

Expanding the Letter to the Hebrews from Within

Introduction

This document came into existence as the result of three shorter essays written not long before it, *The First City*, *Mystery People* and *On the Idea of Returning*. All deal with different topics yet are related even though I had no intent to make them as such. Before moving into Hebrews itself, let's look at the two points of connection among them all because they tie in with each other in some way or other.

In a way, the first is the most important insofar as it represents a time when I began to develop an approach to scripture different from the one to which I had been accustomed. In that article I recounted events starting from when Adam and Eve had been banished from the Garden of Eden through the founding of the first city and then on to the flood. Cain, who had murdered his brother Abel, became a wanderer and eventually settled down to found the world's first city which he named Enoch, that is, after his son. From then on, human civilization began a downward spiral which forced the Lord to destroy every living thing on earth in order to renew creation. All these events are mythic in that they point to more profound realities than any historical ones.

The second article examines references to healing in the Gospel of St. Matthew with special attention given to the various scenarios of what could have happened to those whom Jesus had cured. For the most part these people remain anonymous which conveys a certain sense of mystery. Like us some two thousand years later, they had real lives and had to go on with them. They simply didn't stop frozen in a particular space and time.

The third essay deals with the idea of *metanoia*, the familiar Greek word for conversion which means literally a placing of our mind (*nous*) after (*meta*), this "after" being our normal mode of living. Obviously *metanoia* signifies a completely different orientation from earlier habits and customs, all for the better. Not just that, *metanoia* doesn't occur in a given moment in time, and that's it. Instead, it's a way of living rooted in the person of Jesus Christ as has been established from all eternity. We're simply returning to it more as a kind of home-coming. In a general sense we could say that those persons whom Jesus had healed underwent a *metanoia*. They returned to where they had started off but in a wholly transformed way.

The three documents just mentioned took on their specific forms after I had completed a number of "expansion" texts dealing with scripture along with various

other articles, all posted on this Lectio Divina site. In the process of composing these documents a kind of unifying realization began to dawn. That's putting it in a rather vague way, but it has some truth to it. Actually this new approach had been percolating just below the surface for some time, and I'd catch glimpse of it now and then. The customary "expansion" approach is perfectly fine but revealed a number of insights I felt needed to be expressed differently. In other words, I was groping around for a way to bring to light what I wanted. Now in this lengthy document as well as the above mentioned three articles the process finally got under way. By no means has it reached a completion. So how did I get it underway? First of all, the relative elusive character of the three articles turned out to be an advantage instead of a disadvantage. I decided not to search for insights in a direct fashion but indirectly...from the corner of my eye...while being fully attentive to the text at hand.

Once this had come into clearer focus, the next step was to make it fall into place...to come alive. The solution was simple. Why not adopt a story-like approach? It doesn't involve introducing fanciful elements but looking at a text (Hebrews being the one at hand) and allowing it to breath in and out...expand...in a lateral fashion, if you will. This would happen within the confined space of the text itself. As for telling a story, you don't do much preparation in the conventional sense. You allow yourself to be caught up in the excitement of talking about something you really love and wish to share it with other people. This makes the narrative run on its own without you interfering. Such is the key. ¹

The approach here is to look at the original Greek text in the spirit of *lectio divina* which keeps in line with all the other documents posted on this homepage. Plenty of fine scholarly material on Hebrews exists and should be referenced as needed. However, all this is secondary to allowing the Book of Hebrews lead the reader into the presence of God. As for the book itself, nobody knows who is the author. Indeed, we're dealing with a true Mystery Man which makes it all the more intriguing. So with this information out of the way, we can jump in and see what happens. To a certain degree the text is open-ended and therefore subject to ongoing modifications.

1 Please note that a document entitled **Notes on the Letter to the Hebrews** is posted on this same homepage. It follows the usual pattern of expanding the text from within through the medium of *lectio divina*. The document at hand is different, however, insofar as it follows the just mentioned story approach even though there's some unavoidable overlapping. Actually this is the first time on the Lectio site that two documents are written with regard to one biblical book.

It's worth pointing out that the document at hand has a superabundance of references to prepositions either associated with words or prefaced to them. Admittedly this drags down the flow of the text. However, without this, an essential—perhaps the most essential ingredient—would be missing.

Please note that as you move further into the text, some transliterated words from the Greek as well as the Hebrew are followed by the minus sign in brackets, [-]. That means the word has occurred previously in one or more places. Also it prevents redefining these frequently occurring words. If the transliterated word is within a pair of parentheses along with a transliterated word, the minus sign will be included as well. As for prepositions which are prefaced to words, they are indicated by a dash or - inserted right after them, for example, *kata-*.

A final observation for what it's worth before getting down into business. Composing this document necessitated frequent pauses. The reason? When reading Hebrews in the original Greek with the intent of building ideas around the text as they're presented here, often you find yourself put into a kind of slow mode. Invariably this leads to frequent pauses in order to take it all in. You don't do it on your own, but it's done to you, an amazing experience, really.

The scriptural translation is from the **Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition** (San Francisco, 2006).

Chapter One

As noted in the Introduction, the author of Hebrews is unknown which means we're embarking on an adventure of learning about Jesus Christ from someone about whom we haven't a clue. While authorship used to be attributed to St. Paul, scholars have pretty much abandoned that premise which is perfectly fine for our purposes here. Actually it's refreshing to have a set of eyes other than Paul's even though we don't know their owner.

As for any relationship between the author and St. Paul, we don't know if the two were contemporaries, whether or not they knew each other or of each other. The question is irrelevant for our purposes here. Clearly a cursory look at the text reveals that our mystery man had something profound and original to say and was fully aware of it. The best way was to cultivate a certain anonymity so he could express himself more fully. Even if during his life people tended to associate him with St. Paul, he could care less. A desire to usurp the apostle's ideas was the last thing of his

concern. Instead, he wanted his own ideas to get out there as quickly and as efficiently as possible. We can imagine him taking the greatest delight in seeing other people profit from what he had to say as he basked in his anonymity.

On the other hand, let's say we did know his identity. While the content of his letter remained the same, something hard to pin down suddenly went missing. Instead, we'd be all worked up about the role of such-and-such a person in the early Church, a complete waste of time. For others to take delight in his letter was all that concerned him. So to remain anonymous is a way of being close to God. This may be the final lesson of Hebrews, not stated aloud but inferred. Even much later when the association with St. Paul had been stripped away, the identity of our mystery man managed to elude detection and most likely will continue to do so. Let's hope this is the case.

As for the author, he isn't invisible in the absolute sense. Should we be quiet enough, we can hear him encouraging us to read on and not squander our time over figuring out his identity. To him this would be an outright trivial matter. Nevertheless, we can get to know him on a level just as good if not better than any other New or Old Testament author. So let's us comply with his desire to remain out of sight while being aware of his encouraging support. The text itself is where he wants our attention to be focused. A caveat, if you will. Should anyone discover this person's identity, please don't inform us. It'd spoil everything.

Hebrews starts out with a specific purpose in mind, addressing those who have converted from Judaism to the new religion we know now as Christianity. Obviously these people have put their lives on the line and require as much encouragement as possible. Should they stick with the letter addressed to them, they will find much support in their new-yet-old faith. Some may have received encouragement already from other converts who were privileged to know the author. They reported enthusiastically how he sprinkles his letter heavily with Old Testament witnesses that must have been familiar to them. As for the author's anonymity or his supposed identity with St. Paul, that wasn't an issue for the first readers and hearers². They knew instinctively that he was one of their own compared with being a Gentile.

² There were more listeners than readers at the time. Chances are someone would read the letter aloud and perhaps followed by a discussion.

The book ³ starts off with a certain flourish, not unlike a good story teller would begin his tale. “God spoke of old,” “our fathers” and “the prophets” are words that lend a certain drama coupled with nostalgia, getting us in the mood to sit back and enjoy what is to follow. Also these people represent an era when God spoke directly through prophetic witnesses. Even though times have changed radically, they remain very much familiar and alive. In fact, readers and listeners alive when Hebrews was written couldn’t get enough of it. After all, these people are responsible for passing on to us what these biblical witnesses meant to them. While the written record is important, the oral approach to teaching as in churches was just as important if not more so. That means each generation is encouraged to listen carefully and make sure what he hears registers in his memory. By some miracle, it did happen. Each generation was faithful in passing on what they heard to the succeeding generation. Such is how a tradition is maintained.

As for starting off with a flourish, note the two adverbs at the very beginning, *polumeros* and *polutropos*. The adjective *polus* (much, many) is prefaced to two nouns, making them into adverbs. They are *meros* and *tropos*, part or share and *tropos*, direct, course or way. And so we end up with many parts and many ways—components that require assembly—which are effected by God speaking or *laleo*. The context of this verb suggests a certain casualness God wishes to communicate to make those on the receiving end relaxed and better disposed to receive its contents. Associated with this verb is the adverb *palai*, formerly, of old. What more could one ask for in order to prep not just the reader but for him to pass on what he is hearing to the next generation.

The **RSV** beginning vs. 2 has “but” which is lacking in the Greek though the text slides right into “these last days” from the *polumeros* and *polutropos* of vs. 1. The slide, if you will, is all the more direct by reason of the preposition *epi* with regard to “last days,” literally as “upon last days.” As for this adjective, *eschatos* is more significant than last as in a sequence of events. It has an element of extremeness about it, the end-of-the-line beyond which there is nothing. Furthermore, that end is right now, not off in some la-la land. The demonstrative pronoun “these” bring this *eschatos* front and center to those who are mentioned above and who are tuned in, not lurking in the background.

Vs. 2 also uses *laleo* but in a very important way or more precisely, in *the* most important manner, that is, with respect to “a Son.” Note the lack of a definite article

³ “Letter” often is used in translation which isn’t quite true because Hebrews is more an essay or sermon (from the **NIV Study Bible**). As for the title in Greek, it’s *Pros Hebraios*, *pros* more as “to” or “for the sake of”.

which means that in the mind of our anonymous author no alternative exists. Thus we have *laleo* with the dative of “us” and the preposition *en* or “in” prefaced to *Huios*, Son, “in Son.” So if this *laleo* is “to us in Son,” our author needs to specify the identity of this Son who lacks a proper name. Most people know his identity from other sources. The author does too but is coy the way he presents him. That goal is to fix people squarely within a frame of mind to accept an interpretation of Son as he sees the nascent church presenting it. If he can pull it off and get people interested, he will have accomplished something very important. And so the importance of *laleo* -> us with dative case -> *Huios* [-] with the preposition *en* can't be stressed enough.

Despite this information about Son, people need to hear more about him else they'd lose attention, go off on some bizarre tangent of their own or fall under the spell of others who are less informed. Son implies a father and mother. The audience's expectations are rooted in this natural relationship and if not handled properly, it will pose a genuine conundrum. We can assume...hopefully so...that our author has a solution in mind and not propose a divine mother. Actually, it'd come as no surprise if he had been tempted to place the Virgin Mary in this role. The task of sorting all this out was left to our author's disciples and those well informed. After all, they were dealing with the first steps in a long, drawn-out process of developing a new theology. It isn't expect to come out whole and entire all at once.

Quickly our author realized an immediate step had to be taken. He does this by proposing that God had appointed the Son as heir of all things, the one through whom he had created the ages. *Kleronomos* consists of two words: *kleros* or a lot and *nomos* or usage, custom. What the Son has inherited is not something partial regardless of how wonderful it is but literally everything, *panton* (literally, 'of all'). As for the *tithemi* (to put or to place) involved, it's a direct consequence of *laleo* or to speak and implies permanence.

This *tithemi* [-] includes the fact that the Son is one through whom God had created the ages, *poieo* being the common verb to make in the sense of to fashion. *Aion* or ages aren't limited to such and such a past time but include the present and everything to come, this word being a period of existence. If one is disposed to accept this all-inclusiveness, any question as to the Son's mother is bound to fall by the wayside. The same applies to the notion of father though that term is implied in a tacit way with regard to how God is presented here.

While still not divulging the name of the Son, our anonymous author continues reflecting on this equally anonymous person's nature. Perhaps he wants to keep it that way as long as possible, a kind of personal secret preference. Admittedly it's

starting to get frustrating for first-time readers. After all, they're new to the faith and believe they have a right to know more about the identity of this Son. Who can blame them?

At first glance in vs. 3 the Son can be taken as a divine mirror in the sky which reflects light passively. Instead, he emits brightness, *apaugasma* being a noun and connotes an effulgence or a beaming-from. As for the radiation given off, it's *doxa* or glory belonging to God which you'd tend to think of as something coming from within and passing to the outside. However, the *doxa* at hand comes from *apaugasma* (let's say for want of better words) in a co-equal fashion. Not only that, the Son is carrying around with him at all times the stamp of God's nature. This can be mistaken as something somewhere out there imposed on the Son. While we know this isn't true, it's useful up to a point in order to clarify things.

As for *charakter*, it's a stamp making an impression as on wax which means it has to be pressed down with some force and remain there in order to render a clear picture of what represents. That happens to be God's nature or *hupostasis*, literally a standing-under and connotes an element of duration and stability over time. How long this stamp remains pressed from above down on the Son, we don't know. It doesn't seem to be a permanent situation but more the result of an impression. Nevertheless, the image reflects a profound relationship between Son and God. The two are inseparable which the anonymous author wishes to convey and can be taken as the Son-in-God and God-in-Son. Besides, a *charakter* is associated with some kind of official representation or a few words or both. It is different from yet similar to the idea of an heir of vs. 2.

