

Present Help
Hebrews 2:14-18
Dr. Pierre Cannings

The dominant concept of the entire passage is that of the solidarity of the Son with his people. Within this setting Jesus is presented as champion and high priest. Drawing upon the motif of individual, representative combat, the portrayal of Jesus as the protagonist of an oppressed people addressed a word of comfort and encouragement to Christians in crisis. The depiction of Jesus as champion pointed beyond the immediate crisis of the community to the triumph that already has been secured for the people of God.

I. Shared v.14-15

a. Share

i. Share –

1. participated; sharing in a nature which has been received or which is to be attained. Thus in Hb. 2:14 children share in the common mortality of man (τὰ παῖδια κεκοινωνήκεν αἵματος καὶ σαρκός). Since Christ acquired a share herein (μετέσχευ, synon. κοινωνέω), He entered into a full fellowship of flesh and blood in order that He might vanquish death thereby.
2. The distinction lies in the variation of the verbal tenses. The perfect tense of κεκοινωνήκεν, “share,” marks the “original and natural” state of humanity, while the aorist tense of μετέσχευ, “shared,” emphasizes that the Son assumed human nature “at a fixed point in time, by his own choice.”
3. (“have”; lit “share in common”) implies an existing state of humanity, and since it is followed by the aorist of Christ’s sharing in humanity as well, it further emphasizes not only the common humanity but the common state of humanity shared by Jesus and Christians.
4. It was necessary for Jesus to assume human nature, for only by doing so could he truly be a substitute for the sins of humanity: the perfect God-man dying in the place of sinful people.

ii. Flesh and Blood

1. Since “the children” share a common human nature (αἵματος καὶ σαρκός, Lit, “blood and flesh”), it was necessary for the one who identified himself with them (v 13b) to assume the same full humanity (μετέσχευ τῶν αὐτῶν). This assertion grounds the bond of unity between Christ and his people in the reality of the

incarnation. In the incarnation the transcendent Son accepted the mode of existence common to all humanity.

iii. Partook- Shared

1. The addition of the adverb *παραπλησίως*, “in just the same way,” which signifies total likeness, underscores the extent of the identity of the Son’s involvement in the conditions of human experience common to other persons

b. Death

i. Render Powerless - **to cause something to come to an end or to be no longer in existence, abolish, wipe out, set aside**

1. The author did not mean that Satan ceased to exist or to be active. Rather the word he used for “destroy” (*katargēsē*) indicates the annulment of his power over those whom Christ redeems. In speaking of the devil as wielding **the power of death**, the writer meant that Satan uses people’s **fear of death** to enslave them to his will. Often people make wrong moral choices out of their intense desire for self-preservation.

ii. Power of Death

1. Devil

- a. He assumed a mortal human nature “in order that he might nullify” the power of an evil tyrant who possessed the power of death and “that he might rescue” those who had been enslaved.
- b. The primary goal of the incarnation was the Son’s participation in death, through which he nullified the devil’s ability to enslave the children of God through the fear of death. Jesus’ death was the logical consequence of his determination to identify himself so completely with his brothers and sisters that there would be no aspect of human experience which he did not share

c. Free

i. Fear of Death

1. Moreover, the presence of death makes itself felt in the experience of anxiety (cf. Sir 40:1–5a). The definition of the state of mind that reduced humankind to enslavement as the “fear of death” (φόβος θανάτου), however, almost certainly has a specific reference. It refers to a disposition within the hearers and is a first indication of the serious situation addressed in this pastoral homily
2. The writer to the Hebrews develops this strand of the gospel tradition into a significant pastoral response to the crisis facing his

hearers. Although God intended that his people should participate in his glory, they experienced bondage through the fear of death. They became the captives of an evil tyrant who possessed the power to intimidate them. The writer to the Hebrews affirms that the Son of God assumed humanity in order to become their champion and to secure their release. Through his death, he crushed the antagonist who had the power of death and so brought deliverance to the captives.

ii. Subject to Slavery

1. Slavery - **state or condition of being subservient, *servility*,**
2. *Isa 49:24–26: The christological perspective developed in Heb 2:10–16 has its clearest anticipation in this passage from Isaiah. A continuity in tradition may be traced from the prophetic depiction of God as the champion who rescues the captives of an evil tyrant to Jesus’ word concerning the stronger combatant who retrieves the plunder of a champion to the distinctive formulation of the writer to the Hebrews*
3. Jesus is the protagonist who broke the devil’s power and so secured deliverance for the people of God. This fruitful approach to the incarnation and death of Jesus was designed to strengthen the hearers by reminding them of their liberated status. They are no longer to be paralyzed by the fear of death, even when they experience imperial opposition.

That the incarnate Son comes to the aid of oppressed men and women whom he takes by the hand in order to lead them to safety corresponded to the experience of the congregation addressed. What they needed to appreciate once more was that the harsh authority formerly wielded by the devil has been replaced by the gentle authority of the exalted Son who continues to identify himself with them.

II. Helped v.16-18

- a. Help - **be concerned with/about, take interest** for,” and the sudden intrusion of the present tense (ἐπιλαμβάνεται, “he takes hold to help”) indicate the writer’s intention. He assumes a conversational posture in order to engage his hearers in the argument he is developing.
 - i. Not Angels
 - ii. The Descendant of Abraham

1. Whatever their needs or trials, their Captain is adequate to help them since He ministers to **Abraham's descendants**, not angels. The expression "Abraham's descendants" (lit., "Abraham's seed") may point to the Jewishness of the writer's audience, but even Gentile Christians could claim to be the "seed of Abraham" in a spiritual sense (Gal. 3:29).
2. for death does not take hold of angels, but it takes hold of Abraham's descendants." The point made is that angels experience neither death nor the fear of death, but the descendants of Abraham do, and so the incarnate Son died to deliver them from bondage to the fear of death.
3. The original readers may have thought: "How could Jesus, who died by crucifixion, be superior to angels who, by their very nature, do not even die?" The author argued that the incarnation enabled Jesus to die and thus destroy the one who held the power of death. The fear of death does not affect angels at all, but it certainly does human beings. On this interpretation, 2:16 brings into sharp focus the difference between angelic nature and human nature and serves to strengthen the author's argument as to why it was necessary for Jesus to have a mortal, human nature

b. Made Like Brethren

- i. The help which the Captain gives to these His followers is again predicated on the fact that **He was made like His brothers in every way** (Heb. 2:17), that is, both in terms of becoming incarnate and by virtue of suffering.
- ii. Only by standing with others in human solidarity could the transcendent Son of God be qualified to participate in the life of the people as a merciful and faithful high priest.
- iii.

c. High Priest

i. High Priest

1. The description of Jesus as a "faithful high priest in the service of God" constitutes an allusion to 1 Sam 2:35, where God announces, "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall act according to what is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house."
2. The making of propitiation for sins exhibits the primary concern of the high priestly office with the reconciliation of the people to God. The concept implies sacrifice, and in this context the

propitiatory work of the Son consisted in the laying down of his life for others (cf. vv 10, 14, 18).

- ii. Merciful - **to being concerned about people in their need, *merciful, sympathetic, compassionate*** of God
- iii. Faithful - **pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust, *trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith***
 - 1. Because he did not divorce himself from the human experience of conflict in the world and was tested in this specific sense, he is able to help those who are now exposed to the ordeal of trial. He thus proves to be a compassionate high priest as well
- iv. Pertaining to God
- v. Propitiation - **to eliminate impediments that alienate the deity, *expiate, wipe out***, of Christ as high priest εἰς τὸ ἰλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ *to expiate the sins of the people* **Hb 2:17** make a sacrifice of atonement
- d. Himself Tempted
 - i. Suffered
- e. Aid
 - i. Aid - Render assistance *help, come to the aid of* τινί *someone*
 - ii. Those Tempted
 - 1. Tempted- **to endeavor to discover the nature or character of something by testing, try, make trial of, put to the test**
 - a. The incarnation exposed the Son to the conflicts and tensions of human life, which were climaxed by the suffering of death in a final act of obedience to the will of God (cf. 4:15; 5:2, 7–8). It was at this point that his fidelity to God was put to the extreme test, and he proved to be a faithful high priest

Background

The larger context of 2:10–18 is a meditation on Ps 8, which serves to direct attention to the man Jesus in his humiliation and exaltation. Although for a brief while he had been made “lower than the angels,” he is now “crowned with glory and splendor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (v 9).

The divine Son became one with his people in order to die for them. This was affirmed very generally in v 9, where the declaration “that he might taste death for everyone” indicated that his death was for the benefit of others

Word Studies

Share – participated; sharing in a nature which has been received or which is to be attained. Thus in Hb. 2:14 children share in the common mortality of man (τὰ παιδιά κεκοινώνηκεν αἵματος καὶ σαρκός). Since Christ acquired a share herein (μετέσχεν, synon. κοινωνέω), He entered into a full fellowship of flesh and blood in order that He might vanquish death thereby¹

Partook – Shared

Render Powerless- **to cause someth². to come to an end or to be no longer in existence, abolish, wipe out, set aside³**

Slavery- **state or condition of being subservient, servility, fig.⁴**

Help **be concerned with/about, take interest**

Merciful- **to being concerned about people in their need, merciful, sympathetic, compassionate** of God ⁵

¹ Friedrich Hauck, [“Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία, Συγκοινωνός, Συγκοινωνέω, Κοινωνικός, Κοινώω,”](#) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 804.

²**someth. someth.** = something

³ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 525.

⁴ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 259.

⁵ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 316.

