



BIBLE EXPOSITORY

*Commentary*

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*Hebrews - Revelation*

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# ESV Expository Commentary

VOL. XII

**Hebrews – Revelation**

EDITORS

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# EXPOSITORY

## *Commentary*

VOL. XII

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### *Hebrews – Revelation*

Hebrews  
*Dennis E. Johnson*

2 Peter and Jude  
*Matthew S. Harmon*

James  
*Robert L. Plummer*

1–3 John  
*Ray Van Neste*

1 Peter  
*Sam Storms*

Revelation  
*Thomas R. Schreiner*

*ESV Expository Commentary, Volume 12: Hebrews–Revelation*

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# PREFACE

## TO THE ESV EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

The Bible pulsates with life, and the Spirit conveys the electrifying power of Scripture to those who lay hold of it by faith, ingest it, and live by it. God has revealed himself in the Bible, which makes the words of Scripture sweeter than honey, more precious than gold, and more valuable than all riches. These are the words of life, and the Lord has entrusted them to his church, for the sake of the world.

He has also provided the church with teachers to explain and make clear what the Word of God means and how it applies to each generation. We pray that all serious students of God's Word, both those who seek to teach others and those who pursue study for their own personal growth in godliness, will be served by the ESV Expository Commentary. Our goal has been to provide a clear, crisp, and Christ-centered explanation of the biblical text. All Scripture speaks of Christ (Luke 24:27), and we have sought to show how each biblical book helps us to see the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

To that end, each contributor has been asked to provide commentary that is:

- *exegetically sound*—self-consciously submissive to the flow of thought and lines of reasoning discernible in the biblical text;
- *robustly biblical-theological*—reading the Bible as diverse yet bearing an overarching unity, narrating a single storyline of redemption culminating in Christ;
- *globally aware*—aimed as much as possible at a global audience, in line with Crossway's mission to provide the Bible and theologically responsible resources to as many people around the world as possible;
- *broadly reformed*—standing in the historical stream of the Reformation, affirming that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, taught in Scripture alone, for God's glory alone; holding high a big God with big grace for big sinners;
- *doctrinally conversant*—fluent in theological discourse; drawing appropriate brief connections to matters of historical or current theological importance;
- *pastorally useful*—transparently and reverently "sitting under the text"; avoiding lengthy grammatical/syntactical discussions;
- *application-minded*—building brief but consistent bridges into contemporary living in both Western and non-Western contexts (being aware of the globally diverse contexts toward which these volumes are aimed);

- *efficient in expression*—economical in its use of words; not a word-by-word analysis but a crisply moving exposition.

In terms of Bible translation, the ESV is the base translation used by the authors in their notes, but the authors were expected to consult the text in the original languages when doing their exposition and were not required to agree with every decision made by the ESV translators.

As civilizations crumble, God's Word stands. And we stand on it. The great truths of Scripture speak across space and time, and we aim to herald them in a way that will be globally applicable.

May God bless the study of his Word, and may he smile on this attempt to expound it.

—The Publisher and Editors

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## *General*

b.	born	lit.	literal, literally
c.	circa, about, approximately	LXX	Septuagint
cf.	confer, compare, see	mg.	marginal reading
ch., chs.	chapter(s)	MT	Masoretic Text
d.	died	n.d.	no date
diss.	dissertation	n.l.	no place of publication
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition	n.p.	no publisher
e.g.	for example	NT	New Testament
esp.	especially	OT	Old Testament
et al.	and others	par.	parallel passage
etc.	and so on	r.	reigned
ff.	and following	repr.	reprinted
Gk.	Greek	rev.	revised (by)
Hb.	Hebrew	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (under the word)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	trans.	translator, translated by
i.e.	that is	v., vv.	verse(s)
		vol(s).	volume(s)
		vs.	versus

## *Bibliographic*

AB	Anchor Bible
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>

- ConcC Concordia Commentary
- JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- LSJ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
- MM Moulton, James H., and George Milligan. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. London, 1930. Repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
- NA<sup>28</sup> Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Westphalia; German Bible Society, 2012.
- NAC New American Commentary
- NICNT New International Commentary on the New Testament
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by Colin Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975–1978.
- NIDNTTE *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by Colin Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
- NIGTC New International Greek Testament Commentary
- NIVAC NIV Application Commentary
- NovT *Novum Testamentum*
- NTL New Testament Library
- PNTC Pillar New Testament Commentary
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 1964–1976.
- TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
- TynBul *Tyndale Bulletin*
- WBC Word Biblical Commentary
- WTJ *Westminster Theological Journal*
- ZECNT Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
- ZNW *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

*Books of the Bible*

Gen.	Genesis	Nah.	Nahum
Ex.	Exodus	Hab.	Habakkuk
Lev.	Leviticus	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Num.	Numbers	Hag.	Haggai
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Zech.	Zechariah
Josh.	Joshua	Mal.	Malachi
Judg.	Judges	Matt.	Matthew
Ruth	Ruth	Mark	Mark
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Luke	Luke
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	John	John
1 Kings	1 Kings	Acts	Acts
2 Kings	2 Kings	Rom.	Romans
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Ezra	Ezra	Gal.	Galatians
Neh.	Nehemiah	Eph.	Ephesians
Est.	Esther	Phil.	Philippians
Job	Job	Col.	Colossians
Ps., Pss.	Psalms	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
Prov.	Proverbs	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Song	Song of Solomon	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Isa.	Isaiah	Titus	Titus
Jer.	Jeremiah	Philem.	Philemon
Lam.	Lamentations	Heb.	Hebrews
Ezek.	Ezekiel	James	James
Dan.	Daniel	1 Pet.	1 Peter
Hos.	Hosea	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Joel	Joel	1 John	1 John
Amos	Amos	2 John	2 John
Obad.	Obadiah	3 John	3 John
Jonah	Jonah	Jude	Jude
Mic.	Micah	Rev.	Revelation



*Apocrypha and Other Noncanonical Sources Cited*

1 En.	1 Enoch	3 Macc.	3 Maccabees
1 Esd.	1 Esdras	4 Macc.	4 Maccabees
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees	Bar.	Baruch
2 Bar.	2 Baruch	Jub.	Jubilees
2 En.	2 Enoch	Sir.	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
2 Esd.	2 Esdras	Tob.	Tobit
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees	Wisd. Sol.	Wisdom of Solomon
3 En.	3 Enoch		

# HEBREWS

*Dennis E. Johnson*



# INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

## *Overview*

Hebrews is unique among the NT documents. Its author describes it as a “word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22), the same Greek expression used to describe Paul’s “word of encouragement” in a synagogue of the Jewish Dispersion (Acts 13:15). Hebrews is probably a sermon composed for a Jewish Christian congregation, showing them from the OT (which God spoke through prophets; Heb. 1:1) that Jesus has fulfilled the promises and shadows given to Israel in the law of Moses, guaranteeing to believers cleansing of conscience and access to God’s throne of grace (9:13–14; 10:19–24; 4:14–16). Hebrews explains both the continuities and the development in redemptive history from the old covenant given at Sinai to the new covenant mediated by Jesus. Hebrews exemplifies how revealed truths concerning Christ’s unique person and redemptive mission establish Christians’ confidence and hope, calling the church to perseverance and mutual encouragement.

## *Title*

Unlike other General Epistles, which bear their authors’ names, the title of Hebrews describes its recipients. Yet the text of Hebrews itself identifies neither its recipients nor their location. The traditional title “To the Hebrews,” traceable to the second century AD, is inferred from the contents or perhaps reflects a tradition transmitted orally from the first generation. The identity of the original recipients as “Hebrews,” Jewish Christians rather than Gentiles, has been challenged (cf. Date and Occasion). On balance, however, evidence supports the ancient title’s claim that this book was originally addressed to Jewish people who had come to faith in Jesus.

## *Author*

Unlike the typical Hellenistic letter (cf. Genre and Literary Structure/Features), Hebrews does not open with the identification of its author. The first recipients no doubt knew him, for he asks them to pray that he may be “restored” to them in the near future (13:18–19, 23) and recalls the specifics of their past and present trials (6:9–12; 10:32–34).

The earliest church tradition, reflected in Papyrus 46 and arguments known to Clement and Origen in Alexandria at the end of the second century AD, associates

Hebrews with the apostle Paul. Clement, however, speculated that Hebrews may have been penned by a Pauline associate, perhaps Luke. Origen, while granting the theological affinity of Hebrews with Paul, concluded that only “God knows” who actually authored the sermon-letter. The mention of Timothy (13:23) and appearance of “Pauline” themes (e.g., Christ’s atoning death and the new covenant) have been cited as supporting Pauline authorship. However, a central emphasis of Paul, Jesus’ resurrection, is mentioned rarely (13:20), although it is implied in the motif of Jesus’ “indestructible life” (7:16). Moreover, as John Calvin observed, Paul stressed that his call to apostleship came from the risen Christ himself, unmediated by other humans (Gal. 1:1, 11–17). It is unlikely, then, that Paul would number himself, as the author of Hebrews does, among those who encountered the message of salvation through other apostles (Heb. 2:3). The Muratorian fragment, a seventh-century document that may reflect a second-century original, mentions thirteen Pauline epistles, addressed to seven churches and three individuals. It does not include Hebrews among the Pauline epistles or even among works falsely attributed to Paul.

Another second-century church father, Tertullian of Carthage, proposed Barnabas as the author of Hebrews. Joseph “Barnabas” was a Levite from the Dispersion (Cyprus, specifically), and the nickname assigned to him by the apostles is interpreted as “son of encouragement [*paraklēsis*]” (Acts 4:36). These features would fit the author of a “word of exhortation [*paraklēsis*]” (Heb. 13:22) composed in polished Greek and elaborating Jesus’ fulfillment of the Levitical sanctuary and its sacrifices. Yet Tertullian’s attribution of Hebrews to Barnabas stands alone in the early Christian centuries. Tertullian may be correct, but he does not cite earlier tradition, and none of his contemporaries seem aware of his view.

