The Importance of Being the Eldest Brother and Its Relevance for New Testament Christology

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Table of Contents:

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

1.1 African Understandings of Jesus as the Eldest Brother ................................................................. 3

1.1.1 Anthony O. Nkwoka: Jesus as the Eldest Brother (Okpara) ................................................. 7

1.1.2 Harry Sawyerr: Jesus as the Incarnated Eldest Brother within a Great Family .................. 12

1.1.3 François Kabasélé Lumbala: Jesus Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother ......................... 19

1.2 The Relevance and Challenge of Jesus as the Eldest Brother ..................................................... 24

1.2.1 What Eldest Brother? ............................................................................................................. 27

1.2.2 African or Mediterranean Eldest Brother? .......................................................................... 30

1.2.3 Jesus as the Eldest Brother in the New Testament .................................................................. 32

1.2.4 The Challenge Formulated as a Thesis .................................................................................. 35

1.3 Considerations of Terminology and Language ............................................................................. 35

2 Eldest Brother in African Societies .................................................................................................. 45

2.1 Ethnic Groups Referred to by Nkwoka ....................................................................................... 46

2.1.1 Igbo ........................................................................................................................................... 46

2.2 Ethnic Groups Referred to by Sawyerr ....................................................................................... 58

2.2.1 Akan ........................................................................................................................................... 58

2.2.2 Kikuyu ....................................................................................................................................... 64

2.2.3 Mende ...................................................................................................................................... 67

2.2.4 Yoruba ............................................................................................................................... 70

2.3 Ethnic Groups Referred to by Kabasélé Lumbala ....................................................................... 73

2.3.1 Various Bantu Ethnic Groups ............................................................................................... 74

2.3.2 Kuba and Luba ........................................................................................................................ 79

2.4 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 82

3 Eldest Brother in the First-Century Mediterranean World ................................................................. 85

3.1 Family Relations in Antiquity ....................................................................................................... 87

3.2 Eldest Brother in Greek and Roman Literature ......................................................................... 90

3.2.1 Eldest Brother in the Works of Herodotus .......................................................................... 102

3.2.2 Eldest Brother in the Works of Plutarch ............................................................................... 110

3.3 Eldest Brother in the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint ....................................................................... 120

3.3.1 Characteristics of Eldest Brother as Social Phenomenon or Reality ................................ 120
3.3.2 Characteristics of Firstborn Used Metaphorically ............................................. 136
3.4 Eldest Brother in the Works of Philo ...................................................................... 147
  3.4.1 Characteristics of Eldest Brother as Social Reality .......................................... 150
  3.4.2 Firstborn Used Metaphorically ......................................................................... 159
3.5 Eldest Brother in the Works of Josephus ................................................................. 176
  3.5.1 Explicit About Who Is the Eldest Son or Brother ............................................. 179
  3.5.2 The Eldest Is Expected to Succeed .................................................................. 182
  3.5.3 Spokesman, Representative, and Responsible Eldest Brother ......................... 186
  3.5.4 Rights and Statuses Connected with Being Elder Brothers ............................... 187
  3.5.5 The Term πρωτότοκος in the Works of Josephus ............................................. 190
  3.5.6 Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 191
3.6 Summary and Conclusions ...................................................................................... 192
4 Jesus as Eldest Brother in the New Testament ............................................................ 195
  4.1 Hebrews 2:10–18: The Eldest Brother Who Acts on Behalf of His Brothers ...... 195
    4.1.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 195
    4.1.2 The Challenges Presented in Context ............................................................. 198
    4.1.3 The Son Presented as the Eldest Brother ....................................................... 201
    4.1.4 Conclusions ..................................................................................................... 247
  4.2 Romans 8:28–30: The Firstborn among Many Siblings ......................................... 248
    4.2.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 248
    4.2.2 Establishing Common Origin ......................................................................... 250
    4.2.3 The Firstborn as the Eldest Brother ............................................................... 264
    4.2.4 Eldest Brother Characteristics ....................................................................... 272
    4.2.5 Conclusions ..................................................................................................... 276
  4.3 Colossians 1:15–20: The Elevated Firstborn—the Eldest Brother? ....................... 278
    4.3.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 278
    4.3.2 Establishing Common Origin ......................................................................... 280
    4.3.3 Jesus—the Firstborn ....................................................................................... 286
    4.3.4 Statuses and Roles Corresponding with Being the Eldest Brother? ............... 295
    4.3.5 Conclusions ..................................................................................................... 296
4.4  Mark 3:31–35: Jesus and His New Family ................................................................. 296
4.4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 296
4.4.2 Jesus’ Status and Role in Relation to His New Family ..................................... 298
4.4.3 Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 306
4.5  Matthew 25:31–46: Jesus and the Least of These My Brothers ....................... 307
4.5.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 307
4.5.2 The King in Relation to the Least of These My Brothers ................................. 308
4.5.3 Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 314
5  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 315
6  Bibliography ............................................................................................................. 323
Formalities:


Abbreviations not found in *The SBL Handbook of Style, Second Edition*:

- **ACS** *African Christian Studies*
- **AFER** *African Ecclesiastical Review*
- **AJT** *Asia Journal of Theology*
- **eHRAF** electronic Human Relations Area Files
- **HRAF** Human Relations Area Files
- **IRM** *International Review of Mission*
- **JAH** *Journal of African History*
- **JRAI** *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*
- **LEB** Lexham English Bible
- **NASB95** New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update
- **NCV** New Century Version
- **NIV 1984** New International Version 1984
- **NIVAC** NIV Application Commentary
- **Bibel 2011** Norwegian Bible Society Translation: Bokmål 2011
- **NoTM** *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon*
- **NSBT** New Studies in Biblical Theology
- **ZMiss** *Zeitschrift für Mission*
1 Introduction

Several years ago, I worked as a missionary in Northern Sumatra in Indonesia, teaching at a small Bible college. I experienced there that when the Batak of Northern Sumatra were talking about Jesus, they were using other images than those I was used to in my country, Norway. One particular image fascinated me more than the others: Jesus presented as the first member of the family with the believers as his siblings. This image was called *marga Kristus*. In the Indonesian language, *marga* can mean both “clan” and “family name.”¹ Among the Batak, it is of utmost importance to know the number of generations from the first ancestor of their clan or lineage. A smaller number of generations back to the first ancestor means higher ascribed honor than a larger number of generations. The Batak use this cultural kinship relationship in Christian preaching to emphasize that all believers belong to the first generation in their relationship with Christ. The believers are the brothers and sisters of Jesus. There is thus nobody in *marga Kristus* with a higher number than one. Combined with the privileged status the firstborns have had in traditional Batak society, this made *marga Kristus* a telling image among their own.

Later I was referred to an article entitled “Jesus as Eldest Brother, (Okpara): An Igbo Paradigm for Christology in the African Context” written by Anthony O. Nkwoka that dealt with nearly the same subject, but from an African point of view.² He attempts there to present Jesus as the eldest brother to his younger siblings (the believers) in the New Testament. When reading Nkwoka, I also noticed that his African cultural background

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helped him recognize the preferential status of Jesus as a brother to younger siblings. At first, I wanted to pursue this topic with reference to my former experience from Northern Sumatra, but because of a lack of suitable written presentations, I looked for other contributions from African authors and found more written material that is relevant. Below I will present this material.

Emilio Julio Miguel de Carvalho has in the following quote given an apt description that reflects this “African eldest brother Christology”: “Such an idea of Jesus as our elder brother is perfectly understandable, due to the role that the older brother has in our society and culture: of a defender, mediator and protector.” An African understanding of the eldest brother seems to offer a meaningful image useful in the efforts to formulate a contextual African Christology. If we were to search for an exegetical basis for this understanding of Jesus—read in light of its first-century Mediterranean context—what understanding of the eldest brother would we then find?

To develop my thesis, I will first present this African Christology. After discussing the relevance and challenges of this Christology, I will present a more precisely defined thesis, which here may be given in a preliminary form: According to an African understanding of Jesus, he may be understood as the eldest brother within a large family. As such, he has certain roles and holds certain statuses, which to a certain extent can be substantiated from a reading of the New Testament in light of its first-century Mediterranean context.

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4 The use of “an African understanding” and similar phrases in the following is not an expression of a position arguing for one common African understanding, but refers to the particular understanding expressed by the African authors in the present context.
1.1 African Understandings of Jesus as the Eldest Brother

Concurrently with the liberation of the former colonies and during the process of becoming indigenous, the effort to write an African theology became more important among African theologians. John V. Taylor formulated the question succinctly:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognizable to the rest of the Church Universal?5

Introduction

Among those who initially responded to this challenge to formulate an African theology, most seemed to concentrate their efforts on the African cultural situation with less attention to biblical studies, especially in Christology. The attempts to formulate an “African eldest brother Christology” have been one attempt among several others, to respond to this neglect in writing an African theology.

Harry Sawyerr was probably the first to contribute substantially in this area. He has made a significant impact on the christological discussion in African theology. Aylward Shorter thus comments, “Sawyerr’s suggestion provided an opening for Black Theology and the concept of Christ as the ‘universal brother’ of diminished humankind.” John S. Mbiti asserts that Sawyerr’s work is a substantial study in indigenous theology: “The first

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8 See footnotes 43 and 44 below for a short description of him and a list of his major contributions to this topic.

African theologian of our time to publish a substantial study in the area of indigenous Theology to my knowledge is H. Sawyerr, in *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* (1968). Mbiti labels Sawyerr’s approach “Contact Theology,” which he defines as “a Theology built upon areas of apparent similarities and contact between Christianity and traditional African concepts and practices.”

Unfortunately, few theologians have carried out an investigation as thorough as that of Sawyerr. Most of them give rather short comments on how Africans understand Christ as their brother. Another African that has tried to relate this christological thinking to

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12 The following are some examples: William H. Crane comments: “Jesus Christ confronts African man not as individualized man set over against other men, but as our elder brother, as the first-fruits of a new humanity bound together in the covenant sealed by the sacrifice of His blood and body”; see William H. Crane, “Indigenization in the African Church,” *IRM* 53 (1964): 408–22, here 414, doi:10.1111/j.1758-6631.1964.tb02996.x. Crane is a black American identifying himself with the Africans.

Luntadila Ndala-za-Fwa makes the following statement: “In the Independent Churches, Africans have encountered the risen Christ who has become their brother, one of themselves”; see Luntadila Ndala-za-Fwa, “A Ray of Hope: Evangelization in the Independent African Churches,” in *African Challenge*, ed. Kenneth Y. Best (Nairobi: Transafrica Publishers, 1975), 160–83, here 160. Ndala-za-Fwa has been general secretary of the Kimbanguist Church with its head office in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Sigqibo Dwane states: “The problem thus created is that if Christ is other than the rest of mankind, then it is difficult to visualise how he can be one of us, our elder brother who stands where we stand”; see Sigqibo Dwane, “Christology in the Third World,” *JTSA* 21 (1977): 3–12, here 6. Dwane was a bishop of the Ethiopian Episcopal Church in South Africa.

Aylward Shorter remarks: “Lineage head and elder brother are excellent Scriptural images for Christ”; see Aylward Shorter, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited,” *AFER* 25 (1983): 197–203, here 199. Shorter was born in Britain, but he has held teaching posts in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Britain.

Judith M. Bahemuka comments: “Christ becomes our brother because the African is a child of God. This gives him the right to belong to the royal priesthood”; see Bahemuka, “Hidden Christ,” in Mugambi and Magesa, *Jesus in African Christianity*, 12, emphasis original. Bahemuka is from Kenya.

Finally, Bediako says: “Our Saviour is our Elder Brother who has shared in our African experience in every respect, except in our sin and alienation from God, an alienation with which our myths or origins make us only too familiar. Being our true Elder Brother now in the presence of God, his Father and our Father, he displaced the mediatorial function of our natural ‘spirit-fathers’”; see Bediako, “Jesus in African Culture,” 102, emphasis original. See also Bediako, “Biblical Christologies,” 103. Bediako was from Ghana.
the New Testament material is the aforementioned Nkwoka in the previously mentioned article by him.\textsuperscript{13} Ukachukwu Chris Manus comments that Nkwoka’s article “represents a further milestone in this direction of Biblical Christology.”\textsuperscript{14}

Few theologians have so far taken up the christological proposal outlined by Nkwoka for further investigation. The theme of Jesus as the elder brother does come to the fore, however, from a different perspective. François Kabasélé Lumbala deals with the topic of Jesus as our brother in an article entitled “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother.”\textsuperscript{15} I will not discuss the implications of the wider theme of Jesus as ancestor, but concentrate on what is relevant concerning the brother relation.\textsuperscript{16} Because Kabasélé Lumbala uses the status and role of the elder brother within the family to show what it means to call Jesus our elder brother, this is a workable option.\textsuperscript{17}

Below I will present the material from these three authors.\textsuperscript{18} Nkwoka’s contribution is probably the easier to grasp from a non-African perspective; therefore, I will present his contribution first, after that the richer and more biblically grounded contribution by Sawyerr, and finally Kabasélé Lumbala’s contribution.

\textsuperscript{13} Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother.” See footnote 2 above.
\textsuperscript{14} Manus, Christ, the African King, 68.
\textsuperscript{15} Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” in Schreiter, Faces of Jesus in Africa, 116–27.
\textsuperscript{17} Nyamiti has a more systematic approach and does not relate Jesus as Brother-Ancestor to the position of the brother within the family but to ancestorship where brother qualifies ancestor; see Nyamiti, Christ as Our Ancestor, 23. Shorter asks on the other hand whether lineage head and elder brother gain anything as christological images by paying attention to how deceased lineage heads and elder brothers are venerated in traditional African religion; see Shorter, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited,” 199.
\textsuperscript{18} Chronological developments are not decisive factors concerning how the material is presented.
Before I present this material I will give a very short overview of the main characteristics of African cosmology as an aid in providing a broader African context for the presentation below.\textsuperscript{19} The following five features are considered particularly important: 1) A fundamental belief in transcendent realities that includes the existence of a Supreme Being, the creator of the universe. The Supreme Being is universal and does not belong to particular peoples or societies. 2) God, the Supreme Being, is accompanied by “lesser deities, ancestors of clans and lineages, and other benevolent and malevolent powers” in the transcendent world.\textsuperscript{20} These lesser deities, ancestors, and powers can influence the lives of individual people for good or for ill.\textsuperscript{21} Among these the ancestors are the guardians of morality; that together with the deities “reward and punish people according to their deeds.”\textsuperscript{22} 3) Humankind is weak, finite, and impure. Therefore one is dependent on the Supreme Being and benevolent powers for protection. 4) A belief in the holiness of human life and its divine source. 5) In Africa, to be human means to belong to and take active part in the life of the whole community.\textsuperscript{23}

1.1.1 Anthony O. Nkwoka: Jesus as the Eldest Brother (Okpara)

Anthony O. Nkwoka\textsuperscript{24} gave in 1991 a stimulating contribution to the theme of Jesus as the eldest brother with the aforementioned article entitled “Jesus as Eldest Brother, (Okpara): An Igbo Paradigm for Christology in the African Context.”\textsuperscript{25} Nkwoka notes there the massive growth of Christians among the Igbo, an ethnic group living in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{26} Commenting on the translation of the Bible into Igbo, done by Thomas J. Dennis, he notes that the translator uses \textit{Okpara Chineke} as a rendering of Son of God

\textsuperscript{20} Asamoah-Gyadu, \textit{The Encyclopedia of Christianity} 5:166.
\textsuperscript{21} Asamoah-Gyadu, \textit{The Encyclopedia of Christianity} 5:166.
\textsuperscript{22} Asamoah-Gyadu, \textit{The Encyclopedia of Christianity} 5:167.
\textsuperscript{23} Asamoah-Gyadu, \textit{The Encyclopedia of Christianity} 5:167.
\textsuperscript{24} Anthony O. Nkwoka is a Nigerian. He teaches at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. He has also been a visiting professor at Central University College, Accra, Ghana. He received his PhD in 1990 at Obafemi Awolowo University. He has published extensively.
\textsuperscript{25} Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother.” The following is based on this article.
\textsuperscript{26} See further on page 43 below.
(Jesus Christ). This was a contextual translation because *Okpara Chineke* means “firstborn Son of God” in Igbo. It was thus a deliberate choice and an effort to contextualize the gospel.

The Igbo are mainly patrilineal, and the wish for a son is strong among them. The place of the *okpara* or firstborn son in the family is unique, and his parents, siblings, and the larger community respect and highly esteem him. Within the wider community, the *Eze* (the kings) “exercise both priestly and social leadership through the okpara, heads of families, lineages, and clans rather than through their own staff.”

Of the privileges of the *okpara*, Nkwoka mentions that the *okpara* is the confidant of the father on the family level. The father confides vital family information to the *okpara*. He is the second in command as long as the father lives. His inheritance rights are special and protected. Before his sisters are married, he must be consulted. In addition, he is expected to marry before his younger brothers. He must not take part in various dangerous unimportant activities. He receives the seniority tribute; that is, he receives certain parts of the animal in cases where the father of the man who killed the animal is dead. He also receives tribute gifts on the great feast days of the lineage.

The *okpara* also has many responsibilities and social roles. As “the second father,” he aids his father. Later, when the father gets old, he represents him. The *okpara* is also responsible for the burial of his father and takes care of the upbringing of his younger brothers and sisters. He organizes the work when clearing and cultivating common farmland. When needed, he also has the responsibility of disciplining family members.

In the religious sphere, he is the family priest, being the link between the family members and the living-dead ancestors. He pours libations and offers prayers to the ancestors, and he organizes sacrifices. He consults the ancestors and gods of the land through diviners when unusual events occur. In social activities, he is highly involved; he actively takes part in rites of passage, and he gives the name to a newborn child during the naming ceremony after finding out which ancestor is reincarnated in the child. He

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ensures proper socialization of family members and arranges for proper care of those in need of it. Politically he is the traditional prime minister and head of the family unit. He sounds out the majority opinion in the family, takes a stand and the others must comply. Because of developments in recent years, some of the traditional aspects of the role of the okpara have changed.\textsuperscript{29}

Nkwoka then continues to the New Testament to learn what it says about Jesus as the elder brother. He notes first the significance of the title “Son of God” for Jesus. The Gospel of Mark underlines his divine sonship, but his humanity is also stressed (Mark 1:11; 9:7).\textsuperscript{30} Jesus’ brotherhood with regenerated humankind relates to his divine sonship. Jesus is by nature Son of God while believers in Christ are sons by adoption (Gal 4:5; Eph 1:4, 5). Moreover, Jesus’ teaching on the fatherhood of God is prominent. Jesus addressed God as “my Father,” but fourteen times in the Sermon on the Mount he also presents God as the Father of those who believe in him. Nkwoka focuses next on two passages where Jesus presents himself as a brother; the first he defines as contextual, the second as eschatological.

Mark 3:34–35 with parallels is the contextual passage. First, Nkwoka notes that Jesus is not rude toward his relatives. The emphasis on doing the will of God nevertheless sets the relationship with his relatives on a different level.\textsuperscript{31} He claims that Jesus “admits all His disciples and all believers to the same honourable rank as if they were His nearest relations.”\textsuperscript{32} From this biblical passage, he also claims that Jesus presents himself as a brother for all who do the will of God irrespective of color, race, status, and sex. This new “spiritual kinship surpasses the accidents of birth,”\textsuperscript{33} but Jesus is not just a brother. He is the eldest of all his brothers and sisters (Col 1:15 and 16). He is the first begotten before all creation. By Him, all things were created.

\textsuperscript{29} Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 92–93.
\textsuperscript{31} Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 95 citing Taylor, \textit{Mark}, 247.
\textsuperscript{33} Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 95 citing Ezra P. Gould, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark}, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), 68.
Matthew 25:40 is the eschatological passage. The text presents Jesus in an eschatological scene as the exalted Son of Man that as king sits to reward men according to their works on earth. He identifies himself with the least of his brothers.34 Nkwoka understands these as the outcasts and very marginal members of society, of whom he declares himself a brother. This sounded amazing and perhaps scandalous to both his disciples and the larger Jewish audience, but Jesus serves and cares for suffering humanity. Similarly, the disciple that serves and cares for suffering humanity thus serves and cares for the brothers of the King and so serves the King. Nkwoka goes on to point out that Jesus by his resurrection became “the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre- eminent,” citing Col 1:18 (and Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:20). The redeemed are thus a family, and the resurrection is the entrance into this family. Since Christ was the first to rise, he is the “Eldest-Born.”35 He states:

All the New Testament writers point to the fact that the mission, ministry, sufferings, death, and the resurrection of Jesus had the one purpose of reconciling man to God and bringing about the Kingdom of God where Satan, sin, and suffering shall be no more. In so doing, Jesus did not present himself as a liberator—Lord. But he was bringing many sons to glory, and “is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. 2:11).36

Nkwoka stresses that Jesus’ primary task is to bring the kingdom of God to humankind. In doing this, Jesus presents himself as a brother. Nkwoka emphasizes Jesus’ devotion to God in this task by citing George Arthur Buttrick, who writes about Jesus’ strong spiritual bond and loyalty to God.37 Nkwoka concludes:

From the foregoing, the brotherhood of Jesus to the believers is open to all mankind irrespective of race, colour, or status in life. He is the first begotten of the Father and from the dead. Consequently he is the eldest of all his ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’

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36 Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 96.
African Understandings of Jesus as the Eldest Brother

(Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:17). This relationship by the anticipated eschatological resurrection transcends time into eternity. It is not liable to loss through death.\(^\text{38}\)

Finally, Nkwoka attempts to relate the cultural context. He focuses on the special status of the *okpara*, with the New Testament description of Jesus as the eldest brother. Here he finds that the “New Testament justifies the application of this title by affirming that Jesus is the only ‘natural’ Son of God (Mk. 1:22; 9:7; Jn. 3:16, 18; Rom. 8:32 etc.).”\(^\text{39}\) Moreover, he is not only “the first and only begotten of the Father, he is also the first-born from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18).”\(^\text{40}\) The unique relationship between Jesus and God seems moreover to be the central theme of the Letter to the Hebrews. His obedience and humility that were manifested in his death had the effect that God exalted him and gave him a name worthy of worship (Phil 2:6–11).\(^\text{41}\)

By presenting Jesus as *Okpara Chineke*, Nkwoka lists six positive aspects in this christological contextualization. First, the high value on male children that perpetuate the family name and lineage is a strong exposition of the “only begotten Son of God” theology. Second, the Igbo tradition of giving the heart of a sacrificed victim to the *okpara* as his portion can be used as a theological score for conversion. Third, the priestly role of the *okpara* is refined, amplified, and immortalized in the high priesthood of Jesus. Fourth, in the church as a community, the indebtedness of the family members to the *okpara*, in the form of service and tribute gifts, provides a base for church resources. Fifth, the hospitality can be directed to serving in particular the less privileged “brothers” of the Son of God. Sixth, the Igbo are enamored when someone condescends to do a sacrificial duty below his role expectation. When they are confronted with the fact that Jesus, *Okpara Chineke*, risked everything for us, they become very enamored with Jesus.\(^\text{42}\)

\(^{38}\) Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 96.

\(^{39}\) Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 96.

\(^{40}\) Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 96.

\(^{41}\) Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 96.

\(^{42}\) Nkwoka, “Jesus as Eldest Brother,” 97–98.
1.1.2 Harry Sawyerr: Jesus as the Incarnated Eldest Brother within a Great Family

Harry Sawyerr\(^4\) wrote back in 1968 a book called *Creative Evangelism* with the telling subtitle *Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* where he also discusses the theme of Jesus as the elder brother.\(^5\) In this book, regarded as one of the first major attempts to write an African theology,\(^6\) Sawyerr deals first with some basic factors concerning the situation in Africa and then with some evangelistic considerations, before he turns to what he labels “Sound Doctrinal Teaching.”\(^7\) Sawyerr wants to interpret Christ in terms that are relevant and important to the Africans.\(^8\) This means that if one wants to be an African unto Africans, it is necessary to start with an African

\(^4\) As mentioned above, Harry Sawyerr (1909–1987) was the first notable scholar to make a substantial contribution to the topic of Jesus as the eldest brother. Sawyerr was born in what was then the colony of Sierra Leone. Short biographies focusing on Sawyerr as a scholar are found in Andrew Walls, “The Significance of Harry Sawyerr,” in *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr*, ed. John Parratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 8–16; Glasswell and Fasholé-Luke, “Introduction,” in Glasswell and Fasholé-Luke, *New Testament Christianity for Africa*, 3–7. He belonged to the Anglican Church and was educated at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone and Durham University in Durham, United Kingdom. He became principal and professor of theology at Fourah Bay College, a college that later became a federal part of the University of Sierra Leone. He has published extensively. A list of his published writings till 1974 can be found in Mark E. Glasswell and Edward W. Fasholé-Luke, eds., *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World: Essays in Honour of Harry Sawyerr* (London: SPCK, 1974), xix–xxii. An indication of his actuality for today can be seen in the publication of his most important shorter writings, including some never published before, in John Parratt, ed., *The Practice of Presence: Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).


\(^7\) Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 13–65. The section on sound doctrinal teaching is divided into two chapters, pages 66–91 and 92–117.

interpretation of existence and the universe when dealing with the task of doing theology.\textsuperscript{48} Sawyerr admits that problems are involved in this approach, but it is nevertheless necessary.\textsuperscript{49} He then discusses the interpretation of existence and the universe, the problem of evil, the earth goddess, the practice of presence, and sin. Based on Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians he also gives a short overview of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, God, and the Christian life. He turns next to the question about the relation between God and creation. He states that these concepts, as well as others found in African indigenous religions, are foreign to those found in the Old Testament. He therefore denies a positive equation between African indigenous religions and the Old Testament. It is essential for the understanding of the Christian message that Jesus was born as a Jew.\textsuperscript{50} For Sawyerr, the incarnation is consequently of great significance, a theme he discusses in the section called “The Uniqueness of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ for Christian Evangelism in Africa.”\textsuperscript{51} It is here that the discussion about Jesus as the elder brother begins.

Sawyerr starts by stating: “In the African situation the Incarnation should be so presented as to emphasize that Jesus Christ was the manifestation of God’s love for man, God’s share in human sufferings, God’s victory over death and all the disastrous influences which throng man’s everyday experiences.”\textsuperscript{52} The humanity of Jesus is important, but since God raised him from the dead, Christ is now alive, and therefore it is adequate to speak about the church as “the Great Family.” In this family, Jesus Christ is the Head. The implication is that the community of the church transcends all kinds of divisions among people whether tribal or national. For Sawyerr, this interpretation of Jesus’ role is an interpretation of him as the elder brother.\textsuperscript{53} While others have suggested

\textsuperscript{49} Sawyerr, \textit{Creative Evangelism}, 13.
\textsuperscript{50} Sawyerr, \textit{Creative Evangelism}, 55.
\textsuperscript{51} Sawyerr, \textit{Creative Evangelism}, 72—91. This section has three subsections called Sonship with God, Jesus Christ the Agent of Creation, and Jesus Christ the Founder of the Great Family—the Church.
\textsuperscript{52} Sawyerr, \textit{Creative Evangelism}, 72; Sawyerr, “Jesus Christ – Universal Brother,” 65. For the following, see also Sawyerr, “Basis of a Theology for Africa,” 269–72.
an interpretation of Jesus as chief, Sawyerr finds that an interpretation of Jesus as the elder brother is both more acceptable and more constructive.\textsuperscript{54} He states:

We therefore suggest that chiefship is unsuited to the Person of Christ. But to represent Jesus Christ as the first-born among many brethren who with Him together form the Church is in true keeping with African notions. For Christians, an effort must be made to bring home the mystical relation between Christ and the Christian which St. Paul talks of in Gal. 2:19 ff.

This mystical relation with Christ has many important implications which deserve a separate treatment.\textsuperscript{55}

The relation between the Christians and Jesus that Sawyerr labels a mystical relation implies that the Christians are adopted into sonship with God. This is the ultimate goal for humankind (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:2). According to Sawyerr, many Africans (Christians included) struggle with a feeling of insecurity. To overcome this, many seek help in various ready-made formulas. The purpose is to gain a visible manifestation of the presence of the spirits and through them deal with the situation. Such a resort is considered idolatrous for the Christian, who is left without concrete help. Sawyerr argues that the doctrine of the incarnation is the answer to this problem.\textsuperscript{56}

The spirits worshiped in Africa are close to God. They are neither divine nor human, but can somehow be described as intermediaries between God and humankind. On the other hand, Christianity claims that God created the world with Jesus Christ as the agent of both the first creation and of the New Creation. By citing from Col 2:9–10, 1:16, and referring to John 1:14 and 1 John 1:1–2, Sawyerr argues that the whole fullness of deity

\textsuperscript{54} Sawyerr, \textit{Creative Evangelism}, 72; Sawyerr, “Jesus Christ – Universal Brother,” 66. He lists four arguments against chief as suitable: The chiefs had lost their power in colonial time. Chiefship does not necessarily imply supreme rule. It has not been possible to communicate directly with chiefs under normal circumstances, only through intermediaries. They live in protected walled settlements normally not exposed to contact with their subjects. These arguments against an interpretation of Jesus as chief have not hindered others more recently from utilizing this approach; see Shorter, “Folk Christianity,” 134–35; Kabasélé, “Christ as Chief,” in Schreiter, \textit{Faces of Jesus in Africa}, 103–15.


\textsuperscript{56} Sawyerr, \textit{Creative Evangelism}, 73–74; Sawyerr, “Jesus Christ – Universal Brother,” 67. He further describes how the doctrine of the incarnation may help the Christian in realizing that Christ surpasses the spirits as agents of help in an insecure situation. A new understanding of sin is created, determined on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Repentance is understood as a re-creation of humankind’s nature according to the pattern of Christ with implications for Christian living, and there is another attitude to prayer for a Christian than for an adherent of African Traditional Religion; see Sawyerr, \textit{Creative Evangelism}, 75–78.
African Understandings of Jesus as the Eldest Brother
dwells bodily in Christ and that Jesus became flesh. He concludes: “The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation presents Jesus Christ to us as a genuine ladder between God and nature, humankind included.”

According to Gal 3:28, the Christians are one in Christ (Eph 2:11–22; John 17:21). The church is the body of Christ where Christ is the Head (Eph 1:22; Col 1:18; Eph 2:20). Sawyerr argues that the unity and universality of the church manifest themselves in unity in diversity. This means that the church in Africa may develop an originality of its own as long as it does not lead to syncretism. Christianity in culture requires both an incarnation and detachment. Sawyerr admits that many Europeans are aware of this need for originality, but wonders how seriously they have dealt with this issue.

This understanding of the church as the body of Christ where the members of the body are integrated into Christ as the head has a strong appeal to Africans. The reason is that the idea of Jesus Christ as the firstborn among many brothers fits nicely with this understanding. The benefit of this approach is that it takes care of the contrast between the ancestors and Christ. It is important, therefore, to hold on to the doctrine of the incarnation and thereby to keep the association of perfect manhood with perfect Godhead. Many Africans tend to represent Christ as a true human being, but do not recognize him as “true God of true God.”

The concept of the Great Family may also offer a mold for people of various backgrounds and areas. The disruption of the traditional extended family caused by industrialization has caused many to break loose from the moral sanctions of their

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57 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 75.
59 The contrast relates to primacy: Primacy of time is attributed to the ancestors whereas primacy of essence must be unreservedly attributed to Christ; see Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 83. He states in another place, “To African Christians, Christ must be presented as the ‘first-born’ among many brethren, not in terms of space or time, but in terms of His representativeness of the human race”; see Sawyerr, “Basis of a Theology for Africa,” 278.
former environment. The bond of kinship that all can find in Jesus Christ as the firstborn among many brothers will offer an answer to this as well. The kinship that Sawyerr says is relevant here is the age-mate kinship that creates a sense of fellow feeling among men and women of the same age.61

The African community includes the living, the unborn, and the dead. The relation to the ancestors is an important factor in this respect.62 The Christians have entered a mystical relationship with Christ. Because of this, they are exhorted to live as men who have been brought from death to life (Rom 6:13). This relates both to the fact that they are raised at baptism from death to walk in the newness of life, and to the state of oneness with Christ (Gal 2:20). Sawyerr comments: “Here, the Christian is in symbiosis with Jesus Christ our elder brother, the first-born of many brethren.”63 A significant difference between the African ancestors and Jesus Christ that once was dead is that Jesus Christ is alive now. “Every true Christian has a personal experience of Him as a life-giving Spirit, returned to His place of glory in the Godhead.”64 Also, the Bible states that Jesus was seen after His resurrection by up to five hundred brothers (1 Cor 15:6; Acts 10:40–43). There is, on the other hand, no concrete evidence to claim that the ancestors are alive in the spirit.65

While Africans feel that the ancestors are close to them, it is important to present the church as a unifying community that surpasses anything comparable in African Traditional Religion societies, and at the same time preserve the solidarity between the living and the dead in this new community, the church.66 The church, understood as the Great Family that is founded in Jesus Christ, includes a real concern for the ancestral

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61 Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism, 85. Examples of the African understanding of this kind of kinship are given on pages 85–91.
62 Sawyerr discusses in more detail how to incorporate the ancestors within the Great Family and how to treat them; see Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism, 92–107.
63 Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism, 93, emphasis original. See also Sawyerr, “Living and Dead,” 130.
64 Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism, 93; Sawyerr, “Living and Dead,” 131.
65 Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism, 94; Sawyerr, “Living and Dead,” 131.
66 Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism, 94; Sawyerr, “Living and Dead,” 131. Sawyerr uses the term “pagan” which many today consider to be a derogatory term. I prefer the more common term “African Traditional Religion” instead.
dead, as well as those that may not have been Christians, and for whom God is potentially the Father (Eph 1:10). Sawyerr considers this a proper answer to the pluralism and syncretism that confront Christianity. Moreover, as Christians that have been adopted into sonship by God, they also have a better case in believing that God their Father is their ancestor than adherents of African Traditional Religion.67

The Akan of Ghana68 have a concept of a Messiah that Sawyerr compares with the Christian Messiah.69 In this connection, he states that Christ “provides us with a concrete demonstrable manifestation of deity and also becomes the bridge-head by which we may gain access to God the Father. So He is the first-born among many brethren and as elder brother we have direct and complete access to him.”70 Christ is moreover universal;71 all Christians, whether Jew or Greek, African or Chinese, become co-heirs with Him of the kingdom of God (Rom 8:16 f., 29; Gal 3:27 ff.; Eph 2:11–22; 3:6 f.; 1 Pet 2:9 f.; Matt 8:11). This also implies that Christ is “the leader of the family as the first-born of the family line.”72

In Africa, the Supreme God is the father of the deities. This can be with a pantheon ranging from four hundred gods and goddesses to around one thousand divinities as among the Yoruba.73 For Christians, there is, however, only one Son of God, Jesus Christ, the only begotten. Therefore, he is “the perfect, concrete manifestation of the Power of God.”74

Also, with regard to the attitude to both ancestral and cultic spirits that are widely worshiped among the Africans, Sawyerr argues that the Christians should strive to end this practice. In this connection, he maintains that belief in spirits is not based on any

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68 The Akan is an ethnic group in West Africa, living primarily in southern Ghana, Southeastern Côte d’Ivoire, and Togo. See further on page 55 below.
70 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 105.
71 This universality is not found in the Akan Messiah; see Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 105.
72 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 105.
73 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 115. He gives other examples too. The Yoruba is an ethnic group in West Africa, living primarily in Southwest Nigeria and Eastern Benin. See further on page 67 below.
74 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 115.
personal relationship. Apart from ancestral spirits, none of the objects of worship in African Traditional Religion has any historical origin. Here Sawyerr sees a difference with the Christians because “Jesus Christ is both an historical Person, an elder Brother and a personal Friend who came to the world to manifest the love of God for mankind (John 3:16; Romans 8:28).” Due to this understanding of Jesus as a friend and elder brother, it is now easier to see how God deals with the sufferings of humanity. Through the incarnation of Jesus, God now understands human suffering; moreover, he now comforts and consoles humans in their pain (2 Cor 1:3–10; 12:9). This assurance cannot be offered in African Traditional Religion through amulets and sacrificial rites. The difference between the worship of the spirits and Jesus relates to both the historical origin of Jesus Christ and the personal relationship with him. Referring to Rom 12:1, Sawyerr states that there is a sacrifice that is both acceptable to God and a duty of humankind. This occurs in the Eucharist with a self-offering of the worshiper that identifies himself with the self-offering of Christ. His sacrifice establishes a blood covenant between God and humankind, and is associated with the new creation where the members of the covenant “live in a relation of sonship to God as Father, through the mediation of His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:9 f.).”

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75 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 132–33.
76 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 133.
77 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 133–34.
78 Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, 134; see also 144–145.
1.1.3 François Kabasélé Lumbala: Jesus Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother

François Kabasélé Lumbala[^79] has written several articles where he discusses various models for understanding Christ.[^80] He most specifically takes up the theme of the eldest brother in the article from 1991 entitled “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother” where he defines Christ as the eldest brother as a subcategory of Christ as ancestor.[^81] To understand his description of Christ as the eldest brother, I will first give a presentation of how he treats Christ as ancestor.

Kabasélé Lumbala takes as his starting point John 14:6 where Jesus said to Thomas: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one goes to the Father but by me.”[^82] To a *Muntu*,[^83] these words remind him of the people who are the source of life and obligatory route to the Supreme Being, the ancestors. Jesus’ use of the vine or the tree reminds a Bantu of the importance of ongoing contact with the ancestors for the maintenance of

[^79]: François Kabasélé Lumbala, Dr. theol., published earlier under the shorter name François Kabasélé. He was born in 1947 in former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since 1983, he has been a pastor in Cijiba as well as lecturer in Catechesis and Liturgy in the Catholic Faculty of Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo; see Yvette Aklé et al., eds., *Der schwarze Christus: Wege afrikanischer Christologie*, trans. Ursula Faymonville, Theologie der dritten Welt 12 (Freiburg: Herder, 1989), 206. He has published extensively.

[^80]: See Justin Bukasa Kabongo et al., eds., *Chemins de la Christologie africaine* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1986). The articles of Kabasélé Lumbala in this book are found in Aklé et al., *Der schwarze Christus*. The most relevant articles here are Kabasélé, “Jenseits der Modelle,” in Aklé et al., *Der schwarze Christus*, 138–61; Kabasélé, “Christus als Häuptling,” in Aklé et al., *Der schwarze Christus*, 57–72; Kabasélé, “Christus als Ahne und Ältester,” in Aklé et al., *Der schwarze Christus*, 73–86. Two of these are translated into English as Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” and Kabasélé, “Christ as Chief.” The following will refer to the English articles, but they have been compared with the German translation. The French volume has not been available to me.

[^81]: Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother.” For a similar integration of elder brother and ancestor, see Abraham Akrong, “Christology from an African Perspective,” in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 79 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), 119–30. Akrong does not, however, interact with the New Testament. Carl Sundberg has done an investigation on how Christians perceive Christ in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, and among the statements about Jesus, Jesus as our Brother, present among us, is one among others that is brought forward. This understanding he links with the ancestral older brother. The question is whether this is a necessary link or just a possible link; see Carl Sundberg, *Conversion and Contextual Conceptions of Christ: A Missiological Study Among Young Converts in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo*, Studia missionalia Svecana 81 (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 2000), 277, 291–93.

life. 84 One needs to be grafted onto them; otherwise, one dries up and wastes away (John 15:5ff.). 85 According to Kabasélé Lumbala, the parallel between Christ and Adam drawn by Paul establishes even more the image and suggestion of the ancestors on the figure of Jesus (Rom 5:14b, 15b; 1 Cor 15:45b). There is moreover a strong sense of the concept of the intermediary. As such, Jesus is portrayed for the Jāmaa, as the ancestor par excellence that is present today among his own; he is the new Adam and Mary the new Eve. 86 Christ is above all spirits. Kabasélé Lumbala explains:

He is our own Spirit [Ancestor], because we have been ... born a second time by baptism. We are human beings, but we are also of the race of God, by our baptism. Thus we have two lines of Ancestors. The great spirit [Ancestor] is always Christ, God’s child, who died and who rose again. He is the firstborn from the dead. After Christ, we can rely on other founding spirits. First, [we have] the Blessed Virgin Mary.... Then let us not forget our departed... 87

He relates this description of Christ as their ancestor to what the ancestor represents for a Muntu. The various tonalities, in which the relationship between a Muntu and his or her ancestor is expressed, are then applied to Christ. 88 Kabasélé Lumbala gives after that an outline of the Bantu ancestor to show how the Bantu understand Christ as ancestor.

According to Kabasélé Lumbala, the main characteristics of the Bantu ancestors are as follows. 89 They constitute the highest link after God in the chain of beings while

84 The Bantu peoples live in Central Africa and share a common linguistic heritage. See further page 70 below.
85 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 116.
87 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 117, emphasis and square brackets original. He cites Nkongolo w. Mbiye, Le culte des Esprits (Kinshasa: Centre d’Etudes Pastorales, 1974), 18–20. The book has not been available to me.
88 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 117.
89 The following is taken from Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 117–19. See also François Kabasélé Lumbala, Celebrating Jesus Christ in Africa: Liturgy and Inculturation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 43.
remaining humans. After passing death, they are more powerful than other humans are. They behold both God and God’s subjects. To become an ancestor, one must have led a virtuous life, and observed the laws. Hence high moral conduct is a prerequisite. Moreover, they must have left descendants on earth. They must also have died a natural death, full of years, after having delivered one’s message to one’s own. Those who have fulfilled these conditions can perform the role of mediation, although other deceased might also be called ancestors. The actual mediation is carried out by bringing about fertility, health, and prosperity; in short, a happy life.

The ancestors continue to be what they were as living human beings, man or woman, king or poor, but now the living do not recognize them, they pass like the wind. Recourse to them is made when asking for favor and in remembrance of them. This is always a source of blessing. The important events in life for a Muntu become “either an epiphany of the activity of the Ancestors or an occasion of renewing contact with them, like closing ranks before a battle.”

Kabasélé Lumbala admits that the figure of the ancestor is quite complex. He discusses four aspects of this ancestor figure that he applies to Christ: life, presence, the eldest, and mediation, all aspects we should see together.

Life comes from God, but it has come by way of the ancestors. They are accordingly somehow the “origin,” from whom the Bantu emerge. Kabasélé Lumbala maintains that one “can perform the role of ancestor only if one has given life.” To live is to give life; therefore, the greatest curse consists in dying childless. Now, Christ came to give “life.” “On his account we become heirs to the life of the Father. This life is the gift of the Father, but it comes by way of Jesus.” Thus, he sees Jesus as the source of life by his

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90 Kabasélé admits that there are breaches in such a comparison; see Kabasélé, “Jenseits der Modelle,” 147. The last two characteristics are admittedly broken in a comparison with Christ: Kabasélé, “Jenseits der Modelle,” 153, 154. This does not restrict him from using this comparison; he maintains that Jesus is more than an ancestor. He is beyond the models. Schreiter says that Kabasélé “suggests the image of Christ as elder brother to function complementarily with the ancestor image”; see Schreiter, “Introduction,” in Schreiter, Faces of Jesus in Africa, xii.

91 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 119.

92 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 120.

93 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 120.
word (Matt 4:4; John 11:25; 4:14; 6:51). Jesus continuously nourishes the life of believers, in a similar way to how the ancestors watch over the life of their descendants and strengthen their lives.

The aspect of *presence* means that the ancestors are not treated merely as a memory, as a European ancestor, but as presence. The former is remembered, the latter is invoked, notably on important occasions. Therefore, one shares food and drink with them as well as the communion meals of the family or the clan. Moreover, one converses with them. They are the principal “allies” of earthly beings. He compares this with Jesus (Matt 28:20b).

Christ is also ancestor in the sense of *elder brother*. Kabasélé Lumbala connects this with the notion of anteriority because it is central to the Bantu notion of the eldest sibling. The ancestors, as elder siblings, are closer to the sources because they came first. The one that came first is God; his name, “Mvidi-Eldest,” marks his anteriority to all life, all being. “The word *Mvidi* denotes a category of trees that multiply through their seeds, their roots, and their branches.” This attribute of eldest is also given to his Son. Accordingly, Christ also receives the attribute of “Eldest.” The children of the elder brother, however, will always be “elder” vis-à-vis the children of younger brothers, even if the children of the younger brothers are older than the children of the elder brother. The patrilineal people in the Kasai region show examples of this respect for the elder brother and his sons when a father must give the dowry received for the first and second daughters in marriage to his elder brother or his elder brother’s sons. The same principle is applied to a younger brother’s first wages; he gives them to his eldest brother. The eldest brother makes an offering to the ancestors and to God on behalf of the others. Seen from this perspective, Christ is the elder brother par excellence, because our offerings must be made through him.

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94 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 120–21.
95 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 121, emphasis original. “Mvidi-Eldest” is the name of God in the Luba language. Luba is one Bantu ethnic group. See further page 77 below.
96 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 121.
97 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 121.
98 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 122.
Moreover, as the Bantu eldest brother represents an example to follow, as long as he behaves as the “eldest brother,” so is Christ a true “eldest one.” He has disappointed neither people’s expectations nor those of his Father. From the Father’s point of view, this is seen in that he has restored and crowned him in the resurrection. From people’s point of view, he has given himself as an example (John 13:15). As the eldest sibling, he discharges an exemplary role for the younger, or for the age group that follows. Related to this role of exemplarity is also the responsibility that the eldest child is charged with, for the acts of the younger. As such, Christ has shown himself for the Bantu to be their eldest brother who takes responsibility for their wrongs, by performing expiation for them (Isa 53:4–5; Heb 8–10). This relates to the work of mediation.

The category of ancestor fits Christ because he is the synthesis of all mediations (Heb 8). Within the Bantu context, their conception of the world encompasses the notion of mediation. The contact with God is established through intermediaries that are endowed with a special communications network with God. The contact with the Supreme Being is, therefore, indirect for human beings. Within the mediating community, the ancestors hold first place because of their closeness to the source. Both their relations to the Supreme Being and to those living on earth put them in this special intermediary position.

Christ holds this intermediary position because he is the door that opens access to the Father (John 10:9; Luke 10:22). Hence, for Bantu Christians Christ performs the role of the ancestor through the mediation he provides by fulfilling in himself the words and deeds of the ancestors.

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99 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 122.
100 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 122–23.
101 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 123. He has said more on this later stating, “Christ effectively confirmed that God intervenes in the world through diverse mediations, and that in this way he presents himself as the supreme mediator, assuming headship over all mediations without destroying them”; see Kabasélé Lumbala, Celebrating Jesus Christ in Africa, 47.
103 Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 124.
1.2 The Relevance and Challenge of Jesus as the Eldest Brother

From the presentation given above, we see that it has been important for these three authors to present an African eldest brother Christology that adheres to what they regard as African notions. Sawyerr states explicitly as quoted above that the presentation of Jesus as the firstborn among many brothers “is in true keeping with African notions.” Nkwoka, on the other hand, takes as his point of departure a contextualized translation of the title Son of God into the Igbo language. He shows that this deliberate translation has enriched the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother. The Igbo have also received the translation well. Finally, Kabasélé Lumbala presents Jesus as the eldest brother within the context of the African ancestors, an aspect of African life of vital importance and explanatory force. We see that the three authors clearly aim to offer presentations of Jesus that are relevant primarily within an African context.

There are, furthermore, numerous statements given by African authors signaling that many of the christological titles found in the New Testament are not experienced immediately at home in Africa. John S. Pobee thus claims: “Just as biblical christology is not possible without Jewish anthropology, so too African christology is impossible without African anthropology.” He argues that it is valid for Africans to look for Christologies that speak more directly to the African by giving adequate attention to an African view of humankind. A result of this interest in African anthropology is that African christological thinking tends to focus on relational aspects, due to the prominent

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104 There is a variance in the use of the phrases “elder brother” and “eldest brother” among the authors. Both Nkwoka and Kabasélé Lumbala use both phrases while Sawyerr seems to prefer “elder brother.” While the eldest brother is also an elder brother, the opposite is not necessarily true. I therefore prefer the phrase “eldest brother.”

105 Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism, 73; Sawyerr, “Jesus Christ – Universal Brother,” 66–67. See also page 14 above. This passage is also cited in Stinton, Jesus of Africa, 147.


interest in relationships among Africans. The African eldest brother Christology fits well into this interest.108

The formulation of an African eldest brother Christology is moreover not just creative thinking from some scholars to formulate a contextualized understanding of Jesus but reflects a living perception of Jesus among ordinary Christians at the grassroots level.109 The many positive statements expressing such an understanding of Jesus suggest that the description of Jesus as the eldest brother strikes a positive chord for many Africans in various parts of Africa.110

Moreover, Nkwoka, Sawyer, and Kabasélé Lumbala write within a church setting where their contributions add to the ongoing christological discourse on how to present and understand Jesus in a meaningful way for Africans. Therefore, they address their contributions to a wider audience than to the scholarly community, even though important ideas in their contributions ought to be of interest to scholars as well. In addition to its African relevance, perspectives from African and Asian Christianity may also enlighten Western Christians to discover new insights from the Bible, thereby

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109 Zinkuratire states that a major characteristic of African biblical scholarship is the emphasis on relevance; see Victor Zinkuratire, “Method and Relevance in African Biblical Interpretation,” *ACS* 17.4 (2001): 5–13, here 5. Ezigbo argues, “No constructive Christology is truly contextual if it fails to take seriously and engage with the living experiences of people”; see Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies*, 104.

110 The short comments given in note 12 above confirm this. See also Kurewa who lists various songs that refer to Jesus as brother from Zimbabwe, Angola, and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo); see John W. Z. Kurewa, “Who Do You Say That I Am?” *IRM* 69/274. April (1980): 182–88, here 183, doi:10.1111/j.1758-6631.1980.tb01346.x. See also Pobee, “Confessing Christ,” in Pobee, *Exploring Afro-Christology*, 147, 150. The qualitative research done by Sundberg in the Republic of the Congo lists Jesus as brother both among the titles used explicitly about Jesus as well as among the implicit conceptions of him; see Sundberg, *Conversion and Contextual Conceptions*, 276–77, 291–93. Goergen found that six of his twenty-two seminary students called Jesus their elder or eldest brother in a survey about Christology conducted at Tangaza College of the Catholic University of East Africa in Kenya; see Donald J. Goergen, “The Quest for the Christ of Africa,” *ACS* 17.1 (2001): 5–41, here 21. Stinton simply states, “This particular christological portrait is significant to many African Christians.” There is no point here in discussing exactly how widespread this christological understanding is; see Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 148.
signaling a global relevance as well.\footnote{Ngo Dinh has carried out a rather similar comparison between the privileges of the eldest son or brother and the biblical description of Jesus for the Vietnamese; see Ngo D. Tien, “The Church as Family of God: Its Development and Implications for the Church in Vietnam” (PhD dissertation, Australian Catholic University, 2006), 97–99. See further for another Asian perspective Peter C. Phan, “The Christ of Asia: An Essay on Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor,” \textit{Studia Missionalia} 45 (1996): 25–55. Vanhoozer notes more generally that “the plurality of perspectives from African and Asian Christianity may help Western Christians to discover hitherto unknown aspects of what is nevertheless really there in the text.” The relevance is not confined to African Christianity alone; see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge} (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 424. See also William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, \textit{Introduction to Biblical Interpretation}, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 94.} We may also note positively that this African contextual Christology might contain an understanding that is closer to the biblical texts themselves, read in their own context, than a Westerner at first sight is willing to accept.\footnote{Zinkuratire states that “the African reality can also serve to interpret the Bible much the same way as the texts from the ancient Near East have been doing for the Old Testament in the context of the historical critical tradition”; see Zinkuratire, “Method and Relevance,” 6. See also the discussion on the role of ordinary readers of the Bible in Gerald West, “Biblical Scholars Inventing Ancient Israel and ‘Ordinary Readers’ of the Bible Re-Inventing Biblical Studies,” \textit{OTE} 11.3 (1998): 629–44, here 633–36.} For a Westerner, this understanding might well be challenging, possibly due to cultural distance both to African and biblical societies. The firm focus on equality in the Western world might have led to less interest in inequality, positively evaluated. The African focus on Jesus as the eldest brother might accordingly add a dimension to traditional European Christology.

My presentation of the African eldest brother Christology above does reveal several challenges and questions that I will deal with in this dissertation. I notice, however, and take into account, that the three African authors did not write scholarly monographs about this topic; two have written shorter articles, the third a book that covers a wider topic than what is the focus here.

In this dissertation, I will nevertheless attempt to deal with the challenge from the above-mentioned African authors in a scholarly context. Given the character of their writings, my discussion cannot be in a direct dialog with them. I will seek, however, to bring the insights and proposed Christology from Nkwoka, Sawyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala into a more Western format of scholarly discourse. To accomplish that, I will need to raise some critical questions in the following.
First, what is meant by “the eldest brother”? The three African authors bring forward material from various African contexts when referring to the eldest brother. What do those contexts have in common in their understanding of the eldest brother? Second, to what degree must we confine such a Christology to contextually based understandings from specific African societies—if any? Third, to what extent is it possible to argue for an elder brother Christology based on the New Testament read in its cultural and historical context—indeed, independent of cultural experiences from particular contemporary societies? I will elaborate on these questions below.

1.2.1 What Eldest Brother?
The first question we should ask is what eldest brother we presuppose when we present Jesus as the eldest brother. The three authors present this information in different ways.

Nkwoka starts with a presentation of the *okpara*, the eldest brother in Igbo society. He is highly esteemed and respected, his inheritance rights are special, and he receives the seniority tribute. He is the confidant of his father and as the second in command he assists his father. When his father gets old, he represents him. He is also responsible for the upbringing of younger siblings by both caring for them and disciplining them. In the religious sphere, he is the family priest and acts as a mediator between family members and the ancestors. He participates actively in rites of passage. In the political arena, he serves as the head of the family unit.

The church, understood as the Great Family, is the basis for Sawyerr. By his incarnation, Jesus Christ is the first member or the head in this community. This implies an interpretation of Jesus as the elder brother within the Great Family. Sawyerr, however, is more interested in describing the theological implications of this understanding of Jesus than describing what eldest brother he means. The role as mediator is, however, evident in his function as a ladder or bridgehead between God and humankind. He also understands him as a comforter for people in the Great Family who encounters various sufferings.
Kabasélé Lumbala treats the understanding of the eldest brother in relation to the understanding of the ancestors among the Bantu and its application to Christ.\footnote{Since Kabasélé Lumbala states, “Jesus is the Ancestor in the sense of Elder Brother, as well,” it should be clear that the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother is integrated into his understanding of Jesus as ancestor; see Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 121. Jørn H. Olsen also treats Kabasélé Lumbala’s christological proposal as a kind of ancestor Christology; see Jørn H. Olsen, Kristus i tropisk Afrika – i spendingsfelter mellem identitet og relevans, Studia missionalia Svecana 83 (Uppsala: Svenska institutet för missionsforskning, 2001), 209–10. Therefore, the question of whether Jesus can aptly be described as ancestor becomes important for Kabasélé Lumbala. It must, however, be stated that Kabasélé Lumbala is aware of the fact that there are shortcomings in using such a model. Yet, it seems that with these reservations he still thinks that Jesus as ancestor communicates well. This dependence on the understanding of Jesus as ancestor needs to be considered when dealing with Jesus as the eldest brother.} It should, however, be noted that in his discussion about Jesus as the eldest brother, the comparison is with the role of the eldest brother in the family as such and does not draw on the understanding of ancestors. This should warrant that an analysis of Jesus as brother is possible even though the question about Jesus as ancestor is left open. The notion of anteriority as being closer to the source is crucial for the Bantu. Hence, the eldest brother and his sons deserve respect and their special status as being the elder is marked. By making offerings on behalf of others, he becomes their mediator. By behaving like the true eldest brother, he represents an example to follow, and he is charged with responsibility for younger siblings.

The following lists the characteristics of the eldest brother that emerge from the writings of these three authors if summarized in brief:

- He deserves respect from his younger siblings because he is their eldest brother.
- He is an example for his younger siblings and founder of the filial generation.
- He has special inheritance rights.
- He mediates between his father and his younger siblings by being their spokesperson.
- He is responsible for younger siblings by both caring for them and disciplining them.
- He is the confidant of the father and is second in command.
- He has both a priestly and political leader role in the family.

\footnote{Since Kabasélé Lumbala states, “Jesus is the Ancestor in the sense of Elder Brother, as well,” it should be clear that the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother is integrated into his understanding of Jesus as ancestor; see Kabasélé, “Christ as Ancestor and Elder Brother,” 121. Jørn H. Olsen also treats Kabasélé Lumbala’s christological proposal as a kind of ancestor Christology; see Jørn H. Olsen, Kristus i tropisk Afrika – i spendingsfelter mellem identitet og relevans, Studia missionalia Svecana 83 (Uppsala: Svenska institutet för missionsforskning, 2001), 209–10. Therefore, the question of whether Jesus can aptly be described as ancestor becomes important for Kabasélé Lumbala. It must, however, be stated that Kabasélé Lumbala is aware of the fact that there are shortcomings in using such a model. Yet, it seems that with these reservations he still thinks that Jesus as ancestor communicates well. This dependence on the understanding of Jesus as ancestor needs to be considered when dealing with Jesus as the eldest brother.}
His status is thus special, and his role is that of a mediator, protector, and leader.\textsuperscript{114}

I conclude that Nkwoka, Sawyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala have shown that with the characteristics of the eldest brother that they have brought forward, a presentation of Jesus as the eldest brother makes sense.\textsuperscript{115} It is, however, an open question how representative this understanding of the eldest brother is in the societies of the three authors and more generally in Africa. Nkwoka specifically limits himself to the Igbo while Kabasélé Lumbala focuses on the Bantu. Sawyerr is less explicit. The examples he uses are mainly from Western Africa, but he refers at the same time to “African notions.”

Due to the different kinship systems found in Africa,\textsuperscript{116} we expect differences in the understanding of the eldest brother in African societies. For that reason, it seems necessary to bring the notion of “the eldest brother” presupposed by Nkwoka, Sawyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala into a broader presentation of this concept. I will present such a survey of the eldest brother from a social anthropological point of view in chapter 2. The ethnic groups referred to by the three authors will naturally be of particular interest. We will in chapter 2 be able to see whether these three authors have given a fair description of the eldest brother in their societies.

\textsuperscript{114} This also corresponds with the short comments given by other scholars. See footnote 12 above.

\textsuperscript{115} Goergen maintains that African Christology can for example give the name “elder brother” to Jesus, but warns that this or similar efforts are only the beginning of a christological process, not its end; see Goergen, “Quest for the Christ,” 19. Udoh raises, however, the critical question of whether a particular kinship metaphor is adequate to give a full description of Jesus Christ. He claims that no single imagery is adequate. This does not mean that he does not accept the validity of such metaphors, but “We are saying that the word Savior or Brother alone does not give us the full picture of his person and purpose”; see Udoh, Guest Christology, 247–48. See also Pobee, “In Search of Christology,” 10–11.

1.2.2 African or Mediterranean Eldest Brother?

Maybe an African understanding of the eldest brother has enabled the above-mentioned authors to illuminate an underlying social understanding reflected, not only in African societies but also in biblical texts.¹¹⁷ This needs to be investigated. We need to acquire a proper understanding of the eldest brother in first-century Mediterranean society to determine its relevance for New Testament Christology. My first research question is thus how this description of the African eldest brother relates to the “biblical eldest brother,” in light of its first-century Mediterranean context. More precisely: What does it mean to be the “eldest brother” in the literary and cultural context of the New Testament?²¹¹⁸ When addressing this question, it might be fruitful to pay attention to whether any noteworthy differences exist between a predominantly Jewish context and the wider Hellenistic society, and how the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament influenced the New Testament authors on this question. This means that after the presentation of the social anthropological survey of the eldest brother in African societies, we need to investigate what the eldest brother means in the literary and cultural context of the New Testament.¹¹⁹ This I will pursue in chapter 3.

¹¹⁷ It might also be argued that in the same way as philosophy affects how we perceive things, and therefore when applied may help in illuminating features already there in the biblical text that hitherto have escaped our attention, so may an African understanding as opposed to a typical Western understanding help in illuminating certain features in the text that have escaped the attention of a typical Western reading; see Anthony C. Thiselton, The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 7.

¹¹⁸ For a discussion about the use of the label “Mediterranean”; see Jerome H. Neyrey, Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 8–9. He discusses the use of the term in relation to honor and shame. Neyrey argues that rhetoric became a standard part of Hellenistic education in Greece, Egypt, Africa, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire. Those who thus learned to read and write in Greek were socialized into the same literature and therefore became acquainted with the same values regarding shame and honor. Inasmuch as the status and role of the eldest brother is thematized in the literature shared all over the Mediterranean world, a similar argument can be made for the understanding of the status and role of the eldest brother. Local variations must be expected though. The geographical area will be Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Africa, and Rome depending on what sources are available.

¹¹⁹ The apparently obvious text to include from the New Testament, Luke 15: 11–32, has been read to see what it can add to the understanding of the eldest brother as social reality. Unfortunately, the parable does not yield anything useful for the present study. First, it is difficult to decide from a parable what is social reality and what is not, and secondly the parable focuses on the vertical relationship between each of the sons and their father and not on the relationship between the two brothers. At least, the parable does...
While none that I am aware of has discussed what it means to be the “eldest brother” in the New Testament and its literary and cultural context, several have published studies on the use of family metaphors in the New Testament and its social-historical context. Among these we find the contributions by Klaus Schäfer, *Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft:” Ein Beitrag zum Kirchenverständnis des Paulus*,\(^{120}\) Karl Olav Sandnes, *A New Family: Conversion and Ecclesiology in the Early Church with Cross-Cultural Comparisons*,\(^{121}\) and Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*.\(^{122}\) These three contributions provide useful insight into both the social-historical context of the family and the use of metaphorical family language in the New Testament. The apparently most obvious contribution to mention is Reidar Aasgaard’s monograph: “*My Beloved Brothers and Siblings!*” *Christian Siblingship in Paul*.\(^{123}\) His study provides more details on metaphorical sibling language in Paul and its social-historical context than the contributions previously mentioned. His focus, however, is on the sibling relation. My approach is thus defined differently.

The African understanding of the eldest brother might be a useful comparative resource in the task of uncovering characteristics of the social understanding of the eldest brother in the New Testament era. I will thus ask whether specific features of an elder brother in African societies might be found in the literary and cultural context of the New Testament. This will provide cautiously informed assistance for me when deciding what to look for.\(^{124}\)

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\(^{120}\) Klaus Schäfer, *Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft:” Ein Beitrag zum Kirchenverständnis des Paulus*, Europeische Hochschulschriften Reihe XXIII Theologie 333 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989).


\(^{124}\) If, however, the African understanding becomes a locked grid through which we filter the texts of the New Testament era, this method becomes restrictive. The point is on the contrary to let it function as a critical eye-opener.
When Jesus is described as the eldest brother, the phrase “eldest brother” is obviously used in a figurative or metaphorical sense. It is consequently necessary to distinguish between a literal and a metaphorical use in the relevant sources. Apart from the New Testament, I have found the most relevant sources to be the following Greco-Roman sources: Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Herodotus, and Plutarch, the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, and the writings of Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.

1.2.3 Jesus as the Eldest Brother in the New Testament

Due to the character of the writings of Nkwoka, Sawyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala, none of them provides a broad treatment of relevant New Testament texts. They use, however, texts from different parts of the New Testament to support each other quite easily without discussing the various contexts of these texts. This is obviously due to the popular character of their writings and their church setting. Within such a setting, one often reads the Bible as one book. Notwithstanding this fact: which texts do they refer to? Here are the most quoted texts and some comments on them:

1) Mark 3:34–35, part of the passage Mark 3:31–35, is a central text used as part of the argument that Jesus is the eldest brother of all his siblings. Jesus was in a house together with his disciples when his mother and his siblings came and asked for him. In his answer, Jesus said: “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God are my brother and sister and mother.” It is argued that Jesus is presented as a brother to those who do the will of God. This text is relevant because by using family language Jesus places himself in a fictive kinship relation with his disciples. The natural assumption is that he sees himself as a brother, but does the mentioning of his mother in

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125 I will present my understanding of metaphors in section 1.3 below.
126 I will give the basis for this selection later in chapter 3.
127 This seems to be most visible in the work of Kabasélé Lumbala, and to a lesser extent in Sawyerr and Nkwoka.
his answer have any impact on the argument? Does the text say anything about what kind of brother Jesus is concerning his status and role? How are we to understand Jesus’ answer in relation to those who asked for him? This text also alternates between a literal and a metaphorical understanding of brother and other kin terms. Therefore, the relation between brother as social reality and metaphorical sense needs to be explored further.

How can we understand Jesus as the eldest brother in light of an exegesis of Mark 3:31–35?

2) Colossians 1:15, 16 (where it is said about Jesus that he is “the firstborn of all creation” and that “all things have been created through him and for him”) is used to argue that Jesus is not just a brother, but also the eldest brother of his siblings. The immediate context of Col 1:15–16 does not seem to present Christ as a brother. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how the term “firstborn” is used christologically and what kinship or family relations might be implied when this term is used—if any. Col 1:16 is also one of the texts referred to in a separate argument about Jesus being the ladder or mediator between God and humankind. I will also have to consider how we can understand this mediating role in relation to Christ as brother. While Col 1:15–16 does not in itself provide much basis for an understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother, the actual use of this text and its use of the term “firstborn” makes it necessary for me to look further into the passage Col 1:15–20.

3) Matthew 25:40, part of the passage Matt 25:31–46, is another text referred to. The focus is upon the reference to “the least of these who are members of my family.” The Greek has “these my brothers,” clearly used in a metaphorical sense. This usage has implications for the understanding of this term. The point is not merely whether we understand Jesus as a brother, but rather what kind of brother he is. Does the text say or imply anything about his status and role as a brother? The next question is for whom he is by implication described as a brother. We may understand the expression as a reference to the fellowship of his disciples or poor people in general. The interpretation given by Nkwoka is that the righteous located at the right hand of the King are serving poor people in general and thereby serving the King. What about those called “the righteous” in this text, how do they fit into the picture? Are they part of the fellowship
mentioned by the use of the kin term “brother”? When the Matthean Jesus uses “brother” in a metaphorical sense, is it restricted to the fellowship of his disciples or employed in a wider sense as well?

4) Another text referred to is Rom 8:29, part of the passage Rom 8:28–30. The text is used to argue that Jesus is the eldest of his siblings and to support the description of him as the preeminent, as claimed based on Col 1:18. Romans 8:29 is also mentioned when it is argued that Jesus is presented as the elder brother that provides security for his younger siblings (reference is also given to 1 John 3:2). It is moreover linked to the mediating role of Christ where it is argued that Christ as the elder brother functions as the ladder or bridgehead between the Christians and God the Father. The phrase “first-born among many brethren” (RSV) taken from Rom 8:29 is also a phrase that occurs quite often, though seldom is the text commented upon in detail. We may ask: To what degree can we relate Christ’s status as the firstborn to roles such as protector, mediator, and leader?

5) The last texts, Heb 2:11, 17, part of the passage Heb 2:10–18, are referred to when it is argued that Jesus becomes the firstborn from the dead by the resurrection and the redeemed become a family with him (Col 1:18 cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:20). The conclusion is that Jesus is the eldest of all his brothers and sisters. While the two verses in Heb 2:11, 17 underline that Jesus both calls the believers his brothers and sisters and that he had to become like them in every respect, the texts are not explicit in declaring Jesus as the eldest brother. Hebrews 2:17 moreover links Jesus as brother and high priest. In light of the emphasis on the African eldest brother also having a priestly role, I wonder why this text has not been used more to elaborate on this theme. To what degree is it possible to argue that Jesus as the eldest brother also has a priestly role? This is one of the questions to be raised when investigating Heb 2:10–18.

Although Nkwoka, Sayyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala have pointed to many useful texts and brought forward their insights from their reading of them, a more thorough exegesis of the most relevant texts is necessary to develop a biblically based eldest brother Christology. The starting point must be texts in the New Testament that by using family language deal with Jesus in relation to others that somehow make him a
brother to younger siblings. The brothers and sisters in question are his followers, his believers. This means that texts dealing with Jesus’ physical brothers and sisters are relevant as far as they also imply that they are his believers. Texts that only focus on Jesus as Son of God with the vertical relationship with God as father are left out. I will have to discuss the above-mentioned texts (Matt 25:31–46, Mark 3:31–35, Rom 8:28–30, Col 1:15–20, and Heb 2:10–18) that are the most important for the three African authors, even though it might be difficult to include some of them based on the criteria given here. I will present the exegesis of these texts in chapter 4.

1.2.4 The Challenge Formulated as a Thesis

According to a current African christological understanding—put forward by Nkwoka, Sawyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala—Jesus is to be understood as the eldest brother within a large family with the believers as his younger siblings. This Christology implies that Christ is mediator and representative for his younger siblings, responsible for their welfare, an example to follow and founder of the filial generation. He also has special inheritance rights and a special status.

It is my thesis that (at least part of) this eldest brother Christology can be supported by New Testament exegesis read in light of the first-century Mediterranean literary and cultural context of the eldest brother, and in this dissertation, I will show to what extent this is the case.

1.3 Considerations of Terminology and Language

As it is necessary to describe both family systems and specific relationships within the family, the advantage of using terminology developed by the science of social anthropology is evident.\(^{129}\) I will use this terminology when giving an account of kinship

\(^{129}\) According to Charlotte Seymour-Smith “cultural anthropology” is the preferred term within the American tradition, and comprises both ethnography and ethnology. It may be used in a broad sense to include “prehistoric archaeology and anthropological linguistics as well as the comparative study of human cultures and societies. In the narrow sense, the term is restricted to the study of human cultures and societies only.” In the British tradition, this has been labeled “social anthropology.” The difference in terminology is partly due to the emphasis on concepts such as society, social structure, and social organization in the British tradition in contrast to the American emphasis on the concept of culture. Many
Introduction

and family relations in different societies inasmuch as they relate to the task of explaining the status and role of the eldest brother.\textsuperscript{130} Social anthropologists disagree among themselves regarding many of the definitions that I need to use to describe various cultural phenomena. For that reason, I will explain my use of some important terms from social anthropology as well as others that need clarification.\textsuperscript{131} I will at the end of this section present my understanding of metaphor.

According to the dictionary definition, the primary understanding of a brother is “a male who has the same parents as another or one parent in common with another,”\textsuperscript{132} or “a male person having the same parents as another person.”\textsuperscript{133} It ought to be noted that the vertical relation defines a brother as “offspring.” By the eldest brother, we mean the eldest male of all the siblings within a family. If there is (are) no elder sister(s), he is also the firstborn son of the parents.\textsuperscript{134} This firstborn son can be the firstborn for both parents, only the father’s firstborn, or only the mother’s firstborn. The firstborn opens the womb and is thus the eldest son (or daughter) of his (her) parents where there is more than one child.\textsuperscript{135} He is also the eldest brother for his younger siblings. Therefore, both the firstborn son and the first son born are the eldest brother for younger siblings. An exception is the case when a younger brother (most commonly the second), due to the death of the firstborn or first son born, becomes the eldest (surviving) brother and

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\textsuperscript{130}There are pairs of adjectives in English that are very close in meaning: elder and older, eldest and oldest. While both pairs can refer to age in the meaning “no longer young,” elder seems to be the preferred term when referring to priority or superiority in social status, position, or office; see \textit{Collins English Dictionary}, 8th ed., s.vv. “elder,” “eldest,” “old,” “older”; \textit{Concise Oxford English Dictionary}, 11th ed., s.vv. “elder,” “eldest,” “old”; \textit{Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary}, 11th ed., s.vv. “elder,” “eldest,” “old.”
\textsuperscript{131}The explanations are taken from Seymour-Smith, \textit{Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology}.
\textsuperscript{132}\textit{Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary}, 11th ed., s.v. “brother.”
\textsuperscript{133}\textit{Collins English Dictionary}, 8th ed., s.v. “brother.”
\textsuperscript{134}We can make a distinction between the firstborn son and the first son born: In the latter case he is preceded by an elder sister(s).
\textsuperscript{135}The terms “eldest son” or “eldest brother” are not applicable if he is the only child.
\end{flushright}
It is another matter when a younger brother takes or receives the status of the firstborn.

It is accordingly possible to define the eldest brother so widely that the terms “the eldest brother,” “the eldest son,” “first son born,” and “firstborn (son)” express the same sense. The difference is what point of view one chooses, if viewed from the parents’ generation and downward, the eldest son, first son born, or firstborn, or from within his generation and upwards, the eldest brother. This shows that we can view the eldest brother from at least two points of view. One is vertical from the parents’ generation downward to the next generation: in this connection, “the eldest son” is the most general term, and the point of view and the main relation are the parents. The other view is horizontal within the same generation; in this connection, “the eldest brother” is the appropriate term, and the point of view and main relation are younger siblings.

We can distinguish the different family types in the world by various social systems. “A social system may thus be conceived of as a set of ordered relations within or between human groups or communities which tend to perpetuate itself over time.” The notion “social system,” which is the term that I will use, is preferable to social structure, which in anthropology is associated with structural functionalist theories of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and others. Inherent in these theories is a static and ahistorical view of social systems. When I use the terms “social system” or “social structure” or refer to others who use these terms, there are no implications of a static conception of society or of sociological determinism, but it “implies the possibility that social systems also adapt and evolve over time as a response to internal or external changes and contradictions.”

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136 There is a need to distinguish between the factual firstborn and “opener of the womb” and the eldest surviving, since this distinction is useful to have in mind when discussing matters pertaining to inheritance and succession, and the ransoming of the firstborn. The “opener of the womb” is both firstborn and eldest brother while the eldest surviving can only be eldest brother. This distinction is noted in Meyer Fortes, “The Significance of the First Born in African Family Systems,” in Systemes de signes, ed. J. Rouch, A. Adler, and R. Bastide (Paris: Hermann, 1978), 131–50, here 132.

137 Seymour-Smith, Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 262.

138 Seymour-Smith, Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 262.
According to James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, we can divide social structure or social systems into status, role, social situation, and social group. Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers mention statuses and roles as the major building blocks of social structure or social systems. These two terms will receive most attention here.

*Status*, popularly used as a synonym for “prestige,” is defined in social anthropology as “culturally defined positions associated with particular social structures.” Normally these positions are arranged hierarchically, and value is often attached to a status. A status is often public, which means it has symbols that signify the status. Examples of statuses are father, mother, son, and daughter. An individual is not a status; he/she fills a status, and as such, a status can be understood as a social position. A particular status is further clarified by seeing it in relation to other statuses and can be more or less dominant. According to Spradley and McCurdy, statuses always occur in pairs, with cultural rules for which statuses go together.

The status eldest brother is usually an *ascribed status*; that is, the status is assigned to the involved person from birth independently of personal qualities or abilities, or the status is inherited from a deceased eldest brother or from the eldest brother that is for another reason disqualified from this status. The other type of status, *achieved status*, is obtained through choice and achievement or competition and individual effort. This makes the status eldest brother at least sometimes a conditional status that is dependent on the norms of a particular society. The distinction between ascribed and assigned

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144 Spradley and McCurdy, *Anthropology*, 68; Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 139. Some statuses are both ascribed and achieved. An example of this tension between ascribed and achieved status can be seen in the question of Isaac’s blessing of Jacob instead of Esau in Gen 27.
status, it should be noted, is too simplistic as a differentiation of social types. There is in many societies a fluid overlap between ascribed and achieved status.145

Fredrik Barth makes a distinction between two levels of statuses: on the one hand, the “distribution of rights and resources on social positions,” and on the other hand, “the level of actual behavior in role play.”146 There is thus a difference between the inherent rights of a particular status and the way a particular person fills his role associated with that status. This is seen most clearly when the person interacts with third parties. Which status and its associated role behavior become dominant is decided by the relative importance of the different statuses.147 This recognition of differences in relative status and rank is called “stratification” or “hierarchy of statuses.”148

Role is defined as “culturally generated behavior associated with statuses,”149 or as “the behavior, attitudes, and values associated with a particular status.”150 It is also usually predictable. It involves “the acting out of status and ‘role expectations’ in the expected conduct associated with a given status.”151 We should keep in mind that we cannot take for granted a consensus over role expectations in society. Individuals can actively take part in creating roles during social interaction. When individuals take up roles, they also comment upon these roles and create new variations.

Social anthropologists call the definition of the eldest brother as given above a kin type, that is “an abstract concept that can be described in every culture.”152 This is to be

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147 This is called “role conflict” in Grunlan and Mayers, Cultural Anthropology, 141. Barth argues for the father-son relationship as the dominant relationship in most Middle Eastern kinship systems; see Barth, “Role Dilemmas,” 1:278.
148 Grunlan and Mayers, Cultural Anthropology, 144; Spradley and McCurdy, Anthropology, 79. This principle is used when members of a family are not considered equal. It is seen in the principle of primogeniture—which the special rights of the firstborn are called—which is the right the eldest of several heirs has to a hereditary share that will not be divided.
149 Spradley and McCurdy, Anthropology, 70.
150 Grunlan and Mayers, Cultural Anthropology, 136. This view implies a social system that is relatively unchanging and monolithic.
151 Seymour-Smith, Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 251.
152 Grunlan and Mayers, Cultural Anthropology, 176.
Introduction
distinguished from a *kin term*, that is “labels for kinship roles,”\textsuperscript{153} or “a specific term in a specific language that refers to one or more kin types.”\textsuperscript{154} We can divide kin terms into two categories: Terms of reference are used to talk about someone whereas terms of address are used to talk to someone.\textsuperscript{155} There is thus a possibility of some variations in the use of kin terms in different societies when describing the same kin type.