While the idea of a *charakter* [-] conveying authority to the Son is intended for him, the universe is included, this being rendered as *ta panta*, literally "the all." That, of course, covers pretty much everything though it is secondary to the divine nature of the Son and the equally divine *charakter* he's bearing. This may seem a matter-of-fact statement but to people new to the faith it's an incredible insight. Despite the enormity of what they see around them in nature, especially the night sky, it's all secondary to the Son and God...actually almost too good to be true.

In addition to the Son who has God impressed in him after the image of a stamp, he is upholding "the all" (*ta panta* -). One can't but help think of the image of Atlas bearing the world. As for bearing this weight, the verb is *phero* meaning to carry around as something laid on oneself. Despite the immensity involved, the Son bears it as light as a feather which is unlike the image of Atlas. That is to say, he does it by a *rhema* which is a spoken word, something for him uttered almost in a casual

manner and in one instant. Associated with *rhema* is *dunamis*, power or might which is exerted all at once yet with great discretion.

The second sentence of vs. 3 speaks of the Son having made purification for sins, *katharismos* pertaining more to the performance of a rite which means people are in attendance as witnesses. That means many if not most people attentive to the text know what's involved, and it doesn't require an explanation. The purification is not done privately or in isolation from the local community. In the context at hand *katharismos* pertains to sins, *hamartia* which also means failure. One can't but help wonder what a first century Jew or new Christian thinks of sin. Much of it comes from tradition which presents it not so much as belonging to the individual but to the community as a whole. So for an individual may be guilty of sin, in most instances he or she is violating a communal agreement or covenant.

Once the Son had done this ritual *katharismos* he sits down, *kathizo* ⁴. That means he could have gotten up from the same place or from another one, did what was necessary, and returned. In the meanwhile he was essentially standing. In the text at hand note the two occurrences of the preposition *en* or "in" with regard to *kathizo*: the right hand of *megalosune* or majesty and the adjective *hupselos* or high which often refers to heaven. That means the *kathizo* is done outside time and space or literally, above space (*hupselos*).

The mystery of the still unidentified Son continues in vs. 4 which is an extended sentence from the previous verse. As a result of the *katharismos* just described, somehow he has become better (*kreitton*). Implied is that the Son was not better before this cleansing and required it be done to him. However, *kreitton* pertains to angels, *aggelos* also as a messenger whose function is to announce. Once that's accomplished, he gets out of the way asap. This comparative doesn't pertain to the Son's nature but to his relationship with these messengers. Also involved is the name (*onoma*) obtained, *kleronomeo* more as something he has inherited, this intimating *kleronomos* [-] in vs. 2.

Not coming out clearly and speaking of the Son's identity is frustrating, all the more so because the name he had inherited is described as being more excellent than that of the angels. The adjective is *diaphoroteros*, the comparative of *prodiaphoros* (different), unlike where the preposition *dia-* (through) assists in making this difference all the more apparent...more excellent being a good choice of words as we have here. *Diaphoros* is used with the preposition *para* translated as "than" but also can mean as set beside or nearby which fits in with the comparison being made. As

⁴ One can't but help notice the two instance of the four letters *kath-*.

for that comparison, the Son isn't on the same plane as an *aggelos* but remains as he is in and by himself. This, of course, is all the more frustrating for any newcomers to the faith. While it provides a bit more information, still they don't know his identity, just these various titles which to the uninitiated could apply to anybody.

Vs. 5 has two rhetorical questions with regard to angels or messengers which are connected with the conjunctive *kai* and adverb *palin* translated as "or again." Apparently our author has been receiving inquiries about how the angels fit in with the Son—is he one of them or not?—and feels a real need to address this. Easily one can see that the Son's sending by the Father can be confused with how angels are sent to deliver messages. The problem boils down not so much as to the distinction between the two but to the idea of sending because the two have a lot in common with each other. Since both are sent, albeit in different ways, easily one can claim that in the end they must have the same message. Here our author has to see the similarity (i.e., the sending) and be careful as to make a distinction between how each is sent.

As for the two rhetorical questions, our author presents them in a straight-forward manner, not expecting an answer because they're intended as an introduction to the topic at hand. He knows that his readers are acquainted with scripture, so he decides to situate his approach within that context. In this way it's authority will step in and help him along. As for the first question from Ps 2.7,⁵ he puts in the mouth of the Lord words claiming that he has begotten the Son *semeron* or today...not yesterday or the like but right now. The Lord would concur with this; actually the angels would go along as well because they are on the author's side, wishing that he clarify this distinction. Because angels are God's messengers, never would he elevate one to the rank of a Son who remains unidentified as far as a name goes. On the human level such an elevation would be equivalent for a head of state to appoint a messenger boy as second in charge of the government.

As for the next rhetorical question, the words *kai palin* noted above serve to present it in a matter-of-fact way, simply to get it out there along with the first one. In this way he hopes to resolve any confusion so he can move on. The author does this by

⁵ Note that the author cites several verses from the Psalter. That's a wise choice because most of those whom he's addressing are Jews who use the Psalter both for personal and private worship. At first glance it seems tedious to insert the full scriptural passage as here and elsewhere. However, it's necessary if we want to consider the text at hand from the *lectio divina* point of view. Also if we really wanted to stretch things out, notes on both the Hebrew and Greek verses can be presented. However, that would be enlarging the text unnecessarily.

putting the question in God's mouth, namely, that he will be a father which automatically makes the person being addressed a son. Note that action is in the future both with regard to God and to the son compared with the present tense of the first rhetorical question. That is, the one whom God is addressing is not yet a son but is on the road to being one, if you will.

The reference cited is 2 Sam 7.14-15, the two verses comprising one sentence and reads in full as "I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my merciful love from him as I took it from Saul whom I put away from before you." Such words come from the Lord to King David who wanted to make a suitable dwelling for the Lord. At the same time we have a kind of veiled threat. Should David disobey, he could end up like Saul. As for the citation in the text at hand, note two uses of the preposition *eis* or into: literally as "into father" and "into son." Indeed, that's full penetration of one with regard to the other.

While vs. 5 attempts to resolve any confusion concerning the Son and angels through the two rhetorical questions, vs. 6 moves on beginning with *hotan de palin* which the RSV translates as "and again." So instead of any rhetorical questions we have three fairly lengthy scriptural citations. We could say that they flow from them and continue for the rest of the chapter. In vs 6 our author speaks of bringing the first-born (*prototokos*) into the world, *oikoumene* being not just the world but inhabited regions which for the time was the Mediterranean/Roman Empire. Even mention of *prototokos* suggests other sons and possibly daughters who don't share the same privileges. Also the way *eisago* or bringing-into (*eis-*) is presented infers no mother is involved, just the relationship between God and the son.

The way vs. 6 presents it, there's a relationship between *eisago* and *lego* or to say in the sense of recount which leads directly to two quotes. The first is Dt 32.43 (Septuagint) "Rejoice you heavens with him, and let all the angels of God worship him." The second is Ps 97.7: "All worshipers of images are put to shame who make their boast in worthless idols; let all his angels bow down before him." Both are singled out, it seems, because angels are mentioned in the context of worshipping God. Such worship is the primary function when not on messenger duty which in effect is rare. The Hebrews verse cites more directly the first, the verb being *proskuneo* (to make obeisance), the verbal root being *kuneo* or to kiss with the preposition *pros* prefaced to it, indicative of direction toward-which. Although our author doesn't come right out and say it, he's inferring that the object of worship...this *pros + kuneo*...is the Son of vs. 5.

He continues in vs. 7 with a fourth scriptural verse concerning angels, presenting them in rapid-fire succession. This time it's Ps 104.4 which is part of an extended sentence beginning in vs. 1 and reads as follows: "who make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers." Here we have two functions, angels or messengers and servants or ministers which in the Hebrew are *mal'ak* and the participle *sharath*, the latter connoting a waiting upon ⁶. So while the first applies to someone going out to deliver a communication, the second implies something of the opposite, that one remains in the presence of a superior. With regard to the Psalm quote, fire can apply to natural events such as forest fires and flames to lightning. And so this awesome power is a way the Lord conveys to people his transcendence over creation.

Vs. 8 shifts gears with *pros de* or "but of," the preposition *pros* indicative of direction toward-which with the conjunctive *de* conveying an adversarial sense. Now our author is speaking of the Son, the last time being vs. 5 with regard to Ps 2.7. The scriptural verse is Ps 45.6-7 which runs according to the **RSV**: "Your divine throne endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity; you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows." If we stick with this verse, the person being addressed is the king on his wedding day as noted in vs. 1.

A key word which must have gotten the author's attention is the verb *mashach* (to anoint) because ties in nicely with Christ as the Anointed One, i.e., the Messiah. Such oil is one of gladness, *agalliasis* which is not simply joy but great joy with regard to any associates of the person involved. The reason for this *mashach* (*chrio*)? The king has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness (the Hebrews text), the two verbs being *agapao* and *miseo*; *agape* derived from the former while the latter also means to despise. The text adds scepter, *rhabdos* (also a rod), symbolic of kingly authority. So combine this with being *mashach* as someone who *agapao* and you have in a nutshell a thumbnail picture of the Son with regard to those who are being addressed. Still, those listening have yet to hear of this Son's identity which increases their curiosity all the more. One thing they have intuited. He must be important for the author to take such meticulous pains in his approach.

Vs. 10 begins with the simple conjunctive *kai*—nothing more—indicative that the Lord wants to rush through with his remaining psalm references to the Son. He doesn't want to hurry through them but get them out there as quickly and concisely as possible. In the way his readers will be primed to know the Son whose identity cannot be concealed much longer. Again, it is a calculated approach. This time Ps

⁶ The Greek has the pairs *aggelos* and *pneuma*, *leitourgos* and *puros* with *phlox*.

102.25-27 is fairly substantial and presented as such: “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end.”

If you were the author, you'd ask what made you pick out these verses to associate them with the Son. That is, you'd be on the hunt for key words...those that strike you...such as *mashach* or anointed. Also you'd be struck by sharp contrasts such as the one in vs. 10 or between heaven and earth. However, they're destined to pass away while God remains the same. The two key words in Hebrew? 'Avad and hamad, the contrast between to perish and to stand firm. While not speaking directly of angels, the author is building his case to say that while the Son is superficially like them as far as sending goes, in essence they are miles apart. We can assume that the angels are listening in on this and if asked, they'd concur hardheartedly. This means that not only do they recognize their place and role as messengers but are completely content with it.

In a masterful stroke our author returns (and concludes) with the angels, putting the next-to-last verse of this chapter as a rhetorical question followed by a second one in last verse. Ps 110.1: “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.’” Clearly this doesn't belong to a messenger regardless how exalted it may be. Even more impressively, we have two lords which in Hebrew are YHWH and 'adony, the famous, untranslatable name for the Lord and the other one, if you will, 'adony (also as master) though not on the same level as the former. Nevertheless, this apparent address from a superior to one below him never can be applied to an angel. This is sufficient for now, an introduction to the author's readers who are Hebrew. He's doing all he can to prime them to show that Jesus Christ is equivalent to the Lord or YHWH. I.e., one step at a time.

As for the sitting at the right hand of YHWH, it's a sign not of subjection in the sense of being inferior but of being equal. Sitting (*yashav*) can be taken two ways: equality as well as permanence and as a temporary state, this governed by the small but important *had* (until) while *shyth* is being enacted which means to put in the sense of place. I.e., there's a parallel between two types of putting, *yashav* and *shyth*⁷ which our author seems to have in mind. What happens after that isn't presented but suggested and left to our imagination once we've been informed properly.

⁷ This is pushing it a bit, admittedly so, but consider the letter “y” or *yod* in the three words involved here. It gives them a certain distinction as well as a kind of broadness detectable by the letter's very pronunciation: YHWH, yashav and yyth.

Vs. 14 is the very last rhetorical question for this chapter, one to take to heart, because it sums up all the others as the author prods his readers to pay further attention. “They all” being the various types of angelic/messenger functions described from vs. 5 through vs. 13. They fall under the category of ministering spirits, *pneuma* which are *leitourgikos* or more specifically, the performance of public duty. Clearly the Son doesn’t engage in this. However, they are like the Son in being sent (*apostello* is the verb here) literally “into service” or *diakonia* (also as ministry) with the preposition *eis*. This *diakonia* is specified as at the disposal of persons to obtain salvation. The verb is *kleroneo*, more to inherit with *mello*, as being on the verge of this inheritance. Such is the location of the author’s readers...on the verge of accepting the Son as Jesus Christ but not quite there yet. The biggest hurdle is not to confuse him as an angel or messenger but as God, a pretty big step by any standards.

Chapter Two

A lot more than meets the eye lays behind this chapter’s opening words, *dia touto* or “therefore.” It offers a chance to pause and reflect on what had been said with regard to the Son and angels before moving on. Actually *dia touto* impels us to go forward but only after we have met this important condition. What’s attractive here is that our author uses the first person plural with the verb to hear (*akouo*). He doesn’t hesitate to put himself in the same position as his readers, a recognition of personal humility and a way to win them over without forcing himself. In a way this collective “we” sounds similar to 1 Jn 1:1: “That...which *we* have heard, which *we* have seen with our eyes, which *we* have looked upon.” It’d come as no surprise that our author either knew John or was familiar with his letters as well as his Gospel. Chances are that of yet they haven’t taken on a written form but still part of an oral transmission.

With regard to this collective awareness, it’s expressed by a requirement. The verb *dei* is rendered as “must” (alternately as ‘it is necessary’) with *prosecho*. Thus we get literally as “it is necessary to have to.” The preposition *pros-* as prefaced to the verb makes it indicative of direction towards-which. That’s as direct a command as you can get. The adverb *perissoteros* brings it a step further which is translated as more than abundantly. The preposition *peri* prefaced to this adverb infers being on the circumference or on the outskirts and thus beyond the regular or extraordinary.

