

COMMENTARY

I. HEARING THE APOSTLE AND HIGH PRIEST OF OUR CONFESSION: HEBREWS 1:1—4:13

The first part of Hebrews focuses on paying attention to and being accountable to the word of God. The book opens with the declaration that God has spoken definitively “by his Son” (1:1-2a). The first part ends by emphasizing the word of God as “living and active,” a “double-edged sword” of judgment that penetrates to our innermost motivations; and God as the judge to whom “we must give account” (4:12-13).

The theme of heeding God’s word threads its way through 1:1—4:13. In 2:1 the preacher makes his first call for readers to “pay more careful attention” to the message of salvation spoken through the Son. The wilderness generation serves as an object lesson of the negative consequences for refusing to listen to the voice of God (3:7—4:13). A repeated scriptural refrain from this tragic history addresses the readers: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (3:7-8, 15; 4:7). The theme will be picked up in the second part (4:14—10:18), particularly in the reference to the readers’ slowness to listen (5:11, lit., “sluggish hearing”). The theme will come to its climax in the exhortation not to refuse the One who speaks from heaven and will shake heaven and earth (12:25-27).

The message we should heed concerns the confession of Jesus as “the apostle and high priest” (3:1). In 1:1—2:18 Jesus is presented as the One who is most suited to bring salvation to humanity. He is the exalted Son of God who shares the very nature of God (1:1-14), yet he provided purification for sins (1:3c). The author of salvation achieved his fitting and necessary perfection by identifying with humanity to the point of suffering death (2:5-18).

The sweep of Christ's movement from eternal Son, to humiliation and suffering in the incarnation, to his exaltation before God leads to the thesis or proposition of the entire sermon in 2:17-18. Jesus' solidarity with humanity makes him a "merciful and faithful high priest." His suffering and death provided atonement for sin. But his faithful death and subsequent exaltation as our high priest provide us respectively with a worthy example of endurance under the pressure of temptation, as well as timely help for those who are presently undergoing temptation (compare 4:14-16; 7:25).

Hebrews 3:1—4:13 paves the way for the rest of the sermon by focusing on the readers' need to commit themselves fully to Christ. The positive example of the superiority of Christ to Moses as the faithful Son over God's house (3:1-6) and the negative example of Israel's disobedience in the wilderness (3:7—4:13) serve this end. The audience is urged to "hold on" boldly to their confession of Christ (3:1, 6, 14) and to exercise due diligence to enter into final salvation (God's rest [4:11]; see 4:1, 6, 9). Christ's suffering, as the prime example of perseverance and faith and the definitive sacrifice for sins, forms the foundation for the Son's exaltation as high priest. It is also the basis for the calls to radical commitment to Christ repeated throughout the sermon (4:14-16; 10:19-25; 12:1-4; 13:13).

A. Hearing God's Son in These Last Days: Jesus the Merciful and Faithful High Priest (1:1—2:18)

1:1—2:4

The preacher to the Hebrews faithfully attends to two tasks throughout his sermon. On the one hand, he fixes his gaze on Jesus, the "merciful and faithful high priest" (2:17) and "author of [our] salvation" (2:10). On the other hand, he encourages his audience to share in his vision of the Son of God, so that they might respond appropriately to the gracious word and work of Christ and enter fully into worship and service before a holy God. This dual set of concerns is in evidence in this, the first section of part one.

This section consists of two units. In the first unit (1:1—2:4), the introduction to the entire discourse, the preacher pairs an exposition of the exalted Son with a powerful exhortation to heed the message of salvation. The second unit (2:5-18) plays a supportive role. It does so by demonstrating the necessity and appropriateness of the incarnation for perfecting the Son as Savior and high priest.

I. We Must Heed God's Definitive Revelation in the Son (1:1—2:4)

BEHIND THE TEXT

Hebrews 1:1—2:4: An Exordium. Hebrews 1:1—2:4 easily functions as a formal introduction to the sermon. In classical rhetoric the introduction to a

speech was known in Latin as the *exordium*, in Greek as the prooemium. Many commentators have viewed only 1:1-4 as the *exordium* and have had difficulty describing its relationship to the following subunits (1:5-14 and 2:1-4). There are three reasons, however, for recognizing all of 1:1—2:4 as a carefully constructed introduction.

(1) *Length*. Hebrews 1:1-4 is too brief to serve as the *exordium* for a discourse of this size and complexity. The introduction to a speech was usually 200 to 300 words in length, or several minutes long in delivery time. Since Hebrews would take about forty-five to fifty minutes to deliver, an *exordium* occupying about three to four minutes' time (1:1—2:4 equaling about 320 words) would be well within appropriate limits (Koester 2001, 175; for general instructions on length of exordia, see Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.1.62).

(2) *Framing*. The unit 1:1—2:4 is admirably framed, beginning with a carefully balanced sentence in 1:1-4 and concluding with another in 2:2-4. The opening line of each framing subsection is designed for the ear in Greek, using alliteration with the *p* sound (→ In the Text on 1:1 and 2:1). Thematically, the two subunits (1:1-4; 2:1-4) frame the discussion within the context of the modes of divine speech (using forms of the Greek verb *laleō* ["speak," "utter"] in 1:1, 2; 2:2, 3, 5), and emphasize the definitive nature of God's revelation via the Son. It is no coincidence that the author also frames the introduction by making reference to the recipients of God's ultimate revelation, namely, himself and his audience ("we" [2:1, 3]; "us" [1:2; 2:3]).

(3) *Structure and Movement*. The *exordium* to Hebrews follows a careful structure. Its elegant opening in 1:1-4 sets up a comparison of God's revelation in the Son with that of previous divine messengers. This comparison is focalized in the following subunit through a contrast between the Son and angels. The conclusion to this comparison is stated up front in 1:4, and supported (note the "for [*gar*]" in 1:5) through a chain of seven scriptural quotations (1:5-14). Finally, the author draws the *exordium* to a close (2:1-4). He employs a prominent "therefore [*Dia touto*]" in 2:1, and brings the dignity and majesty of the ultimate agent of divine revelation to bear upon his listeners' response to the message of salvation.

The movement within the *exordium*, from christological exposition to powerful exhortation, is assisted by a vertical movement of the author's thinking regarding the Son. In 1:1-4 the preacher moves from the varied modes of revelation in the past to God's ultimate revelation in the Son who "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (1:3, echoing Ps 110:1) and received the supreme inheritance (1:4).

In 1:5-14 the movement is repeated. Scriptural citations demonstrate the preeminence of the Son over angels, building in intensity toward the key text from Ps 110:1: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Heb 1:13). The listeners, too, are associated with the Son's

1:1—2:4

dignity, since through him they are heirs of salvation and are served by the heavenly host (1:14).

This upward vision will be significant in the next section (see 2:9), but in the *exordium* it is used to press forward a principal persuasive aim: to impress upon listeners the absolute necessity of paying attention to God's saving message in the Son (2:1-4). Listeners will shrug off this revelation only at their own peril, and this urgency will be stressed repeatedly throughout the sermon (3:7, 15, 16; 4:7; 6:1-8; 10:19-39) and climactically in 12:25-29 (observe the dramatic reappearance of God as "him who speaks" [12:25; compare 1:1-2]).

The concluding exhortation, therefore, provides the *exordium* with its proper rhetorical "payoff." It is not enough to marvel at the glory of the Son; we must respond with due attention to "such a great salvation" (2:3). The gravity of the response is indicated also by the "crowded stage" that rounds out the introduction (Westfall 2005, 98). All of the important players populate the preacher's first exhortation in 2:1-4: author, recipients, angels, the Lord Jesus, apostolic witnesses, and God. This underscores the all-importance of our response to the divine revelation. Completing the rhetorical circuit from persuasive argument to necessary response in 1:1—2:4 is what gives this *exordium* its unmatched integrity and dynamism, and characterizes its function as a true rhetorical introduction.

The Purposes of an Exordium. The *exordium* in ancient speeches served at least two functions. First, it introduced the leading ideas developed within the speech. Aristotle advised that exordia "provide a sample of the subject, in order that hearers may know beforehand what it is about, and that the mind may not be kept in suspense, for that which is undefined leads astray; so then he who puts the beginning, so to say, into the hearer's hand enables him, if he holds fast to it, to follow the story" (*Rhet.* 3.14.6). The *exordium* to Hebrews masterfully anticipates the topic that will be amplified throughout the sermon, namely Jesus as Son and Great High Priest (see 1:3). It also employs persuasive strategies we shall see throughout the discourse, like comparison (*synkrisis*), considerations based upon logic and Scripture (1:5-14), exhortation (2:1), and the argument from lesser to greater (2:2-4).

Second, the *exordium* prepares listeners to attend to the remainder of the speech. The ancient rhetorical handbooks concur that exordia must be designed to render listeners "well-disposed, attentive, and receptive" (Cicero, *Inv.* 1.15.20; see Quintilian, *Rhet. Her.* 1.4.6-7; *Inst.* 4.1.5; *Rhet. Alex.* 1436a35). The writer to the Hebrews seems to have had no need to secure the goodwill of his audience. Nowhere in the sermon do we find a hint of ill will toward him that he would need to dispel. He seems to have had a warm, personal relationship with them (13:18-19, 23-24). The pressing issue is the response of the hearers to the word of God, and upon this the preacher lays considerable stress. The persuasive power of Hebrews' *exordium* may be found in the author's decision to privilege, not his own speech, but God's (see Koes-

ter 2001, 175-76). So, apart from his display of accomplished rhetorical skill, the preacher makes no effort to establish his own character or authority as a speaker. Rather, he includes himself among the “we” (or “us”) who are accountable to God’s mighty word (1:2; 2:1, 3).

One’s approach to making listeners attentive depends upon the type of cause one is promoting, whether honorable, mean, doubtful, extraordinary, obscure, or even scandalous (Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.1.40). The cause in Hebrews is obscure (*dysparakolouthēton*, “hard to follow”), though the preacher will not reveal this uncomfortable fact until later. He will state that his exposition of Jesus as high priest in the order of Melchizedek is “hard to explain” (*dysermēneutos*) because his audience has grown “dull of hearing” (5:11 ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV, RSV; see 6:12).

For now, in the introduction, the preacher seeks to win attention through the grandeur and seriousness of the subject matter itself, and through a direct appeal for his listeners to “pay attention [*prosechein*]” (2:1; compare the repeated use of this verb with respect to exordia in *Rhet. Alex.* 1436b5-15, 1438a1). “The receptive hearer is one who is willing to listen attentively” (*Rhet. Her.* 1.4.7), and the way to make hearers attentive is to relate to them matters “that are important, that concern their interests, that are astonishing, that are agreeable” (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.14.7). This is precisely what the preacher to the Hebrews does, not only in the introduction, but throughout his sermon.

IN THE TEXT

a. God’s Definitive Action in the Son (1:1-4)

The opening line to Hebrews sounds forth a “euphonious introduction” (Wiley 1984, 24). The author appeals to the ear through rhythmic Greek, incorporating alliteration (with the repetition of the *p* sound at the beginning of words) and assonance (rhyming of words), which can be fairly appreciated in English transliteration:

Polymerōs kai polytropōs palai ho theos lalēsas tois patrasin en tois prophētais (1:1).

All of 1:1-4 is one periodic sentence in Greek. A period is a “close-packed and uninterrupted group of words embracing a complete thought” (*Rhet. Her.* 4.19.27). Usually it is comprised of carefully balanced clauses, used to express antitheses (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.9.5-8; *Rhet. Alex.* 1435b25-35). The opening to Hebrews presents two contrasts: the first in 1:1-2; the second in 1:3-4. In these the Son is compared with the prophets and angels respectively.

God’s Revelation: Past and Present

Hebrews 1:1-2a contains a carefully constructed contrast between God’s modes of revelation from past to present:

God spoke . . .				
	TIME	RECIPIENTS	AGENCY	MANNER
1	In the past	to our forefathers	through the prophets	at many times and in various ways
2a	in these last days	to us	by his Son	[by implication: definitively]

(1) God’s Word from Past Days to Last Days (1:1-2)

These two verses contain the main clause of the preacher’s opening statement. The author sets up a contrast that he will unpack later in the sermon (e.g., between the Levitical priesthood and Christ’s [ch 7] or the old and new covenants [ch 8]). But here the discontinuity between divine modes of revelation, past and present, is drawn together in continuity through God’s speaking. The same **God** (the subject of the main clause) who **spoke** to ancient Israel (1:1) **has** also **spoken** (the leading verb of the main clause) in Jesus Christ (1:2a).

The preacher never detracts from God’s authoritative words in the Hebrew Scriptures but does insist that the revelation of God through the Son is *more* authoritative, and that the Scriptures themselves point to this (e.g., 3:5; 8:7-8, 13; 12:18-29). The preacher expresses contrasts among the instances of God’s revelation with respect to their manner, time, recipients, and agency in 1:1-2a.

■ 1 The author begins with a consideration of the nature of God’s past revelation. In the Greek text the *manner* of the revelation appears first: **at many times and in various ways** (*polymerōs kai polytropōs*). The first word (*polymerōs*) may be translated temporally, **at many times** (ESV; see NLT; “at sundry times” [KJV]), but it is more likely that **in many parts** is intended (compare “fragmentary” [NEB]; “partial” [NAB]; “in many portions” [NASB]). The author may well be tapping into a common ancient sentiment that the simple, whole, basic, or pure is to be preferred to the complex, composite, fragmented, or alloyed.

The second adverb, **various** (*polytropōs*), indicates the variety of modes through which the revelation took place. These would include vision and prophecy, poetry and proverb, parable and history. Earlier interpreters, such as Chrysostom, took the adverbial phrase *polymerōs kai polytropōs* as a hendiadys (two words joined together by a conjunction to express one point), meaning “all sorts of ways.” However, later commentators are probably correct that the author expresses two ideas. This is elegantly captured by the NEB: “When in former times God spoke to our forefathers, he spoke in *fragmentary* and *varied fashion* through the prophets” (emphasis added). God’s past revelation was diverse, scattered, and incomplete.

The *time* of God’s earlier revelation was **in the past**. This is a reference to the distant past, as in the translation “long ago” (ESV, GW, LEB, NASB, NET, NLT, NRSV).

“Four Hundred Years of Silence”

For Jews the time of revelation had long since vanished with the last of the Hebrew prophets, Malachi. The chronicler of the Maccabees recorded a time of great distress during that period of Israel's history, “such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them” (1 Macc 9:27 NRSV; see also 14:41). Thus, the intertestamental period is often called “Four Hundred Years of Silence,” because of the discontinuance of the prophetic voice. This perspective continued among Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This is reflected in the apocalyptic author who wrote under the pseudonym of Baruch:

Further, know that our fathers in former times and former generations had helpers, righteous prophets and holy men. . . . But now the righteous have been assembled, and the prophets are sleeping. Also we have left our land, and Zion has been taken away from us, and we have nothing now apart from the Mighty One and his Law. (2 Bar. 85:1, 3)

It is no wonder that when Jesus came on the scene, announcing the kingdom of God and performing all manner of miracles, one response was, “A great prophet has appeared among us” (Luke 7:16). The NT authors identify Jesus as “the prophet like Moses” foretold by the Lord through the ancient Lawgiver himself (Deut 18:15, 18; 34:10; see Luke 24:19; John 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). For the author of Hebrews, the Son is more than a prophet. He is the definitive revelation of God.