Faithful - pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust, *trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith*⁶

High Priest

Propitiation to eliminate impediments that alienate the deity, *expiate, wipe out*, of Christ as high priest εἰς τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ *to expiate the sins of the people Hb 2:17* (so Mft⁷. make a sacrifice of atonement⁸

Tempted - to endeavor to discover the nature or character of someth⁹. by testing, *try, make trial of, put to the test*¹⁰

Aid - Render assistance *help, come to the aid of* τινί *someone*¹¹

⁶ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 820.

⁷Mft. **Mft.** = JMoffatt, The Bible, A New Translation—List 6

⁸ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 474.

⁹**someth. someth.** = something

¹⁰ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 792.

¹¹ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 180.

Commentary Studies

2:14–15. These children, however, were once held in servitude by their enemy, Satan. Since they were human, their Captain had to become human and die for them, in order to rescue them. But by doing so He was able to **destroy ... the devil**. The author did not mean that Satan ceased to exist or to be active. Rather the word he used for “destroy” (*katargēsē*) indicates the annulment of his power over those whom Christ redeems. In speaking of the devil as wielding **the power of death**, the writer meant that Satan uses people’s **fear of death** to enslave them to his will. Often people make wrong moral choices out of their intense desire for **self-preservation**. The readers were reminded that they were no longer subject to such **slavery** and that they could face death with the same confidence in God their Captain had.

2:16–18. Whatever their needs or trials, their Captain is adequate to help them since He ministers to **Abraham’s descendants**, not angels. The expression “Abraham’s descendants” (lit., “Abraham’s seed”) may point to the Jewishness of the writer’s audience, but even Gentile Christians could claim to be the “seed of Abraham” in a spiritual sense (Gal. 3:29). The help which the Captain gives to these His followers is again predicated on the fact that **He was made like His brothers in every way** (Heb. 2:17), that is, both in terms of becoming incarnate and by **virtue of suffering**. Here for the first time the writer introduced the thought of His priesthood, which he elaborated on later. For now he was content to affirm that this identification with “His brothers” had made possible a priesthood characterized both by mercy and fidelity **in service to God**. This involved, as its basis, **atonement for the sins of the people**. Of this too the author said more later, but he chose to conclude the section on the profoundly hopeful thought that the Captain, in His role as Priest, is able to aid his readers **who are being tempted** (v. 18) out of the experience of temptation which His own sufferings entailed. Though the discussion of these

themes is far from over, the author has already suggested that the Captain has indeed been made perfect for His role in leading them into participation in His future glory.¹²

14–15 The implications of the solidarity affirmed in vv 11–13 are developed in the balanced clauses of a periodic sentence. The exposition is related organically to its biblical support by the repetition of the expression τὰ παιδία, “the children,” contributed by the previous quotation (cf. Kögel, *Sohn*, 72). Since “the children” share a common human nature (αἵματος καὶ σαρκός, Lit, “blood and flesh”), it was necessary for the one who identified himself with them (v 13b) to assume the same full humanity (μετέσχευ τῶν αὐτῶν). This assertion grounds the bond of unity between Christ and his people in the reality of the incarnation. In the incarnation the transcendent Son accepted the mode of existence common to all humanity.

The synonymous parallelism in the statements of v 14a indicates that any semantic difference between the verbs that refer to “the children” and to the Son respectively ought not to be pressed here. The meaning of the two roots is virtually synonymous; both describe a full participation in a shared reality (cf. J. Y. Campbell, “κοινωνία and its Cognates in the New Testament,” *JB¹³L* 51 [1932] 353, 355, 363). The distinction lies in the variation of the verbal tenses. The perfect tense of κεκοινωνήκεν, “share,” marks the “original and natural” state of humanity, while the aorist tense of μετέσχευ, “shared,” emphasizes that the Son assumed human nature “at a fixed point in time, by his own choice” (F. F. Bruce, 41, n¹⁴. 55). By means of this distinction the transcendent character of the incarnate Son is maintained precisely in a

¹² Zane C. Hodges, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 785.

¹³ *JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

¹⁴n. note

context in which the accent falls upon his full participation in the human condition. The addition of the adverb παραπλησίως, “in just the same way,” which signifies total likeness, underscores the extent of the identity of the Son’s involvement in the conditions of human experience common to other persons (cf. Williamson, 82). It anticipates the inferential statement of v 17, that “obligation was upon him to be made like his brothers *in every respect*” (κατὰ πάντα).

The purpose for which the transcendent Son of God entered human life is indicated by an expanded purpose clause (ἵνα ... καταργήσῃ καὶ ... ἀπαλλάξῃ). He assumed a mortal human nature “in order that he might nullify” the power of an evil tyrant who possessed the power of death and “that he might rescue” those who had been enslaved. The identification of the tyrant as the devil exposes the depth of the human plight. The devil did not possess control over death inherently but gained his power when he seduced humankind to rebel against God. The representation of death as a henchman in the devil’s service and the threat of death as an instrument with which he bludgeons humanity into submission (cf. Michaelis, *TDN*^{15T} 3:907) depend on the interpretation of Gen 3 in the tradition of the hellenistic synagogue: “God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it” (Wis 2:23–24). It is ironical that human beings, destined to rule over the creation (Ps 8:5–7 LX¹⁶X, cited in vv 6–8), should find themselves in the posture of a slave, paralyzed through the fear of death (Kögel, *Sohn*, 80). Hopeless subjection to death characterizes earthly existence apart from the intervention of God (cf. Knauer, *TG*¹⁷ 58 [1968] 155–57). Moreover, the presence of death makes itself felt in the experience of anxiety (cf. Sir 40:1–5a). The definition of the state of mind that reduced humankind to enslavement as the “fear of death” (φόβῳ θανάτου), however, almost certainly has a specific reference. It refers to a disposition within the hearers and is a first indication of the serious situation addressed in this pastoral homily. The crisis they faced was demonic in character.

ἵνα διὰ τοῦ θανάτου καταργήσῃ ... καὶ ἀπαλλάξῃ, “that by his death he might break the power ... and liberate.” The primary goal of the incarnation was the Son’s participation in death, through which he nullified the devil’s ability to enslave the children of God through the fear of death. Jesus’ death was the logical consequence of his determination to identify himself so completely with his brothers and sisters that there would be no aspect of human experience which he did not share. But in this instance death was not the consequence of rebellion. It was an expression of consecration to do the will of God (10:5–7), with the result that Satan’s ability to wield the power of death was rendered ineffective in relationship to the Christian (cf. Delling,

¹⁵*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

¹⁶LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁷*TGI Theologie und Glaube*

TDN¹⁸T 1:453, who calls attention to 2 Tim 1:10: “the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has broken the power of Death”). The incarnation was thus the appropriate and necessary means of delivering the people of God from the devil’s tyranny and the fear of death.

The portrayal of God as a champion engaged in individual combat on behalf of his people appears as one strand of the apocalyptic tradition in the documents of the intertestamental period. For example, in a passage of uncertain date and provenance in some manuscripts of *T. Ze¹⁹b* 9:8. (b d g), the seer announces, “And after that your God himself shall shine forth as the light of righteousness, and salvation and mercy shall be in his wings. He will liberate all the prisoners of Beliar, and every spirit of error shall be scattered” (cf. *T. Lev²⁰i* 18:10–12). A similar prophecy appears in the *Assumption of Moses* (10:1–10; cf. 11QMelch 2:13).

Within the gospel tradition Jesus resorts to the metaphor of a contest between champions in response to certain scribes who accused him of collusion with Beelzebul, the prince of demons:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his possessions are safe; but when someone stronger attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted, and divides up the spoils (Luke 11:21–22).

In the context of the Beelzebul controversy, the strong man is the demonic prince. The stronger one who vanquishes him is Jesus, who defeats his adversary by the finger of God and releases those who had been enslaved through demonic possession (Luke 11:18–20). Jesus’ ministry of exorcism entails an engagement with Satan, the adversary of humankind. This brief logion, however, offers the only explicit appeal to a champion motif in the tradition of Jesus’ words.

The writer to the Hebrews develops this strand of the gospel tradition into a significant pastoral response to the crisis facing his hearers. Although God intended that his people should participate in his glory, they experienced bondage through the fear of death. They became the captives of an evil tyrant who possessed the power to intimidate them. The writer to the Hebrews affirms that the Son of God assumed humanity in order to become their champion and to secure their release. Through his death, he crushed the antagonist who had the power of death and so brought deliverance to the captives.

The unusual formulation in vv 14–15 is consonant with Jesus’ statement about disarming the strong man and dividing his spoils. It appears to draw upon the older prophetic tradition of God as the champion of his people as set forth in Isa 49:24–26:

Can plunder be taken from a champion,
or captives rescued from a tyrant?
This is what the Lord says:
“Yes, captives will be taken from the champion

¹⁸TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

¹⁹*T. Zeb* Testament of Zebulun (in *T. 12 Patr.*)

²⁰*T. Levi* Testament of Levi (from Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs)

and plunder retrieved from the tyrants;
I will contend with those who contend with you,
and your children will I rescue ...
Then all humankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior,
your Redeemer, the champion of Jacob.”

The christological perspective developed in Heb 2:10–16 has its clearest anticipation in this passage from Isaiah. A continuity in tradition may be traced from the prophetic depiction of God as the champion who rescues the captives of an evil tyrant to Jesus’ word concerning the stronger combatant who retrieves the plunder of a champion to the distinctive formulation of the writer to the Hebrews. The writer affirms that what God had pledged to do as Israel’s redeemer, Jesus has accomplished. Jesus is the protagonist who broke the devil’s power and so secured deliverance for the people of God. This fruitful approach to the incarnation and death of Jesus was designed to strengthen the hearers by reminding them of their liberated status. They are no longer to be paralyzed by the fear of death, even when they experience imperial opposition.