Such *prosecho* comes with a warning, that is, that the collective “we” must not drift away from what the author and others have heard, the verb *pararreo* literally as to flow beside or in company with (the preposition *para-*). Keeping in mind the

important role of prepositions, this *para-* can be seen as impinging upon the directness of the *pros-* of *prosecho*. The **RSV** has “from it” whereas this is lacking in the Greek text.

Vs. 2 is the beginning of a lengthy rhetorical question spilling into the next two verses concerning the message spoken by angels. It is a *logos* which had been spoken (*laleo -*), again keeping in mind that *aggelos [-]* means messenger or envoy. Note the definite article, *the* message which in the context at hand suggests the divine covenant and *Torah*. As a footnote in the **RSV** has it, “The covenant of Sinai was thought to have been given through angels (*mal’ak -*).” As for the source, Ex 3.2: “And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’” Here *mal’ak* is interchangeable with the Lord who reveals himself in vs. 6. The reason? Perhaps the Lord didn’t want to scare off Moses but to approach him gradually. For a reference to the same Exodus verse, see Acts 7.38: “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us.”

With regard to the confusion of angels with the Lord, the author of Hebrews sees as an advantage...in short, a teaching opportunity. The words *logia zonta* or living oracles must have struck his fancy, *logion* also along the lines of an announcement and obviously related to *logos [-]*. His readers retain some uncertainty as to the difference between the Son and angels which he tried so assiduously to clarify in the first chapter. Now he can refer to the authority of the Book of Exodus and, of course, Moses. The apparent identity there can be applied to the current state of his readers, for in the end, the *mal’ak* is not the Lord and the Lord is not the *mal’ak*.

Our author describes the *logos*...message...of the angels as valid, *bebaios* also as firm or steady. Note that he uses the plural “angels” and not the singular as in the Ex 3.2 quote. As part of the rhetorical question at hand, he brings in the issue of every transgression and disobedience, both nouns having the preposition *para-* prefaced to them, *parabasis* and *parakoe*. Their respective verbal roots shows that this preposition is representative of having skewered them, *baino* and *akouo [-]* or to go and to listen: one goes beside (not with) as well as hearing beside (not with). Persons who have engaged in both have received a retribution which is just, *misthanpodosia* modified by *endikos* which has the preposition *en-* (in) for emphasis. As for the noun, it’s a full recompense or payment for punishment.

The turning point in this rhetorical question begun in vs. 2 is the first word of vs. 3, *pos* or “how” where our author again uses the first person plural as a means of

identifying himself with his readers. Failure to pay attention to the great salvation being offered to us will prevent us from receiving the gift of salvation, *telikautos* or so great modifying *soteria*. Note use of the verb *ekpheugo* or to escape where the preposition *ek-* prefaced to the verbal root intensifies its meaning. The author speaks as such in order to provoke his readers to a close consideration of the matter at hand.

As for this *soteria*, the Lord has declared it “at first” where the noun *arche* rightly applies to “him” who most likely is Jesus Christ as the first principle or originator of *soteria*. As for the Lord, this is the first instance where we find *Kurios* with respect to the Son. We’re getting very close now to this *Kurios* being identified as Jesus Christ but quite there yet. Nevertheless, it’s a step that much closer to full realization. Note that the way the author speaks he could have heard the Lord first hand or if not, his disciples or their successors. That is, he uses the verb *bebaioo* or to attest (literally ‘into us,’ *eis* being the preposition) as well as to make strong this witness. Also by it he has the authority to continue addressing the Hebrews as well as to sustain their interest.

Vs. 4 continues the second sentence begun in vs. 3 and brings this rather awkward way of expressing things to a resolution. Although not in the Greek, the **RSV** begins with “while” to show the present active participle in action, *sunepimartureo* being quite a mouthful. However, when broken down it makes more sense. The verb consists of the root *martureo* or to bear witness, to testify, and is prefaced with not one but two prepositions, *sun* and *epi* (with and upon) reading literally as to testify with-upon. In the verse at hand it’s God distributing them right now according to his own will. Mention of signs and wonders perhaps reminded some readers of the letter of Pentecost, that being in recent memory. As for the text, the Greek has no verb but implies this by the preposition *kata* (in accord with) applied to *thelema*:

- signs or *semeion*, a mark by which a thing is known
- wonders or *teras*, a marvel, portent
- miracles or *dunamis* [-], outward power, faculty or capacity
- gifts or *merismos*, a division of subjects, arrangement as belonging to the Holy Spirit (*Pneuma* -)

In vs. 5 our author returns to the familiar subject of angels, *aggelos*[-] once again to be taken as messengers whose job is consists of shuttling back and forth. Readers of the letter were aware of this function right from the start, hence their concern as to their identity. God did not subject the world-to-come to these messengers, *hupotasso* to place or to arrange under (*hupo*). It would be absurd to entertain this, for no responsible person would hand over what’s so valuable to mere subordinates. That

would be equivalent of mistaking the message for the messenger, literally in this case.

Oikoumene [-] or the world which is inhabited and spoken of lays in the future, *mello* implying intent. It doesn't have any apocalyptic sense commonly understood but in the context of this documents is akin to the salvation alluded to in vs. 3. It's important for our author to make this clear lest his readers look for a future reality that has no bearing upon all the scriptural verses cited thus far. For this reason he adds "of which we are speaking" to bring home this point.

True to his approach, in vs. 6 our author has recourse to scripture, notably the Psalter, and quotes in way signaling his familiarity with the reference but not it's exact source, "It has been testified somewhere." *Diamarturomai* has the preposition *dia-* or through prefaced to it, a testifying-through, along with the adverb *pou* (somewhere). I.e., *dia* intimates a thorough as well as solemn testimony.

As for the quote, it's rather lengthy and runs from vs. 6 through vs. 8. A footnote in the **RSV** says it's from the **LXX** (4-6) which is quoted in full as "What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you visit him? You made him a little less than angels, you have crowned him with glory and honor; and you have set him over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet."

Keeping in line with the general format of this document, we'll follow the Psalm verses as presented here. After all, the author of Hebrews is using them to back up his argument. The first sentence is a rhetorical question, a method he's fond of employing in an attempt to elicit a response from those in his charge. He's enthralled by the mere fact that God is mindful of human beings, *mimnesko* more than just remembering but a keeping close to one's heart. In other words, he's fascinated by the fact that God is sustaining each person in his memory regardless of where they are in space and time. It's as though they've been inserted there from all eternity.

Vs. 6 adds "son of man" (*huios anthropou*) which alludes to the Son already mentioned a number of times and whose name our author is inching closer to reveal. This son of man is someone whom the Lord not only has in his memory but demonstrates care, *episkeptomai* or the root *skeptomai* (to look about carefully) prefaced with the preposition *epi* or upon, to look upon. Thus we're dealing with someone special made all the more as such by reason of the way it's presented.

We could attribute the words of vs. 7 to the "son of man" of vs. 5 whom God made a little less than the angels. Again with the author's audience in mind, this can be even

more confusing. They could respond that while the Son may enjoy special status, ultimately he's no different from these spiritual beings who after all are created. *Elassoo* is the verb to make less or small and implies diminishment. Despite being applied to the Son, it's limited to a short period of time, *brachu* not unlike *elasso* and implies something that lasts for a moment after which it goes away. To put it like this is a bold move, really, and hopefully the fact that it's taken from scripture will assuage any doubts.

The quote from Psalm Eight spills into the next where the Lord crowns this son of man with glory and honor (*doxa* [-] and *time*). Once this has been done, the Lord puts all things under his feet which is a sign of their subjection. Note the two instances of the preposition *hupo-* (under): the verb *hupotasso* [-] and the adverb *hupokato*. The verb has the same root as *hupotasso* in vs. 5 above, the basic idea being that of arranging or ordering. And so the double *hupo* applies to *pas* or all things, "under his feet" being an obvious image of a king having conquer his enemies. As for *pas*, that's a pretty hefty order because it refers to the universe.

Also in vs. 7 our author offers some reflections on the quote he just presented. The obvious place for this is with *hupotasso* which includes everything and everyone, no exceptions. Using this verb along with *hupokato* above, he's taking a big step. Without missing a beat, he amplifies it by saying that absolutely nothing is omitted as expressed by the verb *aphiemi* and the adjective *anupotaktos*, that is, to omit and not made subject (the opposite of *hupotasso*) as well as unruly and not able to be classified. It's a catchy word of sorts and gets right to the point.

Note the opening words of the second sentence in vs. 8, "As it is" (*nun de oupo*) which have as much relevant today as back then. Violence and suffering was and continues to be all-pervasive, an unfortunate part of daily life. And so our author admits and rightly so that such violence clouds our vision, that we don't see (*horao* in the sense of looking) everything as subjected. In a way, this is the most important, down-to-earth admission in the entire letter.

Stating the obvious as such is the perfect lead-in for what our author had in mind right from the beginning, introducing the person of Jesus Christ as Son of God and thus equal to God. Vs. 9 begins with the tiny *de* translated as "but" to counter the painful reality he had just acknowledged. That is to say, he speaks of seeing Jesus, *blepo* being in the present tense as is the case with *horao* of vs. 8. *Blepo* means to see in the sense of having the power of sight, to discern mentally. It signifies a shift is from the type of looking described as *horao* to one of seeing with one's whole being. Actually the difference between the two verbs can overlap or be similar. However,

the shift from *horaō* to *blepo* signifies a transit from looking to seeing, the latter with one's whole being. Do the readers of the letter pick up on this? Perhaps not all at once but later once they have a clearer picture of Jesus Christ. Once that's established, the bothersome not seeing...not *horaō*...all things subjected to him falls in place. Or to put it better, they can see...they can *blepo*...that all will be such. What they see doesn't necessarily correspond to the way things are in truth.

As for the *blepo* of vs. 9, it's directed toward Jesus specified as "a little while" (*brachu*, -). This is important because it situates him in the context of the just discussed angels or where readers of the letter may confuse him as belonging to that order. And so angels are brought up again, this time in conjunction with a citation from Phil 2.8-9 which reads in full as "And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name." Obviously our anonymous author had read this or perhaps he from Paul himself. Regardless, the two share the same position on the person of Jesus Christ and his divine status.

A key word in vs. 9 is *pathema* or suffering (of death). It has a specific purpose ordered by divine grace or *charis* which is tasting death for everyone, *geuo* being the verb. It implies that Jesus took death within himself—ate it, if you will—and digested it as to become part of his body. It's precisely this ultra-close assimilation with the human condition our author wishes to convey. An angel simply is incapable of such intimacy. All he can do is announce it if called upon to do so.

Vs. 10 begins with the impersonal "It was fitting" or *prepo*, also to be clearly seen or to be made conspicuous. In this way our author is taking pains to step beyond himself, that he's presenting himself as an agent conveying these words about Jesus. Without mentioning God, clearly he's speaking of him with respect to bringing many sons literally "into (*eis*) glory" or *doxa* [-]. The verb is *ago* and is in present because all things exist for and by him, the preposition *dia* (also as through) in both instances. And so by this *ago* Jesus is the pioneer of the salvation as it pertains to sons through his personal suffering. "Pioneer" is a somewhat unfortunate word, *archegos* perhaps rendered better as founder (of a family) or first cause, originator, this based on the significance of *arche* [-] which implies a first principle. Thus *archegos* is the founder, if you will, of *soteria* [-], salvation. To a Hebrew audience this would make sense in order to show the identity between the proper name Jesus and the verbal root from which it is derived, *yashah* or to save.

Interestingly, vs. 11 has Jesus (though his name isn't mentioned) as the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified as sharing one source. The verb here is

hagiazō which involves the act of consecrating: active with regard to Jesus Christ and passive or receptive to those receiving it. The text continues by saying that both are literally “from one” (*ex henos*) which at first glance seems rather vague but indicative of the unity between the divine and the human. Because of this, “he” (again, lack of proper name) isn’t ashamed to call as brethren (*adelphos* or brother) those whom he and they are “from one.” *Epaischunomai* is the verb meaning to be ashamed and is intensified by the preposition *epi* prefaced to the root, “to be ashamed upon,” if you will.

Vs. 12 is a continuation of the previous verse where the author puts the words of three scriptural sources in the mouth of Jesus. The first is Ps 22.22 which runs close to what’s cited: “I will tell of your name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” This psalm begins with a cry of despair, that God has forsaken the psalmist, words attributed to Jesus (cf. Mt 27.46) at his crucifixion. The verse at hand is notable insofar as it is the turning point of Ps 22...from desperation to acknowledgment of trust in God...something our author must have been keenly aware of. The verb *apaggello* means to report and in light of the previous in depth discussion on angels, is the verbal root for that noun. So in a sense Jesus is acting as a messenger though clearly not in the sense of what was presented above. The major difference is that such *apaggello* is done in the midst of the *ekklesia* or church (*qahal* in Hebrew). From that midst the message spreads out evenly to all points as from the center of a circle to its circumference.

The second scriptural source, short as it is, is linked with the first by the opening words of vs. 13, *kai palin*, “and again.” The **RSV** has the quote from Is 8.17, the **LXX**. To avoid getting too complicated, we’ll stick with the version cited but on occasion cite the original Hebrew as in this instance though without commenting upon it: “And one shall say, ‘I will wait for God who has turned away his face from the house of Jacob, and I will trust in him.’” “I will wait for the Lord who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.” Both have the element of waiting for the Lord who is not visible, that he is hiding himself for some reason or another. In the verse cited the verb *peitho* is used meaning to prevail upon, to persuade with the preposition *epi*, literally as “upon him.”