Other authorship proposals were made centuries later, based strictly on induction from the content and style of the sermon-letter itself, without any claim of external confirmation from early church tradition. Supposed authors include Apollos (Martin Luther), Clement of Rome (Calvin, tentatively), Epaphras, and Priscilla (19th- and 20th-century scholars).

The identity of the human author of Hebrews is, and likely will remain, unknown. We do know some things about him. The Greek masculine participle in “time would fail me to tell” (11:32) implies that the author was male. Along with his hearers, he heard about the salvation Christ achieved through the apostles “who heard” the Lord (2:3). He was fluent in literary Hellenistic Greek and a skillful interpreter of Scripture who used the Greek Septuagint (LXX). He could assume his pastoral authority among the sermon-letter’s hearers. Although we, at a distance of twenty centuries, do not know who he was, this would probably not concern him. At one point he mentions a human author of Scripture to make a point about chronology (4:7), but his dominant concern is that we attend to Scripture and the authority of its divine author, who spoke long ago through prophets and still speaks in the Son and, after his ascension to heaven, through the Son’s messengers (1:1–2; 2:1–4, 6; 3:7; 12:25–27; 13:7).

### *Date and Occasion*

#### DATE

Hebrews was probably written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Hebrews 10:1–4, 11–14 argues from the ceaseless repetition of animal sacrifices in Israel’s earthly sanctuary that such deaths cannot cleanse worshipers’ consciences. If the temple had already been destroyed, that event would have generated a different line of argument: that the earthly sanctuary and its sacrifices were obviously insufficient, since the temple’s destruction showed that they had been replaced by a “new and living way” into God’s presence, opened by Jesus in his death (cf. 10:19).

On the other hand, it probably was not written *too long* before 70, for the hearers of the letter are described as having embraced the gospel some time ago and therefore as being less mature than they should have been (5:12–14). The greeting conveyed from “those who come from Italy” (13:24) suggests the sermon-letter’s destination was Italy and that these greeters were Italian expatriates sending greetings home.

Some scholars suggest that the suffering that the readers of this letter had earlier endured, including public exposure, imprisonment, and loss of property (10:32–34), might have been associated with the edict of the emperor Claudius expelling Jews from Rome, reportedly in response to turmoil generated by or over someone named Chrestus or entitled Christos, Greek for “Messiah” (c. AD 49; cf. Acts 18:2). Apparently the edict was not imposed on every Jew who resided in the capital, and it may have lapsed after a few years.

When Paul arrived in Rome for adjudication of his appeal (c. AD 60), he found both an established Jewish community and one or more Christian congregations (Acts 28:14–15, 17–28). Although the members of the Hebrews congregation “have not yet resisted to the point of shedding . . . blood” (Heb. 12:4), the author assures them that Christ’s death has freed them from the fear of death (2:15) and reminds them that those who preceded them in the pilgrimage of faith endured both torture and violent death (11:35–38). A composition date for Hebrews in the mid-60s, as Nero’s persecution of Christians in the imperial capital was escalating, is consistent with all of this available evidence.

#### OCCASION

The occasion of the writing of this letter can be inferred from direct comments addressing the hearers’ situation and spiritual condition and from the sermon’s own argumentation. The addressees began their pilgrimage of faith well when “enlightened” by the gospel, enduring suffering and caring for other sufferers for Jesus’ sake (Heb. 6:10; 10:32–34). At the time of writing, however, some were in danger not only of abandoning the Christian gathering (10:25) but also of renouncing their confession of trust in Christ and his atoning blood (6:4–6; 10:29–30). The sermon argues throughout that Jesus and his redemptive work surpass and replace the means of atonement and access to God, the sanctuary and sacrifices, commanded in the law given to Moses. This argument seems to imply that the

hearers were inclined to look to the institutions of Judaism for assurance of God's forgiveness, as well as for relief from persecution.

There is no mention of circumcision, which would have loomed large if the first audience were Gentiles (as seen in Galatians, Romans, Philippians, Ephesians, Acts, and elsewhere). Thus the hearers probably were not Gentiles being *lured toward* institutional Judaism and its temple but were Jewish followers of Jesus tempted to *return to* the visible sanctuary and its liturgy in Jerusalem, abandoning their confession of Christ's supremacy as eternal High Priest and his sufficiency as the final, conscience-cleansing sacrifice.

### *Genre and Literary Structure/Features*

#### GENRE

Although Hebrews is typically categorized among the "Catholic" or General Epistles, it lacks features that characterized typical Hellenistic epistles. It does not open with the author's name, the recipients' name/description/locale, or an opening benediction or expression of thanks. The author himself characterizes the book as a "word of exhortation" (13:22). This description highlights the letter's pervasively "hortatory" tone—urging hearers to respond rightly to God's Word. It also signals that the book is to be received as a *spoken* explanation and application of Scripture: a sermon. In the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, Paul's exposition of the OT Scriptures, issuing in a summons to faith, is called a "word of encouragement" (Acts 13:15), employing the same Greek expression rendered "word of exhortation" in Hebrews 13:22. In Paul's directive to Timothy for his ministry in Christian congregations, the reading of Scripture is followed by "exhortation" and "teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13).

Consistent with this sermonic genre, in Hebrews God's Word is conveyed orally by "speaking" or "testifying" and is received by "hearing" (Heb. 2:1, 3; 3:7; 7:17; 8:8; 10:15; 12:25; etc.). Hebrews closes with features often found in epistles: commands on various topics, a request for prayer, a benediction, and final greetings. So the sermon has been adapted for distribution via written correspondence.

#### STRUCTURE

This sermon is structured by six contrasts<sup>1</sup> between aspects of God's means of relating to Israel under the old covenant, on the one hand, and the superiority of engagement with God that Christ has effected under the new covenant, on the other (cf. Outline). Each section expounds one primary OT passage, argues that Christ's mediatorial mission transcends old covenant institutions, and leads to a specific exhortation. The flow of thought moves from God's speech (revelation) to his provision for our atonement and forgiveness (reconciliation) and finally to the goal of our worship in his holy presence (rest). The author skillfully interlocks sections, unifying the sermon's movement from theme to

<sup>1</sup> No scholarly consensus exists on the structure of Hebrews. This six-part analysis receives partial support from R. T. France, "The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor," *TynBul* 47 (1996): 245–276.

theme. As a result, the boundaries between the sermon's sections are not always sharply defined (table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1: Major Sections in Hebrews

Text Boundaries	Christ Is Superior To:	With Reference To:	Primary OT Text (Secondary Text)	Exhortation
1:4–2:18	Angels	Revelation	Ps. 8:4–6	2:1–4
3:1–4:13	Moses	Revelation	Ps. 95:7–11 (Num. 12:7)	3:7–4:13
4:14–7:28	Aaronic priests	Reconciliation	Ps. 110:1, 4 (Gen. 14:17–20)	5:11–6:12
8:1–10:31	Covenant, sanctuary, sacrifice	Reconciliation	Jer. 31:31–34 (Ps. 40:6–8)	10:19–31
10:32–12:17	Promised Land	Rest (inheritance)	Hab. 2:2–4	12:1–17
12:18–29	Sinai	Rest (worship)	Ex. 19:16–23 (Deut. 4:11)	12:25–29

### *Theology of Hebrews*

Hebrews explicitly reaffirms many doctrines revealed throughout the rest of the Bible. God created the universe by his word (Heb. 11:3; cf. 1:10–12) through his eternal Son (1:2–3). OT Scripture is God's very Word, addressed by the Holy Spirit to us (1:1–2; 3:7). The human race is destined to rule over other creatures (2:7–8), but we have sinned and are alienated from God, requiring atonement through a pure sacrifice (2:17; 5:1–3; 9:7, 13–14). We are enslaved by the Devil through the fear of death (2:14–15), and we need salvation from his power (2:3, 10; 5:9; 7:25). This list could go on. The *distinctive* theological contributions of Hebrews are in the areas of Christology, soteriology, the covenantal structure of redemptive history, and the church and its worship.

#### CHRISTOLOGY

God's Son, Jesus the Christ, is fully divine, infinitely transcending God's angels in dignity (1:2–9) and the entire universe in immutable longevity (1:10–12; 13:8). The Son became fully human, sharing in our flesh and blood, "like his brothers in every respect," in order to become a merciful, faithful High Priest who offered his own life to rescue us from God's wrath and to grant us access to God's presence (2:14–18; 5:5–10; 10:19–22). Having died for his people's sins, Jesus has been raised to an "indestructible life" (7:16) and has ascended to God's right hand in heaven (8:1–2; cf. 12:2), where he lives forever to intercede for those who approach God through him (7:23–25).

#### SOTERIOLOGY

Hebrews elaborates most fully the priestly aspect of Christ's saving mission, the sermon's central point (8:1). His sufferings during the "days of his flesh" qualify him to represent weak sinners with sympathetic compassion befitting a priest



interceding for his brothers and sisters (2:17–18; 4:14–5:4; 5:7–10). As High Priest he offered himself in death as the final, once-for-all, conscience-cleansing sacrifice of atonement, fulfilling and replacing the endless succession of slaughtered animals associated with the OT sanctuary. Christ has now entered God’s heavenly Holy Place and is interceding on our behalf. We await his emergence from the heavenly sanctuary to consummate our rescue from sin and death.

#### COVENANTAL, REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

Hebrews opens with the theme that God has revealed his Word progressively throughout history, speaking to past generations through prophets but “in these last days” through his Son (1:1–2). This two-age model of history pervades the sermon. Moses testified to “things that were to be spoken later” (3:5). The law’s tabernacle and its sacrifices forecast the priestly work of Jesus and its venue in heaven. Christ “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (9:26). By contrast, the rules given to Moses restricting access to the tabernacle’s holiest inner chamber in times past were the Holy Spirit’s signal that the “time of reformation” had not yet arrived (9:8–10).