16 The parenthetical character of the statement introduced by γάρ, “for,” and the sudden intrusion of the present tense (ἐπιλαμβάνεται, “he takes hold to help”) indicate the writer’s intention. He assumes a conversational posture in order to engage his hearers in the argument he is developing. He appeals to a statement of fact, reinforced by the particle δήπου, “surely,” “of course,” that his conversation-partners will readily acknowledge.

The verb ἐπιλαμβάνεται is indefinite. Bonus (*ExpTi*²¹m 33 [1921–22] 235–36) called attention to the fact that in the manuscript tradition of the Peshitta Syriac version the subject of the sentence is “death”: “for death does not take hold of angels, but it takes hold of Abraham’s descendants.” The point made is that angels experience neither death nor the fear of death, but the descendants of Abraham do, and so the incarnate Son died to deliver them from bondage to the fear of death. Since, however, the subject both of the clause preceding v 16 and of the clause following it is the incarnate Son, it is likely that he is the subject in v 16 as well. The reference to the angels is essentially rhetorical; it marks the limits of the exposition introduced by v 5. All of the interest is concentrated on the statement that the incarnate Son takes hold of Abraham’s descendants to draw them into the fellowship of their own destiny (cf. Delling, *TDN*²²T 4:9).

The description of the community of faith as σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ, “Abraham’s descendants,” conveys an allusion to Isa 41:8–10, where the faithful remnant is the object of God’s comfort: “But you, ... Abraham’s descendants, upon whom I took hold ... do not fear, for I am with you ... and I have helped you” (σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ... οὗ ἄντελαβόμην ... μὴ φοβοῦ μετὰ σοῦ γάρ εἰμι ... καὶ ἐβοήθησά σοι). The passage from Isaiah was appropriate to the situation of the hearers. The summons not to fear (μὴ φοβοῦ), supported by the solemn pledge of God’s presence, is the divine response to the “fear of death” mentioned in v 15. The

²¹*ExpTim The Expository Times*

²²*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

assurance of divine help (ἐβοήθησα) prepares for the climactic assertion in v 18 that Jesus is able to help (βοηθῆσαι) those who are being tested. The substitution of ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι in Hebrews for the cognate ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι found in Isa 41:9 may reflect the formulation of Jer 31(LXX 38):31–32, where the Exodus is described in terms of God’s taking Israel by the hand (ἐπιλαβομένου) in order to lead them from bondage. This text is cited in 8:9, and the exodus motif which the two OT passages share would tend to bring them together in the writer’s thought (so Andriessen, *Nov²³T* 18 [1976] 308–9). An implied reference to deliverance from bondage would follow naturally from the thought expressed in vv 14–15. That the incarnate Son comes to the aid of oppressed men and women whom he takes by the hand in order to lead them to safety corresponded to the experience of the congregation addressed. What they needed to appreciate once more was that the harsh authority formerly wielded by the devil has been replaced by the gentle authority of the exalted Son who continues to identify himself with them.

17 ὅθεν ὥφειλεν κατὰ πάντα τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ὁμοιωθῆναι, “this means that it was essential for him to be made like these brothers of his in every respect.” The inferential particle ὅθεν, “for this reason,” looks back upon the argument developed in vv 10–16. Before proceeding to announce the subject to be treated in 3:1–5:10, the writer summarizes his argument in a single compact clause (v 17a). The reference to the “brothers” (τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς) picks up the keynote of vv 11b and 12, where Jesus’ solidarity with the community of faith was first affirmed in terms of a relationship among brothers. In the statement that obligation was laid upon the incarnate Son to become altogether like his brothers, however, the accent falls upon the qualifying phrase κατὰ πάντα, “in every respect,” which has been placed in the emphatic position in the clause. In context, the phrase refers primarily to the humiliation of testing and the suffering of death (v 18), but it also extends to every quality that demonstrated that Jesus shared a full and true human existence (cf. v 14a). At a later point the writer will guard his statement from possible misunderstanding by insisting upon the sinless character of Jesus, which sets him apart from other men and women (4:15; 7:26). Here, however, he wants to stress the total identification of the incarnate Son with the human situation of his audience (cf. Grogan, *VoxE²⁴* v 6 [1969] 64–67). Jesus had to resemble the brothers in reality, as one brother resembles another.

ἵνα ἐλεήμων γένηται καὶ πιστὸς ἀρχιερεὺς τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, “that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.” The element of moral obligation contemplated in the term ὥφειλεν, “it was essential,” is clarified by the two purpose clauses, which follow in sequence. Only by standing with others in human solidarity could the transcendent Son of God be qualified to participate in the life of the people as a merciful and faithful high priest. What this entailed is explained in the exposition that follows, as the writer addresses himself first to the quality of faithfulness (3:1–4:14), and then to the quality of compassion (4:15–5:10). The formulation of v 17 reflects the influence of the Septuagint where the expression τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν is a standard phrase in the Pentateuch meaning “with regard to God” (e.g., Exod. 4:16; 18:19).

²³*NovT* Novum Testamentum

²⁴*VoxEv* *Vox Evangelica* (London)

This is the first application of the title ἀρχιερεύς, “high priest,” to Jesus in the address. That his ministry was priestly in character was implied as early as 1:3, and the introduction of cultic terminology in 2:9–11 tended to confirm that impression. But with the description of Jesus as high priest, what had only been implied becomes explicit. There is no general agreement on the sources of the high priestly christology that colors the homily so profoundly after this point (see *Introduction*, “Sonship Interpreted ...”; “Locating Hebrews”). The fact that the writer can refer to Jesus as high priest before he has provided any theological exposition of this conception (cf. 3:1; 4:14–16) strongly suggests that it was the common property of the hellenistic wing of the Church. One of the significant values of Hebrews is its preservation and development of the insights of the Hellenists. The treatment of the high priestly theme in 5:1–10:18 bears the marks of original and creative reflection on the part of a teacher who brought to the tradition a penetrating grasp of its value for the enrichment of the theology and life of the Christian community.

What is distinctive about 2:10–18 is that the portrayal of Jesus as champion or protagonist (vv 10–16) leads directly into the body of the address, with its interpretation of Jesus in priestly categories. Although the Greek *Testament of Levi* poses a number of critical questions that have not yet been resolved (cf. J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981] 211–15), one passage is of special interest because it establishes a link between priestly and champion motifs:

Then shall the Lord raise up a new priest....
 And he shall execute a righteous judgment upon the earth.
 And he shall open the gates of paradise
 and shall remove the threatening sword against Adam.
 And Beliar shall be bound by him,
 and he shall give power to his children to tread upon evil spirits.
 (*T. Lev*²⁵ⁱ 18:10–12)

This text, like others that represent God as the champion of Israel, preserves an apocalyptic point of view. It offers a hellenistic-Jewish paradigm for the christological perspectives developed in Heb 2:10–18. The element of representation that is common to the offices of champion and of high priest may account for the fact that in Hebrews champion perspectives flow smoothly into the presentation of a high priestly christology.

The description of Jesus as a “faithful high priest in the service of God” constitutes an allusion to 1 Sam 2:35, where God announces, “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall act according to what is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house.” The recognition of the allusion prepares for the transition to 3:1–6, where the writer calls attention to Jesus as the high priest who “was faithful to the one who appointed him ... as a Son over God’s house” (3:2, 6).

εἰς τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ, “to make propitiation with regard to the sins of the people.” The second purpose clause is a natural extension of the first; it describes the activity of the incarnate Son in distinctly priestly categories. The proper translation of

²⁵*T. Levi* Testament of Levi (from Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs)

ἱλάσκεσθαι has been a matter of academic debate. In a full and balanced treatment of the subject Morris has demonstrated that “to make propitiation” is to be preferred rather than “to make expiation,” because this is the usual meaning of the verb and its cognates not only in secular usage but in the LX²⁶X (*Apostolic Preaching*, 125–60). Moreover, the accusative of respect in the expression ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας, “to make propitiation with respect to sin,” is an unusual Greek construction, but in the few examples where it is preserved it “seems generally to imply the thought of propitiation” (175–76). The making of propitiation for sins exhibits the primary concern of the high priestly office with the reconciliation of the people to God. The concept implies sacrifice, and in this context the propitiatory work of the Son consisted in the laying down of his life for others (cf. vv 10, 14, 18).

The description of those on whose behalf the high priest functions as “the people” (τοῦ λαοῦ) has its background in the Greek Bible, where ὁ λαὸς [τοῦ θεοῦ] is a technical term for Israel in its character as the nation chosen by God and separated from the other nations by covenant relationship (cf. Strathmann, *TDN*²⁷ 4:29–57, esp. 54–55). The writer does not hesitate to transfer this title of honor to the Christian community, for all of the OT is for him a parable of God’s provision for the Church. Although the expression draws upon the rich associations that cluster about the term in the OT (cf. Deut 7:6–8; 14:2; 21:8), its ultimate application is to the new people of God who are the beneficiaries of the high priestly ministry of Jesus. “The people” corresponds to “Abraham’s descendants” in v 16, but now the general statement that Jesus came to the aid of God’s people finds a greater measure of precision in the reference to the high priestly action of making propitiation for their sins.

18 The final statement points to the relevance of the development in vv 10–17 for the community. It is designed to strengthen them in their temptations and conflicts. The writer touches upon both the faithfulness (he is πιστός) and compassion (he is ἐλεήμων) of Jesus in his representative capacity as high priest (v 17). The incarnation exposed the Son to the conflicts and tensions of human life, which were climaxed by the suffering of death in a final act of obedience to the will of God (cf. 4:15; 5:2, 7–8). It was at this point that his fidelity to God was put to the extreme test, and he proved to be a faithful high priest. Because he did not divorce himself from the human experience of conflict in the world and was tested in this specific sense, he is able to help those who are now exposed to the ordeal of trial. He thus proves to be a compassionate high priest as well. Williamson comments that his encounter with sin and the suffering of death “equipped him, as nothing else could have done, to help ordinary, sinful, suffering men and women” (90). The first major section of the address is thus brought to a conclusion on the note of pastoral encouragement.