The third scriptural source (Is 8.18) comes right on the heels of the second. Actually the first and second can be taken as one since they are in succession. All three are connected with the conjunctive *kai (palin -)*, the first as in the text and the second as in the **RSV**: “Here am I and the children God has given me.” “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion.” Both are characterized by *idou* and *hineh* which

are equivalent to “behold,” a readiness to be attentive to the Lord along with those children or persons entrusted to his care. This, of course, insinuates Jesus Christ.

Vs. 14 continues the theme of children, *pais* fundamentally as a boy or girl but here as a term of endearment. Such children enjoy an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ whose name hasn’t been mentioned since vs. 9. It is put in terms of two verbs: sharing in flesh and blood or their same nature, *koinoo* also as to take part in or to be common and *metecho*, literally to have with. The latter is with the adjective *paraplesios*, literally coming along side of (*para-*) or resembling to the point of being equal.

This *para*-ness is done with a specific goal in mind, namely, that through death “he”⁸ might not so much die but the one who has the power of death. The verb *katargeo* literally as to be unemployed or idle (*kata-* here as down prefaced to *ergo* or to work) may be applied to nullifying *kratos* or strength. And this *kratos* belongs to the devil or *diabolos* which as a noun means slandering or backbiting. In actuality this is the very heart or essence of what death is all about which puts physical death on a different plane, as something ultimately not to be concerned about.

By making-idle the devil’s strength, “he” will deliver those who were subject to a bondage lasting a lifetime as a result of death. Note “those” (*toutos*, singular) which implies not everyone, this in turn suggesting that there might be others not falling under this category. As for “those,” they will be the object of *apallasso*, to set free (*apo* or from) a *douleia* that has lasted a lifetime. Although that means from one’s birth to the present, it isn’t spelled out but suggests that one hasn’t been born in this condition but had acquired it and continues in it.

In vs. 16 we return to the familiar angels or messengers who by now are put in their proper place. “He” is not concerned with them, *epilambano* being a good way to express this as not taken upon or *epi-* with them. Instead, focus is upon the children of Abraham where *epilambano* is also applied. This refers to Is 41.8: “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.” Here Jacob (who’d be called Israel) is an essential part of this offspring or literally seed. If the Lord calls Abraham not simply as friend but as “my friend” (the verb *’ahav* as to love), this *epilambano* takes on greater significance. As for an explicit mention of friendship, it’s found in Ex 33.11 where the term *rehev* is used, derived from a verbal root meaning to pasture.

⁸ For the rest of this chapter Jesus will be referred to as such although his name isn’t mentioned.

Vs. 17 begins with *othen* or “therefore” where this *epilambano* is played out because “he” saw the need to resemble his brethren, *opheilo* as to owe or to account for. Use of *adelphos* (essentially as brother, -) shows the intimate relationship at hand. That is to say, “he” saw a need and decided to do something about it which resulted in being like his brothers, *homoioo*. It’s a thorough identification as the phrase *kata panta* shows, literally as “according to all.”

To this *kata panta* there follows the important *hina* or “so that.” In other words, *homoioo* has a specific goal in mind, to be not just a priest but a high priest or *archiereus* (it contains the noun *arche*, -) described as merciful and faithful, *eleemos* and *pistos*. Perhaps those whom our author is addressing have a less than pleasant impression of such high priests, hence the pains to describe him as such. Furthermore, he’s he is to make expiation for the people’s sins, *hilaskomai* or to appease or to conciliate. Everyone knows that such appeasement involves sacrifice, the nature of which is not described but inferred as applicable to the high priest.

This chapter concludes with “he” as high priest spelling out further the nature of *hilaskomai*, for it involves having suffered as well as tempted, *pascho* and *peirazo*. Both empower “him” to help those undergoing temptation, *peirazo*. The verb to help is *boetheo* usually applicable to someone in need. Note that it’s in the present tense, that “he” is doing it right now. As to the exact nature of such *boetheo*, we don’t have details which is how our author wants it. Everyone needs it, so each person will find it accordingly

Chapter Three

Hothen or “therefore” starts off this new chapter, last found in 2.17 and with two other words such as *dia touto* of 2.1 and *epi* of 2.14. It’s significant insofar as our author begins to speak in greater detail about Jesus Christ as well as Moses. Our author’s readers must be pleased when he addresses them as “holy (*hagios*) brothers,” they being as such by reason of sharing a heavenly call. *Metochos* is the adjective derived from *metecho* [-] already noted, literally a having-with, that is, regarding a *klesis* or summons whose origin is in heaven. *Epouranios* has the preposition *epi*- prefaced to it, thereby imparting a stronger sense, if you will, something that would read as “upon heaven”...way up there.

Vs. 1 continues with the exhortation to consider or *katanoeo*, literally as to have the mind operate or think in accord with (*kata*) a given plan of attack. And the object here is Jesus whom our author calls an apostle and high priest with regard to our

confession. We've encountered the latter *archiereus* in 2.17 but not *apostolos*, that word normally reserved for Jesus' closest associates. *Apostolos* means one who is sent and thus parallels the role of a messenger or *aggelos* [-] already discussed. It seems this word is chosen by reason of Jesus being sent...*apostello*...from the Father.

So throughout this early phase of the text our author presents Jesus as derived from the Lord. Easily this talk can be taken as referring to an exalted though secondary position, a typical conundrum facing Christian apologists. Note how the author inserts the word *homologia* or confession with regard to all this. It means an assent or admission consisting of *logos* [-] at its root prefaced with *homos*, like or similar. Such a *logos-in-common* isn't done privately but has a definite public character to it as inferred here.

Vs. 2 is short, having the verb *poieo* [-], usually as to make but here suggests being appointed with regard to Christ which shouldn't apply to him as we'd use it with regard to a creature. And so *poieo* concerns Jesus as *pistos* [-] or faithful, that being spelled out in terms of the one (i.e., God) who had done the *poieo*. Since apostle and high priest are close by, in the verse beforehand, most likely *pistos* applies to those two roles. The conjunctive *kai* with *hos* (usually 'as') translates here as "just as" and shows the important connection Jesus enjoys with Moses who had prefigured him and to whom *pistos* also is attributed. In the latter instance, such *pistos* is with regard to God's house, *oikos* [-] here referring to the nation of Israel. It reads literally as "in all his house," *holos* referring to each and every Israelite. However, it can apply to his more immediate household which consists of Miriam and Aaron, his sister and brother. Reference is to Num 12.7: "Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house." The occasion? Unfortunately both had spoken against their brother for having married a Cushite woman...i.e., not an Israelite. The extraordinary nature of this gesture, naturally scandalous to Israelites, is to be kept in mind when thinking of how Jesus interacted with people.

Vs. 3 begins with *gar houtos* translated as "yet" ⁹ which sets Jesus apart from Moses where the verb *axioo* or to deem worthy and is in reference to a *doxa* [-] or glory far worthier than that of Moses. The comparison here is with him who had constructed a house, *kataskeuazo* more along the lines of equipping or furnishing in full. The root is *skeuazo* (to prepare, to make ready) with the preposition *kata-*, in accord with a given plan. While the *oikos* [-] or house at hand can apply to the nation of Israel, Moses is singled out as greater than that nature posited as a kind of structure. It is this separate-ness applicable to both Moses and Jesus that the author of Hebrews is getting at.

9 Technically *pleionos* or "greater" is first.

The **RSV** has vs. 4 in parentheses which makes it s a kind of comment on the previous verse though this is not the case in the Greek nor in the **NIV**. Regardless, the author states simply that the builder of a house (*kataskeuazo* -) is responsible for the structure whereas God is the one who *kataskeuazo* everything. This emphasis upon *skeuazo* [-] according to (*kata*) a plan is something to be aware of because it is ever present.

Vss. 5-6 set up a comparison between Moses and Jesus followed by several scriptural quotes in the ensuing verses. The first verse begins with the conjunctive *kai* translated as “now.” It introduces Moses, quoting again part of Num 12.7 as in vs. 2 inferring once again the troublesome behavior of Miriam and Aaron. Both were not *pistos* [-] or faithful, this applicable to *therapon* which is more than a servant but more along the lines of an attendant devoted to performing service. With this in mind, we can appreciate the relationship between the two described famously in Ex 33.11: “Thus the Lord used to speak with Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.” And so such a *therapon*-friend testifies to be spoken later, *laleo* [-] with *marturion* which has the preposition *eis*, “into witness.”¹⁰

Vs. 6 shifts attention to Christ which is the first time in Hebrews that our author refers to him as such, having favored the name Jesus instead. Perhaps this signals not just a more formal approach but a recognition of Christ as the one who is anointed. Also he’s designated as a son (lower case in the **RSV**), a name we’ve encountered earlier and as such is upon (*epi*) his house as it reads in the Greek text. With this clarification our author makes the switch of *oikos* [-] or house to the first person plural being as such. However, a condition applies here. We are to hold fast to both confidence and pride, *katecho* literally as to hold down where *kata-* means this instead of “according to.” As for the first word, *parresia* is outspokenness and freedom from reprisal enjoyed by a citizen of a city-state. The second is *kauchema*, subject of boasting and infers being loud when speaking. *Kauchema* belongs to hope of *elpis*, “pride of hope” as it reads literally.

In vss. 7-11 the author shifts emphasis from Christ to the Holy Spirit whom he has as uttering words from Ps 95.7-11. They are inserted here from the **RSV** so we can compare them with the text at hand which is our primary concern: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation and said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my

¹⁰ “Later” is lacking in the Greek text but inferred in *laleo*, future passive participle.

ways.' As I swore in my wrath (*orge*, also as passion, anger), 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

As for the quote at hand, once our author makes clear it's the Holy Spirit speaking, he brings attention to the immediacy at hand, the adverb *semeron* [-] for today...not yesterday nor tomorrow but right now. Compare *semeron* with *hemera* or day with regard to testing. I.e., we have two frames of references which are similar: the former is more here-and-now whereas the latter, a more extended period of time along the lines of a *kairos* event. However, a condition is present, *ean* (if, when). This has to be made with regard to hearing the Lord's voice, the words of which aren't specified but inferred, this making it more conditional and subject to acceptance or rejection.

A clue, however, is given as to what this hearing involved which is not to harden one's heart, *skleruno* being the verb which parallels what had happened at the waters of Meribah. Actually it seems unusual to put this incident in terms of a rebellion, *parapikrasmos* also as something bitter or exasperating because the people had just buried Miriam and found no water. Note the preposition *para-* (beside, near) prefaced to the root *piktros* (bitter)...beside the bitterness, if you will, another name for Meribah. This incident caused them to lament bitterly to Moses and Aaron who interceded to the Lord after which water flowed from a rock. Thus the name Meribah means Contention (as with the Lord). The lesson? Despite desperate times, the Lord will come through, something the Israelites needed to learn repeatedly.

Vs. 9 flows directly from the previous verse, the "day of testing," and uses the fathers of those being addressed as an example to avoid. After all, while in the Sinai wilderness for forty years they had put the Lord to the test (*peirazo*: very different from the one associated with Jesus Christ in 2.18) despite all that time having seen his works. Naturally this spurred the Lord into action, *prosochthizo* meaning to be displeased with, the preposition *pros-* as direction toward-which thereby giving more emphasis. It seems that despite so many interventions, the people go astray, *planao* also as to wander which suggests a more leisurely way of straying from God...leisurely in the sense of having a casual disregard. Actually this *planao* is invisible and difficult to detect by reason of it's location in the heart. Because of this naturally (and unfortunate) it follows that the people don't know the Lord's ways, *ginosko* being the general verb used.

To conclude this lengthy citation from the psalm, in vs. 11 our author quotes the Lord as having sworn an oath in his anger, *omnumi* also as to confirm. Such an oath pertains to the Israelites not entering the Lord's rest where the preposition *eis* (into)

occurs twice: prefaced to *erchomai* and with regard to *katapausis* or rest which also is a stopping, a putting down: the root *pauo* (to put an end) with the preposition *kata-* prefaced to it.

Although the psalm is quoted, the **RSV** adds another reference, Num 14.21-23. It should be kept in mind, however, that Caleb is called “my servant” in vs. 24, he being one of the spies sent out to explore Canaan. As this same verse says, Caleb “has a different (‘*acher* or other) spirit and has followed me fully.” Surely our author has Caleb in mind who hopefully can be applied as incarnate, as it were, within the people.

Vs. 12 begins with the verb *blepo* [-], to see in the sense of having the power of sight, to discern mentally and translated here as “take care” with regard to “brethren,” *adelphos* [-] also as brother. Such *blepo* is to be directed inward toward the heart (cf. *planao* or wandering with regard to *kardia* in vs. 9) that nothing evil nor unbelief may be found there, *apistia* and *poneros*, the latter also as toilsome, painful. If so, both can lead to falling away from God who’s described as living, another way of saying that always he is both present and active. As for the verb, *aphistemi* also means to put away (i.e., *apo-* or from).

Vs. 13 begins with the conjunctive *alla* or “but” which is a continuation of the exhortation in the previous verse. It consists of mutual encouragement or literally mutual summoning beside each other which is putting it awkwardly, *parakaleo*. This is to be done “according (*kata*) to each day” where *kata* suggests the laying out of a plan. Note, however, the contingency: this plan is to be called “today” or *semeron* as noted earlier in vs. 7 which shows how important it is to identify one’s life with an ever present divine reality. The reason? To preclude being hardened not just by sin but by the deceitfulness associated with it which is called *apate* also as fraud, treachery.

