of expiation” or “place of propitiation.” In 1Jn 2:2 we read: “and He Himself is the propitiation (hilastērion) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”
cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, lest he die. Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. (Lev 16:11–14)

Note well that the High Priest dare not enter the Most Holy place on Yom Kippur without having the blood and a fire pan of coals, along with two handfuls of finely ground incense. The phrase “lest he die” (vv. 2, 13) makes it abundantly clear that these were the essential elements necessary for the high priest to accomplish his prescribed duties. Entering without both blood and incense, he would be struck down.

So, the High Priest comes in with blood and incense. What does this imply? Incense is symbolic of “prayer” (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3,4), while the blood is symbolic of “sacrifice.” Clearly, on Yom Kippur the sacrifice and incense are combined in the Most Holy place. This is to teach that the sacrifice of Yeshua and His subsequent intercession or prayers on behalf of His children are combined in His work of salvation. To put it simply: Yeshua applies the blood of His sacrifice to the mercy seat in heaven by interceding for us. In His intercession He pleads the merits of His own blood before the Father and thereby continually cleanses us with the perfect atoning work of His death. Clearly, the death of Yeshua and the application of it to the mercy seat in heaven cannot be separated. He pleads the merits of His blood on behalf of all who draw near to God through Him. It is for this reason that our author states that He is able to save “forever” or “completely,” for He sees to it that the value of His death, stamped with the approval of the Father by the resurrection, is applied to the account of each of His children. Thus, in Him we “draw near” to God—we commune with Him as those entirely cleansed by the blood, and thus in His sight righteous in every way.

Further insight is given to us regarding the intercession of Messiah in John’s gospel, chapter 17. In this scene, Yeshua has faced the reality of the cross, and has come to the garden in order to pray to the Father. Yet though He and His disciples are there in the garden, the text itself seems to indicate that in Yeshua’s mind He has transported Himself beyond the cross, beyond the grave, and even beyond the ascension, entering heaven itself, as the risen, glorified Son. Note the following verses from John 17 which contain words of our Messiah’s prayer:

I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your
name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. (John 17:11–13)

The phrases “I am no longer in the world...,” “While I was with them...,” and “But now I come to You...,” all combine to give the very real sense that Yeshua is here praying as He would after returning to the Father. If this is so, then we may take this chapter from John's Gospel as providing us a glimpse into heaven itself and Yeshua’s intercession for us there.

We may note first of all the particular nature of Yeshua’s prayer. In v. 9 we read: “I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.” Here we see that, like the earthly high priest who entered the Holy of Holies specifically and only on behalf of the people of Israel, so Yeshua intercedes for those who are His, not on behalf of the world. In this regard we may note how often Yeshua refers to His followers as those whom the Father has “given” to Him:

... even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. (17:2)

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (17:6)

I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; (17:9)

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (17:24)

The prayer (intercession) of Yeshua is not general but specific, not wide but narrow. He pleads the merits of His own sacrifice and in this pleading secures the eternal salvation of all for whom He prays. None for whom Yeshua intercedes will be eternally lost, for He prays that the
Excursus: The Intercessory Work of Yeshua as High Priest

merit of His own death will be applied to all those who have been given to Him—to the elect.

Looking at John 17 and the garden prayer of our Lord as indicating the pattern of His heavenly intercession, we may note the kinds of requests which embody His prayer as representative of His heavenly intercession on behalf of His people.

1. The restoration of the glory He had with the Father:

Yeshua spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You…” (17:1)

Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (17:5)

2. The salvation and unity of those who have been given to the Son:

I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. (17:11)

3. That those who have been given to the Son would be kept or protected from the evil one.

I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. (17:15)

4. That those who have been given to the Son would be sanctified in the truth of God’s word.

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (17:17)

5. That those who have been given to the Son would be unified as one people to the glory of the Son.

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that...
they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (17:20–23)

6. That those who have been given to the Son would come to be with Him in glory.

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (17:24)

7. That those who have been given to the Son would be characterized by the love with which they have themselves been loved by Father.

O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (17:25–26)

Surely Yeshua’s intercession is always in complete harmony with the will of the Father, for the Messiah and the Father are One (Jn 10:30; 17:22). Therefore every request He brings is certainly granted and fulfilled. And we see that the requests of Yeshua’s intercessory prayer culminate in full and unhindered communion with the Father, for this is the ultimate goal and the final achievement of His atoning work.

That Yeshua’s intercession is entirely effective, securing the goal for which it is offered, rests upon His divine nature and thus His being eternally without sin. This is the very emphasis of our author in the next verse, v. 26.

-------- End of Excursus --------

26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

The High Priest (Cohen HaGadol) in the earthly tabernacle (Mishkan) was able to carry out his work successfully only when he remained in a state of ritual purity. This was particularly the case on Yom Kippur,
the only day when the high priest enters the Holy of Holies. Rabbinic story tells of the measures taken to guarantee the high priest’s ritual purity on the Day of Atonement.

Seven days before the Day of Atonement they set apart the high priest from his house to the councilors’ chamber. And they [also] appoint another priest as his substitute, lest some cause of invalidation should overtake him... All seven days they did not hold back food or drink from him. [But] on the eve of the Day of Atonement at dusk they did not let him eat much, for food brings on sleep... If] he tried to doze off, young priests snap their middle fingers before him and say to him, “My lord, high priest: Stand up and drive off [sleep] by walking on the cold stones.” And they would keep him busy until the time for the slaughter had come [lest he become unclean by a discharge during sleep]. (m. Yoma 1.1–7)

It seems clear that our author has the impeccability or sinlessness of Yeshua in mind as he compares His high priestly service with that of the earthly high priest. If Yeshua “always lives to make intercession,” then it stands to reason that He must eternally be without defect which might otherwise limit His ability to interceded for His people as the heavenly high priest in the heavenly tabernacle. And, as such, our author continues his former argument, that Yeshua is superior to the earthly high priest in as much as He is Himself the very fulfillment foreshadowed by the earthly priest.

Our author appeals to five characteristics of Yeshua which qualify Him to “always make intercession” as our heavenly High Priest, but begins by stating simply that Yeshua, by His very nature, possess that which was necessary for the work of the heavenly High Priest, and thus He was perfectly adapted1 to that which His office required.

The first three characteristics are grouped as a triad, all dealing with Yeshua’s sinless nature: “holy, innocent, undefiled.” “Holy” (ὅσιος, hosios) describes Yeshua’s being as in every aspect like God and thus without sin. “He is incomparably pure and as God’s high priest he fulfills the will of God flawlessly.”2

1 ἔπρεπεν, eprepen < πρέπω, prepō, meaning “to be fitting, seemly, proper.” Note the use of the same verb in 2:10, “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.”
2 Kistemaker, Hebrews, p. 206.
The second of this triad is “innocent” (ἄκακος, akakos). As “holy” relates primarily with the inner disposition of Yehsua, “innocent” pertains to His external life. Nothing He does incurs guilt, for He is entirely without sin in thought, word, and deed.

The third word, “undefiled” (ἀμίαντος, amiantos), paints the picture of sin being transmitted within an environment of sin. Unlike all mortal mankind, Yeshua entered into the fallen world being immune to the sin which infected all others. He was not born with a sinful nature nor did the stain of sin adhere to Him even though He lived among sinners. Here our author no doubt has the whole realm of ritual purity in mind, for a person may become ritually impure through contact with someone who is himself ritually impure. Yet Yeshua was not defiled by sin even though He lived among sinners.

The perfect illustration of this was when the woman with a flow of blood touched Yeshua’s tzitzit in hope of being secretly healed (cf. Mk 5:25ff). Instead of Yeshua contracting ritual impurity from the woman, power went out from Him healing the woman and thus removing her impurity.