Explanation

The larger context of 2:10–18 is a meditation on Ps 8, which serves to direct attention to the man Jesus in his humiliation and exaltation. Although for a brief while he had been made “lower

²⁶LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

²⁷TDNT G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

than the angels,” he is now “crowned with glory and splendor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (v 9). The reference to Jesus’ death prompts the writer’s reflection upon the appropriateness of the incarnation and death of the Son of God. The pre-existent Son entered the human race and assumed its conditions, especially its liability to death, in order to redeem humankind. The paragraph thus brings into focus the full and authentic reality of the humanity of Jesus and its significance for the redeemed community.

The dominant concept of the entire passage is that of the solidarity of the Son with his people. That solidarity is affirmed in the statement that the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family (v 11) and in the list of citations from Psalms and Isaiah (vv 12–13). The “brothers” of the psalmist are “the congregation of the faithful” with whom Jesus lifts his voice in singing the praises of God. They are those who trust the Lord, the spiritual remnant concerning whom Isaiah had so much to say, and who were represented in the writer’s day by Jesus and all those who responded to his call.

The divine Son became one with his people in order to die for them. This was affirmed very generally in v 9, where the declaration “that he might taste death for everyone” indicated that his death was for the benefit of others. The nature of the benefit derived from his death, however, remained unspecified. The following verses clarify that the death of Jesus opened the way for others to participate in the glory of God as a result of deliverance from enslavement to the devil and the removal of their fear of death (vv 10–16). Jesus’ acceptance of the mode of existence common to all persons and his identification with the community of faith constituted a pledge of the glorification of the human family in the people of God.

Within this setting Jesus is presented as champion and high priest. Drawing upon the motif of individual, representative combat, the portrayal of Jesus as the protagonist of an oppressed people addressed a word of comfort and encouragement to Christians in crisis. The depiction of Jesus as champion pointed beyond the immediate crisis of the community to the triumph that already has been secured for the people of God. The element of triumphalism in the metaphor complemented the theology of glory expressed in v 10. Champion christology provided a fresh interpretation of the incarnation from the perspective of the tradition that God or Jesus is the champion who rescues those enslaved by the prince of death (cf. Isa 49:24–26; Luke 11:21–22). The sober reminder that the champion overcame his adversary through death (vv 14–15) exhibited the costly character of the grace of God extended to the community through the Son (v 9).

This fruitful approach to the incarnation and death of the Son is not sustained, however, beyond v 16. With vv 17–18 the writer prepares to lead his hearers directly into the body of the discourse devoted to the exposition of Jesus as priest and sacrifice. Common to the concepts both of champion and of high priest are the elements of representation and solidarity with a particular people. The presentation of Jesus in 2:10–18 provided assurance that the exalted Son continues to identify himself with the oppressed people of God exposed to humiliation and testing in a hostile world.²⁸

²⁸ William L. Lane, [*Hebrews 1–8*](#), vol. 47A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), 60–67.

Verse 14 begins a subparagraph ending with v. 18. It begins with *oun* (left untranslated in the NI²⁹V) and introduces a conclusion from the preceding argument. *Epei* (“since”) introduces the grounds for the conclusion that means, “Since the children have a human nature, therefore

²⁹NIV New International Version

Jesus took on human nature as well.” The phrase (lit³⁰.) “have blood and flesh”²⁷³¹⁹ probably does not indicate any significance in the word order.²⁸³²⁰ The use of the perfect tense of *kekoinōnēken* (“have”; lit³³. “share in common”) implies an existing state of humanity, and since it is followed by the aorist of Christ’s sharing in humanity as well, it further emphasizes not only the common humanity but the common state of humanity shared by Jesus and Christians.²⁸³⁴¹

At this point, the author defined and described the necessity and the purpose of the incarnation. That Jesus “too shared in their humanity” is an emphatic statement of the doctrine of the incarnation, so explicitly stated “that no possible place is left for the unreal phantom Christ of the docetic heresy.”²⁸³⁵² The aorist *meteschen* (“shared”) indicates the time when Jesus took on human nature, which would have been at his virgin conception, culminating in his birth in Bethlehem. The *hina* (“that”) clause introduces a purpose of the incarnation: “that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.” The aorist *katargēsē* (“destroy”; lit³⁶. “render powerless”) probably indicates that Christ’s death on the cross was a single act that accomplished this purpose.²⁸³⁷³ It was necessary for Jesus to assume human nature, for only by doing so could he truly be a substitute for the sins of humanity: the perfect God-man dying in the place of sinful people.²⁸³⁸⁴ As the orthodox theologians argued against Apollinarius, what the Logos did not take to himself he could not redeem.

Since, as Luther said, “even the devil is God’s devil,” and since death came into the world because of Adam and Eve’s sin, and since God was the one who decreed physical death as a consequence of sin, in what sense might it be said that Satan holds the power of death? It is because he was the instigator of sin through his temptation of the first couple in the garden. God, not Satan, holds the ultimate power of death, “but the power which he presently wields is also the power by which he is destroyed.”²⁸³⁹⁵

³⁰lit. literal(ly)

³¹²⁷⁹ L&N (9.15) translates this as “human beings.”

³²²⁸⁰ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 110.

³³lit. literal(ly)

³⁴²⁸¹ Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 251.

³⁵²⁸² Ibid., 110.

³⁶lit. literal(ly)

³⁷²⁸³ So Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 173.

³⁸²⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.12.4.

³⁹²⁸⁵ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 112. O. Weber said: “We read that God has power over death in Ps. 90:3, 7ff., Matt. 10:28, and often. The fact that according to Heb. 2:14 this is the power of the devil does not make him into a god of death, in that he had his power as a result of the effective No of God” (*Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. D. Guder

In v. 15 the articular present active infinitive of *zaō* is used as a noun (“life”)²⁸⁴⁰⁶ and can be interpreted in one of two ways: it could express (1) the second purpose of the incarnation;²⁸⁴¹⁷ or (2) the result of the preceding thought: “in order that he might destroy the devil and therefore set these people free.”²⁸⁴²⁸ The phrase “in fear” is the dative of cause meaning “because of fear,” and the “fear of death” is an objective genitive meaning “they feared death.” Christians fear death no longer because of the victory of Christ over death and the grave.²⁸⁴³⁹ Paul expressed a parallel thought: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor 15:21–22). Paul’s view of corporate solidarity is essentially the same as the author’s in Heb 2:10–18.

Gregory of Nyssa said: “The Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature that so, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh.”²⁹⁴⁴⁰ This famous fishhook metaphor was first suggested by Cyprian,²⁹⁴⁵¹ who derived it from Job 41:1, “Can you pull in leviathan with a fishhook?” Leviathan later became symbolically identified with Satan. John of Damascus rejected the notion that the devil had received a ransom. He took “death” as the tyrant that swallowed up the body “as a bait is transfixed on the hook of

[Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 1:624). The comment by Luther is appropriate: “by his wonderful wisdom he compels the devil to work through death nothing else than life, so that in this way, while he acts most of all against the work of God, he acts for the work of God and against his own work with his own deed” (*Lectures on Titus, Philemon and Hebrews*, 135). He further stated: “He who fears death or is unwilling to die is not a Christian to a sufficient degree” (137).

⁴⁰²⁸⁶ This is the only such usage in the NT (Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 369).

⁴¹²⁸⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 86.

⁴²²⁸⁸ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 174–75.

⁴³²⁸⁹ Calvin’s comment on the fear of death in Heb 2:15 is interesting in light of the warning passages in Hebrews: “As an overdose of fear comes from ignorance of the grace of Christ, so it is a sure sign of unfaithfulness” (*Hebrews*, 31). See the excellent section on the fear of death in ancient Greek and Latin authors in Moffatt (*Hebrews*, 35–36).

⁴⁴²⁹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, in *NPNF*² vol. 5, *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa*, trans. W. Moore and H. Wilson (London: Parker & Co., 1893; repr., Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 494.

⁴⁵²⁹¹ Cyprian, *Expositio Symboli*, MPL 21, 354–55.

divinity.”²⁹⁴⁶² Although such metaphors are more helpful for illustrative purposes than they are theological truth, a Christus Victor (Christ is Victor) theme does run throughout the New Testament, beginning with Jesus’ conflict with the devil and demons in his earthly ministry (Luke 10:18–20) and ending with the final destruction of Satan (Rev 20:10).

The ransom theory of the atonement claims that the death of Jesus somehow paid a ransom to the devil. But, as Oden rightly noted, this theory is contrary to Heb 2:14–15 where the author explicitly stated that the death of Christ was a triumph over the devil, not a ransom paid to him.²⁹⁴⁷³

In summary, Athanasius’ comment on the incarnation of Christ is potent:

The body then, as sharing the same nature with all, for it was a human body, though by an unparalleled miracle it was formed of a virgin only, yet being mortal, was to die also, conformably to its peers. But by virtue of the union of the Word with it, it was no longer subject to corruption according to its own nature, but by reason of the Word that was come to dwell in it was placed out of the reach of corruption. And so it was that two marvels came to pass at once, that the death of all was accomplished in the Lord’s body, and that death and corruption were wholly done away by reason of the Word that was united with it. For there was need of death, and death must needs be suffered on behalf of all, that the debt owing from all might be paid. Whence, as I said before, the Word, since it was not possible for him to die, that he might offer it as his own in the stead of all, and as suffering, through his union with it, on behalf of all, “bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”²⁹⁴⁸⁴

Verse 16 begins with *gar* and indicates the summary or conclusion of what has been said in 2:10–15. It also explains the reason for the incarnation in v. 14.²⁹⁴⁹⁵ The use of the emphatic particle *dēpou* (“surely”) indicates strong affirmation and assumes knowledge that the readers already have and that they are in agreement with the author’s statement.²⁹⁵⁰⁶ The verb *epilambanetai* (“he helps”) literally means “to lay firm hold of” or “to appropriate.” It is used of taking hold of a person in either a friendly or hostile sense. It occurs three times of taking hold

⁴⁶²⁹² John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *NPNF*² (Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 72. See the excellent discussion of the ransom metaphor in patristic thought in T. Oden (*The Word of Life, Systematic Theology* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992], 2:400–1).