The antidote our author offers is a sharing in Christ (i.e., not Jesus), *metochos* [-], a having-with him which implies having everything he has and visa versa. This comes with a loaded concession indicated by *eanper*, “if” with *per* attached to it, also as “however, at least.” At stake is the necessity to keep our first confidence firm to the end, *katecho* ¹¹ [-] also as to check. It’s direct object? Not just confidence or *hupostasis* (literally, a standing under) but its first principle, *arche* [-]. If we have this *arche*, everything else falls into place because everything hangs from it. In addition to the *kata-* of *katecho*, two more elements confirm this: the adjective *bebaios* [-] or firm as along with *telos* or end, the final goal which also can apply to death.

¹¹ *Katecho* has the root *echo* as well as *metochos* (from *metecho*), that is, to have.

Vs. 15 is a continuation of the previous verse which quotes Ps 95.7-8 as with vss. 7-8 above in the text at hand. Why so? Our author wishes to stress three things, the first two being pretty much the same, that is, “today” along with hearing (*akouo* -). Should this pair be put into practice, there will be no hardening of the heart. As for what this hearing consists of, we have no straight-forward answer but an intimation which leaves it up to each person.

With the exception of the last verse of this chapter, we have a series of rapid-fire rhetorical questions which is how our author prefers to conclude this part of his letter. Actually the questions are quite direct and threatening, no sugar-coating of what’s involved. He starts off in vs. 16 by asking who had failed to hear the Lord’s voice under the guidance of Moses. It’s a kind of indirect indictment, those who suffered death in the Sinai wilderness or those reading the author right now, their direct forebears. And so he brings this sober warning to a conclusion with the fact that if the direct forebears were unable to enter due to their unbelief or *apistia* [-], the same will apply today.

Chapter Four

The **RSV** of this new chapter begins with *oun* or “therefore,” but the Greek has it come after the first word, *phobeo* or to fear. This verb is in the first person plural both an exhortation and a warning, the author, of course, including himself. He has adopted this mode of expression right from the beginning, for if he showed any distance between himself and his audience, they’d pick up on it right away. It would come across as somewhat artificial, of him preaching.

Immediately after *oun* comes the adverb *mepote*—the two working hand-in-hand, it being translated as “while” and alternately as “never” or “on no account.” The mere mention of it conveys a certain urgency and harshness. The two words lead into the verb *kataleipo* or to leave behind or to forsake, *kata-* in the sense of down...to leave below, if you will. Compare the rather hefty threat of this verse with *epaggelia* or an offer, a promise which consists of the root *aggello* or to announce. It has the preposition *epi-* or upon prefaced to it...to proclaim upon or a greater sense of urgency with regard to the subject matter. Here it pertains to entering God’s rest, *eiserchomai* which is prefaced with the preposition *eis* (into) together with *eis* as free standing and to put it awkwardly, comes across as an into entering into. However, it’s perfectly fine in the Greek.

As for the destination of this double *eis*, it's *katapausis* [-] or rest, also as a stopping or more literally, a putting down (*kata-*) in the sense of a cessation. Reference is being made to Ps 95.11 quoted in 3.11 where the Hebrew noun is *menuchah* which has the fuller sense of habitation. However, a danger remains of falling short of this rest/habitation, *hustereo* meaning to be behind, to come late or essentially to miss the boat. And so the author's audience is left in a kind of in between state not knowing how things will turn out. However, he has in mind transforming this incertitude into an adventure and not so much an impending judgment. Those reading him will see that Joshua succeeded in leading Israel into Canaan, but even that was fraught with all sorts of danger.

When it comes to good news, vs. 2 presents both a similarity and a difference with respect to "us" and to "them," the latter meaning the Israelites. As for the resolution at hand, it's done through *kathaper* which is a form of *katha* (*kata*), according as, just as. That is to say, with respect to the participle *euaggelizomai*, *kathaper* means to proclaim the good news, the root *aggello* being noted in the previous verse with regard to *epaggelia*. Usually we don't associate *euaggelizomai* with the Israelites, this being a so-called New Testament concept. While the revelation at that time differs from the one with regard to Jesus Christ, the parallels are sufficiently close enough in the mind of our author. *Euaggelizomai* is expressed through the *Torah* whereas for the new Christian community it's through the person of Jesus Christ.

The key word in vs. 2 is half way through, *alla* or "but" which counters the similarity presupposed with *kathaper*. In other words, *alla* points out the fundamental difficulty Israel had experienced right from the beginning, of not being able to pay attention to the word of the Lord. In the verse at hand this is rendered as *logos* [-] with *akoe* or hearing...word-of-hearing and refers to *euaggelizomai*, the good news. *Opheleo* (fundamentally as to help, to be of service) put in the negative is the result, hearing = nothing beneficial.

While articulating this, we can imagine our author having in mind the difficulty Moses had experienced with the Israelites throughout their forty years of wandering in the desert. Then as in just about every other case it boiled down to an unwillingness to hear. He mentions Moses because the issue of hearing is just as important to his readers as it had been with the Israelites. The end of all this? The Israelites literally were not mixed together or blended with (*sugkerannumi*) the faith of those who did hear.

For our author the association between hearing and rest or *katapausis* [-] is of highest importance because faith (that is, the verb *pisteuo*) is a precondition for entering the

divine rest. The RSV has this verb in the first person plural which can be taken as the author again associating with his readers in the same enterprise. In other words, there's no difference between the teacher and those who are taught. As for the entering itself, the preposition *eis* is found twice: prefaced to *eiserchomai* [-] and free standing as noted last in vs. 1. Once more we have Ps 95.11 quoted as a warning with the Lord swearing an oath (*omnumi*, -) in his wrath or *orge* [-]. A lot of attention is given to this rest because it's the final destination of Israel or more accurately, a return to their native land after some four hundred years of living in Egypt. Because the current generation of Israelites is on the threshold of entering what now has become unfamiliar territory, the Lord wants to make sure it comes off right.

Vs. 3 closes with *kaitoi* (*kai* & *toi*) translated as "although." The author wishes to contrast the Lord's words uttered in hasty anger about Israel not entering his rest with works (*ergon*) he had done (*ginomai* or to become) from the world's foundation or *katabole*. This noun means literally a casting down (*kata-*) in the sense of putting in a foundation. And so this not being able to enter divine rest is contrasted with countless eons of time, making it stand out that much more with a super-exaggerated sense of time. Hopefully this contrast will act not just as a source of shame and embarrassment but as intended to spur entry into the divine rest.

Vs. 4 begins with "he has spoken" which seems to refer to Moses who had communicated to us the most about all this. "Somewhere" or *pou* is a casual way our author speaks of Moses accessing the prodigious amount of information he has at hand and would like to share with his audience. The rest or *katapausis* under discussion ties in with the seventh day when God had brought to completion all his works or *ergon* [-]. This refers to Gn 2.2 where two verbs are involved and function as one, *kalah* and *shavath*. The former means to bring to an end, that is, the six days of creation followed immediately by the latter which is the verbal root for the Sabbath and all that entails. *Katapauo* is the verb for *shavath* as well as root for *katapausis*. Surely tho Hebrews reading our author are aware of this.

Yet again vs. 5 brings up Ps 95.11, about never entering God's rest. You'd think that by this point the author would back off after speaking of it four times. Superficially a great idea but not so when you look at Israel's history to date or when the people were on the threshold of entering Canaan. As noted earlier, they had failed repeatedly to forget to obey...to listen...to the Lord. Not only that, they did this with a suddenness that was appalling. Indeed our author is keenly aware of this and wishes to hammer it into his audience. They too might think it's overkill but all they have to do is look at their own history which is a mirror of human nature anywhere at anytime and in any place.

In vs. 6 our author begins to develop the idea of “today” or *semeron* [-] which in the next verse concerns entry into the divine rest or *katapausis*. We get an intimation of how important this is by the way the verse begins, *epei oun* or “since therefore” followed by the passive of *apoleipo*, to remain, to leave behind (*apo-*, from). In a way, this gets him off the hook of setting forth his personal opinion which could conflict with the delicate matter at hand. And that matter consists of those who enter the divine rest and those who do not. Again, we have *eiserchomai* [-] along with *eis* where the issue of two “intos” are involved. On the one hand is the indeterminate “some” to which this pertains and on the other hand those who at one time (*proteron*, also as first) who at one time had been evangelized, that is, taking the verb *euaggelizomai* [-] literally. Despite this—and it involves that all-important hearing discussed earlier—these people did not share the entry or *eiserchomai* which is mentioned a second time. The reason? Their *apeitheia* or disobedience or having no *peitho* or not being persuaded.

Vs. 7 is a continuation of the previous verse beginning with *palin* [-] or “again” which means the subject matter at hand was noted earlier, the familiar *semeron* [-] or “today.” Apparently as noted in vs. 4 it’s Moses who is determining this, *horizo* fundamentally as to set a bound and is confirmed much later in reference to King David. To him is attributed the words of Ps 95.8 about the hardening of one’s heart, *skleruno* being the aptly sounding verb.

In vs. 8 our author speaks of Joshua who turned out to be the one giving rest (*katapauo*, -), not Moses, whom the Lord forbade to enter Canaan. If Joshua hadn’t done this, there would be no need to mention another day. A reference is Jos 22.4: “And now the Lord your God has given rest to your brethren as he promised them; therefore turn and go to your home in the land where your possession lies which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan.” The verb at hand is *nuach* which connotes a setting down as well as resting and thus has a certain permanence about it.

Putting Israel’s entry into what could be a potentially dangerous situation in terms of going home is a brilliant maneuver on Joshua’s part. Most likely Joshua is referring to Dt 31.7 as cited in vs. 8 as well: “Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and of good courage; for you shall go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall put them in possession of it.’” The verb *nachal* means to take possession and clearly refers to inheriting the land, the same land identified as the place of rest, of *nuach*.

Vs. 9 begins with *ara* or “so then,” introducing a Sabbath rest or *sabbatismos* for the people of God, *laos* equivalent to the frequently used *qahal* of assembly of the people of Israel. Right on the heels of this is the next verse introduced by *gar* or “for” to show a close connection with anyone who enters (*eiserchomai* with *eis* again, -) God’s rest. This is equivalent to putting a stop to one’s labors in imitation of God himself with regard to the six days of creation. The noun is *katapausis* [-] with the verb *katapauo* [-], the issue here being *ergon* [-] or work. Putting rest in this way takes into consideration two realities with which our author is concerned, creation and Israel’s possession (or re-possession) of the homeland.

Actually it’s this issue of returning home that’s on top of our author’s consideration which is why in vs. 11 he offers an exhortation using the first person plural of *spoudazo*, to be busy or eager about the familiar *eiserchomai* [-] with *eis-* relative to *katapausis* [-]. By such application, hopefully no one will fall through the same type of disobedience (*apeitheia* -). The noun *hupodeigma* implies a pattern which has been in the process of being outlined here in great detail.

Our author also is very conscious that the *logos* [-] of the Lord is operative, that is, word-as-expression. In vs. 12 he describes it as both living and active, *zon* and *energes* (the latter as having the capacity to produce an *ergon* [-] or work). The image he comes up with is the maneuverability of a *machaira*, also a large knife as well as a short dagger which has two edges. Note that the *machaira* acts on its own. Nothing is said of it being put in the hand of someone to wield. And so this weapon...this *logos*...has the ability to pierce the finest of all divisions or *merismos* also as partition, the verb being *diikneomai* also as to pass through (*dia*) or to penetrate. As for the example at hand, it’s the unity between soul and spirit (*psuche* and *pneuma*, -), the closest physical example being that of joints and marrow. Most likely when coming up with this our author had in mind Is 49.2: “He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.”

Such *diikneomai* by the *logos-as-machaira* has the ability to discern or judge, the adjective being *kritikos* as it pertains to *enthumesis* and *ennoia*, both of which are prefaced with the preposition *en* or *in*: thought or consideration, conception and the act of thinking, notion or conception. The former is a being-in the *thumos* or mind, heart, spirit whereas the latter is a being-in the *nous* or mind. Both reside in the heart (*kardia*, -) which means the *diikneomai* must reach in there.

Our author comes to the obvious conclusion in vs. 13, namely, that no creature (*ktisis*, also as founding, settling) is hidden from God (not mentioned but obviously implied), the adjective *aphanes* as unseen or invisible (i.e., here with the negative). The opposite to this is *gmnos* and *trachelizo* to the one with whom we must deal with, this being expressed by the preposition *pros* (direction towards-which) and *logos* [-]. As for the adjectives, the first connotes being naked and the second is more interesting in that it can infer to bending one's neck back to expose the throat. That is to say, it can imply to the helplessness of a sacrificial victim.

Vs. 14 has a high priest or *archiereus* first mentioned in 2.17 and then in 3.1, bringing it up here in preparation to expand upon in the following chapters. He's described as having passed through (*dierchomai*, *dia-*) the heavens, an allusion to Christ's ascension into heaven: "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God" [Mk 16.19]. In this verse action is passive...Christ is taken up...whereas in the verse at hand, action is active...Christ is the one doing the *dierchomai*. This makes our author utter an exhortation in the first person plural, namely, to hold fast to the profession we've made. The verb is *krateo* also as to be strong or mighty whose object is *homologia*, literally as speaking together which implies something done in a public fashion.

To drive home Christ's identity with us despite his apparent removal through his ascension, he's able to sympathize with our weakness, *sumpatheo* meaning to suffer with, *astheneia* also as feebleness and implies an overall or general condition. In other words, the *sum-* or *sun-* or with of *sumpatheo* accompanies Jesus as high priest in his *dierchomai* or going through into heaven. This brings up the problem of Christ having been tempted (*peirazo -*), a natural one for our author's readers. They figured if Christ was God or someone pretty much like God, he'd be free from temptation. A logical conclusion still difficult to accept, because it brings up the relationship of the divine with the human. In sum, we find it close to impossible that the two could have such an intimate union. In the verse at hand, Christ tempted *kata panta* or literally "according to all" is the real stumbling block.