Following the triad of these three terms which detail Yeshua’s impecabble nature, our author describes Him as “separated from sinners” (κεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν). Clearly He was not separated from them in terms of His incarnation for He came to dwell with sinners. Owen notes four ways in which Yeshua was not separate from sinners:

1. He was not separate from them as unto community of nature; for God sent His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” Rom 8:3…He took our flesh, that is, our nature upon Him, without sin.
2. He was not separate from sinners as to the duties of outward conversation. He lived not in a wilderness, nor said unto the children of men, “Stand off, I am holier than you.” He conversed freely with all sorts of persons, even publicans and harlots; for which He was reproached by the proud, hypocritical Pharisees.
3. He is not said to be separate from sinners so in state and condition as kings and potentates are from persons poor and mean;…No; but as He was meek and lowly, and took up His whole converse with the lower sort of people, the poor of this world, so He did by all ways and means invite and encourage all sorts of sinners to come unto Him.
4. He is not said to be separate from sinners, as though He had been ever in any communion with them, in any thing wherein He was afterwards separated from them.¹

Owen goes on to write (in substance) that this phrase is to be understood as a summation of the three previous terms, meaning “He is holy, harmless, undefiled, distinguished (in these respects) from those for whom He intercedes.”² And Calvin, in his comments, agrees:

Separate from sinners, etc. This clause includes all the rest. For there was some holiness, and harmlessness, and purity in Aaron, but only a small measure; for he and his sons were defiled with many spots; but Christ, exempt from the common lot of men, is alone free from every sin; hence in Him alone is found real holiness and innocency. For He is not said to be separate from us, because He repels us from His society, but because He has this excellency above us all, that He is free from every uncleanness.³

… and exalted above the heavens; – The final phrase of our verse which the author applies to Yeshua describes His ascension and His current exalted and glorified position with the Father. This takes us back to the opening chapter of the Epistle in which Yeshua is pictured as seated “at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (1:3). Yet here Yeshua is viewed as exalted to greater heights than the heavens, just as Paul writes in Eph 4:10, “He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.”

This final description of Yeshua as the exalted Intercessor offers His people great encouragement, for by His exaltation we may be confident that we too will be with Him in all of His glory.

27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

The opening phrase has caused some difficulty since it speaks of offering sacrifices “daily” but then goes on to describe what takes place only once a year, i.e., on Yom Kippur, when the high priest first offers

¹ John Owen, Hebrews, 3.556–58.
² Sampson, Hebrews, p. 283.
³ Calvin, Hebrews, p. 176.
up a sacrifice for his own sins and only then offers the sacrifice for the sins of the people. Hughes offers this explanation:

...it is perhaps best to suppose that our author is speaking both generally and particularly in this verse, in such a way that when he says “daily” he has in mind the complex daily sacrificial routine performed by high priest as well as priests, whereas when he says “first for his own sins and then for those of the people” his thought is moving from the general to the particular, and is in fact beginning to focus on that great festival which was the annual consummation of the whole sacrificial system.¹

The primary emphasis, then, is once again to establish the utter superiority of Yeshua’s High Priestly office as compared to the Aaronic priests who served in the tabernacle and Temples. Our author does this on two grounds: (1) that Yeshua did not need to be cleansed or to obtain atonement for His own sin as did the earthly high priest, and (2) that Yeshua’s one sacrifice was sufficient for all time and thus need not be repeated as was the case in the Yom Kippur offerings of the tabernacle and Temples, being repeated each year.

That Yeshua is superior by means of His sinless life and being has been firmly stated in the previous verse, and thus our current text is simply stating the obvious conclusion to be drawn on the basis of Yeshua’s sinless nature.

The second basis for Yeshua’s superiority as heavenly High Priest, that He offered His sacrifice once for all time, will become an important and repeated emphasis in our author’s continuing argument for Yeshua being the fulfillment to which Israel’s entire sacrificial system pointed. Thus, the Greek word here translated “once for all” (ἐφάπαξ, ephapax) will be found again in 9:12 and 10:10, and the related word, ἅπαξ (hapax), meaning “once,” will be encountered in 9:7, 26, and 28. In each case, our author wants to make emphatic that Yeshua’s offering of Himself has forever sealed the eternal salvation of all who come to the Father through Him. His sacrifice has paid the price of sin in full for all of His and nothing more needs to be added to it nor could be added to it. For the payment Yeshua made through offering Himself is infinite in value.

¹ Hughes, Hebrews, p. 277.
28 For the Torah appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Torah, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

It was the Torah given to Moses that required the high priest to offer a sacrifice, first for himself, and only after this, to offer the sacrifice on behalf of the people (cf. Lev 16). This requirement made it clear that the Aaronic high priests were themselves in need of atonement, for they, like those they represented in the priestly service, were themselves sinners. One need only reflect upon Aaron’s involvement in the making of the golden calf to realize he and his sons were beset by common, human weakness and the fallen nature.

In contrast, the word of oath (Ps 110:4), coming well after the giving of the Torah at Sinai, appoints a Son, that is, the Son of God, Who is in His very nature perfectly suited for the task to which He was sent.

made perfect forever – The word translated “perfect” (τετελειωμένον, teteleiōmenon) can likewise mean “complete” or “reaching the goal.” It is not as though Yeshua had defects which needed to be corrected, but rather that in His incarnation He came to save sinners, and through His death and resurrection, followed by His ascension and intercession, He forever brings such salvation to its full completion. This is the finale of these three verses which form a glorious “hymn to the High Priest.”
Chapter Eight

1–2 Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.

At the outset of Chapter Eight, our author gives us a summary statement to bring us back to the central issue he intends us to learn. “Now this is the main point (Κεφάλαιον, kephalaion) in what has been said....” And significantly, the subject of his summary is the priesthood of Yeshua. He intends to contrast, as he already has, the Levitical priesthood which, though fulfilling its role in the divine plan, could never effect true repentance and faith in the heart of the worshiper. This he contrasts with the priesthood of Yeshua who is able to change the heart through the gift of faith and therefore to bring about the ultimate goal of redemption, i.e., fellowship, which is friendship with the Father.

This notice, that the main subject of our author’s treatise is the priestly role of Yeshua and how His work fulfills and thus contrasts the work of the Levitical priesthood, is very important for us to grasp. He is not contrasting “old covenant” and “new covenant,” traditionally defined as the era before Yeshua, and the era following Yeshua, respectively. Rather, he is contrasting the covenant made with the Levites on the one hand, and that made with Yeshua as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, on the other. The covenant made with the Levites was a “shadow,” had “weakness,” and ultimately, in the course of history, became obsolete (“useless”) because the earthly Temple was destroyed and thus the ministry of the Levitical priesthood ceased. In contrast, the covenant made with Yeshua via oath1 is better because it secures the ultimate realization of God’s plan of redemption. It is the reality to which the Levitical priesthood was pointing all along.

What is more, Yeshua has “taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in the heavens.”2 His duties as high priest are viewed, on the one hand, as fully accomplished and He is therefore postured as one whose goal has been reached, who sits as a victorious commander, as a favored hero of the King.

1 cf. 7:20, 28, based upon Ps 110:4
2 cf. 1:3; 10:12; 12:2, all based upon Ps 110:1.
The contrasts, then, between the Levitical priesthood on the one hand, and the Melchizedekian priesthood on the other, are precisely those contrasts which exist between faith and unbelief, between righteousness and unrighteousness, between an attempt to find one’s own righteousness, and an acceptance of the revealed truth that salvation is by faith alone. Clearly, the Levitical priesthood should have moved the people to look for—to anticipate by faith—the coming of Messiah and His eternal priesthood. So was the fault with the Levites or with God’s plan to reveal His method of salvation through the ministry of the earthly Tabernacle and Temple? No—the fault was within the depraved heart of man who, though given a picture of the true, nonetheless attempted to make the picture itself the reality.

To have taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens is to have completed the task and to now occupy a position of divine authority and power in applying His completed sacrifice to all who are His (cf. Matt 28:18f). The use of “majesty” as a metonym for God is an obvious Jewish convention. The Greek μεγαλωσύνη (megalōsunē), translated “majesty,” represents the Hebrew חֶגְדוּלָה (hag’dûlāh) “the greatness,” used as a divine descriptive in the Tanach. Note the following:

Great is Adonai, and highly to be praised; His greatness (megalōsunē; hag’dûlāh) is unsearchable. (Ps 145:3)

Yours, O Adonai, is the greatness (megalōsunē; hag’dûlāh) and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Adonai, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. (IChron 29:11)

In the previous chapters we have seen that the superiority of Yeshua as High Priest, when compared to the Levitical priesthood, lies in His ability to effect true righteousness in those for whom He mediates. In this chapter, our author shows the superiority of Yeshua’s priestly work based upon the place of His ministry, namely, the heavenly tabernacle, “which the Lord pitched, not man,” meaning “ordained for an eternal purpose, never to be undone by man.” For who could imagine that man would be able to dismantle what God has Himself set up for His own, sovereign purposes? Moreover, since the tabernacle and Temples were ordained as a “shadow of the real,” it is the very “tabernacle in

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1 For further remarks on “the right hand” as a place of authority, see the commentary above on 1:3, pp. 36–7.
the heavenlies” in which eternal salvation is made sure—where eternal atonement is truly achieved for all of the elect.