⁴⁷²⁹³ Oden, *Word of Life*, 399; cf. Col 2:13–15.

⁴⁸²⁹⁴ Athanasius, “*On the Incarnation*,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 74.

⁴⁹²⁹⁵ So Alford, “Hebrews,” 51; and Bruce, *Hebrews*, 87.

⁵⁰²⁹⁶ Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 36; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 52, 63.

of someone's hand, either literally or figuratively.²⁹⁵¹⁷ Paul used the term in the sense of taking hold of eternal life (1 Tim 6:12, 19), and Luke used it of Jesus' enemies taking hold of his words to trap him (Luke 20:20, 26). Context is the key to how the verb should be translated. From the early church until the time of the Reformers, this verb was interpreted to mean that the Son took on humanity via the incarnation. However, in the seventeenth century there was a departure from this interpretation to the more general sense of "coming to the aid of." Since then, many scholars have taken the verb that way.²⁹⁵²⁸ But in the seventeenth century Turretin pointed out that in the more than 40 occurrences of *epilambanomai* in the LX⁵³X, it never has the metaphorical sense of aid.²⁹⁵⁴⁹

The absence of the definite article with "angels" and with "Abraham's descendants" (lit⁵⁵. "seed of Abraham") in Greek indicates they refer to a class.³⁰⁵⁶⁰ The "seed of Abraham" may be either the Jewish race as a whole or both Jews and Gentiles.³⁰⁵⁷¹ Hughes took the first view, arguing that the author frames the incarnation within the perspective of the covenant with Christ the incarnate Son.³⁰⁵⁸² But the covenant perspective could still be in view if both Jews and Gentiles were intended. Lane's claim that the author's use of "seed of Abraham" is an allusion to Isa 41:8–10 is well founded given the linguistic and semantic parallels: *sperma Abraam, mē phobou, eboēthēsa*, and *antelabomēn*. (The author of Hebrews likely substituted the cognate *epilambanetai* for the latter term in light of Jer 31:32, where the exodus is described as God's taking Israel by the hand, *epilambanetai*, to lead them out of bondage.)³⁰⁵⁹³ This is another

⁵¹²⁹⁷ BDAG 374.

⁵²²⁹⁸ E.g., Alford, "Hebrews," 51–52; and Westcott, *Hebrews*, 54–55.

⁵³LXX Septuagint

⁵⁴²⁹⁹ F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. Giger, ed. J. Dennison (New Jersey: P&R, 1994), 2:308; This has been noted by many since. See Hughes, *Hebrews*, 116. DeSilva (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 120) commented: " 'Laying hold' here speaks of Jesus' role as rescuer, deliverer, and protector of his client in the new exodus from the shakable realm and entrance into the 'rest' of God." This is an example of the patron-client, honor-shame grid through which DeSilva viewed the epistle. His analysis here seems strained at best.

⁵⁵lit. literal(ly)

⁵⁶³⁰⁰ E. g., Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 177.

⁵⁷³⁰¹ The former is supported by Alford ("Hebrews," 51) and the latter by Moffatt (*Hebrews*, 37) and Hughes (*Hebrews*, 119).

⁵⁸³⁰² So Hughes, *Hebrews*, 119.

⁵⁹³⁰³ Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, 63–64.

example of the author's rich and deep understanding of the Old Testament and his Christocentric reading of the text.

It is grammatically possible to take "fear" in 2:15 as the subject of "helps" (lit⁶⁰. "takes hold of") in 2:16. In this case, the author would be employing brachylogy where the subject of a sentence is taken from a preceding noun in an oblique case without a referential pronoun to aid in the transition. If this is the case, a possible translation would be: "For it [the fear of death] clearly does not seize angels, but it does take hold of the seed of Abraham."³⁰⁶¹⁴ The use of the verb *epilambanomai* to characterize fear as "seizing" or "taking hold of" or even as "gripping" someone is completely within its normal semantic range. In a similar way, the Peshitta version takes "death" as the subject of *epilambanomai*.³⁰⁶²⁵ The original readers may have thought: "How could Jesus, who died by crucifixion, be superior to angels who, by their very nature, do not even die?" The author argued that the incarnation enabled Jesus to die and thus destroy the one who held the power of death. The fear of death does not affect angels at all, but it certainly does human beings. On this interpretation, 2:16 brings into sharp focus the difference between angelic nature and human nature and serves to strengthen the author's argument as to why it was necessary for Jesus to have a mortal, human nature.³⁰⁶³⁶ However, it is probably best to take "Jesus" as the subject of the verb *epilambanomai*, where the verb is being used in a positive sense of "help."

"For this reason" begins v. 17 and can be interpreted as a conclusion based on v. 16,³⁰⁶⁴⁷ as introducing a summary of vv. 10–16,³⁰⁶⁵⁸ or as a restatement of v. 14.³⁰⁶⁶⁹ The phrase "in every way" is emphatic by word order and strengthens the verb "to be made like."³¹⁶⁷⁰ "Brothers" is resumed from v. 11, and the phrase "in every way," referring to the Son's incarnation, is well described by Hughes: "This likeness is nothing less than complete identification: assimilation,

⁶⁰lit. literal(ly)

⁶¹³⁰⁴ So argued by M. Gudorf, "Through a Classical Lens: Hebrews 2:16," *JBL* 119 (2000): 1:105–8.

⁶²³⁰⁵ A. Bonus noted that the reading is supported by 14 of the 20 Syriac manuscripts he inspected ("Heb. ii:16 in the Peshitta Syriac Version," *ExpTim* 33 [1921–22]: 234–36); cf. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 56. The meaning would be: "For not over angels has death authority, but over the seed of Abraham it has authority."

⁶³³⁰⁶ Gleason, "Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2," 107.

⁶⁴³⁰⁷ Dods, "Hebrews," 269; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 119.

⁶⁵³⁰⁸ Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, 64; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 179–80.

⁶⁶³⁰⁹ Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 37.

⁶⁷³¹⁰ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 180.

not simulation.”³¹⁶⁸¹ The *hina* (“in order that”) clause may introduce one purpose for Christ’s becoming a high priest, or the purpose for Christ’s becoming united with humanity.³¹⁶⁹² What was alluded to in 1:3 is here stated overtly, namely, that Jesus is the high priest who makes atonement for the people. This theme is developed throughout the remainder of the doctrinal sections of the epistle. The other key title for Jesus besides “Son” is “high priest” as evidenced by the repetition of this term (see 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:1, 5). The role of the high priest is essentially representation, and “representation requires identification.”³¹⁷⁰³ As high priest, Jesus is both “merciful” and “faithful” (the two are parallel) “in the things pertaining to God” (2:17).³¹⁷¹⁴ This latter phrase can be connected with either “merciful and faithful” or just “faithful.”³¹⁷²⁵ The adjective “faithful,” while possibly referring to Jesus’ earthly life, or to his earthly and heavenly ministry, is more likely a reference to his ongoing high priestly ministry.³¹⁷³⁶

Such language may be taken from 1 Sam 2:35, where God promised that he would “raise up ... a faithful priest ... and firmly establish his house.” Interestingly, in 3:1–6 the author combined the concept of the “house” and God as “the builder” coupled with the faithfulness of the Son compared with that of Moses.³¹⁷⁴⁷

An important translation issue as well as a theological issue has to do with the correct rendering of the word *hilaskomai* (“make atonement”) in v. 17, which is rendered either

⁶⁸³¹¹ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 119.

⁶⁹³¹² Dods supported the former (“Hebrews,” 269), and Lane the latter (*Hebrews* 1–8, 64).

⁷⁰³¹³ Succinctly stated by Hughes, *Hebrews*, 120.

⁷¹³¹⁴ Calvin took the phrase to mean “that he might be merciful, and therefore faithful” (*Hebrews*, 33). He viewed “the things pertaining to God” (translated by the NIV as “in service to God”) as the things that have the purpose of reconciling men to God. The accusative of manner, otherwise known as adverbial accusative or the accusative of reference/respect, is the construction used in Greek: “with reference/respect to things pertaining to God.”

⁷²³¹⁵ Alford supported the former view (“Hebrews,” 54), and Dods the latter (“Hebrews,” 269).

⁷³³¹⁶ So I. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, 148; he was preceded by Westcott, *Hebrews*, 57; Grässer, *Der Glaube Im Hebräerbrief*, Marburger Theologische Studien 2 (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1965), 21–22; and Hughes, *Hebrews*, 120.

⁷⁴³¹⁷ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 120.

“expiate”³¹⁷⁵⁸ or “propitiate.”³¹⁷⁶⁹ The literature on this subject is immense. L. Morris’s magisterial study of this subject provides clear and irrefutable evidence that the term *hilaskomai*, although a complex term that includes in it the idea of expiation of sin, nevertheless conveys the concept of the averting of divine wrath and represents a “stubborn substratum of meaning from which all usages can be naturally explained.”³²⁷⁷⁰ Even though *hilaskomai* in 2:17 is transitive with “the sins of the people” as its object, the NI⁷⁸V marginal note offers an alternative reading “that he might turn aside God’s wrath, taking away.” Such a marginal reading as an option to the NI⁷⁹V’s “make atonement” indicates that the translators recognized the word contains an element of averting wrath, hence the term “propitiation.” Hill pointed out that the frequent references to divine wrath and its aversion in the contexts of the *hilaskomai* word group in the New Testament suggest that the idea of propitiation belongs to the terms.³²⁸⁰¹ The difference between “expiation” and “propitiation” is that “expiation” signifies the cancellation of sin whereas “propitiation” denotes the turning away of the wrath of God. Misconceptions about the doctrine of propitiation often occur when pagan ideas are read into the uses of the word in the Old and New Testaments—a problem chiefly responsible for the modern and mistaken attempts to give the verb the sense of expiate (see NEB, RSV).³²⁸¹² Scripture

⁷⁵³¹⁸ Bruce (*Hebrews*, 78–79) and Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 188–89) argued for “expiation” in this context.