Emmanuel Todd has tried to outline the main *family types* in the world by expanding and modifying a theory of Pierre Guillaume Frédéric Le Play who claims “relations between father and son determine people’s concept of liberty or its opposite, whereas the bond between brothers creates an idea of equality or inequality.”\textsuperscript{156} The concepts of liberty and equality work in this way:

The child who continues to live with his parents after marriage, forming a ‘vertical’ relationship within an extended family group, is conforming to an authoritarian model of family relations. If, on the other hand, he leaves his parents after adolescence to form an independent household through marriage, then the model is a liberal one which puts the emphasis on individual independence.

Inheritance may work in one of two ways: if parental property is divided up, the process expresses an egalitarian relationship between brothers; if the inheritance system is based on the indivisibility of the succession and excludes all but one of the brothers, then it embodies an ideal of inequality.\textsuperscript{157}

Different combinations of these and other variables, notably the incest taboo, enable Todd to define various family types with their respective characteristics.\textsuperscript{158} His classification of the various family types is a helpful map to compare with as one encounters different descriptions of various family types.\textsuperscript{159}

The concept of *culture* has been defined in several ways without a consensus as to its precise meaning. A definition that tries to incorporate a rather common conception is:

“Culture is composed of patterned and interrelated traditions, which are transmitted over

\textsuperscript{153} Spradley and McCurdy, *Anthropology*, 107.
\textsuperscript{154} Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 176.
\textsuperscript{155} Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 176.
\textsuperscript{156} Todd, *Explanation of Ideology*, 7.
\textsuperscript{157} Todd, *Explanation of Ideology*, 7.
\textsuperscript{158} Todd, *Explanation of Ideology*, 33, 55, 99, 133, 155, 171, 191.
\textsuperscript{159} See, though, the investigation of his outline of family types in Rijpma and Carmichael, *Testing Todd*, as mentioned in note 116 above.
time and space by nonbiological mechanisms based on man’s uniquely developed linguistic and nonlinguistic symbolizing capability.”

This means: “Sometimes we refer to ‘a culture’ (as we might refer to ‘a society’), meaning an autonomous population unit defined by distinctive cultural characteristics or shared tradition.” The term “culture” may also refer to a system of values, ideas and behaviours which may be associated with one or more than one social or national group.” In those cases where culture may be used as a synonym for society, I prefer the term “society” instead of the term “culture.”

I will use the term *ethnic group*, which partly overlaps with the first understanding of culture when the focus is on named population units. I notice, however, that the term “ethnic group” combines both social and cultural criteria. I will also use the term “ethnic group” instead of the term *tribe*; a concept that is linked to the history of Africa and that is also largely a colonial creation.

Much has been written about the use of metaphors generally and in biblical studies. I do not find it necessary to develop my own theoretical basis, but will rather build on the understanding given by Reidar Aasgaard in his monograph “*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!*” *Christian Siblingship in Paul*. His presentation of metaphor theory is given in chapter 3: “Family and siblingship as metaphors: A metaphor-theoretical approach.” Aasgaard’s understanding is dependent on the theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*. They claim that “the essence of metaphor is about understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” Aasgaard argues that Paul’s use of family language is clearly metaphorical. By applying family terms to other subject areas to which they do not “originally” belong or by understanding Christian relationships using family terms by some sort of analogy, this becomes evident.

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166 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); see Aasgaard, “*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!*” 23.
167 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.
“One kind of thing” can, however, be more or less remote to “another.” This degree of remoteness determines whether the analogy serves as the basis for a metaphor or has become a technical term or “mere convention.”

To structure reality basically three kinds of metaphors are used: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. A structural metaphor “allow[s] us to use one highly structured and clearly delineated concept to structure another.” This makes structural metaphors more dependent on culture, they are “culturally conditioned (‘grounded’) metaphors.” The family metaphors naturally belong to the structural metaphors. According to Lakoff and Johnson, it is not possible to express everything without the use of metaphors; metaphors thus become indispensable and help us to measure what is not measurable. As such, they also become powerful tools, which is seen particularly with family metaphors.

The area from which a term is transferred is called the “source domain” and the area to which it is transferred the “target domain.” Family, or more specifically siblingship (or sonship), is the source domain and Christian relations the target domain. Not everything associated with a term or understanding/experience from the source domain is transferred to the target domain; a selection occurs where only what is relevant is transferred. The result is that some aspects of the source domain are hidden or downplayed, while others are highlighted. This is dependent on at least the textual context and the cultural context. Aasgaard gives an example: “Man is a wolf.” The textual context would be the literary context of the statement and the cultural context how a wolf is comprehended in a particular society. When the target domain is given,

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169 For orientational and ontological metaphors, see Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 25.
170 Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 61.
171 Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 25.
172 Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 3.
174 Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 152.
175 Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 27.
it is called an “explicit metaphor” (Paul is a nurse), and when the target domain is left out, it is called an “implicit metaphor” (the nurse).  

When the point of comparison is given, the metaphor is closed (Paul is gentle as a nurse), and when it is not given, it is an open metaphor (Paul is a nurse). An open metaphor is naturally more open to interpretation; the point of comparison might be more than one thing. While both explicit and implicit metaphors can be open or closed, implicit metaphors are more inclined to be open.

Given these clarifications, it is now necessary to look more closely at the status and role of the eldest brother in African societies. That will be the topic of the next chapter.

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176 Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 26. The examples given are Aasgaard’s. For the terminology “explicit/implicit”; see Hartmut Kubczak, Die Metapher: Beiträge zur Interpretation und semantischen Struktur der Metapher auf der Basis einer referentialen Bedeutungsdefinition (Heidelberg: Winter, 1978), 67–73.

177 Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 26. The examples given are Aasgaard’s.
2 Eldest Brother in African Societies

What Nkwoka, Sawyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala have done is to give short outlines of the main points they consider valid in their presentations of the eldest brother. It is, therefore, necessary to try to draw a broader and hopefully clearer picture that summarizes the status and role of the eldest brother in these societies. To do that, I am dependent on the insights from social anthropology. Not being a social anthropologist myself, the following survey is thus heavily dependent on research done by other scholars.

In this survey I also want to let anthropologists confirm or refute the presentation of the eldest brother as social reality as done by these theologians above in order to establish a broader relevance of the understanding of the eldest brother by the theologians. The anthropologists, by necessity, say much of the same as the theologians, therefore there will be some repetitions below. There is, however, a difference in approach. Whereas the theologians are interested in what is common across different societies or ethnic groups, the anthropologists are more interested in what separates and distinguishes each society and ethnic group.

As noted above, Todd has made an effort in classifying different family types around the world. He does not deal extensively, however, with the African systems. This is due to the general lack of documentation on the issue of African family types. Accordingly, he gives only a very general analysis of the African systems. This needs to be considered when dealing with the eldest brother in these African societies. The scarcity of information that he gives does not provide enough data to classify the various African societies. The main family types he has outlined might, however, be useful when trying

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1 Todd, *Explanation of Ideology*, 191. See also note 116, page 29 above.
to understand what status and role the eldest brother has in various African societies. It is also necessary in some contexts to present somewhat wider material to understand better the context of the understanding of the eldest brother in various societies.

The focus of this survey will, therefore, be on the status and role of the eldest brother in relation to his younger siblings and his father, and then more broadly within the extended family. By necessity, because of the focus of this survey, I will give only a partial description of these ethnic groups. There is, of course, much more to say about them, but what I present below is hopefully in agreement with an overall presentation of these ethnic groups. It must be noted that the written material available for this survey covers a considerable time. It also includes material that today might be considered biased and eclectic. This is due to the scarcity of written material on this rather narrow topic for these ethnic groups. A further consequence of this is that the ethnic groups are not given a description with the same level of attention to details. Furthermore, because of various developments in societies in recent years, some of the more traditional aspects may have changed. This must be considered when the material presented below is evaluated.

2.1 Ethnic Groups Referred to by Nkwoka

2.1.1 Igbo

Traditionally the Igbo-speaking peoples lived in Southeastern Nigeria.\(^3\) Igbo residence is patrilocal, marriage rules are exogamous,\(^4\) and marriage is potentially polygamous,

\(^3\)Today they live in all parts of Nigeria and in other countries as well. Igbo is now used to refer either to the territory of the Igbo people, the native speakers of the Igbo language, or to the Igbo language itself. Agu's primary aim is to present the pre-Western Igbo and their worldview; see Charles C. Agu, *Secularization in Igboland: Socio-Religious Change and Its Challenges to the Church Among the Igbo*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 50 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989), 217, 239. See also Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, ed. George Spindler and Casey Spindler, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ff26-004, 3.

\(^4\) Exogamy, marry out of given group.
although the majority of marriages are monogamous. They are divided into many subgroups and clans. There are accordingly cultural variations among these subgroups. This also leads to differences in the presentations given by various authors that deal with the Igbo, depending on whether they are talking about the Igbo in general or about specific subgroups. According to Charles Chikezie Agu, the sociopolitical organization of the Igbo has moreover been difficult to grasp for the nonindigenous observers. Notice will be given when information relates primarily to a subgroup; otherwise, what I present below is assumed to relate to Igbo in general. The Onitsha and Afikpo Igbo, however, are discussed separately at the end.

The Igbo value the family highly. Igbo society is mainly patrilineal, and therefore it is crucial to get a son. It strengthens both the social and economic status. The firstborn son is called okpara. Nze Ezikeoha notes that the title okpara, or diokpara, is important when dealing with the eldest brother among the Igbo. The prefix di signifies majority, immensity, prosperity, and abundance. The term diokpa, or diokpara with the suffix ra,

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8 A famous old saying among the Igbos states *Igbo amaghi eze*, meaning “Igbos know no king”; see Richard A. Pruitt, “Contemplating the Inculturation of the Christian Gospel Among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria,” *Missiology* 40.4 (2012): 425–42, here 428. This is, according to Pruitt, however, to be understood to refer to a ruler on a higher level than a town, a village group, or a commune.


10 *Patrilineage*: descent is traced through the male line. *Patrilineage*: descent group that traces descent through the male line.

11 Uchendu, *Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 57.

Eldest Brother in African Societies

connotes the first son or man, or “the first son born to a man in the family, whose responsibility is immense and great.”\textsuperscript{13} It is a term that is not used exclusively for that kin type, but may be extended to be used for the successive senior sons if the eldest son dies. Also, the head of a lineage, sublineage, or extended family is also referred to as \textit{okpara} or head.\textsuperscript{14} This \textit{okpara} is the eldest son of the founder of the lineage, sublineage, or extended family. He is the head, and at his death, the next \textit{okpara} inherits the headship.\textsuperscript{15}

In polygamous families, the firstborn son is \textit{okpara} for the father even if his father or his younger wives dislike his mother. Ezikeoha adds that the firstborn son to the father becomes \textit{okpara} irrespective of which of his wives he was borne by. It is also a sign of the highest honor to be the mother of the \textit{okpara} in a polygamous marriage.\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{okpara} is highly esteemed and respected by his parents, brothers, and sisters and the larger community.

The nuclear family in its classic sense is not the primary grouping among the Igbo. That is the extended family.\textsuperscript{17} In this grouping, where everyone belongs, the firstborn son is the president. He should also be the eldest in the extended family.\textsuperscript{18}

The behavior of the \textit{okpara} is a major concern for the whole family, but especially for his father.\textsuperscript{19} Already as a child, he is expected to become a responsible older brother who looks after his younger siblings when their mother is absent.\textsuperscript{20} The \textit{okpara} is the confidant of the father who makes known his will only to him. He is the second in command in the family, and when the father dies, he is the bearer of important family

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{13} Ezikeoha, “Diokpara Legacy,” 2:45.
\bibitem{14} Ilogu, \textit{Christian Ethics in an African Background}, 13. Ezikeoha notes that \textit{okpara} may be used as a shortened form of \textit{diokpara} in some areas; see Ezikeoha, “Diokpara Legacy,” 2:47.
\bibitem{15} Ilogu, \textit{Christian Ethics in an African Background}, 19.
\bibitem{17} Ilogu notes that what is now called a compound by Uchendu and others, older writers called “the extended family”; see Ilogu, \textit{Christian Ethics in an African Background}, 11, note 2.
\bibitem{18} Charles O. Onuh, \textit{Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage: The Prospects of Inculturation}, European University Studies: Series 23, Theology 462 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), 29, 33.
\bibitem{20} Uchendu, \textit{Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 61.
\end{thebibliography}
knowledge.\textsuperscript{21} His privileges, however, can be withdrawn from him if his character is questionable.\textsuperscript{22} His family expects him to marry early to ensure the continuity of the family lineage.\textsuperscript{23} According to Northcote Whitridge Thomas, a man will often consult his elder brother when he is going to marry.\textsuperscript{24}

With regard to social functions and plights, the adult eldest brother can act as father-substitute and adviser.\textsuperscript{25} He is also solely responsible for announcing the death of his father and charged with the befitting funeral rites of his father.\textsuperscript{26} The eldest son also inherits the major share of personal property. He then becomes responsible for the welfare of his younger brothers.\textsuperscript{27} If he dies without an heir, in some areas, the eldest of his younger brothers must marry the widow, and his firstborn son would take the deceased man’s name and his inheritance.\textsuperscript{28} It is, however, necessary to draw a distinction between the \textit{okpara} that dies before his father and the \textit{okpara} that outlives his father. The firstborn of the \textit{okpara} that dies before his father loses his rights due to his father’s death before his grandfather. The rights of the \textit{okpara} are in such cases passed over to the grandfather’s second eldest son and not his grandson.\textsuperscript{29}

In terms of inheritance, Thomas asserts that the property of a man passes to his sons with no exceptions, but when sons inherit property from their mother, there is greater variety. When inheritance of landed property is at stake, often the father divides his land


\textsuperscript{22} Uchendu speaks about the okpara of the lineage, the lineage head, where succession follows the adelphic principle; see Uchendu, \textit{Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 41. Onuh notes that he must be “transparently honest and behave well”; see Onuh, \textit{Christianity and Igbo Rites}, 213.


\textsuperscript{27} Forde, “Ibo (Igbo),” 21.

\textsuperscript{28} Ezikeoha, “Diokpara Legacy,” 2:51.

\textsuperscript{29} Ezikeoha, “Diokpara Legacy,” 2:52.
among his sons before his death and reserves some land for himself. At his death, the head son inherits both his share and his father’s share.\textsuperscript{30}

In religious matters, the eldest brother is the family priest, the link between the family members and the living dead of the ancestral cult. Sometimes the title diokpara refers to a person that performs certain priestly functions. It is reserved, however, for those who are eldest brothers within their respective families.\textsuperscript{31}

In each compound, the eldest is the leader,\textsuperscript{32} but above him stands the head of the lineage, the okpara. He is the link between the living of his lineage and the ancestors. His authority is for a great part ritual.\textsuperscript{33} Edmund Christopher Onyedum Ilogu says that most places in Igboland also have an Eze (king) that stands above the okpara in power. He would rule and exercise both priestly and social leadership through the okpara, heads of families, lineages, and clans rather than through his staff.\textsuperscript{34} Agu, however, disputes that the headship of the lineage is hereditary from father to son.\textsuperscript{35} Instead, it goes to the next brother, but only if his character is acceptable. He concludes that ascribed status is not known among the Igbo; if anyone wants a status, he has to achieve it.\textsuperscript{36} According to

\textsuperscript{30} Thomas, \textit{Anthropological Report}, 86; see also Ezikeoha, “Diokpara Legacy,” 2:51.

\textsuperscript{31} Ilogu, \textit{Christian Ethics in an African Background}, 19, 51–52; Forde, “Ibo (Igbo),” 15, 25–26. Meek notes that “it is not permissible, as a normal rule, for a man to offer sacrifice to his dead father if his elder brother or cousin is alive and physically able to perform the sacrifice”; see Charles K. Meek, \textit{Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule} (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ff26-008, 62.

\textsuperscript{32} Onuh, \textit{Christianity and Igbo Rites}, 30.

\textsuperscript{33} Agu, \textit{Secularization in Igboland}, 218. Above the lineage comes the head of the village or village group.

\textsuperscript{34} Ilogu, \textit{Christian Ethics in an African Background}, 16. See though Forde who states concerning titleholders and members of local Ṫọzọ and Eze lodges that “there was no formal concentration of authority in a single individual”; see Forde, “Ibo (Igbo),” 20.

The Eze, which, according to Richard A. Pruitt, is a title denoting a priestly-king role, is selected by the gods through ritual; see Pruitt, “Contemplating the Inculturation,” 434.

\textsuperscript{35} Agu, \textit{Secularization in Igboland}, 219. He explicitly states, “That type of hereditary onyisi arising from and upheld be the people’s ‘innate respect for heredity’ which Meek thought he saw among the Igbo does not actually exist.” Agu refers to Meek, \textit{Law and Authority}, 111. Onuh gives an explanation about the title “onyisi” when he states: “It is the eldest person in each level of the community that becomes the traditional head – the ‘Onyishi’ – ‘Okpala’ – ‘Diokpa’ – as he is variously referred to in the different sections of Igboland”; see Onuh, \textit{Christianity and Igbo Rites}, 213.

Uchendu, seniority by age regulates social position.\textsuperscript{37} Charles Kingsley Meek also notices that in some communities, headship passes to the next oldest member, but in other communities, it passes from father to son.\textsuperscript{38} Gwilym Iwan Jones maintains that at the governing meetings associated with the political system where all males in the senior age category were allowed to meet, the oldest man in the village or village section held traditional offices. The office passed to the eldest son of the earlier holder of the office among some subgroups, but among others, it passed to the oldest man in the segment or in the senior ranking subsegment.\textsuperscript{39}

This description of status achievement might seem to be somehow at variance with the emphasis put on the ascribed status reserved for the eldest in the family in the title \textit{diokpara}. However, the point is that the Igbo use \textit{diokpara} as a title for more than the eldest son in a family. When they use \textit{diokpara} as a title for lineage heads, the status system becomes more fluid and the variations among the Igbo become more visible. It is also within these kinship statuses that the individual can achieve higher status.\textsuperscript{40}

The \textit{Onitsha Igbo} is a distinct subgroup of the Northern Igbo and they have traditionally lived on the east bank of the Niger River.\textsuperscript{41} Residence is virilocal, but also tends to be patrilocal\textsuperscript{42} because the sons prefer to build their houses on the land associated with their patrilineage, the \textit{umunna}.\textsuperscript{43}

In the village, there is a chief, but the organization of the patrilineage is based on the role of the lineage priest, the \textit{ɔkpala}, and not on chiefship. The village, however, does not

\textsuperscript{37} Uchendu, \textit{Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 84–85. Two age positions are formally institutionalized, the \textit{ɔpara} and \textit{ada}, the first male and female child born to a man.
\textsuperscript{38} Meek, \textit{Law and Authority}, 106.
\textsuperscript{40} See Agu, \textit{Secularization in Igboland}, 219–20; Uchendu, \textit{Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 103; Meek, \textit{Law and Authority}, 104–11.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Virilocal}, residence pattern where a couple after marriage resides near the man’s kin group. \textit{Patrilocal}, earlier used in the same sense as virilocal, but may also be used where the kinship system is also patrilineal.
\textsuperscript{43} Henderson and Henderson, \textit{Outline of Traditional Onitsha}, 5.
have to be a patrilineage. The relationship between father and son forms the basis for this priesthood and is an office of “sanctified fatherhood.” The eldest son receives this role on the death of the father. After the passing of the eldest son, the next eldest son receives this role, and so on. The administration of the lineage estate is the responsibility of the ọkpala.

When Richard N. Henderson discusses the semantic structure of the sibling class, he notes that within the general category of “father’s child” and its plural, the shared descent status is essential. Shared filiation defines the status. There are moreover some complex terms that are not predictable regarding the kin type to which they refer; ọkpala and ịsi-àdá are two of them. The term di-ọkpala, “father’s senior son,” can accordingly be used in a more extended way than the specific kin type to which it refers. In the same way, ọkpala, “man’s senior son,” refers not only to the firstborn son but also to the eldest succeeding living son in those cases where the firstborn is deceased. Henderson explains the relation between ọkpala and di-ọkpala by saying that the ọkpala is the senior son that has the role as the lineage priest. The di-ọkpala are then the senior priests of the ọkpala. He further argues that because the eldest brother becomes the lineage priest when the father dies, younger brothers may send stubborn sons to their eldest brother because he has a particular interest in the behavior of the patrilineage children. This he

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44 Henderson and Henderson, *Outline of Traditional Onitsha*, 5. They write ọkpala and di-ọkpala where others may write okpara and di-okpara.
45 Henderson and Henderson, *Outline of Traditional Onitsha*, 5–6. They note, however, that there are some exceptions to this rule based primarily on achievement competition within the patrilineage.
47 Henderson notes that there is no term that is equivalent to “sibling” in Onitsha; instead, they use two terms, nwanna “father’s child” and nwanne “mother’s child”; see Richard N. Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=ff26-022, 132. Filiation, social recognition of relationships between parents and children.
48 Henderson, *King in Every Man*, 128–29. Ịsi-àdá refers to “father’s senior daughter,” ìdá is “man’s senior daughter.”
49 Henderson, *King in Every Man*, 133–34.
relates to the priestly function of the eldest brother. Younger brothers, on the other hand, may more easily seek their own interests.\(^{51}\)

In addition to the lineage priest, the \(\text{ɔkpala}\), the village chief has a major role. The same person, however, very seldom holds the two roles. For some, notably the most senior chiefs, it is forbidden to hold both. While the role of the \(\text{ɔkpala}\) is based on ascribed status, the chief is selected based on achievements in war, and consequently based on achieved status.\(^{52}\) The two statuses are both affected by the title \(\text{ɔzɔ}\) that both the \(\text{ɔkpala}\) and the chief must hold to exercise their duties fully.\(^{53}\) The king of the Onitsha, Henderson and Henderson argue, “represents in a sense the synthesis of the institutions of lineage priesthood and chiefship.”\(^{54}\)

The father is supposed to concentrate on the upbringing of his eldest son (and to a lesser degree of his eldest daughter), who in turn is expected to educate his younger siblings. The father seems to be less strict in his upbringing of the younger sons. The eldest son thus provides the proper model for the father-child relationship. This also implies that there are some limitations put on him. He cannot challenge his father in such a way that he may be thought to be eager to replace him. The younger brothers can enter the property storage room while their father is still alive; their eldest brother is not allowed. As regards behavior, prescriptions emphasize the submergence of the personal will of especially the eldest son under the will of the father.\(^{55}\) The father, however, must “exercise extraordinary care in directing his senior son.”\(^{56}\) Perhaps, for this reason, a

\(^{51}\) Henderson and Henderson, *Outline of Traditional Onitsha*, 34.

\(^{52}\) Henderson and Henderson, *Outline of Traditional Onitsha*, 6–7. Henderson modifies this by stating: “Playing the role of patrilineage priest cannot, however, in the nature of role-playing, be purely an ascriptive matter. One must act, and in Onitsha this right to act as priest entails first ‘bringing in the father’ to his ancestral house”; see Henderson, *King in Every Man*, 249.

\(^{53}\) Henderson and Henderson, *Outline of Traditional Onitsha*, 7. They explain the \(\text{ɔzɔ}\) title as a title “which associates ritual purity with wealth, and makes the redistribution of wealth within the lineage context an essential step in the achievement of civic status.”

\(^{54}\) Henderson and Henderson, *Outline of Traditional Onitsha*, 7–8. The King cannot act as the senior patrilineage priest even though he might be the senior son of his father. He is furthermore selected by different criteria.


\(^{56}\) Henderson, *King in Every Man*, 148.
father often prefers to send a recalcitrant son for a time to his eldest brother, for whom there is an added interest in seeing children learning to behave well together. After a father has managed to raise his eldest son well, the eldest son in turn is expected to take responsibility for the upbringing of his younger siblings.\textsuperscript{57} Brothers of the same father are moreover supposed to marry according to seniority to ensure that all in turn marry.\textsuperscript{58} Due to the tight bond that exists between the father and his senior son, their respective statuses are considered almost equivalent.\textsuperscript{59} Henderson gives an example of how this works: If the eldest brother attends a festival together with his younger siblings without their father, and they receive food or money, they must share it equally. The younger brothers, however, are expected to take some of their shares and give it to their eldest brother as a token of respect. The eldest brother is thus treated as they would have treated their father. In addition, when they distribute valuables, the separate share for the eldest brother is recognized.\textsuperscript{60}

The relationship between the father and his senior son is furthermore linked to a religious object called \textit{ọfọ} and a medicinal twig called \textit{ọfọ ọkpala}. The power of this is thought to bind the father and his senior son “so closely to mutual truth that any curse uttered by the father against the son would certainly kill one of the two persons.”\textsuperscript{61} This also illustrates the dependence of the senior son upon the will of his father. It is also the senior son who at his father’s death must “bring the father into his house” whereby the senior son becomes the holder of \textit{ọfọ ọkpala}.\textsuperscript{62} When he dies, the next eldest son of their father will be passed the \textit{ọfọ ọkpala} of his father, but his eldest son will also have acquired his personal \textit{ọfọ ọkpala}, which is passed down to his eldest son at his death.\textsuperscript{63} A similar system exists for senior daughters. They may receive the \textit{ọfọ} from the senior

\textsuperscript{57} Henderson and Henderson, \textit{Outline of Traditional Onitsha}, 34.
\textsuperscript{58} Henderson and Henderson, \textit{Outline of Traditional Onitsha}, 6.
\textsuperscript{59} Henderson, \textit{King in Every Man}, 149.
\textsuperscript{60} Henderson, \textit{King in Every Man}, 149–50.
\textsuperscript{61} Henderson, \textit{King in Every Man}, 139. Ilogu notes that regarding the \textit{Ozo} title there is a great variety in various parts of the land of the Igbo; see Ilogu, \textit{Christian Ethics in an African Background}, 30.
\textsuperscript{62} Henderson, \textit{King in Every Man}, 139.
\textsuperscript{63} Henderson, \textit{King in Every Man}, 140.
lineage priest, but when they in turn die, the ɔ revertsto the senior patrilineage priest for redelegation.64

During childhood, the boys are supposed to enter an age set that is not based on age alone, but on other factors as well, thereby showing a certain flexibility in the system of age grading.65 Through the age sets, one is set free from the control of the parents, but only after one’s parents have died is a person reckoned to be an adult. Only after the father has died can a son take title. There is one traditional exception to this rule, however: “The King has the right to bestow title upon his senior son.”66 This reflects the high status of the king’s senior son.

The Afikpo Igbo is one of the Eastern Igbo subgroups. The double descent kinship system characterizes them.67 Inheritance follows descent lines, but there is an emphasis on matrilineal ties.68 While matrilineal societies trace descent through females, both “power and position are generally held by men.”69

The Afikpo males value children strongly because they can acquire important titles through their sons. Likewise, they need daughters to marry off to set up good relations with others.70 When a son is born, it is announced to the male world of the village.71 A first son is usually given his great-grandfather’s first name, the second son his grandfather’s first name. Moreover, a father is not addressed by his name after the birth of a first son; now he is called “father of …,” his wife is likewise called “mother of ....”72

64 Henderson, King in Every Man, 140–41.

65 This system does not, however, “level” the difference in seniority between uterine siblings because an age set unite only those born during a three-year span; see Henderson and Henderson, Outline of Traditional Onitsha, 40. Age set, “age-based social groupings which cross-cut kinship and descent ties,” Seymour-Smith, Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 6.

66 Henderson and Henderson, Outline of Traditional Onitsha, 43.


68 Ottenberg, “Afikpo Ibo,” 12. The matrilineal descent system will not receive full attention; see, however, Ottenberg, Double Descent in an African Society.

69 Seymour-Smith, Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology, 185.


71 Ottenberg, Boyhood Rituals, 8.

72 Ottenberg, Boyhood Rituals, 18.
The relation between the firstborn son and his father is especially intense. We also find a similar relation between a mother and her first daughter.73

Sons of the same parents cannot belong to the same age sets.74 At certain rites, the father offers food and wine to the other men of his compound. He offers twice as much for the first son as for the others.75 There is also a special father’s first son initiation rite, called *isiji*. The pride a father has in his oldest son is seen in this rite. He sponsors the rite for his firstborn son, but not the firstborn for each of his wives.76 In the initiation rite that also seems to allow for nonfirstborn sons, there is a contest where “the best marksman among the true first sons becomes priest of the *isiji* bush and the head of the initiands, the next best the assistant priest. Surrogates and sons other than first sons are thus excluded from formal leadership.”77

Within polygynous families, the father is the head while it is the eldest male in extended families. The head of the extended family must give his members economic support in their first marriages, give advice, settle marital disputes, and act as deputy for those who live away. The *okpara* in the polygynous family has a special prestigious position. He is expected to assume leadership when he becomes an adult.78 Within the “house,” the eldest son, irrespective of being his father’s firstborn or not, is responsible for his mother and full siblings when he has become an adult. His siblings must be provided with matrilineal land, and he must take responsibility for his mother’s funeral.79

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74 Ottenberg, *Boyhood Rituals*, 20. This is also reflected in the ideal of a minimum of three years’ age difference between two sons.
77 This rite also ensures that the father becomes more occupied with village affairs, Ottenberg, *Boyhood Rituals*, 162.
The eldest daughter of each ‘house’ is second in command in the care and discipline of her younger full siblings, and, subject to the mother’s approval, may have considerable authority over them. If the eldest child of a ‘house’ is a daughter, she may as an adult exercise influence over younger brothers in matters concerning the group.\textsuperscript{80}

Normally the father’s eldest brother is supposed to act as legal guardian if the child’s father dies.\textsuperscript{81}

In some instances, a younger brother may be more eloquent and knowledgeable than his older brother. This might cause problems, especially if he disagrees with his older brother as this is an insult to his older brother. The same applies to a son toward his father.\textsuperscript{82}

After a person’s death, there are two funeral ceremonies. The eldest son or the oldest son living at home is responsible for the burial and funeral ceremony. The eldest son, who performs the rite also on behalf of all his agnatic brothers, directs the ritual at the second funeral ceremony.\textsuperscript{83}

When land of a major patrilineage is divided the eldest often receives the father’s main part after his father’s death if he is a full adult and needs land; at other times it goes to a full or half-brother, depending on need and age.\textsuperscript{84}

A man’s eldest son, or any other son, does not inherit the position of influential leadership. For such a position, the person must show his capabilities as a leader.\textsuperscript{85}

To sum up, the preferential status of the firstborn among the Igbo seems to be substantiated. There appears, however, to be some difference in what the term \textit{okpara} conveys and whether the status of the \textit{okpara} is ascribed or acquired. The reason for this appears to be both that one has not clarified at the outset what characteristics of the \textit{okpara} one is describing and that there are factual variations among the Igbo. The

\textsuperscript{81} Ottenberg, \textit{Marriage Relationships}, 205.
\textsuperscript{82} Ottenberg, \textit{Double Descent in an African Society}, 39, 190.
\textsuperscript{83} Ottenberg, \textit{Double Descent in an African Society}, 46–47, 192, 196.
\textsuperscript{84} Ottenberg, \textit{Double Descent in an African Society}, 62.
general picture that emerges is that the Igbo eldest brother is a representative for his younger siblings. He is responsible for their welfare. He is the confidant of his father, and his inheritance rights are special. He therefore has special privileges. These can, however, be withdrawn from him if his character is questioned. He also has religious functions where he becomes the link between the extended family and the living dead. There are some variations concerning succession: It might go from father to son or to younger brothers of the father. The eldest daughter also has a prominent position, particularly among the Afikpo Igbo, showing that aside from sex, relative age is an important qualifier.

2.2 Ethnic Groups Referred to by Sawyerr

2.2.1 Akan

The Akan are not a single ethnic group but form one cultural cluster based on language and cultural uniformity. They live primarily in Southern Ghana and in the southeast of Côte d’Ivoire. The two largest Akan groups in Ghana are the Ashanti (Asante) and the Fanti (Fante); a third group, mentioned below, is the Akyem (Akim). I will in what follows refer mostly to these three ethnic groups.

The general social anthropological characteristics of the Akan groups are matrilineal descent, inheritance, and succession. The Ashanti and Fanti also have exogamous patrilineages and a double descent system. Polygamy exists. Patrilocal residence is common.

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89 Warren, Akan of Ghana, 10.
Among the Ashanti, the extended family is of fundamental value, and the ancestors are considered part of the extended family. The head of the family, Abusua Panin, “family elder,” is the “family intermediary with the spirits, the administrator of all family property, the custodian of family traditions, and an arbitrator of all family disputes.”

The social bond between mother and child is the strongest, and the father has in theory no legal authority over his children. Within the family, the mother’s brother holds authority. However, the religious and educational ties for a child are with the father, while the bond to the mother is more important for political purposes. While a father has no legal authority over his children, he can make strong bonds with his children by caring for them. The father is also responsible for the moral behavior of the sons, while the mother is responsible for the daughters. The sons become the major support for the father.

Within the kinship group, the closest tie is the tie found between siblings of the same mother. Age difference is socially important. Fortes notes:

An older sibling is entitled to punish and reprimand a younger brother or sister and must be treated with deference. He is, conversely, obliged to help his juniors in trouble. This applies especially to the mother’s first-born (piesie) who is regarded as the head of the sibling group and also receives special consideration from his or her parents. But in all other respects it is the equality and solidarity of siblings which Ashanti specially stress.


91 Warren, Akan of Ghana, 36.


95 Fortes, “Kinship and Marriage,” 269.

96 Busia, Position of the Chief, 1; Fortes, “Kinship and Marriage,” 273.

97 Fortes, “Kinship and Marriage,” 273, emphasis original.
The last point is seen also in that one cannot create debt by borrowing from a sibling, and that siblings must help each other no matter what caused the trouble.98 Due to the double descent system, tension does arise between siblings. Half-siblings may in that case become one’s best friends because there are no binding obligations toward them.99

Again, due to the double descent system, it is necessary to distinguish between family estate and personally acquired property. While the uncle of the deceased is the heir, the deceased’s next eldest brother usually receives the inheritance. The next in line will be the next brother and so on.100 Thus, they base their political organization of society on kinship.

The political symbol of the chief is the blackened stool.101 Succession to the stool is matrilineal and often the brother or son of the queen-mother becomes the successor.102 There is, however, no strict adherence to the rule of primogeniture.103 The chief may act as an intermediary between the ethnic group and his royal ancestors due to the belief that the spirits of dead rulers protect the whole ethnic group.104

98 Fortes, “Kinship and Marriage,” 274.
101 According to Busia, “every lineage has its blackened stool which is the shrine of its ancestors. During ritual ceremonies the elder places sacrifices on the stool, and pours libations on it, and prays for the welfare of his lineage, which is represented at these ceremonies”; see Busia, Position of the Chief, 26. Stool: a seat without a back or arms. Enstoolment: en throne ment of a chief. Destoolment: abdication of a chief.
102 Warren, Akan of Ghana, 42; Rattray, Ashanti Law and Constitution, 84–86.
104 Busia, Position of the Chief, 26. The chief also becomes sacred after his enstoolment. This is secured by certain taboos that underline his sacredness. He is thus highly venerated. Busia, Position of the Chief, 26–27, 36–37. In some ceremonies, such as the Adae ceremony, where the spirits of the dead rulers are recalled with an offering of food and drink, he may also act as a priest chief, that is, a priest to the ancestors. Busia, Position of the Chief, 27–28; Busia, “Ashanti,” 202.
The relationship between brothers can be seen in an extended sense in the clan in the relationships between various chiefs of the same clan where they treat one another as brothers. One of them, however, is regarded as their senior brother.\(^\text{105}\)

The *Fanti* rank potential heirs to property by seniority.\(^\text{106}\) A fundamental contrast in seniority is between *panyin* (senior) and *kakraba* (junior). David B. Kronenfeld describes the relation between seniority and authority as follows:

A nua panyin is older than a nua kakraba and has authority over the kakraba. As children, the elder brother can discipline his junior, subject to control by the father. As adults, the elder is senior in the lineage to the junior and will inherit before the junior (the junior will inherit subsequently). Among brothers, the panyin kakraba distinction is commonly made and seems to be considered an important one. In certain lineage situations (see below) an extended younger nua can be senior (panyin) to an elder because he has a senior mother.\(^\text{107}\)

It seems also to be the case that age is the primary defining criterion for authority among children, while among adults the gender difference is more important.\(^\text{108}\) While it is possible to speak of an elder brother, *nua banyin panyin*, it seems not to be very common because the important distinguishing factor is seniority.\(^\text{109}\)

Seniority and the internal relation between siblings are important factors among the Fanti when inheritance rights are assigned. The lineage, *ebusua*, which is the equivalent of the English word “family,” is the group within which the inheritance is given. The elders of the lineage are free to decide who will receive the inheritance. There are, however, ideal norms, which the elders should follow, as much as possible.\(^\text{110}\) These norms suggest a kind of inheritance seniority. Kronenfeld exemplifies this as follows:

According to this seniority pattern [...], if a man, A, creates some property, the property ideally should pass to his next younger matrilineally related brother, then to the next younger, etc. In Generation –1 the eldest son of his eldest sister would come

\(^{105}\) Busia, *Position of the Chief*, 86.

\(^{106}\) Kronenfeld, “Fanti Kinship,” 22.

\(^{107}\) Kronenfeld, “Fanti Kinship,” 23. Nua is the term for sibling, but also includes half siblings and may also be extended to include nonlineage mates. Kronenfeld, “Fanti Kinship,” 21.


\(^{110}\) For the details, see Kronenfeld, “Fanti Kinship,” 25.
first, followed by the eldest son of his next eldest sister and so on. In Generation \(-2\),
the eldest son of the eldest daughter of A’s eldest sister would come first, etc. B, C,
and D inherit only after all of A’s younger brothers inherit and after all the
descendants of his sisters inherit. This pattern seems also to work for positions, as
well.  
Arthur Ffoulkes reaches the same conclusion: “I have mentioned that the eldest member
of the family is recognized as the head, but where this member is a woman, and more
particularly where the family is connected with a stool, the head delegates her authority
to her eldest son, or the eldest male in the family.” Kronenfeld claims that according to
tradition, there is also a possibility of father-son inheritance, but evidence of it has not
been found in recent years. 

The position of the eldest brother is also seen in the fact that when a Fanti dies, his
eldest surviving brother succeeds him, and he in turn is supposed to marry the widow. If
there are no brothers, his eldest sister’s eldest son succeeds the deceased. When a
younger brother acquires debts, he cannot ask an elder brother for help because it is the
elder brother’s duty to get him out of his debts by paying them himself.

Joseph Boakye Danquah, who deals with the Akyem, lists four areas where the
topic of succession is relevant: the succession to the stool, ordinary inheritance, paternity
and custody of children, and the disinheriting of a family member.

The stool, the symbol of authority for a king or chief, is a position to which one is
chosen by the family, ethnic group, or nation. All members of this family are eligible.
There is, however, an apparent right to inherit for “the first male son of the last
occupant’s maternal sister.” Birth alone, however, is not decisive; the members of the

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111 Kronenfeld, “Fanti Kinship,” 26. A father can, on the other hand, only transfer property he himself
has acquired to his sons.


116 Danquah, Gold Coast. He nevertheless refers generally to the Akan throughout his book.

117 Danquah, Gold Coast, 181.

118 Danquah, Gold Coast, 182.
family may choose freely among those eligible. If, however, the closest nephew, that is, the eldest sister’s eldest son that is of the right age, has a good reputation and character as well as being rich, he may not be chosen due to wrongful conduct or by being bodily weak or having bodily defects.\textsuperscript{119} An heir to a stool must be treated with due respect, and his honor must be guarded.\textsuperscript{120}

With regard to inheritance of ordinary property, the difference with succession to the stool is mainly a difference of degree in differing procedure.\textsuperscript{121} In cases of dispute, the mother may step in and her son, or another appointed by her, will become the heir.\textsuperscript{122} In a comment about family property, Danquah sums up:

We have seen that descent is traced through the female, and that the grand old dame or materfamilias is the most important member in the family, yet the actual ruling or governing head is male and not female. This ruler or head of the family is most often the eldest son of the old dame (who is called Ohemma or queen-mother in the higher Stoolocracy), or he might be some male member of the family who by reason of his personal fitness had been chosen to rule them, govern their affairs, and be their mouthpiece in the Chief’s Council or the nation’s assembly.\textsuperscript{123}

To sum up, the Akan cultural cluster is not a homogeneous unit. The status and role of the eldest brother seem to be quite similar across the various groups. While the preeminent status and role of the eldest brother, which can be found in some ethnic groups where primogeniture is of vital importance, cannot be found among the Akan, there are quite a few characteristics of the status and role of the eldest brother. While inheritance rules are not exclusive in their preferences for the eldest brother, there seems nevertheless to be a factual preference. The eldest brother has a responsibility toward the well-being of his younger siblings. This includes both helping them and disciplining them. Hence, he deserves respect from them. From the parents, he receives special attention. This also applies to a firstborn girl. Priority of birth is thus of higher

\textsuperscript{119} Danquah, \textit{Gold Coast}, 111.
\textsuperscript{120} Danquah, \textit{Gold Coast}, 39. A chief may, however, be removed from his stool: this is called “destoolment.” Danquah, \textit{Gold Coast}, 109.
\textsuperscript{121} Danquah, \textit{Gold Coast}, 182. Danquah also claims that nephew succession is the one that creates least quarrels. Danquah, \textit{Gold Coast}, 183.
\textsuperscript{122} Danquah, \textit{Gold Coast}, 183.
\textsuperscript{123} Danquah, \textit{Gold Coast}, 204.
importance than sex. The firstborn is also regarded as the head of the sibling group. As regards succession to a position, the eldest son is also a natural choice if he is thought fit for the position according to normal criteria.

2.2.2 Kikuyu

The Kikuyu belong to the Bantu-speaking peoples of East Africa. It is the largest ethnic group in Kenya. Descent follows the patrilineal principle and marriage is patrilocal.

There are two traceable patterns at work in the social organization of the Kikuyu, but the pattern of interest is the patriarchal system where the extended family is the basic unit. The patriarchal system is also connected with land ownership. The organization of the ethnic group can moreover be classified according to three characteristic patterns of relationships: the family group, the clan, and the age group.

At home, the father is the undisputed master of the homestead while in a polygamous family the mother is the head of her own hut. Among the wives of a polygamous man, the head wife is respected for her seniority in age. We see the same importance given to seniority among the children where especially the firstborn of the

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124 Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s.v. “Kikuyu,” last modified 19 March 2014, http://global.britannica.com/topic/Kikuyu. The Kikuyu are also called Giguyu, Gekoyo, or Agekoyo. Here the preferred spelling is Kikuyu, the one also chosen in Sawyerr, Creative Evangelism.


128 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 8–10.
first wife is “regarded as a centre of affection and a precious possession of the parents.”

At the initiation rite, the parents of a firstborn, whether it is a boy or a girl, are very excited because the parents will acquire a higher status in society after the initiation rite is completed. As a sign of their acquired seniority, they are provided with brass earrings. The authority of the father passes to the next generation through the elder son. This is expressed by the fact that especially the firstborn son is given all the necessary information about the rules that govern land tenure. After the father’s death, when inheritance is going to be divided, the obedient son will be well rewarded.

The Kikuyu trace land ownership backward to a single individual where the descendants form a land-owning subclan. The leader of this subclan is selected based on achievement, while on the lower level of the extended family, the head of the extended family holds his position based on seniority. The sons inherit land while the daughters do not own land and so cannot inherit land. After the death of the father the land is passed on to his sons; it is “their” land, and the eldest son takes the place of his father. The eldest brother has, however, no special right over the land except his title. The title that is given to the eldest son is moramati (titular or trustee). This title is an ascribed title that the eldest son owns due to his seniority of age, and as the firstborn son of the first wife. The form of address also illuminates the respect given to an elder brother. He is addressed as “baba mokoro (elder father, my or our), and the younger brother is called baba monyinyi (small or younger father, my or ours).”

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129 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 12. Among the elders and between the age groups the same seniority is recognized. Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 116, 137, 194, 264.
130 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 145, 151, 201.
133 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 114. Misdemeanor may result in disinheritance; see Middleton, Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu, 51.
135 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 32. See also Middleton, Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu, 52–53. Middleton spells moramati as muramati.
136 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 33.
137 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, 14.
The age sets are thought of in terms of kinship and the concept of seniority between age sets is important. The young of the Kikuyu must in their upbringing and education for life pass through a system of different stages, a series of rites of passage. Older brothers are responsible for educating younger brothers in herding goats and sheep. The different age groups also come into play in the relation with their grandparents where the children belong symbolically to the same age group as their grandparents. They therefore give the firstborn son the same name as his grandfather. At his birth “it is announced that it is ‘he’ who has come.” The first son born is also regarded as “perpetuating the existence of the man’s father, the second as perpetuating that of the woman’s father.” Seen from the perspective of status, the birth of his first child is the most important event in a man’s life after his own circumcision. It marks the beginning of a new adult generation and the possible extension of another one. The initiated firstborn sons by different wives also dig the grave for their aged dead father at his ceremonial burial.

We should note, however, that they also use the terms “father” and “brother” in an extended sense and the terms are thus not restricted to one’s physical father and brothers.

In the Kikuyu system of governmental organization, fathers and the elders maintain the leadership, but in one important group of men between the ages of twenty and forty there are no inheritable positions, they are all based on personal merit.

To sum up: The birth of a child, whether a boy or a girl, gives the parents a higher status. The eldest son is an important member of the family because the authority of the

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141 Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 15. The second male child will symbolically represent in a similar way his maternal grandfather; see also Middleton, *Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu*, 60.
144 Middleton, *Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu*, 65.
father passes on to the next generation through him. In terms of inheritance, he is not entitled to a larger share than the others are, but he holds an important title as the eldest brother. The form of address also reflects his status. Older brothers are moreover responsible for teaching younger brothers herding skills. At the funeral of the aged father, the firstborn sons by his wives are given the task of digging the grave for their dead father. The special role and status given to the eldest brother must be balanced by the fact that in some groups in the political organization of Kikuyu society, personal merit alone seems to be the guiding principle.

2.2.3 Mende

We find the Mende ethnic group mainly in Sierra Leone and the adjoining corner of Liberia.\textsuperscript{147} The Mende language is part of the Mande branch of the Niger-Congo family.\textsuperscript{148}

Marriage is normally exogamous and patrilocal. Polygamy is popular and offers labor for farming and other women’s work.\textsuperscript{149}

The farming household, \textit{mawe},\textsuperscript{150} normally consists of a man and his wives and children, often together with some of the relatives such as younger brothers and their wives. The head of the household, if it is a larger household, lives a large part of the year in the town and a younger brother or son acts as deputy for him at the farm.\textsuperscript{151}

Traditionally, as long as the children live together with their father, he has complete control over his children. This includes any property they might get. The son is, on the


\textsuperscript{149} Aguwa, \textit{Culture Summary}, 4.

\textsuperscript{150} Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone}, 96. This is the basic social unit.

\textsuperscript{151} McCulloch, \textit{Peoples of Sierra Leone}, 13. For traditional Mende culture; see Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone}, 39.
other hand, entitled to some of his father’s personal property on the latter’s death.\textsuperscript{152} The heirs of a man would traditionally be his brothers in birth order and thereafter his oldest son. After contact with Europeans, the son has more often become the first heir.\textsuperscript{153}

When the owner of a farming household, mawe, died, it was inherited according to patrilineal lines. Within the mawe, younger brothers or sons provided produce and needed labor for the head of the mawe. The head, on the other hand, took care of the interests and prestige of his juniors and their own family houses, mawesia.\textsuperscript{154} With regard to inheritance, M. McCulloch states:

Land rights are inherited in the patrilineal line like other property, wives, and the title to headship with which overall control of land coincides. The heirs are traditionally the brothers of the deceased, then the sons, and finally the daughters. The eldest brother was regarded as the most important person in the family and the one who should take charge of the property. Today sons are often awarded their father’s land in preference to his brothers. In the absence of brothers, or if the children are still minors at their father’s death, the maternal nephew may inherit the land, which reverts at his death to the original male line.\textsuperscript{155}

Neither sons nor daughters will inherit as long as they are considered minors. Daughters’ claims come after the claims of sons, particularly the claim of the eldest son. They avoid tendencies toward fragmentation in the division of land by vesting the title in a single heir.\textsuperscript{156} There is thus a close connection between inheritance of land and the assumption of headship of a kin group.\textsuperscript{157}

An important relationship exists between a man and his mother’s brother, \textit{kenya}.\textsuperscript{158}

The Mende use this title for all the brothers of one’s mother, and all of them have power

\textsuperscript{152} Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone}, 110.
\textsuperscript{153} McCulloch, \textit{Peoples of Sierra Leone}, 18.
\textsuperscript{154} Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone}, 97, 200.
\textsuperscript{155} McCulloch, \textit{Peoples of Sierra Leone}, 26. See also Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone}, 85. Among the Temne, an ethnic group in Sierra Leone, the eldest brother would act as guardian of personal property for younger brothers under age. Family property descends, on the other hand, in order of seniority from brother to brother. Among the Susu, another ethnic group in Sierra Leone, personal and family property may sometimes be divided among the brothers; the eldest brother would receive a larger share; see McCulloch, \textit{Peoples of Sierra Leone}, 66–67.
\textsuperscript{156} Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone}, 86.
\textsuperscript{157} Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone}, 88.
\textsuperscript{158} McCulloch, \textit{Peoples of Sierra Leone}, 19. Disobedience to one’s uncle is a graver offense than disobedience to one’s father; see Little, “Mende in Sierra Leone,” 122, 134; Little, \textit{Mende of Sierra Leone},
over the children of their sister. The eldest of their mother’s brothers have the greatest authority. The importance of the *kenya* in the family can be seen in that a marriage is not considered to be in order without the presence of the bride’s uncle.\textsuperscript{159} Furthermore, the relationship to the *kenyaisia* is recognized by a dual inheritance system whereby they are entitled to a share from their uncles’ property too.\textsuperscript{160}

They use the term for father, *keke*, for the natural father and all his brothers. When the natural father is dead, all his brothers have equal power over the children. Preference, however, is given to the eldest among them when consultancy is required.\textsuperscript{161}

The Mende are organized into many independent chiefdoms that are ruled by a Paramount Chief, *ndomahei*. The *ndomahei* was formerly succeeded by a brother or son, sometimes by a woman or a daughter’s son, subject to the approval of the people of the chiefdom. More recently, the *ndomahei* has been elected. Under the *ndomahei*, there are subchiefs.\textsuperscript{162} Each chief or subchief is supposed to be the oldest and most suitable person in the male line of the descent group in question.\textsuperscript{163} In former days, when a chief died, he had usually nominated his successor who would normally be the firstborn, but they also allowed others.\textsuperscript{164} Achievement by merit in election seems to be the governing principle, though.\textsuperscript{165}

In summary, within the family the Mende prefer the eldest whether he is the eldest son or the eldest brother. Formerly, the brothers of a man seemed to be the first in line to inherit. This has changed to a preference for the sons, and here the eldest has a higher position than his younger siblings do. This does not necessarily mean that he would inherit more property than the others would, but that he has a higher status and a more

\begin{footnotes}
\item[159] Sawyerr and Harris, *Springs of Mende Belief*, 128–29.
\item[161] Sawyerr and Harris, *Springs of Mende Belief*, 128.
\item[163] Little, *Mende of Sierra Leone*, 175.
\item[164] Little, *Mende of Sierra Leone*, 181.
\item[165] Little, *Mende of Sierra Leone*, 199–202. In those cases where hereditary succession was found in the precolonial power system of chieftaincy, it was more a result of coincidence than a conscious choice.
\end{footnotes}
important role than others do. He was thus supposed to take care of the property when
the head of the household died and look after his juniors. With regard to the political
organization of Mende society, there seems to have been a transition from a kinship-
based system of succession where the firstborn was the preferred one to a system based
on achievement.

2.2.4 Yoruba
The Yoruba are one of the largest ethnic groups of sub-Saharan Africa. We find
the largest Yoruba population in the Western part of Nigeria. Yoruba kinship is in practice
patrilineal and a Yoruba is born into a patrilineal clan. Marriage is patrilocal. The
patrilineal form prevails, but “the Yoruba reckon descent bilaterally.” This might be
substantiated by the development in the tradition about kingship, where succession to
kingship was traditionally reckoned according to male primogeniture, but was later
changed to a choice among several candidates from the royal clan. Jeremy Seymour
Eades has even argued that “the Igbeti think of themselves as members of compounds
rather than descent groups.”

Within a compound, the head of the compound (bale) lives in a house together with
his senior wife, their senior son and this son’s wives and children. He is the oldest
male member of the compound. Among those inhabiting a compound, there is “a
system of rank according to seniority, as defined in terms of a person’s affiliation, by
birth or marriage, with the omole (descendants of the compound).” Daryll Forde notes:

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166 William R. Bascom, The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology
1–2.

167 Bascom, Yoruba, 42.

168 N. A. Fadipe, The Sociology of the Yoruba, ed. Francis O. Okediji and Oladejo O. Okediji (Ibadan:
Ibadan University Press, 1970), 134. See also Jeremy S. Eades, The Yoruba Today, Changing Cultures

169 Bascom, Yoruba, 30–32.

170 Eades, Yoruba Today, 49. See also Fadipe, Sociology of the Yoruba, 106. Igbeti is a town in
northern part of Yorubaland; see Eades, Yoruba Today, 40.

171 Eades, Yoruba Today, 47.

“The terms *egbon* (senior sibling) and *aburo* (junior sibling) are used with reference to the ‘descendants of the compound’.” In this system of seniority, age is not the only criterion. Within the clan, the hierarchy seems to be based on seniority inasmuch as “each person is ‘elder’ (*agba*) to all others born or married into the clan after him.” Kinship thus guarantees loyalty, cooperation, mutual help and mutual forbearance while seniority guarantees obedience to authority and therefore to the concept of leadership. The way seniority is practiced in family life can be seen when an older child is whipped and then told to whip his younger brother when he becomes offensive toward him. In addition, when children collect gifts from adults or receive meat at a feast, it is shared according to seniority, implying that the largest part goes to the eldest while it diminishes according to age.

In a compound, there is a tendency for groups of siblings by the same mother to live together. An eldest son will likely live in the same house as his father, and he will take over his father’s room when his father dies. Even when his brothers move to other places, the eldest son will stay at home in his father’s house. The relationship between father and eldest son is thus very close. This emphasis on the eldest son is related to the principle of seniority, which is defined in terms of birth order. Twins are a special case where they consider the firstborn twin the youngest because the elder one sent him ahead first; he is called *Taiwo*, and the meaning of the name is that he came to inspect the world for his older twin who is called *Kehinde*, which means that he came afterwards.

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173. Daryll Forde, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa 4 (London: International African Institute, 1951), 11, emphasis original. The terms *egbon* and *aburo* are used for male and female and any kinsman (bilateral) of one’s generation senior or junior in birth; see Forde, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 14; Bascom, *Yoruba*, 49; Fadipè, *Sociology of the Yoruba*, 119, 126.


The eldest son of a man is supposed to succeed him with regard to headship of family. For example, when a man dies at a relatively early age, the eldest son is supposed to supervise and take care of his younger brothers and sisters. Likewise, when sacrifices must be offered, he is the chief celebrant. He must also correct wayward younger siblings.\textsuperscript{181} “The only circumstance in which the eldest surviving male member would not be found acting on his father’s death as the head of the family is the event of his being a lunatic or an imbecile.”\textsuperscript{182} In terms of headship of an extended family, the same principle holds to a certain degree, but a major principal additional requirement is seniority. The most senior male member becomes the head, all other things being equal.\textsuperscript{183}

As regards inheritance, there are two important points. The children of a man inherit what a man acquires for himself during his lifetime whereas the property he himself has inherited is passed on to his siblings.\textsuperscript{184} “His status as a member of his own sibling group passes to the next most senior sibling or to the eldest son of the group of full brothers, while his status as head of his own nuclear family passes to his eldest son.”\textsuperscript{185} The eldest son takes over the administration of family property on the death of his father.\textsuperscript{186} The property inherited by a man’s children is inherited equally based on groups of full siblings.\textsuperscript{187} In the matter of inheritance of widows, “the eldest son was the only one who received about equal with the siblings of his father.”\textsuperscript{188}

Forde maintains that of the land previously held by their father, the eldest son would take the biggest share. For those who were not yet able to take possession of their share, an elder brother would manage the property for them.\textsuperscript{189} William Bascom notes that when a father dies they divide his personal property into shares of equal size according to

\begin{footnotes}
\item Fadipè, \textit{Sociology of the Yoruba}, 135.
\item Fadipè, \textit{Sociology of the Yoruba}, 136.
\item Fadipè, \textit{Sociology of the Yoruba}, 136.
\item Forde states, “the right of children to be their parents’ heirs is said now to be everywhere recognised”; see Forde, \textit{Yoruba-Speaking Peoples}, 25. See also Fadipè, \textit{Sociology of the Yoruba}, 141, 142.
\item Eades, \textit{Yoruba Today}, 55.
\item Eades, \textit{Yoruba Today}, 55. The next eldest son is then the next in line and so on among his brothers.
\item Eades, \textit{Yoruba Today}, 55–56.
\item Fadipè, \textit{Sociology of the Yoruba}, 142.
\end{footnotes}
how many wives with children he had. A childless wife will get a nominal share to support her until she can marry again. The real heirs are the children of his wives, and “the eldest child of each wife takes one share in the name of all the children of his mother. He may keep and use this heritage as he sees fit; but he is held responsible for the economic welfare of the others.”

To summarize, kinship and seniority are two important factors that govern Yoruba life. Seniority ensures respect for custom, authority, and tradition while kinship ensures loyalty, cooperation, and mutual help. In this setting, the role of the eldest brother seems to be important. We see this both in the way he himself is supposed to behave and in how the others relate to him. He is entitled to a larger share of gifts received, he has a responsibility for the upbringing of younger siblings, which is most evident when their father dies at a relatively early age, and he is the chief celebrant when sacrifices are offered. He is also the natural head of the family at the death of the father. In matters of inheritance, there is some disagreement over whether the eldest son will receive more than the others will in all cases, but his status is nevertheless higher than for the rest of the sibling group with the result that he seems to inherit more than the others do. The fact that there has been a shift away from male primogeniture to a choice between various candidates regarding succession to kingship suggests that the preeminent status and role of the eldest brother may have become more questioned in recent times.

2.3 Ethnic Groups Referred to by Kabasélé Lumbala

Kabasélé Lumbala refers to the Bantu in general and occasionally to the Bakuba and Luba ethnic groups. My focus is therefore on various ethnic groups that belong to the Bantu and on the two ethnic groups mentioned specifically by him. All these ethnic groups belong to the Bantu-speaking ethnic groups.

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190 Bascom, *Yoruba*, 46.
2.3.1 Various Bantu Ethnic Groups

The Bantu do not form one ethnic group or a cluster of ethnic groups but designate people that share a common linguistic heritage.\(^{191}\) A common characteristic of the Bantu from Central Africa is that their rules of descent are matrilineal while for the Bantu from East and South Africa the rules of descent are patrilineal. The Bantu from Central Africa differ significantly regarding their family systems.\(^ {192}\)

The ethnic groups referred to below include the Mayombe, Yao, and Lele, who belong to the Bantu from Central Africa, and the Ganda and the Nyakyusa, who belong to the Bantu from East Africa.\(^{193}\)

Among the Mayombe, succession to office is based on matrilineal rule, from brother to brother, then to uterine nephew and thereafter to uterine grandson.\(^ {194}\) Hereditary offices are those held by the chief, the village (section) head, or the senior brother, \textit{khazi}, of a matrilineal fraternal family. This group of brothers and sisters holds ownership of land belonging to a minor maternal descent group, \textit{mvumu}, jointly. The senior brother administers it, however. He also takes care of money earned by his sisters who leave their village when they marry, but keep their possessions distinct.\(^ {195}\) A compound family consisting of the sons of one mother, with their wives and young children and several others, owns land in common. They acknowledge the authority of the senior brother, the \textit{ngadi khazi}.\(^ {196}\) It seems, however, that various persons may hold the office of the \textit{khazi} or “protector.” He may be the eldest brother, or he may be the most competent of the


\(^{193}\) The Mayombe live in the Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Northeast Angola; the Yao live in Malawi. The Lele live in the Western and Eastern Kasai provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Ganda and Soga live in Uganda. The Nyakyusa live in Tanzania and Malawi. The Ndembu, Plateau Tonga, and Soga ethnic groups are not included, as the relevant material does not add substantially to what is found for the others.

\(^{194}\) Uterine, used as a synonym for matrilineal kinship, which is a kinship system where descent is traced through the female.


elders, or one of those educated for the office by the existing khazi. The khazi is both a judge and arbitrator and holds supreme authority over the maternal descent group.\textsuperscript{197} Since the office of khazi is not exclusively hereditary, the status of an eldest brother holding such an office is perhaps best described as an acquired status.

The Yao of Malawi trace their descent from a founding ancestress.\textsuperscript{198} The effective descent group, mbumba, would normally consist of a group of married sisters with their children. Their eldest brother is their leader and is clearly treated as the head of a group of siblings. His sisters and younger brothers use a special kinship term to refer to him. Succession to office follows matrilineal rules where the eldest son of a man’s sister generally succeeds him.\textsuperscript{199} The eldest brother who is the head of the mbumba settles disputes, represents his sisters in court, pays fines for them, and makes marriage decisions for their sons and daughters.\textsuperscript{200} A senior brother, who becomes the head of an mbumba, settles with his sisters, and marriage is accordingly virilocal.\textsuperscript{201} We may characterize the matrilineal system of Malawi by “the more pronounced avunculate exercised by the eldest brother in a society in which primogeniture is emphasized.”\textsuperscript{202}

The Lele base their village organization on genealogical generation and age sets.\textsuperscript{203} The village is moreover the most important social unit.\textsuperscript{204} The Lele base their society on the principle of seniority. We implicitly see an expression of this when a boy at an early age demands respect from his younger brother.\textsuperscript{205} The extent to which the principle of seniority is applied is seen at the birth of twins, regardless of sex. There are only two names allowed for them, Ihaku for the eldest, and Mboyu for the second. This distinctive

\textsuperscript{198} Malawi was earlier called Nyasaland (until 1966).
\textsuperscript{199} There is some variation to this rule.
\textsuperscript{201} Richards, “Some Types of Family Structure,” 235.
\textsuperscript{202} Richards, “Some Types of Family Structure,” 236. Avunculate, a special relationship with the maternal uncle.
\textsuperscript{205} Douglas, \textit{Lele of the Kasai}, 6.
naming reduces the social anomaly. There is a close emotional bond between father and son, and they are supposed to honor each other reciprocally. They also give praise to what a man should do for his father and what a father should do for his son. The same applies to elder and younger brothers. A mother’s brothers exercise authority over her sister’s sons and they compete over authority over their sister’s sons. Between brothers there is supposed to be solidarity and cooperation. Thus, they should avoid competition among themselves. “A younger brother should respect and obey his elder brother.” Inequality is thus integral to their brotherly relationship.

The elder should protect his younger brother who should show him respect and bring him the product of his labours. If the younger brother brought palm wine or game the elder brother decided the distribution. A little boy was expected to be like a devoted servant, rewarded with promises of help with his marriage and cult dues.

Should a crisis occur, the elder brother would be responsible for assisting his younger brother. As an example, Mary Douglas notes that if the younger lost his wife, and the elder had two, then the elder brother should give one to his younger brother. “Such devotion did not always hold between all the brothers of a big family.”

Only the men are organized into age sets where the junior age set refers to the senior age set as their elder brothers, or their grandfathers. Similarly, senior men are supposed to practice equality regarding their authority over all junior clansmen. Neither inheritance nor succession appears to be an important matter among them. If there arise any disputes among them, they are normally over women, not over property. Village headmanship is settled by age.

206 Douglas, Lele of the Kasai, 73. See also the similar feature among the Yoruba; see page 68 above.
207 Douglas, Lele of the Kasai, 73.
208 Vuyk, Children of One Womb, 42.
210 Douglas, Lele of the Kasai, 99.
211 Douglas, Lele of the Kasai, 100.
212 Douglas, Lele of the Kasai, 80.
213 Douglas, Lele of the Kasai, 95.
214 Vuyk, Children of One Womb, 44.
The Ganda have been organized into a fixed number of patrilineal clans, each of them having a senior clan official.215 Entry into the clan occurs at a naming ceremony where they give the child a name belonging to the clan. The system was different for the royal family. Here the children of the Kabaka216 took the clans of their mothers. “Traditionally, it is said, the first-born son, the Kiweewa, had certain privileges and duties, and was not considered eligible for the throne, but any other son, or lacking a son, any grandson, was a possible Kabaka.”217 When a man wanted to marry, he had to go to the sister of the girl’s father or her oldest brother, bringing a gift to ask for permission to marry her.218 Since around 1900, there has been a change in inheritance in Buganda219 toward a system of primogeniture where the eldest son is expected to succeed his father and inherit a greater share than the rest of his brothers and sisters. In what is designated pre-contact times by Margaret Chave Fallers, the eldest son never succeeded his father, and the clan chose his successor. The reason the eldest son could not succeed was that he had certain duties at the funeral of his father that made him ineligible as successor. The most common successor was the son of the deceased’s brother.220 The Nyakyusa belong to one of the Bantu-speaking ethnic groups found in East Africa, in the Great Rift Valley north of Lake Malawi.221 They are in general patrilineal,

216 The Kabaka was the ruler of Buganda, the kingdom of the Ganda people; see Fallers, Eastern Lacustrine Bantu, 15, 19.
217 Fallers, Eastern Lacustrine Bantu, 53.
218 Fallers, Eastern Lacustrine Bantu, 55.
219 Buganda is the name of the kingdom of the Ganda people, located in what is now known as Uganda; see Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s.v. “Buganda,” last modified 15 December 2008, http://global.britannica.com/place/Buganda.
220 Fallers, Eastern Lacustrine Bantu, 57. Among the Soga, kinship institutions were quite similar to those of Buganda. A few differences only are noted. In terms of succession, the rule was that “a man’s wives, children and property passed at his death to his next junior brother”; see Fallers, Eastern Lacustrine Bantu, 59. As in the case with Buganda, there was a shift toward father-son inheritance of property, but the wives and children still passed to the next junior brother; see Fallers, Eastern Lacustrine Bantu, 59.
221 Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” in Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, 111. Lake Malawi is known as Lake Nyasa in Tanzania, lying in a deep trough mainly within
and inheritance and succession follow thereafter. The eldest son of the first or great wife is the ultimate heir of the husband. He inherits the bulk of family property.\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 113.} The Nyakyusa are keen to cooperate when building houses. Cattle are in a similar way not owned exclusively by individuals, but male members of three generations have certain rights: “A man who is the senior son of a senior son, and whose grandfather’s and father’s full brothers are all dead, controls not only the cattle inherited from his father, and those from the marriages of his own full sisters and daughters, but also those from the daughters of his full brothers and the daughters of his sons.”\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 117.} He is not exempted, however, from obligations toward his family.\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 118.}

A full brother is a man's heir, and after him his half-brother linked through their mothers. The next in line is the eldest son of the deceased, provided he is an adult. The eldest son is supposed to marry first, followed by his younger brothers.\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 119.} Even though inheritance passes from brother to brother, ultimately the principle of primogeniture becomes efficient so that the senior line becomes wealthier.\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 131.} Direct transfer of inheritance to sons has become more common, though. Land is not normally inherited, but the eldest son of each house nevertheless inherits certain rights, such as the right to dispose of the cattle of his own full sisters and others. His precedence is also seen in various rituals. While the eldest son of each group of brothers may act as priest, the prayers of the senior brother are sought in times of serious trouble.\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 120.} His senior status is thus clearly recognized. “The privileges of seniority accrue not only to the senior generation but also in some measure to a senior son—the eldest son of a great wife—and in a lesser degree to the eldest son of each house.”\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 131.} Related to this is the belief in the power of senior relatives, living and dead. An example of this belief is the power the

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\footnote{Malawi; see Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s.v. “Lake Nyasa,” last modified 2 July 2013, http://global.britannica.com/place/Lake-Nyasa.}

\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 113.}
\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 117.}
\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 118.}
\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 119.}
\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 131.}
\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 120.}
\footnote{Wilson, “Nyakyusa Kinship,” 131.}
To sum up, we note for these Bantu ethnic groups that they form both matrilineal and patrilineal societies according to descent rules. Even among the matrilineal societies, we find that the eldest brother’s special status is recognized. He is a protector, administrator, and head of the maternal descent group. The eldest brother also has a responsibility for the welfare of the others. With regard to inheritance there is also some variety, from father to son or next brother, to little focus on the question of inheritance at all. The offices held by the eldest brother are not strictly hereditary offices, because in some of these ethnic groups others are also candidates for these offices. His status thus seems to vary from ascribed to achieved.

2.3.2 Kuba and Luba

The Kuba, or Bakuba as they are also called, consist of a cluster of several Bantu-speaking groups that live on the heights between the Kasai, Sankuru, and Lulua rivers in the Kasai province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They formed a kingdom that was a federation of ethnic groups where the chief of the Bushoong was the king for all of them.

Among the Kuba only a child with a married mother has a social father. Therefore, fatherhood is important, even though a child is a member of a mother’s lineage independently of whether the mother is married or not. While the father educates his sons, he has no legal authority over them. Due to the father’s lack of legal authority, sons

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have higher esteem for fathers than for mother’s brothers.²³³ Trudeke Vuyk notes the tension between theory and practice in the relation between brothers among the Kuba:

In theory the elder brother is the protector of his younger brother. The eldest one is supposed to help his father with the education of his younger brothers, and he should give presents to them. The younger ones are supposed to admire their elder brother, and perform services for him. The elder brother behaves respectfully towards his younger brothers’ wives, but the younger ones may joke with their elder brother’s wife.²³⁴

The Luba, or Baluba as they are also called, are a cluster of Bantu-speaking groups that live on the savannah south of the rainforest in the Democratic Republic of Congo.²³⁵ Marriage is virilocal.²³⁶

The Luba Empire was a state led by a king who had access to the throne according to hereditary right based on descent in the same extended royal patriline.²³⁷ According to Jan Vansina, “practically the whole Luba region is patrilineal.”²³⁸ Jacques A. Th. Theuws surmises that before any institutionalized chieftainship existed, the majority lived together in large extended family units where the eldest male member held the authority in a patrilineal family organization.²³⁹ François Neyt refines this and notes that, with regard to descent among the Luba, a geographical distinction must be drawn where the Central and Western Luba have a patrilineal system of descent whereas the Eastern have a matrilineal system of descent.²⁴⁰

²³³ Vuyk, Children of One Womb, 46.
²³⁴ Vuyk, Children of One Womb, 47.
²³⁷ Reeve, Rainbow and the Kings, 9, 49.
²³⁹ Theuws, Word and World, 2.
²⁴⁰ François Neyt, Luba: To the Sources of the Zaire, trans. Murray Wyllie, Publication 20 (Paris: Musée Dapper, 1994), 224. Neyt might therefore be in general agreement with Vansina and Theuws while adding in which geographical regions the Luba are not patrilineal. This is also reflected in the organization of the major families. Among the Eastern Luba there is a decentralized structure whereas among the Central Luba there is a hierarchical family system. The Western Luba are divided into clans; see Neyt, Luba, 223–24.
The household is a separate unit. It consists of a husband and wife or wives and their children. The father, and husband, holds the authority. He owns all there is.\textsuperscript{241} Social status among the children is connected to their mothers. The first wife is the real wife who “owns” the marriage, and she has precedence over the others that follow.\textsuperscript{242} Siblings relate to each other based on the principle of seniority. Boys, however, take precedence over girls.\textsuperscript{243} “The dominating authority in a Luba lineage is the oldest male member, although the individual person’s most immediate authority is his father.”\textsuperscript{244} The principle of seniority, which is established according to primogeniture, must be observed strictly.\textsuperscript{245} A son, even though he might be the master of a homestead consisting of many members, is an inferior in relation to his old father. He is dependent on him for his existence. The eldest son, while dependent on his father together with his siblings, holds a privileged position. He succeeds his father on the latter’s death and inherits his father’s belongings. He must share them, however, with the other children. An elder brother has some rights over the personal belongings of his younger siblings and over his younger siblings as well. They must give to their eldest brother what he wants.\textsuperscript{246} The younger brother is thus largely at the mercy of the eldest brother. Conversely, the elder is responsible for the younger. He must protect him, teach him, and support him according to the standards of the group.\textsuperscript{247} Balancing the hierarchical system, all members of the same generation are brothers and sisters featuring to some extent equality among them and thereby forming “a kind of horizontal layer in the lineage group.”\textsuperscript{248} When a young man wants to pay tribute to the chief, he never does so directly, but instead he takes it to his father who takes it to the eldest man of the lineage who thereafter takes it to the

\textsuperscript{241} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 16.
\textsuperscript{242} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 17.
\textsuperscript{243} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 18.
\textsuperscript{244} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 19.
\textsuperscript{245} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 19.
\textsuperscript{246} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 19. This seems to be at variance with the blessing “a dying father blesses his children” referred to by Theuws where the brother of the father inherits the children, Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 105–6. This holds true only if the eldest son is not yet an adult. Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 29.
\textsuperscript{247} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 20.
\textsuperscript{248} Theuws, \textit{Word and World}, 20.
The relationship between father and child with its focus on seniority and juniority functions as a model for other relationships.

To sum up, the Kuba and Luba ethnic groups differ according to their social organization. The Kuba are mainly matrilineal while the Luba are mainly patrilineal. The material available for the Kuba is sparse, but shows nonetheless the same characteristics as found for the other Bantu ethnic groups. The eldest brother is supposed to protect his younger siblings, help his father in their upbringing, while they, on the other hand, should respect him. There is also some tension in the relationship between the eldest brother and his younger siblings.

Among the Luba, the principle of seniority decides how brothers relate to each other. The eldest holds a privileged position that must be respected by his siblings, but he is at the same time responsible for the welfare of the younger ones. Another characteristic of the Luba balances this hierarchical system where all members of the same generation feature a kind of equality among themselves.

2.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to investigate more closely what is implied in the status and role of the eldest brother in the relevant societies or ethnic groups. It has become clear that the ethnic groups vary to a considerable degree according to their overall social systems and family types. There are patrilineal, matrilineal, and double descent systems among them. We will therefore need to assess the status and role of the eldest brother in light of the different social systems. The difference in status and role is most easily seen in connection with rules of succession and inheritance. A further general observation is that seniority is an important social qualifier—in some ethnic groups sometimes even more important than gender. Nevertheless, even where seniority is held as more important than gender, prerogatives are still often given to the eldest brother. In those ethnic groups where there is a clear preference for the eldest brother, there are

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249 Theuws, Word and World, 28.
250 Theuws, Word and World, 29.
often complementary social systems that balance the power in that ethnic group. The age sets found in some of these ethnic groups are examples of such social systems. Moreover, the kin term “eldest brother” is sometimes used in a sense that extends beyond the kin type that it refers to and it is hence used in a more figurative sense. This might be related to the question of whether the status of eldest brother is an ascribed or acquired status. While there are clear preferences for the firstborn to fill the status of the eldest brother, in some situations the status might be transferred to the next in line or to another person that is considered fit for that role.

If we look at the specific characteristics of the status and role of the eldest brother, the following results emerge. The exemplary function of the eldest brother is seen in several of the ethnic groups, often connected with anticipated respect. This might be seen in funeral rites, and when he has to be a custodian of inheritance given to younger siblings that are too young to make use of their inheritance. He is furthermore responsible for their welfare; this includes everything from making sure that their basic needs are met to educating them for social life. This is often done by the parents by raising the eldest in such a way that he has an educational effect on his younger siblings and in this way becomes an example to follow. In those cases, where the head of the compound or extended family is the eldest brother, it can also be argued that he becomes the founder of the filial generation, especially where his younger adult brother(s) forms a social unit with him. The new status acquired by the parents when their firstborn is born is also an example of this. He also often receives a greater share of the inheritance due to his extended responsibility; this, however, is also found in some cases to relate to the responsibility he has for his younger siblings. The priestly role is not very prominent in most of the ethnic groups, although it is clearly noticeable where it is seen. We have not found the terms “mediator” and “spokesperson” used in the material consulted. This does not mean, however, that the subject matter is absent. Younger siblings often consult their elder brother in important matters and he can act as an adviser for them. He can at the same time act as the confidant of the father and bearer of important family knowledge. He is accordingly a key person in passing on this knowledge in the family. In performing these tasks, the elder brother becomes a mediator between his father and
younger siblings and a spokesperson for both his father and his younger siblings. Both roles are also inherent in the task of handling the upbringing of younger siblings.

Few ethnic groups match all the characteristics of the eldest brother, but all of them match some. Thus, while there are different social systems and family types, the special status and role of the eldest brother are clear. This means that it is not only in social systems known to be patriarchal that the special status can be found. It is perhaps especially important to note that while inheritance is one area where the special status is seen, it is nevertheless not the only one.

It has also become evident that the description of the eldest brother as presented by Nkwoka, Sawyerr, and Kabasélé Lumbala in general matches what I have found in my own survey of these ethnic groups. Their presentations are thus substantiated.