The recipients of the age-old revelations were our forefathers (lit., *the fathers*). Only twice more will the preacher mention *the fathers*, both in scriptural quotations. In these he refers to the wilderness generation whom the Lord brought out of Egypt (3:9; 8:9; “our fathers” in 12:9 is a general reference to male ancestors). He will also refer to “the ancients [*presbyteroi*]” (11:2).

The agents of God's past revelation were the prophets. Once more the preacher will speak of “the prophets,” and then only in a rapid-fire listing of faithful worthies (11:32). Prophets were the primary means of divine communication with ancient Israel. But they were merely a shadow of the Lord's clear, face-to-face communication with Moses (Num 12:6-8). “I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them,” spoke the Lord through Hosea (12:10). “The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him” (Hos 12:13). The Lord reliably spoke to Israel through “my servants the prophets” (2 Kgs 9:7; 17:13; Ezek 38:17; Zech 1:6), as God repeatedly reminded them in Jeremiah (26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4). The preacher to the Hebrews has a profound awareness that the reading of prophetic texts makes God's voice audible (→ 1:5-14 sidebar, “Quoting Scripture in Hebrews”).

■ 2a The antithesis or counterpart to 1:1 is given in 1:2. Here the preacher sets forth the time, recipients, and agency of God's definitive revelation. In relating the *time* of God's ultimate disclosure, the author displays his eschato-

logical perspective. The God who spoke through the prophets has now spoken **in the last days**. The preacher perhaps first encountered the phrase *at the end of the days* (*ep' eschatou tōn hēmerōn*) in his Bible, the LXX. The exact phrase occurs four times (Num 24:14; Jer 23:20; 49:39; Dan 10:14), and many more times in slightly different forms (Gen 49:1; Deut 4:30; 8:16; Josh 24:27; Isa 2:2; Jer 37:24; Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28, 29, 45; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1).

The expression, in keeping with its Hebrew original (*bē'ahārīt hayyāmīm*, “in the last days”), refers to the final period in history when God will act decisively to bring judgment and salvation. Our author shares with other NT writers the conviction that the final epoch of salvation history has already arrived (see Acts 2:17; 2 Pet 3:3). He writes not simply of the last days, but “**these last days**” (“this the final age” [REB]).

Christ “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages” (Heb 9:26) and has inaugurated the messianic era of fulfillment, to which all the prophets pointed (1 Pet 1:10-11). As Paul explained, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son” (Gal 4:4), and so Christ’s followers are those “on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11).

The preacher includes himself among those to whom God addresses his final word: **to us**. These are the *recipients* of God’s ultimate revelation. They realize their identity as an end-times community. This is not only because of the incarnation of the Son but also because God has made his saving presence known to them by the Holy Spirit in miraculous ways (2:4), through the community’s taste of “the powers of the coming age” (6:5).

In Hebrews the supreme *agent* of God’s self-revelation is the Son. Other NT witnesses showcase Jesus’ position as Son—such as the Synoptic Gospels’ narration of Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:9-11 par.), the Gospel of John’s “only Son” (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9), and Paul’s many references to the Son (Rom 1:3, 4, 9; 8:3, 29, 32; Gal 1:15; 2:20; 4:4, etc.). Hebrews adds his unique voice to the chorus. The preacher will return repeatedly to the identity of Jesus as Son as a key point in his argument.

This identification is introduced in 1:2a: **in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son**. The author’s simple two-word phrase in Greek (*en huiō*) is more compact and insightful than English can convey, though the NRSV comes close with “by a Son” (compare “through a son” [NAB]; “in a son” [NET]). One might expect the definite article (God spoke “by *the* Son”); but the lack of the article is deliberate. The preacher emphasizes the *qualitative* importance of God’s eschatological revelation through “One who is Son” (Westcott 1909, 7).

The author of Hebrews will refer to our Lord (1:10; 2:3b) primarily as Son in the *exordium*, and not by his personal name, Jesus, until 2:9. According to the descriptions of the Son in ch 1, and throughout the whole discourse, the priority of God’s revelation in the Son is to be found not only in what Jesus says but supremely in who he is and what he has accomplished *as Son*.

Before proceeding to the descriptions of the Son in 1:2b-4, it should be noted that there is no formal parallel in 1:2a to the *manner* of revelation found in 1:1 (“at many times and in various ways”). The implication of the omission is unmistakable: God’s revelation through the Son is unique and decisive. Later the preacher will accent the “once for all” nature of Christ’s work (*hapax*: 9:26, 28; *ephapax*: 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). Here the contrast between the old and new occurs in two ways.

First, the nature of the comparison in 1:1-2a is typical of the exordia in speeches and history writing. In them, for example, a multiplicity of past works may be weighed (usually unfavorably) against the author’s present work (Luke 1:1-4 serves as a possible biblical example; see also Josephus, *J.W.* Preface 1, 3-4; *Ag. Ap.* Preface 1).

Second, the preacher will demonstrate at length the primacy and uniqueness of the Son’s majesty over the created order in the remainder of this chapter.

■ **2b-c** Two subordinate clauses supply the first two descriptions of the Son in terms of God’s further actions through him. Already we have learned that God “has spoken” by the Son. God is still the subject of the verbs in these clauses (**appointed** and **made**), though the topical focus is on the Son by way of the relative pronoun **whom**.

The first subordinate clause modifies “Son” by stating that he is the one **whom he** [i.e., God] **appointed heir**. Inheritance was a key element in God’s covenant with ancient Israel, involving continued blessing from God and possession of the promised land (see 11:8; 12:17). In the NT there has been an expansion of the divine inheritance. It is now truly cosmic in scope, as evidenced by Jesus’ modification of Ps 37:11 (“But the meek will inherit the land”) to “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5).

In the Son is fulfilled the coronation promise delivered to Israel’s kings, “Ask me, and I will make the nations your possession” (Ps 2:8 CEB). Perhaps Ps 2:8 was in the preacher’s mind, given his quotation of Ps 2:7 in Heb 1:5. The Son is **heir of all things**. As divine heir, the Son is “lord of all” (Gal 4:1 KJV), that is, master of the whole created order.

Importantly, the Son was **appointed**, not created, heir. The Son eternally shares the divine nature, attributes, and dominion. There was never a time when the Son was not the Son. There was never a time when he did not radiate the divine glory, or reflect the divine image. He has ever been the fount of existence for every created thing.

Then why did he need to be appointed heir of all things, if he already owned them? Theodoret of Cyr answered: “Christ the Lord is heir of all things, not as God, but as man” (Heen and Krey 2005, 8). The eternal Son was not appointed heir for his own sake, but for the sake of humanity. People were created to partake of the divine glory, but fall short of it through sin (Rom 3:23). The Son was appointed heir so that we might “inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14;

9:15). The Son restored the divine inheritance to humanity by entering into the human predicament of sin, suffering, and death, and prevailing over them through his atoning death and exaltation.

Hebrews also emphasizes the eschatological character of the inheritance. Other NT writers do the same when they mention inheriting eternal life (Matt 19:29; Titus 3:7) or the kingdom of God (Matt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Jas 2:5). The Son appeared “at the end of the ages” to do away with sin through “the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26), and his appointment as heir involves his installation as king over “the world to come” (2:5; compare 1:6).

The second description of the Son relates his role in creation: **and through whom** [= the Son] **he** [= God] **made the universe**. John, Paul, and Hebrews speak with one voice concerning the Son’s intermediate agency in God’s creation of the world (using the Greek preposition *dia*, “by,” **through**; see John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16). In his creative role, the Son is understood as divine Wisdom. The Greek word *aiōnas*, **universe** or *ages*, denotes here “the whole created universe of time and space” (Bruce 1990, 47).

Lane (1991, 12) considers the order of the two descriptions—heir first, creation second—ironic. But it is perfectly fitting that the preacher would, in two parallel clauses (note the correspondence between “all things” and “universe”), announce both the glorious destiny and origin of creation in the Son.

HEBREWS

1:2b-c

Wisdom Christology and Hymnodic in 1:2b-3

Jewish Wisdom literature was a veritable treasure-house for early Christian reflection on the preexistence and nature of Christ. Personified Wisdom as an agent of divine creation was viewed as directly applicable to the Son, not only in Hebrews, but also by other NT writers (John 1:3, 10; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16). Several aspects of “Wisdom Christology” appear in Heb 1:2b-3:

HEBREWS	WISDOM LITERATURE
through whom he made the universe (1:2b)	“I [wisdom] was there when he set the heavens in place . . . marked out the horizon on the face of the deep . . . established the clouds . . . fixed securely the fountains of the deep . . . gave the sea its boundary . . . marked out the foundations of the earth. . . I was the craftsman at his side” (Prov 8:27-30). “O God of my ancestors . . . who have made all things by your word, and by your wisdom have formed humankind. . . [W]isdom . . . was present when you made the world” (Wis 9:1-2, 9 NRSV).
the radiance of God’s glory (1:3a)	“She [wisdom] is . . . a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty . . . a reflection of eternal light” (Wis 7:25-26 NRSV).

and the exact representation of his being (1:3a)

“She [wisdom] is . . . a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wis 7:26 NRSV).

Given that the form and content of 1:2b-3 resemble other hymn-like confessions of Christ (see Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-18; John 1:1-18; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18-19, 22), many scholars have contended that the author has incorporated an early christological hymn at this point. However, there is no agreement on whether this is so and, if it is, whether the original hymn would have begun at 1:2b with the first relative pronoun “whom,” or in 1:3a (see Attridge 1989, 41-42). Regardless of whether the preacher has chimed in with a Christ-hymn already familiar to his listeners, or has composed one of his own, he has opened his sermon with a sample of the sort of “confession” to which he will later urge his readers to hold fast (3:1; 4:14; 10:23).

(2) The Majesty of the Son Above the Angels (1:3-4)

■3 The Son (*hos*, “who”) is the subject of another major, though secondary, clause in the author’s opening statement. The main verbs in this clause are **sat down** (1:3d) and “inherited” (1:4). These form the climax to the description of the Son in comparison to the angels. Embedded in this grammatical skeleton are four clauses that flesh out the preacher’s confession of the Son’s majesty. The first clause (beginning with the Greek participle *ōn*, “being,” **is**) introduces a pair of complementary statements that describe the Son’s unique role as the *revealer* of God.

First, he is **the radiance of God’s glory**. Interpreters have long wrestled with whether the Greek word *apaugasma* should be taken in an active or passive sense. Actively it means “radiance” (ESV, LEB, NASB, NET, REB, TNIV; “radiates” [NLT]), “brightness” (KJV), or “refulgence” (NAB). Passively it means “reflection” (NJB, NRSV). The difference is comparable to that between the sun and moon. Actively, a ray of light shines forth from the sun and possesses a brilliance continuous with the sun itself. Passively, moonlight is the reflection from a body other than the light’s origin. The distinction was critical to the Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century, and the active reading was enshrined in the Nicene Creed: “Light of Light, very God of very God.”

The second statement, **the exact representation of his being**, likewise figured largely in the christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries. The NRSV’s “exact imprint of God’s very being” can scarcely be improved upon. The Greek word *charaktēr* (**exact representation**) often referred to the embosser or stamp used to imprint coins, or to the imprinted coins themselves, and then to the characteristics of something or someone, such as writing style or an individual’s unique, inborn personality (Gess 1979, 288). The word translated **being** (*hypostasis*) referred to what is basic or foundational, hence, the nature or essence of a person or thing. The Son perfectly reveals

God, so that if one has seen the Son, that person “has seen the Father” (John 14:9; see 1:14, 18; 14:7).

Calvin rightly cautions against needless speculation, making due allowance for the limits of creaturely analogy in describing the divine. The preacher’s “intention was not to describe the likeness of the Father to the Son within the Godhead, but . . . to build up our faith fruitfully, so that we may learn that God is revealed to us in no other way than in Christ. . . . [W]hile God is incomprehensible to us in Himself, yet His form appears to us in the Son” (Calvin 1976, 8).

The second clause declares the Son’s providential role as *governor* over the whole created order. The participle **sustaining** (*pherōn*) conveys the action of “bearing up” (TYNDALE) or “upholding” (ESV, KJV, RSV; see NASB). This is not an image of Jesus carrying the world on his shoulders, “for the Son is not an Atlas sustaining the dead weight of the world” (Westcott 1909, 13-14). Nor is it simply that “all things hold together” in him (Col 1:17). The idea is one not only of supporting but also of acting, moving, or guiding creation toward God’s intended aims (see Erasmus’s comments, cited in Hughes 1977, 45 n. 22).

This action is closely linked to the previous statement about the Son as divine revealer. The two are joined by the connecting word *te* in Greek. It can be translated “so” or “thus” (Smyth 1984, 666 §2968; Westcott 1909, 13). It is his divine prerogative to rule, “and **so** he bears **all things**.” Christ’s all-encompassing providential authority is executed merely **by his powerful word** (the Greek has a Semitic flavor, “by the word of his power” [KJV]).

Christology in Rhyme

The preacher’s rhetorical skill is apparent in his use of *paromoiōsis*, which is selecting words with similar sounds at the beginning or end of clauses (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.9.9; *Rhet. Alex.* 1436a5-14). Hebrews masterfully uses this rhyming technique at both the beginning and end of the four clauses in 1:3 to enhance the acoustic impact of this confession of the Son’s majesty:

Who being [*hos ōn*] **the radiance of his glory**
and stamp of his being [*tēs hypostaseōs autou*],
bearing [*pherōn*] **all things**
by the word of his power [*tēs dynamēōs autou*],
purification [*katharismōn*]
of sins having made [*poiēsamenos*],
he sat [*ekathisen*] **at the right hand**
of the Majesty on high [*en hypsēlois*].

The third embedded clause, **after he had provided purification for sins** (1:3c), introduces an important shift in the preacher’s train of thought. This is expressed in two ways:

First, the participle that governs this clause (*poiēsamenos*, **having made**, **after he had provided**) is placed at the end of the Greek clause. In the previ-

ous two clauses, the participles appear instead at the beginning. Perhaps this participle was chosen for its capacity to extend the rhyme (*hypostaseōs* . . . *dynameōs* . . . *poiēsamenos*; → 1:3 sidebar, “Christology in Rhyme”).

Second, the previous two participles—**being** and **sustaining**—are in the present tense. But this one is in the aorist tense (a Greek past tense). The Son’s revealing the nature of God and sustaining the universe are ongoing activities. His sacrifice of atonement is a completed, historic act.

Many interpreters have noted the author’s use of the Greek middle voice here. This may convey what an ancient addition to the text sought to clarify: that the Son provided purification “by himself” (KJV) or “in his awne [= own] person” (TYNDALE). But it is more likely that the middle voice is only a variation in style. Greek authors often employed the verb “to make [*poieō*]” in the middle voice with verbal nouns (such as *katharismos*, **purification**) to express the same action as the corresponding simple verb (*katharizō*, “to purify”; see Smyth 1984, 391 §1722).

The preacher touches only briefly on a topic to which he will devote considerable space later, namely, the Son as our Great *High Priest*. The atoning death of Christ was of paramount importance to the preacher. This is evidenced by its appearance both here in his opening statement and in the proposition for the entire sermon (2:17). Barnabas Lindars suggests that the first readers of Hebrews were terribly concerned about the defilement of their postbaptismal sins. This explains the author’s reminder that the definitive work of cleansing for sins was accomplished on the cross (1991, 41).