This wholesome acceptance of the material world as being good shows an utter disregard for the christianized platonism which would flourish in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the common era. Our author, thoroughly Jewish, finds no discomfort at all in speaking of God being fully engaged in the physical world, even in pitching a tent. Indeed, the One who spoke and flung the universe into being is portrayed as bowing to pitch a tent! This in itself is doubtless a picture of the incarnation.

“a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.” The “sanctuary” here is the holy place and most holy place considered as a unit. The τῶν ἁγίων, tōn hagiōn, would suggest this, being plural, thus literally “the holy (places).”  

The following term, τῆς σκηνῆς, tēs skēnēs, “tabernacle,” being singular, confirms that our author is speaking of the entire structure. The term “minister” λειτουργὸς, (leitourgos) is the Greek equivalent of שָׁרַת (shārat, and related forms), “to serve,” and follows the argument of our author that Yeshua is engaged in the priestly activities of which the Levitical priesthood was an earthly representation. Here, once again, Yeshua is described as the “Servant of Adonai,” the very one spoken of by Israel’s prophets.

The question of whether or not an actual, physical structure exists in heaven after which the earthy was fashioned is often voiced in connection with this and other texts. We know that the Tabernacle in the wilderness was constructed after the pattern of the one shown to Moses on the mountain. And Rev 15:5 speaks of John seeing the “sanctuary of the tabernacle of testimony” as being opened. Moreover, as noted above, there is nothing “unholy” about material structures so we should not be surprised that in the world to come there might be a physical replica of the heavenly tabernacle as a memorial to the completed work of Yeshua.

Currently, however, the tabernacle in heaven is the “true” one to which the tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temples built by Solomon and Zerubabel pointed. So our author writes: “a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle” (λειτουργὸς καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς). There are two related Greek words used in the Apostolic

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1 This plural use of hagiōn to denote the sanctuary as a whole seems to have become more common in the Apocryphal literature, cp. Judith 4:12; 16:20; 1Macc 3:43, 59.
2 E.g., Num 16:9; Ezek 44:11ff.
3 Cf. 8:5; Ex 25:40.
Scriptures to denote the concept of “true,” namely ἀληθινός (alēthinos, the word used in our text) and ἀληθῆς (alēthēs). Some have suggested that these each carry a different nuance, ἀληθῆς (alēthēs) bearing the sense of “true” as opposed to “false” and ἀληθινός (alēthinos) generally having the sense of “real” as opposed to only “apparent” or “ethereal.” However, these distinctions cannot be sustained by a comparative study of the words.¹ What is obvious in our text is that the heavenly tabernacle, in which the ascended Messiah Yeshua performs His priestly duties, is the only one which is not an imitation of something better than itself, and is thus, in this way, the true Tabernacle. Only at such time as Yeshua takes up His residence in the earthly Temple (as Ezekiel foretells) will the earthly be a more full and accurate representation of Yeshua’s heavenly priesthood, for in His millennial reign, He will intercede for His people here, even as He is now interceding for us in the heavenly tabernacle.

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah; and He will reign forever and ever.” (Rev 11:15)

3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.

For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices – The connecting “For” (γάρ,  gar) indicates that our author is moving logically in his argument for the superiority of Yeshua’s priesthood. Since Yeshua is Himself our High Priest, and since every priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, it is clear that Yeshua too must be engaged in this same duty. This realization opens the way to explore what, in particular, pertains to His priestly activity.

The designation “gifts and offerings” is in concert with the terminology of the Tanach where the two terms may denote the same general thing, i.e., sacrifices in general (cf. v 4 where only “gifts” denotes that which the priest offers). The literary term for this is hendia dys, from the Greek meaning “one [meaning] through two [words].” Examples in English would be “good and plenty” or “well and good.” We find the same combination, “gifts” and “offerings” employed in this way in the

¹ This is especially clear when one studies these two terms in the Gospel of John.
Torah itself, i.e., the two terms denoting sacrifices in general:

Then Adonai spoke to Aaron, “Now behold, I Myself have given you charge of My offerings, even all the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, I have given them to you as a portion, and to your sons as a perpetual allotment. All the offerings of the holy gifts, which the sons of Israel offer to Adonai, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you, as a perpetual allotment. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before Adonai to you and your descendants with you.” (Num 18:18–19)

It is possible that “gifts” speaks more specifically to those portions of the offerings which were given as the priest’s share, while the term “offering” is the broader term encompassing all sacrifices (whether animal or grain) which were brought by the people. But when used together as in our text, the two terms combine to designate the sacrificial offerings presented to the priests by the people.

The actual offerings which Yeshua makes as our High Priest are not immediately expounded by our author. This he puts off until 9:11ff. First, he needs once again to emphasize that there has been a change in the priesthood. For Yeshua, if He were attempting to offer gifts and sacrifices in the earthly Temple, would not be allowed to do so, for He does not have the Levitical lineage required by the Torah to function as a priest in the earthly tabernacle.

4–5 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Torah; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “see,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

This point was made previously (7:11ff), but here it is emphasized in terms of the change that must be reckoned when comparing the earthly and the heavenly tabernacles, and the priesthood require for each. If the Torah required that priests be descended from Levi, and if Yeshua is truly functioning as a priest, then the only conclusion that can be reached is that there are different requirements for ministering in the heavenly tabernacle than those prescribed by the Torah for the earthly priests (7:12). When the two are compared, there is clearly a change from the one to the other when the requirements to function as a priest
This change, however, is not one which should surprise the student of the Tanach, for it is, according to our author, very clearly foretold by the prophets. Our author’s logic runs like this: since God informed Moses that he was to make the tabernacle exactly like the pattern shown to him on mount Sinai, it stands to reason that the tabernacle and the priesthood which served in it were both symbolic of a reality which existed in the place of the Divine presence.

Furthermore, since Yeshua is that reality (as it pertains to the priesthood), and since the place of the Divine presence in the heavenlies is the real tabernacle or temple, it stands to reason that when Yeshua began to function as High Priest, He would possess the qualifications for ministry in the heavenly tabernacle (i.e., an indestructible life) even as the earthly priests were likewise required to meet the requirements as established by the Torah (physical lineage to Aaron). What is more, the prophets themselves spoke of a time future to themselves when there would occur a specific work of God relative to the covenant which He had made with Israel, a work of making new what had heretofore been disregarded on a national level. If the covenant was to take on a new reality in that it would be written on the hearts of the people of Israel, then it seems logical that such a work would require a priesthood on a different level, both of authority and ability, to accomplish this prophetic promise. This, it seems to me, is the general line of logic our author wishes to advance.

who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things – The meaning of this opening phrase of v. 5 is a bit obscured in many of the English translations due to the detached genitive neuter plural τῶν ἐπουράνιων (tōn epouraniōn), “the heavenly things.” But this plural answers to the same genitive neuter plural, τῶν ἁγίων (tōn hagiōn), “the holies” in v. 2, where it denotes the heavenly “sanctuary.” The opening phrase in our verse would therefore be better understood if the translators had rendered it: “who serve in a place which is a shadowy copy of the heavenly sanctuary.”

This somewhat interpretive translation takes ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ, “copy and shadow” to be a hendiadys, thus “shadowy copy.” The Greek

1 The NASB (and other translations) make it appear as though “copy and shadow” function as the object they serve. However, the datives ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ should be taken as datives of sphere, thus, more literally—“these serve in a shadowy copy of the heavenly sanctuary.”

ὑπόδειγμα (hupdeigma) can mean “example” (as it was used in 4:11), but it can also mean a “pattern,” “a sketch,” or “a model,” and that is surely its meaning here as the quote from Ex 25:40 makes plain. Greek σκιά (skia) means “shadow,” and is not used here in a Platonic sense but of an “outline” which gives testimony to the presence of a physical object. It can also be used metaphorically of that which foreshadows an event (this word is used also at 10:1). Thus, our author’s point is that the earthly priests ministered in the earthly tabernacle which was a type of the heavenly tabernacle, its archetype, the very term we find in the quote from Exodus.

just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “see,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.” – In the Lxx of Ex 25:40, which our author uses, the word translated “pattern” is the Greek τύπος, tupos, from which we derive our English word “type.” Every “type” has its “antitype,” that is, the direct mirror copy of the type. The instructions given to Moses, then, were that he was to see to it that the tabernacle they would construct would follow the very pattern or model shown to him on the mountain.