The next question that we must ask regards the extent to which the special status and role of the African eldest brother is recognizable in the status and role of “the biblical eldest brother” in the literary and cultural context of the New Testament in first-century Mediterranean societies. The survey provided above will offer relevant data in the search for the special status and role of the eldest brother in first-century Mediterranean societies. This will be the topic of the next chapter.
3 Eldest Brother in the First-Century Mediterranean World

In this chapter, I will try to draw a picture of the eldest brother in the Mediterranean world in New Testament times as it is depicted in various texts.

Equipped with the results from the survey of the African eldest brother, I now have a helpful, but not a limited description of roles and statuses for the eldest brother to aid me in what to look for in the various texts. I have worked along several lines. We may ask what group of texts can be considered sufficiently relevant for the New Testament authors to have influenced them or come from a background not too different from them and that might describe the status and role of the eldest brother. The Hebrew Bible/Septuagint is obviously a relevant text from a New Testament perspective. Ancient authors who use the HB/LXX in their own writings and in addition add their own comments to the text of the HB/LXX are of special interest. The closer these authors are to the New Testament period, the better. Here, both Philo in his expositions and allegorical interpretation of the HB/LXX and Josephus in his retelling of the Jewish history are the two most obvious authors. I searched these works in the TLG database for texts dealing with sibling relations and where the status and role of the eldest brother are discernible.¹ For Philo and MT/LXX, the morphologically tagged versions of these texts available in Logos Bible Software have also been widely used as well as the scripture index in Loeb Classical Library.² For Josephus, I have also used two lists of cross

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¹ Details about searches are found in the introductions to the relevant subchapters below.
references to the HB/LXX to cross-check relevant texts from the HB/LXX with the corresponding texts in Josephus. I also extended the search in the TLG database to include the whole corpus of the database up to the second century AD. By cross-checking which authors and references seemed to give more hits in several of the searches combined, I started to check out the works that looked most promising. In addition, reading secondary literature both on these works and on family in antiquity with a focus on the status and role of the eldest brother, references to various ancient works relating to my topic were noticed and consulted. Altogether, this made both Herodotus and Plutarch interesting and rewarding. Noticing that Josephus may have modeled his work *Antiquitates judaicae* after Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ work *Antiquitates romanae* made me want to look more closely at the latter’s work with positive results. A further comparison with Livy also writing his history of Rome *Ab urbe condita libri* made me want to compare these two writings on the Roman history from a Greek and Roman background to elucidate any possible difference in perspective regarding the status and role of the eldest brother.

It is difficult to assess how precisely the texts analyzed reflect social realities, but the purpose of this chapter is to look at how the eldest brother is presented in texts to establish a basis for comparison with the presentation of the eldest brother in the texts of the New Testament. This will also include texts where “eldest brother” is used as a metaphor. I will work on a textual level, but there is a priori no reason to believe that the relevant texts do not reflect social realities. I will start with the broader Greco-Roman context before I go to the HB/LXX and thereafter to Philo and Josephus since they relate their writings to the HB/LXX. Before that I will, however, provide a short overview of family relations in antiquity.

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3.1 Family Relations in Antiquity

In this section I aim to draw a general picture of the family in antiquity. The purpose is to provide a broader framework for the investigation of the status and role of the eldest brother in the first-century Mediterranean world that follows next. It thus has the format of a short descriptive summary emphasizing its main characteristics.⁴

Within the Roman, the Greek-Hellenistic, and the Jewish societies the family formed the basic unit in the society and provided the resources needed for its members. Hence, rulers could model their ideology on the family picturing themselves as the head of the family and the citizens as its members. Admittedly, the family forms underwent some changes in the centuries leading up to the period of the New Testament, but the family nevertheless had a central position in the societies. Cultural and geographical differences also affected family forms.⁵

Families also arranged marriages to establish bonds between families. The Roman and Hellenistic traditions were exogamous, while the Jewish one was endogamous. Monogamy with patrilocal or neolocal residence was common.⁶

Life expectancy was short. Many women died during pregnancy or childbirth. The average age of death for women was around sixty while for men it was around forty-five to fifty. Women married at the age of around twenty or earlier, men married at around thirty. Hence, many children lost their fathers before they reached the age of twenty. Only one in five children was born when their grandfather was still alive. Many male teenagers would be the eldest male in their family. Child mortality rates were high. The average number of siblings while still being minors was three and among adults it was about two.⁷

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⁴ In this section I rely on the description of the family as found in chapter 4: “A haven in a heartless world: Siblings within the framework of the family” in Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 34–60.

⁵ Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 34–35.

⁶ Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 37. The needs of the group, the family, have priority over individual needs; see Hellerman, The Ancient Church as Family, 31.

To ensure the succession of the family, both remarriage and adoption were alternatives chosen in families with few or no children. The result was that the sibling group would often consist of a mixture of half-, step-, and adopted siblings in addition to full siblings. When there was a legal heir in the family, it was rare to find an adopted brother. The longest-lasting relationship in the family was the sibling relationship, between forty and fifty years, which also indicated its importance in the family.\(^8\)

Within the family we can distinguish between two related patterns: descent and cohabitation. In the Roman tradition, all who were under the authority (descent) of the head of the family belonged to the *familia*. The household or the cohabitational unit, *domus*, was the preferred and more important concept in our period. Both concepts imply a wide understanding of the family, but whereas *familia* relates to male descent *domus* relates to who lived together. For the Greeks, “clan” corresponds roughly to *familia* and “oikos” to *domus*. Also, partly due to new settlements in Greek colonies, the Greeks became more diverse or individually oriented. Three levels of organization characterize the Jewish tradition. The (twelve) “tribes” were on the top level, with “clans” as subunits below, and at the bottom the “father’s house,” corresponding to the *domus* and “oikos.” The household would be the most important while being a minor, whereas *familia* gained significance for adults. Hence, it played a more important role at major events in the family, such as births, divorces, and death.\(^9\)

Earlier the family (especially the Roman family) was presented as consisting of three generations that also included other family members and nonrelated people. More recently, the flexibility of the family has been emphasized, due to changes within the lifespan of a family as well as geographic and social variations. This resulted in a smaller household with parents and children as its basis. One in ten households might consist of a three-generational family whereas the majority was two-generational. The changes

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\(^8\) Aasgaard, “*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!*” 39–40.

\(^9\) Aasgaard, “*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!*” 40–43. Whereas Westerners have a horizontal focus, in antiquity the vertical focus was much more in focus, including both the past (ancestor veneration) and the future (proper distribution of inheritance); see Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 51–58.
occurring within a family lifespan changed the composition of the family over the years.\(^\text{10}\)

The ideal was a family that supported itself. Succession was ensured by getting descendants through procreation and handing down property to the children. The transfer of the family name and spiritual and cultural values to the next generation was also important. The family was also a production unit, especially in rural areas. In the cities, trade and a money economy were more common. Skills and often a craft, however, were handed down within the family. The household also secured necessary education, including reading, writing, and counting. Religious traditions, beliefs, and practices were also handed down in conformity with the belief of the family head. The family also had judicial functions and provided social security. For social contact and emotional support the family was the main institution.\(^\text{11}\)

The legal position of the head of the family (especially the Roman *pater familias*) ensured him almost full authority in the family. However, his power was balanced in various ways: public opinion, economic freedom of adult sons, and sons that moved out of the family to establish a new home as well as a weakening of his legal authority in the later centuries. Dependence in old age on the next generation also had a softening effect. Moreover, family members cared for each other both socially and emotionally.\(^\text{12}\)

Important ideas that affected family life include the idea of shame and honor. One’s honor was connected with one’s name, status, profession, etc. Honor could be either ascribed or achieved and was a limited good. To gain honor implied loss of honor for another. Shame could be either positive or negative. Positively, it was related to taking care of one’s reputation; negatively, it meant to be shameless and therefore not concerned about one’s honor. For women, shame was shown differently, by modesty,

\(^\text{10}\) Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 43–44.


\(^\text{12}\) Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 49–50.
sexual exclusiveness etc. Honor affected family life as family honor, therefore all the members of the family had to be concerned about defending their family honor.\textsuperscript{13}

A second prevalent idea was the ideal of family harmony. It meant that when each member of the family acknowledged their proper place or role in the family, the relationships between them would be good and family harmony was secured. The most important relationships were between spouses and between parents and children.\textsuperscript{14} These ideals of family harmony are clearly seen in the treatise by Plutarch about brotherly love discussed below.

The third idea was the thought that family life had a morally superior, hence glorious, past, but had ever since declined into a more problematic present. This idea does not reflect social realities, but is probably a reflection of social changes affecting family life.\textsuperscript{15}

### 3.2 Eldest Brother in Greek and Roman Literature

The purpose of this section is to give an adequate presentation of the status and role of the eldest brother within the Greco-Roman world, as it is reflected in some Greek and Roman texts, primarily Herodotus and Plutarch.

The most significant of them is Plutarch. The reason for choosing his writings we find in the general assessment of Plutarch by Hubert M. Martin, Jr.: “Plutarch’s grand literary achievement is that the \textit{Lives} and \textit{Moralia} together constitute a synthesis and interpretation of the thought and events of all antecedent classical antiquity.”\textsuperscript{16} Plutarch wrote a treatise that in English is named “Brotherly love,” found in his \textit{Moralia}, dealing specifically with the relationship between brothers. With specific reference to this

\textsuperscript{13} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 51–52. Sibling solidarity was also deeply connected with family honor; see Hellerman, \textit{The Ancient Church as Family}, 43–44.

\textsuperscript{14} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 54. Related is the value of sharing material resources, called reciprocity; see Hellerman, \textit{The Ancient Church as Family}, 47–51. While the most affectionate bond in Western society is that between spouses, in the Mediterranean antiquity this was found between siblings, consequently treachery and betrayal between brothers is considered the most extreme breach; see Hellerman, \textit{The Ancient Church as Family}, 39–43.

\textsuperscript{15} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 57–58.

\textsuperscript{16} Hubert M. Martin, Jr., “Plutarch,” \textit{ABD} 5:383.
treatise, Mark Golden states: “Though written in or just before the second century of our era, this work draws on examples from the whole range of Greek history down to Plutarch’s own day.”17 This work from Plutarch ought to give a representative view on the relationship between brothers and the status and role of the eldest brother from a Greek and Roman perspective in the first century AD. Plutarch’s treatise might also serve as a contemporary cultural description that may validate earlier findings.

One earlier writer that covers a lot of ground in his writings is Herodotus. He has been called the first historian. He wrote about different peoples in the then known world from a Greek perspective, trying to explain the Persian invasions of Greece. In his stories from both Greece and other societies, he comments now and then on the status and role of the eldest brother. A couple of these stories are moreover found again in the mentioned treatise by Plutarch. Together with Plutarch, Herodotus thus gives access to an early description of the status and role of the eldest brother covering many societies and several centuries. Societies change over time in terms of their wider social context, including both political and economic factors, and the family must be seen in relation to these changes. Historians of the family and social anthropologists now question whether a single family form can be assigned to a given historical period due to differences in family systems that will always be there. It is claimed that geography should be stressed more as a factor that determines the continuity of social institutions such as the family. It is therefore not wise to assign a particular family form to any period of history. Family forms will always vary, especially between regions and classes, and in response to various factors, such as geography and economy.18 While there has been a tendency to search for more or less static systems, Suzanne Dixon gives a useful reminder that is relevant in this context too: “It is now acknowledged that most cultures, however committed to the ideology of a specific form of descent and inheritance, are obliged by demographic


18 See Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 16–17. This is argued in relation to the Roman family, but it would probably be relevant for the Greek family as well.
exigencies to develop alternative systems, and it has become more usual to speak of strategies than of rules or systems of inheritance.”

The writings of Plutarch and Herodotus, read together with a general presentation, should therefore give an adequate description of the status and role of the eldest brother from the perspective of the Greek and Roman world. Before considering these two authors, I will present a more general survey of the eldest brother within the family among Greeks and Romans in antiquity together with some comments on the works mentioned above by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy. Due to the nature of the material available, most of the examples deal with kings and rulers, and not with ordinary people.

Within the family realm, the special status and role of the eldest brother can be noticed in several areas. First, there is a longing for sons. In Classical Athens, it was not enough to be born to become a member of a household; the child had to be accepted by the head of the household. That decision was based on several factors. Gender and the most desirable size of the family were two of them. Girls were in danger of being rejected more often than boys were. This shows the relative higher preference for sons rather than girls. To have no children was a disaster. Solon also pointed out the high value

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20 In the following section on the Greek world, I rely heavily on Golden, whose focus is on the place of children and childhood in Athenian life from around 500 to 300 BC; see Golden, *Children and Childhood*. His “study is based primarily on literary texts, broadly defined,” Golden, *Children and Childhood*, xv. This includes law court speeches of Athens, gravestones, Attic comedy, tragedies, myths, and important authors like Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as iconographic evidence.


24 P. Walcot, *Greek Peasants, Ancient and Modern: A Comparison of Social and Moral Values* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 46. Homer, *Il*. 9.453–456. When a man had no son, he could adopt one. If he already had a son, he could not be disinherited, nor could a daughter lose her position as *epikleros*. Adoption was thus a means to support oneself in old age and ensure the continuance of one’s *oikos* after one’s death. After the classical period a man could use a will to give all his property to anyone he wished; see MacDowell, *Law in Classical Athens*, 100–101.
attached to having sons and grandsons. Croesus in Sardis had just shown Solon all his riches and then asked him who the happiest man in the world was. Solon told Croesus that the happiest man was Tellus of Athens, and one of the main reasons was that he had both sons and grandsons that grew up. In other words, a multitude of male descendants was valued more highly than material riches.

Naming practice and upbringing of the eldest son are also illuminating. The first son of a father would regularly be named after his grandfather. Being identified by the mother’s name was taken as an insult. It would indicate that the identity of the father might be unknown. To know one’s family is therefore important regarding one’s social status. The direct male line from father to son through the eldest son is by this naming practice singled out as important.

The eldest brother would normally marry first and be trained to become a leader. Thucydides thus describes an episode at the end of the tyranny of the Peisistratidae (P.W. 6.54–59). After the death of Peisistratus, not Hipparchus, one of Peisistratus’ sons, but Hippias, who was allegedly the eldest of his sons, succeeded Peisistratus. Thucydides gives the following arguments for why Hippias was the eldest son and hence succeeded to government: It is likely that the eldest marry first. Hippias alone among his brothers appears to have had legitimate sons. Furthermore, on the pillar set up in the Acropolis commemorating the wrongdoing of the tyrants, his name is found immediately after the name of his father. Thucydides interprets this to imply that he was the eldest of Peisistratus’ sons. It would moreover have been difficult to obtain the tyranny if Hipparchus had already reigned. Hippias, however, was used to government “with

25 Herodotus, Hist. 1.30; see Donald Lateiner, The Historical Method of Herodotus (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 142. See also Herodotus, Hist. 6.86.
26 See Thucydides, P.W. 6.54.
27 Golden, Children and Childhood, 25 and note 6 pages 189–190. See Plato, Lys. 204e; Plato, Parm. 126b; Euripides, El. 933–935; Sophocles, El. 365–367. Strauss notes that if one had ancestors who had not achieved anything and were without a name, one was anonymous or nameless; see Strauss, Fathers and Sons in Athens, 27, Demosthenes 10.73.
28 Socially the child first became a member of the family, thereafter a member of the family’s phratry or clan. To become an Athenian citizen one also had to prove that one was legitimately born into an Athenian oikos. See Golden, Children and Childhood, 25–29, 95; Strauss, Fathers and Sons in Athens, 42–43. See also Andocides 1.125–127; Demosthenes 59.55–61.
superabundant security and was at no loss, as a younger brother would have been, since in that case he would not previously have been regularly used to power” (Thucydides P.W. 6.55 [Smith, LCL]). Thucydides thus assumes that the eldest is supposed to be trained to become a leader, more so than younger brothers. He also expected to succeed his father.

Proper filial behavior was thought to pass down from one generation to the next. The relationship between father and son is hence treated as a family possession or an object of inheritance. The children were expected to show respect, loyalty, and obedience toward their parents, and especially toward their fathers.

Within the family, the relationship between brothers should be one of concord and mutual support. The expected support between brothers was so strong that “a speaker could dismiss a brother’s testimony as unreliable” in court. A brother’s neutrality toward his brother therefore demanded an explanation. Among brothers, “older brothers were expected to look out for their younger siblings.”

Brothers were also supposed to support their sisters, and served as “their sisters’ kyrioi” in the absence of a father, finding a husband for them, or taking them in when their marriages ended in divorce or death. When a daughter married, her legal or political status did not change. The change was in whoever was in control of her. Her kyrion would no longer be her father, or in his absence, her adult brother, but her

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30 Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 102. He refers to Stobaeus Flor. 4.25 where many such passages are found. Harrison and Strauss note that an old father (and mother) had the right to be fed and housed by his (her) son(s); see Harrison, “Family and Property,” 77; Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 65. Strauss argues that filial piety is the “major key” of the Greek father-son discourse, while the “minor key” is the likelihood of tension and conflict between them; see Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 13–14.

31 See what Philip, the king of Macedonia, states about the quarrel between his two sons, according to Livy: “How often in your presence, hating the examples of discord between brothers, I have reviewed the dreadful fates of those men who had utterly destroyed themselves, their houses, their homes, their kingdoms!” (Livy, *Ab urbe cond. 40*.8.11 [Sage, LCL]).


34 Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 118. See Aeschines 2.28; Lysias 10.5.

husband. She left her family and joined a new oikos. The father would be kyrios of his son until the age of eighteen. The son would now be legally independent of his father, but he was still a member of the oikos of his father. The subsidiary role of a brother filling the role of a sister’s kyrios shows that her brother in certain situations would act as a representative of her father. This is a role that is assigned to brothers, but considering the general preference for the older, the eldest brother would be the natural choice in this respect.

According to Plato, Socrates referred to this equation between the role of a caring father and that of an elder brother in his defense when he claims to have cared for the Athenians by neglecting his own affairs and having been busy in their interests. He said: “Coming to each one of you individually like a father or an elder brother (ὦσπερ πατέρα ἢ ἀδελφὸν πρεσβύτερον) and urging you to care for virtue; now that is not like human conduct” (Plato, Apol. 31b [Fowler, LCL]). Both as father and as elder brother he is responsible for their welfare.

It was more common for children in large families to participate in labor from an early age than in families with few siblings, “partly because of the model older brothers and sisters provide.” Both boys and girls would eat with their mother, not their father. When boys were allowed to join the men’s club at the symposium, they were set apart from their elders. “Boys, social inferiors destined to inherit the father’s dominant role,

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36 Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 49; MacDowell, *Law in Classical Athens*, 84. See Euripides, *Med.* 231, 238–240, Sophocles, *Trach.* 141–150, 529–530. As long as a daughter was unmarried, other male members of the family, such as the paternal grandfather, could also be chosen in the absence of the father. This would normally mean that the father was dead. In their absence, a guardian had to be appointed. The classical oikos has been described as “a small holding corporation composed of its male head, his wife, their children, and the slaves who served it and worked the land that was its economic base”; see Marylin Arthur, “Liberated’ Women: The Classical Era,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 60–91, here 67.


38 See Plutarch, *Alex.* 2.1.

39 I interpret the phrase “now that is not like human conduct” as refering to Socrates’ behavior toward the Athenians, which is described metaphorically by Plato as “like a father or an elder brother.”

40 Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 34.

41 Strauss warns against picturing the father as absent from the life of infants and toddlers; see Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 90.

were placed in an ambiguous position. They usually ate with their mothers and sisters, but might also be granted an early taste of privileges to come.” The importance of age is here stronger than that of gender for them as role models. The special privileges that boys were looking forward to were, however, different from what girls could expect.

The inheritance strategies of the Greeks also offer valuable information when discussing the status and role of the eldest brother. The inheritance could be distributed to the sons before the father died. One of the sons would in that case take their father into his own household. The father could also distribute only some of his property if he so wished. There was no special age when such an action should be carried out. When inheritance was distributed, it was divided among all the sons at the same time, though probably the eldest son would be most concerned about it, because he would be the one that had reached the age of marriage.

Although the ideal was mutual support between brothers, when the inheritance had to be divided, disagreement could arise between them. “Though the firstborn son had certain privileges—presbeia—involving such things as claim to a family name or first choice in the division of property, in principle all sons shared equally in the estate.” In light of such a statement, we can hardly say that the Greeks practiced primogeniture. If this had been the case, we would have expected the eldest son to have been given a full or larger share in the division of inherited landed property from their father.

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43 Golden, Children and Childhood, 38.

44 Golden, Children and Childhood, 108; MacDowell, Law in Classical Athens, 91–92. The age of thirty is suggested by Golden. Walcot states that the inheritance was distributed in equal shares; see Walcot, Greek Peasants, 46–47. See also Plutarch, Frat. amor. 482d–f; Lysias 19.36–37. The inheritance included not only the family’s plot of land and other acquired property, but the duty to preserve the family cult of the house; see Harrison, “Family and Property,” 123, 130.

45 Golden, Children and Childhood, 112. Young men most commonly married at the age of thirty; see Golden, Children and Childhood, 108.

46 Golden, Children and Childhood, 119, emphasis original. See also MacDowell, Law in Classical Athens, 92–93; Strauss, Fathers and Sons in Athens, 66; Cheryl A. Cox, Household Interests: Property, Marriage Strategies, and Family Dynamics in Ancient Athens (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 109. See Demosthenes 36.11, 34, 39.27, 29; Isaeus 6.26; Demosthenes 43.19; Xenophon, Symp. 4.35. Harrison states emphatically that “All the evidence is against the possibility that primogeniture secured any kind of privilege”; see Harrison, “Family and Property,” 131. He refers, however, in footnote 4 on the same and following page to Demosthenes 39.27, 29, who, according to Harrison, suggests that “the right to bear the name of his paternal grandfather was the πρεσβεία of the eldest son.”
Carl Wium Westrup has offered a proposal where he suggests that we should distinguish between a real primogeniture and an ideal primogeniture. The real primogeniture is thought to be of a material kind including landed property, while the ideal primogeniture relates to status and role without inheriting landed property. This would allow one to speak about an ideal primogeniture among the Greeks where the firstborn son inherited the religious authority as well as the secular power of the house, including economic management. Even though the eldest among the brothers did not receive a larger share in the inheritance, the status connected with the family name was transferred to him, and he was given the role of religious head of the family after the father died.\textsuperscript{47}

Such a terminological distinction seems to focus on the opportunity to use the term “primogeniture,” which in itself does not make any change regarding the division of the inheritance. However, this terminological difference points to a difference between the eldest brother and his younger brothers by showing that the status and role of the eldest brother are not connected with landed property only, but also, in this case for the Greeks, with the religious authority and secular power of the house, where the eldest son has a preferential status.

If we turn to Rome, we must keep two precautions in mind regarding the study of kinship and family. The literature available is “dominated by the viewpoint of the middle-aged male of the ruling class ... who sees women, children, slaves, and agricultural workers as existing (if noticed) on the periphery of life.”\textsuperscript{48} We can furthermore not arrive at a well-grounded understanding of ancient kinship strategies of the Romans by summarizing the legal rights of the ancient Roman family, a point that is also valid for other periods and geographical areas in the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{49}


\textsuperscript{48} Dixon, Roman Family, 34.

\textsuperscript{49} Dixon, Roman Family, 59. Nevertheless, the work that has been done concerning the Roman family has been on Roman law; see Beryl Rawson, “The Roman Family,” in The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives, ed. Beryl Rawson (London: Routledge, 1992), 1–57, here 4.
The central term for the Romans when they referred to the lineage or kinship unit was *domus* rather than *familia*. The term *familia* is nevertheless widely used in the literature when dealing with the family. The head of the family was the *paterfamilias* who was the senior male. His authority or power over the descendants of the family, *patria potestas*, lasted until his death. He could accordingly decide whether an infant born by a person under his paternal power should be accepted into his family or not. The *paterfamilias* performed this by ritually raising the child who had been declared fit to live. In this way, he accepted his paternity and his wish to rear the child.

Due to joint ownership between the father and sons of the house at an early date in Roman history, there was no succession in the classical sense with a transfer of ownership, but the sons continued the already existing joint ownership. The son, at the death of the father, took over the management of the family property. Later, when the use of the will became common, the son could not be deprived of his patrimony without being expressly disinherited by name. The eldest son would normally succeed to the economic authority of the housefather. The possibility of active use of the will combined with disinheriance made the situation rather insecure in a Roman context. There was always a way to manage around the difficulties, as suggested by John Anthony Crook: “Well, it looks as if sweeping away all the male heirs (perhaps all but one, to achieve primogeniture by the backdoor and defeat partibility and splitting-up) was not

51 Rawson refers to *familia* when defining the size and membership of the Roman family; see Rawson, “Roman Family,” 8.
52 Rawson, “Roman Family,” 7. A legal act could dissolve his authority. For a comparison of the differences between the Greek and Roman father, see Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 63–64. He notes, however, that while there was a considerable difference between the Greek and Roman father both legally and ideologically, in practice that might not have been the case; Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens*, 66.
55 Westrup, “Joint Family and Family Property,” 68.
57 Westrup, “Joint Family and Family Property,” 104. There was no change of ownership in the existing joint property.
thought very nice; you could do it but must come clean about it.” The status and role of the eldest brother are therefore in the hands of the *patria potestas*.

We can illustrate this noted difference between the Greek and Roman understanding by comparing how the Greek Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the Roman Livy describe the role and status of the eldest brother in a few incidents from their Roman histories. Dionysius of Halicarnassus seems to take for granted a preference of the eldest brother. He states that Amulius, the younger brother of Numitor, had taken possession of the kingdom that belonged to his elder brother Numitor (*Ant. rom.* 1.71.4). Later he adds:

When Amulius succeeded to the kingdom of the Albans, after forcibly excluding his elder brother (τὸν πρεσβύτερον ἀδελφὸν) Numitor from the dignity that was his by inheritance (τῆς πατρίου τιμῆς), he not only showed great contempt for justice in everything else that he did, but he finally plotted to deprive Numitor's family of issue, both from fear of suffering punishment for his usurpation and also because of his desire never to be dispossessed of the sovereignty (*Ant. rom.* 1.76.1 [Cary, LCL]).

Livy similarly notes the principle of seniority, but adds to this the will of their father when he comments on Proca, father of Numitor and Amulius, bequeathing the ancient realm of the Silvian family to Numitor, the elder of the two brothers, “yet violence proved more potent than a father’s wishes or respect for seniority. Amulius drove out his brother and ruled in his stead” (*Livy, Ab urbe cond.* 1.3.10 [Foster, LCL]).

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59 Dionysius of Halicarnassus was a Greek rhetorician and historian who lived in the late first century BC. Donald Russell, “Dionysius of Halicarnassus,” *OCD* 460. He spent a long time in Rome before he wrote his Roman history, most likely for a Greek audience that according to him did not know the early period of Rome well enough (*Ant. rom.* 1.4.2). He further believed that the Romans were originally Greeks (*Ant. rom.* 1.5.1–4; 7.70.1–73.5). See Gregory E. Sterling, “Historians, Greco-Roman,” *DNTB* 503. Livy (Titus Livius), 59 BC to AD 17, was a Roman historian. He was born in Patavium in Northern Italy, but spent most of his life in Rome. He was on good personal terms with Augustus. His major work is his *Ab urbe condita libri* (Books from the Foundation of the City) that covered the history of Rome from its beginning to 9 BC, in 142 books, of which only some have survived. See John Briscoe, “Livy,” *OCD* 852.
60 Numitor was the grandfather of Romulus and Remus on their mother’s side.
61 An alternative translation is given by Canon Roberts: “violence, however, proved stronger than either the father's will or the respect due to the brother's seniority; for Amulius expelled his brother and seized the crown.” *Livy, History of Rome*, trans. Canon Roberts (Medford, MA: E. P. Dutton, 1912).
therefore be closer to Roman sentiments, but Livy did not exclude the principle of seniority between brothers either.62  

Dionysius of Halicarnassus takes up this principle of seniority again when he recounts the affairs surrounding the death of king Lucius Tarquinius Priscus in Rome, who is left with two minor grandsons. His son-in-law, Servius Tullius, succeeded him on the throne. He had to appoint the elder of his father-in-law’s two grandsons to become the leader of the Romans when they came to manhood (Ant. rom. 4.4.8). This mentioning of the elder of them chosen for leadership is reiterated by Dionysius of Halicarnassus twice more (Ant. rom. 4.29.2, 4.31.2). The elder of these two brothers was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus who, according to Livy, had no right to the throne (Livy, Ab urbe cond. 1.49.1). Livy lets Lucius Tarquinius Superbus argue, however, that he as the king’s son was a more appropriate successor to the throne than Servius Tullius, who was a former slave (Livy, Ab urbe cond. 1.48.2). Livy hence focuses more on other statuses.  

Dionysius of Halicarnassus asserts that Sextus was the eldest son of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (ὁ πρεσβύτατος τῶν Ταρκυνίου παιδών) (Ant. rom. 4.64.2). Sextus too accordingly claims that the succession to kingship is his by right, because he is the eldest (Ant. rom. 4.65.2). According to Livy, however, Sextus was the youngest of the three brothers (Livy, Ab urbe cond. 1.53.5).  

It has become evident that Dionysius of Halicarnassus is more interested in status differences between brothers by adhering to the principle of the eldest as the obvious choice for leadership, including when he recounts Roman history. Livy does once mention the principle of seniority, but it is downplayed by him there. In the other places, he does not find it necessary to mention whether they were younger or elder, and in one place he differs by claiming that the one Dionysius of Halicarnassus claimed was the eldest was the youngest.

62 Livy notes in some places that some are elder brothers or eldest sons without that fact making any difference to what is told (Livy, Ab urbe cond. 1.3.2, 3.12.9, 23.30.10, 35.47.5).

63 Dionysius of Halicarnassus argues against the opinion that they were the sons of Tarquinius (Ant. rom. 4.7.1–5), contra Livy (Ab urbe cond. 1.46.4).
This difference between Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy is corroborated by Livy seemingly acknowledging the principle of seniority among the Greeks when he recounts the story about the succession after Philip, king of Macedonia. Livy notes that Philip named a city Perseis in honor of his elder son Perseus (Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 39.53.15). He further states that Perseus is the elder brother, though not born by a legal wife (Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 39.53.3). When Demetrius, his younger brother, with the aid of the Romans is trying to become the next king, Livy says that Demetrius “hastens to leap over precedence in age, in nature, the usage of the Macedonians, the law of nations” (Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 40.11.7 [Sage, LCL]). He furthermore lets Demetrius acknowledge in a speech that the kingdom belongs to Perseus by law and their father’s wish (Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 40.12.12–13). Livy moreover lets Demetrius claim that it was Perseus’ duty as his elder brother “to intercede for the younger, to win forgiveness for my youth and my mistake.” In short, his elder brother should protect him (Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 40.15.10 [Sage, LCL]). Finally, according to Livy, Demetrius somehow admits that his father’s love is less for him than for his elder brother, but his father should nevertheless pity him on his trial (Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 40.15.15). This shows that when Livy is recounting Greek history he seems to distinguish between the status and role of elder and younger brothers, more so than when he deals with Roman history. The Greek eldest brother is more recognizable as a natural successor, worthy of honor, and protector of his younger brother(s).

To conclude this general overview of the status and role of the eldest brother within family life among Greeks and Romans in antiquity, the following has become evident.

There is a longing for sons among the Greeks. The eldest son was commonly raised to become the leader and therefore trained to succeed his father. Older brothers were expected to look after younger siblings and become role models for them. An elder

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64 An example from other nations is given by Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.4.25, for the pre-Islamic Arabs: “The descendants of the royal family not only reign as kings, but also hold other offices, in accordance with seniority of birth (*κατὰ πρεσβυγένειαν*); and all property is held in common by all kinsmen, though the eldest is lord of all (*κύριος δὲ ὁ πρεσβύτατος*)” (Jones, LCL); see Frederick E. Greenspahn, “Primogeniture in Ancient Israel,” in “Go to the Land I Will Show You”: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young, ed. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 69–79, here 72.
brother would also have a claim to the family name and take the role as religious head of the family. Hence, he commonly fills the political and priestly leader role in the family. There is, however, no real primogeniture among the Greeks. This does not mean that the eldest brother did not have certain privileges. He would be the *kyrios* of his sister after their father’s death, thereby taking over functions that belonged to the father and would thus be second in command.

Among the Romans, the material brought forward does not allow one to conclude that the eldest brother had a preferential status and role. The general tendency to honor seniority would make such a status and role understandable in a Roman context as well, even if there seems to be less interest in role and status difference between younger and elder brothers. The eldest son, however, would normally succeed to the economic authority of the housefather. It is time to take a closer look at Herodotus and Plutarch.

### 3.2.1 Eldest Brother in the Works of Herodotus

Herodotus was most likely born in Halicarnassus in about 484 BC and died around 420–414 BC. Halicarnassus was a Greek city found on the south-west coast of what is now Bodrum in Turkey. The city was under Persian rule at that time. According to his own writings, *Histories*, Herodotus traveled extensively in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. He went to Egypt, where he went as far south as Elephantine, and he also visited Phoenicia, Palestine, Babylon, the Black Sea area, Dodona and Zachyntus,

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Metapontum in Southern Italy, (possibly) Cyrene in North Africa, and Thebes, Sparta, Delphi, and Athens in mainland Greece. Herodotus is thus a representative that throws light on the early stages of what later became the Hellenistic world after the conquests of Alexander the Great. The value of Herodotus lies in how he describes the status and role of the eldest brother in various geographical locations. He thereby gives a Greek cultural perspective or bias on the status and role of the eldest brother in its broader context. Nowhere does he treat this as a specific subject, but the way he portrays the eldest brother gives glimpses of social kinship strategies and customs. Donald Lateiner notes: “Herodotus portrays oriental women less stereotypically and more generously than any other Greek historiographer.”

One should therefore perhaps also expect a generous portrayal of the eldest brother within the family.

Herodotus reports what is said, an important feature of his historical method. “What men have believed—true or not—is as important to him as what they have done.”

Herodotus might therefore give trustworthy information about the status and role of the eldest brother in the societies described by him. Some scholars, notably Detlev Fehling, have questioned, however, the truthfulness of the source citations told by Herodotus. On the other hand, Carolyn Dewald claims that arguments in support of some scholars.

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68 Lateiner, Historical Method of Herodotus, 136.


70 Lateiner, Historical Method of Herodotus, 215. See also Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, Commentary on Herodotus, 21.

71 For an overview of the debate of Herodotus as “father of lies” or “father of history”; see Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, Commentary on Herodotus, 51–55. Both Josephus (C. Ap. 1.16) and Plutarch are critical of him; see Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, Commentary on Herodotus, 52–53.

72 See Detlev Fehling, Herodotus and His “Sources”; Citation, Invention and Narrative Art, trans. J. G. Howie, ARCA: Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 21 (Leeds: Cairns, 1989). This is a revised edition and translation of Detlev Fehling, Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot: Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodot, Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 9 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971).
the trustworthiness of Herodotus’ sources are not weaker than Fehling’s own arguments.\textsuperscript{73} Michael A. Flower and John Marincola also argue that “most scholars still believe that these preserve at least some traces of contemporary tradition.”\textsuperscript{74} Oswyn Murray contends that Herodotus based his \textit{Histories} on testimonies of \textit{logioi andres} transmitted via oral tradition and that “the narrative of Herodotus shows that in each case they are chosen by him because they seem likely to possess an authoritative version of the past.”\textsuperscript{75} Murray remarks that the commentary by David Asheri and his Italian colleagues on the last two books in \textit{Histories} “has demonstrated for the modern generation the extent of the factual basis of Herodotus’ researches: the skepticism of scholars such as O. K. Armayor and Detlev Fehling has been decisively refuted.”\textsuperscript{76}

None of the passages treated in what follows, apart from 2.120 (where it relates to another topic), are listed among those passages, according to the lists given by Lateiner, where Herodotus states that information fails, is insufficient for certainty, or will not profit further research.\textsuperscript{77} The passage 6.52 is a passage where Herodotus does not wish to take responsibility for its content, but he reports it anyway.\textsuperscript{78} Whether the individual stories that are discussed in what follows are historically true or not is nevertheless not of vital importance as long as the descriptions of the kinship relationships can be assumed to be in general accordance with that geographical area and time.

The material from Herodotus will be presented under the following headings based on the interest in the eldest brother in these passages: 1) A longing for many sons, 2) A preference for the eldest brother or son, 3) Competing preferences, and 4) Reasons for not choosing the eldest.

\textsuperscript{74} Flower and Marincola, \textit{Histories, Book IX}, 17; see also note 87.
\textsuperscript{78} Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, \textit{Commentary on Herodotus}, 20.
3.2.1.1 A Longing for Many Sons

Herodotus observes that the Persians value the father of many sons. Every year, the man who can show the largest number of sons receives rich gifts from the king (1.136). The inherited line of succession from father to son is moreover maintained by the Persians, even in kingdoms that they conquered, though only if the son revolted against his father and subdued himself under Persian rule (3.15). This seems to be the common and normal line of succession among various people according to Herodotus. The plausibility of this argument can be inferred from his comment about the Lycians, who are singled out as having a unique custom among every nation of the world. They take the mother’s name and not the father’s name. Status is also inherited from the mother among them. If she is a free woman, the child is free, even if the father is a slave (1.173). Herodotus does not give his own thoughts about this, for him, unique custom, but merely reports it. Its uniqueness and strangeness compared to what is considered normal is likely the reason he mentions it.

3.2.1.2 A Preference for the Eldest Brother or Son

Within a family with several brothers, the eldest brother is normally the first in line to succeed his father. Herodotus reports on a struggle for the crown among the Trojans. The struggle was between the two brothers, Alexandrus and Hector, sons of Priam, the king. If Alexandrus had been heir to the crown, the affairs would have been under his control, but Hector, his elder brother, and a far braver man, stood in his way. On the death of their father Priam, Hector was the heir to the kingdom (2.120). In other words, seniority of age is a fundamental criterion for determining social status and thus preference in succession.

79 How and Wells note that this custom seems to have been common in the East, with references to 2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17; see W. W. How and J. Wells, eds., A Commentary on Herodotus, 2 vols., Wordsworth Classics of World Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1967–1968), 1:259. David Asheri calls this a “wise practice of imperial administration, common to all ancient empires”; see Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, Commentary on Herodotus, 413.

80 Asheri comments that the passage does not deal with rights of citizenship, but with personal legitimacy. Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, Commentary on Herodotus, 195.
Several other reports affirm this. When Xerxes and his army started their march against Greece, Pythius, a Lydian with five sons, asked Xerxes for the king’s favor to let his eldest son stay at home as his guardian. His other four sons might leave in war with the army. Xerxes did not approve of the request and had the son killed in a grotesque way (7.38–39). Pythius most likely asked for this favor to spare his eldest son because he wanted to be sure that his family would be carried on through the preferred line. The eldest brother was accordingly also the beloved son of his father.\footnote{Lateiner states that “the anecdote’s ideological significance outweighs the historical falsehood,” and that “autocrats breach rather than observe custom, law, and justice, the foundation of society”; see Lateiner, \textit{Historical Method of Herodotus}, 154–55.}

In another report from Persia, Herodotus talks about Cyrus who in a vision sees a threat from Darius, the eldest of Hystaspes’ sons. Darius had wings upon his shoulders that respectively covered Asia and Europe (1.209).\footnote{Asheri notes that the winged man is known in royal iconography and that it was a charismatic symbol of the king; see Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, \textit{Commentary on Herodotus}, 215.} Accordingly, Cyrus saw him as a possible threat to his own throne. Cyrus therefore called for Hystaspes to interrogate him. By noting that Darius was the eldest son of Hystaspes, Herodotus might hint at the seriousness of the threat. Hystaspes was a governor in Persia under the reign of Cyrus and therefore among the upper elite (3.70). As his eldest son, he could therefore be a likely usurper of the throne, both according to Cyrus and Herodotus.

One person with a closer relationship with Cyrus, Cambyses, the eldest son of Cassandane, one of the wives of Cyrus, and hence one of his own sons, is reported to have articulated a desire to turn Egypt upside down at the age of ten (3.3). This shows that Cambyses expected to reign when he became an adult, which he later did. Herodotus does not believe the story of the conversation between the Persian woman and Cassandane, Cyrus’ wife. Whether that also included what Cambyses said is an open question. There are no comments, however, indicating that his ambitions to become a ruler were questioned by others. Cambyses is later reported to have been smitten by madness. A sign of this madness is seen in his slaying of his full brother Smerdis (3.30). What brought forward his jealousy against his brother was Smerdis’ ability to draw a
bow longer than any other Persian could do. Smerdis’ abilities might thus be seen as a possible competing preference that Cambyses wanted to rule out.

3.2.1.3 Competing Preferences
In some situations, several preferences might compete for being the preferred. Among the Lacedaemonians, the custom was that the eldest of the king’s children would be chosen as their next king. A problem arose when the wife of King Aristodemus gave birth to twins. They resembled each other so much that they could not determine who the eldest was. They therefore sent an inquiry to the priestess at Delphi who recommended that they should let both be taken as kings, but let the elder have the greater honor. They were, however, unable to find out who was the firstborn, so they decided that the one that their mother honored the most had to be the eldest, and chose him (6.52).\footnote{For a discussion about the origin of this story and the question about dual kingship; see How and Wells, \textit{Commentary on Herodotus}, 2:82–83.} In view of the efforts put into finding out who was the eldest of the two by the Lacedaemonians, the importance of choosing the eldest as their next king is obvious. That one could distinguish between the two brothers based on the honor given them by their mother shows how deeply this inequality was rooted in the family.\footnote{See Lateiner, \textit{Historical Method of Herodotus}, 100.}

Among rulers, allegiances were made through marriages. Herodotus mentions that Metiochus was the eldest son of Miltiades. He also specifies that his mother was not the daughter of the Thracian king Olorus (6.41). Among the sons of Miltiades, Metiochus held the highest status by being the firstborn of Miltiades. Having previously said that Miltiades had married the daughter of Olorus (6.39), he now adds that Metiochus was not her son. Thus, Metiochus held the highest status on his father’s side, but perhaps not on his mother’s side since Herodotus does not give us the identity of Metiochus’ mother. Such information is particularly important for rulers.

When a king has two sons with two different wives, both the eldest sons of their mothers, a fight over the right to succeed the king might occur. Herodotus gives an account of a dispute that arose between two of the sons of Darius. They claimed that
Darius had to declare who his heir was before he marched in war. They were both eldest sons of their mothers. Artobazanes, who was the eldest son of the first wife of Darius, claimed, according to Herodotus, that the crown belonged to him as the eldest of all the children. He referred to an established custom all over the world of giving the preference to the eldest. Xerxes, the eldest of Darius’ second wife, claimed his right due to his mother being the daughter of Cyrus who had won the freedom for the Persians (7.2). According to Herodotus, Demaratus, a Spartan who had been deprived of the crown in Sparta and had come to Susa, advised them. The one born after the father had become king should be appointed heir to the throne (7.3). Here again we see that in addition to the status of being the eldest, there is a fight over what added status might give one of them the priority. This problem was restricted to polygamous families or families where the father had more than one wife successively. Herodotus for his own part adds that he believed that Xerxes would in any case have received the crown due to the power of his mother Atossa, wife of Darius and daughter of Cyrus (7.3). Hence, both the achieved status their father had when they were born and the assigned family status of their mother are factors that weigh in when succession is determined.

Inability to rule might set aside seniority of age as a criterion for succession. This is seen in the story about Periander from Corinth who had two sons. Periander killed his wife, the mother of these two sons. Their grandfather on their mother’s side spoke to them, accusing his son-in-law and their father of the murder of their mother. The elder son did not take any notice, but the younger did. Thus, he did not speak to his father

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85 According to How and Wells, there is no hint of such a custom or law; see How and Wells, *Commentary on Herodotus*, 2:125. Macan argues that Herodotus might not have been able to distinguish between the appointment of a viceroy in a king’s absence and the appointment of a successor at a king’s death; see Reginald W. Macan, *Herodotus: The Seventh, Eighth, Ninth Books with Introduction and Commentary (English)* (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 2000), 2. Frederick E. Greenspahn argues, based on this text (Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.2), that Herodotus alludes to a more flexible system regarding succession in Persia than the system of primogeniture; see Greenspahn, “Primogeniture in Ancient Israel,” 74.

86 See Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 12. He refers to this text when stating, “Age and status have been correlated since antiquity.” See also Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.42, 6.52.

87 Macan maintains that succession of the eldest was the rule in Sparta; see Macan, *Herodotus*, 4. See also Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.39.
from then on. This eventually resulted in his father sending him away. However, Periander did not view his elder son as a man with strong abilities. He therefore wanted his younger son to take his place in his old age (3.49–53). This shows that age can sometimes be a relative criterion for succession; ability can take precedence over age. Herodotus reports that the eldest of the two brothers was slow-witted. Consequently, his inability to rule made him ineligible for succession after his father.

While the achieved status of ability has been seen to take precedence over the assigned status of age (cf. 3.49–53 referred to above), Herodotus shows that the Spartans followed the letter of their law. King Anaxandrides was married to his own sister’s daughter, but they had no children. Consequently, he was asked to put her away, but denied. They urged him then to take another wife who gave birth to a son, Cleomenes. Thereafter, his first wife also gave birth to a son, Dorieus. Cleomenes was said not to be in his right mind and verged upon madness. However, Cleomenes was the older of the two sons. He thus became king in Sparta according to his birthright and in accordance with the law of the Spartans. Dorieus, the son of the first wife of Anaxandrides, had thought, however, that he should have been chosen instead (5.39–42). As told, the story gives an impression that this was a rare and untypical episode among the Spartans.88 It also shows the high status the eldest brother had regarding succession to the throne in Sparta, no matter whether his personal abilities made him fit for the task or not.89

3.2.1.4 Reasons for not Choosing the Eldest

Exceptional abilities of a younger brother might set aside the expected preference for the eldest in some instances. Herodotus explains why the youngest of three brothers received the kingdom among the Scythians: Four implements of gold fell from the sky, a plow, a yoke, a battle-ax, and a drinking cup. When both the eldest and the second eldest approached, the gold took fire and burned intensely. Seemingly, the gold rejected the

88 How and Wells claim that bigamy was illegal across Greece and it seems therefore necessary for Herodotus “to declare that bigamy was unprecedented at Sparta”; see How and Wells, Commentary on Herodotus, 2:15.

89 Herodotus in Hist. 6.51 corroborates this where he says about the house of Eurysthenes, to which Cleomenes belonged: “The house of Eurysthenes has in some sort the greater honour by right of primogeniture (κατὰ πρεσβυγενείην).”
two eldest brothers. When the youngest brother came near, the flames were put out, and he then picked up the gold. After that incident, the two elder brothers agreed to give the whole kingdom over to their youngest brother (4.5). It was therefore an extraordinary sign that brought about the circumvention of the expected order of succession. This story makes most sense regarding succession to the kingdom if we accept the preference for the eldest as the cultural norm.\textsuperscript{90}

3.2.1.5 Conclusion

To conclude, the importance of many sons along with a natural preference for the eldest son regarding succession is evident from Herodotus’ \textit{Histories}. Even among twins where this preference can be hard to determine, a decision in favor of the eldest has to be made. Ability, however, may take precedence over seniority of age in some cases. In other instances, there might be competing preferences in addition to the status of being the eldest. For example, in those cases where a man has more than one wife, the status of the mother within the family may also be relevant. Another determining factor is whether one was born after one’s father became a king. There are also some cases where a younger son has been preferred, but in such instances, Herodotus gives an extraordinary reason for this preference. Herodotus thus shows that the eldest brother is the founder of the filial generation and that he had a special status. With regard to kings, the eldest also had special inheritance rights. It should, however, be noted that Herodotus neither comments on the exemplary function of the eldest nor the function as the father’s representative in his absence.

3.2.2 Eldest Brother in the Works of Plutarch

Plutarch was a Greek biographer, essayist, Platonist, priest of Apollo, and a Roman citizen who lived from around AD 50 to AD 120. He studied mathematics and philosophy at Athens under the guidance of the philosopher Ammonius.\textsuperscript{91} Aristobolus, Plutarch’s

\textsuperscript{90} Aldo Corcella gives an overview of possible parallels to this “fragment of Scythian ‘folklore.’” Corcella surmises that it might be “linked to a law of succession of the youngest, characteristic of nomadic societies”; see Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, \textit{Commentary on Herodotus}, 575, 576.

\textsuperscript{91} Martin, Jr., \textit{ABD} 5:382.
father, was also a philosopher and biographer. Plutarch traveled widely and visited Central Greece, Sparta, Corinth, Patrae, Sardis, Alexandria in Egypt, and Rome. His residence was at Chaeronea, found around a hundred and thirty kilometers northwest of Athens. He kept a relationship with the Academy at Athens, holding Athenian citizenship, and with Delphi, where he held priesthood from AD 95 until his death. He was married and had one daughter and four sons, with at least two of the sons surviving childhood.

His literary production was immense, and his Parallel Lives was the work that made him famous. The other important collection besides Lives is Moralia, a collection of more than sixty treatises and speeches. The overall substance of Moralia surveys “virtually every topic that was subjected to inquiry and discussion in classical antiquity.” Moralia has been arranged into fourteen books. We find the treatise De fraterno amore in book six. While my topic is not the main theme of the treatise, De fraterno amore is nevertheless the one that deals most explicitly with the relationship between brothers, including the eldest brother. Hans Dieter Betz observes: “As usual he draws on a wide variety of traditions and source materials, and consequently his work has the nature and purpose of a consensus.” In this treatise, he deals specifically with the relationship between brothers and the ideals of friendship in such a relationship. This work from Plutarch should give a representative view on the relationship between brothers and the

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93 Martin, Jr., ABD 5:383.
status and role of the eldest brother from a Greek and Roman perspective in the first century AD.\textsuperscript{95}

Plutarch has offered a more clearly structured outline in \textit{De fraterno amore} than commonly encountered in his writings. He shows first, in what he labels the preamble, covering chapters 1–8 (478a–482c), that brotherly love is in accordance with nature. Thereafter, in the main part in chapters 9–19 (482d–490e), he explains how one should behave toward a brother. The main part is divided into four sections: 1) while the parents are still alive, 2) after they are dead, 3) when the brother is inferior, and finally 4) when the brother is superior. He ends the treatise with some stories about affection for brothers’ children (490e–492d).\textsuperscript{96}

Plutarch complains in the preamble that in his time brotherly love is as rare as hatred among brothers was in former times (478c). This shows that he is probably discussing and propagating what he considers an ideal in this treatise, more than giving a description of factual behavior among brothers. It also gives him, however, an opportunity to praise people in the past as examples of brotherly love.

\textbf{3.2.2.1 Friendship among Brothers}

The primary friendship on which all other friendships are based is that between children and parents and among brothers. Plutarch states that Nature’s purpose with brothers coming from one source is to make them cooperate with one another (\textit{συνεργέω}), not to make them separate from each other (478e). Concord (\textit{ὁ μοφροσύνη}) between brothers is also praised (479a). The opposite, choosing a stranger or foreigner as a “brother,” is similar to cutting off a limb from oneself and adding an extraneous member to one’s body (479b). Citing Menander with approval, Plutarch defines the first friendship as follows: “For most friendships are in reality shadows and imitations and images of that

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{De fraterno amore} is dedicated to two brothers, Avidius Nigrinus and Avidius Quietus, who are supposed to be Roman friends of Plutarch; see Hans-Josef Klauck, “Brotherly Love in Plutarch and 4 Maccabees,” in \textit{Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe}, ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 144–56, here 146, 150. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Romans would also be familiar with the topic and its arguments.

first friendship which Nature implanted in children toward parents and in brothers toward brothers” (479c–d). Using the word “brother” in salutations toward others and thereby honoring the name “brother” while not behaving nicely toward a real brother is insane. Both Nature and Law have assigned the greatest honor to the parents, after the gods. The good deeds that children may show toward their parents are steadfast goodwill and friendship toward a brother (480a, cf. 480f). There are thus two kinds of friendship highlighted by Plutarch: goodwill toward parents and friendship between brothers. These two friendships are moreover considered foundational and other kinds of friendship are secondary after this first double friendship. It is in light of this ideal friendship that the understanding of the status and role of the eldest brother must be sought in De fraterno amore.

Homer considered it a misfortune to be without brothers, and Hesiod recommended that an only son (μονογενῆς παῖς) should inherit his father’s patrimony. Plutarch disagrees with such advice (480e). Being in a situation where there is no brother to love is much worse than being a single heir with no possible quarrels regarding the division of the inheritance. If brothers adhere to the ideal of brotherly love, that would not happen anyway.

Hatred and enmity between brothers should be cleansed away, because brothers must share sacrifices and take part in the family’s sacred rites, occupy the same burial chamber, and will perhaps live at the same place or in the same neighborhood. Thus, they will have to live with enmity their whole life and will see other brothers using the same house and table. Moreover, they have not yet divided their estates and slaves between themselves (481d–e). It is in any case not possible to acquire brothers when one has become old. Therefore, the Persian woman acted favorably when she wanted to save her brother instead of her children, because she could not get another brother since her

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97 See Hesiod, Op. 375–379. Hesiod seems to argue for primogeniture, but in cases where there is more than one son, he advises the father to die old, perhaps to act as a controlling force to prevent quarrels arising between his sons.
parents were dead (481e).\textsuperscript{98} Plutarch thus emphasizes the high value of having brothers and the ideal of brotherly love that brings forth friendship among brothers.

3.2.2.2 A Preference for the Eldest Brother

Various examples given by Plutarch show that the eldest brother holds a preferential status and role. It is expected that his younger brothers should respect him. Plutarch argues that for parents, brotherly love is the sustainer of old age. He gives an example with reference to Apollonis of Cyzicus, who gave thanks to the gods, not because of wealth or empire, but because her three youngest sons were members of the bodyguard of her eldest son and their eldest brother, King Eumenes. He was accordingly surrounded by his younger brothers with both swords and spears in their hands, yet did not fear them. To hate his brother is to blame his parents that bore such a brother (480c–d).\textsuperscript{99} The evidence of their brotherly love is shown first by the eldest brother who was not afraid to appoint his younger brothers as members of his bodyguard and in this way shows generosity toward his younger brothers. Secondly, the younger brothers did not take advantage of their opportunity to rebel against their eldest brother, which was not too difficult as members of his bodyguard. They thus showed respect toward their eldest brother. The reason brotherly love will sustain the parents in old age is that they will take care of each other and so be able to take care of their parents.

An elder brother is expected to take responsibility for his younger brothers by administering the estate for them while they are minors and thus care for them. This is seen in the section where Plutarch discusses friendship among brothers after the parents are dead. When dividing the goods of their father they should not declare war on each other, as the majority does. The preservation of the undivided inheritance by the sons of a deceased father is the ideal put forth by Plutarch.\textsuperscript{100} The most valuable part of the inheritance is not the goods left to them, slaves included, but the friendship and confidence of a brother. A praiseworthy example of how this should be handled

\textsuperscript{98} See also Herodotus, \textit{Hist.} 3.119.
\textsuperscript{99} See also Plutarch, [\textit{Reg. imp. apophth.}] 36.
\textsuperscript{100} See also 481e where he also seems to make the undistributed estate the ideal.
Eldest Brother in Greek and Roman Literature

according to Plutarch is the case of Athenodorus. Presumably, his parents were dead. His elder brother Xenon therefore administered his estate while Athenodorus was still a youth. A large part of this was spent thoughtlessly. Xenon also raped a woman and was condemned in court. He thereafter lost the estate. Later the share that belonged to Athenodorus, the younger of the two brothers, was, for reasons not told by Plutarch, restored to him. Athenodorus apportioned the money restored to him, and that was his share of the estate, between himself and his elder brother, even though he himself had been treated unfairly in the division of the estate (483c–484b). It was a generous act on the part of the younger brother, having become of age, to divide what was rightfully his own portion with his elder brother, especially in view of how his elder brother had taken care of his portion of the estate when he was still a youth. We see first the respect that the younger brother shows his elder brother even though he has not been fair toward him, and secondly that the elder brother is charged with the responsibility of acting as a guardian of his younger brother by administering his estate, presumably until he was old enough to take care of the estate himself. In this case, however, the eldest brother handled it badly.

While discussing the attitude of an inferior brother toward a superior brother, which is not necessarily the same as between a younger and elder brother, Plutarch remarks that difference in age between brothers also makes a difference, for

generally speaking, elder brothers (πρεσβύτεροι), when they claim the right always to dominate and to have precedence over the younger and to have the advantage in every matter where reputation and influence are involved, are oppressive and disagreeable; and younger brothers (νεώτεροι), in turn, being restive under the curb and becoming fractious, make it their practice to despise and belittle the elder. (486f)

The superiority of the elder brother results in resentment from the younger brother, while the elder fears that the younger’s status is increased.101 According to Plutarch, the attitude to this age difference should be that the elder should minimize its importance, while the younger should not think it as being of no importance.102 He therefore gives

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101 Especially difference in age among brothers is the greater danger to brotherly love; see Betz, “De fraterno amore,” 255.
102 See also Aasgaard, “Brotherhood in Plutarch and Paul,” 171.
the advice: “It is fitting that the older should be solicitous about the younger and should lead and admonish him, and that the younger should honour and emulate and follow the older” (487a). There are two attitudes that are put into focus: The elder should show solicitude (κηδεμονία), care, or concern for his younger brother, while the younger on his part should try to imitate (μιμέομαι) and follow (ἀκολουθέω) his elder brother. Honor, exemplified by obedience and respectfulness, should be rendered to the elder by the younger. Plutarch gives several examples of people who have shown this attitude (487c–e). The admonition to show brotherly love has been given to both the younger and the elder brother. Due to their difference in status and role, the way the admonition is supposed to be carried out toward the other brother would differ. The elder should lead and admonish, but do it with care. His role is that of a leader and protector. The younger should honor and imitate his elder brother who accordingly becomes an example to follow for the younger. One honors the elder brother by obeying and respecting him. Plutarch is thus arguing for concord between brothers and argues against the older brother who wants to dominate and have precedence over the younger, who wants to have the advantage in every matter, who clings fast to his superiority (ὑπεροχή), and who is arrogant and neglects the younger (486f–487b).103 What Plutarch opposes might again be closer to reality than are his ideals. From this negative list by Plutarch, it is thus possible to find a description of the status and role of the eldest brother as one who has a preferential status and higher honor, who precedes his younger brothers, has the advantage, and is the superior. In other words, due to the superior status of the eldest brother, he should be a leader and an example to imitate and follow that is worthy of respect and obedience. He should also care for his younger brothers.

103 See also Plutarch, Tim. 3.3, where it is said about Timoleon that “he had a brother Timophanes, older than he, and not at all like him, but headstrong and filled with a ruinous passion for absolute power by worthless friends and foreign military adventurers who were ever about him, and having the reputation of being rather impetuous and fond of danger in military service.”
3.2.2.3 Competing Preferences

While concord and cooperation is the ideal, Plutarch does not treat brothers as equals in all respects, but distinguishes between a superior and an inferior brother. With reference to Plato, Plutarch states:

In inequality movement is produced and in equality rest and repose; thus all manner of inequality is dangerous as likely to foster brothers' quarrels, and though it is impossible for them to be equal and on the same footing in all respects ... against these inequalities we must be on our guard and must cure them, if they arise. (484c–d)

A superior brother is therefore advised to let his inferior brothers become his partners. Examples are given that also illuminate the status and role of the eldest brother. Lucullus, who was the elder brother, waived his candidature to hold office and waited for his younger brother (484d–e).104 As the eldest brother, he thus had the right to hold office first.105 Polydeuces, the immortal and therefore the superior of the twins, refused to become a god by himself, but chose to become a demigod with his twin brother Castor. Plato also made his brothers famous by introducing them into the fairest of his writings. It is moreover impossible that one brother will excel in every way. Inviting a brother as a helper and adviser in tasks that will be noticed and bring him honor deprives the superior brother of nothing, but adds a lot to his brother. It is worthwhile to note that Plutarch does not neutralize the difference that exists in status between an inferior and superior brother, but advises how a superior brother should behave toward his inferior brother. He gives much the same advice to the superior brother as he gave to the inferior: Refrain from your right and let your inferior brother become your adviser.106

The terminology used by Plutarch is ὑπερέχω (ὁ ὑπερέχων) or ὑπεροχή for the superior and λείπω (ὁ λείπομενος) for the inferior. The superior brother is not necessarily the elder brother, although he is in the above-mentioned example with Lucullus.107 Patrick Gray

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104 See also Plutarch, Luc. 1.6.
105 Other examples of a superior brother that is not an eldest brother are also given.
106 Betz notes that “the ὑπερέχων need not give up any of the blessings he enjoys when he shares them with his inferior brothers”; see Betz, “De fraterno amore,” 252.
107 It is impossible to be superior in all respects, due to the anthropological concept of “mixture”; see Betz, “De fraterno amore,” 252.
states that the superior brother is “usually but not always the older one” citing 484d (cited above). In the second example, we have the twins, Polydeucaes and Castor. The superior between them is immortal. In the third example, Plato is not the eldest of the brothers. Two of them are older. Plutarch nevertheless regards him as the superior, probably because of his learned and famous writings. High status or a specific role are hence criteria for being designated a superior brother. In some cases, seniority of age is also a major criterion.

Plutarch also adds some examples from brothers who were not Greek (488d). In the Persian Empire, after the death of King Darius, there were different opinions about who should succeed him. Some of the people and Ariamenes, Darius’ eldest son, assumed that the kingdom was his by right. Xerxes was his brother and his contender. He was the son of Atossa, daughter of Cyrus, but was born after Darius had become king. Artabanus, their uncle and brother of Darius, was chosen as judge, and he appointed Xerxes as the new king. “Ariamenes at once leapt up and did obeisance to his brother and taking him by the hand set him upon the kingly throne” (488f). The loyalty of Ariamenes is praised. It is also interesting to note that Plutarch puts the following utterance in the mouth of Darius’ mother before the decision is announced: “Why, my son, do you try to evade Artabanus, who is your uncle and the best of the Persians? Why do you so fear this contest in which even the second place is honourable—to be adjudged brother to the king of Persia?” (488f). According to Plutarch, Atossa argued for brotherly love and reconciliation while Herodotus, who also told this story, for his part believed that the power of Atossa would, despite everything,
have secured the crown for Xerxes. Ariamenes evidently thought that he had the right to the crown because he was the eldest son and held the birthright to the crown. Again, Plutarch recognizes that in addition to being the eldest, there is a competition about what added status might give one the advantage.

3.2.2.4 Conclusion

Friendship among brothers is, together with that between children and parents, the primary friendship on which all other friendships are based. The good companionship of brothers is praised. There is, however, still a difference between brothers in status and role. Younger brothers should respect their eldest brother and the latter is charged with responsibility for them, for example by administering the estate for them while they are minors, and hence being their guardian. Due to the superior status of the elder brother, he should lead and admonish younger brothers with care, being an example to imitate and follow as their leader and protector. The younger brother should honor his elder brother by obeying him. Seniority of age is not the only criterion that makes a brother superior; no one can excel in all things, and in some cases, one's ancestry on one's mother's side might give one the advantage. The ideal of Plutarch is that despite these differences, the relationship between brothers should be that of brotherly love.

In the Greek and Roman world, we have found examples of the following features of the status and role of the eldest brother: His status is special, he deserves respect from younger siblings, and he is an example for younger siblings and founder of the filial generation. In some instances, he also has special inheritance rights, although this is not typical among Greeks and Romans, he is responsible for younger siblings by caring for them and disciplining them, and he has a priestly and political leader role in the family. What are lacking (compared with the African material) are examples of a mediating role and the eldest brother being the confidant of the father.

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3.3 Eldest Brother in the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint

The Hebrew Bible/Septuagint covers a vast time span for its recorded events. Both the interpretation of these as records of historical events and the time of composition of the various books are actively debated. That debate is not, however, of concern here. The HB/LXX will be treated as literature with a formative impact on both the Jewish and Christian communities in the first century AD. While the general stability of family systems has already been noted, it is not the intent to argue that the status and role of the eldest brother as found in the writings of the HB/LXX are necessarily still the same in the first century AD. However, the familiarity with the HB/LXX as Scripture and close cultural contact with the world of the HB/LXX would at least make the description of the eldest brother in the HB/LXX recognizable for a first-century reader of the HB/LXX. In the HB/LXX the eldest brother is both described as a social phenomenon and used metaphorically. I will first deal with texts where the eldest brother is referred to as a social phenomenon or “reality.” This has the benefit of aiding the understanding of eldest brother used metaphorically that I will discuss later.

3.3.1 Characteristics of Eldest Brother as Social Phenomenon or Reality

We find the bulk of the stories about the eldest brother in the HB/LXX in the patriarchal narratives in Genesis (Gen 11:27–50:26). This should come as no surprise since they narrate the story of a family spanning four generations. As the story moves on, the various relationships between the different people within this family are unfolded. Thus, several of the characteristics of the eldest brother are found within the same narratives.

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114 The commentaries to the various books in the HB/LXX dealt with below generally have a historical approach. Hence, they must deal with questions that I will not discuss. In a literary reading of the texts, the focus is, as stated, on social phenomena or “realities.” The same commentaries, when working on a textual level, nevertheless offer valuable insights that are highly relevant in a literary reading. My use of these commentaries below does not indicate a historical approach.

115 There is no room for a detailed treatment of every possible passage.

Moreover, “stories involving actual conflict with older brothers or sisters are largely confined to the book of Genesis.”\textsuperscript{117}

\subsection{3.3.1.1 A Longing for a Son and Successor}

The longing for a son to continue the family line is evident in the patriarchal narratives. In the narrative about Abraham, we read that he gets two sons with two different women. There is an inherent tension between the two mothers in relation to the father of the two sons. Abraham’s firstborn is Ishmael, but he is born of an Egyptian slave girl, Hagar (Gen 16:15). The promised son, Isaac, is later born of his wife, Sarah (Gen 21:1–3). An important question in this narrative is who is the rightful heir. The behavior of Hagar suggests that she expects her son, who is Abraham’s firstborn, to become Abraham’s heir and hence his successor. Given that Sarah is the initiator of Abraham getting a son with Hagar so that Sarah “shall obtain children by her” when she herself proves to be barren, this seems like a reasonable expectation (Gen 16:2). The MT has יָאָבֵד “obtain a child.”\textsuperscript{118} KJV gives the alternative translation “may be builded by her” in a note to Gen 16:2. Frederick F. Greenspahn suggests that the verb בָּנֶה might be rendered “be-ssonned” in Gen 16:2.\textsuperscript{119} Siegfried Wagner notices that בָּנֶה used figuratively might convey “the idea of a tribe or a nation ‘being built up’ by its descendants,” referring to Gen. 16:2; 30:3.\textsuperscript{120} It seems therefore reasonable to assume that Ishmael is initially thought to become Abraham’s successor. This is not, however, in accordance with the promise given to Abraham (Gen 17:15–16, 19, 21). After the covenant between Abraham and Yahweh has been proclaimed (Gen 17:1–4), every male in the household is circumcised. Ishmael is also circumcised, and according to Roger Syrén, as the first (cf. \textsuperscript{117} Greenspahn, \textit{When Brothers Dwell Together}, 112.

\textsuperscript{118} See \textit{HALOT}, 139, s.v. יָאָבֵד that lists this translation when the verb is used in nifal together with the preposition מִן. יָאָבֵד in qal has the meaning “to build.”


That Ishmael is circumcised first must be deduced from the fact that he is mentioned first and by name among those circumcised by Abraham. It would perhaps also suggest that he is next in line after Abraham. Both Ishmael and Isaac are moreover named by Abraham with similar wording (cf. Gen 16:15; 21:3). According to Syrén, it puts the stress on Abraham’s paternal authority, but does not give the two sons equal status. It is thus fair to assume that the narrative is supposed to be read in light of a cultural norm that assumes that the father’s firstborn will become his successor and heir irrespective of the status of his mother. The special inheritance rights of the eldest son are hence recognized. The other important question in this narrative (who is the heir of the promise?) shows that cultural expectations are not necessarily the answer to that question.

3.3.1.2 The Eldest’s Prerogatives

The longing for a son to continue the family line becomes more complicated in the next generation when Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham, gives birth to twins (Gen 25:19–26). In this narrative, an additional question is introduced: What are the rights of the firstborn? Before the birth of the twins, Yahweh tells Rebekah that the

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123 Note also that Ishmael and Isaac are half-brothers while Esau and Jacob are twins.

124 Syrén maintains that “the significance of the birthright is essential to the story”; see Syrén, *Forsaken First-Born*, 92.
elder shall serve the younger (Gen 25:23). Esau is the elder, and Jacob the younger. Isaac loves Esau, while Rebekah loves Jacob (Gen 25:28). One question that lingers in the background of the narrative is how the message Rebekah receives in Gen 25:23 is to be realized. The first step in that direction is the narrative about Esau selling his firstborn’s rights to Jacob for a single meal (Gen 25:29–34). What Esau sells has been debated. The main question is whether the birthright is defined as inheritance. Some have interpreted it to mean the double portion (Deut 21:15–17). Mattitiahu Tsevat thus states that “Esau sold this special portion and nothing else (Gen. 25:31–34)” and further that “Esau’s rank and position are not affected by this transaction, as chap. 27 shows quite clearly.” Others are more reluctant to define the birthright as inheritance.

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125 Greenspahn argues that this saying has nothing to do with the twins, but that it deals with two nations; see Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 118, 141, contra Jeffrey H. Tigay, Deuteronomy, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 179; Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 16–50, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 175–76; K. A. Mathews, Genesis 11:27–50:26, NAC 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 387–88; Bradford A. Anderson, Brotherhood and Inheritance: A Canonical Reading of the Esau and Edom Traditions, LHBOTS 556 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011), 23–33, who all argue that the saying deals with both the twins and two nations. Westermann, Genesis 12–36, 413 takes it as an oracle vaticinium ex eventu.

126 Roland de Vaux argues, based on Gen 25:24–26 and 38:27–30, that “the first to see the light was reckoned the elder”; see Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions, trans. John A. McHugh, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), 41. See also Tigay, Deuteronomy, 196.

127 An interesting commentary is found in Jubilees 24:3–7: “And Jacob was cooking lentil soup, and Esau came in from the field hungry, and he said to Jacob, his brother, ‘Give me some of this reddish-colored soup.’ And Jacob said to him, ‘Hand over your primogeniture (i.e.) this right of firstborn, and I will give you bread and also some of this lentil soup.’ And Esau thought, ‘I will die. Of what use is this right of firstborn to me?’ And he said to Jacob, ‘I give it (to) you.’ And Jacob said, ‘Swear to me today.’ And he swore for him. And Jacob gave his brother, Esau, bread and soup. And he ate until he was satisfied. And Esau despised his right of firstborn. Therefore, Esau’s name was called Edom on account of the reddish-colored soup which Jacob gave him for his right of firstborn. And Jacob became the older one but Esau was lowered from his seniority.” Quoted from James H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the “Old Testament” and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works, 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 97.

128 Vaux, Ancient Israel, 41–42, 53. He argues that the law regulates only movable possessions. Mattitiahu Tsevat argues that we cannot be sure, but finds Vaux’s suggestion about movable possessions unlikely; see Mattitiahu Tsevat, “בכור,” TDOT 2:126. Gordon J. Wenham is also, while more cautious, open to interpret it as the double portion; see Wenham, Genesis 16–50, 175.

129 Tsevat, TDOT 2:126.

130 Rad and Mathews are not certain what the birthright consists of in this narrative; see Rad, Genesis, 267; Mathews, Genesis 11:27–50:26, 393.
Suggestions offered are a general prior claim of the elder, or a transferable status. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch claim, however, that with the patriarchs the birthright of the firstborn "embraced the chieftainship, the rule over the brethren and the entire family (Gen. 27:29), and the title to the blessing of the promise (Gen. 27:4, 27–29), which included the future possession of Canaan and of covenant fellowship with Jehovah (Gen. 28:4)." Based on the wording of the biblical narrative in Gen 25:29–34, it is not easy to conclude whether all this is involved in the birthright. Keil and Delitzsch argue for their understanding primarily based on Gen 27 and not Gen 25. I therefore find Tsevat’s position to be the preferable. Whether this special portion is identical with what is stipulated in Deut 21:15–17 is not essential, but it must have consisted of at least a prior if not larger claim of the firstborn. Based on this narrative too, we can conclude that the eldest brother has special inheritance rights, but that these rights are transferable. The ascribed status of the birthright for Esau as the eldest brother becomes an achieved status for Jacob the younger brother when Esau sells his birthright to him. As noted by Bradford A. Anderson, Jacob, however, never receives the title בְּּכוֹר. The title “firstborn” is thus not transferred.

In the third generation, it becomes even more complicated. Jacob goes to his uncle Laban who has two daughters: Leah the elder and Rachel the younger. Jacob asks for Rachel in marriage, but he is given Leah. When he complains to Laban, he answers: “This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn” (Gen 29:26). The prerogative of the eldest to marry first is in consequence a cultural norm for Laban. In the end, Jacob ends up with two wives, Leah and Rachel, each with their

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134 Anderson, “Inversion of the Birth Order,” 656. Jacob, however, takes the title himself in Gen 27:19; see further below.
135 See, however, Jubilees 2:20; 19:29; *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 18:6 where Jacob receives the title “firstborn by God.”
136 Jacob was deceived in the same way he deceived his brother Esau; see Rad, *Genesis*, 291–92.
maids.\textsuperscript{137} Among the sons of Jacob, Reuben is specifically mentioned as the firstborn of Jacob in the summary in Gen 35:23, but Reuben, Dan, Gad, and Joseph were all firstborn sons of their mothers, and since all of them had at least one younger brother, they were all eldest brothers as well.\textsuperscript{138}

When Jacob before his death blesses the two sons of Joseph, he puts his right hand on the head of Ephraim the younger and the left on Manasseh the elder.\textsuperscript{139} Joseph tries to correct his father and asks him to put his right hand on the head of his firstborn son. His father knowingly refuses (Gen 48:17–19). Isaac’s unintentional blessing of Jacob could not be altered; neither could Jacob’s deliberate blessing of Ephraim.\textsuperscript{140} Birth order and blessing are therefore expected to be correlated. Both Joseph and Jacob accept the rights of the eldest as according to custom, but Jacob deliberately circumvents it. The end of the blessing (Gen 48:22) can be understood in three different ways. Either Jacob gives one portion more of the land to Joseph than to the others (RSV, REB, LEB, ESV),\textsuperscript{141} he

\textsuperscript{137} Zilpah maid of Leah and Bilhah maid of Rachel. Jacob got the following sons: with Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; with Bilhah, Rachel’s maid, given as wife to Jacob: Dan and Naphtali; with Zilpah, Leah’s maid, also given as wife to Jacob: Gad and Asher; with Leah again: Issachar and Zebulun. After that Leah also gave birth to a daughter, Dinah, before Jacob finally got two sons with Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin (Gen 29:31–30:24; 35:16–20, see also the summary in Gen 35:22–26).

\textsuperscript{138} See also Gen 10:15; Gen 22:21; 25:13; 27:19, 32; 35:23; 36:15; 38:6, 7; 41:51; 46:8; 48:18; 49:3; Exod 6:14; Num 3:2; 26:5; Josh 17:1; Judg 8:20; 1 Sam 8:2; 17:13; 2 Sam 3:2; 1 Kgs 16:34; 2 Kgs 3:27; 1 Chr 1:13, 29; 2:3, 13, 25, 27, 42, 50; 3:1, 15; 4:4; 5:1, 3; 8:1, 30, 39; 9:5, 31, 36; 26:2; 4; 2 Chr 21:3 where it is mentioned about a person that he is the firstborn (בְּּכוֹר). In all these references, except 1 Sam 17:13 and 1 Chr 1:13, which do not have a parallel text in LXX, the translation in LXX is πρωτότοκος. The LXX uses πρωτότοκος in about 85 percent of the cases to translate בְּּכוֹר, πρωτότοκος is accordingly the usual term for firstborn/eldest son in the LXX. See also Wilhelm Michaelis, “πρωτότοκος, πρωτοτοκεῖα,” TDNT 6:872.

\textsuperscript{139} Westermann maintains that it is assumed that “the right hand confers the more powerful blessing” and that “throughout the world the right hand is the stronger or better.” He does not explain why this is so though; see Claus Westermann, Genesis 37–50: A Continental Commentary, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 191. See further Heinz-Josef Fabry and J. A. Soggin, “יִָמְיָן,” TDOT 6:101.

\textsuperscript{140} Westermann, Genesis 37–50, 465–66. See also Syrén, Forsaken First-Born, 138; Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 15. According to Anderson, Manasseh loses his status as firstborn, but Ephraim is never referred to as בְּּכוֹר in the patriarchal narratives; see Anderson, “Inversion of the Birth Order,” 657.