So this chapter which sets the stage for Christ to be presented as high priest closes with yet another exhortation, namely, to approach the throne of grace (*charis*,) where our author doesn't mention anyone sitting upon it. In other words, it's almost as though this throne had life in and by itself. If we keep in mind the frequent references to thrones in the Book of Revelation, there's some truth here. *Prosecho* is the verb to draw near with the preposition *pros-* indicative of direction towards-which. It is there we both receive and find, *lambano* and *heurisko* acting as one: the first with respect to *eleos* and the second with respect to *charis* [-]. The aim of the two

verbs? To offer help in a time of need, *boetheia* also as rescue or support and *eukairos*, the noun *kairos* or opportune time prefaced with the adverbial form of *agathos* (good), *eu-*. The former is connected with the latter through the medium of the preposition *eis*, into, which makes this all the more direct, a theme it seems the author of Hebrews is presented though most likely isn't fully aware he's taking this approach which is perfectly fine.

Chapter Five

The beginning of Hebrews devotes considerable time concerning the mediation of angels defined as messengers. This clarification is necessary because as it was pointed out, newcomers to the faith can confuse the two. Now that this is established, the author feels confident to begin a lengthy discussion about Jesus as *archiereus* [-] or high priest. As pointed out earlier, this noun contains *arche* or beginning in the sense of first principle a state of being and by reason of what we have here, assumes special importance. As for vs. 1-4, they deal with such a high priest from the human point of view before dealing with Jesus as such.

Our author has in mind two things with regard to the choosing (*lambano*, -) of a high priest: from men and on behalf of men (*ek* and *huper*). This *lambano* involves an appointment or *kathistemi*, to set in order (*kata-*), to arrange things (*ta*) as they are toward God, *pros* indicative of a specific direction. Among this *kathistemi* are the offering of gifts and sacrifices for sinners, the preposition *huper* as with regard to men at the beginning of this verse. Note the preposition *pros-* prefaced to the verb *prosphero*, another sign of this constant movement as well as directness which should reassure anyone with regard to the role of a high priest.

In vs. 2 consider the word “gently” or *metriopatheo* with *dunamai*, to be able to do something. It consists of the root *pascho* (to bear, to suffer) with the adjective *metrios* (within measure) prefaced to it...in a sense, to put up with something while maintaining a balanced demeanor. Our author is careful to point this out with regard to Jesus Christ in light of the authoritarian image most people have of the human high priest. Such an attitude, revolutionary in many ways, is shown toward those who are ignorant and wayward, *agnoeo* and *planao*, the latter as to wander. The reason? Jesus as high priest was literally surrounded by (*perikeimai*) a lack of strength which is the definition of *astheneia*. Indeed, those afflicted by *agnoeo* and *planao* provide a good description for this lack of strength. It's important to keep in mind that Jesus is *perikeimai*. That means such human maladies around *peri-* him, not impinging upon his nature.

Vs. 3 gets to the very essence of a high priest's duty, that is, he is bound (*opheilo*, also to owe, ought) to make offerings or *prosphero* which already is noted in vs. 1. Such bringing-*pros*, if you will, is chiefly for his own sins and those of the people he represents. Surely this will raise some eyebrows with regard to Jesus Christ who was regarded as sinless. Resolution of that issue has to wait until later. However, the author felt the need to bring it up now else Jesus could run the risk of being considered an angel as had been noted above.

Due to the exalted position associated with a high priest, a man doesn't take it on (*lambano*, -) by his own initiative but is called by God after the example of Aaron. To understand this better, we can assume that the author has in mind Ex 28.1: "Then bring near to you Aaron your brother and his sons with him from among the sons of Israel to serve me as priests." Such *qarav* is a personal matter requiring discernment. Furthermore, it is played out by being clothed with various garments followed by offerings, rites and gestures familiar to those whom our author is addressing. The reference point, of course, is the temple at Jerusalem.

Vs. 5 begins with the two small words *outos kai* (so also) which signal a shift from describing a human high priest to Jesus Christ as such. Our author takes pains to say that Jesus didn't exalt himself, *doxazo* also as to glorify but someone—a specific source isn't mentioned but obviously it's God the Father—who spoke to him. The preposition *pros* signifies here a direct face-to-face contact. *Pros* is a lead-in to a quote from two psalms, the first being Ps 2.7 which runs in full as "I will tell of the decree of the Lord; he said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you.'"

As soon as the Hebrews who are reading this document hear "today" or *semeron* [-], they're reminded of how often their author had discussed it earlier though here it's presented differently. The first part of the psalm verse puts the quote at hand in perspective. That is to say, The Lord will tell of the Lord's decree, *choq* which refers to something appointed as well as a time. It seems to have a general application after which comes the more specific one of the son. Thus both the general and the particular work together, not in isolation. As for the birth, the context itself implies nothing physical, for God who is speaking wouldn't act thus if there's no one (i.e., no son) around to hear his words.

Vs. 6 is the second Psalm quote (i.e., 110.4) which reads in full as "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" Although the author may have had in mind this swearing and not changing (*shavah* and *nacham*, the latter also as to lament as well as to take

vengeance), it's important to be aware of it relative to the quote at hand. Both verbs work in a way to take seriously the designation of the implied son a priest. Such a designation is specified as in accord with (*kata*) a given order: *divrah* and *taxis*. The former obviously is from the same verbal root as *davar*, word-as-expression, whereas the latter connotes a drawing up which can have a military connotation. Thus *divrah/taxis* apply to Melchizedek.

Reference to Melchizedek is found cryptically and briefly in Gn 14.17-24 after which he disappears totally from the scene. The most references are in Hebrews and just one in Ps 110.4. Melchizedek is king of Salem or Jeru(salem) who came out to meet Abram after the defeat of kings arrayed against him. It should be noted that the king of Sodom also met Abram, Sodom being well associated with God's wrath and the destruction that is to take place several chapters later. In this instance we have the noun *kohen* or priest for this office in the Bible. Although Melchizedek was associated with Canaan and not the yet-to-be established priesthood in Israel, the verse says he was a priest of "God the Most High." He may be compared with Jethro, the priest of Midian, to whom Moses had fled for refuge (cf. Ex 2.15-3.1). This might be stretching it, but perhaps Melchizedek was one of the faithful left behind some four hundred years ago when the Israelites took up residence in Egypt.

Vs. 7 begins with an almost story-like choice of words, "in the days of his flesh" where *sarx* commonly refers to "his" human nature, Jesus Christ not being mentioned. Perhaps our author had in mind something he might talk about at a later time, "in the days of his divinity." So the way he presents this is an intimation of the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ. So within these days—and days represent that story-like dimension of time—"he" was taken up with both prayers and supplications, *deesis* and *hiketeria*, the former also as entreating, asking). "He" did this with cries and tears to the one (i.e., God the Father) who alone had the ability to save him (*sozo*) from death. These words give the impression that "he" was doing this his entire life, but it applies to Jesus' last hours. And so this verse concludes with "he" being heard (*eisakouo*, to hear into) by reason of his *eulabeia*, discretion, caution or piety, *eu-* being the adverbial form of *agathos*, good. Most likely this is in reference to the beginning of the second half of Ps 22. After asking God for deliverance from suffering, vs. 22 begins on an upbeat note and brings the psalm to a conclusion almost triumphantly.

Vs. 8 speaks of the unmentioned Jesus Christ as Son, this first presented in 1.2. Despite his exalted position which our author had taken great pains to delineate between 1.2 and now, he had learned suffering through obedience. This is reminiscent of the self-emptying in Phil 2.5-11 when he took the form of a servant.

The form of the two verbs (*manthano* and *pascho*, both -) are similar sounding: *emathen* and *epathen*. As for obedience, the noun is *hupakoe*, literally, a listening-under, *hupo-*. As for the *manthano* and *pascho*, much of it is in the context of Jesus dealing with religious authorities who were responsible for putting him to death.

The *manthano/pascho* of vs. 8 makes Jesus perfect as vs. 9 records, *teleioo* also as coming to an end. Not only that, both enable him to become the source of eternal salvation, *aitios* being an adjective and perhaps better as responsible for it. However, this pertains only to those persons who obey Jesus, *hupakouo* (cf. the noun *hupakoe* above). Jesus' role as a high priest is the *aitios* at work. Although our author recognizes him as such, he says that God has arranged it so, the verb being *prosagoreuo* also as to address, to greet. The root *agoreuo* means to speak in the assembly and along with the preposition *pros-* which infers directness and immediacy. Once again being high priest is in accord with that *taxis/divrah* noted above as it pertains to Melchizedek.

Vs. 11 shifts gears insofar as our author shows some frustration with regard to those in his charge and continues along this line to the conclusion of the chapter. He claims there's much to say or literally "much *logos [-]*" which unfortunately is difficult to articulate, *dusermhneutos* where the verbal root is *hermeneuo* or to interpret. He attributes this *dus-*ness...hardness...to his readers who are sluggish or *nothros* when it comes to hearing. Although he hadn't mentioned this early on, it's easy now to see he was aware of it by reason of his frequent discussion as to listening and obedience in reference to Israel before entering Canaan. Although no response is given, we can assume it wasn't received well.

Dia ton chronon or literally "through time" (*chronos*) in vs. 12 continues to reveal our author's frustration of having thought by now that some of his readers would have become teachers, that is, those not unlike him. However, he claims they need someone to teach (*didasko*) yet again the first principles of God's word. Translation? He'd like someone else to go over what he had covered. *Stoicheon* means literally one of a row or one of a series with regard to *arche*, the first principle of anything, specifically God's words, *logion* also as oracle. To accomplish this, milk—not solid food—is required because the former infers that one lacks skill, *apeiros* also as without having been tried or lacking experience. Such lack of skill is applicable to the *logos [-]* of unrighteousness, *dikaiousune*. This seems unclear but can refer to that lack of *stoicheon* just above.

Vs. 14 concludes with our author speaking of solid food as being for the mature, *teleios* connoting a certain completion manifested through the training of their

faculties in knowing how to distinguish good from evil. *Aistherion* is an organ for perception (i.e., *aisthesis*) and now is *pros* or in the direction of *diakrisis* or literally a judging-through with respect to *kalos* and *kakos*, the former being a general adjective for anything beautiful.

Chapter Six

At this juncture our author feels that his readers have received sufficient instruction so as to move on. After all, he's communicating with them through the limited medium of a letter which is either read privately or aloud to others. In other words, he's not speaking to them on a one-on-one basis. The first part of Chapter Six deals with the difficult topic of repentance. That is to say, whether or not it's possible for one who has fallen away to be restored to the Christian faith. Because focus is upon practical as well as religious matters, such material lends itself less to expansion from within. These pressing, practical matters need to be addressed in a straight-forward manner; no beating around the bush.

Anyone would admit that our author did a pretty good job of introducing Jesus Christ, especially how he differs from angels. His basic approach is to take an image familiar to his Jewish readers and run with it. We can assume that he didn't do this in isolation; a lot of catechesis must have been going on behind the scenes. If he didn't feel confident of some success, he wouldn't begin this chapter with the exhortatory "let us leave, *aphiemi* [-]. The *apo-* or "from" prefaced to the verb has special significance here, an encouragement to move from the milk, not solid food, of 5.12. This emphasis upon the *apo-* is with regard to what reads literally as "the beginning of the Christ word or *logos* [-]. Obviously *logos* isn't left behind but the *arche* [-] or first principle which means a lot more is to follow while at the same time acknowledging this *logos* as the fountainhead.

Aphiemi (that is, 'let us leave') can't be left hanging out there on its own. It has to be followed by something to take its place. That consists of going on or *phero* which means to bear, to carry ourselves, implying that some effort and even pain is involved. Again, the image of *aphiemi* milk with regard to solid food is appropriate. The latter is concerned with (*epi*, upon) maturity or *teleiotes* also as completeness, perfection, that is, tending in that direction.

Such *teleiotes* comes with a note of caution and includes the following six basic doctrines running through vs. 2:

-Not to lay down for a second time the foundation of repentance: *kataballo* implies a considerable amount of work not unlike what our author had done thus far. However, he has more in mind basics as they pertain to *metanoia* or literally a placing of the mind (*nous*) after (*meta-*) or after what we're accustomed to. *Metanoia* is specified as an *apo...*from...with regard to works (*ergon, -*) considered dead.

-Faith or *pistis* literally upon (*epi*) God

-Instruction with regard to baptism, *didache* also as teaching

-Laying on of hands, *epithesis* with another *epi-*, literally as a placing-upon

-Resurrection of the dead, *anastasis*

-Eternal judgment: *krima* also as decision, here with the adjective *aionios* which also can mean lasting for a given age

Vs. 3 is a short exhortation beginning with the conjunctive *kai* concerning the above mentioned six doctrines, that is, the first person plural of *poieo [-]* or doing them should God permit, *epitrepo*, literally as to turn upon (*epi-*).

Vs. 4 begins an extended sentence, essentially a warning in light of the six doctrines, and runs through vs. 6. It's complicated...very much so...and hinges upon the first word of vs. 6, the conjunctive *kai* which the **RSV** translates as "if." What comes before this *kai* is simply a build-up and what comes after is the unfortunate result...unfortunate in that it can't be resolved. *Adunatos* represents the impossibility facing persons who've experienced the following four:

-Enlightenment (*photizo*) or acceptance of the Gospel which at this time they've heard, not read (i.e., the oral tradition)

-*Geuo [-]* or to taste the *dorea* or gift which is *epouranios [-]*, heavenly

-*Metecho [-]* or to have with concerning the Holy Spirit (*Pneuma, -*)

-*Geuo* or to taste the beauty (*kalos, -*) of the word of God, *rhema [-]* as well as the *dunamis [-]* or power of the coming age, *aion [-]*

Note two references to *geuo* (to taste) which show how important it is concerning things spiritual. Implied is the absorption of *dorea* and *kalos*...gift and beauty...within oneself. Such incorporation in the literal of sense (i.e., of putting into the body), wonderful as it is, heightens the tragedy of the *kai* noted above which is translated as "if." What follows has the ability to undo all what had come before.