The climax to the opening statement is that **he sat down at the right hand** (1:3*d*). This alludes to a key text for the author’s Christology: Ps 110:1 (→ 1:13 sidebar, “Psalm 110 in Hebrews”). Having described the Son as revealer, governor, and priest, the preacher now speaks of the Son as *royal heir*. The circumlocution for “God,” **the Majesty in heaven**, serves to heighten the dignity and honor the Son possesses. The title, which indirectly refers to God, indicates that the Son enjoys a status on par with God the Father. The word **Majesty** is rare in the NT (twice in Hebrews [1:3; 8:1], once in Jude [25]), and used only of God.

■4 A fourth and final embedded participial clause in Greek rounds out the opening statement with a comparison between the Son and angels. The heavenly enthronement of the Son demonstrates his superiority to angels: **So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs**. To inherit a great name is to receive recognition and honor.

The name he inherited can be none other than “Son” (see 1:5; 5:5). Preexisting as God, he already possessed every divine attribute and prerogative. So it was as a human being who suffered, died, and was exalted that he restored the divine favor and sonship to humanity, which had been lost with Adam.

By mentioning the Son as heir toward the beginning (1:1-2a), and his inheritance of the superior name, “Son,” at its end (1:4), the preacher encloses the opening statement. And by moving from a comparison with the prophets in the first half (1:1-2) to a comparison with angels in the second (1:3-4), he prepares his readers for the arguments to follow in 1:5-14.

“Better” Things in Hebrews

The word “better [*kreittōn, kreissōn*]” is a key word in Hebrews, used thirteen times. It is sometimes translated “greater” or “superior” in the NIV.

REFERENCE TO	“BETTER . . .”	HEBREWS
the Son	“superior” to the angels	1:4
audience	the preacher is confident of “better things” pertaining to their salvation	6:9
Melchizedek	“greater” than Abraham	7:7
hope	“better” than the Law	7:19
God’s oath	Jesus, the guarantee of a “better covenant”	7:22
ministry of Jesus	mediator of a “better covenant,” founded on “better promises”	8:6 (two times)
heavenly things	purified with “better sacrifices”	9:23
audience’s past loss of freedom and possessions	endured in the expectation of “better and lasting possessions”	10:34
the patriarchs	longed for “a better country”	11:16
Maccabean martyrs	refused to escape torture to gain a “better resurrection”	11:35
all the saints before Christ	the “something better” God provided: that they would be perfected along with us	11:40
sprinkled blood of Christ	“speaks . . . better” than the blood of Abel	12:24

HEBREWS

1:4-14

b. Scriptural Arguments for the Son’s Majesty over Angels (1:5-14)

A catena, or chain, of scriptural passages in 1:5-14 buttresses the proposition made in 1:4 concerning the superiority of the Son to angels. But this is not simply a series of proof texts. Rather, the author marshals them into logical arguments, called enthymemes in ancient rhetoric.

An enthymeme is like a formal syllogism, except that any one (or two) of the components of the syllogism—major premise, minor premise, or conclusion—can be missing (i.e., implied). The preacher stacks one enthymeme upon another in 1:5-14. He employs a scriptural passage (or passages) at the

heart of each logical argument. They build to a climax in 1:13, followed by a conclusion in 1:14.

The scriptural chain is carefully forged. Three OT texts—two at the beginning and one at its end—are introduced with a similar formula: **To which of the angels did God ever say . . . ?** (1:5, 13). All three (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 110:1) were generally accepted as messianic texts. The chain proceeds in three definable steps: The first presents the Son's installation as royal heir (1:5-6); the second, the Son's constancy (1:7-12); the third, the Son's exaltation (1:13-14).

Quoting Scripture in Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews reads and quotes the Holy Scriptures (i.e., the OT) primarily to hear the voice of God. Almost without exception, he is uninterested in noting the human authors of biblical quotations (see 4:7; 9:19-20). Even in 4:7, in which David is identified as the author of Ps 95, this is done to establish a time frame important to the preacher's interpretation. In any case, it is God speaking "through David." The preacher vaguely introduces Ps 8:4-6 in Heb 2:6 with "there is a place where someone has testified" (see 4:4). But the preacher customarily introduces scriptural texts as divine speech.

Of Hebrews' thirty-five OT quotations, twenty are ascribed to God (1:5a, 5b, 6, 7, 8-9, 10-12, 13; 4:4; 5:5, 6; 6:14; 7:17, 21; 8:5, 8-12; 10:30a, 30b, 37-38; 12:26; 13:5), four to the Son (2:12, 13a, 13b; 10:5-9), and five to the Holy Spirit (3:7b-11 [see 3:15]; 10:15; and evidently 4:3, 5, 7; see also 9:8; Lane 1991, cxvii).

Importantly, the preacher never begins quotations with the formula "as it is written," common among other NT authors. Instead, he prefers to use verbs for speaking, and often in the present tense (e.g., *legō* [fourteen times]: 1:6, 7; 2:6, 12; 3:7, 15; 4:7; 5:6; 6:14; 7:21; 8:8; 10:5, 8; 12:26; *phēmi*: 8:5). Hebrews recognizes in Scripture the divine voice of warning (8:5), criticism (8:8), promise (6:13; 12:26), and solemn testimony (2:6; 7:17; 10:15). Scripture is not a dead letter from the historic past, but the "living and active" word of God in the present (4:12-13). His approach to Scripture serves as an example to us. For when reading the Holy Scriptures we, too, ought to listen for the voice of God speaking in and through them.

(I) The Son's Installation as Royal Heir (1:5-6)

■ **5** The opening rhetorical question, **For to which of the angels did God ever say** (1:5a), links the catena to the comparison between the Son and the angels begun in 1:4. The author introduces three scriptural texts. The second and third are linked with the first through similar introductory formulae: **or again** [*kai palin*] (1:5c); "And again [*de palin*]" (1:6a).

The first quotation comes from Ps 2:7: **You are my Son; today I have become your Father.** Psalm 2 is a royal psalm, already alluded to in the opening statement (Ps 2:8 in 1:2b). The psalm includes solemn words spoken at the coronation of a new Israelite king. Christian appropriation of the psalm asso-

ciated Ps 2:7 with the declaration of Jesus as God's Son at his baptism (Mark 1:11||), transfiguration (Mark 9:7||), and resurrection (Acts 13:33).

The second quotation from 2 Sam 7:14 appears within the context of God's covenant promise of perpetual kingship to the house of David: **I will be his Father, and he will be my Son** (1:5*d*). This text is not quoted elsewhere in the NT. But a messianic interpretation of the promise to David's "seed" in 2 Sam 7:12 appears in several passages (John 7:42; Acts 13:23; Rom 1:3; see Luke 1:32-33). The connection of divine sonship and Israelite kingship is implicit in John 1:49. That Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:12 were viewed in tandem as messianic prophecies is confirmed by a text from Qumran (4QFlor I, 10-11).

These two texts are used in the deployment of the preacher's first logical argument. The major premise, already set forth in Heb 1:4, is that the name Son is superior to any other name. The minor premise is that God is the One who called this person his Son, and this is given authoritative support by Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14. The conclusion has already been stated at the end of the opening statement: he has therefore inherited a better name than the angels (1:4).

■ **6** The third scriptural citation in 1:6 is a bit more difficult to identify. **Let all God's angels worship him** resembles both Deut 32:43 and Ps 97:7 in the LXX. However, it corresponds exactly to a version of the "Song of Moses" in the *Odes of Solomon* (2:34), appended to the Psalms in a manuscript tradition of the LXX (Codex A, 55; see also Justin, *Dial.* 130). Apparently the preacher appeals to a liturgical adaptation of a biblical text. This is comparable to preachers today who point to a biblical truth expressed in one of the great hymns of the church.

The introductory formula, **when God brings his firstborn into the world**, also presents a difficulty. First, some interpreters think this refers to the second coming. But this incorrectly takes the adverb **again** with the verb **brings**. Actually, **again** is the last marker for this series of quotations ("did God ever say . . . ? Or again . . . **And again** . . .") [Heb 1:5-6]).

Second, others understand God's bringing the Son into the world as a reference to the incarnation. However, in Hebrews the incarnation of Jesus does not mark the Son's exaltation, but his humiliation, his being "made a little lower than the angels" (2:9, 7). Also, Hebrews uses the word *kosmos* ("world"), rather than *oikoumenē* (→ below), to refer to this created world (4:3; 9:26; 11:7, 38; see 9:1 [*kosmikon*, "earthly"] and 10:5 [Christ's entrance into the *kosmos* at his incarnation]).

A third interpretation is preferable. The **world** (*oikoumenē*) is further defined as the "world to come" in 2:5. Thus, the author is speaking about the ascension-glorification of Christ. Only at the conclusion of Christ's earthly life (5:7)—after he had endured suffering and death—was he "crowned with glory and honor" (2:9). It is at his enthronement that God commanded the angels to bow down before him.

The honorific title **firstborn** does not refer to Jesus' birth, either with regard to his eternal generation from the Father or his incarnation. Instead, it signifies his preeminence as the divine-human heir "over all creation" (Col 1:15) as the Risen One (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5) and forerunner of all "those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14; see Rom 8:29).

This sets up another logical argument, with the major premise: One who is worshiped is greater than the worshiper. This is an unexpressed axiom on the order of Heb 7:7: "And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater." The minor premise is once again supported by a scriptural quotation: the angels worship the Son (1:6). The unexpressed conclusion is pervasive to this entire chapter: the Son is superior to the angels.

(2) The Son's Constancy (1:7-12)

■ **7** A second subunit is comprised of three scriptural passages, stitched together as follows. The author signals the beginning of a contrast in the introduction to the first passage: **In speaking of the angels on the one hand** (*kai pros men tous angelous legei* [1:7]). The counterpart is expressed in 1:8a: "But [or **on the other hand**] about the Son he says [*pros de ton huion*]," followed by the second scripture (1:8b-9). A third passage continues the second half of the contrast in 1:10-12, introduced with, "He also says."

The major premise of this argument was a truism in the ancient world, especially for those influenced by Platonism. This philosophy held that things that do not change are superior to those that do.

The minor premise is that, whereas angels are changeable (1:7), the Son is unchangeable (1:8-12). The angels are clearly unstable, created beings. Psalm 104:4 (LXX) states that God **makes** (*poiōn*) them become fleeting, elemental forces of nature, such as wind or fire. **He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire** (Heb 1:7). It should be noted that the word for **winds** can also be translated "spirits" (CEB, KJV, NET, TNIV), as in 1:14. Thus, the angels are part of the changing created order.

■ **8** The Son, however, is constant and eternal. The preacher demonstrates this by quotations from Ps 45:6-7 (LXX) in Heb 1:8-9 and Ps 102:25-27 (LXX) in Heb 1:10-12. The Ps 45 quotation underlines the Son's constancy in sovereignty and righteous judgment.

The enthroned Son is addressed as God: **Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever** (Heb 1:8b). Not only will the Son's sovereignty endure, but it will be executed in righteousness: **and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom** (1:8c). The **scepter** is used figuratively (by metonymy) to refer to all that was entailed in a monarch's exercise of sovereignty. This is much like our association of kings with crowns, judges with gavels, police officers with badges. The Son's authority is not only symbolized but realized in his establishment of righteousness.

■ **9** You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness (v 9a). Israel's kings were expected to administer righteousness and justice (see 1 Kgs 3:28; 10:9; 2 Chr 9:8; Ps 71:1; Prov 16:12-13; 20:8, 28; 25:5; 29:4; Jer 22:15). They were subject to God's curse when they did not, for God was the Righteous King they were to emulate (Ps 99:4). The prophets foretold a coming king, the "righteous Branch" from the house of David (Jer 23:5). This is the Messiah, the Righteous One (Isa 53:11; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 1 John 2:1), whose kingdom is established in justice and righteousness forever (Isa 9:7).

The preacher's gaze moves, as it always does, to the exaltation (= anointing) of the Son as king: **therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy** (Heb 1:9b-c). Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed in the OT. Anointing with oil signified God's special appointment, consecration, and spiritual enablement of persons for his service. Also, it would not be lost on Greek readers that the word for "anoint [*chriō*]" is related to the word for "Christ [*Christos*, 'Anointed One']."

■ **10** The quotation from Ps 102:25-27 in Heb 1:10-12 emphasizes the contrast between the constancy of the Son as Creator and the contingency of the created order. **In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands** (v 10). The eternal Son existed before creation, and creation came into being at his command (see 1:2c; 3:3-4). The author does not hesitate to attribute to Christ what the OT author attributed to God.

1:9-13 ■ **11-12** The Son is contrasted with a changing and deteriorating creation: **They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out [lit., *become old*] like a garment** (1:11).

Not only is the universe perishable, but the Son—the eternal Creator (1:2c)—could withdraw his sustaining power (1:3c) and bring the present universe to an end as easily as one can remove and put away clothing: **You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed** (1:12a-b).

The Son is unlike the ever-changing cosmos: **But you remain the same, and your years will never end** (1:12c). The preacher will later sum up this truth in the memorable statement, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8). Given the major and minor premises of this argument, the conclusion is once again clear. The Son who is eternal and constant is superior to angels who, as part of the created order, are ever changing.

(3) The Son's Exaltation (1:13-14)

■ **13** A seventh and final scriptural quotation, Ps 110:1, completes the chain. This is one of the preacher's favorite passages. He has already alluded to it in Heb 1:3d and will again several more times (8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

The catena started (1:5a), and now ends, with a similar formula expressed as a rhetorical question, **To which of the angels did God ever say . . . ?** (1:13a). There is a subtle but important difference between the two formulae,

which is difficult to represent in English translation. In 1:5a the author used the simple past tense (aorist, *eipon*), translated as an emphatic past tense in the NIV (**did . . . say**). Here in 1:13a he uses the Greek perfect tense, *has . . . said* (*eirēken*). The perfect tense describes an action as having been completed in the past but having lasting effects. The pronouncement from Ps 110:1, never spoken concerning any angel, has now been spoken resolutely of the Son: **Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet** (Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:13b-c). The climax of enthronement at God’s right hand, which appeared toward the close of the opening statement (1:3d), is repeated here at the close of the catena (1:5-14).

Psalm 110 in Hebrews

It may be an exaggeration to claim, as G. W. Buchanan has (1972, xix-xxx), that Hebrews is a “homiletic midrash” on Ps 110. But this psalm, nevertheless, plays a pivotal role in supporting the main proposition of the sermon—that Jesus is our high priest (see 1:17-18).

The key text in 8:1 summarizes the message of the sermon in terms of Ps 110:1, 4: “The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest”—i.e., in the order of Melchizedek (as in Ps 110:4). The author made this point in the preceding discussion (Heb 5—7). He continues by saying that this priest “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (as in Ps 110:1; see 1:3).

The preacher alludes to Ps 110:1 at the beginning of Heb 1 (v 3) and explicitly quotes it toward the end of the same chapter (v 13). He also echoes this verse in many other passages (8:1; 10:12, 13; 12:2; perhaps also 4:14 and 7:26). He uses Ps 110:4 even more extensively. He cites it initially in Heb 5:6, picks up its language about Melchizedek’s high priesthood and God’s oath in chs 5—7 (5:10; 6:17, 20; 7:3, 11, 15, 20, 24, 28), and quotes it twice more in 7:17, 21 (see Lincoln 2006, 12-13).

Clearly, Psalm 110 serves as the backbone for christological reflection in Hebrews. It is the wellspring for the preacher’s inspired exposition of Jesus as the “great high priest who has gone through the heavens” (4:14).