\textsuperscript{141} Westermann argues that it refers to an extra plot of land; see Westermann, Genesis 37–50, 192. Sarna argues that the rendering one portion is without philological support, he also finds it difficult to accept that it refers to Shechem, and ends up with a position in between, that shekhem is a wordplay on a lost spoken word that alluded to the city of Shechem, but that had a possible meaning of “portion”; see Nahum M. Sarna, Genesis. The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 330. Rad accepts that it refers to the city of Shechem, but finds it improbable that it refers to what is narrated in chapter 34 and retreats to different traditions as an explanation; see Rad, Genesis, 418–19. See also Philo, Leg. 3.26 where Philo states: “For this reason too Jacob gives as a special portion to Joseph Shechem.”
gives one more portion with the added consequence that Joseph receives the portion of the firstborn and becomes head of the family (NJPS, NASB, NRSV, NLT), or Jacob rewards Joseph in his role as a ruler over his brothers “as one who is over your brothers” (NIV 1984) (Gen 48:22; cf. Deut 21:17; see also Gen 50:15–21).\textsuperscript{142} Raymond Westbrook argues that Joseph received the double share of the inheritance, but not seniority over his brothers. Judah is the one selected instead of Reuben for the role of the eldest brother (cf. Gen 49:8 “your father’s sons shall bow down before you”). According to Westbrook, “this refers to the right to administer the paternal estate while still undivided, which would normally have been assigned to the first-born as the obvious person to retain authority of head of household.”\textsuperscript{143} Gordon J. Wenham states that we have to guess.\textsuperscript{144} In either case, there is nothing in the blessing that contradicts the rights of the firstborn. Reuben, however, loses his birthright due to a grave offense toward his father (Gen 49:3–4; cf. Gen 35:22; 1 Chr 5:1).

Later in the biblical account, when Solomon is trying to consolidate his reign after David, we find the eldest’s expectation to succeed coming up (1 Kgs 2:13–25). Adonijah, David’s son, goes to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, and tells her that the kingdom was his and hence “remains firmly convinced of the right of primogeniture.”\textsuperscript{145} He acknowledges, however, that God has given the kingdom to Solomon. Adonijah then asks her to ask Solomon to allow him to marry Abishag.\textsuperscript{146} Bathsheba agrees to ask Solomon, but when Solomon is confronted with the wish from Adonijah he asks her why she does not ask for the kingdom to be transferred to Adonijah as well because Adonijah is his elder brother (1 Kgs 2:22). Solomon thus knows that because Adonijah is his elder brother (cf. 1 Kgs 1:5–6), he has good reason to expect to become the successor after

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\textsuperscript{142} Mathews, \textit{Genesis 11:27–50:26}, 882.
\textsuperscript{143} Raymond Westbrook, \textit{Property and the Family in Biblical Law}, JSOTSup 113 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 136. Interestingly, in the blessing of Reuben (Gen 49:3–4), although he is still his father’s firstborn (אֱלֹי), his status as the preeminent is no longer his (אָבִי) because he violated his father’s bed; see Anderson, “Inversion of the Birth Order,” 656.
\textsuperscript{144} Wenham, \textit{Genesis 16–50}, 466.
\textsuperscript{146} De Vries states that Abishag had been neither wife nor concubine of David. Her closeness to David gave her a special status though; see De Vries, \textit{1 Kings}, 37. See also 1 Kings 1:4; 2 Sam 12:8; 16:21–22; Herodotus, \textit{Hist.} 3.68.
\end{flushright}
David. Adonijah also confirms this in his talk to Bathsheba when he states that all Israel expected that he should reign (1 Kgs 2:15).

3.3.1.3 The Eldest Brother Is Given a Political Leader Role in the Family

The eldest brother’s role in the family is depicted as a leader role. This we can deduce in the narrative where Jacob, with the help of Rebekah, lures Isaac to bless himself instead of Esau. Isaac’s clear intention is to bless Esau (Gen 27:1–29), but he is now an old man with dim eyes (Gen 27:1). Wenham argues that it is elsewhere normal to gather all the sons, bless them openly, and thereby organize the succession (cf. Gen 49; 50:24–25).

Why would Isaac call for Esau only and bless him without the others present? Does it, as argued by Wenham, indicate that something irregular is about to happen?\(^{147}\) It is evident throughout the narrative that Esau is the favored son of Isaac, while Rebekah favors Jacob.\(^{148}\) Wenham also notes the use of “his son” and “her son” in Gen 27:5 and 6.\(^{149}\)

Anderson notices that the term “firstborn” is not used about Esau in this narrative, we have to supply it from Gen 25:19–28.\(^{150}\) We are moreover not told in the narrative that Rebekah ever told Isaac the content of the message she received about the elder serving the younger before she gave birth to their twins. Even if Isaac in the narrative is not informed about the message she received (Gen 25:23), the reader is aware of it. The assigned status and role of being the firstborn, with all that it entails, seems not to have been lost for Esau in his father’s eyes after he sold the birthright. Wenham accordingly notes that Isaac in his dialog with Esau says “so that my soul may bless you” instead of “so that I may bless you,” an expression of his strong desire to bless Esau.\(^{151}\) Thus when Isaac asks who he is before he gives his blessing, Jacob answers: “I am Esau your firstborn” (Gen 27:19).\(^{152}\) When Isaac has been ensured, after some doubt, that it really is

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\(^{147}\) See Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 205.


\(^{150}\) Anderson, “Inversion of the Birth Order,” 656.


\(^{152}\) The MT and LXX have ἐκ πρωτότοκος σου respectively, as also in Gen 27:32 when Esau meets Isaac. Anderson lists as a possibility that because Isaac did not know about the incident when Esau sold his
Esau, he pronounces the blessing upon Jacob. Now Jacob is also made lord over his brothers (Gen 27:29), an echo of the message to Rebekah in Gen 25:23. This is the key statement that cannot be retracted (Gen 27:37). While Jacob now becomes the chosen, and Esau the forsaken firstborn, the drama of the larger narrative presupposes that now both the birthright (Gen 25) and the blessing (Gen 27) belong to the eldest brother. The break with the expected cultural norms that these narratives presuppose makes the narrative stand out. The role as leader over his brothers that normally belongs to the eldest brother is transferred to Jacob and with his father’s blessing; Jacob now takes the political role as leader in the family. Raymond Westbrook argues that what is at stake as the leader in the family is the administration of the undivided inheritance. This administrative right belongs to the head of the household. Esau, however, is not banned from the family but must serve his brother. It seems reasonable to conclude that since Isaac is never told in the narrative about the message to Rebekah, about the elder serving the younger, or that Esau has sold his birthright, he never knew about it. Isaac is therefore planning for a normal order of succession when he wishes to bless his firstborn son Esau. An argument against this understanding of the narrative is that he plans to do it without gathering all in the family as Jacob later did (Gen 49:1–2) and then

birthright to Jacob, both Jacob and Esau use the term “firstborn” when they present themselves before their father; see Anderson, “Inversion of the Birth Order,” 656.

Westermann maintains that this blessing of dominion does not deal with the brothers Esau and Jacob based on the plural “your brothers”; see Westermann, Genesis 12–36, 441. Greenspahn finds this “a rather odd blessing for a boy with only one sibling.” Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 119. Syrén argues, however, that “the ‘brothers’ constitute the group from which the hero is distinguished”; see Syrén, Forsaken First-Born, 25. Syrén argues further that the blessing is more “a wish for overlordship … than actual ‘blessing’”; see Syrén, Forsaken First-Born, 98.

Westbrook maintains that according to the narrative, a legal right cannot be annulled after it has been assigned, it can only be qualified by another right; see Westbrook, Property and the Family, 137. Syrén notes that it is first in verse 37 that Isaac address Esau as “my son.” Syrén, Forsaken First-Born, 99.

See Westbrook, Property and the Family, 137–38. See also Jubilees 37:1–3 where Esau explains that he was placed under Jacob’s hand after Isaac had blessed Jacob. According to Philo, QG 4.224 Esau “dared to present himself as a son although, as a wicked man, he was not to be reckoned in the rank of an attendant servant.”

Westbrook, Property and the Family, 137. Devora Steinmetz argues that we should understand the blessing more like a personal gift, a material one. The blessing of Abraham, of paternal heritage, she argues, is found in Gen 28:4; see Steinmetz, From Father to Son, 40, 98.

Syrén, Forsaken First-Born, 96.
give the blessing. However, if he knows more, the claim of the eldest son or brother to become the successor in the family becomes even stronger, since he too is then trying to ensure the continuance of the family through his preferred son, the firstborn. The silence of the narrative does not allow us to conclude.

3.3.1.4 The Eldest Brother’s Responsibility for Younger Siblings

The narratives also reflect the expectation that an eldest brother should take responsibility for younger siblings. The way Reuben is portrayed enlightens this role for the eldest brother. It is told that Jacob loves Joseph more than any other of his children and makes him a long robe with sleeves (Gen 37:3). Jacob’s love of Joseph is related to Joseph being the firstborn of Rachel, the wife that Jacob loves, so that Joseph becomes the beloved firstborn of Jacob (cf. Gen 25:28; 29:30).\footnote{Wenham, \textit{Genesis} 16–50, 350.} Due to Jacob’s preference for Joseph and Joseph’s own behavior toward his family, the brothers of Joseph hate him; it is said three times, indicating the intensity of their hate (Gen 37:4, 5, 8).\footnote{Wenham, \textit{Genesis} 16–50, 350.} In the incident when Joseph is sold as a slave by his brothers, when they first see him coming, they want to kill him, but Reuben goes in between and tries to rescue him with the intent later to restore him to his father (Gen 37:22).\footnote{Rad, \textit{Genesis}, 353. Syrén notices that the title firstborn is “repeatedly appended to Reuben’s name”; see Syrén, \textit{Forsaken First-Born}, 130.} How are we to interpret Reuben’s action? Mathews does not relate Reuben’s plan to rescue Joseph to Reuben being the eldest brother, but surmises that he perhaps already felt guilt toward his father (cf. Gen 35:22) or wanted to restore his position by becoming a hero later on.\footnote{Mathews, \textit{Genesis} 11:27–50:26, 696. Rad cannot explain why Reuben is given this role apart from that “he is simply the oldest and the most sensible.” Rad, \textit{Genesis}, 353.} Wenham wonders whether he was a responsible elder brother or tries to compensate for his misbehavior with Bilhah.\footnote{Wenham, \textit{Genesis} 16–50, 354.} Nahum M. Sarna states that Reuben “desperately asserts the authority that belongs to” his rights as the firstborn.\footnote{Sarna, \textit{Genesis}, 259.} Westermann makes it clear that Reuben’s behavior is connected with the fact that he is the eldest brother:
Reuben thus exercises the function of the eldest brother. In the patriarchal period when groups or parts of the family were away from the father, the eldest present took over the role of the father when it was necessary; he bore responsibility for this limited time. When the group returned home, he had to answer the father’s questions.164

Because of Reuben’s authority, they throw him into an empty pit instead of killing him. At the initiative of Judah, they later sell him to some Midianite traders that pass by. The text presupposes that Reuben must have been absent for a while, by simply stating, “When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes” (Gen 37:29). His responsibility toward his father is felt in what he says: “The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?” (Gen 37:30).165 The responsibility the eldest brother has for younger siblings toward his father is hence clearly seen in this narrative. It is an authority that is delegated to him by his father in his absence. He thus takes the role of a second father and he is second in command in the family.

3.3.1.5 The Eldest Brother Is Spokesperson, Representative and Mediator

Related to the role of taking responsibility for younger siblings the eldest brother is also seen to take the role of being a spokesperson, representative, and mediator. When Joseph’s brothers come to Egypt and Joseph asks them to let one of them stay and bring the youngest brother to him, Reuben is the one who reprimands his brothers for the wrongdoing that was done to Joseph when he was sold (Gen 42:22).166 Joseph realizes that Reuben had not agreed to his sale. Is this the reason Simeon, the second eldest, is detained instead of Reuben?167 If we follow Westermann above that the eldest present should take over the role as father temporarily, it would suggest that Simeon should take

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166 Both Sarna and Westermann connect this with the previous episode in Gen 37:21–22; see Sarna, *Genesis*, 259; Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 110.

167 Westermann surmises that it was because he was the second eldest; see Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 111. So also Sarna, who also thinks that Simeon might have been the one who made the others persecute Joseph; see Sarna, *Genesis*, 295. Wenham connects it with Joseph realizing that Reuben had not agreed to the sale; see Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 409.
the role of the eldest among those present at the time, but fails to do that. Reuben is also the one that guarantees in front of his father that he will bring Benjamin back (Gen 42:37). Here Reuben acts as a spokesperson on behalf of his brothers before Jacob for the last time. He is also Jacob’s representative to his brothers. When they later meet again in Egypt and dine together, Joseph has them seated before him according to their birthright (Gen 43:33). We hence see in these two narratives that the responsible eldest brother Reuben both disciplines and cares for his younger brothers and tries to mediate between his younger brothers and his father. He is also specifically mentioned as the firstborn in the family listings, thereby highlighting his special status regarding birthright. In these narratives, Reuben as the firstborn and eldest brother takes the role as mediator, protector, and leader among his siblings.

3.3.1.6 A Double Portion to the Eldest Son

The Genesis texts referred to above presuppose that polygamy was relatively common. When the texts deal with legislation this is a given option. Some of the problems connected with polygamy have already been seen in the narrative about Jacob and his sons. In Deut 21:15–17 we find a law relating to wives and firstborn sons. Peter C. Craigie argues “that the law here is not intended to initiate certain rights for the first-born, but it is designed to safeguard rights already belonging to them.” The law assumes that the father is still alive when he is about to distribute the portions to his sons and it forbids the father to follow his inclination to favor the eldest son of his beloved wife in preference to the son of the disliked wife. It is not the feelings of the father that are to be adhered to, but birth order. The firstborn of the father is the one that will receive a double portion of all that he has. The reason given is that he is the first

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168 Reuben’s offer to sacrifice his sons as a guarantee is not accepted by Jacob, it is Judah’s willingness to offer himself for his brother that changes Jacob’s mind and lets his sons bring Benjamin with them (Gen 43:9–11); see Steinmetz, From Father to Son, 48; Weinstein, “Reuben,” 198–99.

169 Syrén, Forsaken First-Born, 132.

170 Sarna, Genesis, 302.


172 Vaux, Ancient Israel, 41–42; Westbrook, Property and the Family, 21–22.
issue of his virility; therefore, the right of the firstborn belongs to him. This law preserves the special inheritance right of the eldest son of the father. The understanding of this right has been interpreted in different ways. It could mean a double portion as in Sir 12:5 and 18:32.\textsuperscript{173} A comparison with texts from Assyria, Nuzi, and Ptolemaic Egypt shows that there the estate was divided into shares that equaled the number of sons plus one more. The firstborn would in that case receive one more share than the others would.\textsuperscript{174} The phrase \( פּ י \) found in Deut 21:17, is an idiom for “two-thirds” in Zech 13:8 (cf. 2 Kgs 2:9).\textsuperscript{175} Duane L. Christensen concludes that “the law may here have meant that the firstborn is to inherit two-thirds.”\textsuperscript{176} Whatever the solution to the understanding of the phrase \( פּ י \) it nevertheless emphasizes that the firstborn receives a preferential share when inheritance is distributed. According to Tigay, some fathers were tempted to do so and did in some places. He thinks that the reason a preferential share is given to one son is to equip him for the role as head of the family. This included “managing the estate on behalf of all the survivors, providing for survivors who were minors, bearing the costs of burying and mourning for deceased parents, or simply to enable him to carry on his father’s name in dignity.”\textsuperscript{177} In societies where the father is free to decide which son to give this preferential share to, the son’s abilities to fill this role may have been decisive for his choice.\textsuperscript{178} Tsevat argues, “The law of the firstborn is

\textsuperscript{173} Tigay, Deuteronomy, 195, see note 43.


\textsuperscript{175} Tigay, Deuteronomy, 196. He also argues that this is a possible meaning in 2 Kgs 2:9.


\textsuperscript{177} Tigay, Deuteronomy, 196.

\textsuperscript{178} Tigay, Deuteronomy, 196.
nothing but an expression of the exceedingly high esteem in which the first child was held, especially if that child was male. The first is the best.”

3.3.1.7 Who Is to Be Designated a Firstborn

It is another question, however, whether all firstborns were declared to be a בְּּכוֹר. It seems to be a title connected with an assigned status, but since it is commonly given to the eldest son, one could be misled to understand it as connected with ascribed status. The normal understanding rendering it as “firstborn” is seen in 1 Chr 26:10: “Hosah, of the sons of Merari, had sons: Shimri the chief (for though he was not the firstborn בְּּכוֹר, his father made him chief [אָראָש]).” The NRSV translation hence seems to understand the text as if it would have been possible for Hosah to declare his firstborn chief, but that Hosah for some reason elected another son as chief instead of his firstborn. The text can also be understood as rendered in the Douay-Rheims translation: “And of Hosa, that is, of the sons of Merari: Semri the chief, (for he had not a firstborn בְּּכוֹר, and therefore his father made him chief [אָראָש].)” Regardless of whether בְּּכוֹר is understood in terms of status or age, this translation seems to understand the text as if there is no בְּּכוֹר in this family, at least not now, even though there were several sons in the family. With this understanding, the term can be taken to refer to an assigned status for the firstborn with the implication of a possibility of transferring the title to a son that is not the first to be born, but nevertheless acquires the status and role connected with being a בְּּכוֹר. This also opens up alternative ways of handling transmission of succession and property. According to Greenspahn, the Peshitta solved the problem in the text by assuming that the eldest was already dead when this statement was made, thereby allowing for an ascribed status for the firstborn. This is also suggested by Anderson

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179 Tsevat, TDOT 2:126.
180 The title בְּּכוֹר seems never to be transferred to another person though; see Anderson, “Inversion of the Birth Order,” 658.
181 See also 2 Chr 11:22.
182 Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 60. Scholars today consider the Hebrew text to be corrupt and read it together with the LXX and Targum that Shimri was not the firstborn בְּּכוֹר. It avoids the understanding that a family with children could have been without a firstborn. See Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 61. LXX writes πρωτότοκος and ἀρχων.
who proposes “that an unnamed elder brother (perhaps deceased) retains the designation *bkwr even after his displacement.”

3.3.1.8 The Consecrated Firstborn

The father has the responsibility of teaching the law to his family as well as giving explanations to his children about particular events and institutions. One part of this parental catechesis is related to the consecration of the firstborn son, the male that opened the womb. He is accordingly the firstborn of the mother and not necessarily of the father. The most relevant texts are found in Exod 13:2, 12–15; 22:28; 34:1–20 and Num 3:11–13; 8:16–18; 18:15. The rite could be understood as a “symbolic declaration of Israel’s complete belonging to Yahweh.” “Secondly, it was a declaration of the continuity and permanence of Israel’s relationship with God.” The best and the first belong to Yahweh. Hence, the fact that the firstborn belongs to God also points to the elevated status of the firstborn in Israel. It seems, however, that the firstborn never exercises priestly functions; the Levites are chosen as substitutes for them. It shows nevertheless that connecting a priestly role with the firstborn is not far off.

3.3.1.9 Conclusion

In a literary reading of especially the patriarchal narratives in the HB/LXX, we find that there is a strong longing for sons to continue the family line. Among the sons, the father’s firstborn is expected to become his successor and heir irrespective of the status of his mother. Furthermore, his inheritance rights are special, although his rights are transferable. The eldest brother will eventually take the political role as leader in the family, including the administration of the undivided inheritance. In the father’s absence,

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186 See Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 22. That does not mean that no firstborns among the Levites exercised priestly functions. Levine hence differentiates between a socio-legal conception where exceptional status is assigned to the first male in the paternal line and a cultic conception where exceptional status is assigned to the first male in the maternal line; see Baruch A. Levine and Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, “Firstborn,” *EncJud* 7:47.
the eldest present takes over the role of the father and thus becomes a second father; this
would normally be the eldest brother. This is an authority delegated by his father that
gives him the right to discipline his younger siblings. He is also charged with the
responsibility for his younger siblings toward his father by caring for them and so
becomes their protector. In combining these two tasks, he mediates between his younger
brothers and his father. The firstborn of the mother or the opener of the womb is
moreover the one that is to be consecrated to the Lord, another token of his special
status; he belongs to Yahweh. The Levites are chosen to exercise the priestly function on
behalf of the firstborn. The special status of the eldest brother is hence recognized as
well as his role as mediator, protector, and leader. I have not found texts, however, that
show an exemplary role as the eldest brother.

It should consequently have become evident that I have argued for the special
position of the eldest son or brother. This view, however, is contested. Frederick E.
Greenspahn in his monograph *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of
Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible*, referred to several times above, reaches a different
conclusion. His work is not a literary analysis; instead, he works also on a historical level,
arguing in light of ancient Near Eastern practices. We thus differ methodologically.
While allowing that “both legal usage and theological imagery seem to rest on the more
conventional view that it was firstborns who were treated favorably,” he nevertheless
questions this view in light of the many heroes presented in the Bible that were youngest
children.187 Accordingly, he argues, “Holders of both property and hereditary office were
free to grant preferential treatment to whichever offspring they wished.” He is neither
inclined to interpret the success of younger brothers “as a protest against Israelite
norms.”188

I read the patriarchal narratives differently and find it more plausible from a textual
reading to argue that when younger brothers take the place of elder brothers the
preference of the younger comes out as something irregular that needs to be explained

188 Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 81, 83.
due to its departure from the cultural norm. It is, however, not something that happens at the whim of a father, but only by the intervention of God. While Syrén also clearly sees that several of those that are firstborns become forsaken, he does not conclude that there is no prerogative status for the firstborn. He argues that it is the “blessings” that are closest to a common denominator in the demotion of the firstborn and states: “It seems also that the ‘blessings’ of the first-born sons are worked out in deliberate reference to the concept of God’s election of Israel.” Tsevat grants, “It is not unlikely that the patriarchal narratives want to describe a time in which the firstborn (frequently) enjoyed no privileged position.” He concludes one sentence later, “In their present form, these narratives are written for an audience which considers the laws of the firstborn to have full weight, and which, therefore, is fully aware of the tension between sacred history and present responsibility.” He also argues that among the varied customs around Israel and in the early period of Israel, “the OT chooses that of the privileged position of the firstborn in the law and in the ritual of daily life in preference to the principle of equal prospects for the great lines of history.”

3.3.2 Characteristics of Firstborn Used Metaphorically

In the HB/LXX, we also find that one of the terms used about the eldest brother or eldest son is used in a metaphorical way. The term used is the term for firstborn, בְּכוֹר. In all instances where the MT has בְּכוֹר the LXX has πρωτότοκος. The texts where בְּכוֹר is used metaphorically are found in Exod 4:22–23; Ps 89:27; Jer 31:9; and Deut 33:17.


190 Jacob Milgrom, “First-Born,” IDBSup 338.

191 See his concluding chapter, Syrén, Forsaken First-Born, 140–45, 141, 144.

192 Tsevat, TDOT 2:127.

193 See section 1.3 on page 40 above for my understanding of metaphor.

194 The last text, Deut 33:17, will not be dealt with since it deals with the firstborn of animals being used metaphorically. It highlights strength and power, derived from the strength and power of the bull.
3.3.2.1 Israel—A Beloved and Special Son

Two of the texts, Exod 4:22–23 and Jer 31:9, use the term בְּכוֹר for Israel. 195 I will deal with these two texts first and start with Exod 4:22–23. I will establish the literary context first, and thereafter analyze the metaphor to see what the metaphor says about Israel.

The context from Exod 3 shows that Yahweh calls Moses at the burning bush and Yahweh’s name is revealed to him. He is there called to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses is reluctant and afraid that the people of Israel will not listen to him. Yahweh shows the miraculous power he gives to Moses and agrees that Aaron, his brother, can speak on his behalf. Moses goes to his father-in-law and tells him that he must return to Egypt. He sets out on the journey back to Egypt when Yahweh again speaks to him saying that he will harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he will not let the Israelites leave Egypt. Moses is furthermore given a message to deliver to Pharaoh: “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, “Let my son go that he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son’” (Exod 4:22–23). Commenting on these verses, John I. Durham states, “Vv 22–23 are an ingeniously compact preview of election, exodus, and triumphant proof-of-Presence.” 196

Joseph Blenkinsopp argues that the form of the message introduced with “Thus says the Lord” aligns it with prophetic oracles. 197 Werner H. Schmidt states that formally this identity statement reminds one of the installation of the king, “You are my son,” Ps 2:7. 198 I take it therefore to be a prophetic identity statement about Israel as a people to be delivered by Moses to Pharaoh, thereby indicating its significance.

The term “firstborn” occurs twice in the message that is to be delivered; the first is used metaphorically while the second is not. 199 The second refers to the eldest son of the recipient of the message, the Pharaoh of Egypt. The metaphorical use of the first occurrence of the term “firstborn” shows that it is a structural metaphor; it is culturally

195 There is one textual variant in LXX Exod 4:22 that replaces πρωτότοκος with πρωτογονος where it is used about Israel, but not in verse 23 used about the firstborn of Pharaoh.
197 Blenkinsopp, Pentateuch, 152.
199 This is noted also by Brevard S. Childs, Exodus: A Commentary, OTL (London: SCM, 1974), 102.
conditioned (“grounded”). The term “Israel” is structured by “firstborn son,” so the metaphor is explicit. It is furthermore an open metaphor; there is no point of comparison given. Its meaning must therefore be sought in the general picture of “firstborn son” as social reality as it is described in the biblical texts, and we must try to determine what is highlighted from the source domain. Before that is done, any clues from the near literary context must be brought forward.

What is told previously is that Yahweh has heard the groaning of Israel, that he has remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he has seen his people, and taken notice of their condition (Exod 2:24–25). Further, when Moses met Yahweh at the burning bush, Moses was told again that Yahweh had seen the misery of his people and that he would deliver them from the Egyptians (Exod 3:7–10). Yahweh presents himself as the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and tells Moses that in the end the Israelites will be brought into favor with the Egyptians and will not leave Egypt empty-handed, but will bring with them vast amounts of jewelry (Exod 3:13–22). They are now slaves in Egypt, but they will leave as wealthy people. From the context, it becomes clear that Israel is dear to Yahweh.

Pharaoh is forced to let Israel go because Israel is his son, his firstborn son (sg.). Because Pharaoh will refuse to let Israel go, Yahweh will kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son (sg.) as an appropriate punishment for him.200 The relationship between Yahweh and his people, Israel, is here expressed in filial terms for the first time in the Pentateuch.201 Just as Israel as the firstborn son is a collective for the people of Israel, Pharaoh is likewise a collective for all the Egyptians. The reference to the firstborn son points forward to the tenth plague, Exod 11:5. There it is clear that Pharaoh’s eldest son shall die, as well as all other firstborn sons of the Egyptians, from the highest-ranking family to the lowest. While Yahweh is the father of all peoples, “Israel has the singular status of being the first

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200 See also Deut 19:16–19. Durham notes, “The reference to Pharaoh’s son, his firstborn, is precisely (and deliberately) parallel to the reference to Israel as Yahweh’s son, his firstborn”; see Durham, *Exodus*, 52.

to acknowledge YHVH and to enter into a special relationship with Him.” Pharaoh, on the other hand, was used to regarding himself as “the son of the gods,” but now the people of Israel are declared the firstborn son of God. Brevard S. Childs argues that what we have here is a conflict “over paternal power, and in the claim of the first-born the God of Israel and the king of Egypt have clashed in a head-on encounter.” The firstborn son in Israel is moreover devoted to Yahweh and belongs especially to him (cf. Exod 13:1–13; 22:29; 34:19–20). His parents could not raise the firstborn without paying a special redemption price that symbolizes that the family recognizes that he belongs to Yahweh. The term “firstborn” is thus not to be understood as merely first in chronological order, but first in status, “firstborn by way of preeminence with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a ‘firstborn.’” This shows that Israel is highly valued by Yahweh and that the punishment will hurt Pharaoh by killing what is equally highly valued by Pharaoh. Durham states: “Israel is lovingly called ‘my son, my firstborn,’ and the [sic] Pharaoh’s son, in an exact parallel, is poignantly called ‘your son, your firstborn.”

The social understanding of the firstborn or the eldest brother presented earlier has shown that he has a privileged status and a role as mediator, protector, and leader. Used metaphorically, it seems that his privileged status is more prominent than his roles. J. Andrew Dearman thus writes: “Moses was instructed to tell Pharaoh that Israel is God’s ‘first-born son’ (Exod 4:22). This claim presupposes the privileges accorded a first-born son as the bearer of the family name and heir to headship within the household of his

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204 Childs, Exodus, 102. See also Fretheim, Exodus, 77.
205 Wright notes that this first reference to “firstborn” corresponds with the fronting of the rite of the human firstborn after the Exodus and its close link with the Passover. Christopher J. H. Wright, God’s People in God’s Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 87. See also Schmidt, Exodus, 214.
208 Durham, Exodus, 56. Schmidt, Exodus, 212 notes that Pharaoh’s son is the crown prince.
clan.” This also fits the context in Exod 4 best. It seems reasonable to assert that by describing Israel as “my firstborn son,” Israel is depicted as highly valued and dear to Yahweh. In other words, the status of Israel is special in the eyes of Yahweh, and this is what is highlighted from the source domain. Greenspahn accordingly argues:

The image joins many other descriptions of that relationship, epitomized in Deuteronomy’s remarkable collocation: “Today the LORD has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; for him to set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised” (Deut 26:18–19, emphasis added).

The status received is not an ascribed status, but an achieved status based on Yahweh electing Israel as his beloved and special son.

Some later texts support such an understanding of the firstborn in Exod 4:22. In Psalms of Solomon 13:9 the two terms “beloved son” and “firstborn” are found in parallel: “For he will admonish the righteous as a beloved son (ὡς υἱὸν ἀγαπήσεως) and his discipline is as for a firstborn (ὡς πρωτοτόκου).” Later in Psalms of Solomon 18:4 the term “firstborn” is intensified with the addition of “only begotten”: “Your discipline for us (is) as (for) a firstborn son, an only child (ὡς υἱὸν πρωτότοκον μονογενῆ), to divert the perceptive person from unintentional sins.” In Sir 44:23 Israel (Jacob) is given the

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210 Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 20. The firstborn was also entitled to a special portion of the inheritance. By using this image of Israel, it might also be understood to imply that God “intends a special territorial portion for His chosen child.” The frequent use of the term “inheritance” as a reference to the land of Canaan might be added in support of such a view. See also Jer 3:19; Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 21.

211 Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 59, 60.


213 Charlesworth, OTP, 2, 663. The term translated as “discipline” is παιδεία. It is on a parallel with “admonish.” BDAG lists one definition as “the act of providing guidance for responsible living, upbringing, training, instruction, in our lit. chiefly as it is attained by discipline, correction (LXX, PsSol; TestZeb 2:3), of the holy discipline of a fatherly God 1 Cl 56:16”; see BDAG, 748, s.v. παιδεία, emphasis original.

214 Charlesworth, OTP, 2, 669. See also Sir 36:17: “Have mercy, O Lord, on the people called by your name, on Israel, whom you have named your firstborn (ὅν πρωτότοκον ὁμολόγας).” There is also one manuscript that has corrected the text to πρωτότοκος instead of πρωτογένως. See also Michaelis, TDNT 6:873.
title “firstborn” in a context where he is also given his inheritance: “Rested upon the head of ISRAEL; And He titled him with the dignity of firstborn, And gave him his inheritance; And He set him in tribes, So as to be divided into twelve.”

In 4 Ezra 6:58 Ezra states: “But we your people, whom you have called your first-born, only begotten, zealous for you, and most dear, have been given into their hands.”

4Q504 1–2 III, 5–7 refers back to Exod 4:22 with the adoption of Israel among all peoples: “you have established us as your sons in the sight of all the peoples. For you called Israel ‘my son, my first-born’ and have corrected us as one corrects his son.”

While most of these texts also speak about discipline for a firstborn, this discipline may include correction in the overall task of providing guidance for responsible living; it thus has a positive purpose.

All of them also corroborate the special status of a firstborn son.

We find the same theme of father and firstborn son used about the relation between Yahweh and the people of Israel in Jer 31:9 (38:9 LXX) as noted above. Chapters 30–31 are commonly called “the book of comfort,” where Yahweh is comforting Israel and Judah. Chapter 30 contains promises of restoration from captivity while chapter 31 speaks about the new covenant. Chapter 31 starts by talking about the rebuilding of Israel, when Yahweh “will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people” (1–6) and continues with a section (7–14) about the return of the scattered


217 Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition (Translations), 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997–1998), 2:1015. The verb translated “to correct” is יָסַר, the main verb used in LXX for this verb is παιδεία. See Moisés Silva, “παιδεία,” NIDNTT 3:585. In yet another text from b. Shabb. 31a there is expressed an explicit connection between God’s love of Israel and Israel being God’s firstborn: “Thereupon that proselyte reasoned within himself a fortiori: if Israel, who are called sons of the Omnipresent, and who in His love for them He designated them, Israel is my son, my firstborn, yet it is written of them, ‘and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death’: how much more so a mere proselyte, who comes with his staff and wallet!” A proselyte in the Talmud expresses it, but it is not refuted afterwards. Isadore Epstein refers in a footnote to Exod 4:22 after firstborn; see Isadore Epstein, ed., The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo’ed in Four Volumes, 1 (London: Soncino, 1938), 141, emphasis original. See also Jubilees 2:20 where God sanctifies his chosen Jacob: “And I have chosen the seed of Jacob from among all that I have seen. And I have recorded him as my firstborn son, and have sanctified him for myself forever and ever. And I will make known to them the sabbath day so that they might observe therein a sabbath from all work.” Quoted from Charlesworth, OTP, 2, 57. See also Byrne, “Sons of God,” 31–32.

218 See note 213 above.
people that includes an oracle of salvation (7–9). A remnant of Israel, a great company, will return, and while they shall come with weeping, Yahweh will let the way back be straight and pleasant, “for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn” (Jer 31:9). The language used here has parallels with Exod 4. John Arthur Thompson states, “The picture is of Yahweh gathering his people from the northern land and from the farthest horizons and leading them on a “New Exodus” march along a highway by flowing streams to their homeland.” We notice that the people of Israel both here and in Exod 4:22 are oppressed and away from their inheritance, their promised land.

Again, we find that the metaphorical use of the term “firstborn” is a structural open metaphor with no point of comparison given. The target domain for the metaphor is given with Ephraim. Ephraim in the present context probably refers to Israel. The two last phrases of verse 9 speak about the relationship between Yahweh and Israel with father-son language, a language that implies both that Israel is subordinate to Yahweh and that he loves Israel. According to Gerald L. Keown, “The language of v 9c points to adoption, a kinship by choice.” It is due to this special relationship between Yahweh and Israel that the return will be good for Israel. Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine note: “There is thus an interesting case of parallelism here, where the second line intensifies or goes beyond the first one: ‘I am like a father to Israel; yes, Ephraim is like

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219 This is the only place where בְכוֹר/πρωτότοκος is used in Jeremiah. Later in the same chapter (31:20), Ephraim is called “my beloved son,” υἱός ἀγαπητός. See also Zech 12:10 where these two terms are used together.


221 John A. Thompson, The Book of Jeremiah, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 569, emphasis original. He also suggests that the “flowing streams” may be a contrastive allusion to the water from the rock. Exod 17:1–7; Num 20:1–13, Thompson, Jeremiah, 570.


224 Gerald L. Keown, Jeremiah 26–52, WBC 27 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 114. See also Hos 11:1.

225 Keown, Jeremiah 26–52, 114. He also points to verse 7 where Jacob (Israel) is described as “chief of the nations (רֹאשׁ הַגּוֹיִם).”)
an oldest son to me.” William L. Holladay finds that the stimulus to this father-son language in Deut 32 and Israel’s preeminence among the nations are suggested by Deut 32:6–9. Thompson argues: “Israel is the firstborn, not because she is superior to Judah but because Yahweh will renew with her the same fatherly love he displayed in centuries past.” We thus find that the context highlights fatherly love for Israel; that is why he is bringing Israel back and this is explained with Ephraim being his firstborn. Israel is as Yahweh’s firstborn dear to Yahweh, and if we accept Deut 32 as a plausible thematic reference, Israel's preeminence among the nations is even more clearly suggested.

3.3.2.2 The King of Israel—An Elevated and Favored Son

We find the last reference where הבורא is used as a metaphor in Ps 89:27 (MT 89:28; LXX 88:28). Yahweh states about the king of Israel: “I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” The psalm can be divided into three sections: 1) Hymn (vv. 2–19), where we are reminded of the covenant Yahweh the creator of heaven and earth has made with his chosen people; 2) Divine discourse (vv. 20–38), where Yahweh says that he has found the chosen from the people, his servant David, and Yahweh’s faithfulness to the covenant made with him; 3) Lament (vv. 39–52), where the psalmist laments that Yahweh’s people have rejected Yahweh. We find our text in the second section containing the divine discourse about the Davidic covenant, understood as an

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227 Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 185. He also considers that a northern recension might refer to the northern tribes calling themselves “firstborn” as opposed to Judah. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 185.

228 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 570.

229 Keown notes that this relationship between Yahweh and Israel is the foundation for redemption (v. 11), ransom (v. 11), and motherly love (v. 20); see Keown, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 114.

230 Amy L. B. Peeler notes that this is the only time where “God designates one person as his πρωτόκοτος; see Amy L. B. Peeler, *You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle of the Hebrews*, LNTS 486 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 39, note 87.

oracle of salvation. In the first part of this oracle, the status of David is in focus. He is the chosen, anointed servant of Yahweh. Divine speeches, notably when they refer to the past, play a central role in the royal psalms (cf. Ps 2:7; 110:4; 132:11–12). “Further, the central divine discourse in Psalm 89 undertakes a *scribal relecture* of 2 Samuel 7, with a focus on the life of David as dynastic founder.” The two-sidedness of this covenant is seen in verses 26–27 with the use of “He,” for David, and “I,” for Yahweh, at the beginning of each of these verses. This two-sidedness “is in the form of ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties with parity,” as can also be seen in Deut 26:17–18. With regard to its content, it is closer to the adoption formula of Ps 2:7. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld claims, however, that we find the background of our text in the covenant formula of 2 Sam 7:14.

The term “firstborn” is used as a structural metaphor, where “firstborn” structures “him” in the text. The metaphor is open, although the repetitive parallelism in the psalm may function as a substitute for the lack of a point of comparison and help in determining the content of the metaphor. “Firstborn” is hence paralleled or further extended by being made “the highest of the kings of the earth,” thereby indicating that the elevated status shown to a king is connected with the metaphorical use of the term “firstborn.” The metaphor is explicit, with “the king” given as target domain. The status of the king as the highest on earth corresponds with the status of Yahweh in heaven. It can therefore be argued that the title here assumes the meaning “excellent” based on its parallel with “highest.” The title “firstborn” is one of the titles used for

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233 Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 422.
234 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 404, emphasis original.
238 See also Deut 26:19, 28:1 where the same elevated status is expressed about Israel as a people; see Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 28.
239 Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 423. See also v. 25, which specifies the range of the power given to the king. For references to God as the highest, see Ps 18:14; 46:5; 47:3.
ancient Near Eastern kings, but is also a title of honor for Israel (Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9), here transferred to its king.\textsuperscript{241} This does not, however, imply deification: “The description of Israel as Yahweh’s ‘firstborn son’ in Exodus 4:22 shows that this way of describing the king does not necessarily imply deification or some kind of quasi-physical relationship. It means that the king entered into a relationship of unique intimacy and privilege that gave him the right to rule in Yahweh’s name over Yahweh’s people.”\textsuperscript{242} It has also been argued that the term “firstborn” (בְּכוֹר) (v. 27) has taken the place of the term “prince” (נָג יד) in Nathan’s prophecy in 2 Sam 7 because the latter term had started to lose the old connotation of “the one especially elected by God from all Israel, His royal family.”\textsuperscript{243} Thus, the title “firstborn” implies excellence and elevated status based on his special election by God. His status, however, is not absolute as God is his father. Tryggve N. D. Mettinger argues that there is a correspondence between verse 20 where the king has the status of servant and verse 26 where he has the status of son. Therefore, “(a) the formulation referring to the king as bekôr is a supreme expression of his divine election and (b) this implies God’s paternal protection of the king against his enemies.”\textsuperscript{244} It has also been noticed that in both Pss 2 and 89 the authority of the king is threatened when he calls on Yahweh as father. “Thus, the sonship of the king is considered to be a divine guarantee of his power and authority. It is divine power that gives the king his power.”\textsuperscript{245}

While firstborn is used in a royal context, its connection with family metaphors is seen in verse 26 where it is stated: “He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!’” Father-son language is also used in the covenant formula in 2 Sam 7:14 referred to above.\textsuperscript{246} It is in response to the king’s cry referring to Yahweh as

\textsuperscript{241} Hossfeld and Zenger, \textit{Psalms 2}, 410–11. Arnold Albert Anderson argues for the importance of the firstborn as belonging to God (Exod 13:2, 12–13; Num 3:13) and that he was holy as more important than the privileges given to the firstborn; see Arnold A. Anderson, \textit{The Book of Psalms: Psalms 73–150}, New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 642.


\textsuperscript{244} Mettinger, \textit{King and Messiah}, 263.

\textsuperscript{245} Ringgren, \textit{TDOT} 1:18–19.

\textsuperscript{246} See Tate, \textit{Psalms 51–100}, cdxxiii–cdxxiv; Mettinger, \textit{King and Messiah}, 263.
his Father that he will make him his firstborn. Royal language and father-son language are thus used together in a covenantal setting of deliverance. Yahweh is the highest, therefore by analogy his adopted firstborn son on earth becomes the highest among the kings on earth. “As the ‘firstborn’ of Yahweh, David is given an exalted status of privilege and power (cf. Heb 1:6); a status higher than that of any other king (v 28b) [27b], comparable to Yahweh’s own status among the divine beings of the heavenly realm (vv. 7–9) [6–8].” Thus, the title given the king suggests that he is “raised to a new status of favor.” Being given the title “firstborn” means “that the king entered into a relationship of unique intimacy and privilege, which is what gave him the right to rule in Yahweh’s name over Yahweh’s people.” Hence, elevated position and excellence are central to what is highlighted. Yahweh’s care for the king to protect and help him is moreover clearly expressed in the preceding verses. He is accordingly dear to Yahweh, being his elected.

3.3.2.3 Conclusion

It has become evident that the metaphorical use of the term “firstborn” is rather restricted in its application. In two of the three occurrences, it is used about Israel as a people, in the third about the king of Israel. There are some similarities regarding the context in which the term occurs. In all occurrences, the people or the king are in a position where help is needed. Furthermore, the term also occurs within a setting where it is either in a divine oracle of salvation or in its immediate context. It is thus a term that is uttered by Yahweh about Israel or the king of Israel in need of help. As such, it is a term that is used in a setting of intended deliverance. The focus in all occurrences is

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247 Yahweh as father for Israel is stated several places (see Deut 32:6; Jer 3:19; Hos 11:1).
248 See Fensham, “Father and Son,” 130.
249 Anderson, Psalms 73–150, 642. See also Ps 7:17. This honor of being the highest given to the king is given to Israel in Deut 26:19; 28:1.
250 Tate, Psalms 51–100, 424. See also 4Q369 1 II, 6–12; Garcia Martinez and Tigchelaar, Dead Sea Scrolls, 2:731. Craig A. Evans, “A Note on the ‘First-Born Son’ of 4Q369,” DSD 2 (1995): 185–201, here 198 notes that Ps 89:20, 26–27 is an instructive parallel to this text. He states, “It is probably God’s love that clings to the soul of the first-born.”
251 Cooke, “Israelite King as Son,” 212; see further 217 and 225.
252 Lucas, Exploring the Old Testament, 63.
vertical, that is, between Yahweh as father and Israel or its king as firstborn son. Israel and its king are declared dear to Yahweh, and are in the texts given the position of a firstborn for Yahweh. What is highlighted is thus status, a place of favor, excellence, and honor, elevated above the others. His status is special but subordinate to Yahweh as father. The focus is therefore upon the status of the firstborn and not on the roles associated with being a firstborn or eldest brother.

3.4 Eldest Brother in the Works of Philo

Philo most probably lived between 20–15 BC and around AD 50. He came from Alexandria in Egypt where he lived most of his life. He was a notable person and was sent as head of a delegation to Gaius Caligula in Rome by the Jewish community in Alexandria in AD 39/40. He was conscious of being a Jew with a good knowledge of the Greek and Roman culture, especially of the Greek philosophers and authors. In his writings, “firsthand knowledge of Hellenistic culture in general and Greek philosophy in particular” is reflected. Most probably, for Philo the Scriptures were a Greek version of the Hebrew Bible as he built his exegesis on the Greek text of the LXX. Whether he knew Hebrew is uncertain. The works of Philo can be classified into three broader groups as follows: 1) The exposition of the laws of Moses; a comprehensive rewriting of the law where he paraphrases and expands on the biblical text. 2) The exegetical commentaries; these include a brief commentary on Genesis and Exodus and allegorical interpretations of Genesis. 3) The remaining writings, which are more

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255 Borgen, *ABD* 5:336. Borgen claims further that Philo “develops a theological understanding of this translation: the LXX is an exact and inspired translation of the Hebrew original.” See also *Mos.* 2.26–27.


difficult to classify. Peder Borgen classifies these under the heading “Pentateuchal principles applied to contemporary issues and events.” The addressees of Philo’s writings are commonly considered to be well-educated Jews, but his writings would also be of interest to the sympathetic outsiders.

Philo is also broadly speaking a contemporary of both Jesus and Paul. I will not argue that there is a direct dependency on Philo for Paul or any other New Testament writer, but the writings of Philo illuminate the broader cultural and theological context in which Paul and the other New Testament authors wrote.

My focus is on what Philo says concerning the status and role of the eldest brother as social reality. His preferences in vocabulary when he deals with texts in the Bible that speak about the eldest brother are of special interest. Even though he is the one that uses the term πρωτότοκος most often apart from the LXX in the relevant period and literature, an interesting question is to what degree he deviates from the vocabulary of the LXX when he speaks about the eldest brother as social reality. Where he differs, the terms used by Philo must be noted.

Almost all the references to a metaphorical use of the eldest brother or son in the works of Philo are found in the second group of his writings: the exegetical commentaries. His metaphorical use of the eldest brother, primarily by using the term “firstborn,” will be followed up in section 3.4.2.

Despite the fact that my focus is on texts that deal with the eldest brother as social reality, the attention given to the term πρωτότοκος in both the LXX and Philo necessitates that I discuss Philo’s use of this term in more detail. We find the word stem πρωτοτοκ-
sixty-two times and the word stem πρωτόγονος- six times in the works of Philo in the TLG database. These findings can be arranged into categories as follows: πρωτόγονος (45x), πρωτότοκα (14x), πρωτοτοκευω (3x), and πρωτόγονος (6x). Nearly half of all the occurrences (thirty-one, with four more that can be treated as allusions) come from citations. However, there are only nine texts altogether from the HB/LXX cited by Philo where these terms are found: Gen 4:4 (1x); 25:32–34 (4x); 27:19 (1x); 27:36 (2x); 38:6 (1x); Exod 4:22 (1x); 13:2 (1x); Num 3:12–13 (7x); Deut 21:15–17 (13x). This shows that Deut 21:15–17 is the text that in this connection is referred to most often by Philo.

The majority of the occurrences of πρωτότοκος are, according to Wilhelm Michaelis, used on a HB/LXX basis. The fact that they are citations or used in connection with citations makes Michaelis ignore these references in his discussion of the term πρωτότοκος in TDNT. The term πρωτότοκος occurs nineteen out of forty-five times in citations in Philo. The fact that a little less than half of the references occur within citations from the HB/LXX does not necessarily mean that these references are not interesting or that they cannot reveal anything about the significance of this term. We must ask why Philo cites these texts from the HB/LXX and what use he makes of them.

264 The references in parentheses refer to the cited texts from the Bible; the references in square brackets refer to texts treated as allusions. Spec. 1.135; 1.138; 1.139; 1.248; 2.134; Virt. 95; QG 1.60 [Gen 4:3–4]; 4.206a (Gen 27:19); QE isf. 22; Leg. 2.48 (Deut 21:15–16); 3.74 (Gen 38:6); Cher. 54; Sacr. 19 (Deut 21:15–17); 88 (Gen 4:4); 89; 118 (Num 3:12–13); 119; 126; 134 (Num 3:13); 136; Sobr. 21 (Deut 21:15–17); 22; Conf. 124; Her. 117 (Exod 13:2); 124 (Num 3:12); Congr. 98; Somn. 1.202; 2.266 [Exod 11:5]; Mos. 1.134; 1.145.

265 Leg. 2.47; 3.190; 3.191 (Gen 27:36); 3.192 [Gen 27:36]; 3.195 (Gen 27:36); Sacr. 18 (Gen 25:33); 19 (Deut 21:17); 120; Sobr. 21 (Deut 21:17); 25 (Deut 21:17); 26; QG 4.173 (Gen 25:32); 4.174 (Gen 25:34).

266 Leg. 2.48 (Deut 21:16); Sacr. 19 (Deut 21:16); Sobr. 21 (Deut 21:16).

267 Fug. 208, Somn. 1.215; Post. 63 (Exod 4:22); Agr. 51; Conf. 63 and 146. The references have been cross-checked with Günter Mayer, Index Philoneus (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); Peder Borgen, Kåre Fuglseth, and Roald Skarsten, The Philo Index: A Complete Greek Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria Lemmatized & Computer Generated, UniTRel studieserie 25 (Trondheim: Religionsvitskapleg institutt, NTNU, 1997); Peder Borgen, Kåre Fuglseth, and Roald Skarsten, The Works of Philo: The Greek Text with Morphology (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005); Centre d'analyse et de documentation patristiques, Biblia patristica: Supplément: Philon d’Alexandrie (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982).

268 The number of occurrences in Philo for each text is given in parenthesis.

269 Michaelis, TDNT 6:875.

270 Michaelis discusses in fact only one reference, Cher. 54, which he claims, is the only instance of independent use by Philo; see Michaelis, TDNT 6:875.
and the term πρωτότοκος. There is therefore no reason to exclude these texts from the discussion. A term closely related to πρωτότοκος in the writings of Philo is πρωτόγονος. Although the term is not used very often, its use is noteworthy in the writings of Philo.

My discussion below will not be restricted to texts where only the terms mentioned above are found. I will also deal with other texts that address the status and role of the eldest brother as social reality using different vocabulary. I will first deal with eldest brother as social reality and thereafter discuss the texts where eldest brother is used metaphorically.

3.4.1 Characteristics of Eldest Brother as Social Reality

3.4.1.1 Sons Inherit—Daughters Do not Normally Inherit

We notice first a more general observation regarding inheritance rights in Philo. He discusses difference in inheritance rights both between sons and daughters and between sons. The first, regarding different inheritance rights between sons and daughters we find in Spec. 2.124–125. He states there, “the heirs of parents are to be sons.” It is only when there are no sons that daughters inherit (Spec. 2.124).271 In support of his claim he appeals to nature where men take precedence over women; consequently, it should be so in families too. Men have the first share, inherit the property, and fill the position of those who have died (Spec. 2.124). However, unmarried daughters who have no dowry set aside for them are entitled to a share equal to that of the males (Spec. 2.125).272 F. H. Colson argues that in this section: “Philo has no biblical authority and is simply giving what he considers to be just, based apparently on Attic (or Alexandrian?) law.”273 Jacob Milgrom thinks that due to later Ptolemaic law giving daughters equal rights with

271 See Num 27:8–11. See also Greenspan, “Primogeniture in Ancient Israel,” 75.

272 If there are no descendants, then the brothers of the deceased are next in line (Spec. 2.127). Philo then raises the question of why there is no mention of the parents in the order of inheritance (Spec. 2.129). He reasons that it would be unnatural for the law to consider an unnatural sequence where the parents outlive their children and inherit them. They are honored, though, by letting the father’s brother become an heir (Spec. 2.129–132). See also Mos. 2.243–245. See Reinhartz, “Philo’s Exposition of the Law,” 14, 16.

brothers if the father died intestate, Philo entitled unmarried daughters without fixed dowries to a share equal to that of the males. The independence of Philo on this subject should be noted. We cannot assume that he always adheres to the biblical text as authority, he may at times simply offer his own opinion.

3.4.1.2 Defining Who Is the Firstborn

A related topic that Philo discusses is who is declared a firstborn and for what purpose. In QE isf. 22 he most likely discusses Exod 13:2: “Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” Two terms from the biblical text are of special interest to him: πρωτότοκος and πρωτογενής. The former is with reference to the mother, for the woman gives birth (τὸ μὲν “πρωτότοκον” πρὸς τὸ μητρὸν γένος, τίκτει γὰρ γυνή). The latter is with reference to the father, for it is the male who begets (τὸ δὲ “πρωτογενές” πρὸς τὸ πατρὸν, γεννᾷ γὰρ ἥρρεν). He probably makes this distinction because of the relation between πωτοκός-τίτκω and γενες-γεννάω. He comments on the phrase “open the womb (διανόιγον πᾶσαν μήτραν)” in the biblical text that this phrase is added so that there should be no question about a firstborn daughter (ἵνα μὴ γενομένες πρωτοτόκου θυγατρί). The first child who opens the womb from virginity is not necessarily the one to be consecrated; rather it is the first begotten from the father and the first born from the mother that is a male child. This clarification is important, as it is about whom is to be consecrated to God. The first and the best belong to God.

Philo further considers the privilege of the priests including the tithe, the offering of the first fruits, and the firstborn (Spec. 1.131–144). The priests are given a maintenance, first fruits, and the firstborn males of land animals (Spec. 1.133–135). He discusses

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274 Jacob Milgrom, Numbers, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 482.

275 This is classified as unidentified fragment no. 15 in Philo, Philo, suppl. II, 261. No translation is given, the translation of this fragment is therefore my own.

276 Exod 13:2 LXX: Ἀγιασόν μοι πάν πρωτότοκον πρωτογενὲς διανόιγον πᾶσαν μήτραν ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραήλ ἀπὸ δυνάμεων ἡς κτήσοντας, ἐμί ἐστιν.

277 The same expression we find later in Spec. 1.248 where Philo speaks about the connection between the different offerings and the Great Vow, which is the vow of the Nazirite.
thereafter which are to be distributed to the priests and for which are to be paid compensation. He defines the firstborn of man as the first fruits from their own souls and bodies that are consecrated as first fruit. First fruit is moreover defined as a thank-offering for the blessing of parenthood. The wish is that marriage thereby is worthy of the highest praise (Spec. 1.137–138). For the firstborn of man, a fixed sum of money is to be paid as compensation to avoid the separation between parents and their children (Spec. 1.139). The high value attached to the firstborn is shown in that the firstborn male belongs to God and should be consecrated to him. He is a sign of the blessing of parenthood and the reason given why marriage is worthy of being praised. When the priests receive their gifts, including the compensation paid for the firstborn, they are conferred supreme honor by sharing with God the thank-offering rendered to Him (Spec. 1.131). Philo is thus more interested in defining the firstborn in cultic terms, and not so much regarding inheritance.

We also find the firstborn discussed in a cultic setting in a little digression in Her. 112–124 based on the phrase “my first fruits” where he expounds on its origin, but now with a focus on being first. Beginning is dedicated to God. As an elaboration of this, he quotes from Exod 13:1, 2: “Sanctify to me every first born (πρωτότοκον), first in generation (πρωτογενές), which openeth every womb” (Her. 117) and comments afterwards in Her. 118 that “the first in time and value are God’s possessions and especially the first in generation (πρωτογενῆ).” The firstborn of man or the “one who opens the womb of all from man, that is reason and speech” (Her. 118). “For he that opens the womb of each of these ... is the invisible, seminal artificer, the divine Word (θείος ἐστι λόγος), which will fitly be dedicated to its Father” (Her. 119). There is a

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278 See the discussion by Adele Reinhartz about procreation as the goal of the marital relationship; see Adele Reinhartz, “Parents and Children: A Philonic Perspective,” in The Jewish Family in Antiquity, ed. Shaye J. P. Cohen, BJS 289 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 61–88, here 69–70.

279 See Congr. 98, “He sanctified all the first-born, and took as their ransom the tenth, that is the tribe of Levi.”

280 We find πρωτογενῆς, first in generation, first-born, only twice in Philo, in Her. 117 and 118 apart from the quoted text from Ex 13:2 in QE isf. 22 discussed above. See also LSJ, 9th ed., 1545, s.v. πρωτογενής.

281 In Somn. 1.75 Philo “moves from the spoken word to Logos as the model behind the work of creation.” Peder Borgen, “Logos Was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of
parallel between the firstborn that opens the womb and the one that opens the womb of mind, the divine Word: They are first in generation. Although the term πρωτότοκος is not used about the divine Word directly, the way Philo works from Exod 13:2 to his statement about the divine Word makes this link very close.  

3.4.1.3 The Rights of the Eldest Son—Primogeniture

We have seen that sons are the rightful heirs for Philo. In another setting, he makes it clear that brothers do not inherit equally; rather the eldest brother or son has special inheritance rights. This is seen in Spec. 2.133–139 where he discusses the rights of primogeniture. Thus, by adhering to biblical law he states, “The eldest son (παιδών ὁ πρεσβύτατος) does not share equally with his juniors, but is adjudged a double portion” (Spec. 2.133). Philo gives three reasons why the eldest son is considered worthy of a double portion: First, before the birth of their firstborn, the parents were only man and wife, but after the birth, they are now father and mother. Second, the firstborn is the one who started to use the names “father” and “mother” in addressing his parents. Third and most importantly for Philo, what was a barren house has now become fruitful for the preservation of humanity. It is sown in marriage and the birth of children is its fruit. This starts with the eldest (ὧν ὁ πρεσβύτατος ἀρχή). This line of arguing is supported, he claims, by the fact that this was the reason “the first-born sons of the enemies (οἱ πρωτότοκοι τῶν ... ἔχβρων)” were slain (Spec. 2.134). He resumes his argument about the effects of the slaying of the firstborns of the enemies later: “For which no consolation


See Deut 21:15–17, which this statement is based upon and that uses πρωτότοκος/יִּתְנָה here. We notice that Philo supports the interpretation of a double portion, not two-thirds. See Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 195.

See also *Mos*. 1.135.

See also *Cher*. 54.
was possible, namely, the destruction of their foremost rank, while God Who wrought the salvation was honoured by the dedication as first-fruits of those who headed (ἡγεμονίαν) the line of children” (*Spec. 2.134*). Erwin R. Goodenough argues that Philo is here (*Spec. 2.134*) reading “back into the Scriptures a Ptolemaic law which had forced itself upon Jewish practice.” He further argues that this is an expansion of Jewish law that has much simpler prescriptions.286 Colson, on the other hand, argues that Deut 21:17 substantiates the claims of primogeniture as argued by Philo, and I agree with him.287 I also find it apparent that Philo in this passage asserts that the eldest son is the founder of the filial generation.288 Philo also argues the high status of the firstborn in his argument about the firstborns of the enemies. They were hit where it hurt them the most, i.e. by the slaying of the firstborns. It should also be noticed that Philo varies between two terms or phrases, παιδῶν ὁ πρεσβύτατος (*Spec. 2.133*) and ὁ πρωτότοκος (*Spec. 2.134*).289

Two comments by Philo when he is interpreting Gen 4:2 might, however, seem to circumvent the rights of primogeniture. In *Sacr. 11* Philo comments on why Abel is mentioned before Cain in Gen 4:2b. Cain is the older, but when their occupation is mentioned, Abel is mentioned first. He states: “For the probability was that the elder (τὸν μὲν πρεσβύτατον) proceeded to his husbandry first, and the younger at a later time to his charge of the flock” (*Sacr. 11*). However, the deciding argument for Philo is that vice is senior to virtue in point of time, but regarding value and honor the opposite is true (*Sacr. 14*). Therefore, Cain has the precedence. The argument about seniority is still adhered to, but it is changed by Philo to be about value and honor, not about time.

Later he praises toil (*Sacr. 35–41*) and comments about the elder and the younger:

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287 Colson, “Appendix to De Specialibus Legibus,” 626–27. See also Reinhartz, “Philo’s Exposition of the Law,” 19. In the rest of this section (*Spec. 2.135–2.139*), Philo affirms that the double portion should go to the eldest son by the first wife, thereby following the intent of Deut 21:15–17. This is somehow at variance with his allegorical treatment of the same passage in *Sacr. 19–20* and *Sobr. 21–26*. See also later in section 3.4.2.

288 In *Mos. 1.242* Philo speaks about the relation between Esau and Jacob. While Esau had given up his birthright as the elder to his younger brother Jacob, Philo still calls Esau “the founder of the nation (ὁ γὰρ τοῦ ἐνόου ἄρχητης).”

289 See also *Spec. 2.137*. 
Never then despise toil, that from the one you may reap a multitude, even the harvest of every good thing. And so though you be the younger in birth (νεώτερος) you shall be accounted the elder (πρεσβύτερος) and judged worthy of the elder’s place (πρεσβεῖων). And if your life to the end be a progress to the better, the Father will give you not only the birthright of the elder (πρεσβεία), but the whole inheritance (τὰ πατρῷα χαριεῖται πάντα), even as he did to Jacob (Sacr. 42).

Again, Philo distinguishes between seniority of birth and of virtue. Jacob is the virtuous (Sacr. 46); therefore, he is worthy of the elder’s place. It is moreover noticeable that Philo speaks about giving the whole inheritance to one of the sons; the reference to Jacob in what follows makes it evident what example Philo has in mind. Jacob, being the younger, received everything. Philo is thus following the biblical text. I will argue that the fact that the younger is declared worthy of the elder’s place in this section does not circumvent the normal understanding of the statuses and roles associated with younger and elder. This is an exceptional raise in status and role for this younger person as the one connected with virtue. Philo bases his interpretation on Gen 33:11, which he cites in his support. Jacob said, “God has had mercy on me and all things are mine.” This was, however, not an invention by Jacob, he had learned it from his grandfather Abraham who, according to Philo, gave all his wealth to Isaac (support is given by reference to Gen 25:5, Sacr. 43). In Virt. 208 he states about the elder, Esau, that “The elder was disobedient, indulging without restraint in the pleasures of the belly and the lower lying parts. Influenced by these, he surrendered his birthright.” Philo does not discuss the question about the rights of the elder that stipulated to him the double portion in this connection. The distinction between the birthright and inheritance is maintained, however, although he does not specify what is meant by each of the terms. These two

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290 In Sacr. 77 Philo defines an elder: “by ‘elder’ (πρεσβύτερος) is meant he that is worthy of honour and privilege and high place, and to approve such was the task entrusted to Moses, the friend of God.”

291 The reference to Jacob and the arguments connected with him is the reason it might be taken as literal here, although the broader context also suggests that younger and elder have references that are not only literal. In Conf. 74 and Migr. 94 Philo argues that Isaac alone as the only legitimate heir inherited the property while the smaller things called “gifts” were received by the other sons as well. See also Abr. 168; Virt. 207; QG 4.122.

292 Walter T. Wilson lists several ancient texts that make an effort to vilify Esau; see Walter T. Wilson, ed., Philo of Alexandria on Virtues: Introduction, Translation and Commentary, PACS 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 401. See also Virt. 192 where Philo allows fathers to formally disinherit their sons “when the depravity which they show overcomes the peculiar and intense affection implanted in parents by nature.”
texts do not contradict the preference of the eldest; Philo maintains it, although he uses it not about order of birth but of vice and virtue, where virtue is declared the eldest.

3.4.1.4 The Eldest Brother Establishes a Pattern to Follow
The eldest son or brother is a founder of the filial generation and establishes a pattern to follow. This becomes evident in several ways, as we shall see. In his treatise on Joseph, he talks about the sale of Joseph and about the brothers' later meeting with him. Philo affirms that when the brothers were about to kill Joseph they were deterred “by the exhortation of the eldest (τοῦ πρεσβυτάτου) among them, to which they reluctantly yielded” (Ios. 13). Hence, the eldest had to argue hard to convince his brothers given that they reluctantly accepted his persuading efforts. His authority is therefore not indisputable, but strong enough to make them comply. Philo states later that it was the fourth eldest brother who was the leader in the plan to sell him (Ios. 15). He adds that the eldest brother had not been present at the sale (Ios. 16) and therefore, by implication, could not avert it. Philo does not argue explicitly here that it was because he was the eldest that the younger brothers complied, but that point is made later.

When the brothers of Joseph went to Egypt and there met Joseph, Philo writes about what happened on the occasion when the second eldest was taken as prisoner:

But perhaps too he thought that that brother had the greatest responsibility for the wickedness, since he might be almost called the officer of the company and the ringleader of their spite. For if he had ranged himself with the eldest when he counselled kindness and humanity, being, though younger than he, older than the others, the wrongdoing might well have been stopped. For the two highest in position and honour would have been united in sentiment and purpose on the question, and this of itself would have had great weight to turn the scale (Ios. 176).

Philo shows quite clearly that among the brothers the authority goes from the eldest brother and downward following birth order. The second eldest did not adhere to his expected role behavior, and the fatal consequences were unavoidable. It was his

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293 See Gen 37:21–22. See also Ios. 173 where it is repeated that the eldest opposed them, “begged, and exhorted you.”
294 See also Contempl. 30–31.
295 Philo also notices that the second eldest corresponds to Joseph as the second youngest; see Ios. 175.
responsibility to take the role of the eldest in the eldest’s absence, and his younger brothers were supposed to comply under his authority. It is not stated that the younger brothers would have had to agree to the opinion of the two eldest, but given their expected role and status, at least Philo thinks it would have had great weight to turn the scale. Philo hence expects the eldest brother to be respected by his younger brothers due to his status and role. The second eldest did not follow the example of his eldest brother for which he is criticized. Philo further surmises that this was the reason Joseph chose to take him captive (Ios. 177). It is thus possible to infer that the eldest is supposed to discipline younger brothers and that the others from the second eldest and downwards are expected to fill that role if they should become the eldest present. He thus also becomes an example to follow.

Later, when the brothers arrived in Egypt again, Philo comments on their being seated according to age, that the brothers were “surprised to find that the Egyptians affected the same fashion as the Hebrews ... and knew how to discriminate between younger and older in the honours which they paid them” (Ios. 203). They also started with “the eldest, and continued in regular order according to their age” when their sacks were examined (Ios. 217). While the Bible mentions the names of the brothers of Joseph, they are in these sections only mentioned according to birth order by Philo (cf. Ios. 185, 189, and 222).

3.4.1.5 The Eldest Brother Is Dear to His Parents
The last distinctive feature of the eldest brother that I find from Philo is his description of the eldest as being dear to his parents. Philo discusses the tenth plague in Egypt, and the theme of the firstborn of Egypt comes up again (Mos. 1.134–142). Philo somehow retells the biblical account of Exod 12:29–36. He states that the majority of the nation was not destroyed, but God “sentenced the first-born only to death (μόνων τῶν πρωτοτόκων καταψηφίζεται θάνατον)” (Mos. 1.134). This continues with a specification of who were sentenced to death, namely that it included all the firstborn from the lowest

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296 See also Spec. 2.237–239 where he speaks about filial piety and how one pays respect to an aged man or woman.
social status to the highest. In the biblical account, πρωτότοκος is used in all these references, but Philo also uses another expression, literally the eldest (brother or son) of the children, ὁ πρεσβυτάτος τῶν παιδῶν. He then gives a description of who the firstborn was: “Those who had been the first to call their parents father and mother, first to be called sons by them” (Mos. 1.135).²⁹⁷ They are also described as “their dearest (τοὺς φιλτάτους)” (Mos. 1.136), in the superlative, thereby also indicating their highest status of the children in the family.

In a comment about the firstborn of Egypt, Philo states: “If you see the firstborn of Egypt, true children of their parents (τὰ γνήσια ἔγγονα), perishing, even lust, pleasure, grief and fear, and injustice, folly, licentiousness with all their brethren and kin, stand in awe and be silent, bending low before the tremendous power of God” (Somn. 2.266). Philo also comments on the two purposes of lips, to keep silence and express thought (Somn. 2.262). In that connection, he states that when God slew the firstborn of Egypt, the response was to stand in awe and be silent, bowing down before “the tremendous power of God” that was displayed.²⁹⁸ Philo gives a description of the firstborn, not found in the biblical account, as “true children of their parents” (Somn. 2.266) which may also be translated “lawfully begotten, genuine, dear, or legitimate offspring.”²⁹⁹ This apposition further underlines the tragedy involved when they perished, and gives added weight to the high value attached to the firstborn by the parents.³⁰⁰

3.4.1.6 Conclusion

The kind of literature produced by Philo does not invite extended discussions about the social reality of family relations including the status and role of the eldest brother. He

²⁹⁷ In Legat. 289 he advances a similar argument to Gaius when he states, “just as in families the oldest children (οἱ πρεσβύτατοι παῖδες) hold the primacy (πρεσβείαν), because they have been the first to give the name of father and mother to their parents.” Here he addresses the emperor Gaius, who was not a Jew, but the argument that the oldest as the bearer of primacy is assumed to be granted its persuasive force by the emperor too. See also Spec. 2.133–139 dealt with above. See further Abr. 195; Ios. 4; Spec. 2.129, 239–240. See Reinhartz, “Philo’s Exposition of the Law,” 8.

²⁹⁸ Exod 11:5 is the biblical reference.

²⁹⁹ See LSJ, 9th ed., 354, s.v. γνήσιος; 467, s.v. ἔγγονος; 503, s.v. ἔκγονος. See also Deus 4; Agr. 32.

³⁰⁰ QG 4.173; 4.174; 4.206a include citations from Gen 25:32; 25:34, and 27:19, respectively, but do not add valuable information for the present purposes. In QG 4.224 Jacob is rightfully assigned two names, that is, “son” and “firstborn,” “as one who has been marked by distinction.”
nevertheless gives some information, mostly as a byproduct of what is the main topic for Philo in the relevant texts. We note that he states that sons are the rightful heirs and that daughters only inherit when there are no sons.

He defines the firstborn as the first begotten from the father and the first born from the mother that is a male child. His interest in defining the firstborn is more in cultic terms than regarding inheritance rights. The cultic firstborn is to be consecrated to God, though, thereby also underlining that he is of the highest value to God.

Brothers do not inherit equally; the eldest brother or son has special inheritance rights. He is worthy of a double portion and Philo explains why with information not found in the biblical texts.

The eldest brother is moreover the founder of the filial generation and establishes a pattern to follow. He is expected to discipline his younger siblings and they, on the other hand, are expected to comply. He therefore deserves their respect. The second eldest is further expected to take the role of the eldest in the eldest’s absence, thereby also underlining that the eldest becomes an example to follow.

The eldest of the children is also described as the dearest of the parents and this gives added weight to the high value attached to the firstborn by the parents.

It has also become evident that Philo is rather flexible in his preferences for vocabulary, through his substitution of the biblical term “firstborn” with “the first born of man” or “the eldest brother or son (among the children).”

The mediating role between father and younger brothers is not found in Philo, and neither is his role as being the confidant of the father, a role closely related. His caring for younger brothers can be argued for based on how Philo describes Reuben’s efforts to save Joseph, but is not explicitly stated.

3.4.2 Firstborn Used Metaphorically

The most important term for eldest brother or son used metaphorically is πρωτόγονος. I notice furthermore that the relevance of the metaphorical use of the term πρωτότοκος is rather meek in Philo, but due to the importance of the term in the LXX and in the NT, I will discuss the two relevant texts I have found. The term is used in allegorical
expositions in some texts and hence not treated as social reality. These texts will be discussed as well.

3.4.2.1 The Term πρωτόγονος Used Metaphorically

Philo uses the term πρωτότοκος only twice in a metaphorical sense, while the term πρωτόγονος is used metaphorically in all of its six occurrences in Philo.

Philo calls Israel God’s firstborn. He argues that a name may have different shades of meaning (Post. 60). The example he uses is the name Hebron. “This Hebron, a treasure-house guarding personal monuments of knowledge and wisdom, is earlier than Zoan and all Egypt” (Post. 62). This is so because soul is older than body (Egypt) and virtue older than vice (Zoan). For “nature determines precedence not by length of time but by worth (ἀξιώματι)” (Post. 62). He continues: “Accordingly he calls Israel, though younger in age, his ‘firstborn’ son (πρωτότοκον υἱὸν) in dignity (ἀξιώματι)” (Post. 63). Playing on the etymology of Israel, he adds that it is:

**301** evident that he who sees God, the original Cause of being, is the recipient of honour, as earliest offspring (γέννημα πρώτιστον) of the Uncreated One, conceived by Virtue the object of the hatred of mortals, and as he to whom there is a law that a double portion, the right of the first-born (τὰ πρεσβεῖα), should be given as being the eldest (ὡς πρεσβυτάτῳ) (Post. 63).**303**

“Firstborn son” is used as a structural closed metaphor of Israel with “in dignity” given as point of comparison; it is thus regarding dignity that Israel is described as firstborn son. There are two additions to the biblical text: that Israel is younger in age, without specifying who is the older in age, and the point of comparison mentioned. The rights and honor ascribed to the firstborn as social reality are transferred to Israel as a people, here following the biblical text in calling Israel “firstborn,” although he differs in vocabulary. It is noteworthy that he admits that Israel is not the eldest according to age; as such, he is the younger, but employing the approach used elsewhere, he changes the
criterion from age to worth or dignity. This is a criterion in accordance with nature.\footnote{See also Ebr. 48.}

This occurrence in Philo also shows that for the present purpose it is legitimate to pursue the texts in Philo where he uses πρωτόγονος since he has used it as a substitute for πρωτότοκος in the biblical text. Basil Tsakonas notes that the term πρωτότοκος never appears as an appellation for Logos, but that Philo uses the term πρωτόγονος instead.\footnote{See Basil Tsakonas, “A Comparative Study of the Term ‘Son of God’ in St. Paul, the Old Testament, the Hellenistic World and in Philo,” Theologia 37 (1966): 99–121, here 115. A distinction seems to be made by Philo in QG 4.160 where he distinguishes between “first-born” and “first-begotten.” The first term (πρωτότοκος) is used by LXX while he prefers the second (πρωτόγονος). The first-born is “the offspring of female and material matter, for the female gives birth; but the first-begotten is a male and (the offspring) of a more responsible power, for it is the property of the male to beget.” The text, however, is not preserved in Greek, only in Armenian.} We find the very same term in Sir 36:11 where it is stated in a prayer that the Lord has called Israel his firstborn, in all probability a reference to Exod 4:22, also changing πρωτότοκος to πρωτόγονος.\footnote{The only other occurrence of πρωτόγονος in the LXX is in Mic 7:1 where it is used to describe figs as first-ripe.} Another text that makes the same connection is 4Q504 1–2 III, 5–6: “You have established us as your sons in the sight of all peoples. For you called Israel ‘my son, my first-born’ and have corrected us as one corrects a son.”\footnote{García Martínez and Tigchelaar, Dead Sea Scrolls, 2:1015. Greenspahn also notes Exod. Rab. 19:7 as a later text in this tradition that understands Exod 4:22 to mean that Jacob had been made the firstborn of God; see Greenspahn, When Brothers Dwell Together, 59.} Philo is explicit in ascribing honor to the firstborn, and he also gives the reason he should receive this honor: It is because he is the earliest or the very first offspring or progeny. This is strengthened by adding that the law of the double portion, which is to be given to the eldest, applies to him. Philo use the term ἀξίωμα also to denote the dignity of seniority (Post. 62), specifically of the seniority of Levi, the firstborn of Israel (Sacr. 119),\footnote{See page 161 below.} honors of high ancestry (Deus 150), and of a magistrate in a city (Leg. 3.191). This shows that what is highlighted by Philo in describing Israel as the firstborn is the elevated status associated with the firstborn and his special inheritance rights.

The notion of Israel as firstborn is also found in Fug. 207–208. Philo discusses the return of Hagar to her mistress and her humbling at her hands (Gen 16:9). The promise
of a son to her is dwelt upon; his name shall be Ishmael, meaning, “Hearkening to God.” However, “hearing takes the second place, yielding the first to sight, and sight is the portion of Israel, the son free-born and first-born (ὁ γνήσιος υἱὸς καὶ πρωτόγονος); for ‘seeing God’ is the translation of ‘Israel’” (Fug. 208). Philo, however, does not elaborate on the meaning of Israel.

The term “firstborn” is used as a structural open metaphor of Israel with no direct point of comparison given. Both firstborn and freeborn are metaphors used to describe Israel. Ishmael, the son of Hagar, stands in contrast to Israel, who is a descendant of the free woman Sarah through her son Isaac; therefore, Israel is freeborn. As freeborn and firstborn, his status is higher and his inheritance rights better. The name Israel occurs only here in this treatise. It is most likely that this text is alluding to Exod 4:22 as in Post. 63 discussed above. Freeborn and firstborn thus signal the elevated status of Israel.

We have previously seen that the eldest son establishes a pattern to follow, but the father may also establish a pattern to follow for the eldest son. In Conf. 60 Philo deals with Gen 11:2 and takes up the term “east” (ἀνατολή), which can also have the meaning of “rising.” In the soul, there are two kinds of rising, better or worse, connected with virtue and vice. An example of the better kind of rising is given in Conf. 62 where he quotes Zech 6:12: “Behold a man whose name is the rising.” This, he claims, is a strange title if it is meant for a being composed of soul and body.

But if you suppose that it is that Incorporeal one, who differs not a whit from the divine image, you will agree that the name of “rising” assigned to him quite truly describes him. For that man is the eldest son (πρεσβύτατον υἱόν), whom the Father of all raised up (ἀνέτειλε), and elsewhere calls him His first-born (πρωτόγονον), and indeed the Son thus begotten followed the ways of his Father, and shaped the different kinds, looking to the archetypal patterns which that Father supplied (Conf. 62–63).