Now that Christ has come as High Priest to offer himself as sacrifice, rituals serving as shadows of “good things to come” (10:1) have given way to the realities to which they pointed—the “good things that *have* come” (9:11). God announced in Jeremiah 31 (cited in Heb. 8:8–12) that he would replace the covenant established at Sinai with a new covenant, based on better promises to secure our access to God. Christ’s death has inaugurated that new covenant (9:14–15). The new era of God’s covenant communion with his people has dawned.

#### ECCLESIOLOGY AND WORSHIP

Hebrews summons its hearers to view their present situation in light of the pattern of Israel’s pilgrimage through the wilderness, from slavery in Egypt to rest in the Promise Land (3:7–4:11; cf. 11:8–10, 13–16; 13:14). Liberation from slavery is a great grace, but in order to enter its blessed destination (variously called “God’s rest”; the city with foundations, designed and built by God; the city to come, which abides eternally) the church must persevere in the hope it confesses (3:6; 4:1; 6:11, 18; 10:23–25, 35–39). This endurance demands mutual encouragement and accountability (3:12–13; 12:12–17), and its source is expectant worship and prayer, in which we draw near to God’s throne of grace, seeking his timely help (4:14–16; 10:19–22; 12:18–24). As a congregation making its way through wilderness trials toward its promised inheritance, the church must hold fast to its confession by holding together in proactive care for one another.

#### *Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ*

##### HEBREWS AND THE OT

Hebrews provides the most extensive and detailed NT commentary on the design and significance of the OT sanctuary and the sacrifices offered in it. In other words,

in this sermon the Holy Spirit (cf. 9:8–10) has provided his divinely inspired interpretation of a large section of the law given through Moses (Exodus 25–40; Leviticus 1–25; Numbers 3–9; 15–19; 28–29; Deuteronomy 12; 14–18; 26), as well as of later OT passages addressing the temple (e.g., 1 Kings 5–8; 1 Chronicles 21–26; 28–29; 2 Chronicles 2–7).

A case can be made that Psalm 110 unifies the entire argument of the sermon we know as Hebrews. The psalm presents a royal Messiah, enthroned at God's right hand (cf. Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12). This king is also a priest, fitting the template of the ancient priest-king of Salem, Melchizedek. He serves as priest "forever," his tenure in office secured by God's solemn oath (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:3, 11–28). Thus Hebrews discerns in this psalm (along with Gen. 14:17–20) the union of priestly and royal offices in Christ; the heavenly venue of his present ministry; the completion of his atoning sacrifice, signified by his seated posture; his unending tenure as priest; and the superiority of Jesus' priesthood to Aaron's.

In Hebrews 3:7–4:13, the interpretation of Psalm 95:7–11 shows Israel's forty-year trek through the wilderness to be a pattern of the Christian church's pilgrimage in the new covenant. Thus Hebrews casts light on the significance of wilderness accounts throughout the Pentateuch (cf. also Paul's discussion in 1 Cor. 10:1–13).

Hebrews uses various interpretive methods to demonstrate, from the OT itself, the superiority of Christ to the events and institutions by which God formerly related to Israel. One strategy, employed three times, merits mention here. Certain OT passages imply that benefits God had bestowed on Israel—rest in the Promised Land, the Levitical priests, the covenant made at Sinai—were imperfect and temporary provisions destined to be replaced by even better blessings. If God had not planned for these provisions to become obsolete, Hebrews reasons, then the relevant OT passages would not have led readers to expect superior replacements in the future:

- (1) Hebrews 4:6–8 notes that Psalm 95:7–11, spoken through David long after Israel's conquest of Canaan under Joshua, still urged its ancient audience—already living in the Promised Land—"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts," for if the people of God did so, they would not enter God's rest. "If Joshua had given them rest," the argument continues, then "God would not have spoken of another day later on." So the "rest" promised in Psalm 95 is something more secure and lasting than peaceful residence in Canaan (Josh. 21:44–45; 2 Sam. 7:1; cf. Heb. 11:10, 14–16).
- (2) If priests descended from Levi could have brought Israelite worshipers "perfection" (the cleansing needed to approach God), then Psalm 110:4 would not have spoken of a coming priest who would belong to a different priestly order, that of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:11). Thus the OT itself implies that a priest greater than Aaron would eventually come to "perfect" those who approach God through him (10:14).

- (3) God promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34 to inaugurate a “new covenant,” unlike the covenant established at Sinai, which Israel broke. Hebrews 8:7–13 reasons that, if that first covenant had sufficed, the Lord would not have predicted a later, better covenant—one in which sins are finally forgiven and all of God’s people enjoy direct access to him.

#### HEBREWS AND OTHER NT BOOKS

Hebrews also displays connections with various NT books, especially in its descriptions of the person and redemptive work of Christ. Like the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1–3) and Pauline texts such as Colossians 1:13–20 and Philippians 2:5–11, Hebrews teaches that the Son is God, was active in the creation of the universe, and uniquely displays the glory of the Father. With the four Gospels and Paul, Hebrews teaches Christ’s full humanity (John 1:14; Phil. 2:6–9), which is essential to his mission as mediator (1 Tim. 2:4–5). Hebrews 5:7 offers a glimpse of Jesus’ anguish in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, recorded more fully in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 26:36–44; Mark 14:32–40; Luke 22:40–46). Hebrews 7:24–25 and Romans 8:34 agree that Jesus now intercedes for believers at God’s right hand.

#### *Preaching from Hebrews*

Since Hebrews is probably an early Christian sermon in writing, we should approach this book not only as God’s Word to be preached but also as an example of what and how to preach, especially as we seek to expound a variety of OT passages and their relationship to Christ. Hebrews grounds its message in a careful interpretation of God’s written Word, which, though given “long ago” (Heb. 1:1), continues to “speak” to our hearers today (3:7, 13). Hebrews illustrates that profound theological truths—the mystery of the incarnation and its purpose, the atonement of our sin—are to be taught for practical purposes: to motivate Christians to persevere in faith, mutual encouragement, and the pursuit of holiness.

Preachers of the rich Christology of Hebrews, its typological interpretation of the OT, and its other motifs must follow the book’s homiletic lead, carrying theological exposition through to the response it evokes from believing hearts. While enduring faith is his primary application, our preacher does not ignore believers’ responsibility for one another (3:12–15; 6:10; 10:32–34; 13:1–2), nor our calling to pursue holiness in general (12:14), in sexuality (12:16; 13:4), and in our hearts’ search for security (13:5–6). As deep as his theological and exegetical insights are, the preacher to the Hebrews also exhibits a pastor’s compassionate understanding of his congregants’ spiritual needs and struggles. With a wise blend of gravity and grace, he combines sobering warnings (6:4–8; 10:26–31) with heartening acknowledgments of his hearers’ evidence of genuine faith (6:9–12; 10:32–39).

The original hearers, nurtured in the OT and the worship life of Israel, were profoundly aware of the defiling effects of human sin and the danger God’s holiness poses when he dwells among his people (10:26–31; 12:18–21, 29). Many

listeners today, influenced by postmodern relativism and preoccupation with self-esteem, will need to be gripped by the biblical vision of the living God, supreme in his majesty and purity as “the judge of all” (12:23), in order to grasp the astonishing good news of the atoning work of Christ, which purges consciences and grants access into God’s presence in order to experience his grace.

In view of the theological richness of Hebrews and our hearers’ unfamiliarity with its OT roots, preachers will need to find ways to make its message clear and vivid today. This may require dividing the document into small texts for exposition, but in each sermon we need to keep in view both the wider flow of the book’s argument and the exhortation toward which each phase of the argument is driving.

### *Interpretive Challenges*

#### HORIZONTAL (HISTORICAL) AND VERTICAL (HEAVEN/EARTH) TYPOLOGY

NT typology characteristically operates along a historical axis, linking events, institutions, offices, and individuals in past history (creation, fall, patriarchs, Israel) to their fulfillments in Christ and his new covenant people, the church. Adam, whose one act of disobedience brought condemnation to all humanity, was a “type of the one who was to come,” namely Jesus, whose obedience in life and death constitutes many as righteous (Rom. 5:12–19). Hebrews reflects the historical trajectory from OT type to NT “antitype” (that to which the type points and in which it is fulfilled); e.g., the ancient king-priest Melchizedek set a pattern for an “order” of priesthood that comprises only one other priest-king, Jesus (Hebrews 7).

But Hebrews adds a “vertical” dimension to this historical typology. Melchizedek could serve as a pattern for the Son who would arrive later in history because he was presented in the OT text in such a way that he “resembled the Son of God,” who lives forever (7:3). Similarly, the ancient tabernacle was a “copy and shadow” of the heavenly sanctuary of God, made visible to Moses on Mount Sinai (8:5). Into that heavenly Holy Place Jesus entered centuries later when he ascended after his death and resurrection. So the temple in which Christ now intercedes is the original, eternal, heavenly sanctuary; the earthly tabernacle and its furnishings were “copies of the heavenly things” (9:23).

#### APOSTASY THAT CANNOT BE REMEDIED

Among the most controversial and troubling sections of Hebrews are passages that warn of the dire, even irreversible, consequences of apostatizing from faith in Christ (6:4–6; 10:26–31; cf. 2:1–4). The sermon addresses a visible church, some of whose members appear inclined to renounce their confession of reliance on Jesus’ sacrifice and to return to the visible rituals of Judaism. The author warns that those who make such a move have shown such contempt toward God’s Son, his shed blood, and his Spirit of grace that for them “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26), and “it is impossible, . . . to restore them again to repentance” (6:4, 6). These texts pose two soteriological conundrums.

First, such texts seem to contradict the truth taught elsewhere in the NT that those whom God has chosen for salvation, given new life and faith, and justified will persevere in their faith to the end (e.g., John 10:27–29; Rom. 8:28–30). Within Hebrews itself we read that Christ “is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). However, if Hebrews originates from God, who always speaks truth, these sober warnings can be reconciled with these and other “perseverance” texts. One issue that will be addressed in the commentary is whether the terms describing (potential) apostates’ previous Christian experience (6:4–5: “enlightened,” “tasted the heavenly gift . . . the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,” “shared in the Holy Spirit”) must refer to genuine spiritual rebirth. It must be remembered that our preacher was addressing a congregation that, like ancient Israel in the wilderness, was likely a mixture of genuine believers and others who, though associated with the covenant community, had not responded to the means of grace with genuine faith (4:2).