⁷⁶³¹⁹ Hughes (*Hebrews*, 122) and Lane (*Hebrews* 1–8, 66) argued for “propitiation” in this context.

⁷⁷³²⁰ L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 155 (see esp. pp. 125–60). The classic argument that the term should be translated “expiation” is by C. H. Dodd (“ΙΛΑΣΚΕΣΘΑΙ, Its Cognates, Derivatives, and Synonyms, in the Septuagint,” *JTS* 32 [1931]: 352–60), which also appeared in his *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 82–95. For an excellent discussion of the terms (including bibliography), see J. M. Gundry-Volf, “Expiation, Propitiation, Mercy Seat,” *DPL* 279–84.

⁷⁸NIV New International Version

⁷⁹NIV New International Version

⁸⁰³²¹ Quoted by R. Ward, *Pattern of our Salvation*, 61.

⁸¹³²² Hughes has a good discussion of the issue (*Hebrews*, 121–22). J. Stott stated, “If we are to develop a truly biblical doctrine of propitiation, it will be necessary to distinguish it from pagan ideas at three crucial points, relating to why a propitiation is necessary, who made it and what it was” (*The Cross of Christ* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986], 171–74. It is necessary because of God’s wrath against sin; unlike the pagan contexts, it is God, not man, who takes the initiative to offer the sacrifice by his grace; and the sacrifice itself is none other than God in the person of his Son, Jesus.

consistently teaches that humanity's sin has incurred the wrath of God and that this wrath is only averted by the substitutionary atonement provided by Christ on the cross. Nor will it do to suggest that the term is used in the New Testament to explain that God is not angry with us because he has already been appeased. Turretin's comment on this is appropriate: "The blood of Christ was not shed to prove the remission of sin, but to obtain it."³²⁸²³ Evangelical theology insists on taking *hilaskomai* in the sense of "propitiation" because that is the meaning of the word and that is the heart of the doctrine of the atonement.³²⁸³⁴

Verse 18 begins with *gar* (untranslated in the NI⁸⁴V), which gives the reason that Christ's becoming like his brothers enabled him to become a merciful and faithful high priest. F. W. Farrar took the *en hō* to mean "in that particular wherein," and thus translates "in that sphere wherein He suffered";³²⁸⁵⁵ but it is better to take it in a causal sense, "because he was tempted" (as in the NI⁸⁶V). The *autos* is emphatic, "he himself." The perfect tense *peponthen* ("suffered") indicates that the cross resulted in Jesus' ever available compassion for his "brothers" in their time of need. The aorist participle *peirastheis* ("when he was tempted") can be construed in several ways. (1) It could indicate the means of the suffering: "he suffered by means of being

See the excellent excursus on this subject in D. Akin, 1, 2, 3 John, in NAC 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 253–65.

⁸²³²³ Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:434. Universalism cannot be taught or inferred from Heb 2:10–18. K. Barth's concept of Jesus Christ being "the electing God" and "elected man"—which implies that all humanity shares in the election—is likewise excluded by these verses.

⁸³³²⁴ E.g., Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 575. C. K. Barrett stated: "It would be wrong to neglect the fact that expiation has, as it were, the effect of propitiation" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, BNCT, [New York: Harper, 1957], 78.) The verb ἱλάσκομαι includes both meanings of expiation and propitiation as Leon Morris has conclusively demonstrated (Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 155). P. K. Jewett, ("Propitiation," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. M. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975], 4:904–5) said: "If one reduces the language of Scripture from 'propitiation' to 'expiation' in all instances, he still must answer the question, 'Why should sins be expiated?' What would happen if no expiation were provided? Can one deny that, according to the teaching of Scripture, men will die in their sins?" A logical implication of the denial of propitiation is that God will ultimately forgive everyone, regardless of how one is related to Christ—an increasingly popular opinion, but one that is contrary to Scripture.

⁸⁴NIV New International Version

⁸⁵³²⁵ F. W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (London: Cassell, 1884), 200.

⁸⁶NIV New International Version

tempted.”³²⁸⁷⁶ (2) It could indicate action parallel to the suffering: “he suffered and was tempted.”³²⁸⁸⁷ (3) It could be causal of the suffering: “he suffered because he was tempted.”³²⁸⁹⁸ (4) It could be temporal: “he suffered when he was tempted.”³²⁹⁰⁹ (5) Less likely is to view the participle as defining the area in which Jesus suffered: “he was tempted in what he suffered.”³³⁹¹⁰ Options one and three seem to be the most likely.

The two phrases “was tempted” and “those who are being tempted” may have either a negative sense or a neutral sense.³³⁹²¹ Perhaps the best resolution is to see both as primarily indicating testing (neutral) but with temptation (negative) as an included secondary meaning.³³⁹³² The present tense followed by the aorist infinitive usually signals imperfective aspect,³³⁹⁴³ which is what the Greek text has, *dunatai* (“he is able”) followed by *boēthēsai* (“to help”). Thus, the author expressed Jesus’ continuing ability to help believers. Grudem offered a helpful analogy about a woman obstetrician who wrote a textbook on childbirth. Then she became a mother herself and could sympathize much more fully with other pregnant women.³³⁹⁵⁴

The help that Jesus gives to the readers is important to the author. He used it here, at 4:16, and at 13:6 where he cited Ps 118:6–7, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” The word *boētheō* is used generally in the LX⁹⁶X to denote military assistance, and its cognates sometimes describe God’s eschatological deliverance of Israel.³³⁹⁷⁵ It is possible that when the author wrote Heb 2:17–18, he had Ps 79:9 on his mind: “Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive [show yourself propitious to] our sins

⁸⁷³²⁶ E.g., Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 39; and Miller, *Hebrews*, 63.

⁸⁸³²⁷ E.g., Bruce, *Hebrews*, 88.

⁸⁹³²⁸ E.g., Dods, “Hebrews,” 270.

⁹⁰³²⁹ E.g., the NIV.

⁹¹³³⁰ So Alford, “Hebrews,” 55.

⁹²³³¹ Moffatt (*Hebrews*, 39), Hughes (*Hebrews*, 123–24), and the NIV take both in the negative sense; Bruce (*Hebrews*, 88–89) and Lane (*Hebrews* 1–8, 66) took both in the neutral sense of testing.

⁹³³³² So Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 191. Calvin took it in a neutral sense meaning “experience” or “testing” (*Hebrews*, 33).

⁹⁴³³³ Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 487.

⁹⁵³³⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 532.

⁹⁶LXX Septuagint

⁹⁷³³⁵ See the discussion in Gleason, “Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2,” 104–7.

for your name's sake." The parallel can be seen in the LX⁹⁸X since both passages contain the verbs *hilaskomai* and *boētheō*.³³⁹⁹⁶

The author strongly denied the Son's help for angels (2:16), which prepared the way for the promise of help from Jesus for believers (2:17–18). Gleason suggested that the author's exhortation to seek help from Jesus must be seen in light of the widespread reliance on angels for personal protection and national deliverance, a practice well attested within both Jewish and Christian literature during the Greco-Roman period.³³¹⁰⁰⁷

Looking at Heb 2:10–18 as a whole, the incarnation functions salvifically but also pastorally in the care of souls: since Jesus suffered, he is able to help all who suffer through temptation. "He suffered the risks and vulnerabilities of human existence, and because of this we can identify with the God who identifies with us."³³¹⁰¹⁸

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS. This passage is one of the most important in the entire New Testament on the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus. It is clear from the prologue that Christ as the Son is fully divine and is thus eternal, so 2:5–18 must be interpreted in this light. It is, therefore, a curious oddity that G. B. Caird, followed by L. D. Hurst, should make the argument that Hebrews 1–2 are not concerned with a preexistent figure who became a man, but rather with a man who is raised to an exalted status by God.³³¹⁰²⁹ Caird believed that Psalm 8 in Heb 2:5–10 was the most important and the most misunderstood Old Testament passage in the epistle. Psalm 8 and the way the author used it in Heb 2:5–18 point to the destiny of mankind,

⁹⁸LXX Septuagint

⁹⁹³³⁶ As suggested by Hughes, *Hebrews*, 124.

¹⁰⁰³³⁷ Gleason, "Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2," 105. He stated the "amulets from Palestine and Syria that illustrate the common use of the verb 'to help' to request assistance from angels. Similar inscriptions on Christian amulets from the Greco-Roman period indicate that the Jewish reliance upon angels eventually became widely accepted within the early Christian community. Examples include Christian amulets containing prayers to angels for protection, curses, good luck, and healing. Their inscriptions often list angelic names of power together with Jesus in order to add to their potency for the bearer. This highlights the relevance of the exaltation of Christ over the angels in the book of Hebrews. Rather than seek help from angels, the readers are encouraged to come to the exalted Son who 'has inherited a more excellent name than they' (Heb 1:4). For Jesus is 'the Lord their helper' (13:6) and therefore able to 'help' them (2:18) and provide 'help' in time of need (4:16)" (pp. 106–7).

¹⁰¹³³⁸ Oden, *Word of Life*, 123.