■ **14** This scripture (Ps 110:1), too, is part of a logical argument in Heb 1:14. The major premise, yet another truism, is that the one who rules is superior to those who serve him (see John 13:16; 15:20). The minor premise is that the Son is ruler (as demonstrated in the quotation from Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:13). By way of contrast, **all angels** are servants (1:14). The servitude of angels is underscored in two ways:

First, they are **ministering spirits** (*leitourgika pneumata*). This echoes the language of Ps 104:4 in Heb 1:7. The preacher may well be thinking of the ministry of worship angels carry out before the throne of God in heaven (1:6; 12:22).

Second, angels are **sent to serve** (lit., *sent for service*). Angels are divinely commissioned to assist human beings on earth.

The particular beneficiaries of this angelic service are **those who will inherit salvation**. The Son is “the heir” par excellence (1:2*b*). Believers are drawn into the divine inheritance through their union with Christ. Thus, angels are dedicated not only to the service of God but also to his people. There is no doubt about the conclusion to this final argument: the Son is superior to the angels.

c. Heed What Was Spoken in the Son (2:1-4)

To say that either 1:1-4 or 1:1-14 comprises the *exordium* to Hebrews would be woefully inadequate. Clearly, 2:1-4 constitutes the interpretive point of everything that precedes it. The author does not switch from exposition and argument (1:1-14) to exhortation (2:1-4) in order merely to insert a homiletical digression. No, this warning is the destination toward which the introduction has been heading all along. This is indicated by the emphatic **therefore** (*Dia touto*) that heads this subunit.

This exhortation harks back to the starting point in 1:1-2*a*: **the God who speaks**. The verb “to utter, speak [*laleō*]” returns (**spoken** [2:2]; **announced** [2:3]; see 1:1, 2*a*), but now along with its important counterpart, hearing the message (2:1, 3*b*). Also, even as 1:2*a* referenced the recipients of the divine word (**to us**), so now **we** are the ones who must pay utmost attention (2:1), and **we** will not escape if we “neglect such a great salvation” (2:3*a* ESV, RSV), which was confirmed **to us** by the apostles (2:3*b*).

In 2:1-4 the preacher brings his comparison (*synkrisis*) of the Son and the angels to its proper conclusion (→ 2:5, 16). We can now determine the reason for this comparison. It lies in the lesser-to-greater comparison between the messages delivered by angels and by the Son. The conclusion is that we disregard God’s word in the Son at our own peril.

This closing paragraph of the *exordium* consists of two sentences. The first sentence in 2:1 contains alliteration using the letter *p* (*perissoterōs prosochein . . . pararyōmen*) as in 1:1. The second is another periodic sentence (2:2-4), as in the opening statement (1:1-4). It constructs an a fortiori (lesser-to-greater) argument in the form of a rhetorical question containing a condition (**if . . .** [2:2]) and proposed outcome (**how shall we escape . . . ?** [2:3-4]). Although 2:2-4 is one complex sentence in Greek, 2:3*b*-4 details the foundation for the great salvation about which the author is speaking, and so may be explored under a separate heading.

(I) Exhortation to Pay Utmost Attention (2:1)

■ I The upshot of all the comparisons between the Son and angels presented in ch 1 is that **We must pay more careful attention, therefore, . . . to what we have heard**. The use of the verb **must** (*dei*) with the adverb **more carefully** (*perissoterōs*) is emphatic, and the sense is captured well in the rendering,

“we are bound to pay all the more heed” (REB). The verb translated **pay . . . attention** (*prosechein*) is used in nautical contexts of directing a ship toward a harbor to anchor there (LSJ, 1512). This would hardly seem relevant, if it were not for the following purpose clause, **so that we do not drift away**. The verb **drift away** (*pararyōmen*) can refer to drifting off course (LSJ supp., 240; see REB). The nautical imagery vividly communicates the insidious danger of neglecting the message of salvation.

(2) The Peril of Neglecting the Message (2:2-3a)

■ **2** Now the preacher leverages his comparison of the Son to angels for maximum persuasive effect. What follows provides a further basis for the exhortation in 2:1 (note the **For** [*gar*]). He begins with a condition: **if the message spoken by angels** (2:2). The **message** is the law of Moses. Hebrews is not alone in claiming that the Law was given to Moses through angelic intermediaries (see Acts 7:38; Gal 3:19). The legal aspect of the message is punctuated by judicial vocabulary. The message **was binding** (*bebaios*, “firm,” “valid,” “in force”), **and every violation and disobedience** [lit., *refusal to listen*] **received its just punishment**. The Mosaic law contained sanctions for disobedience, summed up well in Paul’s quotation from Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”

Why the Comparison of Jesus with Angels in Hebrews?

The sustained comparison between Christ and the angels in Heb 1—2 has tantalized scholars. Is the author addressing a specific problem among his readers?

One suggestion is that, like the Colossians (see Col 2:18), there was a problem with the worship of angels (Manson 1949, 1-17; Jewett 1981, 5-7, 39). However, since there is no explicit polemic against such practice—especially in light of the already clear tradition of angelic refusal of worship (Tob 12:16-22; Rev 19:10; 22:9; *Apoc. Zeph.* 6:11-15; *Ascen. Isa.* 7:18-23; 8:5)—this view is not compelling.

Another suggestion is that the preacher is combating an angelic Christology. Various models of Jewish reflection about the eschatological, high-priestly, or sometimes messianic roles of angels may have played a part in speculation about the nature and function of Jesus the Christ (for a detailed survey, see Attridge 1989, 51-52). In Daniel, for example, the archangel Michael contends for the children of Israel (Dan 12:1). At Qumran, Melchizedek was viewed as an end-time messianic king and priest, who may also have been thought of as an angel (11QMelch; → Heb 7:7-8 sidebar, “Mysterious Melchizedek”). Philo often described the intermediary figure, the Logos, as an angel (*Embassy* 3.177.62; *God* 1.182; *Flight* 1.5; *Names* 1.87; *Dreams* 1.239).

We also know that such Jewish angelic models informed christological formulations among certain Christians into the second century (see Justin, *Dial.* 34.2; *Herm. Sim.* 8.3.3; 9.12.7-8; *Apos. Con.* 8.12.7, 23; *Gos. Thom.* 13 [34,34]). Perhaps Hebrews wanted to emphasize Jesus as not just one of the “sons of God,” even if the most exalted one (i.e., angels; → In the Text on 2:7). Christ is the

eternal and unique Son of God. Once again, in the absence of explicit rebuttals to an angelic Christology in Hebrews, this view can be little more than speculation.

More firmly grounded in the text of Hebrews is a background in which angels were considered mediators of the law of Moses (2:2) and governors over the present cosmic order (2:5). A widespread belief among Jews in the intertestamental period, as well as in the NT, was that the Law was not directly given to Moses by Yahweh, but through the intermediate agency of angels (*Jub.* 1:27, 29; 2:1; Josephus, *Ant.* 15.136; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). In connection with this capacity, angels were leaders of the heavenly liturgy and Israel's worship of God (*Isa* 6:3; *I En.* 39:10-13; *Jub.* 2:2, 18; 15:27; 31:14; *T. Levi* 3:5; IQSb 4:25-26; *Ascen. Isa.* 7:37; 8:17; 9:28-33; *3 En.* 1:12). According to *Jubilees*, angels observed the Sabbath, the Feast of Weeks, and were even created circumcised (*Jub.* 2:17-18; 6:18; 15:26-27).

Beyond this, angels were believed to be responsible for the governance of the entire universe, including nations (Deut 32:8 LXX; Dan 10:13, 20-22; 12:1), heavenly realms (*T. Levi* 3; *I En.* 3-20), and the physical processes of the cosmos, such as heavenly bodies, weather phenomena, and the growth of plants and animals (*Jub.* 2:2; *I En.* 60:16-22; 82:9-20; *I En.* 19; IQH^a 1:10-11). One may wonder whether Paul in Galatians was tapping into such traditions in his associating the Torah with both angels (Gal 3:19) and the *stoicheia* ("elemental spirits" [Gal 4:3, 9 NRSV; see Col 2:8, 20]).

Like other NT authors, Hebrews declares the supremacy of Christ over every cosmic power (Eph 1:20-21; Col 1:16; 1 Pet 3:22). While angels did and continue to serve God in this present age (Heb 1:6, 14; 12:22; 13:2), the Son of God plays a preeminent role "in these last days" (1:2a) or "the world to come" (2:5). The old order has given way to the new order of salvation, now focused on the atoning death of the Son (12:24) and his heavenly intercession for God's people (7:25). If angels once served as God's vice-regents and intermediaries, now the Son reigns as king and high priest, through whom alone we may gain access to God. Membership in God's household, therefore, requires honoring and worshiping God through the Son, not through the practices under the old covenant, which were under the guidance of angels.

■ **3a** The condition is followed by a proposed outcome. If the message, communicated through inferior messengers (angels), stipulated such severe consequences for noncompliance, **how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?** (2:3a). This, of course, is a rhetorical question. The implied answer is, "We won't!" To **ignore** is not casual neglect, but an active, contemptuous disregard. It is not a loss of memory or an unintended oversight, but a culpable lack of concern (such as in our phrase "child neglect"; see 8:9). Because the disregard is for a salvation so great, it entails dishonoring the source of every benefit, God himself (deSilva 2000a, 106).

(3) The Pedigree of Such Great Salvation (2:3b-4)

■ **3b-c** The remainder of the *exordium* is a series of clauses that further modifies "salvation" in 2:3a. It was **first announced by the Lord** (2:3b). The preach-

er uses an expression in the style of the finest Classical Greek to suggest, not simply chronological priority, but that the message had its origin in the Lord's (i.e., Jesus') preaching of the gospel ("announced originally" [NAB]; see Mark 1:1; 1 John 2:7, 24; 3:11; 2 John 5-6).

It was confirmed to us by those who heard him (2:3c). The verb was confirmed (*bebaiōthē*) is a cognate of the adjective "binding" (2:2a) and has the connotation of legal validation. Especially in Luke-Acts, we see Jesus' apostles appointed as qualified witnesses to what they had "seen and heard" (Acts 4:20; 22:15), particularly with regard to Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 21-22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; see Anderson 2006, 34-37, 188-93).

■4 But if this were not enough, God also testified to it. The verb *synepimartyreō* is yet another legal term meaning "to bear witness at the same time," "bear witness along with," or *corroborate*.

The elements of divine corroboration include **signs** and **wonders**. In the OT this is a stock expression for God's mighty works in connection with the exodus (Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 29:3; Ps 135:9; Jer 32:20-21). In the NT the expression refers to **various miracles** performed by Jesus (Acts 2:22) and at the hands of the apostles (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12; Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12). The word **miracles** (*dynameis*) refers to miraculous powers.

Finally, though the preacher speaks of *distributions* or *dividings* (*merismoi*; **distributed**), surely he intends a partitioning not of the Holy Spirit but of the **gifts of the Holy Spirit**. Determining whether according to his will refers to the intention of the Holy Spirit or to God (as Codex Bezae specifies) is unnecessary. In a parallel passage in 1 Cor 12:11 it is clearly the Spirit who apportions gifts "just as he determines." Yet Paul teaches in 1 Cor 12:4-7 that every person of the triune God operates in the gifting of the body of Christ.

HEBREWS
2:3b-4

FROM THE TEXT

Hebrews begins where every theology must begin: divine revelation. "God spoke" (1:1). The author of Hebrews is a master theologian and preacher who brings before his audience the full-orbed revelation of God. His is a pattern for every other preacher of the gospel. Our goal should be to usher listeners into the presence of an awesome, holy, and gracious God.

The author of Hebrews' apprehension and appropriation of divine revelation has some similarities to the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral. This is an approach to interpretation that seeks to apprehend divine revelation by way of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience (see Gunter 1997; Olson 2002, ch 2; Thorsen 2005).

First, the author's main storehouse of revelation is the Scriptures. Of course, the Son is God's ultimate revelation to humankind. But the preacher diligently searches the Scriptures in order to hear the voice of the triune God. He makes abundant use of allusions and quotations in ch 1, including the wis-

dom traditions in Scripture. He exploits these to explain the nature and destiny of the Son. Scriptural exegesis will continue to be basic to the preacher's strategy for pastoral ministry to his readers.

Second, the preacher acknowledges his indebtedness—which he has in common with his listeners—to the witness of the apostles. The message of salvation was first spoken by the Lord Jesus, but it was mediated and confirmed to us by “those who heard him” (2:3c). For us today it is still true that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). We must never forget the historical rootedness of our faith. We must not neglect two thousand years of church history. Throughout its history, the flame of truth has been passed along by faithful believers, preachers, and theologians.

From the time of the early church fathers until now, God has guided the church's understanding of the faith, sometimes called the Great Tradition. Many ambitious believers have struck out on their own, trying to restore Christianity to the pristine glory the church supposedly enjoyed at the time of Jesus and the apostles. However, these are almost always proud and unworkable attempts to figure out the faith within the small circle of one individual's human understanding.

The fact is that we cannot help but stand on the shoulders of spiritual giants in Christ's church. This begins with apostles—Peter, James, John, and others. Then it embraces those who passed on the apostolic baton throughout the history of the church. Names such as Justin Martyr, the Cappadocian fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and Barth come readily to mind. The Westminster Abbey of Heb 11 has been considerably enlarged since the preacher first preached his sermon!

Third, the preacher presses reason into service for the cause of the gospel. He has already used comparisons, considerations (more technically called enthymemes), and logical arguments (such as a *fortiori*). In the first-century world, the highest attainment of education was rhetoric, and the preacher is quite accomplished in it. The book of Hebrews stands as a shining example of how an educated human being can be used by God for the proclamation of the gospel through winsome language, ordered and logical thinking, and persuasive argumentation.

Fourth, the preacher points out the breaking through of God's revelation into the experience of his listeners. God has spoken *to us* in the Son (1:2a). When the gospel is preached, God bears corroborating testimony to it through “signs, wonders . . . miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit” (2:4). The preacher was at one with the apostles in realizing that this miraculous divine testimony is an indicator of the change of times. The death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus marked a transition from the old age of sin and death to the coming age of righteousness and life.

Theological method should not overshadow the stunning christological claim made in Hebrews' *exordium* (1:1—2:4). Few passages in the NT are as lucid as this one in declaring the deity of Jesus Christ. Only the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1-18) is as equally explicit and emphatic, especially in its opening line: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Not surprisingly, the Gospel of John and Hebrews were primary weapons in the arsenal against the Arian heresy that began in the fourth century. Arius held that the Son is not of the same nature as God the Father. The Son did not exist eternally but was the first created being.

The powerful testimony to Jesus' divine nature and eternal existence in Heb 1 led some Arians to dispute the book's status as apostolic. Others twisted texts in Hebrews to suit Arian doctrine (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.37). They seized upon the statement in 1:4 that the Son "became" superior to the angels but more commonly pointed to the assertion that the Son was faithful to God who "made" him (→ 3:2).

Defensively, supporters of orthodox, Trinitarian belief could handily refute these interpretations (e.g., see Athanasius on 1:4 [Heen and Krey 2005, 19] and Epiphanius on 3:2 [*Pan.* 69.37-39]). Offensively, many elements of Heb 1 were interpreted to support the full deity and eternality of the Son:

- That the universe (lit., "the ages") was created through the Son (1:2c) means that he existed before all ages. Only God, according to Ps 55:19 LXX, has existed "before the ages" (Theodore of Mopsuestia; Heen and Krey 2005, 8).
- That the Son is "the radiance of God's glory" (Heb 1:3a) indicates that the Son has the same nature as God (Theodore of Mopsuestia; Heen and Krey 2005, 11). It is impossible to conceive of the Light of God existing eternally without eternally radiating the brightness of the Son. Likewise, 1:3b says that the Son was "the exact representation of [God's] being." Therefore, the Arians are wrong in saying "There was once when he was not" (Athanasius; Theodoret of Cyr; Heen and Krey 2005, 12, 14-15, 16).
- "Sustaining all things by his powerful word" (1:3c) evidences the Son's divine, creative power. He keeps the universe from falling apart into non-existence (Chrysostom; Gregory of Nyssa; Heen and Krey 2005, 16).
- We are forbidden in Scripture to worship created things. That angels are commanded to worship the Son (1:6) implies that he is to be worshiped as God (Didymus the Blind; Heen and Krey 2005, 24).
- The Son is addressed as "God," and it is declared that his kingdom will be everlasting (1:8; Theodoret of Cyr; Heen and Krey 2005, 24).