The second problem concerns the impossibility of restoring apostates to repentance, leading to the forgiveness of their treason against Christ (cf. 6:4–6). Rigorist splinter groups in the early church cited Hebrews in defense of their conviction that no one who had renounced Christ under the pressure of persecution could be readmitted into church membership, however sincere their subsequent repentance seemed to be. The church at large, however, acknowledged that Christ’s grace could cover even such a grave transgression, as Jesus himself had extended mercy to Peter after his three fear-driven denials. Over the centuries, Hebrews 6:4–6 has distressed believers of tender conscience as they have recalled their fluctuating spiritual histories. Without vitiating these passages’ warnings, we can be comforted that none who sincerely turn away from unbelief in heartfelt repentance and faith have crossed the line into irremediable apostasy. See the comments on 6:4–12 for further discussion.

### *Outline*

- I. Prologue: in these last days God has spoken in a Son, who made purification for sins and now reigns at God’s right hand (1:1–4)
- II. Revelation: Jesus is superior to the angels as the agent of God’s speaking (1:5–2:18)
  - A. Instruction: God’s contrasting words to the Son and to angels show the Son’s superiority (1:5–14)
  - B. Exhortation: those who neglect the salvation spoken through the Son will not escape wrath (2:1–4)
  - C. Instruction: the Son became human, lower than the angels, to redeem us, his brothers and sisters (2:5–18)
- III. Revelation: Jesus is superior to Moses as the agent of God’s voice (3:1–4:13)
  - A. Instruction: Jesus, like Moses, was faithful; but Jesus deserves greater honor as Creator and as Son (3:1–6)

- B. Exhortation: the Holy Spirit warns us not to harden our hearts “today” when we hear God’s voice, as Israel did in the desert (3:7–4:13)
- IV. Reconciliation: Jesus is superior to Aaron as the High Priest forever (4:14–7:28)
  - A. Instruction: Jesus, like Aaron, is qualified for priesthood through human weakness and divine appointment (4:14–5:10)
  - B. Exhortation: do not be dull in hearing, but imitate believers who inherited God’s sure promises (5:11–6:20)
  - C. Instruction: Jesus is priest in the order of Melchizedek, greater than Aaron (7:1–28)
- V. Reconciliation: Jesus is superior to the old covenant, its sanctuary, and its sacrifices, for his sacrifice cleanses consciences and brings us near to God (8:1–10:35)
  - A. Instruction: Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant, securing forgiveness and access to God (8:1–13)
  - B. Instruction: the earthly sanctuary of the old covenant showed that another route to God was needed (9:1–10)
  - C. Instruction: animal sacrifices, which could not cleanse consciences, showed that another way of forgiveness was needed: the blood of Christ (9:11–10:18)
  - D. Exhortation: draw near to God through Jesus’ blood (10:19–25)
  - E. Warning: no sacrifice remains for those who abandon Jesus (10:26–31)
  - F. Reassurance: remember your early faithfulness amid suffering (10:32–35)
- VI. Rest: Jesus is superior to the patriarchs who greeted their inheritance from afar (10:36–12:17)
  - A. Exhortation: imitate those who pleased God by acting in faith (Heb. 10:36–11:40)
  - B. Exhortation: focus on Jesus and endure hardship as God’s fatherly discipline (Heb. 12:1–11)
  - C. Exhortation: cultivate endurance through Christian community (Heb. 12:12–17)
- VII. Rest: Jesus is superior to Moses, for his blood grants access to the city of the living God (12:18–29)
  - A. Instruction: you have not come to the terrifying Mount Sinai on earth, but to the celebrating Mount Zion in heaven (12:18–24)
  - B. Exhortation: heed God’s voice as he warns from heaven, and worship him with grateful faith (12:25–29)
- VIII. Epilogue: offer pleasing worship as the heirs of God’s unshakable kingdom (13:1–25)
  - A. Exhortation: Show love to brothers and sisters, hospitality to strangers, and compassion to prisoners (13:1–3)

- B. Exhortation: Seek satisfaction of physical needs in submission to God the ever-present judge and helper (13:4–6)
- C. Exhortation: Learn from the example of your past leaders, but rest in the unchanging Christ (13:7–8)
- D. Exhortation: Share Jesus' disgrace and offer sacrifices of praise and generosity (13:9–16)
- E. Exhortation: Respect your leaders and receive God's benediction (13:17–25)

## HEBREWS 1:1–4

**1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

### *Section Overview: Prologue: God's Last, Best Word in the Son*

In Greek, the prologue to Hebrews is one artfully constructed sentence of seventy-two words. It introduces the sermon's central hero and previews his mission of revelation, reconciliation, and rule. The prologue identifies Christ as the Son of God, the agent of God's eschatological revelation. Then a brief participial phrase, "after making purification for sins" (Heb. 1:3), encapsulates the sermon's central point (cf. 8:1): the priestly ministry of the Son in sacrificing himself to cleanse sin-stained people and usher them into God's presence. The prologue concludes with the Son's kingly enthronement "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" and with a contrast between the Son's superior name and the subordinate role of angels, the theme of the sermon's first movement (1:5–2:18).

### *Section Outline*

- I. God's speech (1:1–2a)
  - A. God formerly spoke to our fathers through prophets (1:1)
  - B. God has now spoken to us in a Son (1:2a)

- II. Messianic sonship: the Son was appointed heir of everything (1:2b)
- III. Divine sonship (1:2c–3b)
  - A. In relation to the universe: the Son created the ages (1:2c)
  - B. In relation to God: the Son embodies and displays God’s glory (1:3a)
  - C. In relation to the universe: the Son sustains everything (1:3b)
- IV. Messianic sonship (1:3c–4)
  - A. The Son descended as priest to purify our sins (1:3c)
  - B. The Son ascended as king to the heights (1:3d–4)
    - 1. The Son sat down at the majestic God’s right hand (1:3d)
    - 2. The Son became superior to angels (1:4)

### *Comment*

1:1–2a Hebrews opens with the God who speaks, a theme that pervades the sermon (2:1–4; 3:7, 15–16; 4:2, 12–13; 6:13; 11:3; 12:25–27). When the living God speaks, his voice is heard in Scripture and in preaching (3:7); “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard” (2:1).

This prologue contrasts the messengers through whom God has spoken throughout biblical history. It opens with a contrast between human prophets who spoke God’s Word to Israel and the Son in whom God has spoken “in these last days.” It concludes with a contrast between the Son and angels, who delivered the law to the prophet Moses. Thus the prologue introduces the first two movements of the sermon, which show that, as God’s spokesman, Christ is superior to angels (1:5–2:18) and to Moses (3:1–4:13).

The first two clauses are balanced to demonstrate both the continuity (one divine speaker) and the differences between God’s self-revelation in the OT and the NT. The Greek word order shows the parallels:

At many times and in many ways

long ago	[epoch]
God spoke	[speech]
to the fathers	[audience]
by the prophets	[messengers]
in these last days	[epoch]
he has spoken	[speech]
to us	[audience]
by his Son	[messenger]

God’s OT speech came in many installments and modes: visions, dreams, riddles, and clear “mouth-to-mouth” self-disclosures granted to the patriarchs, Moses, and his prophetic successors (Num. 12:6–8, cited in Heb. 3:2, 5; cf. Hos. 12:10). The piecemeal, multiform character of God’s speech to Israel differed from his singular



word spoken in the Son in these “last days.” Hebrews reasons that the plurality of agents and modes in the OT implies imperfection and incompleteness. There had to be many priests in the order of Levi and Aaron because death prevented them from continuing in office (Heb. 7:23), whereas Jesus holds his priesthood permanently and needs no successor (7:16, 20–21, 24). The many animal sacrifices offered in the tabernacle could not cleanse worshipers’ consciences, as Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice has now done (10:1–4, 10). So also, whereas OT revelation came piecemeal over a millennium or more, NT revelation came in one installment, complete in the Son and conveyed by those who heard him (2:3–4).

Like other NT texts (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor. 10:11; 1 Pet. 1:20), Hebrews announces that the “last days” foretold through the prophets have arrived with the incarnation of the Son (cf. Heb. 9:26). God had promised to intervene decisively in history to save and to judge in “the last days” (e.g., Num. 24:14; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; Dan. 10:14; Hos. 3:5). Christ’s life, death, and resurrection have launched those “last days,” delivering believers from the “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). “The powers of the age to come” already operate in the Christian community (Heb. 6:5), yet believers still wait for Christ to “appear a second time” to consummate salvation (9:28).

**1:2b–4** Christ is the Son of God in two senses, both of which are indispensable to his revelatory and redemptive mission. The prologue opens and closes with his *messianic sonship* as the incarnate God-man who followed a path of faithful suffering into glory (vv. 2b, 3c–4).

Behind and before Jesus’ messianic sonship is his *divine sonship*. Within the outer “envelope” describing his messianic sonship we find a description of divine sonship with respect to the universe (vv. 2c, 3b) and to God himself (v. 3a). As the divine Son, Jesus carries out his Father’s purposes in creation and providence. Foundational to his role as the universe’s creator and sustainer is the Son’s identity as the “radiance” of God’s glory and “exact imprint” of his substance (v. 3). The prologue’s chiasmic (X-shaped) structure makes this the core truth that qualifies the Son to reveal the Father fully.<sup>2</sup>

**1:2b** With respect to his messianic sonship, at a moment in history the Son was “appointed heir of all things.” As the eternal divine Son, the Son is and always has been, with the Father and the Spirit, creator and owner of all things. Here, however, the focus is on appointment as *messianic* Son and heir, fulfilling Psalm 2:7–8: “You are my Son. . . . I will make the nations your heritage” (soon to be partially quoted

2 The phrases and clauses in 1:2–5 are structured in a chiasm signaled by repetition of terminology:

- (a) Son (v. 2a)
- (b) heir (v. 2b)
- (c) made (the ages) (v. 2c)
- (d) “being” (present participle) (v. 3a)
- (d’) “bearing” (present participle) (v. 3b)
- (c’) made (purification) (v. 3c)
- (b’) inherited (v. 4b)
- (a’) Son (v. 5)

By including verses 1–2a, William Lane and Peter O’Brien discern similar chiasmic structures, with verse 3ab at the center point (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* [Dallas: Word, 1991], 6–7; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010], 45–47).

in Heb. 1:5). The event foretold in Psalm 2:7–8 was the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4), and the reappearance of the terminology of “Son” and “heir/inherit” in Hebrews 1:3d–5 will elaborate on Jesus’ subsequent messianic accession to the status of heir to all that God has made.