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309 See section 3.4.1.4 above.
310 See BDAG, 74, s.v. ἀνατολή.
311 He differs from the text of LXX mainly by substituting ἄνθρωπος for ἄνήρ, but agrees on the keyword ἀνατολή.
312 ἀνέτειλε marks the link to the citation from Zech 6:12.
The term “firstborn” is used as a structural open metaphor of the man called “rising” with no point of comparison given. However, in the text where Philo explains who the man with the name “rising” is, he gives several descriptions of this man that complete his presentation of him. Otto Michel claims that Logos in *Conf.* 63 is the eldest son of God and cosmos the youngest. The Incorporeal one, thus likely identified as the Logos, is described as being without body, like the divine image. This makes the figure seem nonhuman. On the other hand, he is also called the “eldest son” and the term “firstborn” is given as a kind of explicative addition to “eldest son.” The fact that he also adds that he is the eldest son, speaks about the way he was begotten, and that he followed the ways of his father makes it sufficiently clear that here the terminology and imagery are taken from the family setting. This must also apply to the term “firstborn.” By following in the ways of his Father, who is God, he shaped or formed different things according to patterns supplied by the Father. The father thus offers a pattern that the eldest son follows. This must be understood as honorific and imply elevated status.

Related to the pattern that the father establishes for his firstborn is the characterization of the firstborn enabled with subordinate ruling power in an intermediate role. In *Conf.* 142 Philo cites Gen 11:5: “God came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men built.” The last phrase, “which the sons of men built,” is not merely obvious information for everyone, but contains hidden truth that is explained in the following in *Conf.* 144–149. Some ascribe a multitude of fathers to existing things and have many deities. They have pleasure as their aim and end of the soul, and are banished from God’s congregation (*Conf.* 144). There are others, though, who live in the knowledge of the One and that are rightly called “sons of God” (Deut 14:1; 32:18; and 32:6 offer scriptural attestation). These hold moral beauty to be the only good and this is a counterwork to overthrow pleasure as an end (*Conf.* 145). Philo states in *Conf.* 146: “But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to

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314 See *Leg.* 2.4 for a definition of the image of God.
315 Philo probably alludes to Exod 4:22 by adding “firstborn.” This is how the phrase “and elsewhere calls him” is taken, because the implied subject is God. See also *LSf*, 9th ed., 703, s.v. ἐτέρωθι.
take his place under God’s First-born, the Word (τὸν πρωτόγονον αὐτοῦ λόγον), who holds eldership among the angels (τὸν ἀγγέλων πρεσβύτατον), their ruler (ἀρχάγγελον) as it were.” He then continues in Conf. 146, assigning many names to him: “The Beginning,’ and the Name of God, and His Word,316 and the Man after His image,317 and ‘he that sees,’ that is Israel.” In Conf. 147, Philo reiterates in other words: “For if we have not yet become fit to be thought sons of God yet we may be sons of His invisible image, the most holy Word. For the Word is the eldest-born image of God (θεοῦ γὰρ εἰκὼν λόγος ὁ πρεσβύτατος).”318

The term “firstborn” is used as a structural open metaphor of the Word, Logos. Philo explains, however, that God’s firstborn, his Logos, is “the eldest of his angels, as the great archangel of many names.”319 It seems that for Philo the primary choice is to be called a Son of God, but if, for some reason, somebody is not worthy of that designation, then he is advised “to take his place under God’s First-born, the Word.”320 That is later explained as being sons of “his invisible image, the most holy Word.” God’s firstborn is again equated with the Word or Logos. He is not called His eldest son here, but he is the eldest of the angels.321

Most scholars comment on Philo’s use of Logos in this section with little or no interest in the title “firstborn.” Some of these comments nevertheless help in establishing the setting for the term “firstborn.” Quite personal features are attributed to Logos.322

316 In Somn. 1.230 he states that “Here it gives the title of “God” to His chief Word.” Philo distinguishes between “God” with and without article. Logos is “God” without article, and is accordingly not “God” in the real sense; see Siegert, “Der Logos,” 285; Charles A. Gieschen, Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence, AGJU 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 108.

317 See also Fug. 101, Leg. 1.43.

318 See also Fug. 110. In Somn. 1.239 Philo states that “some regard the image of God, His angel the Word, as His very self.”


320 It is also possible grammatically to understand this phrase so that πρωτόγονον is taken as qualifying His Word: under His firstborn Word, so Yonge in Philo, Works of Philo, 247.

321 Charles A. Gieschen notes that this is “very explicit angel nomenclature”; see Gieschen, Angelomorphic Christology, 111.

322 See Borgen, Philo, John and Paul, 77; Borgen, “Logos Was the True Light: Contributions,” 100. Borgen further states that there is a parallel between the heavenly figure in John (cf. John 6:46) and the idea of the heavenly Israel. He also notes that in John he is called the only Son (μονογενῆς John 1:14; 3:16,
The angels, subsumed under the category of powers, are ruled over by the Logos, and Logos, together with Wisdom or Sophia, “enjoys a position of primacy above all other beings, which is attested by the common titles (Leg. 1.43, 2.86).” According to Thomas H. Tobin, when Logos has a cosmological function (as it has when given the title “God’s firstborn”), Logos plays an intermediate role between the transcendent God and the rest of the universe. We thus find that Logos is described with quite personal features, and is, together with Wisdom, placed over the angels and rules over them, but in an intermediate role. This intermediate role is a role that Logos also has when Logos is given the title “firstborn.”

Two of the names that are given to the firstborn, “the Name of God” and “His Word,” show how close his connection is with God. He is furthermore called “the Beginning” and “the Man after His image.” This last name is further qualified when

18) and in Philo the firstborn son (πρωτόγονος Conf. 146). See Borgen, Philo, John and Paul, 177–79. Siegert notes that while Logos is hypostatized, Logos is not personal and cannot be associated with a person like Messiah. Siegert, “Der Logos,” 283.

323 See Richard N. Longenecker, “Some Distinctive Early Christological Motifs,” NTS 14.4 (1968): 526–45, here 531, doi:10.1017/S0028688500018804. See further the two other places where we find ἀρχάγγελος in Philo: Her. 205 where Logos is described as the Father’s “chief messenger, highest in age and honour”; he is further given the right “to stand on the border and separate the creature from the Creator” and “acts as ambassador of the ruler to the subject.” In Somn. 1.157 the archangel is almost equated with the Lord himself with a governing function like a charioteer.

324 Christina Termini, “Philo’s Thought Within the Context of Middle Judaism,” in The Cambridge Companion to Philo, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99–100. The titles are “beginning,” “image,” and “vision of God.”


326 It is not the only title that places Logos in an intermediate role, though. Tobin, ABD 4:351. Gieschen argues that in Pr. Jos. 1–3 where the term πρωτόγονος is also found and where it is stated “but I, Jacob, who men call Jacob but whose name is Israel am he who God called Israel which means, a man seeing God, because I am the firstborn of every living thing to whom God gives life,” the designation of Jacob, who is also Israel, an angel of God, has Philo’s use of πρωτόγονος as background rather than Exod 4:22. See also Ps 89:27; see Gieschen, Angelomorphic Christology, 140. He thus disagrees with J. Z. Smith who favors Exod 4:22 as background; see J. Z. Smith, “Prayer of Joseph: A New Translation with Introduction,” in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the “Old Testament” and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works, ed. James H. Charlesworth 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 2:699–714, here 713.

327 Gieschen notes that Philo attributes the following designations to one hypostasis, the Word, in Conf. 146: Word, Angel, Name, Man; see Gieschen, Angelomorphic Christology, 109–10.
Philo says, “the Word is the eldest-born image of God.”

Being the eldest image probably indicates closest resemblance and therefore highest honor. The names given him are also names of honor. The firstborn is furthermore described as holding “eldership among the angels,” which is explicated as being “their ruler as it were.” He is thus the eldest of the angels, their archangel. The archangel also holds an intermediate role with government entrusted him over his subjects. This role is given to the firstborn, subordinate to God but entrusted with the government of his subjects.

Philo mentions this subordinate role in another text as well. When speaking about the good thing of shepherding, he claims, based on Psalm 23:1, that shepherding is justly ascribed not only to kings and wise men or perfectly cleansed souls, but also to God the All-Sovereign (Agr. 50). The whole universe is likened with “some flock under the hand of God its King and Shepherd” (Agr. 51). He continues, saying: “This hallowed flock He leads in accordance with right and law, setting over it His true Word and Firstborn Son (πρωτόγονον υἱὸν) Who shall take upon Him its government like some viceroy (ὑπαρχός) of a great king” (Agr. 51). Philo’s argument is apparently based on Exod 23:20 where God says that he will send an angel or a messenger in front of Israel.

“Firstborn son” is here used as a structural closed metaphor where the reference is to God as King and Shepherd. The “Firstborn Son” is a shepherd given the task of shepherding the holy herd that he leads and governs, not with sovereign authority, but as a viceroy of a great king. This governing as a viceroy of a great king functions as a point of comparison. Hence, Philo assigns the shepherding, the leading of the flock, that is the governing of the world, to the messenger that he calls both “God’s Word” and

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328 πρεσβύτατος, here translated “eldest-born,” does not require “born” as part of its meaning. See also Leg. 3.218 where he quotes from Gen 18:11–12 that states according to Philo: “but my Lord (the divine Word) is greater, πρεσβύτερός ἐστιν.” See also Leg. 3.175, Det. 82, 118.

329 In Deus 31 Philo likens the sensible universe to the younger son of God, and the intelligible universe to the elder son, to whom God assigned the place of the firstborn; see Siegert, “Der Logos,” 281; Albert C. Geljon and David T. Runia, eds., Philo of Alexandria on Cultivation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary, PACS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 149.

330 See Geljon and Runia, Philo of Alexandria on Cultivation, 145–46, 149. They list the following references for God as a king: Cher. 29; Post. 101; Gig.45; Deus 159; Conf. 170; Congr. 116.

331 The text in Philo only differs slightly from LXX.
“Firstborn Son.” The equation between the two names should be noted. In using the name “the Word,” he signals that there is a close connection with God. The leading is moreover done in accordance with right and law. This could indicate a connection with Moses, through whom the law was given. Borgen notes that Logos reaches into the world through two main mediators, Moses and Aaron, who are both called Logos. An added argument in making a connection with Moses is that Philo explains that Moses as a shepherd received “his first lesson in command of others” (Mos. 1.60). He continues: “For the shepherd’s business is a training-ground and a preliminary exercise in kingship for one who is destined to command the herd of mankind” (Mos. 1.60). In Mut. 113–116 it seems that Philo takes Moses to be the Logos in a real sense, or as an expression of the Logos. In Migr. 23 he even calls Moses “the Law-giving Word.” The task assigned to him is further likened to the governing of a viceroy on behalf of a king. This shows that he holds a high position, but not a position with ultimate authority. He acts with authority assigned him by the king. This is the relation between God and His Word, the firstborn son, who thus is given high status and honor; he is God’s agent, second in command, enabled with subordinate ruling power. The quotation from Exod 23:20 confirms this.

332 In Somn. 1.229–230 the Word is called “a second god”; see Borgen, “Philo of Alexandria,” 273. See also QG 2.62 where the phrase in the Greek fragment is “πρὸς τὸν δεύτερον θεόν, ὁ ἐστιν ἴκεινος λόγος.” Siegert argues that Logos is here presented as mediator of creation; see Siegert, “Der Logos,” 282. David T. states, however, “that Philo generally refrains from describing the Logos as a ‘second God’ (exception at QG 2.62)”; see David T. Runia, “Logos,” DDD 528. See also Geljon and Runia, Philo of Alexandria on Cultivation, 146.

333 For concise overviews of the main characteristics of the divine Logos, see Runia, DDD 528; Tobin, ABD 4:350–51.

334 Geljon and Runia only note that we find this expression in Opif. 46 and Spec. 1.14; see Geljon and Runia, Philo of Alexandria on Cultivation, 149.

335 See Borgen, “Philo of Alexandria,” 273.

336 Philo adds in Mos. 1. 61 that “kings are called ‘shepherds of their people.’”


338 An angel as deputy or governor of the king is also found in Mos. 1.166. God’s Logos is called a governor in Somn. 1.240–241. See Geljon and Runia, Philo of Alexandria on Cultivation, 150.

339 See also Opif. 148 about the first man “whom God formed with great care and thought worthy of the second rank in the creation, making him his own viceroy and the ruler of all other creatures.”
Philo states in *Somn.* 1.215 that there are two temples of God. He comments on one of them, the universe, “in which there is also as High Priest His First-born, the divine Word (ἀρχιερεύς ὁ πρωτόγονος αὐτοῦ θεὸς λόγος), and the other rational soul, whose Priest is the real Man; the outward and visible image of whom is he who offers the prayers and sacrifices handed down from our fathers” (*Somn.* 1.215).

The term “firstborn” is again used as a structural open metaphor of his divine word, Logos. Again, God’s firstborn is equated with the divine Word; here, however, “firstborn” stands as apposition to high priest. Also in *Fug.* 108 Logos is described as high priest, clearly an honorific office. Hence, firstborn again occurs in connection with terms that imply elevated status and high honor. The use of the term “firstborn” in connection with both high priest and Logos is striking.  

3.4.2.2 The Term πρωτότοκος Used Metaphorically

As noted above, I have found only two occurrences where the term πρωτότοκος is clearly used metaphorically. The first occurs in *Sacr.* 126. Philo has been giving short homilies on Exod 13:11–13 in *Sacr.* 90–117. The term “redeemed” discussed there leads Philo to a new line of thought by asking what is meant when it is stated in Num 3:12, 13 that the Levites were a ransom or redemption for the firstborn (*Sacr.* 118). He states: “It is Reason, who has taken refuge with God and become His suppliant, that is here given the name of Levite. This Reason God took from the midmost and most sovereign part of the soul, that is He drew it and allotted it to Himself and adjudged to it the portion of the eldest son” (*Sacr.* 119).

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340 Geljon and Runia, *Philo of Alexandria on Cultivation*, 149 commenting on Agr. 51, note the striking parallel with Heb 1:6 where “Christ, God’s Logos, is also called first-born (πρωτότοκος, 1:6).” They also note that “both Philo and the author of Hebrews see in Logos a great high priest (Heb 4:14; *Somn.* 1.219, see also *Leg.* 3.82).” See also Siegert, “Philo and the New Testament,” in Kamesar, *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, 182.

341 He quotes most of the two verses, only omitting the last phrase of verse 13: “both human and animal; they shall be mine. I am the Lord.”

342 The Greek term used is προσκληρέω. According to BDAG, 881, s.v. προσκληρέω, it means to be attached to someone, join someone. In *Legat.* 3 Philo uses it to describe that God has taken the people of Israel for his portion. See also *Legat.* 68, *Sacr.* 6.

343 That reason is allotted to God indicates a close connection. In *Leg.* 2.6 he says that the princely part of the soul is older than the soul as a whole, and the irrational portion younger.
By allotting the portion of the eldest son to Reason, Reason is equated with the firstborn. Philo knows that Reuben is the firstborn of Jacob, but Levi is the firstborn (πρωτότοκος) of Israel. Again, the distinguishing criterion is that Reuben “has the precedence in years, the latter [Levi] in honour and value” (Sacr. 119). There is thus a similarity in that as “Jacob appears as inheritor of the birthright of Esau, … so too Reuben the man of natural gifts must yield the rights of the elder to Levi, whose life is one of perfect virtue” (Sacr. 120). Levite is the name given to Reason that is further given the portion of the eldest son that belongs to the firstborn. Again, Philo connects honor and value with virtue using the right of the firstborn as a biblical source in his exposition.

Philo further wants to show that “every wise man is a ransom for the fool” (Sacr. 121). He elaborates on this and states that it is seen in the community or a city where the wise or good men become protectors of safety (Sacr. 121–125). It also applies to the individual that is composed of body and soul, where reason is the force that ensures stability through wisdom and knowledge, “which the lawgiver in his parable (μεταφορά) calls on grounds already stated ‘ransom’ and ‘firstborn’ (λύτρα καὶ πρωτότοκος)” (Sacr. 126).

“Firstborn” is used in Sacr. 126 as an open structural metaphor. It is paired, however, with another metaphor, ransom. They are metaphors for wisdom and knowledge, qualities of the reasoning powers. The “grounds already stated” are those given by Sacr. 118 mentioned above. In his allegorical exposition, “ransom” and “firstborn” are terms that are used metaphorically for wisdom and knowledge, which are both qualities of the reasoning powers, hence Reason, which is the name given to Levi. Perfect virtue, honor, and value are therefore what are highlighted from the source domain, thereby indicating special status.

344 See the same connection between λόγος and πρωτόγονος in Agr. 51, Conf. 146, Somn. 1.215; see also page 154 above.

345 C. D. Yonge translates “which the legislator, using metaphorical language (μεταφορά), calls the ransom and the first-born”; see Philo, Works of Philo, 109.

346 For ransom used metaphorically, see also Her. 124.
The second occurrence we find in Somn. 1.202. The topic is the dream of Jacob (Gen 31:11–13); Philo now turns to the essence of the dream where the rams and he goats stand for two ways of thinking that impregnate well-disposed souls (Somn. 1.197–200). He ends by citing from Gen 31:10 about the color of the sheep of Jacob. Each color of the sheep stands for a specific meaning of birth. He first clarifies the meaning of “thoroughly-white,” which is “the brightest and most conspicuous,” “often applied to what is great” (Somn. 1.201). He continues: “His wish then is that the firstborn (τὰ πρωτότοκα) progeny of the soul which has received the holy seed should be ‘thoroughly-white,’ resembling not a dim light, but a brilliant shining” (Somn. 1.202).

“Firstborn progeny” is a structural open metaphor with no point of comparison given. This progeny of the soul, characterized as the firstborn progeny or offspring impregnated with the holy seed, which is a particular way of thinking, should be the brightest and most conspicuous, great, and brilliant shining. It thus again highlights special status.

3.4.2.3 The Terms “Firstborn” and “Birthright” Used in Allegorical Expositions

In some references, Philo does not use the terms “firstborn” and “birthright” (πρωτότοκος and πρωτότοκια) in a metaphorical sense, but rather in allegorical expositions.347 As has been noted above, in several places Philo explains the difference between vice and virtue and gives several examples of vice and virtue based on the biblical account. Some of the people standing for virtue are nevertheless not necessarily those that are the eldest according to age. He therefore has to change the criteria for why they are the bearers of virtue. According to age, the elder representing vice is the senior, but according to value, virtue is the elder. Notice that when virtue is the elder, the seniority argument is still valid; what counts as elder is changed, however. These texts do not add much information about the status and role of the eldest brother or son, but they underline the

value of the seniority principle of Philo. We see this exemplified in three pairs of brothers, the son of the hated wife and the son of the beloved, Abel and Cain, and Jacob and Esau.

In *Leg.* 2.44–48 Philo comments on Gen 2:23. He distinguishes between two kinds of perceptions, as quiescent condition and as activity. To point out the difference between these two kinds of perception he illustrates with the story about Rachel and Leah with short citations from Gen 30:1, 2, 31. In this connection, he says in *Leg.* 2.47: “The opening of the womb is man’s proper function. But mortal kind is prone of itself to hate virtue, and accordingly God has bestowed honour upon it and vouchsafes to her that is hated to bear the first-born (τὰ πρωτότοκια).” He thereafter quotes Deut 21:15, 16 in support of this and concludes in *Leg.* 2.48: “For first of all and most perfect of all are the offspring of the hated virtue, while the offspring of the well-loved pleasure are last of all.”

From this section, it is apparent that being granted the birthright is the sign of virtue (ἀρετή), here exemplified by Leah, the hated one, while the offspring of the beloved woman, Rachel, stands for pleasure (ἡδονή). Mortal man hates virtue, so the hated wife is the example of virtue. That this is so is seen in the fact that she bears the firstborn, which is taken as a sign of honor. This understanding is possible only if there is a correspondence with honor in real life for bearing a firstborn, which according to Philo is supported by the citation from Deut 21:15–16.

The same argument, now about Jacob and Esau, we find again in *Leg.* 3.191. Jacob, the younger according to age, stands for virtue and the good mind while Esau stands for pleasure and bodily things. Jacob fought against passion and wickedness. In the end, passion had to give in because Jacob got the birthright and the blessing from Esau; this is supported by a quote from Gen 27:36. The way Philo makes sense of this is seen in his comment in *Leg.* 3.191:

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348 See also *Her.* 49.
349 See also *Prob.* 57; *QG* 4.157.
350 The uttering “my birthright and my blessing” is important because it betrays the true servile character of Esau; see *Leg.* 3.192, 3.195. See Walter T. Wilson who states “Jacob’s acquisition of his brother’s birthright (πρωτότοκια) is likened to the victory of the sage over passion (*Leg.* 3.190–191) or of
The bad man regards bodily things as more worshipful, the good man the things of the soul, as they are in reality, not in age but in value and dignity (δυνάμει καὶ ἄξιώματι) more worshipful, and really first, as is a magistrate in a city; and it is the soul that is sovereign over our composite being.

In the matter of birthright, the one who is the firstborn is the one who is first in value and dignity, not age. Philo makes a comment on the difference between Esau and Jacob in Vīrt. 208 where he states that the younger was obedient to both his parents and won the favor of God, but Esau, the elder, was disobedient.

This shows that holding the claim of the birthright is important for Philo. The argument of Philo is not understandable unless it is assumed that he acknowledged the priority of the firstborn son in the family. This is even more so since he goes to great lengths to justify why Jacob as the holder of virtue is the “real” firstborn. The way he accomplishes this is, as noted above, by changing the criterion for claiming the rights of the firstborn from priority in time to priority in value and dignity.

In Sacr. 11–19 Philo asks why Abel is mentioned before Cain when speaking about their occupations, even though Cain was older than Abel: “For the probability was that the elder proceeded to his husbandry first, and the younger at a later time to his charge of the flock” (Sacr. 11). The truth inherent in this is given in Sacr. 14 where he says that: “In point of time vice is senior to virtue, but that in point of value and honour the reverse is the case.” And therefore when the birth of each is brought before us, Cain may have the precedence. When we make a comparison of the occupations of the two, Abel should take the lead.” To this understanding of the text, Philo adds another biblical argument, using the case of Esau and Jacob again. Esau, named after his folly, is acknowledged for his precedence in age, but Jacob, named after his discipline and practice of things excellent, is awarded the prize of precedence. This award was granted him when Esau

‘labor striving for the good ... over the craving that pursues evil’ (Sacr. 120, see also 17–18, 42, 81, 135; Leg. 2.89); see Wilson, Philo of Alexandria on Virtues, 402.

351 Or virtue, ἄρετή. See also Leg. 3.192.

352 Filial piety thus seems to be a sign of virtue for Philo. See also Spec. 2.234–239.

353 δυνάμει δὲ καὶ ἄξιώματι. See also Leg. 3.191 above.
sold his birthright (τα πρωτοτόκια) to Jacob, according to Gen 25:33 (Sacr. 18).\(^{354}\) After this, Philo adds still another biblical argument when he again quotes from Deut 21:15–17 and concludes in Sacr. 20: “Mark well then, my soul, and understand who is she that is hated, and who is her son, and thou wilt straightway perceive that to this last alone and to none other belong the honours of the elder (καθήκει τὰ πρεσβεία).” This echoes the last part of Deut 21:17 that Philo quoted above in Sacr. 19: καθήκει τὰ πρωτοτόκια.\(^{355}\)

In Sacr. 134, Philo cites Num 3:13 and comments that the firstborn in Israel did not become holy only at the time the firstborn in Egypt were smitten. That hallowing may be repeated forever in the soul. On this, he comments: “When the most dominant elements of blind passion are destroyed then comes the sanctification of the elder and precious offspring (πρεσβύτερα καὶ τίμια ἐκγονα) of Israel who has the clear vision of God” (Sacr. 134). Again, he returns to discussing Esau and Jacob as examples of vice and virtue. Philo calls the firstborn the elder and precious offspring. In this context, none others are sanctified, so there is no argument about precedence in time versus honor and value. Philo focuses on what is of significance in the designation firstborn, that is elder and precious, which again is a characteristic of virtue.

In De Sobrietate Philo concludes the discussion of Gen 9:20–27. In its course, he discusses briefly the meaning of “becoming sober” and the meaning of the “younger son,” triggered by the phrase in Gen 9:24: “And Noah returned to soberness from the wine and knew what his younger son had done to him” (Sobr. 1). According to Philo, younger means morally inferior and he gives several examples. He thus states in Sobr. 16 that the name “elder” does not apply to “one who is bowed down with old age, but to one who is worthy of precedence and honor.”\(^{356}\) In Sobr. 21–26 he once again discusses Deut 21:15–17, which he quotes in full. He notes that the son of the beloved wife is never

\(^{354}\)See also QG 4.173 where the birthright of Esau, which he desisted from, is the one that leads to virtue and happiness. He had another birthright, though, and the keyword for this understanding in the reading of Procopius is ταύτα in the phrase ἵνα τί μοι ταύτα τὰ πρωτοτόκια in Gen 25:32: that birthright leads to pleasure, lust, licentiousness, stealing and the like.

\(^{355}\)It is interesting that when he uses his own words he uses another term than LXX. It is therefore likely that τα πρεσβεία and τα πρωτοτόκια can be taken as synonyms in this setting.

\(^{356}\)The terms used are γέρας and τιμή. See also LSJ, 9th ed., 345, s.v. γέρας; 1793–94, s.v. τιμή.
called “firstborn” or “elder,” but this is the case for the son of the hated wife. Despite this, Philo maintains that because the son of the beloved wife is mentioned first, he is the older in age (Sobr. 22).\(^{357}\) This does not help him since: “Though his years be more, [he] is counted as younger in the judgement of right reason, while the child of the wife mentioned afterwards, though he be later in the date of his birth, is held worthy of the greater and senior portion (τῆς μείζονος καὶ πρεσβυτέρας μοίρας ἥξιωται)” (Sobr. 22–23). The reason for this Philo gives in Sobr. 23: “We declare that in the beloved wife we have a figure of pleasure and in the hated wife a figure of prudence.” The two opposites, pleasure and virtue, come to the fore, and age is not the real criterion for being called “the elder” because the virtue-lover “ranks as elder in the senate of prudence” (Sobr. 25). He continues stating: “He is ‘the beginning of his children,’ (ἀρχὴ τέκνων) and truly so, because he is first in rank and precedence\(^{358}\)—and again ‘to him belong the rights of the firstborn (τὰ πρωτοτόκια),’ by the law of nature,\(^{359}\) not by any law which prevails among men” (Sobr. 25). In Sobr. 26 he once more returns to Esau and Jacob, claiming that “Moses shews us Jacob as younger in years than Esau, but older in worth and value.” This is because “desire for moral excellence is a later birth, and therefore Esau is forced to surrender the inheritance of the firstborn to the rightful claims of Jacob.” There is no question about the legitimacy of Jacob in obtaining the privilege of the firstborn.

Philo focuses on another description of the firstborn, now as the beginning of the children. This naturally implies further children or the expectancy of further children at the least. Two other expressions are found that apply to the firstborn: His position is first and he is first in authority. This coheres with the rights of the firstborn, which are not

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\(^{357}\) The argument is that the order in which motherhood is mentioned determines the age in the literal sense; see Philo, Philo, III, 454–55 note b.

\(^{358}\) The terms used are τάξις and ἡγεμονία, which also might be translated as “position” and “authority”; see LSJ, 9th ed., 1756, s.v. τάξις; 762, s.v. ἡγεμονία.

\(^{359}\) See also Ebr. 48. In the appendix, an effort is given in explaining an obscure thought: “Perhaps it is something as follows. The dealings of God (here identified with nature) are timeless and therefore the ‘Practiser’ will neglect time-order and look to order in value and this desire to pass from the lower to the higher (νεώτερος and πρεσβύτερος passing as often from the sense of precedence in time to that of precedence in value)”; see Philo, Philo, III, 501.
expressed, but by which is meant the double portion of the inheritance. Again, virtue is
categorized using descriptions of the firstborn that focus on elevated status.

We find that in the allegorical expositions Abel, Jacob, and the son of the hated are
recognized as the true firstborns of value and honor, which are firstborns of virtue, even
though they are not firstborns according to time. The preeminent status of the
firstborn is recognized, and the criterion for claiming the title of firstborn is again
changed from precedence of time to precedence in repute and honor and good name.
We thus find the same pattern in the use of the terms πρωτότοκος and πρωτοτόκια in the
allegorical expositions as in the metaphorical use of πρωτότοκος: The focus is on elevated
status and not on the role of the firstborn in relation to siblings.

3.4.2.4 Conclusion
The term πρωτόγονος is used as a metaphor in all of its occurrences. This term is also the
one used by Philo that contributes most to the understanding of the eldest brother or
son. Compared with the metaphorical use of πρωτότοκος in the HB/LXX, Philo’s use of
πρωτόγονος is closer than when he uses the term πρωτότοκος. The characteristics of the
firstborn include his elevated and honorific status, his special inheritance rights, his
following a pattern established by his father, his intermediate role when entrusted with
governing his subjects, and being God’s agent. Philo uses the term πρωτόγονος twice
about Israel, three times about Logos, the last of these also about the King and Shepherd
and once about the man called “Rising.” He thus uses πρωτόγονος closely to how
πρωτότοκος is used as a metaphor in the LXX. His description of Logos and of the High
Priest is also closely related. While Philo does not offer much data relating the metaphor
to the family setting, his use reflects his description of the eldest brother or son as a
social reality. Nearly all the characteristics of the firstborn used as a metaphor are known
from the description of him as a social reality. The only slightly new characteristic is his

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360 Philo claims that the son of the hated is not a firstborn according to time in Sobr. 22.
361 Sacr. 16.
362 Siegert, referring to the references discussed above, argues that the author to the Hebrews adapts
πρωτότοκος to echo the synonymous πρωτόγονος in Philo; see Siegert, “Philo and the New Testament,” 181.
description of the father as the one that establishes a pattern to follow instead of the eldest brother.

We have also seen that he uses the term πρωτότοκος as a metaphor in only two occurrences where it merely confirms the importance of special status and honor. It is therefore not an important metaphorical term in Philo. In terms of its content as a metaphor, it is used once for wisdom and knowledge, terms related to the divine Word, Logos, and once for a particular way of thinking.

Within the allegorical expositions, Philo discusses vice and virtue in several places where the terms “firstborn” and “birthright” occur. He keeps the seniority principle and the special birthright of the firstborn. Philo changes, however, his criteria for what counts as the elder because several younger brothers are representatives of virtue and elder brothers representatives of vice. This does not cancel his preference for the eldest brother but shows his way of keeping his arguments while still adhering to the preference of the eldest.

3.5 Eldest Brother in the Works of Josephus

Josephus363 lived from AD 37 to around AD 100. He was a first-century Jewish politician, soldier, and historian. Josephus came from a priestly family and received a good education in Jerusalem. He served as a general in the Jewish forces in Galilee in the revolt against Rome, was captured, became a Roman citizen, and moved to Rome. While he was in Rome from around AD 70 until his death, he wrote his extant books. The first, Bellum judaicarum, is about the Jewish war. In the second, Antiquitates judaicae, Josephus retells Jewish history from creation to the Jewish war. He later wrote Vita, an autobiography, and Contra Apionem, an apologetic defense of Judaism.364

363 The English translation given in the text below for the works of Josephus is, unless otherwise noted, taken from Flavius Josephus, Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 1999–2008).

In this section, I will elucidate what Josephus has to say about the status and role of the eldest brother, with a special focus on the vocabulary he uses when he deals with the texts that comment on the eldest brother in the Bible.365

To find the most relevant passages in the works of Josephus that deal with the eldest brother, I have searched in the TLG database for texts dealing with sibling relations and where the status and role of the eldest brother as social reality are discernible. The majority of the texts found are from *Antiquitates judaicae*. This has the consequence that this inquiry will deal mainly with *Antiquitates judaicae* and will be supplemented with passages from his other works.

In *Antiquitates judaicae* certain conventions of contemporary historiography seem to be reflected, and Josephus uses the style of rhetorical historiography. A comparison with Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ work *Antiquitates romanae* shows that Josephus may have shaped his work after it and consequently relied upon it.366 This historiographical orientation suggested to him certain motives and points of emphasis that Josephus applies in retelling Scripture. Maren R. Niehoff has examined his narrative technique and finds that he presents “a carefully scanned narrative which is in a way meant to replace the biblical text.”367 He determines what is proper by subjective choice, and consequently what to omit if it disturbs his overall agenda. He also often adds Hellenizing elements

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365 See also footnote 138 above.
367 Niehoff, “Two Examples of Josephus’ Narrative Technique,” 32.
from the surrounding culture. This, among other things, shows that his work can be included in the genre “Rewritten Bible.” Niehoff says that he:

Structures his selected material with a clear view to guiding the reader’s understanding of the biblical issues and determining his or her conclusions. Josephus furthermore achieves a firm control over both the text and the reader by inserting authorial remarks, which anticipate the readers’ queries and inculcate the ‘correct’ attitude.

Josephus states at the beginning that he believes that the whole Greek-speaking world will find his work worthy of attention, thereby making explicit his primary audience: a Greek-speaking gentile audience to whom he wishes to mediate Jewish culture (A.J. 1.5). He further states that he translates from the Hebrew records, thereby making it necessary for me to compare with the Hebrew Bible too.

_Antiquitates judaicae_ was probably published in Rome in AD 93–94. Josephus’ work is of special interest because it was published in Rome for a gentile audience about three decades after Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans. Both Josephus and Paul were Jews by birth and both wrote in Greek. It is therefore very likely that they were aware of many of the same cultural kinship values. With this general perspective kept in mind the relevant passages in _Antiquitates judaicae_ will be examined.

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368 Niehoff, “Two Examples of Josephus’ Narrative Technique,” 32. See also Feldman who argues that the description of Abraham by Josephus emerges as the prototype of the platonic philosopher-king and the Stoic sage. The features that link him with this description are the hero’s genealogy, his qualities as an ideal statesman, his ability to persuade, his ability as a general, his qualities as a good host, and his erotic appeal. Compared with the biblical text, Josephus diminishes the role of God and of miracles; see Feldman, “Hellenizations in Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities,” 150.

369 Alexander makes an effort toward a definition of the genre; see Alexander, “Retelling the Old Testament,” in Carson and Williamson, _It Is Written_, 116–18.

370 Niehoff, “Two Examples of Josephus’ Narrative Technique,” 32.


372 This is disputed though; according to Thackeray in a footnote to A.J. 1.5, Josephus is largely dependent on the Alexandrian Greek Bible for the later historical books, which he merely paraphrases, although to a lesser degree for the Pentateuch; see Josephus, trans. Henry S. J. Thackeray et al., 10 vols., LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926–1965), 4:4–5. See also Alexander, “Retelling the Old Testament,” 112–13; Feldman, _ABD_ 3:987.

The most interesting passages in Josephus from the present point of view deal mainly with πρεσβύτερος/πρεσβύτατος used about son(s) or brother(s). The fact that this term occurs so often in Antiquitates judaicae suggests it requires further investigation.374 The passages where Josephus deviates from the biblical text when he retells the history of the Jewish people are of special interest because they allow me to compare his presentation with the biblical account where it is applicable. Where he differs, it is likely that contemporary values and attitudes as reflected by Josephus are most evident.

It is moreover significant that in the chapters in Antiquitates judaicae that recapitulate the history covered in the HB/LXX, Josephus uses πρωτότοκος only three times and the term occurs only in Antiquitates judaicae. In comparison, it occurs 125 times in the LXX in the books also found in the MT. A comparison between those passages in the LXX and the MT where πρωτότοκος/בְּכֹר is used and Antiquitates judaicae shows that Josephus, in addition to the three occurrences of πρωτότοκος, uses πρεσβύτερος (four times), πρεσβύτατος (five times), and πρῶτος παῖς (once).375 The material from Josephus will be presented under the following headings based on the interest in the eldest brother in these passages: 1) Explicit about who is the eldest son or brother, 2) The eldest is expected to succeed, 3) Spokesman, representative, and responsible eldest brother, 4) Rights and statuses connected with being elder brothers, and 5) Characteristics where πρωτότοκος is used in the works of Josephus.

3.5.1 Explicit About Who Is the Eldest Son or Brother

One characteristic of Josephus is that he in several instances is explicit about who is the eldest son or brother where the LXX/MT is not. He shows thereby a clear interest in

374 Not all the 140 hits for πρεσβύτερος refer to an elder son or brother; only the relevant passages are discussed here.
specifying status differences between brothers. Thus in *A.J.* 1.62, where Josephus talks about the descendants of Cain (cf. Gen 4:17), he says Cain called the city Anocha “from his eldest son, Anochos.” Interestingly, neither the LXX nor the MT in Gen 4:17 mentions specifically that Anoch was the eldest son, they simply state that he was Cain’s son. It is very likely, however, that the child mentioned first in lists in the HB/LXX is the eldest. Josephus chose to be explicit about it, but he does not add any further information about Anochos as the eldest son.

We find the same interest from Josephus in the incident where he says that Reuben brought some apples of the mandrake to his mother (*A.J.* 1.307). Josephus mentions that Reuben is the eldest of Leah’s sons (πρεσβυτάτου τῶν υἱῶν Λείας), a fact that is not reported in the parallel biblical narrative (cf. Gen 30:14). It is also stated again by Josephus that he was the eldest of the brothers when Reuben later tried to save Joseph (*A.J.* 2.21). It is not mentioned in the biblical parallel there either (cf. Gen 37:21). Josephus is again specific, now about Reuben being an eldest son and brother.

Josephus also adds this status of being the eldest in *A.J.* 6.158 where Jesse’s son is introduced as his eldest son (τὸν πρεσβύτατον τῶν υἱῶν). Josephus omits his name while the biblical account on the other hand only mentions his name Eliab (1 Sam 16:6). This is reiterated later in *A.J.* 6.161 and 162 where Josephus explicitly mentions Taliab as the eldest of Jesse’s sons. Again, in the biblical narrative nothing is specifically said

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376 The translation of personal names of biblical persons follows the spelling in NRSV except in quotations from others.

377 See also Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.3.5, 9.1.6, 13.4.2, 13.4.9, 14.2.17 where Strabo shows a similar interest in mentioning the status of being the elder/eldest.

378 Josephus has said previously (*A.J.* 1.304) that Reuben was the child born to Leah. It is worth noting that in the speech given by Reuben in *A.J.* 2.21–31 that covers eleven paragraphs compared to two verses in the Bible (Gen 37:21–22), he says in 2.27–28 that “they would enjoy sharing equally in participation with him, since they are not aliens but kinsmen. For they should regard as their own whatever things God will give to Iosepos.” These “things” might be understood as acquired through labor and not inherited. See also m. B. Bat. 8:7: “[If] he left adult and minor sons, the adults may not take care of themselves [from the estate] at the expense of the minor sons, nor may the minor sons support themselves [out of the estate] at the expense of the adult sons. But they divide the estate equally;” cited from Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, trans. Jacob Neusner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 576.

379 See also *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 59:2.

380 According to Feldman, the codices RO read “Taliab,” adopted by Niese, while the codices MSP read “Eliab,” adopted by Marcus and Schalit; see Flavius Josephus, *Flavius Josephus: Judean Antiquities Books*
about being the eldest; the only one for whom status is mentioned is David, the youngest (cf. 1 Sam 16:11). That David was the youngest is not mentioned, however, by Josephus in this context. Josephus also lists all of Jesse’s sons using numerical counting from the eldest to the youngest of the sons (A.J. 6.161); the eldest son is again ὁ πρεσβύτερος.382

In A.J. 10.23 Josephus also adds to the biblical account (2 Kgs 19:37), allegedly quoting Berosus, that Adrammelech and Sharezer, who killed their king and father, Sennacherib, were his elder sons (τῶν πρεσβυτέρων παιδών). It is uncertain from what sources he obtained this information, but this question and the historicity of this information are not important here; it is more interesting to note that Josephus finds this kind of information so interesting that he includes it in his writing.383 These two elder sons of Sennacherib were later expelled from their country and were consequently not given access to rule.384

In the references above, Josephus has supplied information about the eldest brother or son not found in the biblical parallels. He has used the term πρεσβύτερος for the eldest in all instances. In some other references, he retells the biblical account without adding information. He nevertheless changes the term found in the biblical account in LXX from πρωτότοκος to πρεσβύτερος. We find this change in vocabulary from LXX when specifying the status of being the eldest in several places. In A.J. 2.92, Josephus uses the word pair πρεσβύτερος-νεώτερος to describe the status relation between the two brothers Manasseh and Ephraim while in the biblical narrative πρωτότοκος/בְּּכוֹר is used instead of πρεσβύτερος, and δεύτερος/שֵׁנ י is used instead of νεώτερος (Gen 41:51–52, LXX/MT, respectively). When Josephus uses πρεσβύτατος υἱός, we should expect the existence of


381 The relative status of the three eldest is given in 1 Sam 17:13; 1 Chr 2:13.

382 See also A.J. 7.21 in footnote 385 below.


384 In A.J. 10.82, Josephus says that Jehoiakim was the elder brother of Jehoahaz by the same mother. This information he must infer from 2 Kgs 23:31, 36. See Josephus, Judean Antiquities Book 8–10, 232–33. Josephus is also explicit that Hyrcanus was the eldest of his three sons, Vita 5.
more than one son. This is clearly the case in all the references above except for *A.J.* 1.62 where the text in both the MT and the LXX (Gen 4:17) is silent about other sons. Perhaps this change in vocabulary can partly explain why there are so few references where πρωτότοκος is used in Josephus’ works; he simply prefers πρεσβύτερος instead.\(^{385}\)

### 3.5.2 The Eldest Is Expected to Succeed

We find the right to succeed for the eldest of several brothers both in the retelling of the biblical text and in other stories by Josephus. In *A.J.* 1.215–219 Josephus retells the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael after the birth of Isaac (cf. Gen 21:8–21). It is illuminating to see that at first (*A.J.* 1.215) he emphasizes that Sarah cherished Ishmael: “Showing no less affection than if it were her own son, for he was being nurtured for the succession to the rule.” It was after the birth of her own child that her attitude changed toward “Ishmael, who was older (τὸν Ἰσμάχηλον ὄντα πρεσβύτερον) and was able to cause him harm after his father had died.” The point of reference for Ishmael as the older is Isaac, and therefore the most natural reading of the text underlines that he was the older brother.\(^{386}\) The Greek text has αὐτοῖς, here translated “him,” but “them” would be a more literal translation. Thus, both the younger brother, Isaac, and his mother would be in danger after Abraham, the head of the household, was dead, since the new head of the household would be Ishmael, who had been “nurtured for the succession to the rule.” In

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\(^{385}\) See also *A.J.* 4.249–250 and Deut 21:15–17; Josephus uses the word pair πρεσβύτερος-νεώτερος where LXX/MT has πρωτότοκος/βen and ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἡγαμημονίας/βεναχαίματα; see also *A.J.* 6.32 and 1 Sam 8:2; *A.J.* 7.21 and 2 Sam 3:2. Josephus deviates in the last two instances from his use of νεώτερος by following LXX in using δεύτερος, but this is probably because he continues to count more brothers; see also *A.J.* 12.235. He also varies his preferences in vocabulary, thus in *A.J.* 5.31 he uses πρώτος παῖς for πρωτότοκος/βen in LXX/MT. Again, in *A.J.* 3.209 Josephus is more specific about social status than the biblical account in Lev 10:1 when he talks about Aaron’s sons “for he had four sons, as I have stated previously. [cf. *A.J.* 3.192] The two older ones (δύο οἱ πρεσβύτεροι), Nabad and Abihu ... were burnt to death.” Is Josephus trying to make the incident more aggravating by mentioning the fact that they were Aaron’s two eldest sons? The biblical account in Lev 10:1 only mentions the names of Aaron’s two sons; to find their social status among the sons of Aaron one has to consult Num 3:2, where the eldest is again described as the firstborn πρωτότοκος/βen. The same is the case in *A.J.* 7.163 and 2 Sam 13:1 where Josephus adds to the biblical account that Amnon was the eldest son of David. In *A.J.* 9.45, he follows 2 Chr 21:3 in specifying status, but he uses πρεσβύτατος while LXX/MT has πρωτότοκος/βен.

\(^{386}\) Thackeray translates “who was the elder child,” but the Greek text does not add a term for “child”; see *A.J.* 1.215 (Thackeray, LCL).
that case, his mother Hagar would acquire a better position than Sarah would.\(^{387}\) Her advice to Abraham was, therefore, to secure the future for both Isaac and herself according to how Josephus retells this story from the HB/LXX. Even though it is explicitly said that Ishmael was born of Sarah’s servant Hagar, Josephus does not question his succession to rule. The crucial point is who the father’s firstborn was. The fact that Hagar was a servant, noted also by Josephus, is not brought in as a complicating fact in this context.\(^{388}\) In Gen 21:10 the argument that Ishmael was older than Isaac is not used, although it is given by the broader context. The reason used by Sarah, according to the biblical text, is that the son of the slave woman shall not inherit together with her son, that is, become a joint heir with Isaac. The question about training for the role as a leader that Josephus mentions specifically is not explicitly mentioned in the biblical text. It is also possible that the distinction between the sons of a legal wife and a slave woman bearing a child on behalf of the legal wife that is reflected in the biblical account is not considered relevant for Josephus. The power held by the eldest brother as trained for succession to rule is nevertheless clearly seen in Josephus’ retelling. This also affects the position of the mother of the eldest son.

We also find this expectation of the eldest to succeed in the story about David’s successors in *A.J.* 8.1–12 where Bathsheba asks Solomon to allow his brother Adonijah to marry Abishag (cf. 1 Kgs 2: 13–25). Josephus is not explicit about the status of Abishag in relation to David, but adds to the biblical text that David had slept with her; however, because of his old age she was still a virgin. Adonijah had in his previous talk with Bathsheba told her that the kingdom belonged to him, according to Josephus, because of his age (διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν), but that it had been transferred to Solomon according to the will of God (*A.J.* 8.4–5). In the biblical account, the fact that he was the elder is not stated in Adonijah’s talk with Bathsheba. Solomon, however, understood what Adonijah was aiming at and wondered why Bathsheba did not ask him to surrender the kingdom to him as well. Josephus refers again to Adonijah being the elder (πρεσβυτέρῳ) brother of

\(^{387}\) See also Philo, *Spec.* 2.138 commenting on Deut 21:15–17: “we may suppose that the gratification felt by the son at obtaining the double portion is shared by the mother.”

\(^{388}\) See *A.J.* 1.215.
Solomon, now stating the same as the biblical account, thereby acknowledging the expectation of the eldest to succeed (A.J. 8.9). Josephus does not question the expectation to succeed as claimed by Adonijah, but is even more explicit in his affirmation of the biblical text (cf. 1 Kgs 2:22).

The expectation of the eldest to succeed is also found among the neighbors. In A.J. 9.43, Josephus talks about the sacrifice of the eldest son of the king of Moab (cf. 2 Kgs 3:27). Again, Josephus prefers πρεσβύτατος instead of the usual πρωτότοκος as found in the LXX (cf. הָכֹל in the MT). The order of succession is through the eldest son among the Moabites too. The horror of the king’s deed is seen in the fact that he sacrificed his eldest son and his rightful successor. The text in A.J. 9.43 reads: “The eldest of his sons (τῶν υἱῶν τὸν πρεσβύτατον).”389 Josephus agrees with the biblical text that the son of the Moabite king was expected to succeed him.

According to Josephus, this custom is also common in more recent times. He reports accordingly in A.J. 14.11 that the younger Antipater, because of his hatred for Aristobulus:

stirred up the powerful Jews against him in secret conversations, saying that it was wrong to ignore the fact that Aristobulus wrongly held royal power and had driven his brother from the throne although he was the elder (πρεσβύτερον ὄντα), and now occupied it, though it belonged to the other by right of seniority (διὰ τὸ πρεσβεῖον).390

By this way of reasoning from Antipater, he probably hoped that he might acquire enough support to overthrow Aristobulus. It must accordingly have been an argument of considerable force, which indicates that status among brothers was a serious political matter too, and where the eldest held the highest status. Josephus uses this argument again in A.J. 14.42 where Hyrcanus charges his brother Aristobulus before Pompey claiming: “Though he was the elder brother (ὅτι πρεσβύτερος ὄν), he had been deprived of his rights as firstborn (τὸ πρεσβεῖον) by Aristobulus.” Josephus adds: “In making these

389 Some textual variants have the singular τὸν ὑίον, as well as πρεσβύτερον in A.J. 9.43. These might be explained as efforts to emend the text to agree with LXX/MT.
390 A.J. 14.11 (Marcus, LCL). See also Strabo, Geogr. 8.6.10, 8.7.1, 12.3.29, 13.4.2 where Strabo is explicit in mentioning that the ruler was the elder son or brother.
Eldest Brother in the Works of Josephus

In B.J. 1.467 Josephus talks about the discord between the three brothers where Alexander and Aristobulus were opposing Antipater. They were all sons of Herod. Josephus states regarding the relative status between them that: “Alexander and Aristobulus aggrieved at the confirmation of Antipater’s right of primogeniture (κεκυρωμένου Ἀντιπάτρῳ τοῦ πρεσβείου), Antipater resenting the rank accorded to his brothers, even though second to his own” (B.J. 1.467–468). The point here is that while Antipater was older than the two other brothers, and all had the same father, the two younger brothers mocked Antipater because his mother was nonroyal. Herod, on the other hand, entitles all three to succession; for Antipater this is based on age, and for the other two on noble birth. Hence, one sees that in addition to seniority of age by the same father, the relative status of their mothers is also used as an argument when claiming the right to succeed.

Finally, in A.J. 13.300 Hyrcanus’ gift to foresee and foretell the future includes the prophecy that his two elder sons (τῶν δύο τῶν πρεσβυτέρων παιδῶν) would not remain masters of the state. This must be understood as a most unusual thing, and therefore as clear proof of his gift of prophecy. The normal state of affairs was that the elder would succeed as a ruler because of the custom that the eldest is expected to succeed.

391 A.J. 14.42 (Marcus, LCL). See also B.J. 1.203.
392 See B.J. 1.449.
393 See B.J. 1.458.
394 K. C. Hanson, “The Herodians and Mediterranean Kinship: Part I: Genealogy and Descent,” BTB 19 (1989): 75–84, here 82, doi:10.1177/014610798901900302. See also Philo, Legat. 142, which states about Tiberius “his birth was of the highest on both sides of his parentage.”
395 See also B.J. 1.69.
396 See further A.J. 13.322 where Josephus moreover states that of all his sons, Hyrcanus loved best the two elder ones. We find a different motif in A.J. 12.228–229 where Hyrcanus, the youngest son of Joseph the Tobiad, was his father’s favorite; see further A.J. 12.195 where Josephus says that Joseph “loved him still more as if he were his only genuine son, and this vexed his brothers” (Marcus, LCL). Susan Niditch finds it likely that this story has been formed after the biblical story of Joseph; see Susan Niditch, “Father-Son Folktales Patterns and Tyrant Typologies in Josephus’ Ant. 12:160–222,” JJS 32 (1981): 47–55, here 50, 51.
3.5.3 Spokesman, Representative, and Responsible Eldest Brother

The eldest brother also acts as spokesman and representative on behalf of the sibling group. By being their spokesman, he also easily becomes responsible for his younger brothers. We find the role of the eldest brother as spokesman in *A.J.* 2.100–101 where it is stated that when the brothers met the charges of Joseph in Egypt (Gen 42:7–13), they “tried to defend themselves against the charges, with Roubelos, who was the eldest of them, as their spokesman (Ῥουβήλου προηγοροῦντος, ὃς ἦν πρεσβύτατος αὐτῶν).” The biblical account in Gen 42:7, 10, 13 does not mention that Reuben acted as their spokesman. They are treated as a group in all the three references; hence, “they said.” Josephus introduces the eldest as the one who has to take the responsibility and burden of representing them.397 His role is described as the one who has both the responsibility and authority to speak on behalf of all the brothers.

Later, when David is announcing that he is ready to fight against Goliath in a combat (*A.J.* 6.178), Ianab398 (Eliab in the biblical account) is referred to as the eldest of his brothers (ὁ πρεσβύτατος τῶν ἀδελφῶν).399 The brother who reprimanded David for his boldness was his eldest brother. According to Josephus, he therefore probably saw it as his duty and responsibility to take care of his younger brother and safeguard him (cf. 1 Sam 17:28–30). David withdrew, according to Josephus, by “deferring to his brother.” This shows the eldest brother’s authority over his younger brother. It is also information added by Josephus in his description of the incident. The status of being the eldest hence also implies authority over younger brothers.

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397 See also *A.J.* 3.47 where, according to Josephus’ account, Moses “urged the younger men to obey the older men and the latter to listen to the general.” There is nothing told about this in the biblical account (Exod 17:9). Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports twice that when three brothers were asked to engage in a combat, the eldest spoke on behalf of the three brothers (*Ant. rom.* 3.17.1 and 4). Moreover, before the combat started, they took their places according to age (*Ant. rom.* 3.18.3).

398 This is the reading of the codices RO, followed by Niese. The codices MSP read “Eliab” as in *A.J.* 6.161, followed by Marcus and Schalit; see Josephus, *Judean Antiquities Books 5–7*, 149.

399 The biblical account in 1 Sam 17:28 according to the text of Origen and Lucian has ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ μεγαλότερος in the MT. Josephus has probably taken better care of the superlative than the text of Origen and Lucian, rephrasing it more in line with his preferences in vocabulary. The article before the adjective is here taken to indicate superlative; see *GKC*, 2nd ed., 431, § 133 g.
3.5.4 Rights and Statuses Connected with Being Elder Brothers

Several passages in Josephus highlight rights or statuses associated with being the eldest. We find that Josephus connects the status of being the elder with the right hand. In the passage about the priestly garments, Josephus recounts Exod 28:9–10, where the names of the sons of Jacob are reported to be engraved on two stones. Josephus says: “The names of the sons of Iakobos have been engraved upon these in the native letters in our tongue, six on each of the stones; and the older ones are on the right shoulder (οἱ εἶσι ηατὰ ὠμον τὸν δεξιόν) (A.J. 3.166).” The biblical account in Exod 28:9–10 says: “You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth (κατὰ τὰς γενέσεις αὐτῶν).” Why is Josephus here saying that the elder sons were on the right shoulder? I find it quite plausible that it is natural for him to connect two statuses, that of being on the right side, which implies honor, with that of being among the elder brothers and thus to explicate the biblical account for his readers.

Another status that adds to the status of being the eldest is that of being wealthy. In A.J. 4.14–19, Josephus talks about the riot instigated by Korah (cf. Num 16). He describes Korah as a man that was an able speaker who could easily persuade people by his speeches (A.J. 4.14). This makes the uprising even more dangerous because Korah becomes a capable opponent to Moses. He gives a speech complaining that Moses had

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400 See also Philo, *Her.* 176, which does not expand on the biblical text.

401 For the honor connected with the right side, see Herm. Vis. 3.1.8–3.2.2 where it is said that those sitting on the right have already been approved by God, as opposed to those on the left. See also Matt 20:21 par.; Mark 10:37; Matt 25:33. See Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary on the Shepherd of Hermas*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 62–63. For left and right as markers of status, see further Philo, *Leg.* 3.90; *Deus* 163; *Sobr.* 29; *Contempl.* 69; *Legat.* 95; and *Legat.* 181 where it is said that he “waved his right hand signifying goodwill.” See further Qoh 10:2; Let. Aris. 179 where it is said about the king that he extended “the right-hand of friendship” to the delegates, and b. Ber. 61a.

given the priesthood to his brother Aaron by his own vote (A.J. 4.15). According to Josephus, Korah asks:

For if God had judged that it was proper to hand over the honor to someone from the tribe of Leuis, I am more deserving to obtain this, being on the same level as Moyses in ancestry, and superior in wealth and in age. But if it should go to the oldest of the tribes (εἰ δὲ τῇ πρεσβυτάτῃ τῶν φυλῶν), the tribe of Roubelos would, of course, have the honor (τὴν τιμὴν), with Dathames, Abirames and Phalaos obtaining it, for they are the oldest of those belonging to this tribe, and powerful through abundance of wealth (A.J. 4.19).

In his elaboration of the complaint of Korah, Josephus adds the information about their status as being “powerful through abundance of wealth.” This is absent from the biblical narrative. I will argue that this has the function of making the complaint more reasonable for Josephus. It is also noteworthy that in the speech as told by Josephus both Korah and the three eldest persons mentioned from the tribe of Reuben are all said to be wealthy. Did the status of being the eldest more easily lead to a social position of high material wealth? This is quite conceivable since the biblical text states that the eldest son received a double portion of the inheritance (Deut 21:17). Thus, wealth adds to status.

After having given a list of the important leaders in the country, Josephus states in A.J. 7.110 that David’s older sons (οἱ δὲ πρεσβυτεροί παῖδες αὐτοῦ) served as his royal officials and guarded him. That it was his “older sons” that guarded him is specified by Josephus (cf. 1 Chr 18:17). The LXX/MT reads προφυλακτικά, which is more open to interpretation. Josephus is hence again more specific about status in the family. Again, status adds to status, and now honorific position is added to the status of being older sons.

Being an eldest son also seems to restrict the freedom of the father, thereby ensuring certain rights for the status of being the eldest. In A.J. 7.173, Josephus talks about the reaction of David after hearing what Amnon had done with Tamar (cf. 2 Sam 13:1–22). The grief of David was great, because, as Josephus says: “He greatly loved Amnon—who

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403 According to Thackeray, “Korah's main grievance was that the office of 'prince' of the Kohathites had been bestowed upon Elizaphan, who belonged to a branch of the family younger than his own (Numb. iii. 30).” *Josephus*, 4:483.

404 See also Plutarch, *Frat. amor*. 480d referred to on page 108 above.
was first-born son (πρεσβύτατος γὰρ ἵν αὐτῷ υἱός)—he was compelled not to cause him grief."  

405 Second Samuel 13:21 LXX reads ὃτι πρωτότοκος αὐτῶ ἵν. David’s love of Amnon must be read together with the additional comment, added by Josephus, that “he was compelled not to cause him grief.”  

406 I find it unlikely to be restricted to his love of his firstborn son only. What kind of grief is Josephus referring to, physical penalty or loss of social status and role? Unfortunately, he does not elaborate, but it is probable that according to Josephus there were certain rights the eldest son had that also restricted the freedom of his father. Here too Josephus uses πρεσβύτατος υἱός while the LXX, as noted above, has πρωτότοκος. This adds weight to the argument of a close relation between these two expressions and the preferences of Josephus. 2 Sam 13:21 MT does not mention any of these attitudes of David; on the contrary, the MT states that he became furious.

The right of the eldest to succeed is upheld even after a message from the Lord to the contrary. In A.J. 1.258, Josephus is retelling the story of the birth of Esau and Jacob, recounting Gen 25:19–28. He is explicit about status in the preferences of Isaac and Rebekah, Isaac loving (ἀγαπάω) the elder son, Esau,  

407 but Jacob the younger was the darling (προσφιλής) of his mother.  

408 The biblical text says in Gen 25:28 that Isaac loved Esau “because he was fond of game,” focusing on his abilities as a hunter and not directly on his status within the family. Earlier, in A.J. 1.257, Josephus records that Isaac received the message from the Lord before the birth of the twins that “the one who seemed to be the lesser would be superior to the greater.” The biblical text does not inform the reader whether the message from the Lord delivered to Rebekah in Gen 25:23 was ever told to Isaac; thus, one is left with the impression that he was not informed. If so, it makes

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405 See A.J. 7.163 where he first describes the social status of Amnon.

406 Begg notes that the remark about David not doing anything in light of what Amnon had done “reflects the plus of LXX BL 2 Sam 13:21 (partially preserved also in 4QSam): ‘... but he did not grieve the spirit of Amnon his son because he loved him, because he was his firstborn’”; see Josephus, Judean Antiquities Books 5–7, 254.

407 See A.J. 1.265. Feldman notes that Josephus omits the reason for Isaac’s love of Esau, even though Josephus generally gives the reason when it is not given in the Bible; see Josephus, Judean Antiquities Books 1–4, 101.

408 See also Plutarch, Frat. amor. 489a: “For he went to war against Seleucus for the kingdom, though he was the younger brother and had the aid of his mother.”
Isaac’s continued favoring of Esau more understandable in the biblical text. In Josephus’ retelling, Isaac loves Esau despite the message from the Lord to him. I will argue, therefore, that Josephus is suggesting that the custom of the eldest to succeed as the head of the family was so strong that even a message from the Lord would not alter the preferences of the father for his eldest son to succeed. Josephus consequently confirms the rights invested in the status of being the eldest son or brother.

3.5.5 The Term πρωτότοκος in the Works of Josephus

Due to the importance of the term πρωτότοκος in the LXX, I find it necessary to summarize the findings of Josephus’ use of this term, even though it does not contribute much to my thesis.

Josephus gives a free rendering of Exod 12:29 in *A.J.* 2.313, retelling the story of the last plague when the Lord smote the firstborn of Egypt. Both LXX and MT use πρωτότοκος/בְּּכוֹר in Exod 12:29. He elaborates on the biblical text and summarizes: “For on that night the annihilation of the firstborn (φθορὰ τῶν πρωτοτόκων) came upon the Egyptians,” leaving out, however, the details in Exod 12:29 about “the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.” The expression “the annihilation of the firstborn” in Josephus probably covers all groups of firstborns, although firstborn of man is most likely primary.

In *A.J.* 4.69–75 he discusses the tithe that the Levites received from the people (cf. Num 18:15–16). In 4.71, he says that for the firstborn of man (ἀνθρώπου δὲ πρωτοτόκου) they must pay five shekels. This is in accord with both the LXX and the MT in Num 18:15–16. It is noteworthy, however, that while both the LXX and the MT use πρωτότοκος/בְּּכוֹר for firstborn of man and animal in this context, it is reserved for firstborn of man in Josephus, whilst for firstborn of animal he uses an expression found only here in Josephus, τὸ γεννηθέν πρῶτον.⁴⁰⁹

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⁴⁰⁹ See, though, Philo, *Cher.* 53 which is the only other reference I have found that uses the same expression (τὸ γεννηθέντα πρῶτον), but Philo uses it for firstborn of man.
Josephus also uses πρωτότοκος in *A.J.* 1.54 (cf. Gen 4:4), but the reference is to firstborn of animals and therefore not of specific interest here. Both LXX and MT use πρωτότοκος/בְּּכוֹר in Gen 4:4. These three references where Josephus uses the term πρωτότοκος show that the term is not important for Josephus in his retelling of the biblical history. Unfortunately, his use of the term does not illuminate anything about the status and role of the firstborn or eldest brother.

3.5.6 Conclusion

We have seen that in several instances where the biblical text is not explicit, but leaves open who the eldest son or brother was, Josephus is explicit. Josephus does not tell us why he chooses to be explicit by giving added information, but since he does so several times it must be deliberate and it must be to inform his readers about what for him is significant information that adds explicatory power to the gist of the story. We can also infer that the cultural norm for Josephus is that the eldest brother has a special status and role. This becomes clear since Josephus expected the eldest brother to succeed their father. Deviations from this norm need explanation.

The eldest brother is presented as a spokesperson that has both the responsibility and authority to speak on behalf of all the brothers. He is also responsible for younger siblings and therefore disciplines them if necessary. Younger brothers, for their part, defer to elder brothers who thereby receive proper respect.

We have also found that Josephus highlights rights or statuses associated with being the eldest. The status of being the elder is thus connected with the status of the right side, a place of honor. Elder brothers also seem to be wealthy and may easily obtain honorific positions. The eldest brother or son also seems to have certain unnamed rights that restrict a father’s freedom of action if he does not live up to expected ethical norms. Stories that deviate from the cultural norm are explained in such a way that the cultural norm is kept.

The use of the term πρωτότοκος by Josephus does not shed further light on the status and role of the eldest brother. In all instances where Josephus uses the term, it is also found in the LXX/MT.
Of the characteristics of the eldest brother given in chapter 1 above, the exemplary function, the role of being the confidant of the father, and the priestly role in the family are lacking in Josephus’ works. Josephus gives, however, examples for all the others.

3.6 Summary and Conclusions

We stated at the beginning of this chapter that the purpose was to look at how the eldest brother is presented in the writings of Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Herodotus, and Plutarch, the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, and the writings of Philo of Alexandria and Josephus to establish a basis for comparison with the presentation of the eldest brother in the New Testament. We wanted to know the degree to which the special status and role of the African eldest brother are recognizable in the status and role of “the biblical eldest brother” in the literary and cultural context of the New Testament in first-century Mediterranean societies.

We have found that all of the roles and statuses of the eldest brother mentioned in chapter 1 and confirmed in chapter 2 are found again in the literature investigated here. However, one or more of the roles or statuses are lacking in all the texts/authors investigated. The exemplary roles, being the confidant of the father and the mediating role, are those roles missing most often in the texts describing the eldest brother as social reality. Deserving respect, having special inheritance rights, and being a leader and protector, are, on the other hand, most common. The HB/LXX, Josephus, and Philo share more of the roles of the eldest brother than the rest and can therefore perhaps be described as having a richer description of the status and role of the eldest brother. We can therefore conclude that the investigation of the eldest brother as social reality in a first-century Mediterranean context confirms the general picture of the African eldest brother as social reality.

When used as a metaphor, we have found that the different roles of the eldest brother are not highlighted in the HB/LXX; instead, his elevated status is in the foreground. He is set apart from the others and this makes him cherished and dear to God. In Philo, we see the same focus on elevated status, although some of the roles of
the eldest brother are also seen. This includes having an intermediate role, being God’s agent, and establishing a pattern to follow. His special inheritance rights are also highlighted. The elevated status of the eldest brother used as a metaphor is not explained in the texts from either Philo or the HB/LXX but its use highlights the status that characterizes the eldest brother as a social reality.

The implications are that we must be open to an understanding of the eldest brother as a social reality where all the characteristics may be relevant, including from a New Testament perspective. Which ones must be determined based on the context of the passage. We furthermore notice variations in preferences in vocabulary, notably between Philo and Josephus and the HB/LXX. The use of the term πρωτότοκος is thus a more important term in the HB/LXX than it is in both Philo and Josephus. We should not reject texts as irrelevant, however, because of a lack of specific terms alone when a common understanding might provide a better explanation.

The next question is the degree to which we find the role and status of the eldest brother as described in the first-century Mediterranean literary context reflected in relevant New Testament texts and how this may influence the interpretation of these texts. This we will bring with us to the next chapter.
4 Jesus as Eldest Brother in the New Testament

This chapter tries to explain the degree to which the characteristics of the eldest brother we have found in the previous chapter will aid in interpreting the New Testament texts mentioned in section 1.2.3 above, that is: Matt 25:31–46, Mark 3:31–35, Rom 8:28–30, Col 1:15–20, and Heb 2:10–18. As regards the order in which these texts will be discussed, we could opt for a chronological order. However, there are uncertainties connected with this approach, because there are uncertainties with regard to the dating of the writings. Moreover, there are for our purposes no obvious advantages in choosing a chronological order. I will therefore start with the texts that seem to offer most for our purposes, Heb 2:10–18 and Rom 8:28–30, then deal with Col 1:15–20 before we look at the two texts from the Gospels, Mark 3:31–35 and Matt 25:31–46.

4.1 Hebrews 2:10–18: The Eldest Brother Who Acts on Behalf of His Brothers

4.1.1 Introduction

We have seen that two verses in the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 2:11 and 17) are referred to when it is argued that Jesus is presented as the eldest brother.¹ This is based on the following observations in these verses: The author says in verse 11 that the Son is not ashamed to call those who are sanctified his brothers and sisters, and in verse 17 he states that the Son had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect. The inference drawn is that the Son is not just a brother, but the eldest of all his brothers and

¹ The New Testament writing “to the Hebrews” is, for purposes of clarity, here referred to as “the Letter to the Hebrews” or “the letter” to help distinguish between the addressees and the writing itself. The designation does not deal with the question of whether it can genuinely be called a letter.
sisters. Through the resurrection, Jesus became the firstborn from the dead. The redeemed are a “family” into which one enters through faith in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is the eldest brother of the redeemed, his brothers and sisters.

The challenge I need to address is the extent to which a closer reading of the relevant section (2:10–18) lends support to this understanding. First, I will have to consider whether Jesus, among several other presentations of him in the letter, is also presented as the eldest brother. Even though the expression “elder” or “eldest brother” is not found in the letter, there might be features in the description of the Son and those he calls his brothers and sister in this section that support such an understanding of the Son. To what extent do I find the statuses and roles of the eldest brother as found in the texts investigated in the earlier chapter in the description of him in this section? It has also become evident that in an African understanding of the eldest brother some see a close connection between the eldest brother and a person with priestly functions because the eldest brother sometimes exercises priestly functions in the family. This priestly role of the eldest brother we have also found in several of the texts investigated in chapter 3. Due to the extensive treatment of Jesus as high priest in the Letter to the Hebrews, I will have to explore the relation between Jesus as eldest brother and high priest to see whether these roles can be connected or understood in relation to each other or not.

The language used to describe Jesus and the believers is metaphorical. It would have been preferable if there had been more specific knowledge about the author, addressees, destination, and date of the Letter to the Hebrews to help decide on the cultural background within which we should interpret the letter. It seems best to base my arguments on a position that argues for an unknown author, indeterminate ethnic background of the addressees, a destination in the Mediterranean world where Greek is the language spoken, possibly Rome, and a date between AD 60 and 90. This is rather

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2 The Greek has “brothers,” I use the inclusive “brothers and sisters,” which is also used in NRSV.
3 See page 10 above.
4 See the description of this characteristic of the eldest brother on pages 9 and 12 above.
5 For further details and bibliographical references, see Harold W. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hermeneia 17 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 1–
vague and thus necessitates being cautious in making too narrow a connection between the interpretation and cultural information that is ethnically or geographically exclusive.

There is no consensus regarding the overall structure of the letter. The various approaches reflect the difficulty in deciding what kind of work the letter is. We can largely divide the proposals into four different approaches: conceptual analysis, rhetorical analysis, literary analysis, and discourse analysis. I opt to follow the structure offered by George H. Guthrie, which he calls a text-linguistic analysis. He distinguishes between expositional and hortatory units in the letter. After the introduction, God has spoken to us in a Son (1:1–4), we find the first major expositional section: The position of the Son in relation to the angels. This consists of two sections: A. The Son is superior to the angels (1:5–14) followed by a hortatory warning: Do not reject the word spoken through God’s Son (2:1–4) and a transitional section: ab. The superior Son for a time became positionally lower than the angels (2:5–9), and thereafter the second expositional section: B. The Son lower than the angels (i.e. among men) to suffer for the sons (2:10–18). Next follows several hortatory sections from 3:1 to 4:13 after which the second major expositional section follows from 4:14: The position of the Son, our high priest, in relation to the earthly sacrificial system. There are two primary embedded discourses within the exposition, the first dealing with Jesus as “Son” (1:5–2:18) and the other with the work of Jesus as high priest (4:14–10:25).


7 O’Brien places him within the discourse analysis approach; see O’Brien, Hebrews, 30. Guthrie states that his text-analytical analysis “seeks to be ever sensitive to literary and oratorical conventions of the first century”; see George H. Guthrie, The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis, NovTSup 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), xviii.


9 Guthrie, Structure of Hebrews, 121; Guthrie, Hebrews, 28–29.
4.1.2 The Challenges Presented in Context

Hebrews 2:11 and 17, our two main verses, are both found within the section 2:10–18 where the brother relationship comes most to the fore. A preliminary reading where attention is given to the exegetical challenges will be given below.

Following the structure given by George H. Guthrie, section 2:10–18 is the second expositional unit in the letter. In these expositional units, Guthrie finds a logical development where “the Son is brought into sharper focus by explicating relevant Old Testament passages which show the Son’s superiority to the angels (1:5–14), the purpose of his incarnation (2:10–18), the superiority of his priesthood (5:1–7:28), and the superiority of his offering as high priest (8:3–10:18).”

After the introduction stating that God has formerly spoken through the prophets but now he has spoken to us in a Son (1:1–4), the first expositional section (1:5–14) uses a chain of Old Testament texts to show the Son’s exalted position. These texts concern sonship, angels, and the eternal reign of the Son and point to the elevated status of the Son. In the transition (2:5–9) the author shows that not the angels, but some group or individual has the right to rule over the coming world. By allowing for both an anthropological and christological interpretation of Psalm 8, Jesus is here presented as “the representative for the rest of his family.”

From 2:10 there is a shift in topic again.

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11 David M. Moffitt argues that the main distinction between the Son and the angels in Heb 1 “concerns the Son’s royal position at God’s right hand and the angels’ spiritual nature”; see David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NovTSup 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 52.

12 Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 120–21. Moffitt further argues that the purpose of 2:5–18 is not to serve as a contrast to the exaltation of the Son over the angels in Heb 1, but to explain “how and why the Son has become so much greater than the angels,” that is, he has become a human being; see Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 60, note 29. Guthrie and many others focus on the Son’s submission and abasement; see Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 61, 63, 119. Lane also notes that the section 2:5–9 creates a transition between 1:5–2:4 and 2:10–18, and thus does not belong to either of them; see Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, xcv.


14 Most scholars take verses 2:10–18 to form one section or to be part of a larger section that comprises 2:5–18. Attridge, Lane, and Koester divide 2:5–18 into two sections 2:5–9 and 2:10–18; see Attridge, *Hebrews*, vii; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 50–51; Koester, *Hebrews*, 213, 224. Westfall, David L. Allen, and Albert Vanhoye read 2:5–18 as one section; see Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 100; David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC
Now the focus is on the solidarity of the Son with the sons through his incarnation (2:10–18). Given this outline, to what extent does a presentation of Jesus as eldest brother fit into the main structure of the letter?

Section 2:10–18 opens in verse 10 with an expression stating that it was only right and proper that God the Creator should let Jesus suffer, for in doing so, he was bringing many sons to glory. Jesus’ suffering is a vital part in the task of bringing many sons to glory. His suffering is related to the possibility of glory for the sons. There is an expressed interest in the relationship between Christ and those called “sons” in verse 10 after the presentation of the exalted Christ in the earlier expositional section and the emphasis on the suffering and death of Christ in the transitional section. God’s desire is to bring many sons to glory, and to achieve that goal, the “pioneer” of their salvation had to be made perfect through suffering. Several proposals have been given for the interpretation of the title ἀρχηγός, “pioneer,” which we will discuss later. The relationship between God and humankind is defined in verse 10 as a father-son relationship just as the relationship between God and the Son in 1:5. The term “sons” in the plural is introduced in 2:10. Earlier in 1:2; 2:1, 3, 5, 8, and 9 a group is spoken of using the terms “us” or “we.” Those referred to using these terms are assumed to be the same and consist of the writer and the readers of the letter. The task given to the “pioneer” to bring the sons to glory thus refers to this group. We will later look at how the task given to the “pioneer” relates to the characteristics of being the eldest brother.

How the Son and the sons are related is pointed out in verse 11 by saying that the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one origin. Due to this common origin, it is stated that Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. It has been debated to what the phrase ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντες, “all of one origin,” refers. The statement in verse 11b is supported with two quotations from the Old Testament in

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verses 12 and 13, which expounds on this relationship and depicts Christ as “an exemplary member of the community of faith.” Verse 11b also prepares for the quotation in verse 12 through its transition from “sons” to “brothers.” Jesus thus acts as an example or model for his younger brothers and sisters. The effect of using family language, as shown by the terms ἱός, ἀδελφός, and παιδίον in verses 10–14, 17, shows the family relationship that exists between Jesus the “pioneer” and the sons, his brothers, and sisters.

In verses 14–15, the emphasis is on why Jesus became one of us and what he had to do. Children share flesh and blood; therefore, he too had to share flesh and blood to fulfill his task. The purpose given is twofold: to destroy the devil and rescue those who were in bondage all their lives because of their fear of death. This purpose reconnects with what was said in verses 9 and 10 that he was made lower, had to suffer death, and was glorified. The previously mentioned relation to the angels is taken up again in verse 16, clarifying that Jesus’ purpose was not to help angels, but Abraham’s descendants. It is still those called his brothers and sisters in verse 11, now called “Abraham’s descendants,” that are in focus.

A major theme in the Letter to the Hebrews that later is presented more thoroughly is now briefly presented in verse 17. To be a merciful and faithful high priest who atones for the sins of the people, he had to become one of us to represent us. The link that connects the high priest and the one who calls the believers his brothers, first

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19 See Guthrie, Structure of Hebrews, 65.
20 Several scholars have recognized "hook-words" or "distant hook-words" throughout the letter. The introduction of Jesus as high priest in verse 17 that is taken up again in 3:1 and in the next similar passage in 5:1–10 is seen as one of these among several others; see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, bxxvi; Guthrie, Structure of Hebrews, 96–100; O’Brien, Hebrews, 124. Attridge sees the main christological theme initially presented in 1:5–2:18 with the climax in 2:17; see Attridge, Hebrews, 17. Übelacker finds the proposition in 2:17–18; see Walter G. Übelacker, Der Hebräerbrief als Appell: I. Untersuchungen zu exordium, narratio und postscriptum (Hebr 1–2 und 13,22–25), ConBNT 21 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989), 193–96. Gräßer finds the main christological theme introduced in 2:17–18; see Erich Gräßer, An die Hebräer: 1. Teilband, Hebr 1–6, EKKNT 17/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 151.
expressed in verse 11, is that in both cases he had to become one of us to act on our behalf.

The tension between the experienced present tests and the future glory is taken up again in verse 18, linking back to verse 17 and verses 9 and 10. Jesus has gone through it as one of us. He is like his brothers and sisters; therefore, he can help his brothers and sisters in the present tests. The relation between the Son and the sons is thus brought together into a comforting message, now including his role as a faithful high priest.