Exactly how God showed him the model or pattern is not made known. But we surely derive from this, as did the author of Hebrews, that the service in the earthly Tabernacle as well as the functions of the priests and the high priest, were given by God as a revelation of His method of saving sinners—of declaring them righteous in His sight and bringing them into fellowship with Himself.

Therefore, the metaphor of “shadow” should not be taken as a negative, as so often is done by those who seek to use the book of Hebrews, and particularly chapters of 8–10, to prove the abolition of the Torah in light of the superiority of the heavenly tabernacle and priesthood. Surely our author’s primary intention in this section is to prove and extol the superiority of Yeshua’s priestly function, for He is the archetype to which the earthly tabernacle and priesthood pointed. But we should consider that in fulfilling this role of pointing to the Messiah as the true and ultimate sacrifice for sinners, Who ever lives to serve as their High Priest by applying the merits of His death to them, the earthly has served a very important role. Rather than the metaphor of “shadow” diminishing the tabernacle and Temples and the priesthood that

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1 Contra Attridge, Ibid.
2 Stephen uses the same quote which contains the Greek word τύπος to describe the model shown to Moses on Sinai, cf. Acts 7:44.
served in them, it portrays the high value accorded to the priestly service, for it was the Father’s will to reveal His plan of salvation via this means, a salvation which is the crown of God’s grace and sovereignty toward mankind.

6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

The covenant made at Sinai included the laws pertaining to the priesthood, and their service, or “ministry.” As the earthly priesthood, a shadow of the heavenly, was marked by a particular service, so it must be that the heavenly Priest, Yeshua, likewise is engaged in a specific priestly service or ministry. He has obtained it because He successfully offered Himself as a sacrifice to the Father, and through the resurrection has been declared victor over death. As conqueror of death, and thus of sin, He has proven His worth as the real High Priest to whom all others who held the earthly office pointed.

The priestly service which He has obtained as the eternal High Priest is better on a number of counts, the greatest of which is that His service actually deals with sin and is able to effect eternal forgiveness and a position of righteousness for the sinner whom He represents. This argument is taken up particularly in chapter ten, but is here simply noted. His service is also better because it is that service to which all others pointed—it is the reality which casts the shadow seen in the earthly service and priesthood. But primarily the superior nature of the service which Yeshua renders is that it always has its eternal effect upon the heart of each one for whom He intercedes before the Father.

Our author states that this more excellent ministry in which Yeshua is engaged as the heavenly High Priest is primarily seen in that He is the mediator of a better covenant. The term translated “mediator” is μεσίτης, mesitēs, and can mean either “mediator” or “guarantor.” This same word is found in two other places in Hebrews:

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:15)

and to Yeshua, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:24)
It appears as though our author uses a near synonym of mesitēs in 7:22, that is, the Greek word ἔγγυος (enguos),¹ and used there in the sense of “guarantor.” The obvious sense of mesitēs, “mediator,” is “one who stands between parties to act on behalf of them both.” Yet in the fact that Yeshua mediates on behalf of those for whom He died, or to put it another way, He mediates on behalf of those for whom His sacrifice was offered, it is obvious that His mediatorial work will always achieve its purpose. Thus, as mediator He is also the guarantor, for He has Himself paid the price and procured all the means by which those whom the Father has given to Him will, without exception, be eternally saved by His priestly work.

Thus, in our context it seems more likely that the meaning our author wishes to convey by referring to Him as the “mediator of a better covenant” is that Yeshua is the guarantor of that better covenant, i.e., the new covenant. Therefore, it is a surety that the Torah will be written on the heart of all whom the Father draws to Himself (John 6:44). This will include, in the last days, the entire nation of Israel as Paul stated in Rom 11:25–26 and Jeremiah prophesied in the new covenant prophecy, Jer 31:31ff, the text our author will quote in vv. 8–12 of this very chapter.

It is in this reality that the “more excellent ministry” of Yeshua is fulfilled since He is the mediator of a better covenant, seen primarily in the fact that it is based upon better promises. But does this mean that our author is contrasting the Sinai covenant with the New covenant and by this indicating that the Sinai covenant was flawed or inferior to the New covenant? As we will see, he is by no means teaching that the Sinai covenant, the Torah given to Israel by the hand of Moses, was flawed. The “better covenant” is better because it contained “better promises,” promises which could be brought to fruition only by a divine priest, i.e., Yeshua, Who alone could qualify as having an “indestructible life” (7:16).

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

Every commentary on the Epistle of Hebrews which I own and consulted considers this verse to present a contrast between the New covenant and the “Old covenant.”² But the first thing we should note

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¹ See the discussion of this word in the commentary on 7:22 above.
² E.g., Delitzsch, Calvin, Kistemaker, L. Timothy Johnson, Montefiore, Milligan, Alford, Westcott, F. F. Bruce, Attridge, etc.
in regard to this verse is that the word “covenant” (διαθήκη, diathēkē) is not found in the Greek text itself. It has been added by the translators of nearly every English translation and as such, has been greatly influential in forging the standard Christian view that the “first covenant” is to be equated with the “old covenant,” and therefore (as stated in our verse) had flaws.

The Greek of our verse seems to lack the completion of a conditional clause, for if we were to translated it woodenly, it would be: “For if that first was flawless, never a place for a second will be sought.” What is missing is the corresponding apodosis (“then”) for the initial “if” (pro- dosis). But such unfulfilled conditional sentences are not uncommon in Hebrews. The fact that the sentence opens with the conditional “if” means that a corresponding “then” is implied and required. So the logic of our author is clear: if the Levitical service in the Tabernacle and Temples had brought a complete fulfillment of God’s saving plan, then there would have been no need for a priest after the order of Melchizedek to be commissioned. Or to put it another way, the very fact that God took an oath in establishing David’s Master (Yeshua) as a “priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4) proves that the Levitical priesthood and the service they rendered was not God’s intended means for bringing about the eternal salvation of the elect.

This is the point: our author is not contrasting two covenants, a “first” and a “second” covenant, but two priesthoods, the first (Levitical) and the second (Yeshua as the Melchizedek high priest). And this becomes even clearer when one considers the traditional Christian interpretation which has our author referring to the Sinai covenant as being flawed. How is it possible that the very words of the Torah given by God to Moses for Israel were flawed? Note the remarks of Owen:

> From this supposition the apostle proves that the first covenant is imperfect, blamable, and removable. And the force of his inference depends on a common notion or presumption, that is clear and evident in its own light. And it is this, when once a covenant is made and established, if it will serve unto and effect all that he who makes it doth design, and exhibit all the good which he intends to communicate, there is no reason why another covenant should be made.

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1. One exception is the recently produced *Tree of Life* translation which has translated our verse as: “For if the first one had been flawless, there would not have been discourse seeking a second.”

And Johnson, while taking a different approach, still attributes failure to the “first covenant,” i.e., the Torah covenant of Sinai:

To be fair, the failure of people to keep a covenant does not by itself condemn the terms of the covenant or require a new framework for the relationship. But however illogical, that is the line our author follows. It is important to remember that for the author, it is precisely the failure of the people to keep it that reveals the inadequacy of the first covenant. Why? Here we again see the author’s conviction that the worth of a covenant is measured by its efficacy in perfecting persons. Their failure to be perfected is a failure of the covenant as such.1

In pure contrast to this, the words of the Psalmist ring in our ears: “The Torah of Adonai is perfect (תְּמִימָה, têmîmâh, “flawless”) restoring the soul...” (Ps 19:7).

Once again, however, the majority of Christian commentators take for granted that our verse is contrasting a “first covenant” with a “second covenant,” but the next verse (which is already referenced in the quote above) speaks differently. The “flaw” or “fault” is not with God’s Torah covenant but with the people.

8 For finding fault with them, He says, “BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH;

Note very carefully how our author introduces Jeremiah’s prophecy of the “New covenant,” which he quotes from Jer 31:31–34. He does not write “For finding fault with it...,” meaning a covenant, but rather “with them” (μεμφόμενος γὰρ αὐτοὺς), that is, with the people including the Levitical priests.

Here we see reinforced again what we recognized at the beginning of our chapter: our author’s primary subject is the priesthood, and specifically the contrast he sees between the Levitical priesthood and the heavenly high priesthood of Yeshua:

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. (8:1–2)

In making the claim that God found fault "with them," that is, with Israel, our author is relying directly upon the new covenant passage he now quotes from Jer 31:31–34.