**1:2c–3b** At the prologue’s center are three affirmations of the Son’s divine pre-existence. As we have seen, the first and third pertain to his agency in the creation and preservation of the universe. Between them is a declaration of the Son’s eternal relationship to God the Father (v. 3a).

Like John 1:1–3 and Colossians 1:15–16, Hebrews affirms the Son’s agency in the creation of the world. The statement of the Son’s ongoing rule over the created order, whereby he “upholds the universe by the word of his power,” agrees with Paul’s statement that in Christ “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Yet the author’s word choice invites hearers to view the physical universe from a *temporal* perspective. The “world” (Heb. 1:2) that was created through the Son is literally “the ages” (*aiōn*; also in 1:8; 5:6; 6:5, 20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28; 9:26; 11:3; 13:8, 21). The referent here and in 11:3 is the spatial expanse of the heavens and the earth. But our preacher bypasses *kosmos* (used in 10:5), substituting “ages” to hint that the present heavens and earth are “wearing out” through successive ages (1:10–12; 13:8).

The incarnate Christ uniquely reveals the Father’s glory because he eternally “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (v. 3a). He shares God’s divine being (John 1:1–3, 14; 10:30–33; Phil. 2:5–6; Col. 1:15; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4–6; Rom. 9:5). As early as Origen (early third century AD), commentators have heard here echoes of *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:25–26, which characterizes God’s attribute of wisdom as an emanation of his “glory” and the “radiance” of his light. Unlike that intertestamental book, Hebrews (following Proverbs 8) applies these terms not to the *personification* of a divine attribute but rather to a divine *person*, distinct from yet equal to the Father. “Exact imprint” in extrabiblical Greek was the design on a coin that replicated the die from which it was cast, or the insignia in a wax seal that reflected the stamp impressed into it. Through the images of “radiance” and “exact imprint” Hebrews captures Jesus’ claim that “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

**1:3c** The prologue takes a decisive turn at “After making purification for sins,” returning to Christ’s messianic sonship and focusing on the priestly mission necessitating his incarnation. Hebrews 2:5–18; 4:14–5:10; 10:5–10 will show why the Son’s assuming human nature was necessary to his priestly ministry in empathy, sacrifice, and intercession. This first glimpse of the sermon’s central theme (8:1) shows the result of Christ’s death: the purification of believers’ consciences (9:14) so that we may approach God in worship (10:19–22).

**1:3d–4** Jesus’ reward for his messianic obedience, culminating in his sacrifice for sinners, was his resurrection, ascension to heaven, and enthronement “at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” This allusion to Psalm 110:1 complements the

allusion to Psalm 2:8 in Hebrews 1:2b, since the following series of OT passages in Hebrews 1 will open with Psalm 2:7 and close with Psalm 110:1, which will also reappear throughout the sermon (Heb. 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). The more excellent “name” that Christ “inherited” through his redemptive mission is the title “Son” (Ps. 2:7), addressed to him at his resurrection from the dead (cf. Acts 13:33). Angels replace the human prophets with which we began for two reasons: (1) angels delivered the law to the prophet Moses (Heb. 2:1–4), and (2) the divine Son became “lower” (Ps. 8:5) than angels through his incarnation in order to save his siblings, the offspring of Abraham.

### *Response*

The preacher to the Hebrews exhorts his hearers to hold fast to their confidence in Jesus (10:35–39), “the apostle and high priest of our confession” (3:1). Such endurance can come only from a deepened grasp of the majesty of the Son in whom God has spoken his final, finest word. This sermon will fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of faith (12:2). Faithfully confessing the identity of Christ is a matter of spiritual life or death! This opening sentence refutes Christological heresies that deny the full deity of the Son (adoptionism, Arianism, etc.). Later sections of Hebrews will expose the error of denying his true humanity (docetism, Apollinarianism, etc.).

The Son’s threefold mediatorial office (prophet, priest, king) guides our response. He is the definitive spokesman sent from God, so we must hear and heed his voice in the Scriptures as they are read and preached. He is the priest whose sacrifice purifies our defiled consciences, so through him we may and must draw near to God’s throne of grace. He is the king enthroned at God’s right hand, so we rejoice in his royal victory over the Devil (2:14) as we are the fulfillment of God’s promise to the priest-king at his right hand: “Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power” (Ps. 110:3).

## OVERVIEW OF

# HEBREWS 1:5–2:18

The prologue’s concluding affirmation that the Son surpasses the angels leads to an extended discussion of the relationship of the Son to the angels. First, a series of seven OT quotations shows the Son’s superiority to angels in terms of his title (1:5), their obligation to worship him (1:6), their servant role (1:7), his divine reign (1:8–9) and immutability (1:10–12), and, finally, his enthronement at God’s right hand (1:13). A concluding comment on the angels reaffirms their role as servants to those who will inherit salvation through the Son (1:14). Second, the core exhor-

tation of this section (2:1–4) shows the preacher’s purpose in contrasting the Son to the angels: God’s word came through both—the law through angels at Sinai, and the word of salvation through the Lord (the Son) in his incarnation. Third (2:5–9), at his incarnation the Son assumed human nature, becoming for a little while lower than angels, fitting the description of humanity in Psalm 8:5–7. The purpose of the Son’s voluntary condescension was to “[bring] many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10) by destroying the one who enslaves his human “brothers” (2:11–16), making propitiation for their sins, and providing aid as their merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17–18).

## HEBREWS 1:5–14

<sup>5</sup>For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

“I will be to him a father,  
and he shall be to me a son”?

<sup>6</sup>And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God’s angels worship him.”

<sup>7</sup>Of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels winds,  
and his ministers a flame of fire.”

<sup>8</sup>But of the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

<sup>10</sup>And,

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands;

- 11 they will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment,  
12 like a robe you will roll them up,  
like a garment they will be changed.<sup>1</sup>  
But you are the same,  
and your years will have no end.”

13 And to which of the angels has he ever said,

“Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

<sup>1</sup>Some manuscripts omit *like a garment*

### ***Section Overview: Scripture Shows the Son's Superiority to Angels***

The Son's superiority to angels, asserted in Hebrews 1:4, is now demonstrated through a series of seven quotations from the OT, strung together with minimal (but sometimes significant) introductions. This rapid-fire citation of Scripture heightens the dichotomy between the way God has spoken to and about his Son and the way he has addressed and described angels. The Son's superiority to angels is emphasized not only by the content of the citations but also by the disparity in their number: five concern the Son, while only two concern the angels.

The OT texts are grouped in two sets of three, followed by a final OT quotation about the Son and a summative description of the angels' role. In the first triplet, two passages highlight the exalted title “Son,” and then one summons the angels to worship him. In the second set, one text shows the angels' role as creaturely servants, and then two illustrate the eternal reign of the Son, who is “God,” and his divine immutability as creator and “Lord.” The OT testimonies follow the order of the prologue: the Son as royal heir (Heb. 1:2b, 5–9) and mediator of creation (vv. 2c, 10), his eternal divine nature (vv. 3ab, 11–12), and his exaltation to God's right hand (vv. 3d, 13).<sup>3</sup> The seventh OT quotation, like the first, is introduced with the rhetorical question, “To which of the angels has he ever said . . . ?” The form of the question in Greek demands a negative answer (“none”), thus implying the Son's unique superiority. Its repetition in verse 13 signals the conclusion of the sequence of citations that began in verse 5.

The motif of God's speech, which opened the prologue, appears throughout. The introductions to OT citations assume that what Scripture says, God says (1:5, 6, 7, 13; implied in 1:8, 10). Because these passages are understood as *God's* declarations to and about the Son (and the angels), they make the case for the Son's superiority. The preacher's agenda in showing the Son's superiority to angels will become clear in the sermon's first exhortative section (2:1–4).

<sup>3</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 22.

### *Section Outline*

- I. In OT Scriptures, God addresses the Messiah as Son and commands angels to worship him (1:4–6)
  - A. God addresses the Messiah as the unique Son (Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:14) (1:4–5)
  - B. God commands angels to worship the exalted Son (Deut. 32:43 and/or Ps. 97:7) (1:6)
- II. In OT Scriptures, God calls the angels serving spirits and calls the Son both God and Lord (1:7–12)
  - A. God calls angels serving spirits, who share creation’s mutability (Ps. 104:4) (1:7)
  - B. God addresses the Son as God, reigning forever, and as immutable Lord (Pss. 45:6–7; 102:25–27) (1:8–12)
- III. In OT Scriptures, God has invited the Son to sit enthroned in supreme power, while angels serve the human heirs of salvation (1:13–14)
  - A. God invited the Son to sit at his right hand (Ps. 110:1) (1:13)
  - B. God sends angels to serve the human heirs of salvation (1:14).

### *Comment*

1:5 The preacher points out that it was not angels but the divine and messianic Son described in the prologue who was addressed in the words of Psalm 2:7. It is important to note that our preacher probably selects his OT texts not only for the words they contain but also for their context. Psalm 2, for instance, opens with an international conspiracy against the Lord and his anointed king, an insurrection that early believers recognized as being fulfilled in the convergence of Jewish and Roman forces that killed the Christ, fulfilling God’s redemptive purpose (Acts 4:25–28). After Christ’s suffering, God enthroned and acclaimed him as Son, conferring the nations as his inheritance (Ps. 2:6, 8). Thus this psalm links sonship, inheritance, and enthronement.