A cursory reading of the section 2:10–18 challenges me to investigate in detail the theme of Jesus as the eldest brother in relation to the believers as his brothers and sisters. This makes it necessary to look more carefully at how Jesus is presented as a brother. In doing so, the question about common origin will be discussed first, then the characteristics of his brothers, and finally Jesus’ possible status and role as the eldest brother. In the next hortatory section (3:1–6), the topic is about Jesus as the supreme example of a faithful Son over the God’s household compared with Moses as a servant in the house. The meaning of “house” in this setting is most likely personal. We therefore need to discuss the relationship between Jesus and the believers who are part of God’s household and what role Jesus has in this relationship.

4.1.3 The Son Presented as the Eldest Brother

We mentioned above that the references to the brothers of the Son are given in 2:11 and 17. We noted earlier that the common definition of a “brother” focuses on sharing one or both parents. To identify a common understanding of brotherhood in these instances, we should look for references to some kind of common parentage. In addition, by naming someone “brothers” in this context, it is apparent that the term “brother” is used metaphorically. The source domain of this metaphor is the family. If we can define the meaning transferred from the family source domain to the target domain, it will allow us to argue for an understanding of Jesus as eldest brother that is based upon or includes

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22 See page 37 for a definition of status and page 39 for a definition of role.
elements from an understanding of the eldest brother within the family source domain. This makes a presentation of Jesus as eldest brother comprehensible and defensible.

4.1.3.1 A Common Origin

As previously noted, according to the dictionary definition, the primary understanding of a brother is “a male who has the same parents as another or one parent in common with another,”23 or “a male person having the same parents as another person.”24 In other words, brothers share having the same parents, that is, a common source or origin. This understanding is expressed several times in discussions about brotherhood in Hellenistic literature.25 The author states a similar thought when he says in verse 11 that the Son is not ashamed to call them brothers. This is based on a premise indicated by the preceding phrase δι’ ἦν αἰτίαν, “on account of which reason.” The reason given by the author is that the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one origin. The use of ἁγιάζων and ἁγιαζόμενοι points to a difference between the two. Lane notes that the designation ὁ ἁγιάζων might reflect the formula ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ ἁγιάζων ύμᾶς that is used as a self-presentation of God in the Pentateuch.26 Here it is used about the Son.27 He is the one who sanctifies.28 It is only the one who himself is holy that can sanctify others.29

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24 Collins English Dictionary, s.v. “brother.”
25 Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 339. Gray refers to Plutarch, Frat. amor. 479e; 484f–485a; Aristotle, Eth. nic. 8.12.3–4; 4 Macc 13:19–22. To these we may add Plutarch, Frat. amor. 478e; Philo, Praem. 57; Mos. 1.240; Somn. 2.33; Virt. 82; Josephus, A.J. 2.17.
27 Koester notes that the use of “Son” and “sons” suggests commonalities: origin, inheritance, and suffering; see Koester, Hebrews, 227.
29 C. J. A. Hickling notes that the two forms of ἁγιάζω recall John 17:19 where the verb is used about Christ and those saved by him; see C. J. A. Hickling, “John and Hebrews: The Background of Hebrews 2.10–18,” NTS 29 (1983): 112–16, here 113. Michel notes that the godly function of ὁ ἁγιάζων refers to godly and not human origin; see Michel, Hebräer, 150. See also Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 58; O’Brien, Hebrews, 108.
Attridge notes that this cultic language gives a hint forward to verse 17 and Jesus’ high-priestly status because sanctification is also a priestly activity.\(^{30}\) The same thought, that Jesus is the sanctifier, is expressed explicitly in 13:12. The role as the one who sanctifies in contrast to those who are sanctified also points back to the superior status of the Son that has been the focus of 1:5–14. There is thus clearly a difference between the sanctifier with his superior status and the sanctified, but they all share being of one origin, ἐξ ἐνός πάντες. The main purpose of the sentence is thus to point to what they share.\(^{31}\) To what origin does it refer? It has been argued for various possibilities. Those commonly discussed are the Gnostic transcendent world, a neutral “one,” Adam, Abraham, or God.\(^{32}\) We will explore these proposals.

Käsemann is the main proponent of reading this text in light of a Gnostic background.\(^{33}\) He argues that the Letter to the Hebrews stands in a tradition that presupposes an Alexandrian-Gnostic wisdom tradition and finds that the heavenly journey in Gnosticism might offer the proper background for the Letter to the Hebrews.\(^{34}\) Relevant themes that support this understanding are the earth is not the abiding place, on earth they are foreigners, and heaven is the father’s house. One moreover inherits the heavenly city. The redeemer is both leader and helper.\(^{35}\) Souls can overcome their suffering by looking at the leader. Redemption is primarily for the family

\(^{30}\) Attridge, Hebrews, 88; see also note 107. See also Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Christ and His People: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Hebrews 2.5–18,” VE 6 (1969): 54–71, here 61. Grogan moreover states on page 68 with reference to verse 18 and what has been anticipated in verse 11: “Christ is now virtually a new Aaron, however inadequate that term will appear later as a description of His high-priesthood.”


\(^{33}\) Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 90–95. R. McL. Wilson states that the possible influence of gnosis or Gnosticism on the Letter to the Hebrews is perhaps the most difficult to assess, see R. McL. Wilson, Hebrews, New Century Bible Commentary (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1987), 25.

\(^{34}\) Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 44–45, 47, 52–53.

\(^{35}\) Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 54–55.
of souls. “Fellowship of souls,”36 “a company,”37 and “a people”38 are terms used for this group. The relationship between the clan of souls and the world of light is described as sonship, the relation between the souls among themselves as that of a brotherhood. The heavenly redeemer is their helper, but he is moreover their brother.39 This is the Gnostic teaching about common kinship (συγγένεια).40 Käsemann then argues that the relationship between Christ and the believers is described in a similar way to both sonship and brotherhood.41 The presentation of the Son in the Letter to the Hebrews can be used to explain the Gnostic influence on the letter.42 The same Gnostic teaching about the common kinship (συγγένεια) thus provides the background for understanding Heb 2:10–18.43 According to Käsemann, those who propose that ἐξ ἑνὸς refers to God as origin do not do justice to the text.44 For him the Gnostic understanding of the common heavenly preexistence of the Redeemer and the redeemed provides the right interpretative framework.45 It is, however, necessary for Käsemann to delimit himself from the naturalism inherent in the Gnostic myth where all souls are saved and only dead matter remains on earth, a naturalism Käsemann does not find in the Letter to the Hebrews.46

Gerd Theißen follows Käsemann adhering to the same interpretative tradition, but admits that the Gnostic myth as postulated by Käsemann cannot be upheld.47 He asks whether the Letter to the Hebrews reflects Gnostic rather than apocalyptic traditions. In his critical assessment of the motives of the Gnostic tradition, he is not denying the main

36 References are given to Ginzā 302.16f.; Book of John 188.11ff.
37 Reference is given to Ginzā 361.25f.
38 Reference is given to Odes Sol. 10.6.
39 References are given to Book of John 132.11f. and 133.8f.; Ginzā 371.4f.
40 Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 56–57.
41 Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 58.
42 Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 58–74.
43 Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 92–93.
44 Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 90–91. He refers to and quotes Kögel and Michel.
45 Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 91.
46 Käsemann, Wandernde Gottesvolk, 94; see further 112–113.
thesis of Käsemann but trying to modify and state the reasons for Käsemann’s thesis anew on certain specific points. Thus, every tradition found in the letter must be argued on its own. They cannot so easily be integrated into a larger Gnostic system as Käsemann seems to have done. The Gnostic analogies that Käsemann used are reconstructions. The one about the relationship between the Son and the sons is thus based on the Gnostic primal-man myth offered by Bousset and Reitzenstein.

Theissen also searches for Gnostic motives in the Letter to the Hebrews. In this connection, he states that Jesus and the sons have their origin in God (2:11) and follows Käsemann in interpreting this in light of Gnostic thought. Hebrews 12:9 is used to argue that God is the father of the spirits, understood as preexistent souls. According to Theissen, it is not possible to deny that in 2:11, 14; 12:9, and 13:3 the preexistent human self is presupposed. The result is a dualistic anthropology. The reasons for the solidarity between Christ and his brothers in 2:11 as well as between the brothers themselves in 13:3 is found in the teaching about the common kinship (συγγένεια) between the Redeemer and the redeemed. Their preexistent origin is moreover adhered to in the title προτότοκος in 1:6 when Jesus returns to the heavenly world. It is important that Christ and his brothers are not related through common origin and suffering only. They also share a common goal. Jesus prepares for the brothers as ἀρχήγος and τελειωτῆς (10:14; 11:40).

Some follow Käsemann and Theissen, refining their argumentation to some extent.

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49 Theissen, Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief, 119.
50 Theissen, Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief, 62–63, 66.
52 Theissen, Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief, 122.
53 Theissen, Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief, 123.
The Gnostic teaching about the common kinship (συγγένεια) provided Käsemann with a tool to interpret to what the common origin refers. He also recognized the relationship between the Son and the sons positively as that of brothers, but did not explore further on that topic in relation to common origin. The dependency of Hebrews on Gnosticism has been highly questioned.\textsuperscript{55} Later Käsemann also acknowledged problems with his religious-historical sketch.\textsuperscript{56} Attridge thus states concerning Käsemann’s understanding: “His understanding of Gnosticism and characterization of portions of Hebrews as Gnostic are dated.”\textsuperscript{57} Lane notes the following arguments against Gnosticism as a conceptual background: The sources appealed to by Käsemann are late, and it cannot be proven that they reflect traditions that are earlier than the Letter to the Hebrews. The myth of the redeemed redeemer cannot be established in the first century based on written sources. The alleged first-century Gnosticism or Proto-Gnosticism that would offer the conceptual background for the Letter to the Hebrews has not been established.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} See Lane, Hebrews 1–8, cix; Harold W. Attridge, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” \textit{ABD} 3:103; Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 60–61; O’Brien, \textit{Hebrews}, 38. They relate the similarities to a common Hellenistic Jewish heritage.


\textsuperscript{58} Lane, Hebrews 1–8, cix.
In addition to the question about Gnostic traditions behind the Letter to the Hebrews, the interpretation of 12:9 seems to be crucial to Theissen. It is, however, problematic to argue that God is the father of the spirits, understood as preexistent souls based on the expression πατὴρ πνευμάτων, “Father of spirits.” This is an expression that is both unique and unexpected. The contrast is between the fathers of our flesh and the Father of spirits. The force of its meaning is thus a contrast between our physical, earthly fathers and our spiritual, heavenly Father. If Theissen’s interpretation of 12:9 cannot be supported, the argument in support of a dualistic anthropology behind 2:11, 14 and 13:3 cannot easily be upheld. Hebrews 2:14 and 13:3 are of no help without a prior interpretative tradition to rely upon. What is left is 2:11 where we have already concluded that the teaching about the common kinship (συγγένεια) is not a likely interpretative framework. We therefore dismiss a Gnostic background for the letter and for the interpretation of ἐξένος in 2:11 as well as for 12:9. We will therefore look at the other options left.

“One” can be either neuter or masculine. If neuter, it is taken to refer to common human nature. If it is masculine, it might be taken to refer to Abraham, God, or

59 Wilson, Hebrews, 224. These scholars do not even discuss the interpretation given by Theissen: Michel, Hebräer, 442–43; Wilson, Hebrews, 223–24; Attridge, Hebrews, 362–63; Bruce, Hebrews, 344. Koester mentions it, but finds this interpretation less plausible; see Koester, Hebrews, 529. They all refer to Num 16:22; 27:16 as a possible background.

60 Bruce, Hebrews, 344. An anthropological dualism is thus not likely expressed here. It must instead be understood in light of the two-sphere thinking in Hebrews. Schweizer and Kremer read it as inclusive of the spirits of angels and of the righteous; see Eduard Schweizer, “σάρξ,” TDNT 7:141; Jacob Kremer, “πνεῦμα,” EDTN 3:119.

61 See Müller, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΡΧΗΓΟΣ, 297; Attridge, Hebrews, 88–89; Koester, Hebrews, 60–61, and more cautiously Weiß, Hebräer, 103–7. Weiß, however, dismisses a simple takeover of the Gnostic idea of συγγένεια for understanding Heb 2:11 and the phrase ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντες; see Weiß, Hebräer, 212.

62 Philip E. Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 105–6. See also JB, “are of the same stock.” NEB, “are all of one stock.” Ellingworth argues that this interpretation is unnatural in Greek, is unsupported by the Greek Fathers, and has no close parallel”; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 164.


64 Attridge, Hebrews, 89; Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 58; Koester, Hebrews, 230; Small, Characterization of Jesus, 237, note 320; Peeler, You Are My Son, 92; Ole J. Filtvedt, The Identity of God’s People and the Paradox of Hebrews, WUNT II/400 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 68.
Adam. While Abraham is not introduced until verse 16, there is a reference to descendants born from Abraham in 11:12. It would be more natural for Abraham to be introduced by name the first time the author refers to him.

The majority of scholars interpret “one” as a reference to God. This implies that both the Son and those called his brothers and sisters have their common origin from God. deSilva points out that this phrase echoes a Stoic idea, the common descent of all humanity from God. In the immediate context before in verse 10 it is stated that all things exist for God and through God. The language is doxological and “points to God as the cause of all things.” When it is stated in verse 11 that he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one origin, the inference according to this interpretation is that this means that they share a common origin in God. Christ is the unique Son of God, and God has said he will be his father (1:2, 5). There are, however, still others called “sons” that God intends to bring to glory (2:10). These are those sanctified by the Son, thereby pointing to his redemptive work. The relationship between the Son and the sons is thus a “familial relationship that is rooted in the gracious determination of God to bring his children to their destiny through the redemptive mission of the Son.”

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67 Hickling argues for a similar understanding in the Gospel of John where it is stated about the Logos in John 1:14 that He is μονογενὴς παρὰ πατρός and in John 1:13 that those who believe in him are ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννηθήσαν; see Hickling, “John and Hebrews,” 113. See also John V. Dahms, “The Johannine Use of MONOGENES Reconsidered,” *NTS* 29.2 (1983): 222–32, here 228, doi:10.1017/S0028688500010730.


69 O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 104; he refers to Rom 11:36 and further to 1 Cor 8:6.


Scholars differ on whether this common origin is based on God’s act in creation or on his redemptive act in Jesus, labeling the first option “anthropological” and the second “theological.” Weiß is not convinced of either of them, arguing that because the phrase ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντες gives the presupposition for the Son to acknowledge the sons as his brothers, what connects them must be found in their humanity, more specifically their solidarity in lowliness and suffering. They share human flesh and blood. The point is thus not so much a question about origin as about a fellowship in destiny and solidarity. The Son shows himself as the pioneer of the sons by not being ashamed of them in his humiliation and suffering. Their shared humanity is thus noted. These last comments show that some, while concluding that “one” refers to God but by also underlining the shared humanity, end up with a solution that is close to the last interpretation: that it refers to Adam. Moffitt has more recently promoted this position.

While Adam is not mentioned in the letter, this suggestion might at first thus seem rather unlikely. Moffitt argues, however, that while the term “one” in its widest sense connotes humanity, “a more particular reference to Adam, however, appears likely.” He finds similarities in the application of Ps 8 in Hebrews and in literature of the Second Temple and rabbinic periods. The Son is set apart from the angels by becoming flesh and blood just as Adam was. If read in light of the expression “share flesh and blood” in

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73 Weiß, *Hebräer*, 212–13. He also asks in note 34 on page 213 whether ἐξ is best understood as being neutral. deSilva combines the thought about common origin from God and solidarity of the Son with the many children by stating that it begins at this point of common ancestry; see deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 115. Guthrie also wants to include both aspects; see Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 108.


75 Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 131. He admits, though, that the author might intend the ambiguity of the phrase.


77 Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 132–41. This is in agreement with his general understanding of 2:10–18 where “the familial and bodily ties (blood and flesh) between Jesus and his siblings” are emphasized. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 124 (emphasis original).
2:14, such an understanding would be possible here.\(^{78}\) According to this view, the emphasis is thus on the son’s identification with his human family.\(^{79}\) Christ can call those who are sanctified his brothers because he shared the same nature as they do.\(^{80}\) A problem raised with this interpretation is that those who have a common origin with the sanctifier are not humankind in general, but those who are sanctified. The phrase introducing that Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters in the next sentence δι’ ἡν αἰτίαν, “for this reason, therefore,” points back directly to ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντες.\(^{81}\) Those who share a common origin are therefore the sanctifier and the sanctified, not humankind in general. This is an open-ended and ongoing familial relationship.\(^{82}\) The author thus uses family language to establish the reason the Son and the sons are brothers: They share blood and flesh.\(^{83}\) The Son is therefore not ashamed to call these sons his brothers.\(^{84}\) Johnson argues that the author uses litotes or understatement in a similar way to Rom 1:16 with the meaning “he is proud to call them brothers.”\(^{85}\)

4.1.3.2 The Characteristics of the Brothers and Sisters

We have seen that several scholars have argued that the exalted status of the Son is recognized in the difference between the one who sanctifies and those sanctified, but that the purpose of claiming a common origin is to underline that they share being brothers. We have also concluded that the author argues for brotherhood based on common origin

\(^{78}\) Koester also refers to this possibility, but he opts as noted above for interpreting “one” as a reference to God; see Koester, Hebrews, 229.

\(^{79}\) Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 124.

\(^{80}\) See Peeler, You Are My Son, 86.

\(^{81}\) David Peterson, Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the “Epistle to the Hebrews,” SNTSMS 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 60. The scriptural support found in Heb 2:12, 13 also strengthens this understanding. See also BDAG, 31, s.v. αἰτία.

\(^{82}\) O’Brien, Hebrews, 110, note 145. Koester argues that because the verb “call” is in the present tense, “the exalted Jesus continues to call others his brethren”; see Koester, Hebrews, 238.

\(^{83}\) See also NIV, “are of the same family,” NCV, “are from the same family,” CEV, “all belong to the same family.”

\(^{84}\) Robert L. Brawley states similarly that “the ‘many offspring’ that Jesus leads into glory in 2:10 are siblings of Jesus (2:11, 14)”; see Robert L. Brawley, “Discoursive Structure and the Unseen in Hebrews 2:8 and 11:1: A Neglected Aspect of the Context,” CBQ 55 (1993): 81–98, here 90. O’Brien notes that the affirmation anticipates Heb 11:16 where “God is not ashamed to be called their God”; see O’Brien, Hebrews, 110. See also Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 59.

\(^{85}\) Johnson, Hebrews, 98.
or sonship as in a family. Michel argues that sonship and brotherhood are connected here: “Was der Heiligende ist und was die Geheiligten werden, das sind und werden sie aus Gott; Sohnschaft und Bruderschaft werden schon hier verbunden.”

A qualitative difference in sonship is admittedly found between those who sanctify and those who are sanctified. This is also expressed in the shift from active to passive in the use of ἁγιάζω in 2:11. Who are these sons that together with Jesus have God as father sharing a common origin and that also are called brothers by Jesus (2:11)?

The term ἀδελφός, “brother,” is found in the letter in 2:11, 12, 17; 3:1, 12; 7:5; 8:11; 10:19; 13:22, 23. In 7:5, it is used as a description of those belonging to the descendants of Abraham, the Israelite people, with the meaning “fellow kinsmen” or “countrymen.” It is used twice in quotations from the OT: in 2:12, quoting Ps 21:23 LXX, and 8:11 quoting Jer 38:34 LXX. The spiritual relationship is more prominent in its setting in Hebrews, thus the meaning “sibling believer.” The term is further used by the author as a designation of the receivers of the letter in 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22. In 13:23, it is a description of Timothy. In all these instances, it is a description of them as fellow Christians, collectively or individually, by the author of the letter. They too are “sibling

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88 Gräßer, *Hebr 1–6*, 134–35. The difference in sonship will be dealt with in more detail below.
89 See also Rom 9:3. This is similar to common OT usage. See Exod 2:11; Lev 25:46; Deut 2:4; 3:18.
90 In the quotation from Ps 21:23 LXX the term is used in parallel with the Israelite congregation. There is thus a shift from a physical to a spiritual relationship; see W. Günther, “ἀδελφός,” *NIDNTT* 1:255. In Jer 38:34 LXX, friend or neighbor and brother are put in parallel as those comprising the people of the Lord. Its meaning is “fellow kinsman” and “fellow countryman”; see Johannes Beutler, “ἀδελφός,” *EDNT* 1:29; Hans F. von Soden, “ἀδελφός,” *TDNT* 1:145, note 7. Johnson states that “the main point of both citations is clearly about family.” Johnson, *Hebrews*, 98.
91 A similar use is found in the Pauline letters: Collectively: Rom 1:13; 7:1; 1 Cor 1:26; 15:58; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:1. Individually: Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 12:18. The meaning “friend” might also be included here, as a Christian brother is a friend too; see Beutler, *EDNT* 1:29–30. See also Ep. Apos. 19 where the apostles are said to be both brothers and friends of the Lord. Philip A. Harland mentions several inscriptions from Asia Minor that according to him refer to an association or cultic organization using “brother” terminology such as “brother priests,” and where this phrase does not refer to real brothers, who incidentally are fellow priests, see Philip A. Harland, “Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: ‘Brothers’ (ἈΔΕΛΦΟΙ) in Associations of the Greek East,” *JBL* 124.3 (2005): 491–513, here 498–99. Others, however, have argued that these are Christian epitaphs. If Harland’s reading of these inscriptions, which seems

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91 A similar use is found in the Pauline letters: Collectively: Rom 1:13; 7:1; 1 Cor 1:26; 15:58; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:1. Individually: Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 12:18. The meaning “friend” might also be included here, as a Christian brother is a friend too; see Beutler, *EDNT* 1:29–30. See also Ep. Apos. 19 where the apostles are said to be both brothers and friends of the Lord. Philip A. Harland mentions several inscriptions from Asia Minor that according to him refer to an association or cultic organization using “brother” terminology such as “brother priests,” and where this phrase does not refer to real brothers, who incidentally are fellow priests, see Philip A. Harland, “Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: ‘Brothers’ (ἈΔΕΛΦΟΙ) in Associations of the Greek East,” *JBL* 124.3 (2005): 491–513, here 498–99. Others, however, have argued that these are Christian epitaphs. If Harland’s reading of these inscriptions, which seems
believers.” The two remaining references are 2:11, 17. Who are the brothers mentioned here?

Otfried Hofius has argued that the background for the understanding of the brother relationship in 2:11, 17 is found in the teaching about the priesthood of the believers.92 The proposed background he finds in the designation of the priests as brothers of the high priest. Support is found in Lev 21:10 where the high priest is called ὁ ἱερεύς ὁ μέγας ἀπὸ τῶν ἄδελφῶν αὐτοῦ, “the priest who is chief among his brothers” (ESV), and in numerous other texts in ancient Judaism. Hofius lists several texts, e.g. the following: “Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate” Neh 3:1 (ESV); “When he received the portions from the hands of the priests, as he stood by the hearth of the altar with a garland of brothers around him, he was like a young cedar on Lebanon surrounded by the trunks of palm trees” Sir 50:12 (NRSV).93 In addition to the texts specifying the priests as brothers of the high priest, there are texts that present the priests as brothers among themselves, e.g. 2 Kgs 23:9: “However, the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in

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reasonable, is accepted, these inscriptions show that this kind of terminology is not restricted to Christian groups. It is therefore possible to argue that this kind of terminology would be understandable in different religious contexts.

92 For the following, see Hofius, Katapausis, 216, note 830. He explicitly argues against the Gnostic teaching about common kinship, ἱδρυγένεια.

93 He also lists: 1Q33 XIII, 1; XV, 4; m. Tamid 7:1; t. Yoma 1:22 [182:28]; b. Yoma 51b; 53b; b. Zevah. 100a; b. Menah. 109b (several); see also Memar Marqah III § 2. See Memar Marqah: The Teachings of Marqah: Volume I: The Text, ed. John Macdonald, trans. John Macdonald, BZAW 84 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963), 93, lines 13–16. According to Macdonald, the Memar can be dated from the 2nd to the 4th centuries AD; see Memar Marqah I, xx. We may add the following texts to the list given by Hofius: 1 Chr 16:39; Ezra 3:2; b. Yoma 38b; y. Hor 2:7; y. Yoma 1:2, 38a (discusses Lev 21:10); y. Yoma 3:6, 40d. Zadok is not designated as a high priest in 1 Chr 16:39; he is, however, depicted as the leader of the priests (1 Chr 15:11–12). Joshua, son of Jozadak, is not described as high priest either, but he is the leader of the priests (Ezra 3:8–9). See also John R. Spencer, “Aaron (Person),” ABD 1:3–4; Steven J. Schweitzer, “The High Priest in Chronicles: An Anomaly in a Detailed Description of the Temple Cult,” Bib 84 (2003): 388–402, here 394–95. By adhering to the translation given by Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, Jr., and Edward M. Cook, The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation, Rev. and upd. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 165 that translates 1Q33 XIX, 11: “And the Chi[ef] Priest shall approach there [with] his [depu]ty, his brothers [the priests],” this text could also be added. García Martínez and Tigchelaar, Dead Sea Scrolls, 1:144–45, on the other hand, transcribes 1Q33 XIX, 11 with שֶׁשֶׁהוֹן אֵל הַמֶּלֶךְ אוֹשֶׁךְ וְחָשְׁבוֹתָם שֶׁשֶׁהוֹן אֵל הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵל הַמֶּלֶךְ אוֹשֶׁךְ וְחָשְׁבוֹתָם which García Martínez and translates “And the Hi[gh] Priest will approach there, [and] his [se]cond, and [the priests,].” 4Q471 1 2; 4Q491 1–3 17; 11Q18 15 3; 11Q19 44 5 might also be added, but parts of the relevant portions of these texts are more insecure.
Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers” (ESV). The Levites are also portrayed as brothers among themselves: “You are the heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites. Consecrate yourselves, you and your brothers” (1 Chr 15:12; ESV). Priests are also portrayed as brothers of the Levites in 1 Esdr 1:14. These references, combined with those given by Hofius, show that there was most likely a fairly common literary tradition in ancient Judaism where both Levites and priests were called brothers among themselves and where the priests were called the brothers of the high priest. There are no references where the Levites are called brothers of the high priest.

An interesting example is found in 2 Chr 35:14 where LXX has ἀδελφός for HB יַעֲם as seen in the following phrase where the priests are designated brothers of the Levites: “so the Levites made preparations for themselves and for the priests, the descendants of Aaron” (NRSV) compared with “the Leuites prepared both for themselves and for their brothers, the sons of Aaron” (NETS). The parallel text in 1 Esd 1:14 reads, however, καὶ τοῖς ἱερεύσιν ἀδελφοῖς αὐτῶν υἱῶν Ααρων, thereby combining the HB and the LXX, taking priests as an apposition to their brothers (kindred), translated “the Leuites prepared it for themselves and for their kindred, the priests, sons of Aaron” (NETS). Unfortunately, other similar examples are not found. Seen in light of the other references where the priests are called brothers of the high priest and among themselves the translation given by LXX in 2 Chr 35:14 can perhaps be taken as an example of translating according to the sense of the references listed above where the priests are designated as brothers of the high priest.

According to Hofius, the phrase “for the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father” (2:11) is not to be understood christologically as Käsemann did, but must rather be understood in connection with 5:1–3 where the focus

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94 See also: 1 Chr 16:39; 24:31; 2 Chr 31:15; Ezra 3:2; 6:20; Neh 12:7; 12:12 (LXX); 13:13; 1 Esdr 5:47; 7:12; 1Q33 XV, 6–7; 4Q266 5 II, 3–4; m. Arakh. 7:3; m. Mid. 5:4; m. Sanh. 9:6; m. Tamid 5:6; 7:2. In m. Tamid 5:6 the two groups “his brethren the priests” and “his brethren, the Levites” are mentioned after another in a list. All the references mentioned relate of course to the Levitical priesthood, not to the priesthood of Melchizedek. 11Q19 LX, 14 uses the same brother language for the relation among Levites.

95 See also: 1 Chr 15:16; 24:31; 2 Chr 29:34; Ezra 8:24; Neh 12:24; 13:13; m. Tamid 5:6.

96 Hans F. von Soden suggests that this translation of the LXX might be “a variant, an error, or perhaps even a free translation according to the sense”; see Soden, TDNT 1:145, note 7.
is on the relationship between the priests and the congregation.97 According to Exod 28:1, the priest is taken “from among the Israelites.”98 This is the reason the author states that Jesus became a man (Heb 2:11b ff).99

It is obvious that the high priest as well as the other priests had to be Israelites, which shows their common origin and solidarity with the rest of the people.100 The references do not give any further clues, however, to what this brother relationship implied, but the general description of the high priest and the priests in the OT shows a difference in responsibility and privilege between them that implies that even though they belong to the same social and cultic group, they differ in roles and statuses.

Given this fairly well-recognized tradition, it is thus possible that with the use of the verb ἁγιάζω and by explicitly calling the sons brothers of Jesus in 2:11, the thought about the priests as brothers of the high priest could come to mind, even though the theme of Jesus as high priest is not introduced properly until 2:17.101 Sanctification is a priestly activity in the OT.102 It might also be worth noting that while the phrase ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ ἁγιάζων ὑμᾶς, referred to above,103 occurs in Lev 21:15, Hofius points to Lev 21:10, which is within the same context, in support of his understanding. God is the one who sanctifies the priest who is chief among his brothers, but according to Lev 21:8 he is also the one who sanctifies the priests. With regard to the argument of the Letter to the Hebrews that Jesus is both Son of God and high priest, we will argue that both thoughts

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97 It is not easy to grasp exactly what the phrase ἐξ ἐνός πάντες refers to according to Hofius. Attridge understands Hofius as suggesting of “the same priestly lineage”; see Attridge, Hebrews, 88, note 111. Attridge dismisses this understanding as highly implausible, but states that the “notion of the High Priest’s solidarity with his people is also developed in Heb 5:1–3.” Attridge, Hebrews, 88, note 108.

98 The phrase is מַתָּן מַיִן מִנֵּה יָשָׁר, from among the sons of Israel,” NASB95.

99 Hofius, Katapausis, 216, note 830.

100 This also fits well with the interpretation that the Son and the sons share a common humanity.

101 Weiβ argues for a cultic usage where ἁγιάζω must accordingly refer to priestly activity, as is the case in Heb 9:13 and 13:12 too. It anticipates the high-priest Christology of Heb 2:17; see Weiβ, Hebräer, 214–15.

102 Attridge lists the following references in support: Exod 28:4; 29:33; 30:30; Lev 8:12; 1 Sam 16:5; see Attridge, Hebrews, 88, note 107.

103 See note 26 above.
may be seen together in 2:11. As Son of God he sanctifies the sons, his brothers. As Son of God and high priest, he sanctifies the priests, his brothers.\textsuperscript{104} The brother relationship cannot be treated apart from the question about sonship. It has thus been argued that the sonship of the believers is not expressed specifically as that of being priests.\textsuperscript{105} If, however, as noted above, the use of the verb \textit{ἁγιάζω} can allude to a thought of a high priest who consecrates,\textsuperscript{106} the quotation from Ps 21:23 LXX in verse 12 can be understood as placing Jesus in that role by his proclamation of God’s name to his brothers and sisters and his praising of God in the middle of the assembly.\textsuperscript{107} It does fit such a context without necessarily needing it.\textsuperscript{108}

Moreover, this can also be alluding to a theme to be dealt with in more detail later. Hebrews 3:1 picks up from here both by calling Jesus “high priest” and by calling the believers “brothers,” albeit now brothers of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews.\textsuperscript{109} In 4:14 and 5:5 Jesus is called both “Son” and “high priest,” thereby combining two important titles for Jesus in the Letter to the Hebrews. This makes it possible to view the brother relationship along two lines where the main line in this context will be the argument from common origin and the secondary will be the brother relationship expressed between the high priest and the priests.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{104} The translation of Heb 2:11 in NEB is informing: “For a consecrating priest and those whom he consecrates are all of one stock.” O’Brien admits that “the language here gives a hint of the high-priestly status that results from Christ’s ‘perfection’ (2:17)” but argues that NEB “narrows the meaning of the verb to ‘sanctify’ in a sacerdotal direction too quickly, for it explicitly refers to Christ’s priestly function before the author himself does (2:17)”\textsuperscript{111}; see O’Brien, Hebrews, 108.

\textsuperscript{105} So Loader: “Daß die Sohnschaft der Christen spezifisch als Priestersein verstanden ist, ist im Brief nicht zu erkennen.” Loader, \textit{Sohn und Hoherpriester}, 134.

\textsuperscript{106} Lenski states that “The one sanctifying’ is already a high-priestly term”; see Lenski, Hebrews, 85.

\textsuperscript{107} Lane interprets the quotation as a reference to Jesus “who as the singing priest leads the redeemed community (ἐν μίσθῳ ἑκκλησίας) in songs of praise”; see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 59.

\textsuperscript{108} The primary function of the proofs from scripture in 2:12–13 is to show the solidarity of the Son with the sons. This applies to both citations; see Weiß, Hebräer, 216; O’Brien, Hebrews, 113.

\textsuperscript{109} Ellingworth wonders whether the author in light of 3:1–6 has in mind an analogy with Moses’ consecration of Aaron and his sons (Exod 29:1; Lev 8:30); see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 164.

\textsuperscript{110} Jacob Neusner argues that in the period between ca. 70 and ca. 120 the Pharisees reinterpreted the law in such a way that what was formerly expected of the priests alone was now expected of every Jew; see Jacob Neusner, “The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh (Jamnia) from A. D. 70 to 100,” \textit{ANRW} 19.2:22.
I will not argue exclusively for a priestly brother relationship in 2:11.\textsuperscript{111} It prepares, however, well for understanding the relation between Jesus as high priest and the believers as a kind of brother relationship. The argument put forth in 2:17 that he had to become like his brothers in every respect to be a high priest in the service of God underscores that the relationship between the Son and the sons as that of brothers is still valid when he is presented as high priest. Two lines of arguing for brotherhood are merged. There is thus a close connection between the Son as brother and the high priest as brother.\textsuperscript{112} Guthrie argues for a link between two expository sections, 2:17–18 and 5:1–3, using distant hook words. He notices five terms and phrases found in both.\textsuperscript{113} The connection between 2:11 and 5:1–3 is thus through 2:17 where we also find the term ἀδελφός.\textsuperscript{114} To be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, Jesus had to become like his brothers and sisters.

It has already been argued that in 2:11 the brother relationship is with Jesus, the one who sanctifies.\textsuperscript{115} Those designated brothers are the sanctified (2:11), the sons to be brought to glory (2:10).\textsuperscript{116} They are thus his sibling believers. In 2:17, the brother relationship is again with Jesus. Following the line of thought from verse 11, where the brothers are the sanctified, they are the congregation as the parallelism in verse 12.

\textsuperscript{111} This means that to read 2:11a as dealing with the same relationship as 5:1–3 is difficult; it anticipates, however, the relationship between the high priest and the congregation. This can be seen in the parallel in the relation between the Son and the sons on the one hand and the high priest and the people on the other. The point that the Son and the high priest need to be one of the people to act on behalf of them is important in both places.

\textsuperscript{112} Weiß argues for two distinguishable Christologies being discerned in 2:10–18, first an ἀρχιερεύς-Christology and then an ἀρχηγός-Christology, the latter connected with the theme of the Son and the sons; see Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 203.

\textsuperscript{113} Guthrie, \textit{Structure of Hebrews}, 97–98. The terms and phrases are: τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, 2:17 and 5:1; τοῦ λαοῦ, 2:17 and 5:3; ἀμαρτία, 2:17 and 5:1, 3; ὀφείλω, 2:17 and 5:3; ἀρχιερεύς, 2:17 and 5:1.

\textsuperscript{114} Lane notes that Jesus calling them brothers is derived from the quotation in 2:12, but it also prepares for the statement in 2:17; see Lane, \textit{Hebrews 1–8}, 53.

\textsuperscript{115} There are those who prefer not to understand the brother relationship christologically; see Doormann, “Deinen Namen,” 249; Hofius, \textit{Katapausis}, 216, note 830; Strobel, \textit{Hebräer}, 103.

suggests. In verse 13, they are the children whom God has given the Son. They are true human beings according to verse 14. They are then in verse 16 called the “descendants of Abraham” who are the family of faith. The brothers in verse 17 are thus the same as the brothers in verse 11. These brothers of the Son are also the receivers of the letter (3:1).

The variation in vocabulary used by the author in describing the sanctified in 2:10–18 is worth noting. The terms include ὅιοι, “sons,” 2:10, ἀδελφοί, “brothers,” 2:11, 12, 17, παιδία, “children,” 2:13, 14, and σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, “descendants of Abraham,” 2:16. All these designations fall within family language. Based on this extensive use of family language in this section, it seems reasonable to conclude that the term ἀδελφός still carries meaning derived from family life.

In other words, a sibling relationship exists between the Son and the sanctified, his sibling believers.

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117 Peeler, You Are My Son, 92.
119 Ellingworth, Hebrews, 197.
120 See also Guthrie, Structure of Hebrews, 64–65; Westfall, Discourse Analysis, 103.
121 Karl Olav Sandnes reaches the same conclusion for the Pauline tradition. He finds support for this understanding in the use of the term in its application to individuals; see Sandnes, New Family, 74. The only singular use in the Letter to the Hebrews is found in 13:23. There is thus not enough textual evidence available in this letter to argue in the same way.
122 These are explicit in naming the Son brother: F. Delitzsch, Commentar zum Briefe an die Hebräer: Mit archäologischen und dogmatischen Excursen über das Opfer und die Versöhnung (Leipzig: Dörrling & Franke, 1857), 73; Koester, Hebrews, 237; Johnson, Hebrews, 253; Vanhoye, A Different Priest, 111; Moisés Silva, “ἀδελφός,” NIDNTT 1:151. Delitzsch also states that the author could have appealed to Matt 12:49; 28:10; John 20:17 in support, but that he prefers to quote the OT. Aasgaard on the other hand does not find a sibling relationship expressed here. He argues that status difference is implied in the phrase “not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters,” that Jesus is the superior and that he bridges the gap, but this needs to be justified by references to Scripture that are interpreted christologically. The status difference might have been seen to be too vast to allow for a sibling relationship being expressed; see Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 147, especially note 49. However, he also states that “Hebrews appears to think in terms of a ‘family of God,’ in which Christians are God’s children and the siblings of Jesus (2:11–17);” see Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 115.
4.1.3.3 Eldest Brother Characteristics

We have argued above that the Son and the sons are brothers. This is based on a common origin as humans and on a fellowship in destiny and solidarity. It has become evident, however, that while Jesus and the sons are brothers, there is a difference between them. This difference is seen in what sets Jesus apart from his brothers and sisters. The contention put forward above is that by understanding the relationship between Jesus and his brothers as that of the eldest brother in relation to his younger brothers and sisters, this difference between them can be explained. We will thus have to examine how Jesus is characterized in relation to his younger brothers and sisters, that is, what his status and roles are in relation to them.

In answering the question about what sets Jesus as brother apart from his brothers and sisters in the letter, the relevant textual material must be specified. If it can be argued, as Gray seems to do, that the understanding of Jesus as brother runs throughout the Letter to the Hebrews, then more than what is stated in the section 2:10–18 can be used in a characterization of Jesus in this regard.\(^\text{123}\) A more cautious approach will nevertheless concentrate primarily on an exegesis of this central section because this section contains both the most explicit description of the believers as brothers of Jesus and of Jesus as their brother. The focus is on what can be explained primarily from this section about Jesus as the eldest brother. That Jesus is given other descriptions than the believers is not difficult to show, the challenge is to connect these descriptions with the status and role of the eldest brother. Other texts in the Letter to the Hebrews will also be brought into the discussion where relevant.

**Representative and Leader**

The first characteristic of Jesus that reveals something about Jesus as eldest brother we find in the use of two phrases in 2:10: “bringing many children to glory (πολλοὺς υἱοὺς εἰς δόξαν ἀγαγόντα)” and “the pioneer of their salvation (τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν).” In the immediate context, Jesus is presented as one who represents others. He tasted death

\(^{123}\) Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 350–51. He also argues that the two roles of high priest and brother are merged throughout the Letter to the Hebrews. This will be dealt with below.
for everyone (2:9b) with the result that many sons are led to glory (2:10). In the following verses, he identifies with his brothers and sisters and declares his kinship with them (2:12, 13b).\textsuperscript{124} He thus acts on behalf of his brothers and sisters in order that they also shall share glory with him. The main actor is God, but Jesus fulfilled what is fitting for God: to bring the sons to glory by his suffering.\textsuperscript{125}

We first recognize that the filial status between God and Jesus is clearly seen in the use of the title “Son” for Jesus (1:2, 5, 8). By using the term υἱός instead of παιδία (cf. 2:13, 14) in the phrase πολλοὶ υἱοὶ in 2:10, the author also draws a familial connection between the Son and those being led to glory.\textsuperscript{126} In arguing for a familial relationship between God and the sons, Peeler notes that the verb ἀγω is used to describe a parent leading children or God as father leading children.\textsuperscript{127} The verb is also used in compound forms in two other occurrences in Hebrews with God as subject: in 1:6 where God leads (εἶσαγω) his firstborn into the coming world, in anticipation of his leading of many sons to glory (2:10),\textsuperscript{128} and in 13:20 where God is bringing back (ἀνάγω) our Lord Jesus from the dead. Peeler summarizes: “God performs the same action with respect to his Son and to humanity.”\textsuperscript{129} Just as the Son has been crowned with glory and honor (2:9), so the sons will be led to glory. In agreement with Peeler, the majority of scholars take God as the subject of the verb ἀγω, “lead.”\textsuperscript{130} Some, however, have argued for taking Jesus as the subject.\textsuperscript{131} Hughes, while favoring God as subject, states regarding taking Jesus as subject

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Moffitt, \textit{Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection}, 124.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 235; Peeler, \textit{You Are My Son}, 80.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Peeler, \textit{You Are My Son}, 81.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Parent leading: Gen 46:7; Exod 2:10; 1 Macc 6:15; Philo, \textit{Leg.} 3.84. God as father leading: Jer 3:14; 38:9 LXX; Rom 8:14. See Peeler, \textit{You Are My Son}, 81.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Peeler, \textit{You Are My Son}, 81.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Hughes, \textit{Hebrews}, 101–2; Attridge, \textit{Hebrews}, 82; Lane, \textit{Hebrews 1–8}, 56; Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 227; Peeler, \textit{You Are My Son}, 81; Filtvedt, \textit{The Identity of God’s People}, 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Käsemann, \textit{Wandernde Gottesvolk}, 89, note 4; Gerhard Delling, “ἀρχηγός,” \textit{TDNT} 1:488; Grogan, “Christ and His People,” 60; R. J. McKelvey, \textit{Pioneer and Priest: Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews} (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 23.
\end{itemize}
that in Greek “the participle ἀγαγόντα, which is in the accusative masculine singular, would best agree, so far as appearances go, with the contiguous noun τὸν ἀρχηγὸν, which matches it in case, gender, and number.” Weiß, while admitting the matching case, argues that the sons are God’s sons and therefore God must be the logical subject. The text does not say that the sons are the sons of the one leading them, it states “bringing many children to glory.” It is therefore possible to understand the text so that while the sons are God’s sons, the one that leads them to glory is God’s Son. While this interpretation is tempting because it would add the characteristic of leading more directly to Jesus, taking God as subject seems in the end to have the best support without necessarily having to draw a sharp line between the two interpretations. Moffitt thus seems to support God as subject but he nevertheless states about Jesus that “he now leads others into glory (2:10).” This characteristic of leading might be implied, however, in the title given him in the next phrase, “the pioneer of their salvation (τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν).”

The title ἀρχηγός, “pioneer,” is found only four times in the NT, and all of them are references to Jesus. Many scholars have acknowledged that this title is difficult to translate and Müller claims that ἀρχηγός has been translated by over thirty different terms. The title implies that Jesus somehow is a “leader,” “founder,” or “originator” for others.

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132 Hughes, Hebrews, 101.
133 Weiß, Hebräer, 206.
134 Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 196.
135 Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 181; see also his statements on page 124 that Jesus “is able to lead ‘many sons’ (πολλοὺς υἱοὺς, 2:10) into glory” and on page 135 that “he is explicitly said to be responsible for leading many ‘sons’ into glory (2:10).”
137 Müller, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΡΧΗΓΟΣ, 110. The multitude of translations is, according to Müller, due to no clear sense being derived from either a diachronic reading of the use of the term or the immediate context. See also Johnston, “Christ as Archegos,” 381–83.
138 These are the main senses according to BDAG, 138–39, s.v. ἀρχηγός.
Hughes thus states that ἀρχηγός “signifies one who is both the source or initiator and the leader (ἀρχή plus ἀγω), one who first takes action and then brings those on whose behalf he has acted to the intended goal.”

Johnston suggests, on the other hand, that ἀρχηγός should be translated “prince” and treats it as a title representing one of the strands in the primitive Christology where the fulfillment of the Davidic hope is a key factor. Attridge focuses on the etymological play between ἀρχηγός and ἀγαγόντα and argues that Christ is here fulfilling “the function of various guides on the heavenly path found in Greek, Jewish and Gnostic sources.” He also notes that the title ἀρχηγός can designate a founder of a family in classical sources.

Lane argues for “champion” as the preferable translation. This translation focuses on “the divine hero” in the Hellenistic world as the wider background against which to understand this title. Koester, on the other hand, prefers “pioneer” as a translation for ἀρχηγός. He argues that like those Israelite leaders who led the people in the wilderness to victory through battle or to the promised land, Jesus is identified as the one who leads people forward.

Moffitt “suspects that the larger narrative of Israel being led in the conquest of the promised land by Joshua (in Greek Ἰησοῦς) is close at hand.” He bases this on two observations: First, when Moses commands Joshua together with one man from each of the tribes to

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139 Hughes, Hebrews, 100, note 88.
140 Johnston, “Christ as Archegos,” 383–84. He argues, based on the translation of נָשִׂי and נָסִי in LXX that is translated by ἀρχηγός in some instances, that “prince” is the preferred translation. He holds this together with the use of this title for the Davidic Messiah in Ezekiel.
141 Attridge, Hebrews, 88.
142 Attridge, Hebrews, 87. Even though Attridge gives several references to ancient sources, none of them refers explicitly to a founder of a family; see, however, Aristotle, Fragm. 1.14.94 (Stobaeus, Flor. 88.13) where the phrase ὁ ἀρχηγός τοῦ γένους is found. Within the context γένος may here be taken to refer to lineage, clan, or family, and thus be translated: the founder of the lineage or family. Müller refers to Isocrates, Nic. 28, where he translates the phrase containing ἀρχηγός “Ahnherr unseres Geschlechts” (τοῦ γένους), Phil. 32, where he translates “Stammvater eurer Familie” (τοῦ γένους), and Phil. 105 where he translates “Stammvater eures Geschlechts” (τοῦ γένους). These references show that at least ἀρχηγός can refer to a founder of an extended family or lineage; see Müller, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ἈΡΧΗΓΟΣ, 77.
144 Koester, Hebrews, 236. He refers to Num 10:4; 13:2–3 for those who led the tribes in the wilderness and to Judg 5:15; 9:44; 11:6, 11; 1 Chr 5:24; 8:28; 26:26; 2 Chr 23:14; Neh 2:9; Jdt 14:2 for those in battle; see Koester, Hebrews, 228.
145 Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 129.
spy on the land of Canaan, they are called ἄρχηγοι (Num 13:2–3). Their twelve are princes or leaders in each of their tribes and are sent as representatives of the people. “Their entry proleptically symbolizes the entry of those whom they represent.” Second, the author of the letter refers to this entry into the land in Heb 4:8. Thus the representative relationship found in Num 13:2–3 is taken up by the Son “who represents and stands in solidarity with the many sons whom he leads into the glory they are about to possess (2:10).”

I will argue that the phrase “the pioneer of their salvation (τὸν ἄρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτών)” is best understood if we translate it as “the leader to their salvation.” This fits best with the broader context in Hebrews. The goal is the salvation of the readers (2:3) that is hoped for at Christ’s return (9:28). The content of this eternal salvation (cf. 5:9; 7:25) includes both salvation from God’s judgment and from the powers of evil (2:14–15). It also means to obtain glory in the presence of God (2:10). The present experience of the readers, however, is that this goal has not been reached yet, they still experience various forms of suffering and hardship (10:32–34; 13:3). “Jesus’ ascension into heaven and assumption of the heavenly throne can therefore be identified with the entry of the representative of God’s people into the eternal promised land.” Moreover, since Jesus is the ἄρχηγός of God’s many sons and daughters (πολλοὺς υἱῶν), the author draws forth another emphasis of the term ἄρχηγός: the head of the family.” Jesus thus “becomes the head of God’s family leading the many υἱῶν to glory.” I am reluctant to state that Jesus becomes the head of God’s family because I would reserve that role for

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146 Bryan J. Whitfield states that in Num 13:2–3 Joshua is as ἄρχηγος understood as a leader; see Whitfield, “Pioneer and Perfecter,” in Bauckham et al., A Cloud of Witnesses, 83.

147 Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 129.

148 Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 130.

149 So also Filtvedt, The Identity of God’s People, 60. See also Peeler, You Are My Son, 82. She notes that the title also indicates “forerunner.” The following references support a translation of ἄρχηγός as leader in LXX: Num 14:4; 25:4; Isa 3:6, 7; 30:4; Neh 12:9; Jdt 14:2; 1 Macc 9:61; 10:47.


151 Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 142, emphasis original.

152 Peeler, You Are My Son, 83, emphasis original. She lists the following references in support: Exod 6:14; Num 13:3; 1 Chr 5:24; 26:26; 1 Esdr 5:1; Neh 7:70, 71.

153 Peeler, You Are My Son, 83.
the father in the family, but his leader role in relation to his brothers and sisters is evident. He is also their representative.

Looking at the three other places where this title is used in the New Testament, all of them relate to Ps 110: Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb 12:2. Psalm 110 has already been cited in Heb 1:3, 13, and it can thus be argued that this psalm is part of the larger context here too. The connection made between Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:6 in other passages in the New Testament such as Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20–23 may indicate that a similar connection exists between these two psalms here too considering the quotation of Ps 8 in Heb 2:6–8. The connotations added by the use of Ps 110 are that royal, priestly, and heroic imagery are applied to Jesus. I do not argue that there is a demonstrable connection between Ps 110:1 and the use of ἀρχηγός in Heb 2:10, only that with the prior use of this psalm in Hebrews, royal and priestly imagery has already been applied to Jesus. The image of the high priest that enters the Holy Place (cf. 9:25) also accords well with Jesus as leader and representative on behalf of the many sons, that is, his brothers and sisters.

The other reference where ἀρχηγός is found in the letter is as noted in 12:2. The context in 12:1–2 shows that while Jesus was not the only one who had shown faith in God, as the list in 11:4–38 shows, he is the one who attained the goal of faith by taking his seat at the right hand of the throne of God (12:2). He thus brings faith to completion, and thereby also enables others to follow him. The sitting at the right hand of the

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155 See Loader, “Christ at the Right Hand,” 210; Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 46; Koester, Hebrews, 204. Hay notes that both Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:7 appear in Heb 1:13–2:8; see Hay, Glory at the Right Hand, 35.

156 See Koester, Hebrews, 204. The argument is that if the royal imagery in Ps 110:1 applies to Jesus, then by extension also should the priestly imagery in Ps 110:4. Johnston similarly argues that the title reflects royal prerogatives and princely power, although, as noted above, he regards ἀρχηγός as equivalent to נָשִי; see Johnston, “Christ as Archegos,” 384.

157 Loader thinks such a connection is possible; see Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 20.

Majesty, which is stated about the Son, thus connotes authority and high honor.\textsuperscript{159} This is the result of his suffering and death. Jesus opens the new and living way for us by his blood and thus establishes the new covenant (8:6; 10:19–21). In this way, he is the source of faith as well as a model of faith.\textsuperscript{160} The metaphor of the athlete who runs a race is, however, also clearly present in 12:1–2. Jesus has run the race and completed the race; the believers are encouraged to look at him also as a model and leader.\textsuperscript{161} He has put his trust in God (cf. 2:13), and remained faithful.\textsuperscript{162} In this way the believers thus have a model or example to follow.\textsuperscript{163}

The last point is related to the title given him in 6:20 where he is called πρόδρομος, “forerunner.”\textsuperscript{164} Most scholars recognize the link back to 2:10 to the title ἀρχήγος when commenting on the title πρόδρομος as found in 6:20. This title is not drawn from the family realm, but refers primarily to athletic and military functions.\textsuperscript{165} The forerunner is the scout moving ahead of the main army or of advance ships of a fleet. It can also refer to a herald announcing the approach of a party, or be used for early-ripened fruit.\textsuperscript{166} All these uses have the notion of precedence in common. Witherington states that “the sense is not just someone who arrives in advance to announce that others will follow, but it is someone who does something once he arrives to help accommodate or prepare for those following.”\textsuperscript{167} It is also used metaphorically as a precursor.\textsuperscript{168} The title thus implies that

\begin{footnotes}
\item:\textsuperscript{159} Exod 15:6; 1 Kgs 2:19; Ps 20:6; 44:3; 98:1; 110:1; 118:15–16; Sir 12:12.
\item:\textsuperscript{160} Koester, Hebrews, 523.
\item:\textsuperscript{161} Some would argue for the meaning “beginner” but Ellingworth argues that the meaning “leader” is to be preferred here too; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 640.
\item:\textsuperscript{162} Witherington, commenting on 12:2, notes that the faith/faithfulness of Jesus put forward as a model for the believers is a striking analogue between Galatians and Hebrews; see Ben Witherington, III, “The Influence of Galatians on Hebrews,” \textit{NTS} 37 (1991): 146–52, here 151.
\item:\textsuperscript{163} Lane, Hebrews 9–13, 412; Koester, Hebrews, 523.
\item:\textsuperscript{164} See Otto Bauernfeind, “πρόδρομος,” \textit{TDNT}\textsuperscript{8}:235.
\item:\textsuperscript{165} Attridge, Hebrews, 185; Koester, Hebrews, 330, 335.
\item:\textsuperscript{166} Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 154.
\item:\textsuperscript{167} Witherington, III, \textit{Letters and Homilies}, 226.
\item:\textsuperscript{168} \textit{LSJ}, 9th ed., 1475, s.v. πρόδρομος.
\end{footnotes}
others would follow the forerunner. This thought is also present here in 6:20. Jesus has entered the heavenly glory and the believers are called to tread in Christ’s footsteps.

The author returns in 6:20 to where he left off in 5:10. It is there said of Jesus that, although he was Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Moreover, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (5:9). This would possibly imply that being forerunner is not restricted to the final part of the journey to eternal salvation, but includes suffering and temptation as well. The role of being a forerunner is also linked with his role as high priest. This is seen in the reference to Ps 110:4 in 6:20 that reiterates the high-priestly theme from 5:10.

Ellingworth furthermore argues that the use of πρόδρομος in 6:20 suggests the theme of the pioneer that opens a path for others to follow in 2:10 and that this can be combined with the theme of the wandering people of God that is explicated more directly in 3:7–4:11. The fact that Jesus called disciples to follow him (Mark 2:14; John 1:43), and that he walked before them (Mark 10:32; Luke 19:28), may also be a direct background. Less directly, Moses leading Israel out of Egypt may also be a background. Jesus is then the leader of others following him.

Thus, by looking at the immediate context of the use of the title ἀρχηγός and its wider use in the NT, with 12:2 as the closest parallel, which is furthermore related to the use of πρόδρομος in 6:20, a picture of how these titles help us understand how Jesus can be presented as the eldest brother emerges.

169 Alan C. Mitchell states: “As the representative human, Jesus is the forerunner (6:20) of human destiny in relation to God”; see Alan C. Mitchell, “The Use of πρέπειν and Rhetorical Propriety in Hebrews 2:10,” CBQ 54 (1992): 681–701, here 695. See also Small, Characterization of Jesus, 192–93; Filtvedt, The Identity of God’s People, 147, 209. Ellingworth notes that the reference to some following is implied by the prefix προ-. Here it refers to “for us (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν)” in the text; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 348.

170 Attridge, Hebrews, 185.

171 Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 60, 183.


173 Bauernfeind states that “πρόδρομος fits into the priestly and sacral thinking”; see Bauernfeind, TDNT 8:235. McKelvey contends that “the closely related figure of the forerunner (prodromos) in 6:20 is actually called high priest”; see McKelvey, Pioneer and Priest, xxiii–xxiv.

174 Ellingworth, Hebrews, 161. See also Small, Characterization of Jesus, 239.
Under the description of what is fitting for God, that is God’s goal of eternal salvation for the brothers and sisters of Jesus, Jesus is being declared as the leader to their salvation. This implies that he walks ahead of them, opens a path for them, and thus prepares for others to follow. He offers salvation through his suffering by tasting death for everyone (2:9, 10). He thus leads the way to their salvation. He is moreover a model or example for the others; this is expressed most explicitly in 12:2. The way he fulfills his role model is not merely by pointing out the way to the goal of salvation, but he is the model for the others with his own example of putting his trust in God and being faithful to God. His leading role thus sets him apart from the others that follow him. The status and power ascribed him by the implications from Ps 110 signal his authority and high honor. His status is thus above that of the other brothers.

Given the noticeable use of vocabulary relating to kinship in chapters 1–2 such as “father,” “son,” “sons,” “brothers,” “children,” and “inheritance,” the use of the two titles ἀρχηγός and πρόδρομος lends support to understanding Jesus as the eldest brother. This understanding of these titles is also in agreement with Jesus being designated the firstborn (1:6), and calling the others his brothers (2:11). The following characteristics of the eldest brother are thus in agreement with what is stated about Jesus by the use of the title ἀρχηγός in 2:10; 12:2 and the related title πρόδρομος in 6:20: Jesus is a model or example to follow, he is their representative and leader. By providing for their salvation, he also takes care of them in his leading of them. All this moreover signals that his status is higher than that of his brothers and sisters.

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175 Rafael Gyllenberg, “Die Christologie des Hebräerbriefes,” ZST 11 (1934): 662–90, here 681. Bruce says that it “signalizes the first fruits of a mighty aftercrop”; see Bruce, Hebrews, 155.


179 Gray states that his temporal priority is signaled by the two titles ἀρχηγός and πρόδρομος; see Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 340.
Special Status

In addition to supporting the notion that Jesus and the sons are brothers and sisters in the three quotations found in 2:12–13, it is also possible to identify the special status of the Son. I will further argue that the use of the titles “Son” and “Firstborn” given to Jesus also indicates his special status in relation to his brothers and sisters.

The author has stated that both the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified share a common origin. I have argued that this common origin is based on their shared humanity. Jesus is therefore not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters (2:11). In support, the author puts two quotations from the Old Testament in the mouth of Jesus. The first quotation is from Ps 21:23 LXX where he says “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you” (2:12). The quotation differs slightly from the LXX by substituting διηγέομαι with ἀπαγγέλλω. The main purpose of the quotation is found in the term ἀδελφός, which is the key term in support of their siblingship, without being the only point of the quotation. The parallelism in the psalm also makes ἀδελφοί and ἐκκλησία parallel terms, thereby suggesting that those called brothers and sisters of Jesus are the members of his community.

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180 Peeler, You Are My Son, 18. Peeler lists 2:12, 13 and 10:5–8 where Jesus speaks the scripture.
181 ἀπαγγέλλω is found only here in the Letter to the Hebrews. διηγέομαι is found only in 11:32. Most commentators agree that the author has made the change; see Attridge, Hebrews, 90; Johnson, Hebrews, 98. Weiß argues that the parallel with ψηλώ is strengthened by substituting διηγέομαι with ἀπαγγέλλω; see Weiß, Hebräer, 216. He further states that it is not to be taken as a technical term for preaching the gospel; see Weiß, Hebräer, 216, note 42. Attridge states that the term used here might be more suitable to underline Christ’s mission; see Attridge, Hebrews, 90. Ellingworth finds the most likely explanation in Ps 21:32 LXX where ἀναγγέλλω is used in the phrase “proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn” and a similar passage in Ps 77:3–6 LXX where both διηγέομαι and ἀπαγγέλλω are found (ἀπαγγέλλω is found in verse 6 to proclaim the “testimony” and “law” to the children yet unborn, to their sons); see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 168.
182 Ellingworth, Hebrews, 166.
What is implied by Jesus “proclaiming your name” and “praising you”? “Your name” and “you” stand in parallel. “Your name” is unemphatic and not further commented upon.\(^ {184}\) The name refers to God because Jesus uses here the words of the psalm to speak to God.\(^ {185}\) God himself is proclaimed by the Son to his brothers and sisters. Later the author urges the readers continually to offer praise to God and confess his name (13:15). It is thus possible to understand the proclamation and praising of God’s name as implying more than uttering his name in worship: God himself is proclaimed and praised by the Son to his brothers.

Many scholars recognize the christological use of Ps 22 in the Gospels as a possible background.\(^ {186}\) The context in which this proclamation and praising are uttered is important both in the psalm and here in Hebrews. The uttering in Hebrews comes after his suffering and death. He is now crowned with glory and honor. In the psalm the thanksgiving comes after the lament.\(^ {187}\) Lane comments that “it is appropriate to an experience of vindication and exaltation after suffering and affliction.”\(^ {188}\) The eternal salvation is thus an integral part of what is meant here. This agrees with the next part of the quotation; his praising of God’s name is in the midst of the congregation. This is taken by Lane to be understood as a reference to the exalted Christ “who as the singing priest leads the redeemed community (ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας) in songs of praise.”\(^ {189}\)

\(^ {184}\) Ellingworth, Hebrews, 168.

\(^ {185}\) Peeler, You Are My Son, 86, note 73. The proclamation of God’s name may also echo John 17:6 where the manifestation of God’s name by Jesus clearly implies that God’s essential nature is revealed to men; see Leon Morris, The Gospel according to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 723.

\(^ {186}\) DeSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 116; Johnson, Hebrews, 98–99. Peeler discusses whether there is an intended connection with the tradition of placing a quote from Ps 22 on Jesus’ lips on the cross and concludes that we cannot know. For those who were familiar with the tradition and those familiar with the entire psalm, this quote also points to his suffering and death; see Peeler, You Are My Son, 88.

\(^ {187}\) The use of this psalm by Christ on the cross is also a strong argument in favor of reading this quotation in the context here as uttered by the crucified and exalted Christ. Bruce, Hebrews, 82. deSilva argues that this Christocentric reading of this psalm as Jesus’ own “enables the author to find a clear confession of those who hear Jesus’ proclamation of God’s ‘name’ as Jesus' family”; see deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 116.

\(^ {188}\) Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 59.

\(^ {189}\) Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 59. Lane’s understanding of this quotation is in line with the argument put forward above that connects the understanding of Jesus as both eldest brother and priest.
Similarly, Johnson states that “his ‘singing praise’ to God ‘in the assembly,’ moreover, suggests the presence in the community (see 12:27) of Christ as high priest (2:17).”

Jesus’ proclamation and praising of God’s name to his brothers and sisters, that is, his community, shows his special status above that of his brothers and sisters.

The second and third quotations are derived from Isa 8:17 and 18. The third quotation gives further weight to his special status. The quotations are again put in the mouth of Jesus: “And again, ‘I will put my trust in him.’ And again, ‘Here am I and the children whom God has given me’” (2:13). The children (τὰ παιδία) mentioned here are not to be understood as the children of Christ, but the children of God, thus his brothers. They are given to him by God.

The verb used here in the third quotation from Isa 8:18 is δίδωμι. According to Gray, this can mean “to entrust to one’s care” as when someone is entrusted to an appointed guardian. Gray finds support for such an understanding in the Roman legal institution of tutela impuberum:

A tutor, often an older brother, became responsible for the care of minor children and their inheritance until they reached the age of majority, thus heightening the older brother’s natural duty to take care of his younger siblings. Jesus, then, is pictured as the guardian of the audience, those whom God has given him and whom he ‘is not ashamed to call brothers’ (2:11).

Jesus is thus to be understood as being the guardian of those who have been entrusted to him. By being their guardian Jesus is set apart from his brothers and his special status above his brothers is marked.

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190 Johnson, Hebrews, 99.
192 O’Brien thus states: “they belong to Christ not by virtue of their common humanity but because of God’s mighty action”; see O’Brien, Hebrews, 113.
193 Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 340. BDAG, 242–43, s.v. δίδωμι lists John 6:37, 39; 17:6, 9, 12, 24; Heb 2:13 (Isa 8:18) for references with the meaning “entrust someone to another’s care.”
194 Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 340, emphasis original. Gray explains tutela impuberum as the Roman legal institution “which provided for the the guardianship of children who were still minor at the time of the father’s death,” see Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 340.
In the verses following, several actions are attributed to Jesus, actions that also distinguish him from his brothers and sisters. Through death he destroyed the power of the devil (2:14), he freed all those whose lives were held in slavery by fear of death (2:15),\textsuperscript{195} he came to help the descendants of Abraham (2:16),\textsuperscript{196} he became a merciful and faithful high priest to make atonement for the sins of the people (2:17);\textsuperscript{197} because he has been tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested (2:18).\textsuperscript{198} All these actions show that his power is stronger and emphasize his special status in relation to his brothers and sisters. Within the same context numerous references are given to his brothers and sisters: They are the children (2:14), that is, God’s children, they are the descendants of Abraham (2:16), they are brothers and sisters of Jesus (2:17). Thus, his special status is emphasized in the very context that also relates him to his brothers and sisters, making his special status a feature that is intelligible with an understanding of him as the eldest brother.

Two of the titles ascribed to Jesus also signify his special status in relation to his brothers and sisters. These are “Son” (υἱός)\textsuperscript{199} and “firstborn” (πρωτότοκος).\textsuperscript{200} While these two titles are not found in my primary section (2:10–18), they both occur in chapter 1 and I will argue that the understanding of Jesus in relation to his brothers and sisters

\textsuperscript{195} Ellingworth notes that the aorist forms of the verbs καταργέω, “destroy” and ἀπαλλάσσω, “set free” refer to the single event of Christ’s death; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 173.

\textsuperscript{196} Ellingworth presents a thorough discussion of the use of the verb ἐπιλαμβάνομαι, “take an interest in, help.” The use of the present tense signifies his present activity and points forward to his high-priestly service. He ends up with the meaning “take charge of,” arguing that the meaning “help” loses part of the intended meaning; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 176–78. BDAG lists Heb 2:16 under “be concerned with/about” and “suggests the rendering take an interest in, prob. in the sense help”; see BDAG, 373, s.v. ἐπιλαμβάνομαι.

\textsuperscript{197} Koester notes “that Christ makes atonement (hilaskesthai, Heb 2:17) in a manner that is comparable to the biblical rituals for the Day of Atonement”; see Koester, Hebrews, 121.

\textsuperscript{198} O’Brien argues that he is powerfully able to help and claims that when δύναμαι is used positively “it is related to the present powerful activity of Christ,” (4:15; 7:25); see O’Brien, Hebrews, 123, note 208. Ellingworth states that “nowhere in Hebrews does δύναμαι denote a mere possibility”; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 191.

\textsuperscript{199} Heb 1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 5:5, 8; 7:28. The more explicit title “Son of God” (υἱός τοῦ θεοῦ) is found in Heb 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29. I do not discuss it here because the occurrences are found after chapter 2 and the context where this title is found does not relate the title explicitly to his brothers and sisters. Koester argues that when “Son” is used christologically, it is a synonym for “Son of God”; see Koester, Hebrews, 35.

\textsuperscript{200} Heb 1:6.
sisters in chapter 2 includes and presupposes what has been stated about him as “Son” and “firstborn” in chapter 1.201

The title “Son” indicates a special relationship with God.202 His special status is expressed in several ways. In the introduction to the letter (1:1–4), all that is stated about the Son can also be read as an expression of his unique position and special status:203 

God created the world through him and has chosen to speak to us through him.204 By his powerful word he sustains all things. His resemblance to God is seen in that he is the reflection of God’s glory and is the exact imprint of God’s very being. As Son he is heir,205 and God has accordingly appointed him heir of all things.206 “By making purification for sins’ the Son sat down at God’s right hand as High Priest of his people.”207 The seating at the right hand connotes authority.208 Compared to the angels he has become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.209 All of this puts the Son in a higher position than his brothers and sisters and thus gives him a special status as Son.

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201 This argumentation also applies to my discussion later of Jesus as spokesperson and his special inheritance rights.

202 See Small, Characterization of Jesus, 179. The believers may be called “sons” but the titles “Son” (singular) or “Son of God” are reserved for Jesus.

203 See Koester, Hebrews, 186.

204 For the Son being a spokesperson, see below on page 228 under “Spokesperson.” The anarthrous ὦ illustrate in “a Son” (NRSV) emphasizes the quality of sonship; see Gareth L. Cockerill, The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 90. Attridge contends that “the term emphasizes the exalted status of that final agent”; see Attridge, Hebrews, 39.

205 Cockerill, Hebrews, 92.

206 The topic of being an heir will be dealt with below on page 231 under “Special Inheritance Rights.”

207 Cockerill, Hebrews, 96. The text has “the Majesty on high” (τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὕψηλος), a reverential periphrasis for God that also emphasizes “the supreme greatness of the Son’s position”; see Cockerill, Hebrews, 97. See also Attridge, Hebrews, 46; Bruce, Hebrews, 50. Attridge also notes that the term is common for cultic purification in both the LXX and the NT; he notes especially Exod 30:10 as particularly important. See Attridge, Hebrews, 45; see also note 132. Lane and deSilva note that Job 7:21 LXX might also be a possible resource; see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 15; David A. deSilva, “The Invention and Argumentative Function of Priestly Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” BBR 16 (2006): 295–324, here 297.

208 Koester, Hebrews, 35.

209 The author could not have compared the Son with anyone greater than the angels; see Cockerill, Hebrews, 100–101. See also Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 51. The adjective “superior” (κρέττων) is one of the most characteristic in Hebrews; see Attridge, Hebrews, 47.
Building further on the comparison with the angels, the author, using two quotations, asks whether the same has ever been said to the angels: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”? (1:5) The answer is assumed to be negative. The two quotations are taken from a royal context where what is stated is uttered to the Israelite king (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14). Peeler argues that by using these texts, “the author is asserting that Jesus is the true King of Israel.” In his citing of these two texts, the author is also making God declare his role as Father of the Son. The paternal/filial relationship between God and Jesus is thus clearly expressed. Moreover, these two quotations assert that the one God has chosen to speak to is not one of the prophets, but his own royal Son. The author himself has emphasized the great honor thus attributed to Jesus as Son (1:2), but now having God declare him Son, he shows how much more profoundly this honor is emphasized. The “unparalleled superiority of the Son” has thus been declared.

In the following verse (1:6) the designation “firstborn” (πρωτότοκος) is applied to the Son where the author states: “and again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘let all God’s angels worship him.’” There are several interpretative challenges in

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210 The framing parallel arrangement in 1:5–14 must be noted: nature of the Son (1:5), position of the angels (1:6), position of the Son (1:13), nature of the angels (1:14); see Cockerill, Hebrews, 102.

211 Peeler, You Are My Son, 48; Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 56. The singular “to which of the angels” (1:5) is important because the angels were in some instances called “sons of God.” But no angel has been singled out and spoken to with the phrase “You are my son”; see Cockerill, Hebrews, 103. The Logos in Philo can be called an angel (Mut. 87) and is also called Son (Conf. 63); see Attridge, Hebrews, 53, note 38; Braun, Hebräer, 35. Koester states that the argument assumes that the readers are not familiar with Philo’s use of the term; see Koester, Hebrews, 191. See also Ellingworth, Hebrews, 111.

212 Peeler, You Are My Son, 37. The combination of these two texts together is unparalleled; see Peeler, You Are My Son, 38. See also Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 73.

213 Peeler, You Are My Son, 39. She notes that the author chooses to cite two and allude to a third (Ps 88:28 LXX) from a small group of texts where God is designated father of the king (Pss 2:7; 88:28 LXX; 109:3 LXX; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6); see Peeler, You Are My Son, 39.

214 Peeler, You Are My Son, 41. Lane thus takes the more excellent name in 1:4 to be “my Son” (υἱὸς μου) here in 1:5 and takes the phrase “You are my Son,” as a legal formula of recognition; see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 25–26, emphasis original.

215 Peeler, You Are My Son, 46.

216 Peeler, You Are My Son, 51.

this verse. The first concerns how we should understand the use of πάλιν, “again.” We can regard it as an adverb and connect πάλιν with the verb εἰσάγω, “bring or lead in,” the sense being that it refers to a second bringing.\(^{218}\) We can also regard πάλιν as a connective used in an introductory formula.\(^{220}\) The sense becomes continuative or mildly adversative.\(^{221}\) It is here preferable to treat πάλιν as a connective introducing a biblical quotation rather than taking it as relating to a second coming.\(^{222}\)

The meaning of οἰκουμένη is also debated. The general meaning is “habitable land.”\(^{223}\) It is also found in 2:5 in the expression τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μελλοσσαν, which picks up from 1:6. It seems reasonable to think that what is referenced in 1:6 is the coming world, the heavenly realm. The firstborn is then brought into the heavenly world at the exaltation.\(^{224}\) The exaltation is thus the occasion for the worship of the firstborn by the angels.\(^{225}\) Koester notes that in Exod 16:35 it means the promised land that in Heb 4:1–11 signifies the future world.\(^{226}\) Moffitt similarly argues that οἰκουμένη “may be a more direct allusion to the larger exodus narrative than is commonly recognized.”\(^{227}\)
It is into this coming world that the firstborn (πρωτότοκος) is brought.228 Heb 1:6 is the only text in the NT with no added exposition or interpretation of πρωτότοκος.229  “He is the ‘Firstborn.’”230 The term is taken from the realm of the family meaning the first born to the parents. Using this term, the author thus continues his familial focus where the filial relationship to God is affirmed. Here it is used messianically. Ps 88:28 LXX is the only text in the OT where a single person, the king, is named God’s πρωτότοκος.231 However, a clear reference to God as father is lacking in Ps 88:28 LXX.232 It is found, however, in the preceding verse: “He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!’” It is quite possible that 1:6 alludes to this verse (88:28 LXX) where this term “is a title of honor expressing priority in rank.”233 Ps 88:28–29 LXX is also close in content to Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14, which have already been cited in the previous verse and which both focus on the filial relationship of the king to God.234

Weiß argues that the three terms πρωτότοκος, εἰσάγω, and ὁἰκουμένη form a common motive combining Davidic king ideology and entrance into the promised land.235 Granting that Weiß is right, Filtvedt argues that the term πρωτότοκος could also be used for the people of Israel, as in Exod 4:22; Jer 38:9; 4 Ezra 6:58, suggesting that Jesus “is presented both as the Messianic king who receives universal lordship, and as the ideal

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228 See also my discussion in chapter 3.3, Eldest Brother in the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, above for a literary background.
230 Cockerill, Hebrews, 105, emphasis original.
231 Peeler, You Are My Son, 52.
232 Peeler, You Are My Son, 40.
233 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 26. See also Helyer, “Prōtotokos Title,” 10, 12; O’Brien, Hebrews, 69; Cockerill, Hebrews, 105, note 28; Filtvedt, The Identity of God’s People, 58. I concluded on page 139 above that elevated position and excellence are central to what is highlighted and that Yahweh’s care for the king in protecting and helping him is moreover clearly expressed in the preceding verses of the Psalm.
234 Michel, Hebräer, 113–14; O’Brien, Hebrews, 69–70. For a discussion of Andriessen’s proposal, who does not find an allusion to Ps 88:28 LXX necessary; see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 27. He argues that the title is in either understanding suitable to emphasize Jesus’ supreme position over the angels.
235 Weiß, Hebräer, 163. He refers to Exod 4:22; Num 11:12; Jer 38:9 LXX as referring to Israel as πρωτότοκος. However, the term is not found in Num 11:12.
representative of God’s people.”236 With reference to Deut 6:10; 11:29, cf. Deut 31:20; Exod 3:8, Cockerill argues that both entrance into the promised land (ἀρχηγός, 2:10) and entrance into the Holy of Holies (ἀρχιερεύς, 10:19–21) are images used in Hebrews of God’s people entering the promised salvation brought them. He sums up by stating that the introductory phrase in 1:6 might have the purpose of saying that “just as God once brought His people into Canaan, now He has brought His firstborn Son into the true heavenly homeland and thus opened the way for his other sons to enter this homeland.”237 Hence, he summons the angels to worship him, emphasizing again the unique relationship with God. The preeminence of Jesus as the firstborn introduced here anticipates the relationship claimed between the Son and the sons that he is not ashamed to call his brothers and sisters.238 J. Daryl Charles argues that the story in Gen 25 about Esau and his birthright (πρωτότοκια, LXX), used as a warning example in Heb 12:16, poignantly emphasizes the privilege of the firstborn. Esau was supposed to receive privilege, blessing, and inheritance, but sold his birthright and lost his authority and blessing. Jesus, unlike Esau, has inherited many brothers and sisters. Thus, the church can be called the assembly of the firstborn (12:23).239 Based on Jesus being designated the firstborn, Gray states that “he is therefore their older brother in Hebrews.”240

236 Filtvedt, The Identity of God’s People, 58. Cockerill notes that “firstborn” and “heir” are combined in Exod 4:2–23; see Cockerill, Hebrews, 105.


238 O’Brien, Hebrews, 70. Similarly, deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 96. Witherington states that “Christ is the προτότοκος of many brethren (Heb 2:10–18)”; see Witherington, Ill, Letters and Homilies, 129, emphasis original. Ellingworth thinks this is not argued at this stage in the letter; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 118.