We could go on. Hebrews 1 fits into the pattern of biblical revelation behind the truth confessed about Christ in the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325): "of

the same essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

The revelation of Jesus Christ as more than an exalted figure, but the divine Son, who is superior even to the angels, is not simply for the purpose of making a doctrinal statement about the deity of Christ. In Hebrews, the aim of this high view of Christ is to impress upon the readers the magnitude of their accountability to the message of salvation spoken by the Son (2:1-4). The preacher does not want us simply to express belief in Jesus as the Son of God. He wants us to commit ourselves to him as our Savior, who makes us holy through his atoning death and leads us into the glory of his inheritance.

2. Jesus Perfected as a Merciful and Faithful High Priest (2:5-18)

BEHIND THE TEXT

Having solicited the full attention of his listeners in the *exordium* (1:1—2:4), the preacher now turns to a statement of facts (2:5-16) and proposition (2:17-18). Called the *narratio* (Lat.; Gk. *diēgēsis*) by ancient teachers of rhetoric, the statement of facts serves three important functions in a speech. First, it presents the relevant background story for the following arguments. Second, it gives the nature of the subject at hand. Third, it leads up to the proposition of the speech, which often immediately follows the statement of facts (Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.4.1). The proposition relates the central point(s) of the speech. As a conclusion to the statement of facts, it is a summing up of its contents and an introduction to the succeeding arguments (Übelacker 1989, 193).

One had considerable flexibility in composing a statement of facts (see *Rhet. Her.* 1.8.12-13). In deliberative speeches it could narrate past events, catalog a series of present facts, or forecast future events (*Rhet. Alex.* 1338a5). Since Hebrews is a brief sermon, the statement of facts is not a complete run-down of the arguments to follow. It is a staging platform upon which everything else in the sermon is built. It has in view the present and future state of affairs (namely, the current subjection of the world to come in 2:5) as a result of the grand drama of the incarnation. It tackles head-on the central challenge to the listeners' commitment to the lordship of Christ: the off-putting notion that the Son of God came to suffer and die. In rhetorical terms, this is “the head of the whole business [*kephalaion estin*]” (Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.10.27). Without dealing with this matter up-front, the preacher would not be able to persuade his listeners, not with any number of other arguments, of the high priesthood of Christ or the expediency of their holding allegiance to him. The *narratio* is the appropriate place to grapple with a matter so fundamental to the entire case being argued.

The Scandal of Christ's Suffering

A primary hurdle that Hebrews must overcome is the tremendous scandal of Christ's suffering. Gods appearing as humans was not a foreign idea to the Greeks (see Acts 14:11-12; Ovid, *Metam.* 8.611-725), and Jews were aware of angels appearing in human guise (Gen 18:1-15; Josh 5:13-15; Judg 13:1-7; Tob 12:19; see Heb 13:2). However, the notion of divine or angelic figures so participating in the human condition as to suffer and die—especially a criminal's death on a cross—was ridiculous, repulsive, and scandalous to Jews and Gentiles alike (1 Cor 1:23).

The crucifixion of Christ served as the basis for negative assessments of Christian faith. Tacitus could hardly find enough disparaging adjectives to describe the Christians persecuted under Nero. That Christ, their founder, “suffered the extreme penalty” (i.e., crucifixion) under Pontius Pilate sufficiently demonstrated their disreputable beginnings (*Ann.* 15.44). According to Justin Martyr, pagan critics of Christians believed it was “madness . . . that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of all” (*1 Apol.* 13.4). Justin also reported the protest Trypho raised among Jews: “But this so-called Christ of yours was dishonourable and inglorious, so much so that the last curse contained in the law of God fell on him, for he was crucified” (*Dial.* 32.1).

Such criticism of the suffering Christ led the preacher to the Hebrews to insist that Christ suffered nobly and courageously on behalf of others to bring them the benefits of eternal salvation.

The statement of facts should be concise, clear, and credible (see *Rhet. Alex.* 1438a20-b10; *Rhet. Her.* 1.9.14-16; Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.31-60). The statement of facts in Hebrews is certainly clear and concise. It details God's action of placing all things under the authority of the Son, bringing salvation to humankind through the incarnation, and defeating death and the devil, all in relatively short compass.

The most important quality of the statement of facts is that it be credible (Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.32-34; other rhetoricians add plausible, probable, or convincing [see Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.31-32; *Rhet. Alex.* 1438a20]). This is achieved, “if in regard to facts that are improbable we bring forward reasons [*aitiai*] that will make the events that we allege seem likely to have taken place” (*Rhet. Alex.* 1438b1; see Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.52).

Both the rationale and purpose behind God's actions in Jesus are privileged in the *narratio* of Hebrews. Notice the frequency of inferential connectives such as “so [*di' hēn aitian*]” (2:11b), “since [*epei oun*]” (2:14a), “for surely [*gar dēpou*]” (2:16), and “for this reason [*hothen*]” (2:17a), and purpose clauses like “so that [*hopōs*]” (2:9b), “so that”/“in order that [*hina*]” (2:14b, 17b), and “that [*eis to*]” (2:17c). Moreover, there are references to God's or Christ's actions as gracious (2:9c), appropriate (“fitting” [2:10]), sacred (2:11a), honorable (“crowned with glory and honor” [2:9b]; “not ashamed” [2:11b]), and

necessary (“he had to” [2:17]). Other telltale signs indicate that 2:5-18 constitutes the statement of facts and proposition of the sermon:

First, the preacher opens the statement by denying that the world to come has been subjected to angels (2:5). Ancient rhetoricians insisted (see Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.132) that the statement should end where the issue to be determined began. So we see the statement beginning and ending with a negation of the angels as beneficiaries of divine salvation (2:5, 16). The conversational tone of both 2:5 and 16 also lends to our identification of 2:5-16 as the statement of facts. The proposition immediately follows in 2:17-18.

Second, the preacher introduces Jesus by name for the first time, and emphatically so (→ 2:9 sidebar, “Use of the Name ‘Jesus’ in Hebrews”). Jesus is also given titles that have an archaic Jewish (“son of man” [2:6]) and Hellenistic (“author [*archēgos*]” [2:10]) flavor, and evoke images of a great champion for the people of God. Most notable, though, is the appearance of Jesus as a speaker. “What really carries weight in deliberative speeches,” writes Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.8.12), “is the authority of the speaker.” So it is significant that the preacher brings forward statements by the authoritative figure of Jesus himself in 2:12-13. Only in one other place will the author quote Jesus directly (10:5-7)—again, significantly, regarding Christ’s incarnation.

Finally, the preacher appeals to his readers’ emotions (see Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.111-15). What is potentially the most incredible aspect of his case, namely Jesus’ humiliating suffering and death, the preacher sets forth as the chief strength of God’s work for humanity in the incarnation. Jesus’ suffering may not be regarded as senseless or contemptible, because his was a noble death. He died for others, for everyone (2:9), to exalt them to glory (2:10a), make them holy (2:11a), and claim them as members of God’s family (2:11b-13). Indeed, it was appropriate for God to “perfect” Jesus as “the author of their salvation . . . through suffering” (2:10c). What’s more, Jesus came to destroy the devil, who held the power of death, and free his siblings from the greatest fear of all, the fear of death (2:14-15). Thus, the preacher appeals to his listeners’ feelings of admiration, gratitude, and courage in contrast to his eliciting their fear in the *exordium* (2:1-4).

The statement of facts is developed as follows. It begins with a consideration of the main question: Whether the future inheritance and kingdom of God truly belong to the Son, over against the domain that has existed under the administration of angels (2:5-9). The preacher uses Ps 8:4-6 as an authoritative guide to understanding the course of events in the incarnation. He introduces the issue of Jesus’ suffering as the necessary prelude to his exaltation. Then, in Heb 2:10-15, the preacher looks at the appropriateness and necessity of the Son’s complete identification with mortal humanity in order to bring salvation. In 2:16 he returns to where the discussion began, by stating that Jesus’ powerful leadership concerns the children of Abraham, not angels.

The discussion of Jesus' fellowship in human suffering leads up to the proposition or thesis in 2:17-18 (note "For this reason" in 2:17). The proposition is twofold, corresponding to the expository and hortatory goals of the sermon:

On the expository side, Jesus' identification with humanity qualifies him as a high priest who is compassionate and faithful and who provides atonement for sins. The image of Jesus as the Great High Priest is, of course, key to the preacher's argument in Hebrews (compare 2:17 with 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:1, 5-6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15-17, 21, 26; 8:1; 9:11, 25; 10:12, 21; 13:11).

On the hortatory side, the preacher wishes to encourage his listeners to endure every temptation and suffering with the help of and in allegiance to this Great High Priest (compare 2:18 with 3:1, 6; 4:14-16; 6:18-20; 10:19-39; 12:1-28). We can see, then, how the statement of facts and proposition are critical to framing the rhetorical aims of the entire sermon.

IN THE TEXT

a. The Humiliation and Exaltation of Jesus (2:5-9)

■ 5 This passage is closely tied to the preceding *exordium* through the use of the conjunction *for* (*gar* [2:5]; untranslated in NIV). The preacher builds upon his previous arguments for the supremacy of the Son over angels: **For it is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come.**

Ancient Jews thought angels had jurisdiction over the nations of the earth, based on such texts as Deut 32:8 LXX: "When the Most High divided the nations, when he scattered the sons of Adam, he established boundaries for the nations according to the number of the angels of God." Thus, in the OT the prophet Daniel recognized angelic princes over Israel and Persia (Dan 10:13, 20-22; 12:1).

In the NT angels are classed among cosmic rulers and powers (Rom 8:38; 1 Pet 3:22; → Heb 2:2 sidebar, "Why the Comparison of Jesus with Angels in Hebrews?"). However, **he** (i.e., God) has not granted sovereignty to angels in the coming kingdom of God. That privilege belongs to Christ and his church (see 1 Cor 3:21-23; 6:2-3; Eph 1:20-23; 3:10; Col 1:13; 2 Tim 2:12; Heb 12:28; Jas 2:5; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 1:5-6, 9; 5:10; 22:5).

The verb **subjected**, according to the Latin etymology behind our English word, as well as the Greek here in Heb 2:5 (*hypotassō*), means "to place under," that is, "to bring something under the firm control of someone" (L&N 37.31). The use of this verb anticipates its appearance in the last line of the psalm quotation in 2:6b-8a, as well as its recurrences in the preacher's interpretation of Ps 8:4-6 in Heb 2:8b-c.

The object of this subjection is **the world to come**. The **world** here is the same as that found in 1:6. There the angels were commanded to worship the Son when he was introduced "into the world." The **world** (*oikoumenē*) is that

realm of authority and dignity into which Christ entered when he had made “purification for sins” and “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty” on high (1:3). Here in 2:5 the preacher more clearly refers to that realm as the world to come (*mellousan*) or “future world” (NLT). This is the world Jesus inherited through his death and exaltation. It is the present and sure reality of the coming kingdom of God (see 1:8; 12:26-28) about which we are speaking (“which is our theme” [REB]).

Eschatology in Hebrews

The preacher’s eschatology (understanding of last things) mirrors the “already-but-not-yet” tension throughout the NT. On the one hand, the exaltation of Jesus has ushered in the realization of “the good things to come” (10:1 NRSV), which were but shadowed in the Law. Jesus “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages” to deal decisively with sin through his self-sacrifice (9:26). So even now believers taste of “the powers of the coming age” (6:5) and are in the process of entering into the promised end-time “rest” (4:3). Jesus has already entered into “the world to come” (2:5; see 1:6), so that the church presently participates with him in the realities of the heavenly city of Jerusalem (12:22-24).

On the other hand, “we are looking for the city that is to come” (13:14). Our entrance into divine rest lies in the future (→ 4:11), as does God’s “eternal judgment” (6:2; see 9:27; 10:27, 30; 13:4). Since our inheritance of salvation is a future prospect (1:14), the preacher consistently speaks of it in terms of “hope” (3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1). The Son is already invested with universal authority over the world to come; “yet at present we do not see everything subject to him” (2:8c), not until the unshakable kingdom of God is fully revealed (12:26-28; see 10:13).

The tension between the “already” and the “not yet” is due to our living between the two pivotal moments of God’s saving action in Christ: “so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (9:28). From the perspective of time, then, we have the *hope* of salvation; from the perspective of eternity, we are receiving the *reality* of salvation. The link between the two is *faith* (see 11:1), by which we receive God’s promises (4:1-3; 6:12; 10:22-23, 36; 11:6, 9, 13, 17, 33). For further discussion on Hebrews’ eschatology, see C. K. Barrett (1956, 363-93) and Lincoln (2006, 92-100).

■ **6-7** In 2:6-8a the witness of Scripture contradicts (**But, de** [2:6a]) the notion that angels will rule the world to come (already negated in 2:5). The nondescript introduction—**there is a place where someone** (lit., *somewhere someone*)—does not indicate ignorance regarding the location and authorship of the following quotation. Perhaps being vague gives the audience the pleasure of recognizing for themselves such a well-known quote. More likely, like the Alexandrian Jewish scholar Philo and later Jewish rabbis, the preacher is de-emphasizing the human medium of the scriptural text and focusing on

the fact that it is ultimately *God* who **has testified** in the Scriptures (→ 1:5-14 sidebar, “Quoting Scripture in Hebrews”).

The psalmist in Ps 8 revels in the majesty of God and the grandeur of God’s creation. In Ps 8:4-6 (quoted in Heb 2:6*b*-8*a*) he reflects on the irony of humanity’s insignificance by comparison to its divinely granted predominance in the world. Surely, the preacher to the Hebrews was well aware of the psalmist’s commentary on human nature, and its indebtedness to Gen 1:26-28. But for Hebrews, as for Paul, the dignity and divine destiny of humanity is only realized through “the man from heaven” (1 Cor 15:47-49), Jesus Christ, the true image of God (Heb 1:3; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). The preacher’s christological approach to Ps 8:4-6 is apparent in several ways.

First, as we have already seen, his reading of the text is concerned with the governance of “the world to come” (Heb 2:5), to which he has already alluded throughout ch 1. Two verbal links between 2:5 and the psalm quotation in 2:6*b*-8*a* make this clear: **angels** (2:5, 7*a*) and **subjected** (*hypotassō* [2:5, 8*a*—put . . . under]).

Second, it is no coincidence that the quotation from Ps 8:4-6 in Heb 2:6*b*-8*a* appears in proximity to Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:13. Early Christians interpreted these texts in tandem as prophecies regarding the exaltation of Jesus, using a rabbinic hermeneutical technique called *gezerah shawah* (→ 4:3*b*-5 sidebar, “Verbal Analogy”). This was a principle of analogy, whereby two texts were mutually interpreted based on catchwords or phrases appearing in both of them, as follows:

Ps 110:1 “until I make your enemies a footstool for *your feet*”

Ps 8:6 “put everything under *his feet*”

Paul draws together the same two texts as dual testimony to the fact that God has placed “all things” or “enemies” under the feet of the exalted Christ (1 Cor 15:25-27; Eph 1:20-22; see Phil 3:21; 1 Pet 3:22). Hebrews is probably an heir to this interpretive heritage.