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<td>31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares Adonai, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares Adonai. 33 “But this is My covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares Adonai, “I will put My Torah within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know Adonai’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares Adonai, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”</td>
<td>31 Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took hold of their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; for they remained not in my covenant, and I disregarded them, saith the Lord. 33 For this is My covenant which I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will surely put my laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. 34 And they shall not all teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them: for I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins I will remember no more.</td>
<td>8 Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; 9 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord. 10 for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 and they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘know the Lord,’ for all will know me, from the least to the greatest of them. 12 for I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”</td>
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In comparing the quote of our author in Hebrews with that of the Lxx and Hebrew texts, it is clear that our author was influenced by the Lxx\(^1\) but not necessarily bound by it. He makes some interesting changes when compared with the Lxx, which some have suggested were fostered by influence of liturgy, but there is no convincing evidence to substantiate this.\(^2\)

It is by this lengthy quote from Jeremiah’s “new covenant” prophecy that our author explains his term “better promises” of the previous verse. It is precisely in what God has divinely promised in the New covenant that not only secures the salvation of Israel in the eschaton, but likewise gives the basis for the eternal salvation of all who are part of the elect.

BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH. The prophecy begins with the announcement that this sovereign work of the Almighty would take place in “coming days” (יָמִים בָּאִים / ἡμέραι ἔρχονται), a favorite term of Jeremiah, used 14 times.\(^3\) In the majority of these, the context makes it amply clear that the time frame referenced is the “last days” or the “days of consummation” which will be characterized by the dispersed tribes being gathered back to the Land to dwell securely and “… no one will make him afraid” (Jer 30:10). Further, Israel will experience these promises “in the latter days” (בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים, Jer 30:24).

The text reads that God “will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” The Greek, if given in a more literal word order, would be: “and I will effect upon the house of Israel and upon the house of Judah a new covenant,” where “new covenant is put last and the verb “I will effect” (συντελέσω, sunteleśō) is placed first in the clause. This, it seems to me, puts emphasis upon the divine monergism expressed in the words of HaShem. He will bring this to pass on His own initiative, for His own purpose, and through His own sovereign will. Indeed, this dovetails with Ezekiel’s prophecy that in the last days God would remove the heart of stone from Israel His people and put in its place a heart of flesh, and it is this “heart transplant” that would cause Israel to repent and return to their God with fulness of heart, in genuine faith and faithfulness.

For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle

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1 As aligned with the text as evidenced by Codex Alexandrinus.
2 See Attridge, Hebrews, p. 225, n. 11.
clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. (Ezek 36:24–28)

The Greek word translated by the NASB as “I will effect” (συντελέσω, suntelesō) is found only here in Hebrews, but is used five other times in the Apostolic Scriptures. The root verb (teleō) means “to bring to completion” or “to perform or finish something as stated or promised.” The prefix sun is most likely perfective in function, meaning “to bring to full completion” or “to perform and finish something completely, as promised.” Our author has chosen this word rather than following the Lxx which has the more common verb διατίθημι (diatithēmi), “to put something in order,” “to decree,” or “ordain.” Once again, it would appear that the intention of our author is to emphasize that God has dedicated Himself to this reality and nothing could therefore possibly stand in the way of its fulfillment.

That which God has purposed to establish is a “new covenant” (בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה, bĕrît chadāshāh), the only place in the Tanach where this term is found. Much has been made of the word “new” as meaning “renewed” or “re-established.” And while it surely is evident that the Hebrew word chadash can have this meaning, one wonders if this could have been the meaning Jeremiah intended. Others, wanting to overcome the bifurcation between the supposed “old covenant” and “new covenant,” have even suggested that Jeremiah is using irony when calling the covenant “new,” and doing so to shame Israel who continued to maintain that the covenant was fully intact and they had nothing about which to worry.

However, when we consider the larger context of Jeremiah’s prophecy, and then consider the immediate context of the New Covenant prophecy, the characteristic of “new”seems highly appropriate, for Jeremiah is speaking in reference to the whole nation, not to a remnant.

2 See Wilber Wallis, “Irony in Jeremiah’s Prophecy of a New Covenant” JETS, 12 (Spring, 1969), 107–110.
part. If one considers this prophecy as having a national scope, then such a phenomenon is, in fact, new. For never in Israel’s history do we see the nation as a whole fully demonstrating faithfulness to God and His righteous ways. Yet, as we continue to see Jeremiah’s prophecy unfolded, we marvel at the superlative and comprehensive characteristics of the entire nation as having unequivocal covenant allegiance to the God Who has redeemed them.

... WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH – The fact that Jeremiah specifically mentions both the northern and southern kingdoms indicates the breadth of his prophecy. It pertains to the whole nation which God has regathered from the nations, and which all together return to a faithful obedience to Him.

Note carefully how the language changes in v. 10 (quoting Jer 31:33).

...for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Adonai: (Heb 8:10)

Now, in this subsequent verse, which reiterates the same thought as our verse (v. 8), we hear of only the “house of Israel” and not the “house of Judah”? Surely Jeremiah did not simply neglect to mention the “house of Judah” after just lines before explicitly stating that the covenant would be established with both houses! Rather, what is obvious is that in the regathering of Israel and Judah to the Land, the nation is once again united and no longer exists as two distinct, divided kingdoms. Ezekiel’s dramatization of the sticks is realized in the establishment of the New Covenant.

Say to them, ‘Thus says the Adonai YHVH, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. (Ezek 37:21–22)

This, of course, has not yet happened. The majority of the houses of Israel and Judah remain dispersed among the nations. What then does this tell us about the New Covenant? It tells us that while the remnant, comprised of all who are covenant members through faith in Yeshua, Israel’s Messiah, is constituted as first fruits of the New Covenant, the complete fulfillment of it awaits the latter days when, as Paul writes, “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26).
By this I do not intend to convey the idea that every person with lineage to Jacob will be saved but rather that when the New Covenant is finally and completely fulfilled, the world will be able to say of Israel that they, as a national entity, have confessed Yeshua as the true and only Messiah through Whom salvation is granted, even as national Israel, from the earliest times, was known (and is still known) as rejecting Yeshua. Indeed, the very purpose of God in restoring Israel, according to Ezekiel’s prophecy, is that the nations would know that He and He alone is the God of the universe.

Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, Adonai, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, Adonai, have spoken and will do it. (Ezek 36:36)

9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD.

As can be seen in the table on p. 245 above, there are small differences between our text and the Lxx, and a significant variant between the Lxx (which is followed by Hebrews) and the Hebrew text (MT).

The small variants between the Lxx and the text of Hebrews are:

1. in the phrase ἣν ἐποίησα τοῖς πατράσιν αὐτῶν, “which I made with their fathers,” the Lxx uses the verb διεθέμνη (from διατίθημι, diatithēmi) “to arrange a formal agreement,” “to make a covenant” (the same verb used in the previous verse) while the author of Hebrews used the more common and generic word ἐποίησα (from ποιέω, poieō), “to do, make,” having previously used the verb συντελέω (sunteleō). While the variation may simply be one of style, it seems at least probable that our author intends to emphasize the inevitable success of the new covenant in contrast to the Sinai covenant which Israel despised.¹

¹ See K. J. Thomas, “The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews,” NTS 11 [1964–65] 310–13. He suggests that the initial “I will establish a new covenant” when compared with “the covenant which I made” emphasizes that the “new covenant” will be kept in contrast to the Sinai covenant which
2. in the final phrase of the verse, the Lxx has καὶ ἐγώ (kai egō), “and I” while Hebrews has κἀγώ (kagō), “and I.” This is merely the difference between a contracted and a fully written expression but both have the same meaning.

The more significant variant is found in the Lxx and copied by the author of Hebrews as well, and this pertains to the final clause of our verse. The Hebrew has יִהְוָה בָּעַלְתִּי בָּם נְאֻעְמַי, “and I was a husband to them, declares ADONAI.” The Lxx, however, as well as the Greek of our Hebrews text, has (literally) κἀγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν, λέγει κύριος, “and I was neglecting them, said the Lord.” The NASB’s “and I did not care for them, says the Lord,” might be misunderstood in our modern English, for the expression “I do not care for” in colloquial English means “I don’t like something.” But the NASB intends us to read the word “care” in the sense of “attend to” or “take care of,” and thus gives the sense of the Greek verb ἀμέλεω, ameleō, “to neglect,” “to not attend or care for” for someone. Interestingly, the Peshitta has בָּסָי (bsy’), “to despise,” indicating that the Syriac translators were translating from the Lxx. The Vulgate, however, understands the phrase in line with the MT, “and I was a husband to them.”