Priestly Role

We have already noted several allusions to the priestly role of Jesus. The Son making purification for sins (1:3) is cultic language.\textsuperscript{241} When he sat down at God’s right hand, he sat down as Son and high priest of his people.\textsuperscript{242} The use of Ps 110:1 applied to Jesus in 1:3, 13 might also add priestly imagery by extension through Ps 110:4.\textsuperscript{243} This is the Son, the sanctifier, that is not ashamed to call the sanctified his brothers and sisters (2:11).

We have also argued that the designation of the priests as brothers of the high priest makes sense as a background for understanding the brother relationship in 2:11, 17. The quotations from the OT also support this: The singing priest who leads the redeemed community in praise is the one who proclaims God’s name to his brothers and sisters (2:12). However, the differentiation between the sanctifier and the sanctified in 2:11 sets him in a position above his brothers and sisters in that he can offer the sanctification they need. Thus, he takes care of their eternal welfare. At the same time, by describing them as the “sanctified,” a positive term, the readers of the letter will likely identify themselves with the sanctified and thus benefit from the work of Jesus.\textsuperscript{244}

The self-identification of Jesus with his brothers is reiterated in 2:17 where the reason he had to become like his brothers and sisters in everything is explicated. Verses 2:17–18 can thus be seen as a summary of why it was fitting for Jesus to suffer.\textsuperscript{245} That Jesus had to become like his brothers in every respect (2:17) is preceded by ὅθεν, “for which reason,” thereby signaling that 2:10–16 states the reason he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect.\textsuperscript{246} The mentioning of them as brothers and sisters

\textsuperscript{241} Cockerill states that the author will later explain this in terms of high priesthood; see Cockerill, \textit{Hebrews}, 87–88.
\textsuperscript{243} Ps 110:4 is applied to Jesus later in 5:6; 7:17, 21.
\textsuperscript{244} DeSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 115.
\textsuperscript{245} Attridge, \textit{Hebrews}, 94.
\textsuperscript{246} Small lists the following requirements that Jesus had to fulfill to become high priest: be made like human beings (2:17; cf. 5:1), share flesh and blood (2:14), experience temptation (2:18; 4:15) and suffering (2:10, 18; 5:8), remain sinless (4:15; 726–27), be perfected in obedience (5:8–9; cf. 7:28); see Small,
refers back to verses 11 and 12 where the relationship between the Son and the sons has been described as a relationship between siblings. The scope of his self-identification with them is highlighted by the phrase κατὰ πάντα, “in every respect,” which is placed in the emphatic position of the clause. The primary focus, as the following verse shows, is upon his suffering and temptation, although it also includes all of what is meant by being a human being. “Jesus had to resemble the brothers in reality, as one brother resembles another.”

The purpose of this self-identification with his brothers (ἵνα, “in order that”) is that he, by being their brother, can be a merciful and faithful high priest to make atonement for the sins of the people. The imagery now shifts from slaves who need liberation (2:15) to people who need atonement for their sins. He is the mediator between humans and God and thus acts as the bridge builder, here expressed in cultic terms. The fact that the high priest had to be taken from among the people and set apart from others is stated in Exod 28; Lev 8; cf. Heb 5:1–2. The Son was with God (1:2) and now had to become like his brothers to be the high priest that represents his brothers and

_Characterization of Jesus_, 185. Moffitt argues that the experience of mortality functions as a prerequisite of his high-priestly status; see Moffitt, _Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection_, 286.

Lane, _Hebrews 1–8_, 64.

Lane, _Hebrews 1–8_, 64.

Moffitt notes that his differentiation from the angels as spirits is expressed in 2:14, 16 and 17; see Moffitt, _Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection_, 139. See also Peeler, _You Are My Son_, 105–6.

Lane, _Hebrews 1–8_, 64. If the exodus motive is again taken into consideration, Exod 4:16 depicts Aaron as serving as the mouth of Moses and Moses serving as God for Aaron. Grogan notes that the expression “in every respect” cannot be taken with unrestricted absoluteness (cf. Heb 4:15; 8:26). He thus qualifies Jesus’ solidarity in three ways: His person is unique because he is both Divine and human. His character is unique because he is sinless. At least certain aspects of his work are unique inasmuch as his sacrifice is unique (cf. Heb 10:12); see Grogan, “Christ and His People,” 66.

See also Heb 5:1–4; see Campbell, “In a Son,” 28. Weiß notes that in 2:10–15 the main christological term is ἀρχηγός while in 2:17–18 the term is ἀρχιερεύς; see Weiß, _Hebräer_, 222. The term ἀρχιερεύς, “high priest,” is used ten times for Jesus in Hebrews: 2:17; 3:1; 4:14–15; 5:5; 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11. Jesus is referred to as ἅγιος, “priest,” three times in quotations from Ps 109:4 LXX: 5:6; 7:17, 21; see Small, _Characterization of Jesus_, 183. O’Brien notes that the purpose has a twofold goal: the first and more immediate to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect and the further goal to make atonement for sins; see O’Brien, _Hebrews_, 119, note 190.

Koester, _Hebrews_, 240–41.

DeSilva, _Perseverance in Gratitude_, 120.
sisters in his service as high priest before God.\textsuperscript{254} Neither priests nor high priests are ever said to be merciful in the Greek Bible, but it is a recurring description of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{255} As a human, the Son must endure the suffering that characterizes his siblings before he can become the one who sanctifies the many.\textsuperscript{256} Thus Jesus also as high priest represents his brothers and sisters in his service before God. Moreover, this title and role are applied to Jesus alone. None of his brothers and sisters are placed in a similar position. He alone makes atonement for the sins of the people. The shift from brothers and sisters to people is most probably due to the use of δ ἡλιός [τοῦ θεοῦ], “people,” as a “technical term for Israel in its character as the nation chosen by God and separated from the other nations by covenant relationship.”\textsuperscript{257} This status is now transferred to the Christian community.\textsuperscript{258} The manner in which Christ makes atonement reminds one of the Day of Atonement.\textsuperscript{259} This entails both the removal of sin that alienates people from God (Lev 16:16, 19, 22; Heb 1:3; 9:13–14) and the averting of the wrath of God (3:7–4:13; 10:26–31). Jesus thus makes it his responsibility to take care of the eternal welfare of his brothers.

A further response to the theme introduced in 2:10 where God’s goal is to bring many sons and daughters to glory is that on their wandering toward glory Christ is able to give ongoing help in their temptations and tests because he himself has suffered and been tempted (2:18).\textsuperscript{260} The purpose of this assurance is to strengthen his brothers and sisters in their temptations and conflicts in their lives (cf. 13:13–14).\textsuperscript{261} The goal is that through the help he gives in the sufferings and temptations, he will bring them to

\textsuperscript{254} The high priest was a leader of the Jewish people (Sir 50:1–21); see Koester, Hebrews, 233.
\textsuperscript{256} Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection, 196. Peeler notes that when the nature of Jesus’ priesthood is described, his sonship is frequently integrated into the discourse; see Peeler, You Are My Son, 106. She also speaks of “the Son’s priestly vocation”; see Peeler, You Are My Son, 107.
\textsuperscript{257} Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 66; Filtvedt, The Identity of God’s People, 68.
\textsuperscript{258} Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 66; O’Brien, Hebrews, 122; Hermann Strathmann, “λαδως,” TDNT 4:55.
\textsuperscript{259} Koester, Hebrews, 121; Johnson, Hebrews, 103.
\textsuperscript{260} Peeler, You Are My Son, 133–34.
\textsuperscript{261} Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 66. Gray argues that the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood over the Levitical priesthood is that it “provides the help needed to obviate the readers’ fears”; see Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 336.
glory.\textsuperscript{262} He does not disappoint them.\textsuperscript{263} “It was precisely this likeness to his brethren that qualified him (hence our author’s insistence on its necessity) to act as their high priest—a title and function, now mentioned for the first time, central to the Christology of this epistle.”\textsuperscript{264} His faithfulness and compassion are emphasized in his role as high priest.\textsuperscript{265} We have thus seen both that Jesus is described as being a true brother to represent his brothers and sisters as high priest and that by being their high priest his role differs from theirs.\textsuperscript{266} While the text does not explicitly describe his role as high priest as a role of him as eldest brother, the description fits well with the priestly role of the eldest brother.

**Spokesperson**

We noted above that in the introduction (1:1–4) the author states how God has previously spoken to the ancestors and how he now in recent days has chosen to speak to us (1:1–2). Indeed, the initial affirmation that “God has spoken” is fundamental to the entire argument of the letter.\textsuperscript{267} God’s manifold revelations in the former days are narrowed in on the one that he has chosen to speak through in these last days.\textsuperscript{268} “By designating this medium of God’s speech as God’s own Son, the author establishes the Son’s unparalleled excellence and trustworthiness.”\textsuperscript{269} Lane emphasizes Jesus’ sonship as qualifying him for the role of being God’s spokesperson: “The eternal, essential quality of

\textsuperscript{262} “Christ ‘is able’ (δύναται) to give aid because, as a fellow sufferer, he is merciful and sympathetic, but also because, by his suffering, he has been brought to that position of honor and glory whence true help comes.” Attridge, *Hebrews*, 96.

\textsuperscript{263} Bruce notes the attempts by his friends to restrain him in Mark 3:21 [and 31?]; see Bruce, *Hebrews*, 88, note 89. He had gotten “new” brothers that he could not leave behind.

\textsuperscript{264} Hughes, *Hebrews*, 120.

\textsuperscript{265} Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 66. Cockerill argues that his faithfulness includes both his loyalty to God and his trustworthiness as savior; see Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 150.

\textsuperscript{266} Gray states before quoting Heb 2:17 that “His identity as brother of the faithful is the familiar and serves as the key to understanding the nature of his distinctive priesthood”; see Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 351.

\textsuperscript{267} Bruce, *Hebrews*, 44.

\textsuperscript{268} Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 11. Koester also notes the change from a multiplicity of messengers to the singularity of God’s son as his messenger; see Koester, *Hebrews*, 185.

\textsuperscript{269} Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 11.
Jesus’ sonship qualified him to be the one through whom God uttered his final word.”\(^{270}\)

We recognize the contrast in by whom, when, and how the message is spoken: In former days in many and various ways by the prophets compared with in these last days by a Son. Note the brevity in the manner in which the final revelation was given: In many and various ways is not contrasted, it is simply by a Son.\(^{271}\) How the verb λαλέω, “to speak,” is used in these two verses also emphasizes that the definitive mode of communication is through the Son.\(^{272}\) The noun “Son” (υἱός) is anarthrous\(^{273}\) and as such focuses on “the essential character of the one who is Son, in contrast to the prophets (τοῖς προφήταις).”\(^{274}\)

To be a prophet, one must hear from God what to say and thereafter deliver the message from God to one’s recipients (1 Sam 3:1–21; Amos 7:14–15; Jer 1:1–19).\(^{275}\) Attridge also notes other agents mentioned in the letter through whom God has spoken: angels, Moses, Joshua, and Aaron.\(^{276}\) The prophets also received God’s secret and were in his council.\(^{277}\) If they were trustworthy deliverers of God’s message, how much more can his own Son be trusted as spokesperson?\(^{278}\) In addition, the way God “speaks” is not only

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270 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 11.

271 Small, Characterization of Jesus, 259. Ellingworth warns against exaggerating the contrast by noting that the author does not introduce his favorite ἔπαξ or ἐφάπαξ; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 91. He also states that the author is not concerned at present with how or when God spoke; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 93. One way is implied; see Guthrie, Hebrews, 46.

272 Koester, Hebrews, 177. The form is aorist participle in verse 1 and aorist indicative in verse 2.

273 See also Heb 1:5; 3:6; 5:8; and 7:28. Schenck notes that the lack of an article in these references highlights a qualitative distinction; see Schenck, “Keeping His Appointment,” 101. The preposition can be understood as instrumental; see Attridge, Hebrews, 39 or locative; see Cockerill, Hebrews, 90, note 19.

274 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 5. Koester lists several references in support of a prophet being the one to and through whom God speaks. She also notices that Moses’ relationship with God as one who knew God face to face is unparalleled (Deut 34:10), but not even Moses is known as God’s Son (Heb 3:1–6); see Peeler, You Are My Son, 12, note 6. See also Attridge, Hebrews, 38–39; Koester, Hebrews, 184.


276 Jer 23:18, 22; Amos 3:7.

277 Groten, You Are My Son, 13.
through the words of his Son (2:3), but by sending his Son to become a human, letting him suffer and die (2:14–18; 10:5; 13:12), crowning him with glory and honor making him a leader to salvation for others (5:8–9; 7:25) he “speaks.”

The Son is thus God’s spokesperson both by his words and his deeds, “in the entirety of the Christ-event” as the chapters following will explicate.279 Michel thus states “Sein Kommen auf die Erde und seine Erhöhung, sein Wort und sein Weg sind Gottes Sprechen zu uns.”281 The Son who is not ashamed to call the sanctified his brothers and sisters is the one by whom God has spoken to them. He is the ultimate spokesperson and representative of God the Father, the one through whom the Father reveals himself.

**Special Inheritance Rights**

Immediately after the statement that God in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, he adds a continuable relative clause advancing the discourse: whom he appointed heir of all things (1:2). This addition thus describes the greatness of his Son.282 He is the one to inherit all things.283 Being son, he is thus heir because the concept of heirship is involved in sonship.284 To be an heir marks a right based on a personal connection, it does not imply a passing away with subsequent succession (cf. Gal 4:1). “The heir as such vindicates his title to what he holds.”285 God moreover appointed him sole heir.

279 Koester, Hebrews, 185.
280 Attridge, Hebrews, 39.
281 Michel, Hebräer, 95.
282 Cockerill, Hebrews, 91.
283 Michel claims that the term “son” easily included “inherit” as part of its meaning in antiquity; see Michel, Hebräer, 94. See also Gal 4:7; Rom 8:17.
284 Hughes, Hebrews, 38; Charles, “Angels, Sonship and Birthright,” 175–76; Koester, Hebrews, 227–28. Cockerill notes that “appointed heir of all things” (1:2) stands in chiastic parallel to “he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3); see Cockerill, Hebrews, 92. Attridge claims that being seated at the right hand manifests Christ’s status as heir; see Attridge, Hebrews, 40.
285 Westcott, Hebrews, 8. Koester notes the peculiarity of the statement in 1:2 where God as testator does not die, instead the inheritor through his own death receives his inheritance; see Koester, Hebrews, 178. Ellingworth claims, on the other hand, that “here, as generally in biblical Greek, κληρονόμος does not, unless (as in Heb. 9:16f.) the context so specifies, imply the transmission of property by a testator, but more generally the idea of taking permanent possession (cf. κατάσχεσις in parallel to κληρονομία in Ps. 2:8), especially of something given by God”; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 94–95. Peeler disagrees with Ellingworth and maintains that inheritance and sonship emphasize the status as Son and heir; see Peeler, You Are My Son, 14, note 12.
That must be the meaning of inherit all things (κληρονόμον πάντων). The use of τίθημι, “appoint,” for installation to high status is also found in Ps 88:28 LXX where it is said about David: “I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” No one, except the Father, can be higher in status than the one who is made heir of all things. This phrase is also commonly recognized as an allusion to Ps 2:8 that is addressed to one that is the Lord’s Anointed and the royal Son. He will receive the nations as his inheritance. The inheritance is here in the opening of the letter widened to include all things. There is thus presumably nothing more for others to inherit. This agrees well with the general understanding that no one else can properly be called Son of God.

We have already shown above in chapter 3 that in the literature surveyed the eldest brother had special inheritance rights. We did not, however, find occurrences of the eldest inheriting everything and leaving nothing to his siblings. There is, of course, a problem here in that the Son is said to be appointed heir of all things (1:2). Is there anything left for his brothers and sisters to inherit? Yes, it seems so, although the

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286 Attridge notes that the genitive can be either personal or impersonal. He finds the personal to be strained; see Attridge, Hebrews, 40, note 63. See also, Ellingworth, Hebrews, 95.
287 See Attridge, Hebrews, 39, note 62. He refers to Heb 3:2; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11; and possibly Rom 4:17, which is a citation from Gen 17:5. We note the use of πρωτότοκος in Ps 88:27 LXX, the same title occurring later in Heb 1:6.
288 See also 1 Cor 15:27–28. Hebrews 2:5 makes it clear that it includes the world to come; see Filtvedt, The Identity of God’s People, 56.
289 Lane also refers to the similarity with Gen 17:5 where the verb τίθημι is used and a new name is given to Abraham when he is appointed heir of the nations; see also Heb 1:4. See Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 12.
290 A parallel to Gen 17:5 has also been recognized. Abraham is invested as heir, he receives a new name (cf. Heb 1:4), he receives the nations as his inheritance; see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 12.
291 Lane notes also the contrast to Gen 17:5 and Ps 2:8; see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 12. Byrne notes that we see in several passages in Jubilees (1:23–28; 2:17–20; 19:27–29; 22:11–14) “the sonship privilege set firmly within the context of inheriting God’s promises to the Patriarchs – promises widened to include (by appropriation of Adam to Israel) the inheritance of the whole earth”; see Byrne, “Sons of God,” 32.
292 Koester states that when “Son” is used christologically, it is synonymous with “Son of God” (4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29); see Koester, Hebrews, 177. Many see the name he has inherited (1:4) as “Son” while others have suggested “Lord”; see Cockerill, Hebrews, 98, especially note 60. Guthrie argues, on the other hand, that it does not allude to a title but to “an honor conferred by God on the Messiah as the Davidic heir at the establishment of his throne and in association with God himself”; see George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 919–95, here 925.
arrangement of dividing an inheritance is broken. In 1:14 it is stated about the angels that they are ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation. Those who are to inherit salvation are moreover described as heirs of the promise(s), (6:12, 17). Christ is moreover the mediator of a new covenant, enabling those who are called to receive the promised eternal inheritance (9:15). These are the same as those that the Son is not ashamed to call his brothers in 2:11. They receive their inheritance because he has made purification for sins and thus made it possible for them to inherit their promised salvation. The thought seems to be that because he has inherited all things, they will in turn receive their inheritance. The focus is not on his larger portion in contrast to theirs, which is smaller, but to put it negatively, if he had not as the heir of all things done what God the Father appointed him to, to make purification for sins, the promise given would not have been valid, and they in turn would not have inherited anything (cf. 6:17–20). The special inheritance rights of the Son are thus recognized without excluding an inheritance for his brothers and sisters as well.

**Second in Command**

The author has stated that Jesus is the Son of God and is seated at God’s right hand (1:2, 3). Both designations place him in a subordinate position to God while at the same time specifying a close relationship. I contend that this subordinate position puts him in a role of being second in command to God. The passage 3:1–6 shows this role for Jesus as Son in relation to his brothers and sisters where Jesus as Son is compared with Moses as servant in relation to God’s house.

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293 Peeler argues that those who are the brothers and sisters of Jesus (2:10) “take their status as God’s children and the inheritance that comes with it only through him”; see Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 15, note 14.

294 Filtvedt, *The Identity of God’s People*, 65. He also finds it plausible that being a sibling of Jesus implies being co-heir; see Filtvedt, *The Identity of God’s People*, 66.


296 Moffitt argues that to be crowned with glory (which is linked with his exaltation, cf. 1:3) means to take a position in the created economy second to God; see Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 136.
In 3:1 the recipients of the letter are addressed as holy brothers and sisters, referring to the members of the Christian community (3:12; 10:19; 13:22). They are called holy because they have been sanctified by Jesus (2:11). They are sharing in a heavenly calling with Christ. The term used is μέτοχος, “sharing/participating in.” It links back to 1:9 and the previous section, especially to the verb μετέχω, “share,” in 2:14. Here the emphasis is on their sharing with one another, not primarily with Christ, as in 3:14 where the expression is μέτοχοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, “partners of Christ.” The term can be used for partners in business, and for those sharing an inheritance. This aspect connects to 1:2 and 1:14 where the Son is proclaimed as heir and the inclusion of the sons as inheritors of salvation is mentioned. It is also used in a theological sense as in 1:9 of the companions of the Son. The term then suggests that they are positioned with Christ as his companions, sharing a heavenly calling and salvation. They are admonished to consider that Jesus was faithful to God, in like manner as Moses was faithful in God’s house. The point is not to put Moses in a derogatory position, but to show the superiority of Jesus. Jesus is furthermore described with the titles “high priest” and “apostle,” thereby referring to 2:17 for high priest and to 2:10 by extending the idea of

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297 Gräßer, “Mose und Jesus,” 5; Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 74. See also Hughes and Weiß who point out that the brotherhood they share here is based on the brotherhood with Christ explicated in the previous section (2:10–18); see Hughes, Hebrews, 125; Weiß, Hebräer, 241. Bruce states that they are “made members of his family”; see Bruce, Hebrews, 91. Ellingworth states that “Christ is the one who makes the readers holy as well as brethren”; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 197.

298 Koester, Hebrews, 242.

299 BDAG, 643, s.v. μέτοχος.


301 Koester, Hebrews, 260. The possibility for younger brothers to act as partners may also help to avoid disagreement between brothers. See Plutarch, Frat. amor. 485b–c. See also Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 343.

302 Koester, Hebrews, 260. He lists 4 Ezra 7:28; 14:9 where it is used for companions of the Messiah.

303 Attridge notes that what they share is something better than what business partners or fellows share; see Attridge, Hebrews, 106.

304 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 77.
the pioneer with the title “apostle,” the one who is sent. These are the ones that the house of God consists of, that is, they are God’s household (3:6).

This phrase is introduced in 3:2 where it is stated that Jesus “was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also ‘was faithful in all God’s house.’” Most commentators as well as English translations take the pronoun “his” (αὐτοῦ) here and in verses 5 and 6 to refer to God. This last part of verse 2 is taken as an allusion to Num 12:7; 1 Chr 17:14; 1 Sam 2:35, texts that respectively speak about Moses, an heir to the throne of David, and a future priest. Three characteristics of Jesus are thus intertwined here. The faithfulness of Moses in God’s house (Num 12:7) is used in a comparison with Jesus who is also acknowledged as faithful (3:2). The divine sonship of Jesus is stressed in 1:1–14, including a quotation from 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13 in 1:5, which includes establishing a house for David. “Faithful,” “Son,” and “house” are here connected. Jesus is the faithful Son over God’s household. The last reference from 1 Sam 2:35 includes a reference to a promised faithful priest and the building of a faithful house. The description of Jesus as the faithful high priest in 2:17 is thus carried on by adding the

305 Koester, Hebrews, 243; Peeler, You Are My Son, 110. Bruce states that by using these designations “he is marked out as being both God’s representative among human beings and their representative in the presence of God”; see Bruce, Hebrews, 91. Ellingworth notes ample rabbinic evidence for the high priest being designate envoy or apostle (šāliaḥ) of God; see Ellingworth, Hebrews, 200.

306 Apart from Heb 3:1–6 where ὅπερ is found six times, the term is also found in Heb 8:8 (twice) and in 8:10 in a quotation from Jer 38:31–34 LXX, where ὅπερ refers to the house of Israel and Judah, that is, to a nation, in Heb 10:21 where the phrase is “house of God” denoting the people of God, and Heb 11:7 where it refers to the household of Noah. The meaning of ὅπερ apart from 3:1–6 thus refers to persons, not buildings, in the occurrences in the Letter to the Hebrews. In 3:3, 4 the use of the term can have both senses, depending on how one understands the exemplification. I therefore prefer to translate it as “household” when the term refers to persons. See Scott C. Layton, “Christ over His House (Hebrews 3:6) and Hebrew אשה על־הבית,” NTS 37 (1991): 473–77, here 477, doi:10.1017/S0028688500015988; Bruce, Hebrews, 92, note 11; Koester, Hebrews, 245–46.

307 The term ὅπερ, “house,” can mean both a structure and a household. BDAG, 698–99, s.v. ὅπερ lists, for example, Matt 11:8; John 2:16 for the sense any large building, and for household, among others, Acts 10:2; 11:14; 1 Cor 1:16. See also Brett R. Scott, “Jesus’ Superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1–6,” BSac 155 (1998): 201–10, here 206.

308 NASB95 translates more literally: “as Moses also was in all His house.” A discussion of the text’s critical question of whether ὅπερ “all” is to be included is found in Koester, Hebrews, 244; Ellingworth, Hebrews, 202. They conclude in the negative.

309 Attridge, Hebrews, 111; Bruce, Hebrews, 92, note 11; Weiß, Hebräer, 247–49; Koester, Hebrews, 245. Swetnam, however, argues that it refers to Christ; see James Swetnam, “Form and Content in Hebrews 1–6,” Bib 53 (1972): 368–85, here 377.

310 Koester, Hebrews, 243–44.
thought of a household to the Son. In 3:6, it is thus stated that Christ was faithful over God’s household as a son, stating his position over the household.\footnote{311 Note the different prepositions used in v 5 and 6. Moses was faithful in (ἐν) the house as a servant, but Jesus was faithful as a son over (ἐπὶ) the house; see also Matt 25:21, 23. Moses is thus placed in the household while Jesus is placed over the household. See Layton, “Christ over His House,” 473; Peeler, You Are My Son, 114.}

The superior position of Jesus in relation to Moses (and the believers) is now seen in that Jesus as Son stands in an elevated position over God’s household.\footnote{312 It is possible to argue that the house is Christ’s house, but the analogy with Num 12:7 suggests that the house is God’s house. Layton also refers to Heb 10:21. He maintains that the expression “over the house” does not occur in other places in the NT, but he has probably overlooked Luke 1:33 and Heb 8:8; see Layton, “Christ over His House,” 473–74. See also Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 78.} The argument is from the lesser to the greater.\footnote{313 Layton, “Christ over His House,” 476. See also Hughes, Hebrews, 129; Bruce, Hebrews, 92.} Layton argues that based on the use of the Hebrew expression (אֶשֶׁר)על הבית and its translations in the LXX, the understanding of this phrase in 3:6 suggests that Christ is superior to Moses as being son as opposed to Moses being a servant, but also as a steward who is in charge over the house as opposed to a servant who is a member of the house.\footnote{314 Layton lists the following as references: Matt 25.21–23; Luke 12.42; 16.10–12; 19.17; 1 Cor 4.2; see Layton, “Christ over His House,” 476.} The steward metaphor necessarily needs to be held together with the title “Son” but adds a qualification to what it means to be Son here. A steward is supposed to be found faithful over what he oversees.\footnote{315 Bruce, Hebrews, 93.} Christ is the one who is in charge over God’s household. “Christ rules over the household as the Son whom his Father, the owner of the household, has appointed to exercise this rule.”\footnote{316 Nardoni states: “Christians are sons of God and brothers of Christ because they are μέτοχοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ”; see Nardoni, “Partakers in Christ,” 464.}

The Son has thus been presented as the one appointed to rule over God’s household, consisting of his companions, his brothers, and sister.\footnote{317 Koester, Hebrews, 73.} With the use of family language, he is thus placed second in command in God’s family.\footnote{318 Koester, Hebrews, 73.}
4.1.4 Conclusions

We have seen that family language is used to describe the relationship between Jesus and the believers. In this relationship, Jesus is presented as not being ashamed to call the sanctified his brothers and sisters, thereby stating a sibling relationship. This sibling relationship is based on sharing a common origin as being humans. It is thus in agreement with common definitions of what it means to be a brother. The brother relationship is moreover seen described along two lines: the first by using language drawing on vocabulary that focuses on sonship, brotherhood, and inheritance. The second based on the relationship between the high priest and the priests being described as a relationship between brothers. It should therefore be unproblematic to argue that in the Letter to the Hebrews Jesus is presented as a brother to the believers, his brothers, and sisters.

The main question I raised was whether the presentation of him based primarily on 2:10–18 could be used to argue that he is not only presented as a brother to the believers but as their eldest brother. I conceded that there is no explicit reference to Jesus being designated as the eldest brother. My findings have been that many of the characteristics of the eldest brother are found to apply to him. He is presented as the leader and representative of his brothers and sisters. As their leader, he is also a role model and example. He also takes care of their eternal well-being through his redemptive work for them. His redemptive work is further described as that of the high priest who as their brother makes a sacrifice of atonement for their sins. The actions ascribed to him set him in a superior position in relation to his brothers and sisters. Hence, his status is special. He is also God’s spokesperson, not only by his word, but God has spoken through him by both his words and deeds. His inheritance rights are special, setting him in an elevated position in relation to his brothers and sisters by being the heir of all things. This does not, however, prevent his brothers and sisters from receiving their inheritance. He is also described as being second in command by having been appointed to rule over God’s household, a household comprising his brothers and sisters. This role puts him in the position of a steward and son in charge over God’s household.
These characteristics form the majority of the characteristics I have found to be typical of the eldest brother, so Jesus is, in the Letter to the Hebrews, presented as mediator and representative for his younger siblings. He is responsible for their welfare, and an example to follow. He also has special inheritance rights and a special status. The characteristics lacking are being founder of the filial generation and his disciplining of his brothers and sisters.\(^{319}\)

A first-century Mediterranean reader equipped with an understanding of the status and role of the eldest brother as described in chapter 3 above would, in my opinion, be able to draw together these characteristics of Jesus as being characteristics typical of the eldest brother and thus see Jesus also as their eldest brother when reading the Letter to the Hebrews.

4.2 Romans 8:28–30: The Firstborn among Many Siblings

4.2.1 Introduction

We turn now to the second text: Rom 8:28–30. We observed above (in chapter 1.2.3) that the African authors use this text to argue that Jesus is the eldest brother among his siblings. The phrase “firstborn among many brothers” (RSV) in verse 29 is the key phrase for them in this regard. They draw several inferences from this text: Jesus’ status as the eldest brother is characterized as a status of preeminence. With regard to his role as the eldest brother, he can offer security for his younger brothers and sisters and he is an example to look at in their own sufferings. The last point is argued with the aid of Rom 8:17 where it is stated that the recipients of the letter are joint heirs with Christ if they are willing to suffer with him. Based on his mediating role as the eldest brother it is

\(^{319}\) Deserving respect, being the confidant of the father, and having a political leader role are not being argued either as part of the characteristics found in the Letter to the Hebrews, but it could be argued that deserving respect is part of the response to the superiority he is given. Being the confidant of the father likewise can be included in the presentation of him as God’s spokesperson. While being described in royal language might include a political role, the context is different and I have hence not argued for this characteristic being present.
also argued that he is the ladder or bridgehead between the believers and God the Father.

The challenge that I need to deal with is the degree to which this understanding can be substantiated after a more detailed analysis of the relevant texts from Romans 8. We may ask: How can we relate the description of Jesus as the firstborn among many siblings in Rom 8:29320 to an understanding of him as the eldest brother in relation to the believers as his siblings and, if possible, connect this understanding of him with roles of the eldest brother such as protector, mediator, and leader?

We note that in Romans 8 the description of Jesus and the believers is metaphorical, consisting mainly of family metaphors.321 The first issue to consider is the degree to which Paul’s stated sonship of Jesus (8:3, 29, 32) and of the believers (8:14–17) can be used to argue for a brother relationship between Jesus as Son of God and the believers in Christ as sons and daughters of God considering the following:322 There are two occurrences (8:12, 29) where the believers in Christ are called “brothers” and several occurrences where it is stated that the believers in Christ share something with Christ: They are joint heirs with Christ (8:16), they will suffer with him (8:16), they will be glorified with him (8:16), they will be conformed to his image (8:29), and they will be given everything with him (8:32). The believers in Christ have in addition received the spirit of adoption, which enables them to cry “Abba! Father!” (8:15, 23). Second, does the phrase “firstborn among many siblings” in verse 29 sum up and express a brother relationship between Jesus and the believers? What purpose does the inclusion of this

320 The Greek reads ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς: “among many brothers.” I prefer to translate it as “among many siblings” to avoid a gender-exclusionary expression. For the same reason, I also choose to translate ἀδελφοί as “brothers and sisters” in some places.


322 I also use the inclusive “sons and daughters” where the Greek has only sons (υἱοί). My position is in agreement with the largely uncontested position that Paul is the author of the letter written to Christians in Rome at around 57–59; for further details and bibliographical references see the relevant sections in Michael Wolter, Der Brief an die Römer Röm 1–8: Teilband 1: Röm 1–8, EKKNT 6/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2014), 17–72; Richard N. Longenecker, Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 3–91; Robert Jewett, Romans: A Commentary on the Book of Romans, Assisted by Roy D. Kotansky, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 1–91; Brendan Byrne, Romans, SP 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 1–31.
phrase in verse 29 have? Rom 8:29 is also the only occurrence in the NT where the term πρωτότοκος, “firstborn,” is used in relation to a term for siblings. What is the significance of this use of the term regarding the interpretation of this text? Finally, to what degree can we argue that the statuses and roles of the eldest brother as found in the texts investigated in chapter 3 above are found in the portrayal of Jesus in this passage?

In analyzing the Letter to the Romans, Longenecker divides the letter into three sections: opening sections (1:1–12), body sections of the letter (1:13–15:32), and concluding sections (15:33–16:27). The body sections also have a “body opening” (1:13–15) and “body closing” (15:14–32) with a “body middle” that he divides into four large sections (1:16–4:25; 5:1–8:39; 9:1–11:36; and 12:1–15:13). Chapter eight thus ends the second “body middle” section that he labels “Peace, reconciliation, and life ‘in Christ.’” He divides the chapter into three sections: “No condemnation and new life for people ‘in Christ Jesus’ and therefore ‘in the Spirit’” (8:1–17), “Life in the Spirit, both personal and universal and both present and future: A life of suffering and glory” (8:18–30), and “A triumphal affirmation of God’s vindication, care, and eternal love for people ‘in Christ Jesus,’ with early Christian confessional materials incorporated” (8:31–39). We also note that in 8:1–30 there is a “highlighting of relationships ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the Spirit.’”

4.2.2 Establishing Common Origin

We noted earlier that the common definition of a “brother” focuses on sharing one or both parents. Hence, to identify a common understanding of brotherhood, we should look for references to some kind of common parentage. How are Jesus and the believers

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323 I follow the structuring of the letter as outlined by Longenecker; see Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 125, 538, 675, 711, and 743. A similar outline for Romans 8 is given by Jewett; see Jewett, *Romans*, viii. Wolter gives a different structure but Romans 8 ends the second main part in his outline. He also divides chapter eight into the same three sections as Longenecker and Jewett; see Wolter, *Römer 1–8*, 68–72.

324 Longenecker argues that the “body middle” “contains very few of the usual epistolary features of the day”; see Longenecker, *Romans*, 125.


326 See above on page 194 where I also list references from Hellenistic literature that share this understanding.
in Christ presented as sons in this chapter? We will pay attention both to what is held in common and to possible differences. We start with texts that focus on the vertical relationship of common parentage and proceed with texts that deal with the horizontal relationship between siblings. We delay the discussion of Rom 8:29.

Paul starts in Rom 8 by declaring that there is no condemnation of those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit has freed those who are in Christ from the law of sin and death. God accomplished this by doing what the law could not do. He sent his own Son to deal with sin (8:3). The Son is thus characterized as being “his own Son” (τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν). A similar characterization of Jesus as Son is found again in 8:32 where he is described as “his own Son” (τοῦ ἵδιου υἱοῦ) using a slightly different terminology. Again, the theme is God not withholding his Son, but giving him up for all of us. In these two verses the added emphatic possessive pronoun and adjective functioning as a possessive pronoun thus denote a close relationship between God and His Son.

Larry W. Hurtado notes that there are seventeen references to Jesus’ divine sonship in the traditional thirteen-epistle Pauline corpus. “Son of God” occurs four times (Rom 1:4; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:13). In the rest of the references he is referred to as “his Son” (Rom 1:3, 9; 5:10; 8:29, 32; 1 Cor 1:9, Gal 1:16; 4:4, 6; 1 Thess 1:10), as “his own

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327 Longenecker argues that Paul alludes to a Christianized version of a Jewish “sending formula” in a way similar to the sending of Torah, Wisdom, and Logos; see Longenecker, Romans, 695. See also Eduard Lohse, Der Brief an die Römer, 15th ed., KEK 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 231; Ulrich Wilckens, Der Brief an die Römer: 2. Teilband Röm 6–11, EKKNT 6/2 (Zürich: Benzingier, 1980), 124, note 506. Dunn, however, finds it more likely that it is “drawn from Jesus’ own talk of himself as ‘sent’”; see James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1–8, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 420. Wolter compares the text with Gal 4:4–5 as the closest parallel. He does not find a “formula” behind the expression; see Wolter, Römer 1–8, 476.

328 BDF, 149, § 286 (1) states that ἴδιος is used “for the most part simply = ‘own’ = ἑαυτοῦ.” Gordon D. Fee understands ἴδιος as “his own/only” in line with MT Gen 22:2. He refers to BDAG definition 2 “pertaining to a striking connection or an exclusive relationship, own”; see BDAG, 466–67, s.v. ἴδιος. The LXX has τοῦ ἴδιου ζηγανθησθείον; see also Mark 1:11. Isaac was the son of promise, and in this sense, he was “his only” son. The “Son” God did not spare was “his only” Son in the same sense as Isaac was for Abraham; see Gordon D. Fee, Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 252.

Son” (Rom 8:3), as “the Son” (1 Cor 15:28), and as “the Son of his love” (Col 1:13). Due to the added ἵδιος in Rom 8:32 I put the reference in Rom 8:32 together with the one in Rom 8:3. Hence, these two references are the only ones where Paul says that the Son is God’s “own” Son. Interestingly, the closest reference to these two references is Col 1:13, which has the added “of his love” (τοῦ ἴδιοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ), an expression found in close proximity to references about Jesus as the firstborn (Col 1:15, 18).

The consistent use of the definite article in these references to Jesus’ divine sonship is acknowledged: “This suggests that Paul was concerned to attribute to Jesus a unique kind of sonship, and not merely to include him in a class of those ... who can be referred to as ‘sons/children’ of God.” By being God’s “own” Son, Jesus’ sonship is differentiated from that of the believers in Christ because he alone is God’s “own” Son while they, on the other hand, receive their sonship through adoption (8:15). Paul thus states that Jesus’ sonship as God’s “own” Son makes him special and his primacy as Son is thus also recognized. “More than any other title in the New Testament, the title Son of God connects the figure of Jesus with God.”

James D. G. Dunn argues that being God’s “own” Son expresses a “unique intimacy between God and Jesus” and that “it is characteristic of Paul elsewhere that he speaks of Jesus as God’s Son as a way of increasing the emotional impact of the cross (5:10; 8:32; Gal 2:20; so also here and in Gal 4:4, the closest parallel to 8:3).” Several scholars have


331 Hurtado, “Jesus Divine Sonship,” 222. See also Burke, Adopted in God’s Family, 109. Cranfield argues that “the ἐστιν and ἵδιος in 8:3 and 32, respectively, seem to be used to underline the contrast between the one true Son of God by nature and the sons by adoption”; see C. E. B. Cranfield, “Some Comments on Professor J. D. G. Dunn’s Christology in the Making: With Special Reference to the Evidence of the Epistle to the Romans,” in On Romans and Other New Testament Essays, by C. E. B. Cranfield (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 50–68, here 66.

332 David Wenham, Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 117. He lists Rom 8:17, 29 in support.


334 Dunn, Romans 1–8, 420, 421.
Furthermore found an echo from Gen 22:12, 16 in Rom 8:32.\textsuperscript{335} The allusion to the story of the offering of Isaac together with the phrase “his own Son” adds “a powerful emotive force to the statement.”\textsuperscript{336} This “emotive force” or “emotional impact” is rooted in the unique sonship of Jesus.

An added qualification of the Son is given in 8:3 with the phrase “in the likeness of sinful humanity” (ἐν ὑμιώματι σαρκὶ ἁμαρτίας), thereby emphasizing the humanity of the Son.\textsuperscript{337} I interpret this phrase as a conscious effort from Paul to delimit himself from merely saying “in sinful humanity” (ἐν σαρκὶ ἁμαρτίας) and therefore he adds ὅμοιωμα.

Jesus, God’s Son, was sent as fully human, but without sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21).\textsuperscript{338}

The believers in Christ, those who are “in Christ,” are spoken of as the sons and daughters of God (ὑἱοὶ θεοῦ) for the first time in Romans in 8:14.\textsuperscript{339} Longenecker argues that Paul has “been building up to the theme of believers in Christ being ‘children of God’ (τέκνα θεοῦ)” in his proclamation of 8:1–11.\textsuperscript{340} In 8:14–17 Paul unfolds the details of this theme.

What significance should we attach to Paul using two similar phrases: υἱοὶ θεοῦ and τέκνα θεοῦ in these verses?\textsuperscript{341} Several suggestions have been put forward: Paul treats these

\textsuperscript{335} For a listing of several positions and a discussion of them, see Longenecker, Romans, 753–54. See also Lohse, Römer, 255–56. Wolter argues that a reference to Gen 22:12, 16 is not recognizable here; see Wolter, Römer 1–8, 541.

\textsuperscript{336} Hurtado, “Jesus Divine Sonship,” 232.

\textsuperscript{337} Byrne, Romans, 236.

\textsuperscript{338} See Burke, Adopted in God’s Family, 109. For a discussion of ὅμοιωμα in Rom 8:3, see Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 379–82. David Wenham argues that Jesus is not thought of as only apparently human, but Paul’s use of ὅμοιωμα suggests that “he saw some distinction between Jesus’ humanity and normal sinful humanity”; see Wenham, Paul, 343. See also Wolter, Römer 1–8, 477. For a different view, see Dunn, Romans 1–8, 421.

\textsuperscript{339} Philip F. Esler, Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 247.

\textsuperscript{340} Longenecker, Romans, 702. Byrne argues that while the language of divine filiation may at this point come suddenly upon a modern reader, Paul is confident that he shares this symbolic universe with his readers; see Byrne, Romans, 248.

\textsuperscript{341} The term υἱός in the plural is found in 8:14, 19 while the term τέκνα in the plural is found in 8:16, 17, 21. The two other occurrences of υἱός in the plural in Romans are found in quotations: in 9:26 in a quotation from Hos 1:10 and in 9:27 in a quotation from Isa 10:22. The four other occurrences of τέκνα in the plural in Romans are found in 9:7, 8 (three times). Paul uses the expression τέκνα θεοῦ in one other place (Phil 2:15); see Arland J. Hultgren, Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 315.
two phrases as synonymous and thereby makes it insignificant.\textsuperscript{342} The term \textit{υἱόι} can be used for adults while \textit{τέκνα} is limited to children.\textsuperscript{343} Paul’s use of \textit{τέκνα} reveals the inclusive sense of \textit{υἱόι}.\textsuperscript{344} By using \textit{τέκνα} Paul does not open up status differences among believing groups.\textsuperscript{345} The legal relation to “heirs” is more accurately expressed by the term \textit{υἱόι}.\textsuperscript{346} Paul does not seem to use the terms in total agreement with this last claim, as when he writes in 8:17: εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι, “and if children, then heirs.” So, while most of these interpretations make some valid points, regarding the status of the believers in Christ there seems to be no or little difference whether they are designated sons and daughters of God or children of God.

What Paul states about the believers in Christ as sons and daughters/children of God is more important than the terminology used about them as the sons and daughters/children of God: They are led by the Spirit of God (8:14), they receive a spirit of adoption (8:15), they cry “Abba! Father!” (8:16), they are heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (8:17), they will be revealed, something the creation longs for (8:19), and the creation itself will obtain the freedom of their glory (8:21). The references in verses 16 and 17 give ample evidence of their status as sons and daughters of God. Thus, while Jesus as God’s “own Son” is attributed a unique kind of sonship of God, the believers in Christ as sons and daughters of God are also “in a special, favored relationship with God” because of their filial status.\textsuperscript{347}

A difference between Jesus as God’s “own” Son and the believers in Christ as sons and daughters of God is expressed in how the latter receive their sonship. This relates

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{343} Hultgren, \textit{Romans}, 315–16. He claims this fits well with the use of “abba,” “traditionally associated with the call of children upon their earthly fathers.”
\item \textsuperscript{345} Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 501.
\item \textsuperscript{346} Fitzmyer, \textit{Romans}, 499.
\item \textsuperscript{347} Wenham, \textit{Paul}, 112.
\end{itemize}
back to 8:3 and God’s sending of his own Son as a sin offering where both incarnational and sacrificial aspects are in focus.\(^{348}\) The sending of the Son is also the presupposition for the new life in the Spirit and it is those who are led by the Spirit who are the sons and daughters of God (8:14, cf. Gal 5:18).\(^{349}\) Paul is “highlighting the work of the Spirit in bringing about the believer’s new status as a child of God and in witnessing to the believer of the reality of this new family relationship.”\(^{350}\) This family relationship is explained by the use of the metaphor of adoption, when Paul states in verse 15 that they “have received a spirit of adoption (ἐλάβετε πνεύμα υἱοθεσίας).”\(^{351}\) The question is how we should understand the term υἱοθεσία.\(^{352}\) In a recent article Kyu Seop Kim investigates the background of the adoption metaphor.\(^{353}\) He argues that we should understand the adoption metaphor in relation to adopting slaves (which was rare), who moreover are complete strangers. He makes two points in this regard: We must distinguish between adoption of slaves and of freeborn in Roman social practice and law, and it was not common to adopt when there was a legitimate heir present.\(^{354}\) There is a legitimate heir present, the firstborn (8:29), and the adoptees are said to be joint heirs with Christ (8:17). Kim discusses Jewish, Greek, and Roman adoption and concludes that “the idea

\(^{348}\) Douglas J. Moo, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans}, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 479; Byrne, \textit{Romans}, 242–43.

\(^{349}\) Burke, \textit{Adopted in God’s Family}, 137–40. When the verb ἀγω (lead) is used with God as subject in the OT, it is used almost exclusively in the context of the Exodus from Egypt and of the new Exodus from the exile, often with father-son relationship between God and Israel; see Deut 8:2–5; 32:5–12; Isa 43:5–6; 63:13–14; Jer 31:8–9. See Matthew Vellanickal, “The Pauline Doctrine of Christian Sonship,” \textit{BiBh} 5 (1979): 187–207, here 199.

\(^{350}\) Longenecker, \textit{Romans}, 702.

\(^{351}\) Byrne suggests translating this as a compromise “Spirit of (adoptive) sonship”; see Byrne, \textit{Romans}, 250.

\(^{352}\) The term υἱοθεσία is found in the NT in Rom 8:15, 23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5. For a discussion of adoption in Romans and its background, see, for example, Byrne, “\textit{Sons of God};” Francis Lyall, \textit{Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God}; Burke, \textit{Adopted in God’s Family}. Wolter argues that υἱοθεσία is a technical term in the Hellenistic world for legal adoption of a son; see Wolter, \textit{Römer 1–8}, 495. Lohse claims that Paul has taken the term υἱοθεσία from the Roman-Hellenistic world where this legal form of adoption comes from; see Lohse, \textit{Römer}, 241.


of Roman adoption and inheritance is more fitting for the nature of Paul’s adoption metaphor than Greek adoption, because Paul closely links adoption with inheritance in Romans 8:17a.” The main purpose of adoption in the Roman world was related to succession and inheritance. Close relatives’ or friends’ children were most often adopted. Adoption of complete strangers was rare. Adoptive children had a lower status than natural children, both in the family and in relation to the law. Because the privileges and statuses of biological children were unobtainable for adopted slaves, they were seldom preferred for adoption. When there was an heir present, it was neither common nor widely accepted to adopt. The implications for understanding the adoption metaphor in Rom 8:15 are: Adoption is contrasted with slavery, we are thus dealing with adoption of slaves. Slavery is characterized by fear whereas adoption makes the adopted cry “Abba! Father!” God’s choice of adopting complete strangers is thus unusual. The same holds true for adopting others when there already exists a legitimate heir; cf. the firstborn in Rom 8:29. Taking into account the fact that dissolution of adoption was common among Romans, the confidence that Paul utters claiming that nothing will be able to separate God’s children from the love of God in Christ Jesus shows “God’s meaningful and extraordinary act of love to Roman recipients.” The achieved status for the adopted children of God is special: “because of faith baptized Christians have been taken into the family of God, have come under the patria potestas, ‘paternal authority,’ of God himself, and have a legitimate status in that family, not simply that of slaves (who

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355 Kim, “Another Look at Adoption,” 137. He argues that the idea of sonship is, however, basically Jewish. Cranfield reminds us that while the legal form of adoption as practiced in the Greco-Roman world was not practiced by the Jews, they were familiar with bringing up someone else’s child and treating the child as their own son; see Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 398. Fitzmyer, however, questions whether these children ever had filial rights; see Fitzmyer, Romans, 500.

356 Kim, “Another Look at Adoption,” 140.

357 So also Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 260. He refers to Rom 8:1–2; Heb 2:14–15; and to Rom 8:21, 23.

358 For the believers as former slaves of sin, see Rom 6:14, 16, 20; 7:14. They are now free from the laws of sin and of death (8:2); see Kim, “Another Look at Adoption,” 141.

359 Kim, “Another Look at Adoption,” 141. Cranfield similarly states that “it is not likely that the thought of the divine act of grace from which the believer’s status of sonship derives was absent from his mind. Cf. the formulation in Jn 1:12f.”; see Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 398, note 1.
belonged, indeed, to the ancient familia), but of sons.” While the adoption of God’s children shows the extraordinary act of love and their new status, there is still a contrast in status between the adopted child of God and God’s own Son. But they do enjoy filial status.

The cry “Abba! Father!” confirms that the believers in Christ are children of God. God is called “Father” four times in Romans (1:7; 6:4; 8:15; 15:6). For Paul, God is father of both Jews and Gentiles and those who acknowledge God as father are designated both as “beloved” and as “called.” It has been argued that the background for the early Christian talk about believers as children of God “is essentially Jesus’ own proclamation of God the Father, something discernible in Matt 5:45 par. Luke 6:35.” Paul claims that “it is the very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit” (8:16) that makes us cry. He now uses inclusive language, adding himself to those who cry “Abba! Father!” The very Spirit is the Spirit of God (8:14) but he is also the Spirit of Christ (8:9). In Gal 4:6 Paul thus states that “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” In discussing the relation between Paul and Jesus, David Wenham argues that “it seems possible in view of this that the Gethsemane prayer may be in the background when Paul speaks in Gal 4:6 and Rom 8:15 of the Christian crying ‘Abba.’”

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360 Fitzmyer, Romans, 500.
361 Even if we should hesitate to distinguish too sharply between adoption of slaves and of freeborn, this argument still holds.
362 Byrne, Romans, 249.
363 Thompson, “‘Mercy upon All,’” in Soderlund and Wright, Romans and the People of God, 207–8.
364 Schneider, EDNT 3:342, the reference should be to Luke 6:36. See also Hengel, The Son of God, 63.
365 James D. G. Dunn, Jesus Remembered, Christianity in the Making 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 715–16. He states that “the prayer is seen to express the Christians’ own sonship, which is obviously seen as a reflection of Christ’s sonship.” See also Wolter, Römer 1–8, 497–98. Lohse argues that “Abba!” is emphatic and has a vocative meaning “my/our father”; see Lohse, Römer, 241.
366 Scott states “whether the Spirit cries “Abba” in the sons (Gal 4:6), or the sons cry “Abba” by the Spirit (Rom 8:15), the idea is materially the same, because in Rom 8:11, too, the Spirit indwells the believers”; see Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 261, note 144.
367 Wenham, Paul, 278. He understands the verb “cry” in Rom 8:15 as a reference to Jesus’ extraordinarily intense prayer in Gethsemane, as the Gospels make clear. Longenecker argues for taking the cry “Abba! Father!” as “a vocative of address that carries an emphatic nuance”; see Longenecker, Romans, 703. Cranfield states that “in view of the last words of this verse, we must not forget that Paul was aware of the fact that Jesus had taught His disciples to address God as ‘Father’”; see Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 398. Wilckens discusses whether the “cry” is a reference to the Lord’s prayer, but argues for a spirit-inspired acclamatory prayer; see Wilckens, Römer 6–11, 137.
If Wenham is right, as seems probable, then Paul argues that the cry “Abba, Father” uttered by Jesus to God his Father in Gethsemane (cf. Mark 14:36) provides the background for Paul basically stating that the father Jesus cried to in Gethsemane is the same father the believers in Christ are crying to because it is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, that enables the believers in Christ to cry “Abba! Father!” and thus ensure them of being children of God: They can call God their “Father.”

We also find “surrogate father language” more often in Romans than in any of the other letters of Paul. God is the referent in several of these instances (1:7; 6:4; 8:15; 15:6). Joseph H. Hellerman argues that “the metaphor of God as father also comes into play in corresponding references to followers of Christ as God’s offspring.” As an example he cites Rom 8:21, which speaks about the glory of the children of God. The implication is that when the believers in Christ are spoken of as children of God, the metaphor of God as father is also active, although it is not necessarily explicitly expressed. The father-child metaphor is hence expressed in various ways in 8:12–17: children of God (8:14, 16, 17), adoption, Father (8:15), heirs and joint heirs (8:17), and Abba (8:15).

Hurtado has noted that references to Jesus’ divine sonship are found in clusters in Romans. One such cluster is found in Romans 8 (8:3, 29, 32). It should therefore be no surprise to find that the major cluster of references to the sonship of believers in Christ is also found in Romans 8 (8:14, 16, 17, 19, 21). These two themes, the sonship of Jesus and that of the sons and daughters of God, are closely related. Jesus is presented as Son of God and the believers in Christ are also presented as sons and daughters of God. Hence, they share a common parentage, the criterion for being called “brothers”

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369 Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 114. The term πατήρ is found fourteen times in Romans. It is used of God, Abraham, and the other ancestors in the faith.


371 Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 115. He also notes the use of sibling terminology in verse 12.


373 See footnote 341 above.
I admit, however, that this is not stated explicitly, but has been argued based on the common definition of “brother” where the focus is on a shared vertical relationship to parents using metaphors of “sonship” and of “father-child.”

Do we find references that focus more directly on the horizontal relationship between siblings? The term “brother” (ἀδελφός) is found twice in Romans 8 (8:12, 29). Within the Epistle to the Romans the term is found eighteen times. Nine times the believers in Christ in Rome are addressed as “brothers” and “sisters” of Paul (1:13; 7:1, 4; 8:12; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14; 16:17). Five times a fellow believer is called a “brother” (14:10 (twice), 13, 15, 21). Unnamed believers are called “brothers” and “sisters” (16:14). Quartus is called a “brother” (16:23). The Israelites are Paul's brothers (his kindred) (9:3). Finally, the believers are brothers of Christ (Rom 8:29). Paul’s use of the term “brother” thus shows that apart from 9:3 (and possibly 16:23) the term is used consistently about fellow believers in Christ with the majority of the references in the plural.

Kim argues that in Jewish letters sibling language is applied to Jews only and thus not to Gentiles. Hence, one could use the term “brother” in such letters as a way to both describe and distinguish oneself from Gentiles and highlight an ethnic insider perspective. Sibling terms were neither used to address non-Jewish recipients in contrast to Greco-Roman letters where such terms were used “without reference to actual or symbolic familial relationships.” Sibling language was thus reserved for use within Jewish groups, but included proselytes. What is characteristic of Paul is his use of sibling language in the letter body and letter closing. Given that the recipients were

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374 The descriptive term “the brother” given to Quartus can be taken either metaphorically, implying that he is a Christian brother, or indicating a physical relationship with either Tertius or Erastus, mentioned previously in the passage; see John Gillman, “Quartus (Person),” ABD 5:583. In support of Quartus as the physical brother of Erastus, see Jewett, Romans, 983–84.


377 Kim, “Reframing Paul’s Sibling Language,” 5.


379 Paul does not use sibling language to address the recipients of the letter in the letter opening of his undisputed letters, except Phlm 1:1.
both Jews and Gentiles, Paul thus transcends common Jewish conventions by including the Gentiles among the siblings.\textsuperscript{380} Kim concludes that Paul was probably aware of how sibling language was commonly used among Jews. Hence, for Paul the term “brother” was Gentile-inclusive language as well as gender-inclusive and therefore implied that both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ are members of this new family.\textsuperscript{381}

In Paul’s use, there is no discernible difference between his use of the term in 8:29 and the other references apart from whose brothers and sisters they are. Those who are addressed and described as brothers and sisters include both Jewish and Gentile Christians. This supports reading 8:29 in a similar way to the other references as long as the context does not demand another sense. We will discuss this reference later.

In addition to the factual use of the term “brother,” we observe several references in Rom 8 where the preposition σύν is used, either alone or in compounds.\textsuperscript{382} I will discuss the terms where the believers in Christ have something “together” with Christ. In 8:17 three of these terms occur relating Christ to the children of God. Paul has just declared that, as attested by the Spirit, the believers in Christ are children of God (8:16). He then goes on to list the consequences in a threefold expansion in 8:17: if they are children, then heirs (κληρονόμοι) (without qualification), that is, heirs (κληρονόμοι) of God (with the source of their patrimony explicated). That in consequence means that they are joint heirs (συγκληρονόμοι) with Christ (with the relational aspect of the inheritance clarified).\textsuperscript{383} To be an heir “implies a status in society based on descent from a father in a

\textsuperscript{380} While conflict between Jews and Gentiles is not discussed in Romans 8, by using sibling language here Paul prepares for his discussion in Rom 9–11 and 14–15.

\textsuperscript{381} Kim, “Reframing Paul’s Sibling Language,” 7. He argues that Paul understood their status as being that of a proselyte of the family of Abraham.

\textsuperscript{382} The terms are: συμμαρτυρέω (8:16), συγκληρονόμοι (8:17), συμπάσχω (8:17), συνδιάζω (8:22), συναντιλαμβάνομαι (8:26), συνεργέω (8:28), σύμμορφος (8:29), and σύν (8:32). We will discuss the terms in 8:17, 29, 32. Walter Grundmann lists fourteen compounds that develop the σύν Χριστῷ (with Christ) theme; see Walter Grundmann, “σύν – μετά,” TDNT7:786.

\textsuperscript{383} Jewett, Romans, 501; Lyall, Slaves, Citizens, Sons, 108. The term συγκληρονόμοι is found in the NT in Rom 8:17; Eph 3:6; Heb 11:9; 1 Pet 3:7. According to Cynthia J. Bannon, joint inheritance was practiced among Romans; see Cynthia J. Bannon, The Brothers of Romulus: Fraternal Pietas in Roman Law, Literature, and Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 13. Esler takes this reference to fellow heirs as a reminder that the Judeans did not practice primogeniture; see Esler, Conflict and Identity in Romans, 247.
Romans 8:28–30: The Firstborn among Many Siblings

Paul is in general agreement with Roman law: If a Roman had children in his family, whether natural or adopted, he had an heir. This was also the case while he was still alive. Paul also links to ideas found in the OT and other Jewish literature, to Israel as God’s son(s), and to heirs of the promise of the land given to Abraham.

It is thus in 8:17 not so much a question of what possessions are included in the inheritance—Paul does not speak about the inheritance as such—but of the status and privilege associated with being an heir of God and joint heir with Christ. Jewett notes the terminological change from “sons” to “children” and argues that this change sidesteps the cultural legacy of both primogeniture and precedence arbitrarily given to favored sons because each member shares equally. We hence take the genitive as being dependent on the preposition in the compound and translate it as “joint heirs with Christ.” It is thus taken for granted that Christ is an heir of God. The consequence is that those who are “in Christ” (8:1) share in his sonship. The status of becoming a child of God through adoption gives the child the rights that belong to those who are part of the family, the child becomes an heir, and because Christ is already part of the

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384 Fitzmyer, Romans, 502.

385 Lyall, Slaves, Citizens, Sons, 110. He also states that “in Roman law the heir existed and had legal standing as heir during the life of his ancestor” (emphasis original). See further Burke, Adopted in God’s Family, 110. He makes the comment that in the Roman legal system the son was already an heir while the father was still alive, unlike in other legal system where he would become an heir after the father had died; see Burke, Adopted in God’s Family, 110, note 24.

386 Dunn, Romans 1–8, 455. He lists the following references for Israel as God’s inheritance: Deut 32:9; 1 Kgs 8:51, 53; 2 Kgs 21:14; Pss 33:12; 74:2; Isa 63:17; Jer 10:16; Mic 7:18; Judg 13:5; Sir 24:8, 12; Jub. 1.19–21; 22.9–10, 15; 33.20; 3 Macc; 6:3; and 2 Bar. 5.1; LAB 12.9; 21.10; 27.7; 28.2; 39.7; 49.6.

387 Dunn, Romans 1–8, 455.

388 Jewett, Romans, 502. He also states that “the pre-Pauline examples of συγκληρόνομος refer to parties who share an inheritance.” It is thus an argument supporting the upholding of the relationships of the household.

389 BDF, 97, § 181; Jewett, Romans, 502; Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 248.

390 Byrne argues that Christ “as ‘Firstborn’ (8:29) is primary heir”; see Byrne, Romans, 251.

391 Hultgren, Romans, 316; Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 254–55.
family as God’s own Son, the child becomes a joint heir with Christ. This implies being brothers and sisters of Christ. Thus, they are regarded as being siblings.

Paul follows up in 8:17 with an εἰπερ clause where he refers both to suffering with Christ and glorification with Christ. The understanding of εἰπερ is debated. It can be translated “if indeed, if after all, since,” “provided that,” or “since, indeed.” I prefer the translation “since, indeed” because it is highly likely that the believers in Christ in Rome were still facing sufferings. The present tense of συμπάσχομεν, translated “we suffer together with,” hence refers most likely to present experiences rather than to the future (cf. Phil 3:10). “To be a child of God in the Christian sense, to live according to the Spirit, is to take up one’s cross.” The use of ἰνα, “in order that,” and the subjunctive aorist verb συνδοξασθῶμεν, “that we might be glorified,” “points toward a fulfillment that is granted but never becomes a permanent possession.” Although both verbs lack a complement, the sense must be to add “with him” instead of “with one another.” Thus the verbs used express the notion that both suffering and glorification are shared with Christ.

The same idea of sharing something with Christ is found in the term σύμμορφος in Rom 8:29 where Paul says that those whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ). A likely

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392 Scott states that “believers are ‘fellow-heirs with Christ’ because they are, like him, sons of God, which necessarily implies they are brothers of the Son”; see Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 248. See also Wolter, Römer 1–8, 499; Schäfer, Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft,” 50.

393 For a discussion of the alternatives with references to other commentators, see Jewett, Romans, 502; Dunn, Romans 1–8, 456; Wolter, Römer 1–8, 501.

394 Jewett, Romans, 502–3. Cranfield states that the suffering Paul speaks about is the suffering that comes from being faithful to Christ; see Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 408. He also refers to 2 Tim 2:11–12a regarding content.

395 Jewett, Romans, 503.

396 Jewett, Romans, 503.

397 Morris, Romans, 318, note 75.

398 See also Käsemann, who states, “the preposition σὺν in both verbs imposes discipleship of Christ and proclaims its promise”; see Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 229. See also Wolter, who points to 2 Cor 4:10; Phil 3:10–11; and also 2 Cor 13:4 as parallels; see Wolter, Römer 1–8, 500. He argues that the σὺν- expressions convey “witness” and “shareholder.” Lohse argues that the use of the preposition σὺν in these compounds expresses belonging to Christ; see Lohse, Römer, 242.
background is found in humankind created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). Christ is the image of God (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) (cf. 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). The believers will experience full conformity to Christ glorified. The sense of σύμμορφος is “participation in a way of being” whereas the sense of εἰκὼν is “that of a likeness revealing and making present an inner reality.” The second genitive in the phrase is most likely epexegetical, hence the sense “the image which his Son is.” The goal is to restore the divine image in humankind. The Son, the bearer of the divine image, also bore this image in his humanity. As the second Adam (cf. Rom 5:12–21), the Son through his incarnation and his death and resurrection has restored what the first Adam lost. The believers will be transformed “and thus once more [be] conformed to that image.” It is possible to understand this conformity in light of 8:17 and connect it with suffering with him and then being glorified with him. Others take this conformity to include both Jesus’ earthly career and his glory. Here the conformity most likely refers to participation in the glory Christ has as last Adam and risen Lord. Full conformity will happen at the final glorification, but it is a growing and progressive conformity in suffering and obedience toward that goal.

The final reference of sharing something together with Christ is found in Rom 8:32 where Paul states what God will give the believers in Christ “with him” (σὺν αὐτῷ). Paul is again using inclusive language; it is what God will give “us” (ἡμῖν). The verb used is

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399 Dunn, Romans 1–8, 483. He lists the following references as a Jewish commonplace of this idea of the period: Sir 17:3; Wis 2:23; Testament of Naphtali 2:5; Apocalypse of Moses 10:3; 12:1; 33:5; 35:2; Life of Adam and Eve 14:1–2; 37:3; 4 Ezra 8:44; 2 Enoch 65:2. Wolter dismisses Gen 1:26–27 as a necessary background. What Paul wants is to maintain the lasting difference between Christ and the Christians; see Wolter, Römer 1–8, 532.

400 Wilckens, Römer 6–11, 163.

401 Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 432.

402 Byrne, Romans, 268. Lohse argues that the meaning of εἰκὼν is “character,” not “form”; see Lohse, Römer, 253.

403 Byrne, Romans, 272.

404 Fee, Pauline Christology, 251, emphasis original.


406 Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 432; Moo, Romans, 521.

407 It is not to be understood universally, it means “us Christians”; see Morris, Romans, 336.
χαρίζομαι, “to give freely as a favor, give graciously.” 408 God has already given up his Son for “all of us,” which is the greater gift. He surely will give the lesser gift too. 409 “The gift is given along with him; in other words, it is to be understood in terms of our union with the crucified Christ.” 410 The gift given is “all things” (τὰ πάντα), which should either be understood in connection with the believers being joint heirs with Christ (8:17) or in the sense “all things connected with salvation.” 411 Read independently, this reference does not add to our discussion, but in light of the connection back to 8:17 the reference confirms that the believers share “all things” with Christ, and in this sense they are equal.

To sum up, Christ’s sonship as God’s “own” Son is unique. The believers in Christ are also sons and daughters of God, attested by the Spirit. This sonship is by adoption, but it gives them the rights of an heir, thereby sharing the prerogatives of sonship. Their shared sonship, attested through their cry “Abba! Father!”, and being joint heirs make them siblings with rights inherent in their sonship. This is further confirmed by what they share with Christ: suffering with him and glorification with him. The goal is to be conformed to the image of His Son and they will graciously be given “all things” with Christ. In short, they are treated as the brothers and sisters of Christ, while this is stated more indirectly than directly. 412

4.2.3 The Firstborn as the Eldest Brother

We find the key clause in Rom 8:29: “in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family (εἷς τὸ εἶναι αὐτῶν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς).” Paul sums up what God has done in Christ and what His purpose is. Using a series of four identical relative clauses beginning with the relative pronoun σὺς modifying the clause “who are called

408 BDAG, 1078, s.v. χαρίζομαι. The sense “forgive” does not match the context, inasmuch as the gift is given with Christ; see Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 336–37.
409 πῶς σὺς is thus to be translated “most surely, most certainly”; see BDAG, 901, s.v. πῶς.
410 Morris, Romans, 336, emphasis original.
411 Morris, Romans, 336. Some argue that τὰ πάντα denotes “the universe”; see Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 251, note 104.
412 Aasgaard argues that “Paul does not deduce from the sonship and heirship of Jesus that the Christians are his siblings and co-heirs”; see Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 146.
according to purpose” in verse 28, he describes divine grace “within the logic of five consecutive verbs: whom God foreknew, God thus predetermined, and then called, justified, and glorified.” Fee puts this basic argument of the passage (8:29–30) in tabular form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>oύς</th>
<th>προέγνω,</th>
<th>whom he foreknew,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>καί</td>
<td>προώρισεν</td>
<td>also he determined beforehand;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oύς</td>
<td>δὲ</td>
<td>whom he determined beforehand,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τούτους</td>
<td>καὶ</td>
<td>these also he called;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καί oύς</td>
<td>ἐκάλεσεν,</td>
<td>and whom he called,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τούτους</td>
<td>καὶ</td>
<td>these also he justified;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oύς</td>
<td>δὲ</td>
<td>whom he justified,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τούτους</td>
<td>καὶ</td>
<td>these also he glorified.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This sums up Paul’s larger argument as to why they no longer need to rely on Torah observance (cf. 8:3), and shows that they can put their trust in what God has done through the Son and the Spirit. However, the key element in this chain is left out in the table above: The redemption of humankind that God had in mind from the beginning was that they should “be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (8:29). This clause is placed after the first clause in the table above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>oύς</th>
<th>προέγνω,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>καί</td>
<td>προώρισεν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τῆς</td>
<td>εἰκόνος</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εἰς τὸ</td>
<td>αὐτὸν εἶναι πρωτότοκον</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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414 Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 249, emphasis original. Translation in the table by Fee.
415 Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 249.
416 It is argued by several scholars that the list is pre-Pauline; if so, the key element that breaks the chain is usually taken to be Paul’s emphasis. See Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 140; Longenecker, *Romans*, 716–717, 739.
417 Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 250, emphasis original. Translation in the table by Fee.
ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς

whom he foreknew,

also he determined beforehand to be conformed

to the image of his Son,

so that he would be the firstborn

among many brothers

(and sisters)

Three key terms about Christ are placed together: “image,” “son,” and “firstborn.”

“The divine Son is the Father’s firstborn, who bears the Father’s image.” The last clause in verse 29 reveals the final purpose in God’s plan to make the sons and daughters of God conformed to the image of his Son, that is, so that the Son might be the firstborn among many siblings. Christ as God’s own Son, as the true child of God, recovered the divine image; therefore he became the “firstborn.” In this context the siblings of the ‘first born’ are to cooperate with the Spirit to exercise a proper dominion in a corrupted world.

This is also the first occurrence of “Son” and “firstborn” appearing together in the traditional thirteen-epistle Pauline corpus. The only other instance is Col 1:13–15, a text we will discuss later.

The understanding of the term πρωτότοκος is the key to clarifying the relationship between Jesus and those designated as his siblings. The term is used in the NT eight times, five of them in reference to Christ. It is used in an absolute sense in Heb 1:6, in Col 1:15 of the firstborn of all creation, in Col 1:18, and Rev 1:5 of the firstborn from the

[Numbers and references are cited throughout the text.]
dead. We may also add 1 Cor 15:20 as a relevant text where Christ is the first fruits of those who have died. First fruits imply later fruits. The literal sense of the term as it is used in the OT is the first child born, the opener of the womb. This connotes priority and normally an expectation of others to follow. The firstborn was consecrated to Yahweh. He held certain prerogatives, was given a leader role in the family, was responsible for younger siblings, acted as a spokesperson, representative and mediator, and was given a double portion. Various backgrounds to the use of the term in 8:29 have been looked for, though most conclude that the OT provides the most likely background, with recourse to texts where the term is used in a metaphorical sense.

As I have demonstrated above (see section 3.3.2), the focus is vertical when the term πρωτότοκος is used metaphorically in the HB/LXX, that is, between Yahweh as father and Israel or its king as firstborn son (Exod 4:22–23; Jer 31:9 (38:9 LXX); Ps 89:26–28 (88:27–29 LXX)). Israel and its king are declared to be dear to Yahweh, and are in the texts given the position of a firstborn son for Yahweh. What is highlighted is thus status, a place of favor, excellence, and honor, elevated above the others. His status is special but he is subordinate to Yahweh as father. The focus is therefore upon the status of the firstborn (in comparison to others) and not on the roles associated with being a firstborn or eldest brother.

All of the three OT texts have been suggested as a plausible background for Paul’s use of the term πρωτότοκος in Rom 8:29. Jer 31:8–9 has been suggested as an intertextual background because of the leading of God, the image of God as father, and a link between Ephraim (Israel) as the firstborn and Jesus as firstborn. The text from Exod 4:22–23 combines the two terms “son” and “firstborn,” two terms that also occur in close connection in Rom 8:29. In both texts “firstborn” can be read as a clarification of the

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424 The references in Heb 1:6 have been discussed above in section 4.1.3.3 page 225. The two references from Colossians will be discussed later.
425 See section 3.3.1 above.
427 Sylvia C. Keesmaat, Paul and His Story: (Re)interpreting the Exodus Tradition, JSNTSup 181 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 64.
more general term “son.” The people/the king are/is not only God’s son, they/he are/is God’s firstborn son. Finally, in the messianic promises in Ps 89:26–28 the terms “father” and “firstborn” occur together. David the king will call God “My Father” and God will in turn appoint the king as his “firstborn.”

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The king is accordingly the highest of the kings of the earth. A messianic understanding of Ps 89:26–28 is found in Heb 1:6.

Before we consider what this metaphorical use of the term in the OT might imply for Rom 8:29 we will give our attention to the rest of the clause. The phrase εἰς τὸ ἐνναί is commonly taken to indicate purpose or result; most likely a double entendre fits the context best. The phrase ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς is a rare expression. The shorter phrase ἐν πολλοῖς is found in two other places in the NT: in Acts 1:3 where it is said that Jesus presented himself to the disciples “by many convincing proofs” (ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις), and in 2 Cor 8:22 where a brother is commended for being found eager “in many matters” (ἐν πολλοῖς πολλάκις). Ἐν has here the sense “among, in,” and is also translated thus by the majority of English Bibles. The sense of “among” is “in or through the midst of: surrounded by.” This sense is expressed by NRSV, which translates as “within.” “Many” is not restrictive, but signals the large number (cf. Rom 5:15–19; 12:5). We have earlier seen how Paul uses ἀδελφός as a reference to, or as an address to, fellow believers in Christ. The context here supports this understanding. Thus, the

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429 Fee, Pauline Christology, 250.
430 See note 424 above.
431 BDF, 207, §402 (2); Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, 611. The construction εἰς τὸ ἐνναί followed both by a personal subject in the accusative and an accusative object is found in the NT in Rom 1:20; 3:26; 4:11; 8:29; 15:16; 1 Cor 10:6; Jas 1:18. See also Rom 4:16; Eph 1:12. The construction with εἰς τὸ does not of itself indicate more than direction, and does accordingly not distinguish between final and consecutive; see Maximilian Zerwick, Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples, Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici 114 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963), 122. Moreover, often “the categories of purpose and result merge, for a result might be a designed consequence”; see M. J. Harris, “Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,” NIDNTT 3:1187, emphasis original. Within the insertion into the golden chain εἰς τὸ ἐνναί primarily expresses result, but when the insertion is viewed from the perspective of the golden chain, the result must also be seen as an intended consequence from God, that is, purpose. As such, a double entendre might perhaps explain Paul best here.
432 It does not occur in other references either in the NT nor in the LXX.
433 BDAG, 326–27, s.v. ἐν, 1 d.
435 Wilckens, Römer 6–11, 164; Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 141. Byrne claims that the stress is upon “many”; see Byrne, Romans, 269.
result or goal is that the Son should be, or become, the firstborn within, or surrounded by, the many brothers and sisters that are believers in Christ.

What is the connotation of “firstborn” in this context? We find several positions as an answer to this question. First, some do not find the use of the title in the OT to be an important background for determining the meaning here in Rom 8:29. Ps 89:26–28 is interpreted as presenting the Messiah as the firstborn ruling over others. This, it is argued, does not fit the context of Rom 8:29 where neither the father relationship nor his superiority over his brothers is in focus. Christ becomes the “firstborn” as his brothers arrive at their sonship. Based on this understanding, “firstborn” connotes “the unique character of Christ’s sonship” as well as a focus on “His preeminence and supremacy among a multitude of brothers.” He is “above them in rank and dignity, since He remains their Lord.” “Without injury to his unique status” he becomes “the eldest of the wider family of God.”

Second, some argue for a messianic interpretation based on Ps 89:26–28. The connection is based on being joint heirs with Christ (8:17); hence, they will reign with the Son over the world upon entering the Abrahamic inheritance. It is argued that Rom 8:34 supports the idea of the universal sovereignty of the Messiah (Ps 89:29; 110:1). “The same adoption of the Son according to the Davidic promise at the resurrection as in 1:4” is expressed, but now the focus is on the relationship of the Son to the sons, who

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436 None, to my knowledge, has argued for a connotation of the firstborn based on Jer 31:9; hence, I will not present that as one of the positions.

437 Gieniusz, Romans 8:18–30, 274, especially note 921; Michaelis, TDNT 6:877, note 39. See also Byrne, “Sons of God,” 118–19. Gieniusz also refers to Moo, Romans, 535 in support of this view, but Moo, who points to Christ as the first fruits (1 Cor 15:20) as a parallel, states the following in the adjacent note: “Note also Ps. 89:28, where it is said that God will adopt the (Davidic) Messiah as his ‘firstborn’ Son.” Some are silent about an OT background; see Cranfield, Romans I–VIII, 432; Langkammer, EDNT 3:190; Longenecker, Romans, 739–40. Wilckens refers primarily to a later use of “firstborn” for God’s wisdom and his law, also taken over by Philo for Logos; see Wilckens, Römer 6–11, 164–65.