Third, in the two parallel clauses of the Ps 8:4, **What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?** (Heb 2:6*b*-*c*), a straightforward reading would equate **man** (i.e., humanity) with **son of man** (“mere human beings” [GNT]). Synonymous parallelism is common in Hebrew poetry and would tend to support such a reading. The preacher would also know from his extensive knowledge of the OT that the expression **son of man** can be employed simply as an equivalent for **man** (e.g., ninety-three times in Ezekiel).

However, it is difficult to escape what must have leapt off the page for early Christian readers. It is “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5; see Rom 5:15, 17) who in the NT is “the Son of Man” (Heb 2:6*c* gw). They identified him with the regal figure in Dan 7:13-14, who is granted universal dominion (as in Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:6). This is the Son of Man sitting (or standing in Acts 7:56) at the right hand of God (Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69; see Heb 1:3, 13).

The lack of the definite article **the** before **son of man** in the Greek text (Ps 8:5 LXX in Heb 2:6c) does not rule out interpreting the expression as a christological title, since identical wording elsewhere refers to Jesus as Son of Man (John 5:27; Rev 1:13; 14:14). It is significant to note, as well, that Heb 2:5-18 is enclosed by sections (1:1—2:4 and 3:1-6) in which Jesus is prominently identified as the divine “Son” (1:2, 5 [two times], 8; 3:6), as he is throughout Hebrews (“Son” [5:5, 8; 7:28]; “Son of God” [4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29]). In Hebrews, Jesus is both the quintessential human being in his complete identification with suffering and mortal humanity, and Son of Man in his regal authority at God’s right hand.

Fourth, in 2:7-8a the preacher reads this selection from Ps 8 in a way that highlights the proper sequence of major events related to the incarnation. The preacher’s use of the Greek version of the OT (the LXX) facilitated his unique and inspired interpretation of the psalm. The Hebrew text of Ps 8:5 clearly expresses the idea of humanity’s preeminence within the created order. In the Hebrew text humanity ranks only a little lower than “God” (HCSB, NASB, NIV^{msg}, NLT, NRSV; “a god” [NAB, NJB, REB]). The common Hebrew word for “God [’Ēlōhîm]” may also be translated “heavenly beings” (ESV, NIV) or “angels” (KJV, NCV), following the LXX. For the preacher, however, the psalmist is not making a statement about the exalted state of humanity, but the humiliation of the Son of Man.

An interpretive possibility in the LXX (quoted in Hebrews) lends itself to this reading. The NIV’s **a little** (2:7a, 9a) preserves the ambiguity of the LXX’s *brachy ti*. This expression may faithfully render the almost certain idea of space or degree in the Hebrew text of Ps 8:5a (“a little bit”). But both in the LXX and in Heb 2:7a, 9a it more likely conveys the idea of a brief period of time: **for a little while** (NIV^{msg}, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV^{1msg}, NRSV; “for a season” [TYNDALE]).

Thus, instead of the two clauses in Ps 8:5 being parallel and synonymous, they are viewed as antithetical. **You made him for a little while** [NIV^{msg}] **lower than the angels** refers to the Son’s entrance “into the world” (10:5), commencing “the days of Jesus’ life on earth” (5:7). This is the first phase of Christ’s incarnation, when he participated fully in the frailty and mortality of human life (2:14) and provided for the purification of sins (1:3; 10:10). **You crowned him with glory and honor** is the second phase, the exaltation that followed the Son’s temporary humiliation. It is his enthronement at God’s right hand (1:3c, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). The third phase of the Son’s fulfillment of the divine purpose is envisioned in 2:8a.

■ **8** Another pair of parallel clauses appears in Ps 8:6, but the quotation in Hebrews passes over the first of them (“You made him ruler over the works of your hands”). As a result, the preacher’s reading of the psalm text does not expand upon the dominion of humanity over creation celebrated in Ps 8:5. Rather, it foretells the culmination, not only of the Son’s life of obedience

and suffering, but of world history under the Son's authority in the age to come: God **put everything under his feet** (see Heb 1:13; 10:13). The three-part movement of the incarnation (from suffering and death, to exaltation, to final supremacy over all creation) will be clarified in the interpretation of the psalm text that follows in 2:8b-9.

A brief interpretation of Ps 8:4-6 begins in Heb 2:8b-c by seizing upon the phrase **put everything under** from the last line of the quotation. The verb **subjected** (put . . . under; *hypotassō*) was introduced in 2:5 in anticipation of the Scripture quotation. It is now repeated twice (**putting . . . under** [2:8b]; **subject** [2:8c]) and joined by the related adjective **not subject** (*anypotakton* [2:8b]).

The first statement in 2:8b is a synonymy (or “interpretation”) in which a speaker restates an idea to deepen its impact on the audience (*Rhet. Her.* 4.28.38):

**For in putting everything under him,
God left nothing that is not subject to him.**

Not as easily seen in English is the chiasmic (x-shaped, ABB'A') pattern in Greek:

subjecting (<i>hypotaxai</i>)	x	all things (<i>panta</i>)
nothing (<i>ouden</i>)		unsubjected (<i>anypotakton</i>)

Thus, the preacher states categorically that the Son has dominion over everything. Many scholars think this verse is about humankind, as reflected in the translation “to them” (NIV¹¹, NRSV; see REB) instead of **to him** (*autō*). Others think the author is intentionally being ambiguous, so that **him** can refer either to humanity or to Jesus (deSilva 2000a, 109-10). These interpretations are not impossible, especially since the glorious destiny of the people of God intertwines with that of the Son in 2:10-18. However, the christological thrust of the quotation and interpretation of the psalm seems uppermost (→ 2:6-7).

Shockingly, the preacher presents an apparent challenge to the Son's universal authority: **Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him**. The author does not directly contradict the statement in 2:8b. He does not say that everything is **not subject to him**. Rather, he says we do not presently **see** (emphasis added) everything that already has been (as the Greek perfect tense suggests) and indeed is **subject** (*hypotetagma*) to him. Other translations clarify an important detail in Greek: we do **not yet** (*oupō*) see everything subjected to him (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NCV, NET, NRSV, REB).

The preacher's concern is eschatological as well as perceptual. **Yet at present** contrasts with “the world to come” (2:5), which has already been subjected to the Son but has not been finally manifested in divine judgment and salvation. Psalm 8:6b (in Heb 2:8a), as we have already seen, may be cor-

related with Ps 110:1 (in Heb 1:13). The paradox, readily apparent in Paul's exposition of both texts in 1 Cor 15:24-28, is that indeed God has placed all things under Christ's feet (1 Cor 15:27-28; see Eph 1:20-22), yet "he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor 15:25).

So also Heb 10:12-13 neatly distinguishes between the enthronement of the Son at God's right hand and the final subjugation of his enemies. Therefore, by faith we can see "the Day approaching" (10:25) when our salvation will be complete and the last enemy destroyed (see 1 Cor 15:26). But **at present we do not yet see** it with our eyes. There is a sustained interplay between what is seen by faith and what is seen or not yet seen with the eyes in Heb 11:1, 3, 7, 13, 26-27.

■ **9** Verse 8*b-c* focuses on the last line of the psalm (Ps 8:6*b* in Heb 2:8*a*). In 2:9 the two previous lines (Ps 8:5 in Heb 2:7) serve as the basis for an authoritative interpretation of the incarnation and its implications for humanity. The intricacy of the Greek composition is difficult to capture in English translation. Here is my own literal translation of 2:9, which attempts to do so:

But it is the one who for a little while was made lower than the angels whom we see, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Observe that what we do not now see in 2:8*c* stands in contrast to what we do see here in 2:9. The word translated *we see* (*blepomen*) is the principal verb of the entire sentence. **Jesus**, described with language from the psalm quotation, is the object of our seeing. Note how the name of the One borne witness to in the psalm is flung to the end of the first clause in Greek (see the ESV and NASB). This arrangement heightens the suspense, since this is the first occurrence of his proper name in Hebrews.

Use of the Name "Jesus" in Hebrews

Deferred placement of Jesus' name for emphasis is unique to Hebrews. Out of the nine occurrences of the name Jesus by itself (not, e.g., "Jesus Christ"), eight times it stands emphatically in Greek either at the end of a clause (2:9; 6:20; 12:2, 24; see 4:14) or sentence (3:1; 7:22; 10:19; 13:20). In this way the preacher draws attention to the humanity of the One who bears that incomparable name: Jesus.

The psalm quoted in 2:7*a* bears witness to the temporary abasement of Jesus. The word order of the psalm in Greek (**You made him for a little while** [NIV^{msg}] **lower than the angels**) is altered here to **for a little while made lower than the angels**. The phrase **for a little while** is pushed toward the beginning of the sentence to prioritize the idea of brevity. (→ 2:6-8 on **for a little while** [NIV^{msg}].) However, that Jesus' humiliation is temporary does not minimize its importance; indeed, his exaltation depends upon it.

The psalm also testifies to Jesus' high position, **now crowned with glory and honor**. The image of crowning is associated with the recognition of someone's athletic victory (1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 2:5) or reward for faithful endurance (Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10). Jesus' crowning was the fitting sequel to his having been made low. More precisely, he was crowned **because of the suffering of death**. Both the grammatical construction and the understanding of Jesus' suffering throughout Hebrews (2:10, 18; 5:8; 9:26; 13:12) suggest that the preacher is talking about suffering that *is* death. Thus, the NIV helpfully translates, **because he suffered death**.

For the writer to the Hebrews, then, Ps 8:7 would be one of the very prophecies that "predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Pet 1:11). Jesus himself spoke of his messianic destiny foretold by the prophets, "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:26). This suffering-to-glory theme is also evident in Paul's famous Christ-hymn, in which (as in Hebrews) it is precisely **because** of Christ's humble, obedient, and disgraceful death (i.e., on a cross) that, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place" (Phil 2:9).

Finally, the purpose of Jesus' incarnation, and more particularly his death, finds expression at the end of Heb 2:9 (**so that . . .**). The greatest scandal of the Christian faith is Christ crucified. Paul said it is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). In the next section the preacher will demonstrate the appropriateness and necessity of Jesus' complete identification with humanity through suffering. For now, though, he anticipates that discussion by stating three important things about the purpose of Jesus' death:

First, the death of Jesus was initiated **by the grace of God**. Grace is at the heart of the gospel, in that God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rom 8:32). Death had come through Adam, but "how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (Rom 5:15). These are passages Chrysostom points out in his homily on our present text (1996, 383). He could have also pointed to Eph 1:6-7: "to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." God's grace is mentioned explicitly only a half-dozen more times in Hebrews (see 4:16 [two times]; 10:29; 12:15; 13:9, 25), but stands no less as the foundation (along with holiness) of God's dealings with humanity, for his throne is "the throne of grace" (4:16).

"By the grace of God" or "apart from God" (2:9)?

The reading "by the grace of God [*chariti theou*]" has early and widespread support among Greek NT manuscripts, including the important and early \mathfrak{B}^{46} . However, the variant reading "apart from God [*chōris theou*]," meagerly attested

in late Greek manuscripts and versions, was amply defended by many church fathers. Origen found it in some manuscripts as early as the third century.

Both readings figured into christological controversies. Orthodox writers, such as Athanasius and Ambrose, argued from the reading “apart from God” that the divine nature did not participate in Christ’s suffering (the doctrine of divine impassibility). Other Orthodox fathers, such as Oecumenius and Theophylact, accused the Nestorians of introducing this reading into the text (see the hurling of accusations back and forth in the selections from Oecumenius and Theodore of Mopsuestia in Heen and Krey 2005, 38-39).

While “apart from God” is the more difficult reading, its appearance is easily explained: a scribe mistook the word “by grace [*chariti*]” for “apart from [*chōris*].” Or, a marginal note (“apart from God”) for Heb 2:8, inspired by Paul’s qualification of Ps 8:6 in 1 Cor 15:27, was mistaken as a correction for the reading “by the grace of God” in Heb 2:9. A later scribe then transferred this marginal note into the text of 2:9.

Given the overwhelming textual support for “by the grace of God,” and the transcriptional probabilities for the rise of the variant reading “apart from God,” the former is likely to have been the original reading. Besides, that Jesus tasted death “by the grace of God” makes much more sense in the context (for more detailed discussion of this textual issue, see Metzger 1994, 594; Hughes 1977, 94-97).

Second, the death of Jesus was real. The phrase **taste death** may give the impression of a mere sampling, as some would interpret it (e.g., Chrysostom and Luther). However, this is a biblical idiom that indicates the real and personal experience of death (see Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27; John 8:52). Jesus drank his fill of death; he drained the bitter cup to its dregs.

Third, the death of Jesus was vicarious, that is, it was experienced on behalf of others. The scope of Jesus’ representation was universal. He tasted death **for everyone**. Jesus did not die for only a chosen few, but for the whole world (so, e.g., 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 Tim 2:4-6). He died even for those who might turn aside from him, and effectively crucify him all over again (Heb 6:6), trample him under foot, and desecrate his covenant blood that sanctified them (10:29).

b. Jesus’ Identification with Humanity (2:10-18)

Having mentioned the suffering of Jesus’ death in 2:9, the preacher now turns to an explanation of why it is that the Son became fully human—even to the point of death. The discussion is framed by statements about the appropriateness (2:10) and necessity (2:17a) of Jesus’ suffering.

The first part of the discussion (2:10-13) demonstrates the divine intention for Jesus to be in full solidarity with the people of God, not least with scriptural declarations by Jesus himself to this effect (2:12-13). The second part (2:14-18) details the benefits of Jesus’ sharing in our humanity, especially

his deliverance of the people of God from the fear of death (2:14-16), and his preparation for high-priestly service on their behalf before God (2:17-18).

■ **10** The core assertion in 2:10 is stunning: it was appropriate for God to perfect the author of salvation through suffering. The verb **it was fitting** (*eprepen*) stands at the head of the sentence in Greek. It refers to something that is fitting, suitable, or appropriate to someone or to a set of circumstances. The verb occurs only six other times in the NT in contexts where something is fitting in the sense either of being appropriate to meeting a need (as in 7:26) or being morally proper (Matt 3:15; 1 Cor 11:13; Eph 5:3; 1 Tim 2:10; Titus 2:1). Only here is the word used in reference to **God**.

There seems to be something inappropriate in deliberating about what might or might not be fitting for God. It is a train of thought much more at home in Hellenistic philosophy than in Jewish theology. Yet even in Hellenistic Jewish thought it would have been an impropriety to identify God with suffering humanity. Here in Hebrews, as in the rest of the NT, the appropriateness of God's action in the death of Christ is not in its accommodation to human need but in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. God is the **One for whom and through whom everything exists** (see Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:4-6). That is, in God may be found the origin and destiny of all things. The human tragedy of sin and death did not derail God from "the unchanging nature of his purpose" (Heb 6:17). The death of Christ was in accordance with the express will of God (10:5-10).

So how is it that the Son's death was appropriate for God? It was appropriate to God, whose essential character is described throughout all the Scriptures as gracious (or loving) and holy. These very same essential divine attributes flank our present verse, with grace in 2:9 and holiness in 2:11. The identification of Jesus with humanity through suffering and death fulfills both aspects of God's nature, while at the same time accomplishing God's purpose for humanity. How this is so will unfold only as we learn more concerning Jesus' atoning death and high-priestly ministry in Hebrews.