¹⁰²³³⁹ Caird, "Son by Appointment," in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. W. C. Weinrich (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1984), 1:73–81; L. D. Hurst, *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 151–64.

which Caird believed was the overall theme of the epistle.³⁴¹⁰³⁰ If the interpreter accepts what Caird and Hurst seem unwilling to accept—namely, the deity and thus the eternality of the Son as the focus of Hebrews 1—he is then prepared to benefit from the points they make about the focus of chap. 2 being on the exaltation of the *incarnate* Son following his suffering and death on the cross. Jesus thus fulfilled Psalm 8 by his atoning work, which enables redeemed humanity, the “many sons,” also to be brought into the picture of the fulfillment of Psalm 8 in that they too will have supremacy over the angels in the eschaton. Hurst is certainly correct in saying that the point of Hebrews 1 is “to lead the readers of the epistle to the glory of mankind foretold in Psalm 8 and explored in chapter two.”³⁴¹⁰⁴¹

Given the statement in Heb 2:5 that it is not to angels that God has subjected the world to come, one is left to wonder what eschatological role the original readers could have mistakenly attributed to the angels.³⁴¹⁰⁵² Apparently it was thought by some that angels would “rule” in the coming age, and the author corrected this misconception by showing from Psalm 8 that such is not the case. The defeat of the enemies of God in that day will be at the hands of the Son who has been exalted by God after his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Psalm 8 has as its background Gen 1:26–28, where both the dignity and the destiny of humanity is set forth. The author did not build his case directly on a messianic interpretation of Psalm 8, though it is clear that other the New Testament writers, like the author of Hebrews, connected the psalm with Christ. In Christ, the exalted status of humanity portrayed in Psalm 8 has been fulfilled. The author typologically connected Psalm 8 with Christ,³⁴¹⁰⁶³ understood (as in Paul) as the last Adam, the representative man, who achieves for humanity the dominion that had been lost due to Adam’s sin.

Three propositions are given in v. 9 that are then further explained in 2:10–18. The Son’s incarnation and coming to earth are expressed by “made a little lower than the angels.” As the God-man, and according to God’s will, Christ died for humanity, expressed by “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” As a result, he was exalted by God, expressed

¹⁰³³⁴⁰ Brawley analyzed the discourse structure of Hebrews using the analytic theories of Greimas and Courtes (“Discursive Structure and the Unseen in Hebrews 2:8 and 11:1: A Neglected Aspect of the Context,” *CBQ* 55 [1993]: 81–98). Like Caird, he considered 2:5–8 as introducing the theme that culminates in chap. 11, the rhetorical high point of the letter. His main thesis is that the theme of what is not seen (Heb 2:8) is a preparatory qualification “reducing the ambiguity of the meaning of faith in 11:1” (p. 85). Heb 11:1 “has to do with the reality of the ultimate subjection of all things to Christ, which is hoped for and not seen” (85).

¹⁰⁴³⁴¹ Hurst, *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament*, 163–64.

¹⁰⁵³⁴² A question well asked and answered by Gleason, “Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2,” 100.

¹⁰⁶³⁴³ Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 171–74; L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, ed. J. Roloff, trans. J. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 2:244–46.

by “now crowned with glory and honor.” The author’s strategy here reveals him to be a deft interpreter and communicator. The noble position of humanity in Ps 8:5 became by paronomasia a reference to the incarnation of the Son. The glory and honor that man possessed in Ps 8:5 by his being created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27) became a statement about the exaltation of Christ after the crucifixion. The reference to an individual man (“son of man”) and then—by extension and Hebrew parallelism—humanity in Ps 8:4 became an oblique reference to Jesus as the “Son of Man.”³⁴¹⁰⁷⁴ None of this was lost on the original audience.

Hebrews 2:10–18 is a crucial passage on the incarnation that would play a major role in the Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries. Hebrews 2:14 emphasizes the full humanity of Jesus and his solidarity with humanity. The verb tenses are critical for a correct understanding of the verse: the perfect tense *kekoinōnēken* points to humanity’s constant state, while the aorist tense *meteschen* with ingressive force denotes Christ’s entrance into a new, albeit permanent, state of incarnation.³⁴¹⁰⁸⁵ The question is often discussed by commentators whether Heb 2:10–18 represents a Christology “from above” or “from below,” that is, a preexistent Christology or a functional Christology. Dunn and Knox argued for a Christology from below and operated from a position that concluded if Jesus was fully human, he cannot be divine or pre-existent.³⁴¹⁰⁹⁶

This is, of course, a non sequitur. The author of Hebrews established in chap. 1 that he operated from a preexistent Christology. The shift in focus in chap. 2 to a more functional Christology “from below” is solely for the purpose of emphasizing the humanity of Christ and the necessity of the incarnation to the Son’s atoning work on the cross.

In what way does the human nature of Jesus differ from all other people? It differs in that his human nature does not have a different human personality of its own, but rather subsists in the divine personality. This two nature-one person Christology does not destroy the true humanity of Jesus. Some have taught that in order to preserve Christ’s real humanity, his human nature must have a separate personality all its own.

But such a claim actually makes the incarnation impossible since there can be no true incarnation so long as the man Christ is a separate, distinct person from the Son of God. Scripture nowhere describes the incarnation as the activity of the second member of the

¹⁰⁷³⁴⁴ See Fanning, “A Theology of Hebrews,” 378–79.

¹⁰⁸³⁴⁵ So most commentaries. Cf. B. Fanning on the aspectual differences between the perfect and aorist tenses (*Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, Oxford Theological Monographs [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991], 136–40).

¹⁰⁹³⁴⁶ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 98–128; J. Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 61–70, 93–95. Dunn stated that any preexistent Christology in Hebrews “has to be set within the context of his indebtedness to Platonic idealism and interpreted with cross-reference to the way in which Philo treats the Logos” (p. 54), but this flounders on the evidence that the author of Hebrews was hardly indebted to either Platonic or Philonic thought.

Godhead in a human person distinct from God, or as God causing someone to give perfect expression to his will. Hebrews 2:14 teaches that the person of the Son of God, in distinction from the Father and the Holy Spirit, took human nature into his person.

As a result of the incarnation, Jesus has two natures, but he is not two persons. This hypostatic union is the joining of two distinct natures in one person, without creating a “hybrid” third nature. Jesus is the “God-man”; he is not 50 percent God and 50 percent man. And Christ’s divine nature must not be thought of in the same way that the Holy Spirit indwells believers. The human nature of Jesus is a real humanity without a sin nature. There is a perfect commingling³⁴¹¹⁰⁷ of the two natures in Jesus as a result of the incarnation. The two natures in Christ interpenetrate each other, yet both natures remain intact. There is no double personality or independent functioning of the two natures. The divine nature was not changed into the human nature nor was the human nature absorbed into the divine. Monophysitism, the early church Christological heresy that Jesus had only one nature, is an ultimate denial of the true humanity of Jesus and thus a denial of the incarnation. Nineteenth-century liberal kenotic Christology, which misinterpreted Phil 2:5–11 by teaching that the eternal Son of God abandoned his divine nature at the incarnation, must also be rejected.

To put the matter in theological terms, the human nature of Jesus does not have its own subsistence (*autopostatos*), nor does it lack subsistence (*anupostatos*); it has its own subsistence (*enupostatos*) in the one who is himself the second member of the Trinity, God the Son.³⁴¹¹¹⁸ Finally, it should be noted that the incarnation is permanent in that the divine Word took upon himself humanity and remains after his resurrection and exaltation for all eternity the God-man. “Unlike the avatars of the East, the incarnation was a permanent assumption of human nature by the second person of the Trinity. In the ascension of Christ, glorified humanity has attained the throne of the universe.”³⁴¹¹²⁹

The incarnation makes Jesus one of us, and thus we are called “brothers” in Heb 2:11–13. This “band of brothers” motif prepares the way for 2:14. Psalm 8:5 says that God crowned humanity with “glory and honor,” but Christ the incarnate Son brings “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10). He is able to “sanctify” them because as one of them, his death atones for their sins. This leads to another theological point in this passage. It was God’s plan all along that Jesus should, by his suffering and death, procure salvation for sinful humanity. This is evidenced by the phrase “by the grace of God” (v. 9) and by the statement that “it was fitting that God ... should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering” (v. 10).

¹¹⁰³⁴⁷ Some Reformed theologians, by denying the communion of natures, ended up directly contradicting Scripture. The debate between Lutheran and Reformed theologians on this issue is quite interesting. See O. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), 2:122, 152ff.

¹¹¹³⁴⁸ See the discussion in Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 80–81; B. Demarest and G. Lewis, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 2:343; and J. L. Garrett, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:624–25.

¹¹²³⁴⁹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1907), 698.

Another theological point in this passage is the necessity of the death of Christ on the cross to make atonement for sinful humanity. The statements that “it was fitting that God should” and “he had to be made like his brothers ... [to] make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:10, 17) present Christ’s death on the cross as absolutely essential to God’s plan of salvation. Likewise, the cross was necessary for humanity to be restored to the place of “glory and honor” (v. 9) through Jesus the *archēgos* (“author”) of salvation. As our *archēgos* Jesus leads us to “glory,” which includes the fulfillment of humanity’s position in Psalm 8 and Gen 1:26–27. Other passages speak explicitly of the necessity of the suffering of the incarnate Christ on the cross (Luke 24:26; Heb 2:10; 8:3; 9:22–23).