Some older commentators, based upon a supposed connection with an Arabic root, seek to find the meaning “to look down upon,” “despise” for the Hebrew verb בָּעַלְתִּי, referencing the Lexicon by Gesenius,¹ and thus suggest that the Hebrew of Jeremiah is more properly understood by the Lxx. More likely, however, the Lxx read גָעַלְתִּי, “I despised” for בָּעַלְתִּי, “I was a husband,” and the Syriac was using the Lxx at this point for its translation. That our author followed the Lxx in his quote does not drastically alter the general sense of the text nor its use by our author in substantiating his thesis.

The point of this verse as originally found in the prophecy of Jeremiah is to emphasize the goodness and faithfulness of God in promising a “new covenant” in spite of Israel’s rebellion. That God is pictured as taking Israel “by the hand” and leading the nation out of Egypt stresses was not. Note also the remarks of Attridge, Hebrews, p. 227, “Again, the alteration may be intentional, indicating that God’s actions in establishing the two covenants are of a different order, and the new will “made” in a more profound and effective way.”

¹ See, for example, Sampson, Hebrews, p. 303f. However, my copy of Gesenius’ Lexicon (dated 1849) has no such meaning listed for בָּעַלְתִּי.
Israel’s inability (being pictured as a child in need of being led on the journey), emphasizes the kindness of God. Thus, His kindness is ex- tolled all the more when Israel, seen as rebelling against the covenant, is nonetheless promised a new covenant which will most assuredly re- sult in final and ultimate success for Israel.

Thus, the “covenant which I made with their fathers” is contrast- ed with the future “new covenant” and it is important for us to see this contrast and understand what constitutes the differences. For God states, “I will effect a new covenant...not like the covenant which I made with their fathers.”

The first and most obvious difference between the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai, and the new covenant which He promises to make with Israel, is that the response to the new covenant by the nation of Israel will be in stark contrast to the response the nation gave to the Sinai covenant. For at Sinai, before Moses had even returned with the written covenant on tablets of stone, the nation had succumbed to idol worship. A golden calf was constructed and the people were ascribing to it their deliverance from Egypt: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (Ex 32:4).

What is more, even when severe discipline came upon the people, they did not turn in wholehearted repentance to God, but continued in their stiff-necked ways to murmur and complain, and to test God. What therefore contrasts the covenant at Sinai and the promised new covenant in a primary sense is the willing response of Israel to the cov- enant to keep it. But the further contrast is both that which brings about Israel’s desire to keep that covenant and, even more, the ability to do so. This results from being given a new heart—the result of the Ruach’s work of regeneration in bringing the people of Israel to genuine faith in God’s Messiah, Yeshua. Once again, the primary contrast between the Sinai covenant and the new covenant is not a change in the covenant itself but a change in those for whom the covenant is enacted. This be- comes eminently clear in the following verses.
10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

As noted above, while the initial promise (v. 8) is given “to the house of Israel and the house of Judah,” here we only see the “house of Israel.” The reason seems clear: Jeremiah is prophesying that the new covenant of which he is speaking will come to completion at a time in earth’s history when the divided nation, Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom) will be reunited and constitute a unified kingdom as was the case under the rule of king David. Obviously, in our day this has not yet taken place and thus we recognize that while everything necessary for the establishment of the new covenant has most assuredly been accomplished, its full and complete application to the nation of Israel remains for the future.

The most obvious illustration of this is the very central and core aspect of the new covenant, and this is the death, resurrection, ascension and intercession of Yeshua as the Savior of His people. Consider this: everything necessary to redeem all of God’s elect, everyone who is or will be eternally saved, has been accomplished by the finished work of Yeshua in His death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father. Yet not all who will make up the innumerable company of redeemed individuals have presently come to faith in the Messiah. Thus, what has been accomplished for the salvation of the elect must still be applied to each individual in time and space.

In precisely the same way, the reality of the new covenant has been applied to all who have come to genuine faith in the Messiah, regardless of the era in which they may have lived, or will live. Even as God has drawn individuals in every generation to Himself by granting them saving faith, thus constituting the believing remnant in every generation, so He will, in the last days, do that same work within the nation of Israel, drawing them to Himself by removing the unbelieving heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh endowed with the gift of saving faith by which they will together, as a nation, bow before Yeshua and proclaim Him to be their Messiah, their Savior, and their Lord (cf. Zech 12:10).

I will put my laws into their minds – The Greek of our text is almost exactly the same as the Lxx, the only exception being that the Lxx doubles the verbal idea for emphasis while our author does not:
Lxx - Διδοὺς δῶσω νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν
Hebrews - διδοὺς νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν

The Lxx doubles the verbal component for emphasis: “I will surely put My laws into their minds,” mimicking a Hebrew idiom of using an infinitive followed by its cognate finite verb to make the statement emphatic.¹

The other obvious differences are:

1. that the Lxx and well as our Hebrews text has “mind” (διάνοια, dianoia) rather than simply following the Hebrew which has “I will put my Torah within them” (נָתַתִּי את־תורָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם)

2. the Lxx and our Hebrews text have the plural, νόμους μου, nomous mou, “My laws” while Jeremiah has תּוֹרָתִי, tôrâti, “My Torah.”

Once again, these variations are slight, and easily explained. That the Lxx had used nomos almost exclusively to translation torah makes it understandable why our author, who is quoting from the Lxx, would use nomos in our text as well. That it is plural reflects the fact that in this context particularly, the issue is one of future obedience in contrast to past disobedience. Thus, it is understandable why the plural would be used, for it speaks of the fact that the single Torah is God’s standard of righteousness for all aspects of life and is therefore plural in nature and application.

Moreover, from a Greek perspective, the place where one makes moral and ethical decisions—where the cognitive and volitional functions take place within a person—is the mind. For the Hebrew, this is the heart, which is mentioned in the next clause.

It is interesting that the Lxx translators understood the Hebrew בְּקִרְבָּם (b’qirbam), “within them” (or “within their midst”) to mean “within their minds.” The Hebrew might be understood as “within their homes, families, community, etc.” rather than having an individual, cognitive meaning. Regardless, the use of “mind” surely parallels the Hebraic understanding of “heart” (לֵב/לֵבָב leiv/leivav) as appropriate for a Hellenistic audience.

And I will write them on their hearts – The Lxx (and thus our author as well) continues the plural with “write them on their hearts,” referring to the previous plural, “laws.” The Hebrew of Jeremiah, having the

¹ The Greek here actually has a participle followed by its cognate finite verb.
singular “My Torah” (תּוֹרָתִי, tôrâti) follows with וְעַל־לִבָּם אֶכְתֲּבֶנָּה, “and upon the heart I will write it.” Thus, the whole Torah is envisioned here, not simply part of it. This in itself should warn us away from the common teaching of the Christian Church that the ceremonial and civil parts of the Torah have been abolished, and only the moral aspects remain. In Jeremiah’s new covenant, the Torah is considered (as everywhere in the Tanach) as a singular whole that cannot be divided.

The Torah written upon the heart is a direct fulfillment of the Shema (Deut 6:6; 11:18) where God commands His people to “put these words upon your heart and your soul.”¹ The very fact that God commands this of His people in the Shema is proof that the internalization of the Torah was always possible where true faith existed. Thus, the expression “a man after God’s own heart” (1Sam 13:14) draws upon the command to write God’s Torah, His instructions, upon one’s heart. A person after God’s own heart is one who has, by faith and through the power of the Ruach (Spirit), internalized the Torah of God through hearty agreement and humble submission, and a growing desire to please their Redeemer in all aspects of life.

And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. – This final phrase of v. 10 is, once again, national. He is the God of a people—a nation—a corporate reality. The same phrase is found in Jer 32:38–40, in a reiteration of the new covenant (here called the “everlasting or eternal covenant”).