The purpose of God in perfecting Christ is to be found **in bringing many sons to glory**. Scholars debate whether the participle **bringing** (*agagonta*) belongs with God or with Jesus (i.e., **the author of . . . salvation**). Choosing between the two options is of no real consequence, though the latter is more likely. On the one hand, God's purpose is to bring many sons to glory—in other words, **their salvation**. Glorification is God's desired end for those who are in Christ (see Rom 8:30). On the other hand, the participle most certainly belongs with the following word in the Greek text (**author** [*archēgon*]), since the two words are in grammatical agreement (see deSilva 2000a, 112 n. 56). So, in fulfillment of God's purpose, Jesus is the One who brings **many sons to glory**. He stooped down into our world of suffering and was consequently crowned with glory and honor (2:7, 9), so that as our "forerunner" (6:20 NIV¹¹) he could lead us into the glorious presence of God.

In characteristic style, the preacher engages in a clever wordplay in this verse. The title for Jesus, **author** (*archēgos*), is difficult to render into English (→ 2:10 sidebar, “Jesus the Champion”). It is played off against two related words in this verse. The second part of *archēgos* is derived from the verb *agō* (“to lead, bring”), which is the root of the participle we have already encountered (*agagonta*, **bringing**, **leading**). Jesus, the “leader [*archēgos*],” “leads [*agagonta*]” **many sons to glory**.

The first part of the word *archēgos* is derived from the noun *archē*, “beginning.” This produces a pun with the word for **make . . . perfect** (*teleiōsai*), which means to bring something to its proper end or goal (→ 5:9 sidebar, “Playing with Beginnings and Endings”). Aside from this wordplay, to **make . . . perfect** also carries the connotation of Jesus’ being prepared or qualified for priestly ministry. The language of perfection (the verb *teleiōō* and noun *teleiōsis*) occurs in connection with the consecration of priests in the law of Moses (Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev 4:5; 7:27; 8:33; 16:32; 21:10; Num 3:3; see Lane 1991, 57-58).

Jesus the Champion

The title for Jesus in 2:10 (**author** [*archēgos*]) is difficult to translate, as evidenced by the many translations of the word: “author” (NASB, NIV); “leader” (NAB, NJB, NLT); “pioneer” (NIV¹¹, NRSV, REB); “founder” (ESV); “source” (GW, HCSB); “captain” (KJV); “lord” (TYNDALE). While not a rare word, neither is it commonplace, occurring twenty-seven times in the LXX with many different meanings, and only four times in the NT (Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb 2:10; 12:2), solely as a title for the risen, exalted Jesus.

The word had an archaic, literary flavor that conjured up images of ancient founders of cities, renowned patrons, or divine heroes. The context of 2:10-18 suggests that Jesus is being portrayed as a champion for the people of God, almost like the famous Greek hero Hercules who was the “champion [*archēgos*]” and “savior [*sōtēr*]” who triumphed over Death, “the dark-robed lord of the dead” (Euripides, *Alc.* 2.843-44; see Lane 1991, 56-57; Witherington 2007, 149). Jesus took on flesh and blood in order to triumph in mortal combat with the devil and deliver people from the fear of death. Thus, Jesus is the “the champion who initiates and perfects our faith” (12:2 NLT).

■ 11 That the perfection of God’s champion through suffering meant his qualification as high priest is confirmed in 2:11. Here Jesus is designated as the **one who makes people** [NIV¹¹] **holy**. To make **holy** (*hagiazō*), or to sanctify or consecrate, is the principal function of a priest. In a Jewish context, it involved cleansing people from their sins so as to prepare them for worship (1:3; 9:13-14, 22; 10:2, 22), marking them off as holy, that is, devoted to God. This is now accomplished through Jesus’ sacrificial death (10:10, 14, 29; 13:12).

The perfection of Jesus through suffering was appropriate and necessary, because the only way for people to be identified with a holy God is

through holiness (12:10, 14). **Both the one who makes *people* [NIV¹¹] holy [ho' *hagiazōn*] and those who are made holy (*hoi hagiázomenoi*)** are related to God through holiness.

Indeed, the source of all holiness is God. Both the sanctifier and the sanctified are “all of one” (as the KJV literally renders *ex henos pantes*). English versions generally translate the expression *ex henos* (“from one”) as a reference to God (“one Father” [HCSB, NASB, NRSV]; “same Father” [GW, NLT]), a reference more generally to “origin” (ESV, NAB, NET, RSV), or to membership in the **same family** (CEV, NCV, NIV; “of the same stock” [NJB]; “of one stock” [REB]). The following train of thought, focused on Jesus’ kinship with humanity, speaks in favor of the rendering of **the same family**. However, this translation too quickly puts the *result* of God’s work in Christ (note the **So** in 2:11b) in place of its *source* (implied by the preposition *ek/ex*, “from”). Furthermore, the masculine gender of the word *henos* (“one”), as well as the preceding designation of God as the One “for whom and through whom everything exists” (2:10), seem to indicate that the association between sanctifier and sanctified stems from only one source, God.

So, or more precisely, “For this reason [*di' hēn aitian*]” (NRSV) introduces the result of God’s holy work in perfecting Jesus and leading many sons to glory through his death and exaltation: **Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers**. The preacher uses a figure of speech called litotes—understatement (e.g., when “not a little” means “a lot, many” in Acts 12:18; 14:28; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:23; 26:29; 27:20). When it says Jesus is **not ashamed**, it means that he is *honored* to call them siblings (see Rom 1:16). God spoke similarly about the faithful patriarchs (Heb 11:16).

The irony is that the path to such an honorable position for both Christ and his siblings was through the disgrace of his suffering and death (see 13:12-13). Endurance of present disgrace in view of future glory was the same path pursued by Moses (11:26), and has already been experienced in some measure by the audience (10:36); but it is Jesus’ own example (“despising the shame” [12:2 ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV, RSV]; “bearing the disgrace” [13:13]) that encourages the Hebrew Christians to persevere in their faith to continue on as members of God’s family (3:6).

The words “brothers and sisters” (NIV¹¹) anticipate their appearance in the first Scripture quotation that follows in the next verse. A prominent facet of God’s saving work in Christ Jesus is the adoption of believers as children of God (Rom 8:15, 23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5) or heirs of the kingdom (Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 3:29; 4:7; 5:21; Eph 1:14, 18; 5:5; Col 3:24; Titus 3:7; Heb 1:14; 6:17; 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4; 3:9; Rev 21:7). “For those God foreknew,” writes Paul, “he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29).

■ **12** The scriptural demonstration of Jesus' sibling relationship with those he has sanctified follows in 2:12-13. Three passages from the OT are quoted. Two things are significant about them.

First, they are cited as quotations from Jesus himself. The word translated **He says** at the head of 2:12 does not actually start a new sentence in Greek. Rather, it completes the thought in 2:11 that Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers, *saying* . . . (*legōn*). To regard the scriptures as not only being about Christ, but spoken by him, is a unique aspect of Hebrews' use of Scripture.

Second, the author selects Scripture passages from contexts that were already well-known for their testimony to Christ, as we shall see.

The first quotation from Ps 22 was a scripture that deeply enriched the early church's understanding of Jesus' death. The preacher hears the voice of Jesus speaking in Ps 22:22: **I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.** Jesus acknowledges his "brothers and sisters" (NIV¹¹) in the **congregation** (*ekklēsia*, **church**; see Heb 12:23). The One who is worshiped by angels (1:6) humbled himself below angels to become the leader of the worshipping community. In Hebrews, Jesus' high-priestly ministry prepares believers to draw near to God in worship (4:16; 7:19; 10:19-22; 12:22-29 [esp. vv 24 and 28]; 13:15).

Psalm 22: Jesus as Sufferer and Worship Leader

2:12-13

Psalm 22 is notably connected with the passion of Christ in the NT (Ps 22:7 [Matt 27:39 and Mark 15:29]; 22:7-8 [Matt 27:43 and Luke 23:35-36]; 22:15 [John 19:28]; 22:18 [Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24]). Indeed, its very first line (Ps 22:1a) served as Jesus' last words from the cross in Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Hebrews likely quotes from this psalm because it was already recognized as a rich source for christological reflection. Uniquely, however, Hebrews quotes from the latter portion of the psalm, where the righteous sufferer praises God for his help (Ps 22:22). Here he actually hears the voice of Jesus himself, as the exalted high priest, leading the church into the presence of God to worship.

■ **13** The second and third passages in 2:13 come from the eighth chapter of Isaiah. Isaiah 8:14 was an important prophecy concerning the Christ as a stumbling block for Israel (Luke 2:34; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:8). In the original context of Isaiah, Yahweh foretold both doom and salvation for Israel by way of the names of Isaiah's children (Isa 8:1, 3; 7:3). In a time of national turmoil and unfaithfulness, the prophet resolved to trust God (Isa 8:17) and hold on to the tokens of divine providence given to him in the names of his children (Isa 8:18).

Once again, Hebrews hears in these verses the contemporary voice of Jesus. Perhaps the proximity of the prophecies concerning Immanuel in Isa

7:14 and the Wonderful Counselor in Isa 9:6 contributed to his being attuned to hearing the Messiah's voice in Isa 8.

In the second of the three scriptures, a quotation from Isa 8:17, Jesus says, **I will put my trust in him** (Heb 2:13a). Jesus has entered into solidarity with humanity through his unqualified trust in God. The hallmark of his humanity in Hebrews is his faithful obedience to God, especially in the face of suffering (5:7-8). His faithfulness qualifies him as the honored Son who is given charge over God's family (or "house"), and he is thus the great example of faithfulness for anyone who is a member of that household (3:1-6). Jesus' faithful endurance makes him "the author and perfecter" of faith (12:2). Paul, too, spoke of the key significance of "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:22 CEB, NET; Gal 2:16 CEB, NET; 3:22 CEB, NET).

The third passage in Heb 2:13b is added (**and again he says**) to complete the thought that Jesus has been united with the people of God. **Here am I**, Jesus says in the words of Isa 8:18, **and the children God has given me**. Those who belong to the family of God are not part of a club instituted by human beings. They are people who have responded to the divine call (3:1; 9:15; see Rom 8:28). They are, as Jesus asserts repeatedly in the Gospel of John, those whom the Father has given him (John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 7, 9, 24; 18:9).

■ 14 The Son participated fully in humanity so as to come to its rescue (Heb 2:14). The incarnation was a result (**Therefore** [oun]; untranslated in the NIV) of the divine intention for humanity's salvation. Likewise, the Son's suffering allowed him to experience fully the predicament of humanity. This was only appropriate, given the character of God revealed in Scripture (→ 2:10).

Picking up on the language from the scripture just quoted in 2:13b, the author points to **the children** whom Christ came to save. It is **since the children have flesh and blood that he too shared in their humanity**. What humanity **holds in common** (*kekoinōnēken*, have) is **flesh and blood**. The idiom **flesh and blood** does not refer simply to bodily existence. That could equally be communicated by the expression "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39; see Gen 2:23; Job 2:5). **Flesh and blood** emphasizes the inferiority of humanity to God (Matt 16:17; Gal 1:16), as well as frailty and mortality (1 Cor 15:50; see Sir 14:18). The latter connotation fits the following references to the power and fear of death (Heb 2:14b, 15). In Hebrews the word order is inverted to **blood and flesh** (as in Eph 6:11). By placing **blood** first, the author may subtly hint at Jesus' sacrificial death, a central theme in Hebrews (Isaacs 2002, 43).

Jesus' full participation in the human condition is expressed forcefully in the clause **he too shared in their humanity**. First, **he** is an emphatic personal pronoun in the Greek text, often translated "he himself" (ESV, KJV, NASB, NRSV). Second, Jesus' complete identification with humanity is doubly expressed. He **in just the same way** (*paraplēsiōs*, "similarly, likewise"; **too**) shared **in the same things** (*tōn autōn*, see ESV, NRSV; **their humanity**). Jesus' humanity was no

shadow or phantom. Hebrews stresses the identity of Jesus as a human being “in every way” (2:17).

Yet there is a distinction between humanity’s sharing in flesh and blood and Jesus’ participation in the same. Humanity’s participation is a long-standing state of affairs characteristic of its identity (perfect tense *kekoinōnēken*, “share, have a share,” **have**). But for Christ, human nature was not native to him. The divine Son **partook** of or **shared** (aorist tense *meteschen*) in human nature as a historical act in obedience to God’s will (10:5-10). Bengel notes that the verb for **shared** (*meteschen*) may express the likeness of one to the rest; **hold in common** (*kekoinōnēken*) to the likeness of many among one another (Bengel 1877, 4:364).

The incarnation has a twofold purpose: First, negatively, to destroy the one who held the power of death. Second, positively, to deliver those who were held captive by the fear of death.

The first prong of the purpose statement (*hina, so that*) is in 2:14b. Jesus came to **destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil**. Nowhere else in the Bible is the **power of death** so expressly attributed to the **devil**. However, a Christian reading of the story of humanity’s fall in Gen 3 reveals the devil’s role in deceiving Adam and Eve to take the path toward death (see also Wis 2:23-24). According to John 8:44 the devil is the primal murderer and liar, and in 1 John 3:12 Cain’s murder of his brother is the sin most intimately associated with one who belongs to the evil one.

HEBREWS

2:14

The devil does not possess the power of death inherently, but only by way of trickery and intimidation (Acts 13:10; Eph 6:11; 1 Tim 3:6-7; 2 Tim 2:26; Rev 12:9; 20:10), and cannot inflict a mortal blow unless God allows it (Job 1:12; 2:6). Christ came to **destroy** the devil. Here is the same verb (*katargeō*, “render powerless or ineffective”) used by Paul of the last enemy to be “destroyed”—death (1 Cor 15:26; see 2 Thess 2:8; 2 Tim 1:10; 1 John 3:8).

The means by which Jesus dealt a deathblow to the devil was by **his own death**. How can this be so? The preacher does not explain, but we may infer several things from what he says elsewhere in Hebrews about Jesus’ death: His death was in obedience to the will of God (10:10; see 5:7). His death was undeserved, for when tested through suffering he never sinned (2:18; 4:15). He is “holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners” (7:26) who endured such hostility from sinners (12:3).

Therefore, since he did not die on account of any sin he had done, his was a death purely for others. He “taste[d] death for everyone” (2:9) to ransom them from their sins (9:15; see 1:3; 2:17; 7:27; 9:26, 28; 10:12). Because his death was not due to his own sins, but an act of holy obedience, “it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:24; see Heb 7:16). In this way Jesus the champion (*archēgos* [2:10]) wielded the devil’s own instrument of terror and enslavement against him.

■ 15 The second, related purpose of Jesus' death is to free people from the fear of death. The dire condition of death's victims is described as persistent, enslaving fear. This death phobia is a chronic condition of human existence. It is "lifelong" (ESV; **all their lives**), so that it holds sway over all of our attitudes, decisions, and relationships. The enslavement is expressed redundantly as being held in [*enochoi*, "subject to" (ESV, KJV, NAB, NASB)] slavery (*douleias*).

Ancient Philosophy on the Fear of Death

Greco-Roman authors commonly compared the fear of death to slavery. Euripides wrote, "Are you a slave and afraid of death, which might set you free from suffering?" (*Orest.* 1522). Others commented on this famous line. Philo wrote "that nothing is so calculated to enslave the mind as fearing death through desire to live" (*Good Person* 22). Plutarch wrote, "Who can be a slave if he gives no heed to death" (*Mor.* 34b).