Vs. 6 describes the consequence of losing the four gifts above in terms of apostasy, *parapipto* literally as to fall beside, *para-* suggestive of having been in a position of privilege now lost. This is followed by the phrase which deals with the issue at hand, a bringing back to repentance (*metanoia, -*). Its importance is stressed through the

adverb *palin* [-] or “again” with the preposition *ana-* prefaced to the verb *anakainoo*, to renew or to restore. I.e., we have two occasions of again-ness. The potential renewal signified by *ana-* is nullified by a second use of this preposition in *anastauroo*, to crucify again the Son of God on their own and thus hold him in contempt, the verb being *paradeigmatizo*. This verb means to make an example of, to have a sample or pattern (*deigma*) which is set beside or *para-* for comparison.

In vs. 7-8 our author takes an example from the physical world and applies it to these unsettling words. Land (*ge* or earth) has drunk rain and brings forth vegetation which is useful, thus receiving a blessing from God, *eulogia* with *eu-* prefaced to *logion* [-]. However, should this same land produce thorns, etc., it is worthless and might as we be cursed. The adjective for the former is *adokimos*, not standing the test and *eggus* with *katara*, the noun for curse...near but not quite though pretty much there as the concluding words show whose end (*telos*, -), that is, the land, is to be burned. Such words come from Gn 3.17-18, the result of disobedience which harkens back to the Israelites not hearing the word of God in the Sinai wilderness: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.”

At last, vs. 9 moves out of this gloomy but necessary part of the letter by beginning with the positive *peitho* [-]. It means to be persuaded and is in the first person plural so favored by our author who, we should keep in mind, is anonymous. He’s at pains to call his readers beloved or *agapetos* which, of course, is derived from *agape*, for one so called is less likely to fall away, *parapipto* as in vs. 6. This first person plural approach continues by speaking of better things pertaining to salvation (*soteria*,-) and implies that what he had just presented were “worse,” if you will. We can take this as a kind of back-handed though necessary complement. If the readers aren’t warned, they may become lax and lose what they’ve gained.

In vs. 10 God isn’t unjust (*adikos* implies unrighteousness) in that he forgets both work done and love shown in service of the saints, the two verbs being *epiletho* and *endeiknumi*. As for the saints or those who are *hagios*, it applies to persons serious about their faith and are recognized as such. With regard to the verbs, note the two prepositions: the first literally as cause to forget-upon (*epi-*) as it pertains to *ergon* [-] or work and the second to show in (*en-*) as it pertains to *agape*. In other words, the *epi-* represents mindfulness of the *en-*, this *en-* reinforced by the preposition *eis* as “into his name.” Vs. 10 concludes with two uses of the verb *diakoneo*, literally to serve through: “having ministered and ministering.” The idea seems to be that ministering in the past continues into the present.

Vs. 11 is an extended sentence running through the next verse. It begins with the verb *epithumeo* where the preposition *epi-* prefaced to *thuo* shows an intensification of the desire our author has which is put in the first person plural. It's object?

Endeiknumi [-] or to show upon or where the *epi-* at hand bears upon the *en-* in this second verb; i.e., upon-to-in. Both pertain to a *spoude* or zeal or earnestness—they share in it each in their own way—with regard to (*pros*, direction towards-which). This concerns the fulfillment (*plerophia*, also as certainty) of hope to the end, *telos* [-] which is a completion and a way of speaking of a faith-filled death.

Hina [-] or “so that” beginning vs. 12 represents what the author as first person plural desires in *epithumeo*, to desire-upon. Instead of being sluggish or *nothros* [-], “we” wish the readers to be imitators of those who inherit the promises, *kleronomeo* [-] and *epaggelia* [-]. Being such an imitator or *mimetes* is another way of speaking of that close attention concerning the faith and patience (*pistis* [-] and *makrothumia*) which effect possession of the promise. The latter is rendered as long suffering or having a *thumos* [-] which can be extended indefinitely.

Vs. 13 signals a movement from the prosaic yet necessary precautions on dangers facing the Christian life to material that lends itself more to expanding from within which is the intent of this document. That is to say, we return to a discussion of the high priesthood relative to Jesus Christ. And so our anonymous author seems more at home in talking about Israel's history starting with God's promise to Abraham, *epaggello* meaning to proclaim, to announce. He puts this somewhat cleverly, in that God was looking for someone equal to himself to swear by. After having no success, he settled on himself, the verb being *omnumi* [-].

Continuing along in vs. 13, we have the following from Gn 22.16, “By myself I have sworn.” The Hebrew verb is *shavah* noted earlier in reference to Melchizedek followed by the preposition *b-* (‘in me’), the Greek being *kata*, “according to himself.” This is part of a fuller verse which runs as “‘By myself I have sworn,’ says the Lord, ‘because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only-begotten son.’” Reference is to Abraham about to sacrifice his son Isaac, this forming a kind of lead-in to another quote in vs. 14 from Gn 22.17¹² right after the previous one: “I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves because you have obeyed my voice.” The key word here is *shamah* or to

¹² Vs. 17 spills over into vs. 18 which is quoted here to get the full picture of what's going on.

hear: “have obeyed in my voice” which ties in with the earlier discussion on obedience.

Although vs. 15 is an independent sentence, the way the conjunctive *kai* is used makes it seem like part of the previous verse and could be taken as such. It’s a kind of footnote with regard to Abraham (proper name in **RSV** only) who had endured with great patience, *makrothumeo*: the adjective *makros* or “long” prefaced to the verb *thuo* [-], to desire earnestly, suggesting that such desire has extended over a long period of time. Because of this he had literally hit upon (*epitugchano*, *epi-* or upon) the promise mentioned in vs. 13, the noun being *epaggelia* [-]. Interestingly, right after this incident with Isaac we have a new chapter describing the death of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

Vs. 15 continues with the idea of swearing an oath, that is, *omnumi* [-] with respect to (*kata*, in accord with) something or someone we make which is greater than ourselves. This provides the framework for the oath (*horkos*) as final arbiter of disputes which is rendered as “a boundary (*peras*) into confirmation” or *bebaiosis*. As for dispute, the noun is *antilogia*, a kind of *logos* which is against (*anti-*) or contrary to the true nature of things at hand.

Keeping in mind what was just said about swearing an oath upon something greater helps us to understand that God operates in the same arena. For example, he deals with heirs of the promise or *epaggelia* noted above which hearkens back to Abraham and his obedience to the Lord¹³. The Lord wishes to show in a more convincing fashion the unchangeable character of his purpose, the key word being *ametathetos* which consists of the alpha privative prefaced to the verbal root *metabaino* (to pass from one side to the other, *meta-* as after). And this he confirmed with an oath, the verb being *mesiteuo* which is the offering a surety or mediate.

In the **RSV** vs. 18 is a continuation of an extended sentence whereas the **NIV** has it as a sentence on its own. Regardless, the Greek begins with *hina* [-], “so that” concerning two things (*pragma*: also as matter, thing, affair) that are unchangeable, *ametathetos*. They are found in the previous verse or referring to God’s promise and his oath. Both are rock solid which is to say that never can God be found as false (*pseudo*, to be deceived, mistaken). By the two we who have fled to him for refuge find strong encouragement to seize the hope before us. Our author uses the first

13 Actually “promise” occurs in Genesis three times, one of which refers directly to Abraham: “So that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him” [18.19], these words uttered by the three visitors.

person plural indicating that he too participates in what he's conveying to his readers.

As for this flight, the *kata-* of *katapheugo* can be taken as “down” or as something like “down in” and thus is an intensification of the root *pheugo*. Being so ensconced in this protection, the nature of which is suggested but not delineated, we obtain not just encouragement or *paraklesis* but one which is strong. This noun can read literally as a summonsing beside, *para-* and enables us to grasp the hope set before us, *krateo* also as to take hold of. And so this hope or *elpis* [-] is set before us (*prokeimi*) while we're in that refuge just spoken of. It's suggestive that our presence there, if you will, is temporary, not permanent which is in accord with our author's discussion about Abraham's promise.

In vs. 19 our author continues to use the first person plural by way of encouragement, likening the hope which he just delineated as an anchor of the soul (*psuche*, -). It's described as sure and steadfast, *asphales* and *bebaios* [-] or not liable to fall and firm. This hope takes on a life of its own, if you will, by entering the inner shrine located behind the curtain, the verb *eiserchomai* [-] with the preposition *eis*...a double *eis*. If that weren't enough, the adjective *esoteros* or inner embodies such *eis*-ness which is the definition of the holy of holies behind the *katapetasma* or curtain, this noun being derived from a verb meaning to spread out. Chapter Twenty-Six of Exodus goes into great details as to this curtain which there is called *yeryhah* by reason of its association with the entrance to a tent as it moves in the wind. As for the Holy of Holies, it's described in Chapter Twenty-Five of Exodus.

Vs. 20 is the last verse of this chapter which began with the vexing problem of falling away from God and the difficulty of handling it. By shifting from this quandary to examining the role of Jesus Christ as high priest a solution might present itself on its own without our intervention. And so our author appeals to imagery familiar to his listeners, that is, the practices and layout of the Jerusalem temple. He posits Jesus himself as having entered the inner shrine, *eiserchomai* again but no preposition *eis* as above. His role as *prodromos* or one who runs before takes the place of that preposition, he doing all this for our benefit. Jesus can *eiserchomai* as *prodromos* only by reason of being a high priest according to the order or according to the *taxis* [-] of Melchizedek, this hearkening back to 5.6 with its quote from Ps 110.4.

Chapter Seven

The opening words of this chapter, “for this Melchizedek” (*houtos gar*) reveals our author’s approach to an obviously little known figure from the past. They convey a desire to get to the heart of a matter discussed earlier in the letter (cf. 5.6) by singling out or isolating the topic at hand, namely, the priesthood of this king of Jeru(salem). As noted with regard to 5.6, Melchizedek is found cryptically and briefly in Gn 14.17-24 plus Ps 110.4 after which he disappears totally from the scene. Something about this mystery man caught our author’s attention. Perhaps he saw a certain reflection of himself and developed that unknowingly to his readers. At the same time he wished to conceal his identity; if not, that would detract from the letter and introduce a whole can of worms as essentially irrelevant. And so apart from the fleeting references at hand, we know nothing further about Melchizedek. Better to keep it that way and milk it for what it’s worth but only in accord with our author’s intent. Surely if both were contemporaries they’d delight in their respective obscurity which reveals their love for God. Any personal interference would be seen as a major detraction.

For some reason or other the Genesis text calls Melchizedek a priest (*kohen*) of God Most High. He comes across as an isolated person in the midst of a land where various gods are worshiped, standing out as a sore thumb amid a jumble of peoples who had worshiped various divinities. As for his offering to Abram¹⁴, it has the air of being politically motivated after his defeat of several kings. This fact is made especially vivid by the noun *kope* translated as slaughter, also a cutting into pieces and should be kept in mind when making any comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ. As noted with regard to 5.6, the king of Sodom accompanied him and takes an active part by asking for those Abraham had taken prisoners, not any booty. Also the association of Melchizedek with Jeru(salem) can tie in with the temple that would be constructed there later on. With this in mind, the two poles of Israel’s history—Abram and the temple with its priesthood—can be tied together.

Vs. 2 is a continuation of the previous verse where Abraham gives a tenth “of all” to Melchizedek, the verb being *merizo* which has a more technical sense of assigning or allotting a part. Most likely it’s booty taken from the kings he had defeated. After this designation, again for political reasons, our author explains that the proper name Melchizedek translates as king of righteousness (*dikaiousune*, -) whose domain is Salem (*shalom*) or peace. Indeed, he stands out as a beacon in an otherwise amorphous landscape of peoples and their gods. With this Salem/*shalom* in mind, mention of Abraham’s *kope* noted above as a genuine annihilation stands in sharp contrast.

¹⁴ In Genesis it’s Abram whereas in Hebrews it’s Abraham.

All this is fine with our author taking certain liberty to describe Abraham's relationship with Melchizedek. However, vs. 2 admittedly gets a bit fanciful: without father, mother or genealogy, these three words being prefaced with alpha privative. Emphasis on Melchizedek's uniqueness continues with his apparent lack of resources, if you will: he has no beginning with respect to time nor an end to his life. I.e., both *arche* [-] and *telos* [-] are not applicable to him which would make him an angel if not like one of them. Perhaps here our author has in mind his earlier discussion on this matter and is drawn to make a parallel.

Such lack of physical rootedness, albeit exaggerated, qualifies Melchizedek for being like the Son of God continuing not as a priest but as one forever. Again, such talk harkens back to the distinction between Jesus Christ and angels and the broader issue of created vs. uncreated reality. *Aphomoioo* is the verb to make like or similar which our author employs to draw a parallel between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ. Admittedly it's a thin one, yet he deemed it sufficient for those with a Jewish background who are reading his letter. That means he had a certain sensitivity others may not have had, so why not capitalize on it? If others can't accept this argument, most everyone can accept the fact that Jesus remains a priest for all time. This is expressed by the preposition *eis* or into with *dienekes*, without interruption, continuous. Failure to accept this would mean one couldn't accept Jesus Christ as mediator between God and humanity.