They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. (Jer 32:38–40)

“I will be their God and they shall be My people” is a phrase found in other strategic covenant passages in the Tanach as well. Note, for instance, Gen 17:8 where just the first half of the phrase is found in the context of the Abrahamic covenant:

And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” (Gen 17:8)

¹ Other instances in the Tanach where this phrase occurs: Is 42:25; 47:7; 57:1, 11; Jer 12:11; Mal 2:2; Song of Songs 8:6; Dan 1:8.
A very interesting use of this phrase is in Ezekiel 37:

And when the sons of your people speak to you saying, ‘Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?’ say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand. And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. And say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. (Ezek 37:18-23)

Here we see that the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, dispersed to the lands of their enemies, are regathered and made one, just as Jeremiah subtly hints by beginning with “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” and moving to only “the house of Israel” as he unfolds his new covenant prophecy. But notice that this reunion and uniting back into one nation happens in the Land. Once again, this models or should we say brings to completion the exodus motif, for even as Israel was delivered from Egypt in order to dwell in the Land God had promised, so the regathered Israel is planted once again in the Land, and it is their return to the Land that accompanies the national fulfillment of the new covenant on their behalf.

11-12 And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all will know me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

The next characteristic of the new covenant describes how Israel’s loyalty to the Lord will be universal. The word “know” in a Hebrew context often connotes intimate relations, and in a covenant context, “faithful relations.” Note, for instance, 1Sam 2:12, where the sons of Eli
are referred to as “sons of Belial who did not know the Lord.” In an even more specific covenant context, note these words of Hosea:

For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, so that they will be mentioned by their names no more. In that day I will also make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and will make them lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD. (Hosea 2:17–20 [Heb 2:20–22])

Here, in a specific “new covenant” context, the idea of “knowing the Lord” as loyalty to the covenant is cast in the picture of a husband and a wife. The new covenant made with Israel will bring her into the true and intimate relation with God that He has always desired and promised. But notice, this is once again corporate in scope: the nation as a whole is brought to her God in truth.

For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. – The final description of the new covenant is found in the promise of forgiveness of sins. That this has been true for individuals through the ages cannot be denied. But that it has never been true for Israel as a nation is equally evident. Here, once again, the effects of the new covenant are seen corporately and nationally. Here is the picture of a nation turning to God in sincere repentance and experiencing national revival and salvation.

Moreover, since the only means of forgiveness of sins is through the work of Yeshua and through placing one’s faith in Him, this final clause of the new covenant text makes it clear that there is coming a time in earth’s history when Israel, on a national scale, will accept and confess Yeshua to be the true and only Messiah, and the only way to the Father, as He said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6)

It is not difficult to see that this expression of the new covenant has not yet been realized. This corporate, national reality for the nation of Israel awaits the future coming of the Messiah again, and the final pouring out of the Ruach as Joel prophesied. This is not to imply in any
way that the realities of the new covenant are not in place each time an individual (whether Jew or Gentile) comes to true faith in Messiah. But what makes this covenant “new” in Jeremiah’s perspective is that what has been true for individuals in each generation will, in the last days, be true for the nation as a whole. It is with this same mindset that Paul can proclaim and prophecy: “thus all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26).

13 When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Most English translations of this verse have inserted the word “covenant” as the object of the adjective “new,” thus imposing their theological opinion that the author of Hebrews is contrasting the Mosaic covenant with the New covenant text which he has quoted from Jeremiah in the preceding context. Besides the NASB quoted above, the following are representative:

(ESV) 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.

(NET) When he speaks of a new covenant,* he makes the first obsolete. Now what is growing obsolete and aging is about to disappear. [*note: Grk “when he says, ‘new,’” (referring to the covenant).]

(NIV) By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

(CJB) By using the term, “new,” he has made the first covenant “old”; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.¹

(KJV) In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.²

¹ Bold typeface on the word “new” is in the original.
² Italic typeface on the word “covenant” is in the original.
(HCSB) By saying, a new covenant, He has declared that the first is old. And what is old and aging is about to disappear.

Two recent English translations offer the text as it is found in the Greek: the Common English Bible and the Tree of Life Version:

(CEB) When it says new, it makes the first obsolete. And if something is old and outdated, it’s close to disappearing.

(TLV) In saying “new,” He has treated the first as old; but what is being made old and aging is close to vanishing.

The Greek (with word-for-word translation) is:

ἐν τῷ λέγειν καινὴν πεπαλαίωκεν τὴν πρώτην· τὸ δὲ παλαιούμενον καὶ γηράσκον ἐγγὺς ἀφανίσμοῦ.

In the (his) saying “new,” he has already made (or considered) the first obsolete. But what is becoming obsolete and old is about gone.

There are no extant Greek manuscripts which contain the word “covenant” (διαθήκη, diathēkē) in this verse. Nor does the Peshitta include the word “covenant.”

In that he said “new,” he made the first old; and that which is old and decaying is near to dissolution.

Thus, those many English translations which include the word “covenant” in this verse do so as a matter of interpretation by the translators, not as based upon anything in the Greek text itself. But I would agree that the word “new” in this verse is pointing back to its use in the new covenant texts just quoted from Jeremiah and thus the addition of the word “covenant” with the word “new” by English translators gives the proper sense. But this leaves us with an obvious question: why did the author of Hebrews not include the word “covenant” if by using the word “new” that is what he intended? The answer to this question, it seems to me, is that he did not want his readers to think that he was making a contrast
between covenants, between the “new covenant” and the “first covenant.”

But this is precisely how the English translations have understood our verse. They conclude that our author is comparing the Sinai covenant with the New covenant and that the Sinai covenant is that which our author considers as “old,” having outlived its usefulness, and, in his own day was about to be “finished” or “rendered obsolete.”

But a number of issues speak against such an interpretation. First and foremost is the idea that the Sinai covenant could be rendered “old” and “obsolete” when it was given as an eternal covenant to Israel. Indeed, the Sabbath is designated as the sign of the Sinai covenant, and it is clearly noted to be eternal:

So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Adonai made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed. (Ex 31:16–17)

But more importantly, we have already seen that the primary subject addressed by our author in this context is not “covenant” but “priesthood,” and specifically the superiority of Yeshua as high priest after the order of Melchizedek when compared to the earthly, Levitical priesthood. Our author’s argument on this subject began in earnest at 7:1 and continues through 10:18. The first verse of our chapter reiterates this in no uncertain term: he is contrasting the earthly and the heavenly high priesthoods, showing that the former clearly pointed forward to and anticipated the latter. Indeed, it was the primary purpose of the Levitical priesthood to point the people to the ultimate high priest Who alone is able to take away one’s sin through the application of His own, eternal and infinite sacrifice.

Why, then, does our author appeal to the new covenant by the extensive quote from Jeremiah? He does so in order that his readers might ask an obvious question: “How does the promise of a new covenant demonstrate the superiority of Yeshua’s heavenly high priesthood?” Or,

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1 We will see that in 9:15, the designation “first covenant” refers to the Sinai covenant as anticipatory of the manner in which the new covenant would be established, i.e., through the eternal sacrifice of Yeshua as the ultimate heavenly high priest foreshadowed in the priestly service of the Tabernacle and Temples.
to ask the question differently, “Why does the establishment of the new covenant require a different priestly order than the established Levitical priesthood?”

The new covenant, as we have studied, promises a revival of national proportions, the like of which Israel has never known. The Levitical priesthood, even in its finest hour (which certainly was not during the 1st century CE), could never have hoped to effect such a national revival. Time and time again, the priesthood of Israel had been unable to keep the nation from straying. Indeed, at times it was the priesthood that led them into falsehood. The very fact that Jeremiah prophesied a future new covenant in which the Torah would be written upon the hearts of the people of Israel en masse is seen by our author as requiring a high priest who not only could offer a superior sacrifice but who could, in addition to such an offering, remove the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh (cf. Ezek 36:26–27). Only a priest who can truly change the heart of those he serves would be able to bring about the promised revival. Thus, the primary reason that our author brings Jeremiah’s new covenant up in the first place is simply to show that it required a superior high priest to establish it. And the following context corroborates this, for our author states that only Yeshua, the heavenly high priest, is able to “cleans the conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14), something the Levitical priests could never do.

When He said, “new,” He has made the first obsolete. – The Greek word translated here as “obsolete” (παλαιῶ, palaiō) can have the sense of “to grow old” or “to be worn out,” i.e., no longer able to function as intended.¹ The word is found in 1:11 (a quote from Ps 102:26) of garments which become old and worn out.² The only other place the word is found in the Apostolic Scriptures is in Lk 12:33 where Yeshua admonishes His disciples to “make purses which do not wear out.” Clearly, the word describes something which, because of age, has been well used and thus worn out and is therefore din need of being replaced.