These three themes likewise converge in Hebrews 1:2–4 (“Son,” “heir,” “sat down . . . on high,” “inherited”). The NT attributes the title “Son” to Christ with respect to his eternal preexistence (e.g., Gal. 4:4), his incarnation (Luke 1:32, 35), his baptism (Luke 3:22), and his transfiguration (Luke 9:35). Here he “inherited” that “more excellent” name *after* his atoning suffering (Heb. 1:3). This means that the “today” of Psalm 2 is the day of Christ’s exaltation, encompassing his resurrection (Acts 13:32–37; Rom. 1:4) and his ascension to God’s right hand (Acts 2:32–36).

Reinforcing the testimony of Psalm 2 was God’s word to David, delivered through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 7:14). God promised to be a “father” to David’s royal descendant, who in turn would be a “son” to God and would build God’s house (2 Sam. 7:12–13). This prophecy’s initial fulfillment came in David’s royal son Solomon, who built the temple. But the prophecy ultimately looked beyond Solomon, promising an eternal kingdom and throne (2 Sam. 7:16). Generations

of Israelites watched and waited for the offspring of David (John 7:42) who would be the final and forever King, the literal Son of God. Jesus, descended from Judah, David's tribe (Heb. 7:14), is the Son of God who builds and governs God's house (Heb. 3:3–6; 10:21).

1:6 The first citation in this chapter to mention angels relates them to the Son: "Again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" It is possible to construe "again" as signaling *a second moment* when God introduced the firstborn into the world, that is, to Jesus' second coming at the end of history (Heb. 9:28). But the ESV is correct to present "again" as connecting OT quotations logically, not chronologically (cf. "again" in 1:5; 2:13; 4:5; 10:30).

At first glance, the reference seems to be to the Son's incarnation and birth at Bethlehem, announced by angels to shepherds (Luke 2:11–14). But the Greek word translated "world" (*oikoumenē*) is not the one Hebrews uses elsewhere (*kosmos*) when referring to Christ's incarnation (Heb. 10:5; cf. also 4:3; 9:26; 11:7, 38). The word used here reappears in 2:5, "the world [*oikoumenē*] to come, of which we are speaking." This parallel suggests that angels were commanded to worship the Son at his resurrection and ascension, when God brought him into "the heavenly world of eschatological salvation."<sup>4</sup> "Firstborn" reinforces the "heir" theme (1:2, 4), evoking a firstborn son's preeminence in leadership and inheritance (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1–2). In the OT the term became a metaphor for Israel's special status (Ex. 4:22) and the supremacy of the Davidic monarchy among other kings (Ps. 89:27). In the NT "firstborn" refers to Christ's preeminence as the creator and owner of the universe (Col. 1:15) and as the Resurrected One (Col. 1:18; Rom. 8:29; Rev. 1:5).

The OT source of this citation is unclear. The wording closely resembles a line in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:43. This line is absent from the Hebrew Masoretic Text, but it appears in the LXX (Greek OT) and in the Deuteronomy scroll found at Qumran. The wording also approximates Psalm 97:7: "Worship him, all you gods!" The LXX renders this verse, "Worship him, all his angels!" Earlier in the psalm, the Lord's coming is accompanied by fire and lightning (Ps. 97:3–4). This imagery describes angels in the next OT citation in Hebrews, from Psalm 104:4. Whichever verse is its OT source, this citation asserts that the Son is worthy of worship by angels.

1:7–12 The second triplet of citations is linked grammatically by Greek conjunctions signaling contrast (absent from ESV): "And *on the one hand*, of the angels he says. . . . But, *on the other hand*, of the Son he says" (vv. 7–8). The quotation about the angels is from Psalm 104:4; the two about the Son (linked by "and"; Heb. 1:10) are from Psalm 45:6–7 and 102:25–27.

1:7 Psalm 104 is a creation psalm that personifies stormy winds and lightning as the Lord's obedient messengers, serving his sovereign purpose. In Hebrew and

<sup>4</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 27. Also O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 69; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 79. Cf. also 1 Timothy 3:16.

in Greek one word (*ruakh* and *pneuma*, respectively) refers both to physical winds and to immaterial spirits. Our preacher capitalizes on this providential linguistic ambiguity to argue that, as winds and lightning serve God's purposes in nature, so God's spiritual messengers also fill a servant's role. The previous psalm (103:20–21) encouraged this identification of "angels" as God's personal spiritual servants, since it closed by addressing the Lord's "angels" and "ministers" (terms to reappear in Ps. 104:4) who do his word and will. Their servant role differs sharply from the Son's royal rule, as Psalm 45 attests. Moreover, as creatures they are as ephemeral as wind, whereas the Son is the changeless Creator, as Psalm 102 affirms. Key terms from Psalm 104:4 will reappear in Hebrews 1:14, where the angels' role as servants is contrasted with the Son's enthronement.

1:8–9 Psalm 45, celebrating a royal wedding, extols the bridegroom. At verse 6 the psalmist daringly addresses the Davidic descendant: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." The attribution of deity to a human king is so shocking that interpreters have sought a more acceptable alternative, such as reinterpreting this phrase as "Your throne is God" or treating verse 6 as addressed to God and verse 7 to the king. But the most natural reading of the Hebrew and LXX syntax is that "God" is indeed a vocative addressed to the king, whose throne is forever and ever. His God has anointed him above his companions. In this OT text, therefore, a host of significant themes converge. A king who is the "radiance of the glory of God" (Heb. 1:2–3) deserves to be addressed as God. An eternal throne befits a king who lives forever (7:16–17, 24). His love of righteousness is demonstrated in his holy life (7:26) and, as we will see, is expressed in the name of Melchizedek ("king of righteousness"; 7:2), the ancient priest-king whose order Christ fulfills. The psalm brings into view the Messiah's "companions" (Gk. *metochoi*; 1:9) as well. Our preacher will later call his hearers the "companions" of the Anointed One (that is, those who "have come to share" in him; *gegonamen metochoi*, 3:14), and Jesus calls them his brothers (2:10–12), as he "partook of" (*metechō*, a cognate of "companion") the blood and flesh they share (2:14).

1:10–12 Psalm 102, quoted here, is a lament over human suffering, weakness, and mutability (Ps. 102:1–11, 23–24), but God's faithfulness gives the psalmist hope that his suffering and Israel's disgrace will be reversed (Ps. 102:12–22). The psalm concludes with the verses cited in Hebrews (Ps. 102:25–27), extolling the Creator who is eternal, infinitely more permanent than the heavens and earth he fashioned. The heavens and earth will wear out and be discarded, but the Creator of the ages (cf. Heb. 1:2) remains unchangeably "the same, and your years will have no end" (1:12). The divine immutability of the Son is crucial to his priestly office and ministry, which rests on the power of his "indestructible life" (Heb. 7:16, 23–25). Although the congregation's human leaders come and go, "Jesus Christ is *the same* yesterday and today and forever" (13:8). He bestows on believers a city that lasts (13:14), an unshakable kingdom that will survive the final cataclysm of the present heaven and earth (12:26–28).



**1:13** The chain of OT citations showing the Son's superiority climaxes with Psalm 110:1, to which the prologue alluded (Heb. 1:3). The theme of the Son's enthronement links Hebrews 1:13 with Psalm 45:6–7, which is quoted in Hebrews 1:8–9. Psalm 110, especially verses 1 and 4, is interwoven throughout Hebrews (Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 11, 17, 21; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2). This psalm was recognized as messianic in the Judaism of Jesus' day, so Jesus cited it to confute his opponents' assumption that David's royal heir would be merely human (Mark 12:35–37). Jesus' heavenly enthronement at God's right hand is mentioned repeatedly throughout the NT (e.g., Acts 2:34; 1 Cor. 15:24–28). Our preacher will cite these words to show: (a) the heavenly *place* of Jesus' present priestly ministry, which is superior to the earthly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1–6; cf. 9:11–12), and (b) his seated *posture*, demonstrating the complete sufficiency of his atoning sacrifice (10:11–14).

**1:14** A final rhetorical question (now expecting an affirmative answer in Greek) reaffirms the angels' subservient mission, in contrast to the Son's enthronement at God's right hand. "Ministering" and "spirits" (winds) echo Psalm 104:4, cited in Hebrews 1:7 (cf. also Ps. 103:20–21). While the Son *sits* in heavenly sovereignty (Heb. 1:13), the angels are *sent out* to serve. They serve "those who are to inherit salvation" through the Son. So our preacher brings us into the picture: Believers are the Messiah's "companions" (v. 9). He is the unique Son, firstborn heir of all things (1:2–5), yet they are his "brothers" and heirs of the salvation he has achieved, for through him God is "bringing many sons to glory" (2:10–12; cf. also 6:12, 17; 9:15; 11:7–9; 12:23).

### *Response*

Speculation runs rampant concerning the involvement of angels in human experience, whether we speak of the Judaism of Jesus' day, ancient or recent paganism, global animism, or the supposedly "disenchanted" West, in which fascination with "spiritual" phenomena persists despite the dominance of naturalistic secularism. God's Word affirms the reality of a realm of unseen spiritual forces who influence our lives (Gen. 19:1–15; 2 Kings 6:15–17; Job 1; Ps. 91:11; Matt. 18:10; Acts 10:3; 12:7–8; Heb. 13:2), but Scripture is sparse in details about their activities. The biblical writers' reticence confirms the point made throughout the OT citations collected in Hebrews 1: We can appreciate angels' service, but our hearts' allegiance must belong to the Son.

The Son's status as king underscores how imperative it is that we heed, trust, and obey his word—to "pay much closer attention to what we have heard" (Heb. 2:1). The king's love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness set the pace for his companions' affections and actions. When we find ourselves overwhelmed by rapid social change, political disruption, natural disaster, or personal tragedy, our only secure foundation is the Lord, who remains the same, whose years have no end.