Vs. 4 is comprised of two short sentences, the first being a kind of exclamation where our author invites his readers to consider the greatness of Melchizedek. The verb *theoreo* or to see is more encompassing than just giving a glance. It implies observation in a sustained fashion as well as coming to an understanding. Because those who addressed are familiar with Melchizedek or more so than a purely Gentile audience, they can appreciate the enthusiasm being expressed here. The second sentence simply says that Abraham gave Melchizedek one tenth of his spoils, *akrothinion* literally the top part of a heap. Some this topmost part coupled with the small-ish one tenth means that Melchizedek didn't receive much volume-wise but a lot quality-wise with respect to the booty Abraham from the kings he had defeated.

Vs. 5 expands on this idea of tithing, shifting attention from Melchizedek who's somewhat of an anomaly because he came on the scene from nowhere. Our author speaks of the descendants of Levi—not their pedigree, another thing with which the readers are familiar—but the tithing associated with them. “To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance in return for their service which they serve, their service in the tent of meeting” [Num 18.21]. The noun for tithe is *mahser*

which is related to the number ten and thus fits in neatly with the verse at hand. Note, however, that *mahser* is associated with *nachalah* or inheritance. This, as the Numbers verse indicates, complies with their priestly functions.

Vs. 5 is at pains to say that the descendants of Levi have received (*lambano*, -) the *hierateia* or priestly office. If he didn't mention this, the door could be left open to think they have usurped it. This is backed up by a commandment in the law (*kata* with *nomos* [-] or according to the law (*Torah*) to take tithes, *apodekatoo* containing the number ten or a tenth. Again our author is careful here. He says this is done not so much from the people but from the brethren (*adelphos*, -) of the Levites. They have a right despite the fact that such brethren also are descendants of Abraham.

Having spoken of the Levites, vs. 6 shifts attention back to Melchizedek without mentioning him although the readers know the author has him in mind. By use of the tiny conjunctive *de* (but) he acknowledges the difficulty of positing a basically unknown character from the past as a model for Christ's priesthood. That is to say, Melchizedek does not have the same genealogy as the Levites (literally 'not from them') yet has in common the taking of tithes from Abraham. The specific references again: "And Abram gave him a tenth of everything" [Gn 14.20]. This, of course, is followed by the king of Sodom saying "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself" [Gn 14.22]. As for the latter, *nephesh* or soul is used for persons and *rekush* for goods which also means substance or wealth. A dark side of the king whom we associated with a less than desirable place is intimated in his demand for *nephesh*. We have no information what happened latter but can surmise it wasn't good.

A commentary of sorts follows in vs. 7, that no dispute exists when the inferior is blessed by the superior. Here we have two uses of the verbal root *logeo* or two ways of speaking indicated by their respective prefaces *anti-* and *eu-* [-] or against and well; the latter is the adverbial form of *agathos*, good. The words, of course, are *antilogia* and *eulogeo* or dispute and to bless.

Vs. 8 has a contrast between *hode* and *ekei* or here and there. To the former belongs tithes as they pertain to mortals and to the latter, one who lives, the contrast being signified by the two verbs *apothnesko* and *zao*, to cease having vital functions and to live. The reality of latter is attested by the verb *martureo* [-], to be a witness. Such witnessing can be backed up by 5.6 and 6.20 where Christ is declared (by scripture) as being a priest forever.

Vs. 9 begins with the phrase *kai hos epos eipein*, the first word being a conjunctive followed by something like “as to speak a word,” *epos* also as a tale or a story. It can intimate a well-intentioned desire to stretch the facts> Our author had introduced this with Melchizedek himself, that Levi as a person who represents the priestly line named after him both receives and pays tithes through Abraham. However, the goal is to show the close bond between the Levitical priesthood and Abraham as patriarch. As for Levi, he does this while still in his ancestor’s loins when Melchizedek and Abraham had met. Although one is tempted to think of Jesus and John the Baptist meeting in their wombs of their respective mothers (cf. Lk 1.41), both were alive whereas Levi has the potential of being alive. One can’t help but wonder if Melchizedek somehow felt Levi’s presence within him while related to the patriarch. As for Levi, he won’t come to birth until Gn 29.34, his mother being Leah who was married to Jacob who favored his other wife Rachel. And so we have a paradox of sorts. Levi is essential to Israel’s priesthood while at the same time not from a mother whom the patriarch Jacob favored. Surely this quirkiness, if you will, carries over to Christ’s priesthood which is central to the church yet in a way has an element of being a bit off center.

Vs. 11 is a lengthy rhetorical question which calls into question the Levitical priesthood compared with the one according to the order of Melchizedek. Note that *taxis* [-] or order is applied to the latter, not the former as it is in 5.6. Perhaps the notion of some kind of arrangement regarding priestly things is what our author sees in Melchizedek, an advantage over the Levitical one. The admittedly murky background of this priest of Jeru(salem) has its strength resting soely on the relationship with Abraham. If it weren’t for him, most likely he’d be a blip on the radar screen.

This shift with regard to the priesthood ties in with the *teleiosis* or perfection noted in vs. 11 which supposedly isn’t attainable under the Levitical one. Instead of this word being translated as such in the **RSV**, “fulfillment” seems better because it’s more recognizable. At this point or before the verse moves on, there’s an editorial insert of sorts: the Levitical priesthood was responsible for transmitting the Law or *Torah* to the people, *nomotheteomai* which consists of *nomos* and *tithemi* (law and to place), in short, to legislate. That is to say, this priesthood and *Torah* around one and the same.

After this insertion vs. 11 continues with saying outrightly why there’s a need for another priest to come (the verb *anistemi* is used, to arise) according to the order or *taxis* of Melchizedek rather than the *taxis* belonging to Aaron.

Vs. 12 elaborates upon the distinction made in the previous verse by speaking of a change in priesthood, *metathesis* (literally a putting after, *meta-* and *tithemi*, -). When such a putting-after, if you will, happens, the same applies to the Law (*nomos* = *Torah*) as well, that is, by necessity (*anagke*). Obviously our author has in mind a radical shift, namely, that this applies to a man from another tribe, not Levi. One must keep in mind, of course, that priests were from this tribe and not from the other eleven. As this apologia move on, another dynamic seems to be at work, one that's described but not delved into as much but becomes clearer should we take a few steps back. It seems that sometimes God goes against accepted norms. While he respects them, his proclivity to alter them here and there can throw a lot of people off balance. If it weren't for this interjection, religion would be quite dull and uninspiring.

In vs. 14 and 15 we have two instances of the adjective *delos*, also as manifest or clear. In vs. 14 it has the preposition *pros-* prefaced to it (indicative of immediacy, direction towards-which) and rendered as "evident." In vs. 15 *delos* has the preposition *kata-* prefaced to it, implying clarity in accord with or something quite plain. The second has the preposition *kata-* which here implies clarity in accord with or something quite plain. The first applies to Jesus who here is called "our Lord" found last in 2.3 and suggests a more formal approach out of reverence to the priesthood. Also *prosdelos* is something many observant Jews of our author's readers were familiar with, that Jesus is not descended from the tribe of Levi but from Judah, the verb being *anatello*, to spring up. "And you, O Bethlehem...are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler" [Mt 2.6]. Our author cites the best authority on this who is recognized by all, that is, Moses. He had remained completely silent as to priests associated with the tribe of Judah.

Vs. 15 has the second adjective or *katadelos* with *perissoteron* or "even more." It pertains to another priest who arises (*anistemi*, -)-*heteros* or another referring to Jesus Christ—in accord with (*kata*) the likeness of Melchizedek. As mentioned several times earlier, a subject matter as this *homoiotēs* has a tenuous quality about it, as though our author was making too much from too little actual information. *Katadelos* refers to the power of a life which cannot be destroyed, not anything legal. *Dunamis* [-] is contrasted with *nomos* [-] or the Law, *Torah*. It's associated with this indestructible life, the adjective being *akatalutos*, something that cannot be loosened (*luo*) whereas *nomos* is associated with *enotole* or a commandment.

In order to once again drive home the association of Jesus Christ's priesthood with that of Melchizedek, vs. 17 quotes the familiar refrain from Ps 110.4 in vs. 17. This sets the stage for "on the one hand" and "on the other hand" scenario as through the

small particles *men* and *de*. Vs. 18 has the *men* which speaks of a commandment (*entole*) that now is considered as belonging to the past as indicated by the noun *athetesis* which means the refusal to recognize that something is valid. Here *entole* seems to be used for *Torah* treated as such because of its weakness and uselessness, *athenes* and *anopheles*, the alpha privative making the contrast being made stronger.

Before the counterpart to *men*, (that is, the *de*) we have inserted at least in parentheses in the **RSV** the fact that the Law made nothing perfect, *teleioo* [-]. Such words can echo those of Jesus himself: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” [Mt 5.17]. The verb *pleroo* or to fulfill is used here which counters the negative of *teleioo* (actually the two verbs in and by themselves are not dissimilar). Both are opposite to the two uses of *kataluo*, literally to loosen down (*luo* + *kata-*).

After this insertion to vs. 19 comes, as noted above, the *de* which consists of introducing a hope (*elpis*,) presumably better, *epeisagoge* having two prepositions prefaced to the root *ago* (to lead, to carry), *epi-* and *eis-* or upon and into giving a sense of full or total introduction. Actually this *epi* + *eis* + *ago* allows us to draw near to God, *eggizo* also as to approach.

Vs. 20 is short, almost a continuation of the previous verse, beginning with the conjunctive *kai* (and). Our author wishes to add that the better hope has an oath, *horkomosis* more indicative of the process of taking an oath. I.e., it's something that's active and always present. Thus vs. 21 follows with the observation that priests in the past took up their office without such an *horkomosis* whereas the present one has such a promise. Here we have yet again Ps 114.4 with attention on the verb *omnumi*, to swear or confirm by oath. Right afterward vs. 22 says that this verse, so much referred to, makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant, *egguos* pertaining to the assurance that something be fulfilled. Again, the argument put forth has a certain tenuousness about it but is important in this letter.

Vs. 23 says that there had been quite a large number of former priests because of the simple fact of their mortality which prevented them from continuing in their position. This is expressed by the verbs *koluo* and *parameno*, to hinder and literally to remain at hand or by the side (*para-*). Hence mortality as applicable to the Levitical priesthood is a hindrance. Those involved may have had an inkling about this which grew over time and that somehow it heralded an end to this institution. In fact, it did come to an end with the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

Vs. 24 spills over from the previous verse with *de* or “but” which introduces a contrast with the mortality of the Levitical priests. However, instead of being mentioned by name, Jesus is referred to as “he.” He holds his priesthood forever, *meno* as to remain without *para-* prefaced to it in reference to the previous verse. The adjective *aparabatos* as permanent is interesting in that *para-* is part of it, “not going (*baino*) beside.”

Hothen which begins vs. 25 as “consequently” is a kind of continuation of *de* (but) in vs. 24. Here the author makes a bold statement, that “he” has the capacity to save (*sozo, -*) *eis* to *panteles* which reads literally as “into all complete(ness)” those who approach God through him. Two prepositions are at work here: the *pros-* or direction toward-which prefaced to the verb *prosago* and *dia* or through him or Jesus Christ. So this verse is quite loaded and requires that we take all the prepositions into consideration, including the *eis*. After all, “he” lives always, *pantote* compared with *eis* to *aiona* (*aion, -*) or “forever” in verse 24. And so *pantote* (*pas + tote = all + then*) describes “him” as living—not dying as with the Levitical priests—to make intercession, the preposition *eis* (into) with the verb *entugchano* which has the preposition *en-* (in) prefaced to it, to draw near in the sense of making an appeal.

Vs. 26 begins with *gar* or “for” as a lead-in to more information about Jesus (he continues unnamed through the end of this chapter) as high priest, this word again setting him off from the Levitical priests. *Gar* fits in well with *prepo*, “it is fitting” in the sense of to be seen clearly followed by five qualities:

- hosios* or holy
- akakos* or without evil
- amiantos* or without defilement
- chorizo* or separate from sinners, also to distinguish
- hupselos* or exalted above the heavens; comparative form used

By reason of these five characteristics, “he” has no need (*anagke, -*) to offer sacrifices on a daily basis as is the case with the Levites. This would include sacrifices for his own sins as well as the people. The verb is *anaphero* which consists of the root *phero* (to bear, to carry) prefaced with *ana-* which connotes that which is above...to move from a lower position to a higher one.

Vs. 28 concludes this chapter by contrasting the *nomos* [-] or *Torah* with the oath or *horkomosis* [-] or as noted above, more the process of taking an oath. Note the personal touch, if you will, of *Torah* which does the appointing of high priests, *kathistemi* or to set (*histemi*) in accord with (*kata-*) a given order. Interestingly, the

form used here—the actual installation—suggests that the Jerusalem temple was still functioning but as we know, not for much longer.

The second part of this verse, however, has *de* translated as “but” which introduces not just the oath but the word (singular *logos*, -) of the oath. This *logos* came later than *Torah* and appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever, *eis* or into with *aion* [-]. As for the verb “appoints,” it’s in the **RSV** only, not the Greek text. So it runs literally as “the (one) after the law, son for the age who was perfected,” the verb being *teleioo* [-]. Two references from Hebrews can be associated with this, 2.10 and 5.9. Nevertheless, as pointed out several times earlier, the argument presented here is somewhat tenuous. One can’t help but wonder how those reading it accepted our author’s point of view, especially since the temple was still in operation. If it hadn’t been destroyed but persisted for a longer period of time, this argument may not have gotten as much traction as it had done originally.