The primary question, however, is to what “the first” (τὴν πρώτην) refers in our verse. What is it, this “first,” that is growing old or obsolete?

¹ The verb in this verse is in the perfect tense (πεπαλαίωκεν) and gives the sense that in proclaiming the new covenant through Jeremiah, the reality of the “first” becoming obsolete is sure but being worked out in the course of time.
It is natural to assume (under the influence of our English translations and the general teaching of the Christian Church on this passage) that our author is referring to the Mosaic covenant. For some, this seems the obvious interpretation since in 9:15 he speaks of “transgressions that were committed under the first covenant,” where “first covenant” seems clearly to refer to the contrasting periods of time noted in Jeremiah’s new covenant prophecy—“I will make a new covenant... not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.” But note carefully that, in contrast to our verse (8:13) in which the word “covenant” does not occur, in 9:15 the word “covenant” is used in connection both with the new covenant as well as the “first covenant.”

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant (διαθήκης καινῆς), so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant (מוקדת πρώτης διαθήκης), those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:15)

But as already noted, it makes no sense that our author would consider the Sinai covenant to have become old and useless since Moses and the prophets speak of it as being eternal. And beyond that, the core of the new covenant is that the Torah, the central element of the Sinai covenant, is written upon the heart. Thus, far from using the terms “new” and “first” as representing contrasting covenants (i.e., the Sinai covenant and the New covenant), our author is contrasting priesthoods: the priesthood set into place by the Sinai covenant contrasted by the heavenly priesthood of Yeshua Who alone is able to bring the New covenant to its appointed fulfillment.

But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. This last phrase of v. 13 adds yet another conclusive reason why our author is not contrasting the Sinai covenant with the New covenant in order to show that the Sinai covenant has been abolished and has been replaced by the New covenant. For Christian theologians consistently argue that it was the death and resurrection of Yeshua which destroyed the “old covenant” (i.e., the Torah) and rendered it no longer applicable. Note these examples from Christian commentators.

When Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, gave His disciples the cup and said, “This is the blood of the covenant, shed for many;” (Mark 14:24, NEB), the paschal context of the incident would surely have made them link His words
with “the blood of the covenant” which God established with His people Israel in the days of Moses on the basis of the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:8). Nor can we doubt that His intention was to announce that now at length that earlier covenant was to be replaced by the “new covenant” foretold by Jeremiah midway between Moses’ day and His own.”

God himself introduced the word new when he said, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (8:8). In Christ the new covenant has become reality; consequently, the old covenant has become obsolete… The Jew of the first century, therefore, had to realize that the era of the covenant God made with his people at Sinai had ended.

Both of these quotes give the general sense, found throughout the Christian commentators, that the abolition of the Mosaic or Sinai covenant including the Torah, was accomplished by Yeshua through His death and resurrection.

But the problem the final phrase of v. 13 presents to this interpretation is that elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures the finality of the work accomplished by Yeshua through His death and resurrection is immediate and conclusive, not progressive and tentative. For instance, our sin is said to be “nailed to the cross.”

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Col 2:13–15)

Even in Hebrews our author speaks in a similar way:

and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb 9:12)

1 F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, pp. 177–78.
2 Kistemaker, Hebrews, p. 228.
Thus, if our author intended to teach us that the Sinai covenant was rendered inoperative by the priestly work of Yeshua in His death and resurrection, then he would not have portrayed the “first covenant” as “becoming obsolete” and “ready to disappear.” Granted, some commentators consider these words to describe the “outward” appearance of the “old covenant,”¹ but that is not the issue about which our author is concerned. His concern is to show that the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah by necessity required a different kind of priesthood, one which could effect the very central tenet of the new covenant, namely, writing the Torah upon the heart. This Yeshua accomplished once for all time when He offered Himself as the eternal sacrifice for sin—the only way for sin to be taken away.

If, in fact, our author wished to teach that the “old covenant” was abolished once for all by the death of Yeshua, then he most certainly would not have used the metaphor of “becoming obsolete,” “growing old,” and “ready to disappear.” These are progressive in contrast to the work of Yeshua in paying for the sin of all the elect and thereby securing their eternal redemption which was completed by His death and resurrection—a once for all time event.

To what, then, is our author referring when he writes that “the first is becoming obsolete and growing old” and is thus “ready to disappear”? Remembering that the main subject of our immediate text is the superiority of Yeshua’s heavenly priesthood as over against the Levitical priests, and given the fact that our author purposely does not include the word “covenant” in our verse, what seems to be the obvious referent is that of the Levitical priesthood. This is what was becoming obsolete, growing old, and ready to disappear.

But if this is the proper interpretation, then would this not indicate that the Temple was still standing and the sacrifices were being offered? How can this interpretation be paired with the suggestion given in the introduction of this commentary, that the epistle may well have been written soon after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE?

The history of the destruction and subsequent years gives us some interesting insights. Historically, the *tamid* or daily sacrifice continued uninterrupted throughout the siege of Jerusalem, as difficult as this was. But on the 17th of Tammuz the Romans breached the walls and thus the daily sacrifices had to cease due to the lack of lambs and of qualified priests to offer the sacrifice. Three weeks later, on the 9th of Av, the Temple was entirely destroyed by the Romans and the regu-

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lar sacrifices ceased entirely. There is some evidence, however, that the Pesach (Passover sacrifice) was offered in some form on the rock upon which the altar had stood for some years after the destruction. The following gives some of the supporting evidence.

Clement of Rome, in his epistle to Diognetus speaks of the sacrifices as though they are still being performed:

But those who imagine that, by means of blood, and the smoke of sacrifices and burnt-offerings, they offer sacrifices [acceptable] to Him, and that by such honors they show Him respect—these, by supposing that they can give anything to Him who stands in need of nothing, appear to me in no respect to differ from those who studiously confer the same honor on things destitute of sense, and which therefore are unable to enjoy such honors.¹

Josephus, likewise, appears to make the same point, where, in his Treatise against Apion,² written sometime after 93 CE, he speaks of the institutions of the priesthood as though still in place and argues for the continuation of sacrifices on behalf of the Emperor.

The Mishnah seems to be speaking in similar terms:

They may not roast the Passover offering on a skewer of metal or on a grating. R. Zadok said, It once happened that Rabban Gamliel said to Tabi his slave, ‘Go forth and roast for us the Passover offering upon the grating.’³

The Talmud⁴ notes a servant of Gamaliel II by the name of Tabi. Gamaliel II lived in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, and thus this gives an indication that the Pesach sacrifice was being observed well after the destruction.

Consider as well the words of R. Joshua recorded in the Mishnah:

Rabbi Joshua said: I have heard that sacrifices may be offered (according to another version: ‘were offered’) although there is no Temple and that they may eat the Most Holy things although there are no curtains and the Lesser Holy Things and the Second Tithe although there is no wall; since its (the Temple’s) first dedication (by Solomon) sanctified it both for its

¹ Chapter 1: “Superstitions of the Jews”
² ii.6, 23.
³ m.Pesachim 7.2.
⁴ b.Berachot 16b; cf. m.Berachot 2.7; m.Sukkot 2.1.
own time and for the time to come.\textsuperscript{1}

If the rabbis were concerned over the issue of whether sacrifices could be offered where there was no standing Temple, one could surmise that some may well have been attempting this very thing.

Guttmann gives this tentative conclusion after surveying the evidence:

> When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the public sacrifices were completely terminated. However, some of the private sacrifices were, for a short period, still offered on a limited scale. With the possible exception of Gamaliel II, no rabbi is known to have offered any sacrifice after 70 CE. However, the cessation of the sacrificial cult was not an inevitable consequence of the destruction of the Temple as shown in the light of past precedents.\textsuperscript{2}

The issue of whether sacrifices continued to be offered after the destruction of the Temple is debated by scholars, but there appears to be at least some evidence that some sacrifices did indeed continue after the destruction. If this is a valid conclusion based upon the data cited above, then it would make sense that our author would use the present situation, in which minimal sacrifices were being offered even after the Temple no longer stood, to characterize the priestly activity in Jerusalem as growing old, becoming obsolete, and passing away.

\textsuperscript{1} m.Eduyyot 8.6.
\textsuperscript{2} Alexander Guttmann, “The End of the Sacrificial Jewish Cult” HUCA 38 (1967), 147.