## HEBREWS 2:1–4

**2** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup>For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup>how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup>while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

### *Section Overview: Pay Close Attention to the Lord's Word of Salvation*

The chain of OT testimonies demonstrating the Son's superiority to the angels (Heb. 1:5–14) has been moving toward a goal: the exhortation to heed the message God has spoken through the Son (2:1–4). This first of many exhortation sections (3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–31; 12:1–17; 12:25–29) in this “word of exhortation” (13:22) contains a grave warning of the consequences of drifting away from the salvation achieved and announced by Christ. The greater the dignity of the messengers whom God sends, the greater the punishment for ignoring the message. If disregarding God's word spoken “long ago” through angels at Sinai brought punishment, all the more does ignoring the “last days” message spoken in the Son have eternally disastrous consequences.

### *Section Outline*

- I. Exhortation: let us hold fast to the word we have heard from God through his messengers (2:1)
- II. Rationale: the relative dignity of God's messengers shows the relative gravity of their messages (2:2–4)
  - A. The word of law spoken through angels (2:2)
    1. Covenant confirmation
    2. Covenant curse
  - B. The salvation spoken through the Lord (2:3–4)
    1. Greater covenant curse: no escape! (2:3a)
    2. Greater messenger: the Lord (2:3b)
    3. Covenant confirmation through witnesses (2:3c–4)
      - a. The Lord's hearers (2:3c)
      - b. God the covenant witness (2:4)

*Comment*

2:1 “Therefore” signals the connection between the scriptural case for the Son’s superiority to angels (1:4–14) and the response that the hearers must offer. Although sometimes characterized as a “parenthesis” or “digression” from the theological argument, this exhortation, like others in this sermon-letter, is the *purpose* toward which the biblical-theological argument was driving. Here the preacher includes himself with his hearers in his admonition: “We must pay . . . attention” (cf. also 4:1, 11, 14–16; 6:1; 10:19–27; 12:1, 28; 13:10–15; cf. 3:6, 14; 12:25). Elsewhere he addresses the readers in the second person: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of *you* an evil, unbelieving heart” (3:12; cf. 3:1, 13; 5:11–12; 6:10–12; 10:32–36; 12:4–8, 18–25; 13:1–9, 16–19). As a brother he stands alongside his hearers, but he also addresses them with pastoral authority.

The term translated “pay attention” frequently had this general sense of giving heed to something of import (e.g., 7:13; Luke 21:34; 1 Tim. 4:13). Here it is contrasted with a verb meaning to “drift away,” describing a ship loosened from its mooring and at the mercy of strong currents. Our preacher later evokes the nautical image of an anchor (Heb. 6:19), so here too he may be imploring his readers to be like a vessel secured to its dock, not slipping away from its safe haven. Hebrews will repeat the imperative to hold fast one’s confession and strengthen others whose commitment is wavering (3:6, 12–14; 4:11, 14; 6:18; 10:23, 35–36; 12:1, 12–15; 13:9).

2:2–4 The exhortation is reinforced with a sobering warning that uses a form of reasoning well known among ancient rhetoricians, called *a fortiori* by the Romans and *qal v’homer* (“light and heavy”) by the Jewish rabbis. The logic of this form of rhetoric is simple: since a cause of lesser importance will yield a given outcome, a cause of greater importance will yield a correspondingly greater outcome. Later our preacher will reason that, whereas animal sacrifices could effect external, ritual cleansing, “how much more” will the blood of Christ purify our conscience (9:13–14). Here, however, the logic yields a sobering conclusion (as in 10:28–29): if the law delivered to Moses by angels mandated just punishment for its violators, an unspeakably graver penalty must await those who disregard the message of salvation now spoken through God’s Son. The exalted dignity of angels showed the gravity of transgressing the word spoken through them. The infinitely higher dignity of the Son, who is Lord, means that those who “neglect”—who show no lasting commitment to—the great salvation that came through him cannot expect to escape the eternal wrath of God.

2:2 Angels are not mentioned in the account of Moses receiving the law at Sinai (Exodus 19–40), but Moses later recalled the covenant inauguration on Sinai like this: “The LORD came from Sinai; . . . he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand” (Deut. 33:2). Ancient Jewish sources (*Jub.* 1:26–2:1; rabbinic statements; and Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.136) mention the tradition of angels delivering the Lord’s word to Moses. This tradition receives NT confirmation in the speech of Stephen (Acts 7:53) and in Paul’s letter to the

Galatians (Gal. 3:19). The angels' presence on Sinai underscored the holiness of the covenant inaugurated there.

The term here rendered “reliable” (*bebaios*) elsewhere has the general sense of firmness (Heb. 3:14; 6:19). Here it has a more legal sense, indicating the ratification of a covenant between God and his people. It reappears in 9:17, which describes the function of sacrificed animals (symbolizing the sanctions enforcing mutual loyalty) in the “taking effect” of a covenant’s legal obligations (cf. comments on 9:15–20). The “just retribution” suffered by violators of the covenant made at Sinai and the worse judgment awaiting those who spurn the new covenant will be explained in 10:26–31.

2:3–4 The superiority of God’s final message is shown not only in its messenger (the Lord) but also in its contents (“such a great salvation”). In 1:14 our preacher spoke of “those who are to inherit salvation.” Salvation entails cleansing from sin’s guilt and defilement, so that we may draw near to God (7:25). It includes rescue from the Devil, who has the power to inflict death and to enslave us in fear (2:14–15). But it also encompasses God’s bringing his sons to glory as heirs of the world to come (2:5–8, 10). Jesus is the founder and source of this salvation, through his suffering (2:10; 5:9).

Our preacher and his audience did not hear the word of salvation firsthand from the Lord during his earthly ministry. (See Introduction: Authorship.) Instead the salvation-word, having been spoken first through the Lord, “was attested to us by those who heard.” “Attested” reflects the verb (*bebaioō*) cognate to the term referring to the “reliable” covenant confirmation in verse 2. Reliable new covenant revelation, spoken by and about the Son, is conveyed through the apostles to succeeding generations of the church (Luke 1:1–4). Paul therefore calls the apostles and prophets, through whom God revealed his redemptive mystery, the “foundation” of God’s new temple (Eph. 2:20–22; 3:4–5; cf. Rev. 21:14).

The apostles’ testimony is confirmed by God’s own testimony, expressed through signs, wonders, miracles (*dynameis*, acts of power), and the Holy Spirit’s distribution of gifts for service to the body of Christ. God bore witness to the incarnate Son in his earthly ministry through the mighty works (*dynameis*), wonders, and signs that Jesus performed (Acts 2:22; John 5:36–37). After Christ’s glorification, the “signs of a true apostle” legitimized Christ’s apostolic witnesses, including Paul (2 Cor. 12:12).

Thus a fourfold concert of witnesses—the Lord Jesus, his apostles, God the Father testifying through miracles, and the Holy Spirit empowering the church—certifies the message of salvation announced in these last days. Those who taste this good word of God (Heb. 6:5) but then drift away will not escape the destruction that awaits those who commit treason against the Lord of the covenant.

### *Response*

Various influences and pressures lure people away from commitment to Christ. For the Hebrew followers of Jesus who first heard this sermon, factors such as rejection

by family (Heb. 13:12–13), public shame (10:32–33), loss of property and freedom (10:34; 13:3), or the threat of martyrdom (12:3–4) may explain why some neglected meeting together (10:25). Such costs of discipleship still confront the global church today. When faced with such challenges, those who see the supreme glory of Christ find courage to follow the suffering footsteps of OT people of faith, “of whom the world was not worthy,” anticipating a better resurrection and a better and abiding possession (11:35–38; 10:34).

Christians in the West enjoy freedom, safety, and tolerance, yet still some may lose interest in God’s last, best word, spoken in his Son. Their drift toward spiritual shipwreck may not start with storms of life-shaking crisis. Instead, subtle rip currents—career advancement and financial security, entertainment and recreation, reputation and social acceptance—loosen the line linking them to a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (6:19). Such drift spells eternal ruin. Our preacher has displayed the majesty of the Son in order to guard our hearts against any distraction that would deflect our gaze from him (3:1; 12:1).

#### OVERVIEW OF

## HEBREWS 2:5–18

The OT texts demonstrating the Son’s superiority to angels introduced “those who are to inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14). This “salvation” reappeared in the first exhortation section (2:1–4). From that exhortation the author now launches a further discussion of the Son’s relationship to angels (2:5–18). The focus turns to his mission on behalf of his human siblings, who inherit salvation because he became “for a little while . . . lower than the angels” in order to suffer and thereby achieve their salvation (2:9–10).

As the OT citations on the Son’s superiority (1:5–14) were “bookended” by the rhetorical question “*To which of the angels did he [God] ever say . . .*” (1:5, 13), so is this section enveloped by statements that God has extended his grace “*not [to] angels*” but to humans, whom the Son saves (2:5, 16). Psalm 8:4–6, which anchors this section, is explained in terms of its eschatological, anthropological, and Christological implications. Other OT passages are cited (Ps. 22:22; Isa. 8:17, 18) and alluded to (Isa. 41:8–13) in order to elaborate the Son’s bond with the “many sons” whom God brings to glory through him (Heb. 2:10).

## HEBREWS 2:5–9

<sup>5</sup>For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. <sup>6</sup>It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that you care for him?  
<sup>7</sup> You made him for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned him with glory and honor,<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>8</sup> putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. <sup>9</sup>But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

<sup>1</sup>Some manuscripts insert *and set him over the works of your hands*

### *Section Overview: The Humbled and Glorified Son of Man*

The mention of “salvation” (Heb. 1:14; 2:3) calls for elaboration. Salvation includes rescue from the Devil—from his power to inflict death and from the enslaving fear of death (2:14–15). But salvation also encompasses a destiny of glory and dominion for human beings. The eternal divine Son humbled himself to become the incarnate messianic Son in order to redeem his “brothers.” Our preacher views Psalm 8:4–6 not as a retrospective on a past paradise lost but as a preview of a paradise to come. The psalm traces the course of human history from the present (in which humans are lower than angels) to the future (in which everything will be subjected to humanity). The present does not yet show all other creatures in submission to humans, who bear the divine image (Gen. 1:26–28). Although humanity’s royal destiny is not yet visible, one man has traveled the painful route from lowliness to exalted glory. His name is Jesus, and his coronation is his reward for suffering death on behalf of others.