The perfecting of Christ through suffering should be carefully defined theologically. There is no hint in the text that Jesus was somehow morally imperfect. In fact, this epistle makes crystal clear in 4:15 that Jesus, though he was tempted in all points as a member of the human race, “yet [he] was without sin.” This perfecting was for the purpose of qualifying or preparing Christ for his high priestly service. The *teleioō* word group is used in the LX¹¹³X for the consecration of priests, and the use of this word in Hebrews to describe the perfection of Jesus always occurs in the context of his high priestly service (2:10; 5:9; 7:28).³⁵¹¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the word conveys the thought of “mature,” “full grown,” “fully fitted for use.” In his humanity Jesus experienced suffering and death, which allowed him to accomplish the atonement on the cross. Through the life experiences of suffering and death, he is a merciful high priest able to help us when we are tempted (2:18). His sufferings were the testing grounds, as it were, in which he “learned obedience” (see Heb 5:8–9). We see through a glass darkly here, as Liddon well described: “Nor do the prerogatives of our Lord’s Manhood destroy Its perfection and reality, although they do undoubtedly invest It with a robe of mystery, which Faith must acknowledge, but which she cannot hope to penetrate.”³⁵¹¹⁵¹

There is nothing in Hebrews 2 that would support divine passability, the notion that God suffered on the cross. Theopassionism was condemned by the early church as a heresy, but it

¹¹³LXX Septuagint

¹¹⁴³⁵⁰ See M. Silva, “Perfection and Eschatology in Hebrews,” *WTJ* 39 (1976): 60–62. D. Peterson argued that the *τελειόω* word group in Hebrews doesn’t carry the cultic sense, but the contextual use of the word group in Hebrews indicates otherwise (*Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the “Epistle to the Hebrews,”* SNTSMS [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 47:26–30).

¹¹⁵³⁵¹ H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: Eight Lectures Preached Before the University of Oxford in the Year 1866* (London: Rivingtons, 1884), 23. Liddon went on to note three things. (1) Christ’s manhood is not unreal because it is impersonal, that is, because it does not possess a separate human personality other than that of the Divine Word. (2) Christ’s manhood is not unreal because it is sinless, since the virgin birth accomplished both. (3) Christ’s humanity is not impaired by his attributes of deity (23).

has become for many the new orthodoxy.³⁵¹¹⁶² The incarnation of the Son and his suffering on the cross do not entail the concomitant notion that God suffered on the cross. The purpose of the incarnation was to equip Jesus to do as the God-Man what he could not do as God, namely, suffer and die. The focus of the author of Hebrews when it comes to the suffering of Christ is on redemption. As Peterson said: “The suffering of Christ in our writer’s presentation is primarily regarded in its *redemptive* role, Christ achieving for others the salvation that they could not achieve for themselves (1:3; 2:9, 14–15, 17; 5:9; 9:12, 14, 15, 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 14, 19–20; 12:24; 13:12).”³⁵¹¹⁷³

Having come to the end of chap. 2, it is appropriate to look again at what the author has said about Christ’s sonship. Several points seem clear at this stage in the epistle. Jesus did not become God’s Son for the first time at his exaltation, and he was not given the name “Son” because of his exaltation.³⁵¹¹⁸⁴ In Heb 1:1–2:18 there are three stages of sonship, and each one is vitally connected to the other. First, according to the prologue, Jesus has always been the Son in his preexistent state. Second, there is a sense in which he became the Son in connection with his incarnation that enabled him to learn obedience through suffering (2:5–18). Third, upon completion of his suffering, he was exalted by God to a new stage of sonship (1:4–5).³⁵¹¹⁹⁵

The connection of 2:5–18 with what was stated in 1:6 about the Son now comes into focus. Both Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7 contextually portray the eschatological dimension of the messianic rule. The future earthly dimension of Jesus’ rule as Davidic King is pictured in Heb 1:6 where “firstborn” probably should be given the sense it carries in Ps 89:26–27, which is another passage picturing the Davidic ruler as God’s son, even his “firstborn.” The reference to bringing the Son into the *oikoumenē* (“the [inhabited] world”; 1:6) at first seems to refer to the incarnation, but in light of 2:5–9 the angelic worship is difficult to connect with that event since the incarnation was what actually made Jesus “lower” than the angels for a time. In Heb 1:6 angelic worship is directed toward the Son when he is brought into the *oikoumenē* as the royal firstborn. Westcott noted that the clause with *hotan* and the aorist subjunctive indisputably refers to a future occurrence.³⁵¹²⁰⁶ Thus 2:5–9 clarifies the sense of 1:6 by picking up the contrast with angels with an added, “it is not to angels,” and a back reference, “of which we are speaking” (2:5). In 2:6–9 “the world to come” (v. 5) is subjected to Jesus as Son of Man who

¹¹⁶³⁵² E.g., J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); and R. Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹¹⁷³⁵³ Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 175. Cf. K. DeYoung, “Divine Impassability and the Passion of Christ in the Book of Hebrews,” *WTJ* 68 (2006): 48.

¹¹⁸³⁵⁴ Against Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 1–56; and Caird, “Son by Appointment,” 73–81.

¹¹⁹³⁵⁵ See the discussion on 1:2–5. For a helpful summary of “sonship” in Hebrews, see Fanning, “A Theology of Hebrews,” 386.

¹²⁰³⁵⁶ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 22. Hughes disagreed (Hebrews, 58).

perfectly fulfills Psalm 8. If *oikoumenē* is to be interpreted in a literal earthly sense, as seems likely, and given the author's point of the Son fulfilling the Davidic promises in the Old Testament passages he quoted (esp. Ps 110:1), then it is difficult not to see in this word a reference to the future earthly millennium.³⁵¹²¹⁷ The author of Hebrews has portrayed Jesus as the King who will fulfill the Davidic promise in two stages: the already/not yet.³⁵¹²²⁸ Thus Jesus' Davidic kingship in Hebrews has two dimensions: a rule presently in effect, inaugurated yet invisible, and a visible rule on this earth that is yet to be consummated but is certain of fulfillment.³⁵¹²³⁹

Ever the pastor, the author took anthropology, Christology, and eschatology in Heb 2:5–18 and placed it in the service of the church. Humanity has not fulfilled her destiny as stated in Gen 1:26–27; but in Christ who became man and who made atonement for humanity's sin, humanity will do so in the eschaton. Meanwhile, the church must view the present suffering from the perspective of her union with Christ, whose union with our human nature and consequent suffering culminated in the cross and perfectly fitted him to be our merciful high priest who comes to our aid. Chrysostom, in his sermon on Heb 2:5–7, caught the pastoral heart of the author of Hebrews and reflected it in his effort to encourage his hearers: "If then all things must be made subject to Him, but have not yet been made subject, do not grieve, nor trouble thyself.... The King has not yet clearly conquered. Why then art thou troubled when suffering affliction?"³⁶¹²⁴⁰

Before closing this chapter, a word needs to be said about how the author perceived the role of angels in relation to Christology. It is clear that Hebrews 1 focuses on the exaltation of

¹²¹³⁵⁷ The meaning of *oikouμένη* as an earthly realm is defended by Buchanan (*Hebrews*, 17–18, 26–27, 64–65). Cf. Michel, *TDNT* 5:159; Fanning, "A Theology of Hebrews," 386; R. P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and a Review* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 171. Premillennialists say that the realization of Christ's dominion in Heb 2:9 will occur in the future millennial kingdom.

¹²²³⁵⁸ So Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," 364.

¹²³³⁵⁹ D. Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. C. Blaising and D. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 37–67.

¹²⁴³⁶⁰ Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *NPNF* 14, revised with Introduction and Notes, F. Gardiner (Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 383. He continued: "Again, he reminds them of the Cross, thereby effecting two things; both persuading them to bear all things nobly, looking to the Master.... Then he shows that the Cross is 'glory and honor,' as He Himself also always calls it, saying, 'That the Son of Man might be glorified....' If then he calls the [sufferings] for His servants' sake 'glory,' much more shouldst thou the [sufferings] for the Lord" (ibid.).

Jesus above the angels, while in Hebrews 2 the focus shifts to his incarnation and death where he is temporarily made lower than the angels. In both chapters Jesus is emphatically distinguished from the angels: in Hebrews 1 he is not one of the angels, but a member of the Godhead; in Hebrews 2 he is human, and thus not one of the angels. As Heb 2:16 makes clear, Jesus had to be human in order to provide help to humans, not to angels. Bauckham is correct that the prominence of angels in these two chapters must take account of their relationship to the divine Son of God who is above them and the human Son of God who is, in his earthly life, below them. Thus it would seem that the author contrasted Jesus with the angels for additional reasons than simply to explain the Son's revelation as superior to that of the law of Moses as brought out in the hortatory paragraph of Heb 2:1–4.³⁶¹²⁵¹ Assuming that the purpose of Hebrews 1–2 is to set the stage for further theological reflection by clear identification of Jesus with God and humanity, then the author used angels as “indicators of ontological status” for Jesus in the Jewish monotheistic worldview. Unlike Jesus as Son, angels possess neither divine nor human nature, but rather serve those who are the heirs of salvation, as 1:14 makes clear. They serve the author's purpose of Christological definition.³⁶¹²⁶²

In the light of Hebrews 1–2, the seriousness of the warning in 2:1–4 is evident. Since God has spoken decisively in one who is a Son; since this Son is coequal with the Father, sharing in the divine nature in an exclusive sense; since the Son has condescended to become man in the incarnation in an inclusive sense, and has suffered death on our behalf as our substitute; since this Son and high priest has not only been raised from the dead but has been exalted by the Father and as the God-man is destined to rule over all things as Lord; since the Son is fully human in both roles now as Lord who reigns from heaven and as high priest who has atoned for sin; then we better pay close attention to all that God has done and is doing for us in this Son who is our Lord and our high priest. As the author put it: “how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?” (2:3).

Excursus: Hebrews 2:14¹²⁷

¹²⁵³⁶¹ Bauckham, “Monotheism and Christology in Hebrews 1,” 170–71.

¹²⁶³⁶² Ibid., 172–73.

¹²⁷ David L. Allen, [*Hebrews*](#), The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 218–233.