Ancient moral philosophers often spoke of the emotional well-being achieved by overcoming the fear of death. Epicureans sought to dissuade their students from fearing death by rationalizing that in the end it is really nothing at all. Death is merely the termination of one's existence, so one has no reason to fear eternal punishment (Lucretius, *Nat.* 1.102-26). The typical Epicurean epitaph was, "I wasn't, I was, I am not, I don't care." Stoics pointed to death as the ultimate escape from suffering or appealed to a sense of honor by encouraging people to face death nobly, as Socrates did. Seneca wrote that human reason "makes us joyful in the very sight of death, strong and brave no matter in what state the body may be" (*Ep.* 30.3).

In Hebrews, however, the preacher does not tackle the fear of death by diminishing its reality (9:27). Nor does he present Jesus' valiant battle with death merely as a noble example of how to endure suffering, though that it is. More than this, Jesus' own triumph over death means that he can "save completely" (7:25) from death's tyranny (2:14-15). Through his own suffering, the Son was perfected as "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:9). Believers have the hope that they are on the path to glory that their champion, Jesus, trail-blazed for them.

■ 16 The preacher interjects in a conversational manner, **For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants**. First, he marks his words emphatically with the word **surely** or **of course** (*dēpou*). Second, he abruptly switches to the present tense (**helps**). But what may appear as an interruption helps to tie together the discussions in 2:5-9 and 2:10-18 through references to angels (2:5, 7, 9, 16). The sermon has thus far been punctuated with comparisons between Jesus and angels (see also 1:4, 5, 6, 7, 13; 2:2). (Only two more references to angels will occur toward the close of the discourse [12:22; 13:2].) The reference to angels in 2:16 signals a conclusion to the introductory parts of the sermon and leads into the statement of facts (→ 2:17-18 and Behind the Text on 2:5-18).

The meaning of the verb *epilambanetai* (**helps**) has been the subject of debate. The church fathers (both Greek and Latin) unanimously translated this verb as “takes hold of,” and understood it to mean that the Son took upon himself human nature. This view was maintained by the Scholastics, as well as Reformers such as Calvin. Modern scholars have generally rejected this classical interpretation, opting instead for another attested meaning of the verb, “assist, help, be concerned about” (see esp. Sir 4:11). They have been followed by most English translations (“helps” [ESV, GNT, GW, HCSB, NAB, NASB, NCV, NIV, NLT, NRSV]; “concern” [NET]; “is concerned” [RSV]), with few exceptions (“took [or taketh] on” [KJV, TYNDALE]; “took [or takes] to himself” [NEB, NJB]; “become” [PHILLIPS]).

Neither of these interpretations does justice to the text of Hebrews. On the one hand, both **angels** and **Abraham’s descendants** are classes of beings, not anything as abstract as human nature or as concrete as “flesh and blood” that one would “take on.” In any case, despite the opinion of the church fathers (driven as it was by christological controversy), the verb *epilambanomai* is never employed in the sense “assume the nature of.” Even Chrysostom, who promotes the patristic interpretation, acknowledges that the text of Hebrews reads “takes hold of” not “took on him” (1996, 388).

On the other hand, a translation such as **helps** or “be concerned with” is far too weak. The verb strongly conveys the action of grasping, seizing, or taking hold of. Looking forward to 2:18, the preacher will only then explicitly state that Jesus comes to our aid, using the common and expected verb for **help** (*boētheō*). But grasping the meaning of *epilambanomai* in 2:16 is achieved by looking backward to the string of vivid images in 2:14-15.

Jesus is described as “break[ing] the power” (NIV¹¹) of the devil, who has death in his grip (*ton to kratos echonta*; lit., “who has the hold” [2:14]; note the cognate verb *krateō*, “hold fast” [4:14 ESV, KJV, LEB, NASB, NRSV; 6:18 ESV, LEB]). Consequently, Jesus can “free” or release (*apallaxē* [2:15]) people who have been “held” in slavery to the fear of death (*enochos*; “pert. to being held in or constrained” [BDAG, 338]). So Jesus *releases* people from the devil’s *hold* on death. He **takes hold of** (*epilabanetai* [2:16]) those who were *held* in slavery to the fear of death. The verb *epilambanomai* occurs only once more in Hebrews, in the quotation from Jer 31:32 in Heb 8:9. There likewise the action of grasping is for the purpose of deliverance.

Why does Jesus take hold of **Abraham’s descendants** (lit., “seed of Abraham”) rather than humanity in general? This expression has particular theological significance in connection with the theme of divine inheritance. That theme has resonated in the first chapter concerning both the Son (1:1, 4) and those he saves (1:14) in contrast with angels. The Son brings to fulfillment the promise to Abraham of numerous descendants (see 11:12) in his “bringing many sons to glory” (2:10). The heirs of the promise to Abraham are those who hold on firmly to the hope of salvation in Jesus Christ (6:11-20).

True, this hope is available to all, since Jesus tasted death for everyone (2:9). However, it avails only for those who become true sons (2:10; 12:5, 7-8). It is for those who are sanctified (2:11a) and are therefore brothers (2:11b, 12, 17; see 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:1, 22), partners with Christ (3:1, 14), members of the church (*ekklēsia* [2:12]; see 12:23), God's children (2:13-14), and God's "people [*laos*]" (2:17; see 4:9; 13:12).

■ **17-18** The comparison of Christ with angels ends in v 16. Thus, 2:17-18 serves as a conclusion, not only to the discussion in 2:10-18 concerning Jesus' solidarity with the people of God, but to everything spoken up to this point in the sermon. These two verses also comprise the proposition for the entire discourse. This announces the theme that will occupy the balance of the sermon.

The preacher announces for the first time that Jesus is the **high priest** (*archiereus* [2:17]). This is perhaps intended to play phonetically with the title *archēgos* ("author") in 2:10. One of Jesus' primary high-priestly actions is his making **atonement for . . . sins**. This forms a link with the beginning of the sermon, where the Son is said to have "provided purification for sins" (1:3c). The introduction of Jesus as high priest (2:17) is coupled with encouragement about his assistance in times of testing (2:18). We have in miniature, then, the preacher's procedure throughout the sermon: exposition about Christ as high priest and exhortation to persevere.

For this reason points forward to the purpose (**in order that**) for which Jesus' complete identification with humanity "was essential" (2:17 NJB). The suffering that was regarded as "fitting" (2:10) is a high-priestly obligation (2:17). The verb translated **he had to** (*ōpheilen*) is used in a similar context in 5:3 of a high priest's obligation to offer sacrifices.

Here the effectiveness of Jesus' high-priestly ministry depends upon his having **to be made like** humanity **in every way** (*kata panta*). Of course, **every way** encompasses his suffering and death. **To be made like** (*homoiōthēnai*) means that Jesus shared (*meteschen*) in the very same things that the children have in common (*kekoinōnēken* [2:14]). Specifically, he shared in the frailty and mortality of humanity. This made possible his perfection as high priest through suffering (2:10). Paul similarly says that God sent his Son "in the likeness [*en homoiōmati*] of sinful man to be a sin offering" (Rom 8:3).

Jesus' ministry extends to **his brothers**, already proudly named in 2:11, 12. This anticipates the preacher's direct address to the Hebrews as "holy brothers" in 3:1 and the succeeding discussion of the Son's leadership over God's household (3:1-6).

Thus, Jesus' complete identification with suffering humanity qualified him to **become a merciful and faithful high priest**. He is **merciful** (*eleēmōn*; "compassionate" [NJB]) in that he is able to "sympathize with our weaknesses" because he "has been tempted in every way, just as we are [*kata panta kath' homoiotēta*]"—yet was without sin" (4:15; compare **he was tempted . . . those who are being tempted** [2:18]). Therefore, we can "approach the throne of

grace with confidence” to “receive mercy [*eleos*] and find grace to help us in our time of need [*boētheia*]” (4:16; compare **help**, *boēthēsai* [2:18]). One can see how the complete likeness, mercy, and help in temptation in 4:15-16 mirror what we find in 2:17-18.

Jesus’ high-priestly ministry is **in service to God** (*ta pros ton theon*; lit., “in things pertaining to God” [NASB]). This somewhat uncommon biblical expression is used in contexts in which a minister represents God (Exod 4:16; 18:19; Deut 31:27; Rom 15:17). Both occurrences of the expression in Hebrews (2:17; 5:1) relate to a high priest’s representation of the people in matters pertaining to God, especially in connection with offering sacrifices: **that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.**

Propitiation, Expiation, or Atonement?

For the rendering **that he might make atonement** the NIV offers another translation in a footnote: “that he might turn aside God’s wrath, taking away [the sins of the people]” (2:17 NIV^{m8}). This combines two competing views of how to translate the Greek verb *hilaskomai* (and the related words *hilastērion* [Rom 3:23] and *hilasmos* [1 John 2:2; 4:10]).

First, “That he might turn aside God’s wrath” reflects the traditional translation “make propitiation” (HCSB, ESV, NASB, NKJV). Second, “taking away [sins]” reflects “make expiation” (REB, RSV; or “expiate” [NAB, NJB]). A more recent trend is to translate the verb as **make atonement** (NIV, NET) or “make a sacrifice of atonement” (NRSV). This avoids the theological debate, as well as the contested sacrificial terms with which most English readers are unfamiliar.

Many modern NT scholars deny the notion of appeasing or conciliating God in the biblical use of the verb *hilaskomai*, despite its widespread use in this sense in the ancient Greek world. It seems objectionable that God’s wrath would need to be averted through Christ’s sacrifice. Therefore, arguments have been made for interpreting this word group in connection with removing or wiping out sins (expiation) rather than placating God’s anger toward sins (propitiation).

However, God’s steady, holy hostility toward sin (i.e., his wrath and judgment; see Heb 2:3; 3:10-12, 17-18; 4:3; 6:7-8) is not incompatible with his equally strong love for sinners. Only through the cross could both aspects of the divine nature be adequately put into action: God’s condemnation of sin (in which his wrath toward it is exhausted) and his love for sinful humanity.

In Hebrews, continued commitment to the sanctifying work of Christ’s sacrifice is essential to being delivered from God’s wrath. Missing out on the grace of God (12:15) and sinfully rejecting Christ’s sacrifice (10:26, 29) can only expose one to “a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (10:27; see 12:29). “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31). Therefore, God graciously sent Jesus to “taste death for everyone” (2:9), “to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (2:17 ESV).

In line with what has already been noted (see comments on “Abraham’s descendants” [2:16]), Christ’s high-priestly work is effected especially on be-

half of the **people** of God whom he represents. This people is in historical continuity with the people of Israel, but not merely genetically. The most important links between the Hebrews addressed by the preacher and God's ancient people of Israel are viewed through examples of faithful (6:12-18; 11:1—12:2) or unfaithful responses to God's promises (3:7—4:13; 12:16-17). It is to this topic that the preacher will turn in chs 3—4.

Jesus' ability to help [*boēthēsai*] **those who are being tempted** (2:18) is a clear example of his qualification as a **merciful . . . high priest, . . . because he himself suffered when he was tempted**. That Jesus is **faithful** (*pistos*) is likewise associated with his faithful obedience to God in the face of suffering and death (→ 2:13a above). Jesus' faithfulness will be highlighted in the following passage (3:1-6).

FROM THE TEXT

Hebrews is one of the most important contributors to our understanding of Christology. The preacher could scarcely relate more fully both the deity and humanity of Christ. Chapter 1 clearly demonstrated the deity of the Son. Chapter 2 (particularly vv 10-16) could not more strongly articulate the full extent of Jesus' identification with humanity. The preacher is not concerned with the debates in philosophical theology pertaining to the two natures of Christ. This was not settled until A.D. 451 with the Definition of Chalcedon. Rather, he is concerned with the question so ably put by Anselm of Canterbury in the title of his influential work on the atonement, *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became Man").

Hebrews captures the cosmic drama of the Son's descent "for a little while lower than the angels" to reach the lowest ebb of human existence—death. He is fully aware that Christ's death was degrading and base in the eyes of the culture around him (→ above Behind the Text sidebar, "The Scandal of Christ's Suffering"). But Jesus' death was actually honorable and courageous, since it was for a noble cause (see Aristotle's exposition of courage in *Eth. nic.* 1115a1-1115b12). Hebrews 2:14-15 may well be the earliest vivid portrayal of the so-called Christus Victor ("Christ the Victor") understanding of the atonement. Jesus is the *archēgos* or champion who successfully takes on the Herculean task of destroying the devil and rescuing humanity from death's tyrannical grip of fear. Yet Jesus' death is also viewed as a propitiatory sacrifice (2:17c).

The death of Christ was appropriate because it was grounded in the nature of God, who is gracious and holy (2:9c, 11). But it was also necessary because it was only through taking on mortality that he could defeat it. So Jesus, as Anselm explained, did what only God *could* do but what only human beings *ought* to do. It was in his obedient humanity, in fact, that Jesus revealed the love and holiness of God most clearly. Christ as "the man for others" (to borrow Dietrich Bonhoeffer's phrase) was the quintessential man for God.

What then should our response be to this mighty champion who in an epic struggle with the devil freed us from the paralyzing fear of death? For modern readers the conclusion in 2:17-18 might almost seem like an anticlimax, since we are not familiar with the figure of a high priest and we are not nearly as obsessed with the dangers of temptation as first-century Jews and Christians were. The great achievement on our behalf by Jesus, the Great High Priest, is that through his death and exaltation he brings us to God. But “bringing many sons to glory” requires them to be “made holy” (2:10-11). This is why being cleansed from sin and avoiding yielding to temptation are so important.

In Hebrews we can see the beginnings of the doctrine of *theosis* (“divinization”) formulated by Greek fathers such as Irenaeus and Athanasius. In Jesus, God became human, so that we could become like God. In the language of Hebrews, Jesus shared (*meteschen* [2:14]) in our humanity so that we could also be sharers (*metochoi*) in his “heavenly calling” (3:1; see 3:14; 6:4; 12:8). This becomes possible because we share in the family likeness of Jesus’ faithfulness, courage, hope, and, holiness (2:11a; see 12:14). This is why he came, to make us true children of God (2:11b, 13b; see 12:4-17).

B. Hearing God’s Word Today: Jesus the Apostle and High Priest of Our Confession (3:1—4:13)

Normally the statement of facts would be followed by a series of proofs, that is, the main arguments of a speech. (→ Behind the Text for 2:5-18.) But this is not what we find in chs 3—4 of Hebrews. Rather, we find a kind of “second *exordium*,” as Quintilian might call it, which “may form a very useful preparation for the examination of the main question,” and can be offered “with a view to exciting or mollifying the judge or disposing him to lend a favouring ear to our proofs” (*Inst.* 4.3.9).

Such a digression (Gk. *parekbasis*; Lat. *egressus* or *egressio*) is “the handling of some theme, which must however have some bearing on the case, in a passage that involves digression from the logical order of the speech” (Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.3.14). It could be used in virtually any part of a speech. It could involve amplifying or abridging a topic, making an emotional appeal, or introducing topics that add charm and elegance to oratory, such as “luxury, avarice, religion, duty.” “But these would hardly seem to be digressions as they are so closely attached to arguments on similar subjects that they form part of the texture of the speech” (*Inst.* 4.3.15).

Hebrews 3—4 is a sort of repeat performance of the *exordium* in 1:1—2:4. It compares Jesus and Moses (3:1-6), albeit more succinctly than the comparison between the Son and angels in 1:1-14. In both instances Jesus proves to be superior, with a better name in 1:4 and “greater honor” in 3:3.