### *Section Outline*

- I. The world to come will be subjected, not to angels, but to the son of man (2:5)
- II. Scripture announced God’s purpose to subject all things to the son of man (2:6–8a)
  - A. The son of man is small but is the object of God’s special care (2:6)

- B. The son of man is temporarily subordinated to angels (2:7a)
- C. But the son of man is destined for dominion (2:7b–8a)
- III. The son of man's dominion is not yet visible in our experience (2:8bc)
- IV. Nevertheless God's promise to the son of man is now fulfilled in one whom we do see, Jesus (2:9)
  - A. Jesus was temporarily subordinated to angels (2:9a)
  - B. Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor (2:9b)
  - C. His glorification is his reward for suffering death for others (2:9cd)

### *Comment*

**2:5** The conjunction “for” shows that the forthcoming exposition of Psalm 8 supports the exhortation to stay moored to the word spoken through the Son (Heb. 2:1–4). He has spoken salvation because he has come to share our humanity in order to lead us to glory. Our author has been speaking of the “world to come” since 1:6, where he introduced God's command for angels to worship the Son as having been spoken at the moment when God brought him into that realm of last-days blessedness (through resurrection and ascension). “Not to angels” implies that God subjected the world to come to someone else—but to whom? Psalm 8 gives the answer.

**2:6–8a** The psalm citation is introduced in vague terms: “It has been testified somewhere” reflects the Greek text's indefinite identification of the quotation's source (lit., “somewhere someone testified”). The author is signaling that this text, unlike those in chapter 1, is addressed by a human speaker to God, but the identity of the human speaker is not significant.

God put everything “in subjection” under the feet of “the son of man.” Scholarly opinion is divided over whether our author treats Psalm 8 as a straightforward messianic prophecy of the *Son's* brief humiliation and subsequent exaltation or as a forecast of *humanity's* destiny, which finds its first fulfillment in Jesus. In favor of seeing the Son as the one to whom the world to come is subject is the motif of subjects being placed “under his feet,” which links Psalm 8 with Psalm 110:1, cited in Hebrews 1:13. On the other hand, “those who are to inherit salvation” were introduced in 1:14, and the author will soon describe them as “many sons” whom God brings to glory through Christ's suffering (2:10). Further, when the formula “not [to] angels” concludes this section in 2:16, the preacher places over against angels “the offspring of Abraham,” the people of God.

A third alternative, which builds a bridge between the messianic and anthropological perspectives, is based on the observation that Psalm 8 shares vocabulary appearing in preceding and following psalms (e.g., the Lord's name, the earth, foes, enemies, heavens). These connections embed this psalm in a context that opens the biblical Psalter by identifying the blessed man with the anointed Davidic Messiah, the Lord's Son (Psalms 1–2).<sup>5</sup> Psalm 2:7, we recall, was the first OT passage that our

<sup>5</sup> James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Psalms*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: Holman, forthcoming).

author cited to establish the Son's superiority to the angels (Heb. 1:5). In view of Psalm 8's undeniable allusion to the universal dominion entrusted to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28, it is reasonable to believe that David, the royal speaker of Psalm 8, portrayed his reign as a step toward the remedy of Adam's failed kingship in the garden. Our preacher would then be building on David's Adamic-Messianic trajectory, showing its destination in Jesus.

In this understanding, Psalm 8 is invoked first to describe *humanity's* honored place in the hierarchy and history of God's personal creatures, seen in King Adam at creation and reappearing after the fall in King David, a seed of the woman en route to the ultimate Seed, who would conquer the Foe through his own submission and suffering (Gen. 3:15). Then, after noting that humanity's dominion is not now visible, our author brings Jesus into view as the fulfillment of human destiny, interpreting the psalm as forecasting the phases of Jesus' mission as the last Adam and royal Messiah, first in submissive humility and then in glory.

Our author's citation follows the LXX except for the deletion of one line, "and you appointed him over the works of your hands," which is essentially synonymous with the next, included by Hebrews and containing the significant term "subjection" (cf. 2:5, 8). The LXX renders the Hebrew term *'elohim* ("heavenly beings" in Ps. 8:5) as "angels," a legitimate interpretation that serves our author's purpose in showing the angels' relationship to humanity and to the incarnate Son.

In what ways are humans subordinate to angels? Our author implied his answer when he referred to the angels' mediation of the law to Moses at Sinai (Heb. 2:2). That law imposed obligations and stipulated penalties for their violation and delivered an earthly system of worship, including sanctuary and sacrifices (Hebrews 8–10). Christ was "born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4–5) and to replace the law's shadows (Heb. 9:11–14; 10:19–22).

**2:8bc** Our author's commentary first notes that Psalm 8 speaks of earthly creatures' universal subjection to humanity. Then comes the realistic observation that "at present" this human dominion is not visible. Believers' sufferings (2:14–16; 10:32–34; 11:32–38; 12:3–11) and the perishability of the heavens and earth (1:10–12; 12:25–27) display disorder, dysfunctionality, and death, which contradict God's purpose revealed in the psalm. Human sin has infected the created order with rebellion and chaos (Gen. 3:14–19; Rom. 8:18–22). Yet a spark of hope glimmers in the adverb "not yet" (*oupo*). Psalm 8 is not a mournful elegy for an idyllic world long ago deceased. Rather it offers a preview of a peaceable kingdom yet to come, perhaps foreshadowed in the "rest" from enemies that David once enjoyed (2 Sam. 7:1; cf. comment on Heb. 4:8).

**2:9** The spark of hope expands to a ray with the introduction of Jesus, now—for the first time in this sermon-letter—called by the human name given him at birth (Matt. 1:21, 25). The author builds anticipation by first describing an individual using the psalm's terminology: "for a little while . . . made lower than the angels." Then the suspense is broken and he is identified by name, "Jesus." The two lines of



Psalm 8:5 (Heb. 2:7) forecast two phases of the Son's identification with us in our humanity: (1) first he was lowered for "a little while" beneath the angels (through becoming incarnate and suffering death for others); (2) then he was "crowned with glory and honor" (raised, ascended, and enthroned at God's right hand). The adverbial expression "a little" (Hb. *me'at*; LXX *brachy ti*) could indicate a small difference of degree or distance (2 Sam. 16:1) or a brief period of time (Pss. 94:17; 119:87; Luke 22:58; Acts 5:34). Our author understands the expression temporally: "for a little while."

His appeal to Psalm 8 serves two purposes:

- (1) It clarifies the relationship between the Son's *eternal divine* superiority to angels and his *mediatorial* superiority to angels. Since the Son is the changeless creator of heaven and earth and all their inhabitants, infinitely greater than angels, how could he "become" superior to angels and "inherit" a name more excellent than theirs (Heb. 1:4)? The exaltation of the Son *after* he made purification for sins (1:3) presupposes his prior condescension to become the incarnate mediatorial Son, sharing for a brief time humanity's position subordinate to the angels.
- (2) It affirms the solidarity of the Son with human beings through his incarnation and humiliation. Angels are servants not only to the Son but also to the human heirs of the salvation he came to achieve (1:6, 14), whom he calls his "brothers" (2:11–12).

The prologue mentioned the Son's priestly work of making purification for sins, but here we learn the price he paid to achieve this purifying mission: he suffered death, tasting it "for everyone." Our author will further describe the "everyone" for whom Jesus died as the "many sons" for whom he is the founder of salvation (Heb. 2:10) and as the "offspring of Abraham," whom he helps (v. 16). Jesus' death was the purpose of his incarnation: "He himself likewise partook of [flesh and blood], *that* [Gk. *hina*] through death he might destroy . . . the devil" (2:14–15). His death is also the warrant for his vindication: "crowned with glory and honor *because of* [Gk. *dia*] the suffering of death" (v. 9). His enthronement at God's right hand is his reward for faithful obedience "to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6–11).

### *Response*

When we step back from everyday activities, diversions, and relationships to consider our place in the grand scheme of things, we are humbled by our insignificance. The psalmist's contemplation of the vastness of the universe rightly evoked the question, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:4; cf. Heb. 2:6). Beyond that universe is a Creator who transcends it in majestic infinity. As we reflect on the OT texts cited in Hebrews 1 to show the Son's supremacy, it seems unlikely that we tiny ephemeral creatures might *matter* to him. When we factor in the sobering truth that human sin disrupted the dominion once entrusted to our race by the Creator whom we spurned, our condition seems even more dire and

despicable. But Psalm 8 lifts our shame-bowed heads. Although the world we see resists us, the Creator has come to us, becoming one of us in humble subjection and emerging from suffering crowned with royal glory and honor. We should marvel and praise the God of grace, who sent his Son to die, bringing us to glory as heirs of “the world to come.”

## HEBREWS 2:10–18

<sup>10</sup>For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. <sup>11</sup>For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.<sup>1</sup> That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,<sup>2</sup> <sup>12</sup>saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

<sup>13</sup>And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

<sup>14</sup>Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup>and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. <sup>16</sup>For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. <sup>17</sup>Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup>For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

<sup>1</sup>Greek *all are of one* <sup>2</sup>Or *brothers and sisters*. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters*; also verse 12

### ***Section Overview: The Champion of Salvation for His Brothers and Sisters***

The opening conjunction “For” shows that this section argues for the appropriateness (“fitting”) of the truth announced in Hebrews 2:9, that God’s grace mandated that Jesus suffer death on behalf of others. He could suffer as their substitute because of the family tie that unites him, the unique Son, to them, the “many sons”

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