439 Byrne, “Sons of God,” 119. Hellerman argues that the readers perceived Jesus as the firstborn brother; see Hellerman, The Ancient Church as Family, 115. For David A. deSilva the Christians seek to imitate Jesus as their senior brother; see David A. deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 212.
follow after the Son at the resurrection.\textsuperscript{441} Rom 8:17 implies that they who are joint heirs with Christ are brothers of the Son; what verse 29 adds is merely that “he is the \textit{firstborn} Son among his brothers, the \textit{primum inter pares}.”\textsuperscript{442} He is the “first among the many.”\textsuperscript{443} Jesus is presented as a “model son, worthy of honour in the same way as a firstborn in the ancient family.”\textsuperscript{444} He deserves to be respected, submitted to, and imitated, as “the exemplary firstborn son and brother.”\textsuperscript{445}

Third, some argue that Exod 4:22 mentioning Israel as God’s firstborn son is a background that Paul must have known. A corporate dimension is in view (Christ as eldest of many brothers). Christ as second Adam is also relevant as it refers to a beginning of a new family of humankind.\textsuperscript{446} Christ is the firstborn who brings many children into God’s family.\textsuperscript{447} A place of preeminence is also suggested based on both Exod 4:22 and Ps 89:26–27.\textsuperscript{448}

I will argue that the contexts of both Romans 8 and the two OT texts (Exod 4:22; Ps 89:26–27) are relevant in determining the connotation of the term “firstborn” as used in Rom 8:29.\textsuperscript{449} The two OT texts highlight certain aspects primarily related to his status: preeminence, excellence, favor, honor, elevated above the others, yet subordinate to God.

\textsuperscript{441} Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God}, 255. Scott argues that in Ps 89:28 πρωτότοκος expresses both a relationship with God and over other rulers; see Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God}, 253, note 110. See also Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 142–43; Hultgren, \textit{Romans}, 329; they do not, however, explain the relationship to the OT text.

\textsuperscript{442} Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God}, 248, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{443} Hultgren, \textit{Romans}, 329.

\textsuperscript{444} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 145. He lists the characteristics without providing detailed arguments.

\textsuperscript{445} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 145. Aasgaard, however, does not argue for his understanding based on the connection with Ps 89:26–28, but instead on what is stated about Jesus in Romans 8. Aasgaard could therefore have been included among those in the first group as well.

\textsuperscript{446} Dunn, \textit{Romans} 1–8, 485.

\textsuperscript{447} Schreiner, \textit{Romans}, 453–54; he also refers to Ps 2:7–9 and Ps 89:27 in support for the firstborn as ruler over the world.

\textsuperscript{448} Fee, \textit{Pauline Christology}, 250–51. So also Fitzmyer, but he does not relate these OT texts to his understanding of firstborn, only in the context of adoption in Rom 8:14–17; see Fitzmyer, \textit{Romans}, 497–498, 525.

\textsuperscript{449} I have not found others that have suggested Jer 31:9 apart from Keesmaat, and she has suggested the text as an intertextual background without claiming direct dependence on it; see Keesmaat, \textit{Paul and His Story}, 64. I therefore do not find it likely that this text provides a direct background, although it shares the understanding of the firstborn with Exod 4:22–23.
as father. The implication for understanding the clause in Rom 8:29 is that Jesus is depicted as the firstborn son in relation to God as his father. His elevated status subordinate to God substantiates that he is God’s “own” Son in relation to the other sons and daughters who are adopted. As the firstborn in relation to his brothers and sisters he shares their sonship as sons and daughters of God their father, being joint heir with them, but his elevated status above his siblings sets him apart from them. They are to be conformed to his image. Hence, his status in relation to them is that of the eldest brother in relation to younger siblings.\footnote{Aasgaard notes the status and role differences between Jesus and the Christians, which restrains him from arguing that Paul sees Jesus as a brother of the Christians, and they as his siblings; see Aasgaard, “My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!” 145–46. I argue that understanding Jesus as the eldest brother takes full account of the role and status differences between him and his siblings and of their brother relationship.}

When will it happen that he becomes their eldest brother? God has sent his Son (8:3) and raised him from the dead (8:11), the believers in Christ are God’s children now (8:14), they are joint heirs now (8:15). They share being sons and daughters of God with him, but they await the revelation of the glory, if indeed they are willing to suffer with him in the present (8:17). While experiencing suffering in the present the believers in Christ that have the first fruits of adoption wait for adoption, the redemption of their bodies (8:23).\footnote{The term 
υἱόθεσίαν (adoption) is omitted from several important manuscripts: P46 \textit{vid}, uncial \textit{D F G}. The longer reading is to be preferred; see Longenecker, \textit{Romans}, 712–13; Dunn, \textit{Romans 1–8}, 466; Wilckens, \textit{Römer 6–11}, 157, note 690. Fitzmyer, however, prefers the shorter reading; see Fitzmyer, \textit{Romans}, 510–11.} Paul hence speaks about adoption both as a present experience and something that they await.\footnote{Petersen speaks of a process of adoption; see Petersen, \textit{Rediscovering Paul}, 210. See also Lohse, \textit{Römer}, 248.} The adoption in the future involves the redemption of their bodies (cf. 8:19: awaiting the revelation of the sons and daughters of God). This will remedy the suffering experienced at present because they are being subjected to “corruption” in the context of a future restored creation. The restored creation must be understood in the sense of the “new creation” of 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15.\footnote{Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 519. See also Wilckens, \textit{Römer 6–11}, 157–58.} Adoption is thus already, but not yet. We have also seen that to be conformed to the image of his Son is a
growing and progressive conformity in suffering and obedience toward the goal.\textsuperscript{454} It would therefore make sense to interpret Jesus being the firstborn among many siblings as also already, but not yet, thereby taking the result and the purpose of εἰς τὸ as a double entendre, as argued above. The resurrected Christ begins a new family of humanity where he as the second Adam is already the firstborn among many siblings. The full realization will occur at the consummation. Hence, both the present and the future aspects are held together by Paul.\textsuperscript{455}

4.2.4 Eldest Brother Characteristics

In the previous section the focus was on establishing Jesus as the eldest brother. This led to an interest primarily in statuses associated with the term “firstborn,” both in relation to God as his father and in relation to his siblings. I will now look at possible characteristics that can be associated with being the eldest brother. In comparison with Hebrews, the material is not as rich, but there are nevertheless statuses and roles ascribed to Jesus in Romans 8 that are congruent with being the eldest brother, as presented in chapter 3 above. I will investigate how these statuses and roles add to the picture of Jesus as the eldest brother. The characteristics mentioned by the African authors will also have to be discussed.

4.2.4.1 Special Status

I have already argued for several statuses that I have associated with Jesus as the firstborn: preeminence, excellence, favor, honor, elevated above the others, yet subordinate to God as father. Is there more to be said about his status? It has been argued that he is “worthy of honour in the same way as a firstborn in the ancient family,”\textsuperscript{456} and that he as a firstborn “should be held in respect for his age and status.”\textsuperscript{457}


\textsuperscript{455} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 143; Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 529; Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God}, 246–248, 255; Wolter, \textit{Römer 1–8}, 533.

\textsuperscript{456} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 145.

\textsuperscript{457} Aasgaard, “\textit{My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!”} 145.
I argued above that these statuses are part of the characteristics of the eldest brother of first-century Mediterranean society, but the question is whether and how we can substantiate these statuses from a reading of Romans 8.

The honor and respect that he deserves can be argued from Rom 8:34 where it is stated that he is at the right hand of God. To be seated at the right hand connotes in this reference being at “the highest place of honor.”458 The phrase is influenced by Ps 110:1 where God said to his son “Sit at my right hand.”459 This honorific position is given to Jesus, who has been declared to be God’s “own” Son, his firstborn. I will also argue that to be called God’s “own” Son also emphasizes “very high divine favor and honor.”460 Jesus is thus clearly worthy of the highest honor and respect. It is not, however, possible to argue for elevated status based on his age in Romans 8.

4.2.4.2 Example and Prototype

We have seen that God has predestined the believers in Christ to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). The primary focus is on the believers. However, Jesus as the image to which the believers are to be conformed can be seen as a prototype “through whom others are enfranchised as sons of God.”461 In Rom 8:29, image (ἐἰκών) does not have the sense “copy” but “original.”462 Hence, Christ becomes the model or prototype that the believers are predestined to be conformed to.463 Reading this together with Christ as the firstborn makes him the new pattern of the new humanity where he can be seen as the head of many siblings.464

Schäfer, in his discussion of the background of πρωτότοκος, refers to Philo Conf. 146–149 where Wisdom is personified using the terms “beginning” (ἀρχή), “image” (ἐἰκών),

458 Jewett, Romans, 542; Peter von der Osten-Sacken, “Σεξιτί,” EDNT 1:286. For biblical references, see note 159 above. See also Hengel, Studies in Early Christology, 155.
459 Hengel, Studies in Early Christology, 159.
460 Larry W. Hurtado, “Son of God,” DPL 903, 905.
461 Hurtado, DPL 905. See also Schäfer, Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft,” 65; Burke, Adopted in God’s Family, 148.
463 Byrne, Romans, 268.
“son” (υἱός), and “firstborn” (πρωτόγονος).\footnote{See also section 3.4.2.1, page 156 above.} For Philo, there are two options available to become a son of God, either through direct knowledge of God (\textit{Conf.} 145) or in a derived way through conformity to Logos as the real “Son of God.”\footnote{Schäfer, \textit{Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft,”} 61–62.} It is for Philo only the “firstborn son of God” that “can make men worthy of being called ‘sons of God’ through spiritual rebirth.”\footnote{Hengel, \textit{The Son of God}, 53.} Hence, for Philo, Logos is the prototype or the leader of the people who are becoming sons of God.\footnote{Schäfer, \textit{Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft,”} 62.} As such, Philo provides an analogy to Paul’s use of the σὺν Χριστῷ theme and to being conformed to the image of his Son. Being with Christ, Christ becomes the leader through suffering to glory (8:17), and Christ is the one through whom they become sons and daughters of God.\footnote{Schäfer, \textit{Gemeinde als “Bruderschaft,”} 65. See also Hengel, \textit{Studies in Early Christology}, 6.} The question is whether this is more than an analogy. While there are clear parallels in vocabulary and themes, I am hesitant to argue for dependence on Philo for Paul.\footnote{I therefore prefer not to include the role of leader in his role as prototype, because that would require a description of Jesus as being more active than the texts in Romans allow for.}

4.2.4.3 Mediator

Christ is described as a mediator or intercessor in Rom 8:34 where it is stated that he intercedes for us (ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν). He has previously stated that the Spirit also intercedes for the saints (8:27).\footnote{The verb occurs five times in the NT (Acts 25:24; Rom 8:27, 34; 11:2; Heb 7:25).} “The word belongs in ‘the conceptual world of the ruler’s court,’ where accusations and requests are heard and the person closest to the throne usually has the most influential word.”\footnote{Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 542. He also lists several references.} As used by Paul here, it is part of the answer to his rhetorical question: “Who is to condemn?” If Christ intercedes for those called his siblings in verse 29, it is futile for them to fear that their status as his siblings can be altered by any kind of accusations because the answer to the rhetorical question is “no one.”\footnote{Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 542–43. Byrne asks “What other agent could dare to condemn the elect when the one they can own as ‘Brother’ (cf. v 29) stands in such privileged closeness to God, offering entreaty on}
the intercession are in the present tense because both belong together and he acts in the present for them.\textsuperscript{474} Hengel argues that Paul, by describing Christ as the heavenly high priest in Rom 8:34 (based on Ps 110:4), is in a brief form alluding to a theme developed more fully at a later stage in the Letter to the Hebrews.\textsuperscript{475} We saw above in the discussion about Hebrews 2:10–18 that one of the roles of Jesus as the eldest brother was his priestly role. That Paul describes Jesus with a priestly role of mediator in the same context as he describes him as the eldest brother among many siblings might thus not be a mere coincidence.\textsuperscript{476}

4.2.4.4 Protector

Paul starts in Rom 8:1 by declaring that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. At the end of the chapter he concludes that nothing or no one will be able to separate the believers in Christ “from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39). Hence, the believers in Christ are protected. He has stated why in 8:31–32 by asking two rhetorical questions: “If God is for us (ἐὰν ἔχωμεν), who is against us?” and thereafter “He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us (ἐὰν ἔχωμεν), will he not with him also give us everything else?”\textsuperscript{477} Having outlined his proof in the second body middle section starting in 5:1, Paul “thus asks the audience to reflect on the burden of the entire second proof.”\textsuperscript{478} This includes that Christ died for (ὃς ἔπεσε) the ungodly (5:6), that he died for (ὃς ἔπεσε) us (5:8). They have been set free from the law of sin and of death (8:2). The Spirit also intercedes for (ὃς ἔπεσε) the saints (8:27).\textsuperscript{479} He sums up by stating first that God is “for us” and then explicating how God is “for us”: Christ died “for us.”

\textsuperscript{474} Hengel, \textit{Studies in Early Christology}, 159.
\textsuperscript{475} Hengel, \textit{Studies in Early Christology}, 162. Wolter argues that this understanding is not found in Rom 8:34; see Wolter, \textit{Römer 1–8}, 548.
\textsuperscript{476} If we accept that “ladder” or “bridgehead” can be understood as synonyms for “mediator,” then it can be argued that Jesus fulfills these roles. Because these terms are used in relation to the mediating role of the eldest brother by the African authors, I concede to such an understanding.
\textsuperscript{477} Jewett labels these two questions “rhetorical questions concerning divine favor”; see Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 534.
\textsuperscript{478} Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 535.
\textsuperscript{479} Jewett, \textit{Romans}, 536.
Having become joint heirs with Christ (8:17) and being given all things with him (8:32) there is nothing that can separate the believer in Christ from God’s love in Christ (8:39). Christ is thus described as the protector who offers security for those who are also described as his many siblings.

4.2.5 Conclusions

Romans 8 is rich both in the use of family metaphors and in using divine sonship language in the description of Jesus and using sonship language about the believers. I have argued that Jesus is presented as God’s “own” Son with God as his father and similarly that the believers in Christ are presented as sons and daughters of God with God as their father. Based on the common definition of a brother, sharing parentage, Jesus and the believers in him can thus be considered siblings. I admit that Paul does not express it directly, it is inferred from his use of sonship language. There is a difference in the sonship between Jesus and his siblings in that the latter become his siblings through adoption. From having been slaves and strangers they become children of God with a legitimate status as that of being sons in the family.

Paul also uses the term “brother” fairly consistently about fellow believers in Christ, mostly in the plural. Again, Paul can be seen to use sibling language to express that both Jews and Gentiles belong together because they are sons and daughters of God as well as brothers and sisters of Christ.

Paul expresses what they share with Christ in various ways. They are joint heirs with Christ, an expression that makes sense in view of the Roman legal and social system and recalls ideas in the OT, with Israel as God’s son(s) and heirs of the promise given to Abraham. The believers in Christ also share present suffering and future glory with Christ. Their likeness to Christ is also expressed by their being confirmed to the image which God’s son is. God has given up his Son for all of them, he will also give graciously all things with him, his Son. Hence, Paul in various ways shows what the believers in Christ share with Christ. He does so using family metaphors. In my opinion, this strengthens the understanding of Jesus being described as a brother of his siblings.
This understanding of the relation between Jesus and his siblings is confirmed when he states that Jesus is the firstborn among many siblings. Based on the background of the term “firstborn” in the OT, Jesus is to be understood as having a status of preeminence, excellence, favor, honor, elevated above the others, yet subordinate to God as father. His status sets him apart from his many siblings, but he is nevertheless one of them in his family of brothers and sisters. He is their eldest brother.

We have also seen that in Romans 8 the focus is on the status of the firstborn in relation to his siblings. Looking at characteristics a first-century Mediterranean reader would find typical of the eldest brother, we find some of those roles applied to Jesus. He is described as a prototype and an example, mediator, and protector. These are roles we have found to be characteristic of the eldest brother in general. While these roles are ascribed to Jesus here, none of these roles can be ascribed him based directly on Jesus being the eldest brother. Hence, Paul is more suggesting themes that we have seen are more extensively developed in the Letter to the Hebrews written one or more decades later. Therefore, based on the understanding of the eldest brother presented in chapter 3 above, I will argue that Romans 8 fits such an understanding, but on the other hand, without such an understanding, it is difficult to argue for the roles ascribed to him from the text of Romans 8 alone.

I have not discussed what has incited Paul to describe Jesus as the eldest brother among many siblings. Dunn discusses the Christian family in his discussion about the social composition of Paul’s churches. He also examines Paul’s use of the term “brother” and argues that it is not particularly remarkable. In this connection, he states:

What would be more distinctive, however, is his assertion that Christ, the central figure to whom the Christian association was devoted, is the eldest of the brothers. Perhaps we should see here one more instance of the influence of the Jesus tradition, in this case the episode in which Jesus was remembered as acknowledging “whoever does the will of God” as “my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35).

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480 Hengel presents a similar argument for Christ as high priest in Rom 8:34; see Hengel, Studies in Early Christology, 162.
481 Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18; see also Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:6–7.
482 James D. G. Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem, Christianity in the Making 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 636.
I will not discuss the possible influence of the Jesus tradition upon Romans 8, but the text from Mark 3:31–35 is a text I have singled out for discussion on its own.

4.3 Colossians 1:15–20: The Elevated Firstborn—the Eldest Brother?

4.3.1 Introduction

We have earlier seen that our African authors have used Col 1:15–20 to support their claim that Jesus is not just a brother, but also the eldest brother of his siblings. The key term for this understanding is again the term πρωτότοκος (firstborn) found in two phrases: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15) and further: “He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything” (Col 1:18). Based on the verses in Col 1:15–20 (together with references to other texts) our African authors have argued that Jesus is the eldest brother and that his status is preeminent. Jesus becomes the firstborn from the dead by the resurrection and the redeemed a family with him. He is also the mediator or ladder between God and humankind (Col 1:16), and the church is the body of Christ where Christ is the Head (Col 1:18).

The questions that I need to deal with relate again to the understanding of the term πρωτότοκος within the immediate context and what family or kinship relations might be implied when this term is used. Since there are no family or kinship terms in the immediate context of the two occurrences of πρωτότοκος I will look at the broader context within the letter searching for possible contextual evidence in support of an understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother in Colossians.

The use of family metaphors in Colossians is, to a large degree, limited to the beginning and to the end of the letter. The recipients of the letter are called “the

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483 My views concerning author, place of writing, and date are traditional. I take at face value that Paul and Timothy are the authors of the letter with Paul as its main author (hence I name the author Paul in the following), most probably written during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome sometime between 60 and 62 AD. See the following for recent discussions: Paul Foster, Colossians, BNTC (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 61–81; Douglas J. Moo, The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Pillar New Testament
saints” and “faithful brothers and sisters in Christ” (1:2). God is called God our Father (1:2) and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:3). God, the Father, has enabled the recipients to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light (1:12). God, the Father, has rescued both Paul and the recipients from the power of darkness and transferred them into the kingdom of his beloved Son (1:13). The recipients are encouraged to give thanks to God the Father through Lord Jesus (3:17). Tychicus is called “a beloved brother” (4:7) and Onesimus “a faithful and beloved brother” (4:9). The believers in Laodicea are also called “brothers and sisters” (4:15). We thus find family terminology describing the believers as brothers and sisters with God as their father. Jesus is the beloved Son of God, the Father. The recipients will share in the inheritance of the saints, thereby implying being heirs. Given this use of family language in the letter, what relationship is there, if any, with Paul's use of the term πρωτότοκος in 1:15, 18? How can it, if possible, be argued for an understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother considering the specific use of the title πρωτότοκος and the metaphorical use of family language? What other, if any, characteristics of Jesus are there in the letter that are congruent with a description of him as the eldest brother? These are the questions that I will answer in what follows.

After the letter opening with greetings in 1:1–2, it continues with the exordium in 1:3–11. The exordium consists of only two sentences: a thanksgiving in 1:3–8, and an intercession in 1:9–11. Then follows a praise and hymn in 1:12–20, with an application and demand for reconciliation in 1:21–23. The hymn thus stands at the thematic


484 Eduard Lohse, Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon, trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 13. Some take the intercession and praise together (1:9–14) and hence single out the hymn as a separate unit; see Foster, Colossians, 120; Wilson, Colossians and Philemon, 98–99; Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 41. See also Franz Zeilinger, Der erstgeborene der Schöpfung: Untersuchungen zur Formalstruktur und Theologie des Kolosserbriefes (Wien: Herder, 1974), 75–78; Christian Stettler, Der Kolosserhymnus: Untersuchungen zu Form, traditionsgeschichtlichem Hintergrund und Aussage von Kol 1,15–20, WUNT II/131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 75–79.
center of a section of prayer for their belief in Jesus and a continued admonition to do so. Some would hence structure 1:3–23 as an extended thanksgiving or take 1:1–2:5 as the letter opening.\textsuperscript{485} It thus seems reasonable structurally to read the hymn together with the introduction of the letter.\textsuperscript{486}

4.3.2 Establishing Common Origin

As noted earlier, the common definition of a “brother” focuses on sharing one or both parents.\textsuperscript{487} Hence, to find a common understanding of brotherhood, we should look for references to some kind of common parentage. To what degree does Colossians offer evidence of a common parentage between the believers and Jesus?

First, we notice that the believers are never described as sons in Colossians. The term ὥς is found only twice. In 1:13 Christ is described as “his beloved Son” (τοῦ ὥς τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ).\textsuperscript{488} “His” refers to the father mentioned in the previous verse. There the father is not identified using a possessive pronoun specifying a relationship to others.\textsuperscript{489} However, the context clarifies that the father is God (cf. 1:10 and 1:2–3). Thus, Christ is the Son of God the Father. Some manuscripts also insert θεῷ before πατρί in 1:12 while others add θεῷ καί in front of πατρί. However, the term “father” alone for God is not common in the NT except in the Johannine writings. Scribes may thus have added to the


\textsuperscript{486} Many authors use the term “hymn” differently. I will use it to designate an elevated poetic praise of the deeds or characteristics of God and/or Christ. Whether the form is prose or poetry is not the major criterion because the border between free poetry and rhythmic prose is often vague; see Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 176. For a critique of understanding the passage as a hymn; see John F. Balchin, “Colossians 1:15–20: An Early Christian Hymn? The Arguments from Style,” \textit{VE} 15 (1985): 65–94.

\textsuperscript{487} See above on page 194 where I also list references from Hellenistic literature that share this understanding.

\textsuperscript{488} The other reference is found in Col 3:6 where it is used in the plural in the phrase τοὺς ὥς τῆς ἀπειθείας (sons of disobedience). I will deal with the term “beloved son” later.

\textsuperscript{489} Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 163.
text in 1:12 in agreement with their expectations. The support for “father” alone is both early and diverse.\textsuperscript{490}

The term “father” is coordinated with the term “God” on the three other occasions where the term refers to God (Col 1:2, 3; 3:17).\textsuperscript{491} The relationship between God and Jesus is expressed in 1:3 where God is described as “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{492} Thus, God is now “known for his special relationship with Jesus, as the Father of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{493} In 1:2 Paul describes God as “our Father” where “our” refers to both the senders and recipients of the letter.\textsuperscript{494} Hence, in Col 1:2–3 God is acknowledged as father of both the believers in Jesus and of Jesus. Dunn argues that “Paul’s implicit claim is that by accepting the gospel of Christ and his Spirit Gentiles were incorporated into Israel/the family of God, now redefined as ‘the household of faith.’”\textsuperscript{495} In 3:17 Paul encourages the recipients to give thanks to God the Father through Jesus. There is no pronoun specifying for whom God is the father, but because he has already been named as their father (1:2) this is the most natural reading in 3:17.\textsuperscript{496} To summarize, God is declared the


\textsuperscript{491} Foster, Colossians, 25. See also Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 46. We find the last of the five occurrences of the term “father” in Colossians in 3:21 where it refers to earthly fathers.

\textsuperscript{492} The reading θεῷ πατρί is an unusual collocation that we only find in Col 1:3; 3:17; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Jude 1 in the NT. For the references in Colossians where some manuscripts have inserted καί; see Metzger and United Bible Societies, Textual Commentary, 553, 558; Foster, Colossians, 136. Fee notes that the phrasing is similar to 2 Cor 1:3 and that it prepares for the Son of God Christology that starts in 1:12; see Fee, Pauline Christology, 293. For a discussion of whether the “we” in 1:3 (εὐχαριστοῦμεν) includes Timothy or is an editorial “we”; see Wilson, Colossians and Philemon, 80–81.

\textsuperscript{493} Ben Witherington, III, The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 120. See also Michael Wolter, Der Brief an die Kolosser. Der Brief an Philemon, ÖTK 12 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1993), 50. This relationship to God that was “claimed particularly by Israel for itself (e.g., Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; Jer. 31:9; Mal. 1:6; Tob. 13:3–4) and for the righteous within Israel (Wis. 2:13, 16, 18; Pss. Sol. 13:9) is appropriated also by Gentile believers: ‘our God,’” see Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 52, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{494} This is the only place (with the exception of 1 Thess 1:1) in the Pauline letters where God the Father stands alone in the opening salutation; see Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 10.

\textsuperscript{495} Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 52.

\textsuperscript{496} Bibel 2011 hence translates the end of 3:17 “med takk til Gud, vår Far, ved ham” (giving thanks to God, our Father, through him). No English translation that I am aware of includes “our” in the translation.
father of Jesus and Jesus his Son. God is also the father of the believers, but they are not referred to explicitly as sons of God. Moreover, God can only “be designated as ‘our Father’ because he is ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus.”497 There is thus a difference in how God is father of the believers and of Jesus Christ. God is father of the believers who are in Christ (1:2). Hence, for the believers the relationship to God their father is mediated “in Christ.”498

In the OT God is called “father” to signify his relationship to Israel as a nation and as his chosen people. Hence, when Israel is called his firstborn son (Exod 4:22, cf. Deut 32:6; Jer 31:9) God is, as their father, understood to be their helping father.499 God is also the father of the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7). This twofold use in the OT is also found in Colossians where he is father both to the people of believers (1:2) and to his Son (1:3).500

Foster argues that the description of God as father of Jesus could have arisen from strict logic in Paul’s thought. God has been described as father of both Paul and the Colossians. The Colossians have moreover been described as “brothers and sisters in Christ” (1:2). One could infer from these verses that because of a shared brotherhood with Christ, this implies some kind of shared parentage.501 Foster continues, stating, “this probably presses the logic of the familial relationship language too far, and also it would undercut the theological belief that the primary paternal-filial relationship is between God and Christ.”502 He gives two arguments in support: For Paul, Jesus is the Son of God (cf. Rom 1:3–4) and “it is because of the filial relationship of Jesus to God


499 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 169; Wilson, Colossians and Philemon, 82–83; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 14–15. I have shown that the term “firstborn” when used metaphorically in the OT is used in a context where help is needed from God the father; see page 139 above.

500 Thompson, Colossians and Philemon, 17.

501 Foster, Colossians, 136.

502 Foster, Colossians, 136.
that believers are called into fellowship with God (1 Cor 1:9).” I concur, but question whether that is all there is to say. 1 Cor 1:9 cannot be used as an argument against a description of the relationship between Jesus and the believers as that of brothers sharing parentage. Paul does not in 1 Cor 1:9 state how the relationship between Jesus and the believers should be understood after they have come into the new fellowship with God. Furthermore, I argued above in my discussion of Romans 8 for brotherhood between Jesus and the believers based on shared parentage. In Romans 8 Paul uses mainly sonship language, but I also argued that Paul supports the thought of shared parentage and therefore that the believers are brothers and sisters of Jesus their eldest brother. This is based on what the believers share with Christ and Paul’s statement about Jesus as the firstborn among many siblings (Rom 8:29) expressed by using family metaphors. If we accept this as Pauline thought, it is not unlikely that the idea of shared parentage is also found in Colossians. However, we need to look at all the possible evidence in Colossians, and not only at Col 1:2–3, before we reach a conclusion about shared parentage.

In Col 1:12 Paul might imply sonship of the believers when he says that God, the Father has enabled (ἱκανώσαντι) the recipients to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. The term translated as “enabled” (NRSV) (ἱκανόω) is a term that can also can be translated as “cause to be adequate, make sufficient, qualify (perhaps shading into the sense empower or authorize).” Barth and Blanke argue that “qualify” is the best rendering of the Greek given its use in a legal comparison. The aorist participle signals a completed event in the past. Formerly they were not qualified to receive the inheritance. However, God the Father has qualified the Colossians to become partakers of the inheritance. The use of the term “father” in connection with qualifying someone to receive an inheritance evokes the imagery of a father distributing the inheritance to his

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503 Foster, Colossians, 136.
504 BDAG, 473, s.v. ἱκανόω. LSJ, 9th ed., 825, s.v. ἱκανόω lists “make sufficient, qualify” as the sense in the active. The verb is also found in 2 Cor 3:6 in the NT. Some manuscripts have the variant καλέσαντι, likely because ἱκανώσαντι was found to be a difficult word; see Wilson, Colossians and Philemon, 111.
505 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 184. See also Foster, Colossians, 164. “Qualify” is also the rendering in ESV, NASB95, NIV, RSV.
506 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 184; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 35.
507 Foster, Colossians, 164.
sons.\textsuperscript{508} God takes this role in relation to those who believe in His Son. By qualifying them to share in the inheritance, they by implication become heirs, and if they are heirs the normal expectation would be that they are sons, either by birth or by adoption (cf. Rom 8:17; Gal 4:7).\textsuperscript{509}

The expression “share in the inheritance (τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου) of the saints in the light” furthermore evokes the sayings about the promised land of Israel as God’s inheritance in the OT.\textsuperscript{510} This language could also “be transferred to eschatological hope of share in the resurrection and/or life beyond death in the eternal life of heaven.”\textsuperscript{511} We note the same in Col 1:12 as we saw in Rom 8:17: The emphasis is not on the content of the inheritance, but on the status of having become partakers of the inheritance.\textsuperscript{512} Thus, the believers in Colossae have been qualified by God the Father to become partakers of the inheritance, a change of status that puts them in the position of sons as heirs. This is not expressed directly, but is inferred from the language used by Paul.

The language used to describe the relationship between God, Jesus, and the believers has so far described vertical relationships. Does Paul also use sibling language to describe the horizontal relationship between siblings? The term “brother” (ἀδελφός) is found five times in Colossians (Col 1:1, 2; 4:7, 9, 15). It is used three times about individuals: Timothy (1:1), Tychicus (4:7), and Onesimus (4:9). Paul calls Timothy his co-sender “the
In the letter opening Paul hence claims that he, Timothy, and the recipients are “brothers.” In this respect, hierarchical implications between them are ruled out. Tychicus and Onesimus are both called a “beloved” brother. Considering how Paul generally uses the term when speaking of his colleagues or particular Christians, it “indicates warmth of fraternal feeling and common (spiritual) kinship.” Hence, these three “brothers” are described by the term as fellow believers. The recipients of the letter are likewise called “faithful brothers and sisters in Christ” (1:2). The addition of “faithful” (πιστοίς) is unique in the letter greetings by Paul. Their brotherhood is based on the spiritual bond of belief in Christ Jesus, not on a blood relationship. In 4:15 Paul sends his greetings to the “brothers and sisters in Laodicea” now leaving out “faithful,” but using “brothers and sisters” with the same sense as in the other references. Hence, Paul uses the term “brother” both in the singular and in the plural in Colossians to denote fellow Christian believers. In none of these references does he specify a direct brother relationship with Christ. However, they are once described as brothers and sisters “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) (1:2). “In Christ’ is Paul’s way of saying that believers are now ‘located’ in a new ‘place’—the kingdom of God’s Son (v. 13)—that carries with it a total reorientation of one’s existence.” Tychicus is also a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant “in the Lord” (ἐν κυρίῳ) (4:7).

513 Barth and Blanke argue, however, that the term “brother” in this particular context has the sense “co-worker” or “colleague”; see Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 138–39. Wilson interprets the term to denote “a fellow-member of the larger Christian community”; see Wilson, Colossians and Philemon, 69. The close relationship between Paul and Timothy can be inferred from 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:20; see Foster, Colossians, 129.

514 Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 48.

515 Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 49.

516 Derek J. Tidball notes that only Paul’s colleagues are called brothers, never individual members of the church in Colossae; see Derek J. Tidball, In Christ, in Colossae: Sociological Perspectives on Colossians (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), 111. Gnilk argues that “faithful” describes their community as a brotherhood of faithful, as “die christusgläubigen Brüder”; see Gnilk, Kolosserbrief, 29.

517 Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 49; Witherington, III, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, 117; Wolter, Kolosser, 49.

518 Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 49.

519 For a discussion of Paul’s use of the term “faithful”; see Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 49.

520 Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 77.

521 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 477 and Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 171 argue that one should not restrict “in the Lord” to “fellow servant” only, hence Tychicus is a “brother in the Lord.”
To sum up, God is described as father of both the believers and Jesus. Jesus is said to be God’s Son, but the believers are not explicitly called “sons of God.” The believers are described as having a share in the inheritance, a fact that makes them heirs. The heir would normally also be a son. Hence, indirectly the believers are understood to be sons of God. The believers are called “brothers,” both individually and collectively, though never “brothers of Christ.” Based on the common definition of “brother” referred to above, I will argue that the material in Colossians supports the thought of Jesus and the believers as siblings. We also notice that while sonship language is more prominent in Romans 8, father language is more prominent in Colossians. Compared with Romans 8, Paul does not explain what the believers share with Christ by using family language either. Thus, it is not possible (based on the texts discussed so far) to argue that Jesus is described as the eldest brother of his brothers and sisters. The question is whether and how the description of him as the firstborn in Col 1:15, 18 can be of help in that regard.

4.3.3 Jesus—the Firstborn

The term πρωτότοκος (firstborn) is found in two phrases in the so-called hymn in Colossians 1:15–20. In the verses immediately before the hymn (1:12–14) Paul reminds “the Colossians of the foundation for their new life in the redemptive work of the Father.

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522 Tidball notes the frequent use of language of belonging and incorporation into Christ in connection with the absence of personal family language of “brothers and sisters”; see Tidball, In Christ, in Colossae, 105.

523 Overviews of the various backgrounds that have been postulated for the hymn can be found in Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 3–57; John M. G. Barclay, Colossians and Philemon, T&T Clark Study Guides (1997; repr., London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 63–68; Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 236–42. Foster points out that even though many scholars consider the hymn as a preformed unit that was incorporated into the letter, nearly every phrase in the hymn is taken up in another place in the letter. Hence, the content of the hymn is integrated into the letter. There are also strong arguments supporting the inner coherence of the hymn. It is therefore considered unlikely that the hymn has originated in a pre-Christian context. Thus, it must be a Christian composition. These factors make it possible that the author of the letter may also be responsible for the hymn. The content of the hymn is nevertheless more interesting than a possible pre-history; see Foster, Colossians, 31–32. Stettler argues that the background must be sought in the entire Old Testament-Jewish tradition, not only in a narrower Hellenistic-Jewish tradition; see Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 57, 101–102. I will therefore, in my discussion of Jesus as the firstborn in Col 1:15, 18, consider first the hymn and then the letter as the proper context and the Old Testament-Jewish tradition as its most relevant background. This is not to deny that many of the concepts found in the hymn also occurred in non-Christian settings, but that is not likely their primary background.
through the Son.” The Son is the Son of his love (τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ) (1:13). He, the Son, is “the antecedent to all the subsequent pronouns through v. 22.”

Coupled with the kingdom (βασιλεία) given to the Son, the phrase in 1:13 alludes to 2 Sam 7:12–16; Ps 2:2, 7; 89:27–28. Jesus’ messianic and kingly status is signaled.

In several instances in the LXX, God’s chosen is his beloved. The Hebrew 팟 (only [son]) is also translated “beloved” in the LXX. Hence, this translation “clarifies its meaning as the ‘first-born son.’” In Psalms of Solomon 13:9 the two terms “beloved” and “firstborn” are used as synonyms. Paul moreover states that the believers have been rescued from the power of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (cf. Acts 26:15–18). This recalls the redemption of the people of God from Egypt into the promised land (cf. Exod 4:22–23). The term ῥύομαι (rescue) (1:13) is also used in texts dealing with the Exodus.

The verb λυτρόω (redeem) — corresponding to the noun ἀπολύτρωσις (redemption) (1:14) — “is not only a special terminus for the designation of deliverance of the first-born, of slaves and alienated property, it is also a firm designation

524 Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 100.
525 The construction is taken to be a Semitism; see Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 189; Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 79; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 38; Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 49. Wilson notes that it recalls the voice at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, but adds that it does not therefore necessarily derive from the Gospels; see Wilson, Colossians and Philemon, 118. Gnilka argues that the expression originates from the baptismal context (cf. Mark 1:11 par.); see Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 49.
526 Fee, Pauline Christology, 297.
527 Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 105; Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 189. See also Schweizer, Kolosser, 48; Wolter, Kolosser, 67. Foster questions whether the text supports this theologically rich interpretation; he confines the expression to communicate “the closeness of the relationship between God and Jesus.” See Foster, Colossians, 171.
528 For the beloved as the chosen, see Deut 32:15; 33:5, 26 (LXX); Isa 44:2. For beloved as a translation of the Hebrew 팟 (only [son]), see Gen 22:2, 12, 16; Judg 11:34; Zech 12:10. See Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 190.
529 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 190.
530 See above page 133; see also Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 190.
531 Of the fourteen references to the term “kingdom” in the Pauline corpus, nine are qualified by God in a possessive sense, one has the possessive pronoun “his,” referring to God. One refers to the kingdom of both Christ and God (Eph 5:5), two references in 2 Tim to “his” kingdom are commonly taken to refer to the kingdom of Christ. The use of the kingdom of his Son is thus striking; see Foster, Colossians, 170.
532 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 188.
for the release of the people out of Egypt.” Thus, the kingdom to which the believers are transferred is the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, with a description of the Son that also evokes the title “firstborn” found in verses 15 and 18.

In Col 1:15 Paul states that Christ, the beloved Son of God, is the image (εἰκών) of the invisible (ἀόρατος) God, the firstborn of all creation (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως). These two strophes can be seen as parallel depictions where the first is explicated in the second. Hence, we should interpret them in light of each other. In the first statement, there is a contrast between God as invisible and his Son as his image. How are we to understand the designation εἰκών (image)?

The meaning of the term is “likeness, portrait, living image, form, appearance.” Barth and Blanke argue that the most likely interpretation is to read it in light of Gen 1:26–28 where “image” denotes a function, “namely the divine mandate to dominate the earth.” The other reference in Paul (2 Cor 4:4–6) that also refers to Christ as the image of God supports this interpretation. Jesus as the image of God is proclaimed as Lord and hence proclaims...
“the supreme position of the Son in the cosmos.”539 Hence, “Christ is viewed as mirroring the cosmological relationship that God has with the entire universe.”540

How does this understanding of Christ as the image of God relate to God as invisible? In the OT God is not invisible as such (cf. Exod 3:6; 24:9–11; Isa 6:5), but humans do not have the capacity to see God. It is only when God provides special protection that humans can see God’s glory and still live (Gen 16:13; 32:30; Exod 33:18–23; Lev 16:2; Num 4:20). Thus, ἀόρατος (invisible) must be understood in this factual or pragmatic sense.541 The point is not primarily related to God’s “invisibility” and the effort to make him visible, but to his glory and his power that he has as invisible. “The addition of ‘who is not seen’ indicates the glory and power not only of God but also of him who is installed by the Father.”542 This interpretation of Christ as the image of God proclaimed as Lord also fits well with verse 13, which mentions the kingdom of his beloved Son. In this kingdom, the Son must be understood to be Lord and ruler. Hence, Christ as the image of God is the Lord and ruler of all creation.543 He reveals the invisible God.544

He is also the firstborn of all creation. I have demonstrated above that the focus is vertical when the term πρωτότοκος is used metaphorically in the HB/LXX, that is, between Yahweh as father and Israel or its king as firstborn son (Exod 4:22–23; Jer 31:9

539 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 249.
540 Foster, Colossians, 177. Hence, he is “the exact and full representation of God in character and otherwise. Whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father”; see Witherington, III, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, 133. See also Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 109; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 48; Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 61.
541 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 195–196, 250. Foster argues that God possesses the quality of invisibility; see Foster, Colossians, 178.
542 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 250.
543 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 250. They also argue that being the image of God expresses primarily the relation to all creation rather than to God; see Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 195. Foster discusses whether the “connection between image and God” and the theme of creation evokes the creation story, but argues that while texts about the creation (e.g. Gen 1:1, 27; Prov 8:22) may have been instrumental in shaping the religious background for this passage, their influence must be indirect rather than intentional; see Foster, Colossians, 178–79.
544 Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 129. One question that has been debated is whether Christ is understood to be preexistent as mediator of creation. Dunn denies it; see Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 89. Stettler, Wolter, and Wright argue in favor; see Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 130–31; Wolter, Kolosser, 76–77; Wright, Colossians and Philemon, 73–74.
Israel and its king are declared to be dear to Yahweh, and are given the position of a firstborn son for Yahweh. What is highlighted is status, a place of favor, excellence, and honor, elevated above the others. The status of the firstborn son is special but he is subordinate to Yahweh as father. The focus is upon the status of the firstborn (in comparison to others) and not on the roles associated with being a firstborn or eldest brother. The elevated status of the firstborn fits the context well considering the context in Col 1:12–14. The Son is there depicted with a kingdom, hence with princely dominion.

In Col 1:15 he is described as the firstborn of all creation (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως). The term “creation” (κτίσις) can have either an active meaning “the act of creation, creation” or a passive meaning “the result of a creative act, that which is created.” The latter passive sense predominates in both the LXX and the NT. Due to the lack of an article in front of κτίσεως, the most adequate translation is “every creature” (cf. Col 1:23; 1 Pet 2:13). How should we understand the genitive construction? In the similar occurrences in Rev 1:5 and Col 1:18 the relation is expressed with either a partitive

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545 See section 3.3.2. See also page 258 above. Gnilka argues that these OT texts are directly relevant for Col 1:18, but only indirectly for 1:15. He finds 4 Ezra 6:58–59 more relevant; see Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 62.

546 So also Schweizer, Kolosser, 59.

547 Moo argues that Ps 89 is important in light of what Paul has said in 1:12–14; see Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 119. For Christ’s kingship as a subordinate kingship of God; see Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 79. Dunn interprets this phrase as an expression of wisdom Christology; see Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 89–90. See also Schweizer, Kolosser, 60. According to Fee, the term πρωτότοκος never occurs in the wisdom tradition; see Fee, Pauline Christology, 320. Stettler argues that in Greek-speaking Judaism in the first century, πρώτος, ἀρχή, and πρωτότοκος in connection with wisdom were exchangeable, in contrast to LXX, which distinguishes between ἀρχή and πρωτότοκος. He refers to Philo Cher. 54 in support; see Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 151. Through Prov 8:22 Stettler links to Ps 89 and argues for a messianic interpretation of Ps 89 in rabbinic sources, an interpretation presupposed in Zech 12:10 LXX. I agree that Ps 89 is a relevant text, but question whether we have to rely on Prov 8:22 to make that point. Perhaps Prov 8:22 is needed more to support wisdom Christology as a background for the use of πρωτότοκος in 1:15 than to support Ps 89 as a relevant text; see Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 152.

548 BDAG, 572–73, s.v. κτίσις. See also Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 196–97.

549 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 196, note 14 lists only Rom 1:20 as an example of the active sense in the NT.

550 Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 197. In support, a similar undefined construction in Eph 2:21 πᾶσα οἰκοδομή (the whole construction) is given. In light of τὰ πάντα (all things) in the next verse, Barth and Blanke nevertheless translate it as “all creation.” See also Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 147–48; BDF, 143, § 275 (3).
genitive (Rev 1:5) or with ἐκ as a substitute for a partitive genitive (Col 1:18).\textsuperscript{551} Jesus is the firstborn brother from the dead, that is, the possibility of resurrection for others is given.\textsuperscript{552} Several suggestions have been proposed and an objective genitive might be preferred.\textsuperscript{553} The verbal idea implicit in “firstborn” in this genitive construction is to be elevated over, or have a status of primacy in relation to, every creature.\textsuperscript{554} There is thus a qualitative difference because no one else will be able to share in his status as “firstborn of all creation.”\textsuperscript{555} This exclusive status is supported by 1:16 where Paul says that in the Son all things were created.\textsuperscript{556} Hence, it is difficult to find a relation to siblings of the firstborn expressed in Col 1:15.\textsuperscript{557} As the manifestation of God and thus closely connected with God he is also different from the created.\textsuperscript{558} Rather, it is his elevated status as the beloved and the preeminent in relation to God, his Father that is expressed. This elevated status is what is prominent in the messianic promises in Ps 89:26–28 (88:27–29 LXX). David the king will call God “My Father” and God will in turn appoint the king as his “firstborn.”\textsuperscript{559} The king is accordingly the highest of the kings of the earth.

\textsuperscript{551} Stettler, \textit{Kolosserhymnus}, 148, 235; BDF, 90, § 164.

\textsuperscript{552} Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 180. Barth and Blanke find the construction “out of the dead” unusual; they argue that ἐκ often designates origin in the NT. See Barth and Blanke, \textit{Colossians}, 208–9.

\textsuperscript{553} Larry R. Helyer, “Arius Revisited: The Firstborn over All Creation (Col 1:15),” \textit{JETS} 31 (1988): 59–67, here 63–65. Stettler argues for a partitive genitive, but qualifies it immediately regarding how we should understand the construction; see Stettler, \textit{Kolosserhymnus}, 148. Wallace dismisses partitive genitive but considers both genitive of reference and genitive of subordination (“over”). He favors the latter, although he lists Col 1:15 among the disputed examples; see Wallace, \textit{Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics}, 103, 127–28.

\textsuperscript{554} Helyer argues that “the meaning of πρωτότοκος is, in this context, moving close to the semantic field of kyrios”; see Helyer, “Arius Revisited,” 65. Wallace defines objective genitive as follows: “The genitive substantive functions semantically as the \textit{direct object} of the verbal idea implicit in the head noun”; see Wallace, \textit{Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics}, 116–17, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{555} Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 181. Foster notes that in the Pauline writings, the term πρωτότοκος is found only in Rom 8:29 apart from Col 1:15, 18. In Rom 8:29 the term ἐκκόν also occurs. The inclusive use of πρωτότοκος is found in both Rom 8:29 and Col 1:18 where he is seen in relation to others. This is different in Col 1:15 where the use is exclusive; see Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 180–81.

\textsuperscript{556} Stettler interprets “in him” as instrumental; see Stettler, \textit{Kolosserhymnus}, 147.

\textsuperscript{557} Stettler, \textit{Kolosserhymnus}, 149; Dunn, \textit{Colossians and Philemon}, 90. Schweizer argues, however, that “Christ is the one who causes those who believe to be made like his image and to follow him as brothers and sisters”; see Eduard Schweizer, \textit{The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary}, trans. Andrew Chester (London: SPCK, 1982), 68.


\textsuperscript{559} Fee, \textit{Pauline Christology}, 301.
and will rule over the other kings. Hence, Christ as the firstborn is to be seen as being placed in the position of sovereign with regard to creation.\textsuperscript{560} It has been argued, however, that as the firstborn he is “the acting subject who extends God’s activity to the creatures that follow him.”\textsuperscript{561} This does not, however, express the thought that he is to be understood as their eldest brother.\textsuperscript{562} Having used the term “firstborn” (πρωτότοκος) in 1:15–17 to identify the relationship of the Son to creation, Paul uses the term in 1:18–20 to identify the Son as the redeemer based on his resurrection.\textsuperscript{563} “The obviously deliberate repetition of ὁς ἐστιν ... πρωτότοκος is clearly intended to parallel the opening of the hymn (1:15) and thus to introduce either a second strophe or an echoing supplement to it.”\textsuperscript{564} In addition to πρωτότοκος, Paul uses two other terms in 1:18 to identify Jesus.

He is head (κεφαλή) of the body, the church.\textsuperscript{565} Being the head denotes rule or authority.\textsuperscript{566} “In the ancient world, the head was conceived to be the governing member of the body, that which both controlled it and provided for its life and sustenance.”\textsuperscript{567} This is seen in Col 2:19 where the head protects the body from disintegration, nourishes the body, and enables the body to grow.\textsuperscript{568} Here in 1:18 the body metaphor does not describe functions of body parts as it does in other instances (cf. 1 Cor 12:12–31; Eph 4:1–16), instead Christ’s headship is used christologically.\textsuperscript{569} He “cares for the existen

\textsuperscript{560} Fee, \textit{Pauline Christology}, 301. Foster argues that the term denotes “both temporal priority and superiority to creation”; see Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 181. See also Witherington, III, \textit{Philomen, Colossians, Ephesians}, 134. See also Gnilka, \textit{Kolosserbrief}, 63.

\textsuperscript{561} Schweizer, \textit{The Letter to the Colossians}, 67, quoted in support by Moo, \textit{Colossians and Philomenon}, 120.

\textsuperscript{562} It is therefore difficult to support the argument that Jesus is the ladder or mediator between God and humankind based on Col 1:16.

\textsuperscript{563} Fee, \textit{Pauline Christology}, 298; Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 193.

\textsuperscript{564} Dunn, \textit{Colossians and Philomenon}, 97.

\textsuperscript{565} The genitive is epexegetic, the church stands in apposition to the body; see Wilson, \textit{Colossians and Philomenon}, 145.


\textsuperscript{567} Moo, \textit{Colossians and Philomenon}, 128; see especially note 182 for further references.

\textsuperscript{568} Barth and Blanke, \textit{Colossians}, 206. See also Fee, \textit{Pauline Christology}, 306.

\textsuperscript{569} Foster, \textit{Colossians}, 41. See also Gnilka, \textit{Kolosserbrief}, 69–70; Wolter, \textit{Kolosser}, 82–83.
and life of the church.”

He is also the beginning (ἀρχή). The term ārchē has the sense of beginning and implies “founder.” The next phrase, “firstborn from the dead,” explicates how we should understand the term “beginning.” He is the first resurrected, but also the “the ‘founder’ of the new order of resurrection” or “the inaugurator of a new ‘family’ of those who are raised ‘in him.’” An added ἵνα clause in 1:18 states the purpose, that he in all things becomes the first (πρωτεύων). The verb πρωτεύω is found only here in the NT; it means “to hold the highest rank in a group, be first, have first place.” In using the term πρωτότοκος in relation to others that are to follow, viz. those who are to be raised from the dead after him, a relationship to siblings might be seen, although it is not expressed directly. Stettler argues that Ps 89:28 with the title πρωτότοκος understood messianically is in the background here too and that the dead can be understood as future “brothers” of the “firstborn,” as those who later will be raised from the dead. In Gen 49:3 LXX ārchē has the meaning “founder” and ārchē also occurs

Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 206.

See Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 231–34; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 55.

Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 129. He refers to Gen 49:3; Deut 21:17 LXX in support. Schweizer argues for the sense “beginning”; he refers to Josephus, C. Ap. 2.190. See Schweizer, Kolosser, 63, note 151.

Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 129. See also Wright, Colossians and Philemon, 78–79. Schweizer argues that it is his separation from the realm of the dead that is emphasized in Col 1:18; see Schweizer, Kolosser, 63–64. Hence, Schweizer does not understand the phrase as parallel to Rev 1:5; Rom 8:29.

Wilson, Colossians and Philemon, 135.

BDAG, 892, s.v. πρωτεύω. Barth and Blanke argue that the meaning “to be the first one among” is unattested. We should therefore read it as designating first in status without a comparison to others; see Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 209–10. Lohse argues that “to be the first” takes up “firstborn” mentioned twice (1:15, 18) and being before (πρῶτος) all things (1:17), giving the first place in the universe to Christ; see Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 56. Stettler refers to two possible backgrounds: Philo translates ἡ πρώτη in Prov 8:22 once with πρωτότοκος as a name for wisdom (Ebr. 31) and from the middle of the second century the term ἡ πρώτη (first) is used as a name for the Messiah in the school of Rabbi Ishmael. A predicate for God is transferred to the Messiah, also reflected in Rev 1:17; 22:13. This Messiah designation might be the background for stating that Jesus is the first as mediator of both the creation and the new creation; see Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 248–49.

Foster hence refers to Rom 8:29 as a parallel text; see Foster, Colossians, 194; Witherington, III, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, 135. Wolter interprets πρωτότοκος and ἀρχη as denoting superiority in rank; see Wolter, Kolosser, 84.

Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 242.
together with πρωτότοκος. When these two words occur together they sometimes “describe the first-born as the founder of a people” (cf. Deut 21:17 LXX).578 Who are these dead? The meaning is not specified, most likely because the emphasis is on the precedence of the Son in relation to others.579 If read in light of the Son being the head of the church, the dead could be understood as the believers.580 This would mean that the Son by his resurrection becomes the founder of a new people consisting of these dead, understood as believers who have died. Support for this understanding is found in the parallel expression in Rev 1:5 where Christ is also described as the “firstborn of the dead.”581 He is in Rev 1:5 further described as the ruler (ἄρχων) of the kings of the earth. Ps 89:28 is seen as the likely background for Rev 1:5 as well.582 We thus have similarities in the use of language, context, and background between Col 1:18 and Rev 1:5. David E. Aune argues that in Rev 1:5 “the phrase implies that while Jesus is the first to have conquered death, he is also not the last but provides the precedent for the subsequent resurrection of believers who have died.”583 It thus seems reasonable to conclude that the dead in the phrase “firstborn from the dead” in Col 1:18 also refers to the believers who have died. This is also in agreement with the immediate context where the Son is described as the head of the church. There is thus reason to concur with Moo who concludes like this: “He is the ‘firstborn (πρωτότοκος) among many brothers and sisters.”584

578 Lohse, Colossians and Philemon, 56, note 173. Gnilka sees Gen 49:3 as a more distant parallel; see Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 70, note 100.
579 Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 236. Barth and Blanke understand “out of the dead” as “a special distinguishing attribute of the ‘first-born’”; see Barth and Blanke, Colossians, 209.
580 Foster considers this without concluding in its favor; see Foster, Colossians, 194. Stettler interprets Rom 8:29 as referring to Christians, while Col 1:18 refers to the resurrection of all; see Stettler, Kolosserhymnus, 242. See also Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 70–71.
581 A variant reading to Rev 1:5 adds ἐκ; similarly, a variant reading omits ἐκ in Col 1:18. See also note 551 above.
583 Aune, Revelation 1–5, 38. He adds that “the association of the term πρωτότοκος with the resurrection of Jesus in Col 1:18 and Rev 1:5, and perhaps also in Rom 8:29, indicates the presence of a traditional conception.” He lists Rom 8:29; Acts 3:15; 26:23; 1 Cor 15:20–23 in support of the use of πρωτότοκος in a resurrection context.
584 Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 129.
To sum up, Jesus is the beloved Son of God who is given a kingdom where he is sovereign or Lord. He is also the redeemer of those who are qualified by God to receive a share in the inheritance of the kingdom of his beloved Son. The description of him as the firstborn focuses in 1:15 on his elevated status as the sovereign over all creation. He is the manifestation of God. In the second occurrence in 1:18 the Son is described in relation to others. He is first described as the head of the church, signaling that he is both its leader and protector. He also has the first place. This is confirmed by him being the first to be resurrected, and thereby both indicating his elevated status and implying that there are others that will be resurrected after him. He is as both the first and the firstborn the founder of a new people by his resurrection. This new people where he is the head consists of the believers who have died. Considering the parallels in Rom 8:29 and Rev 1:5, he can therefore be understood as the firstborn or eldest brother among many siblings.

4.3.4 Statuses and Roles Corresponding with Being the Eldest Brother?

We have seen that in the hymn (1:15–20) the Son as the firstborn has been presented as having an elevated or preeminent status. The question is whether there are other references that present the Son with elevated statuses or roles that correspond with being the eldest brother and that relate him to possible siblings. Several descriptions of him correspond with having an elevated status. In Col 3:1 Christ is seated at the right hand of God, indicating the highest place of honor. The title Lord that is reserved for him in the letter suggests dominion and supremacy. He is also described as having a mediating role even as Lord (3:17). However, in none of these instances do we find that the status or role ascribed to him is related to him as the firstborn or the eldest brother. Family language is not used and there is no relation specified that indicates a sibling relationship.

585 Col 1:3, 10; 2:6; 3:13, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24; 4:1, 7.

586 Dunn, Colossians and Philemon, 241; Moo, Colossians and Philemon, 292; Wolter, Kolosser, 192; Gnilka, Kolosserbrief, 203.
4.3.5 Conclusions

Colossians uses family language to relate both the believers and Jesus to God. Thus, God is the father of both the believers and of his beloved Son, Jesus. Jesus is called “Son” once in Colossians, the believers are never called “sons of God.” They are qualified to become heirs, however, which gives them the status of sons indirectly. The believers are also called “brothers,” but never “brothers of Jesus.” Based on the definition of “brother” given above, I argue that the texts support an understanding of the relation between Jesus and the believers as that of brothers or siblings because they share common parentage. However, this is not explicitly stated. Thus, the sibling relationship is undefined and expressed indirectly.

Jesus is twice called the “firstborn” in Colossians. Only the second occurrence relates him to others that might be understood as his brothers and sisters. The immediate context opens such an understanding. Jesus is the head of the church, indicating that he is the leader, protector, and founder of the church. He holds the first place, which implies others. He is also the firstborn from the dead. This means that others will be raised from the dead after him. The dead are not explicitly described as the believers. However, when the term πρωτότοκος is used in a resurrection context, the dead refer to the believers who have died. Hence, based on both the narrow and wider context, it seems reasonable to argue for an understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother of many siblings, understood as his believers. This understanding, however, is not expressed as explicitly as in Romans.

4.4 Mark 3:31–35: Jesus and His New Family

4.4.1 Introduction

In Mark 3:31–35 Jesus is situated at home inside the house when his mother and his brothers call for him standing outside the house. Within the house a crowd is sitting around him. Jesus is told that his mother and his brothers (and sisters) are outside the house asking for him. He answers, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking at
those sitting around him he says, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (35). This text is used by Nkwoka to argue that Jesus is presented as a brother to those who do the will of God. Read together with other texts in the NT (Col 1:15, 16) he is understood as the eldest brother.\(^\text{587}\) From a different perspective, Dunn is open to the possibility that the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother (Rom 8:29) reflects the influence of the Jesus tradition as expressed in Mark 3:35.\(^\text{588}\) The underlying assumption is that Mark presents, or at least invites, an understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother among his siblings, his disciples.

The challenge of Mark 3:31–35 is how, if possible, this text can be used to argue for the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother. This text alternates between a literal and a metaphorical understanding of several kin terms. In using family language, Jesus places himself in a fictive kinship relation to those sitting around him. The most natural understanding of this text is that he sees himself as son and brother, but can we be more specific about what this entails regarding what kind of brother he is presented as and thereby possibly substantiate the assumption that he is presented as their eldest brother?

This passage consists of verses 31–35, but picks up from verses 20–21, a feature typical of the Markan “sandwich” method of narration.\(^\text{589}\) In the verses in between we have the story of Jesus and Beelzebul (22–30) where the scribes claim “that he is possessed by Beelzebul and that he casts out demons by the prince of demons.”\(^\text{590}\) In the two texts that surround the Beelzebul text, the family of Jesus tries to control him. Within this setting, Jesus defines who belongs to his family. This Markan feature with the intercalation is absent from the synoptic parallels in Matt 12:46–50 and Luke 8:19–21.\(^\text{591}\)

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\(^\text{587}\) See page 9 above.

\(^\text{588}\) See Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 636. See also page 268 above.


\(^\text{590}\) Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 134.

In these two texts, there are several questions we need to discuss. First, are those with him in verse 21 the same as his family that call for him in verse 31? The crowd that is sitting together with Jesus inside the house, who are they? Where do we find the disciples in these two texts? In verse 31 Mark says that it was his mother and his brothers that came and called him. When the crowd reports this to Jesus, they include his sisters, at least in some manuscripts. In Jesus’ reply, he repeats the family terms three times. In the first two occurrences, he refers to “my mother” and “my brothers”; in the third he alters the order and includes sister: “my brother, sister and mother.” How should we understand these family terms used by Jesus in relation to what role Jesus has in this fictive family? For the reader of the Gospel of Mark, how does Mark describe Jesus in the Gospel, primarily up to this point? Are there any characteristics of him that help in understanding him as the eldest brother in this text, and if so, how?

4.4.2 Jesus’ Status and Role in Relation to His New Family

Mark reports in 3:20–21 that Jesus went home.\footnote{The phrase “and he went home” in 3:20 recalls 1:29, 32–33, 2:1. See R. T. France, The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 164–65; especially note 31; Rudolf Pesch, Das Markusevangelium I. Teil: Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kap. 1, 1–8, 26, HTThKNT 2/1 (Freiberg: Herder, 1976), 211. Walter Schmithals argues that the house is Peter’s house; see Walter Schmithals, Das Evangelium nach Markus: Kapitel 1–9,1, ÖTK 2/1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1979), 211. Adela Yarbro Collins argues that “it is assumed that the disciples went with Jesus”; see Adela Yarbro Collins, Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 226.} The crowd (\(\delta χλος\)) gathered again “so they could not even eat.”\footnote{Schmithals argues that in verse 3:32 Jesus and the crowd are located inside the house sitting around him in contrast to 1:29–31 where only those living in the house are with him and 2:1–12 where the house is full and the crowd is pushing from the street to get in; see Schmithals, Markus 1–9,1, 211.} Some unnamed others, “those with him” (\(οι παρ’ αυτω\)) heard about this. Thus, there are three groups mentioned in these two verses: “the crowd,” “they” who could not eat, and “those with him.” Who are “those with him”? The phrase when used in the LXX and Hellenistic literature means “either adherents and followers or parents and other relatives.”\footnote{Joel Marcus, Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 270. He lists the following references in support: 1 Macc 11:73; 12:27; 2 Macc 11:20; Prov 31:21; Sus 33; Josephus, A.J. 1.193. See also C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary, Reprinted with revised additional supplementary notes, CGTC} The alternatives in 3:21 are either his
disciples or his family members. The scribes and Pharisees can be ruled out. The disciples are included in the plural “they” (αὐτοῖς) in verse 20 of those who could not even eat. The disciples are also distinguished from the crowd in 3:7–9 where Jesus asks the disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, and in 3:13–19 Jesus appoints the twelve. “They” refers therefore most likely to Jesus and the disciples who are then already present. We are thus left with his family members as “those with him.” This is the first time Jesus’ family is mentioned in Mark; it has only been told that Jesus comes from Nazareth (1:9, 24).

The Markan sandwich technique used here also supports the interpretation that “those with him” in 3:21 are the same as the family members as “those with him.”

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 133–34. Vincent Taylor also quotes in support a papyrus, P. Grenf. ii 36.9 (95 BC); see Taylor, Mark, 236.


“The scribes and the others” is suggested by the manuscripts D W it. They probably felt the original reading too embarrassing; see Metzger and United Bible Societies, Textual Commentary, 70. Best argues that the traditional meaning taking “those with him” to refer to his family is the offending meaning behind the manuscripts D W it; see Best, “Mark III,” 313–14.

Marcus, Mark 1–8, 270. France understands the antecedents of “they” to be Jesus and the twelve; considering 3:14, however, he also mentions that Mark uses a plural pronoun to refer to a crowd (ὄχλος), therefore the pronoun could refer to the crowd. See France, Mark, 165; Best, “Mark III,” 311. Pesch also understands them to be the twelve in light of 3:13–19; see Pesch, Markusevangelium I. Teil, 211.

France, Mark, 164. Mark 6:3 is the only place where the names of his closest family are mentioned in Mark. Paul S. Minear seems to suggest that in verse 21 it is Jesus’ friends that is meant, and in verse 31 his family; see Paul S. Minear, “Audience Criticism and Markan Ecclesiology,” in Neues Testament und Geschichte: Historisches Geschehen und Deutung im Neuen Testament: Oscar Cullmann zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Heinrich Baltensweiler and Bo Reicke (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972), 79–89, here 82. Joachim Gnilka argues that the phrase “those with him” is unspecified; it is first with verse 31 that it becomes evident that it is his family. See Joachim Gnilka, Das Evangelium nach Markus: 1. Teilband Mk 1–8, 26, EKKNT 2/1 (Zürich: Benziger, 1978), 144, 148. See also Yarbrough Collins, Mark, 226.
mentioned in 3:31–35.599 Thus, his closest family, his mother and his brothers, heard what others were saying about him and therefore they tried to control him.600

The crowd mentioned in 3:20 is coming together again, probably intending to listen to Jesus (cf. 2:2, 4, 13, 15; 3:7, 9).601 In the references where the crowd occurs, there is a positive interest from the crowd in listening to Jesus, in hearing him teach, and in being healed. In 3:32 the crowd (ἵλαροι) is mentioned again now sitting around him, and Jesus and the crowd are inside the house. It is probable that the crowd mentioned in 3:32 is the same as the crowd in 3:20.602 The crowd in 3:32 must accordingly be distinguished from the disciples as they were in 3:20–21.603 The disciples are not mentioned explicitly in 3:31–35, but I assume that they are there together with the crowd (cf. 3:20). It does not make sense that the saying in verse 34 “Here are my mother and my brothers!” refers to a crowd that does not include the disciples. They may therefore be included among those mentioned as sitting around him in both verses 32 and 34. The antecedent of those who report to Jesus (λέγουσιν αὐτῷ) that his family is calling him is the crowd in verse 32.

599 Donahue and Harrington, Mark, 129; Marcus, Mark 1–8, 270. Robert H. Gundry adds an additional argument, the commonness of dual expression where the second specifies the first; see Robert H. Gundry, Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 171. Dunn says that “the problem is that no suitable single word for ‘family’ was available to Mark”; see Dunn, Jesus Remembered, 595, note 228.

600 Morna D. Hooker argues that the plural δεδελφοί can include females. Therefore the reference to Jesus and his brothers (plural) can be understood “as a reference to brothers and sisters, or more generally, to relatives”; see Morna D. Hooker, The Gospel According to St Mark, BNCT (London: Continuum, 1991), 118. For an overview of different positions regarding the brothers of Jesus; see Marcus, Mark 1–8, 275–76; John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, AYBRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 318–32; Richard Bauckham, Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 19–32; Taylor, Mark, 247–49. I assume that the brothers were Jesus’ siblings. Yarbro Collins finds an echo from Ps 68:8–9 LXX in the rejection by his own family; see Yarbro Collins, Mark, 227.

601 The term ἵλαροι is found in 2:4, 13; 3:9. In 2:2 it is stated that many gathered, in 2:15 it is stated that many followed him, and in 3:7 the phrase is “a great multitude.” Minear adds that “the editor noted that they came to Jesus, a verb which often carried a distinctly Christian nuance (1 :40, 45; 5:15; 10:14, 50) and which, significantly, was in the imperfect tense”; see Minear, “Audience Criticism,” 81.

602 Pesch thinks the crowd is a different one from the one mentioned in 3:21 and that the crowd is not to be identified with the disciples either; see Pesch, Markusevangelium I. Teil, 222. Gnilka argues that it is the same group in both places; see Gnilka, Markus 1. Teilband, 144.

603 France makes the distinction with the twelve; see France, Mark, 179. See also Minear, “Audience Criticism,” 82–83. Best argues that for Mark the disciples are not limited to the twelve; see Ernest Best, “The Role of the Disciples in Mark,” NTS 23 (1977): 377–401, here 398, note 3, doi:10.1017/S0028688500012364. This article is reprinted in Best, Disciples and Discipleship, 98–130. See also Best, “Mark III,” 318, note 6.
It is to them (αὐτοῖς) Jesus replies (3:33). According to Mark, Jesus in his reply makes no distinction between the narrower circle of his chosen traveling companions and the wider group of his followers.604 “By picturing the crowd thus surrounding Jesus Mark gives a visual impression of the gathering of the ‘circle’ (in our metaphorical sense) of Jesus’ followers.”605 This is also accentuated in verse 35 with the opening phrase “whoever does the will of God” where Jesus makes this “circle” of his new family “in principle indefinitely extendable.”606 The distinguishing feature of belonging to this new family is to do “the will of God.” Thus, his new family is not restricted to the narrower circle of the twelve plus others as in Matt 12:49 where the term “disciple” (μαθητής) is used.607 Matthew 12:50 has “the will of my Father in heaven” instead of “the will of God.”608 Luke specifies “the will of God” as to “hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21).

With regard to the family of Jesus, we have seen that “those with him” in 3:21 are the same as those mentioned in 3:31–35. Mark says that they are his mother and his brothers (31). Those sitting around Jesus report them to be his mother and his brothers, and according to some manuscripts also his sisters (32). So far, the reference is to his natural family and it is they who are standing outside. Mark then lets Jesus reply in verse 33, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Whom this refers to is now open. It may refer to his natural family, but it may also refer to a fictive kinship relationship. In the next verse (34) it becomes clear that fictive kinship language is used and this is also the case in the

607 Gould argues that in this case the crowd was made up of his disciples; see Gould, *St. Mark*, 67. Taylor says that the crowd “apparently (cf. 34) includes many disciples”; see Taylor, *Mark*, 246.
concluding pronouncement in verse 35. In this final sentence the Markan Jesus changes the word order around: “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” In these references to Jesus’ family, both in a literal and metaphorical sense, the father is absent. He is also absent in 6:3, and is not mentioned either in 10:30. The inclusion of καὶ ἀδελφαί σου by some manuscripts in verse 32 might have been added because of its inclusion in verse 35. The shorter reading is to be preferred. It is surprising, however, that the phrase was not added in the other instances as well (3:31, 33, 34). “Deliberately inclusive language” is used in verse 35 with the inclusion of sister. Because mother and brothers are mentioned in 3:31–34, France argues that “logical consistency required only ἀδελφός μου καὶ μήτηρ here, but Jesus’ followers (and Mark’s church) contained women as well as men, and their presence is appropriately recognised.” We end up with a setting in 3:31–35 where Jesus is inside a house together with a crowd of followers that most likely also include his disciples, but his disciples are not specifically mentioned. Outside the house his mother and his brothers call for him as son and brother. Jesus recognizes his natural family who are outside the house. In his definition of his new family of those who do the will of God, Jesus includes the kinship terms “brother,” “sister,” and “mother.”

Does the use of these kinship terms describe how the relation between them should be understood? Jesus does not apply these kinship terms in agreement with their roles in

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609 Donahue and Harrington refer to 9:37; 9:40; 10:29–31, 43, 45; 11:23 as instances of such pronouncements or “gnomic” sayings; see Donahue and Harrington, Mark, 132. Schmithals understands this community as familia Dei; see Schmithals, Markus I–9, 217.

610 Pesch is open to an original questioning of the precedence of “the brothers of the Lord” by this reversal of word order; see Pesch, Markusevangelium I. Teil, 224.

611 Donahue is open to the rather common suggestion that Joseph might have died before Jesus’ public ministry, but adds that “the omission may have an added significance in Mark”; see Donahue and Harrington, Mark, 133. See also France, Mark, 242–43.

612 France, Mark, 177. See also in agreement Metzger and United Bible Societies, Textual Commentary, 70; Best, “Mark III,” 315, note 4; Cranfield, Mark, 144; Taylor, Mark, 246; Gundry, Mark, 185; Yarbro Collins, Mark, 225, note 1. Marcus and Pesch regard them as original; see Marcus, Mark 1–8, 276–77; Pesch, Markusevangelium I. Teil, 221, note b.

613 France, Mark, 180. Gos. Thom. 99 has only brothers and mothers, and puts brothers before mother in both occurrences. Matt 12:46–50 has sisters only in the last saying in 12:50. Luke 8:19–21 does not include sisters at all. See also Sandnes who argues that the inclusion of the well-attested reading “and your sisters” is “an indication that from early on Mark was seen as writing about Jesus’ biological family”; see Sandnes, New Family, 70.
their physical family. They are applied indiscriminately to all who do the will of God. “The redefined family is replicating the physical family not in terms of traditional gender roles, but rather in that the replacement-family refers to people taking up the basic functions of the family.”\textsuperscript{614} The correlation is therefore only partial.\textsuperscript{615}

Having defined his new family, where does Jesus himself fit into this new family, what role does he have? While arguing that verse 35 expands verse 34 and “sets out the claims of discipleship rather than describing the nature of the relationship between Jesus and his followers,” Best asserts that “the very fact that Jesus enunciates the logion authoritatively sets him on a different plane.”\textsuperscript{616} He refers in an adjacent note to Rom 8:29 that “Christians thought of him as the ‘first born’ among brothers.”\textsuperscript{617} Best also allows the absence of “father” in the saying to “remind the Christian that the ‘father’ of the new family was God.” This, he argues, is expressed in verse 35 where “the family must do the will of God.”\textsuperscript{618} Sandnes, on the other hand, doubts that God as father “is here seen as replicating the role of the fathers in a natural family.”\textsuperscript{619} He argues that “Jesus’ audience, as first-century individuals, would see the role of the father as continued and safeguarded by the mentioning of brothers, and older brothers in

\textsuperscript{614} Sandnes, \textit{New Family}, 72.

\textsuperscript{615} Sandnes, \textit{New Family}, 72. He states further that in the text in Mark 10:29–31 “the redefined family has to be seen as in some way mirroring the role of the physical family, replicating the structures of the natural family”; see Sandnes, \textit{New Family}, 69.

\textsuperscript{616} Best, “Mark III,” 318.

\textsuperscript{617} Best, “Mark III,” 318, note 4. See also France who argues that “it may not be illegitimate to recall the ‘elder brother’ imagery found elsewhere in the NT: Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11–13”; see France, \textit{Mark}, 180.

\textsuperscript{618} Best, “Mark III,” 318. See also Marcus, \textit{Mark 1–8}, 277; Pesch, \textit{Markusevangelium I. Teil}, 224; Schmithals, \textit{Markus 1–9,1}, 214.

\textsuperscript{619} Sandnes, \textit{New Family}, 70. Guelich also dismisses a theological concern as the reason why “father” is absent, see Guelich, \textit{Mark 1–8}, 26, 181. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce argue that “in the Jewish-Palestinian culture, the authority structure of the patricentric family does not easily allow the father to be a disciple of his son or on the same level as he.” They claim, however, that the family structure is not invalidated by the absence of fathers, but the internal coordinates are changed. The result is that “the lack of a male apex within the family structure facilitates the emergence of a relationship between mother and sons (cf. [John] 2:12 where the mother appears with her sons, as elsewhere in the proto-Christian tradition: Mark 3:31–35; Ev. Naz.; and Acts 1:14), and in particular the eldest son”; see Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, “Kinship, Discipleship, and Movement: An Anthropological Study of John’s Gospel,” \textit{BibInt} 3.3 (1995): 266–84, here 270. See also Moxnes, “What is family?” in Moxnes, \textit{Constructing Early Christian Families}, 34–35.
particular.” While Sandnes argues for this role of brothers in the new family for those who do the will of God, Jesus’ audience might also have seen Jesus himself in the role of the eldest brother because he has, as Best asserted, set “himself on a different plane” in relation to the others in his new family. Hence, an understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother should be considered possible. In the role of the eldest brother he could be understood as becoming a second father. However, there is nothing explicit in the text that necessitates such an understanding of Jesus here in Mark. We will therefore look for characteristics of Jesus elsewhere in Mark that might support such an understanding.

Jesus is presented in different ways in Mark. The Gospel opens by stating that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1:1). Donahue and Harrington comment: “Mark stresses this title as a description of Jesus, or a variation of it such as ‘beloved [or only] son’ (1:11; 9:7; 12:6), the Son (13:32), Son of God (3:11), Son of the Most High God (5:7), son of the blessed one (14:61), and ‘a (or ‘the’) Son of God’ (15:39).” The title Son of God “reveals Jesus’s unique and unparalleled relationship with God.” In all of these references, the relationship is vertical, expressing sonship.

In Mark 13:32 we have father-son language expressed using both terms, where Jesus is the Son and God the Father. God is also presented as the father of Jesus as the Son of Man in 8:38 and Jesus opens his prayer to him in Gethsemane with the words “Abba, Father” in 14:36. The disciples are asked to forgive, if they have anything against anyone, so that their Father in heaven may also forgive them their trespasses (11:25). God is thus the father of both Jesus, his Son, and of the disciples. There is no horizontal language used that may indicate a brother relationship in these references.

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620 Sandnes, New Family, 70.

621 The reading υἱὸς θεοῦ (Son of God) is contested. It is omitted from K* Θ 28* al but included by B D W al. The absence might be explained as an oversight in copying due to the similarity of the endings of the nomina sacra; see Metzger and United Bible Societies, Textual Commentary, 62. The sequence of six identical genitive -ου endings may also explain its omission. The following argue that the reading is original: Stein, Mark, 52; Donahue and Harrington, Mark, 60; France, Mark, 49; Guelich, Mark 1–8:26, 6; Gnilka, Markus 1. Teilband, 43. The following argue that it is secondary: Yarbro Collins, Mark, 130, note a; Marcus, Mark 1–8, 141; Pesch, Markusevangelium I. Teil, 74; Schmithals, Markus 1–9,1, 73.

622 Donahue and Harrington, Mark, 60.

623 Stein, Mark, 41.
One of the variations of the title Son of God puts the focus more on the Son than on God. In Mark 1:11 the voice from heaven declares, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” The declaration is traditionally understood to be a combination of Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1. A third text that is textually closer, at least in the LXX, is Gen 22:2.  

In the combination of Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1 two contrasting strands of messianic thought are combined: “a suffering, unrecognised Messiah.”  

The most interesting term in this declaration for our purpose is “beloved” (ἀγαπητός). We have seen that “beloved” (ἀγαπητός) is used to translate the Hebrew יָח יד “only (son)” in the LXX. Several commentators suggest that this is the sense here too and that the term denotes a special family relationship. France also notes the parallel in the parable of the vineyard (12:1–12), where the last sent to the tenants is his beloved son (ὑἱὸν ἀγαπητόν) in contrast to the slaves sent earlier. He is unique; the owner of the vineyard had one (ἕνα) son, his beloved. France then comments on ἀγαπητός: “It thus carries something of the theological weight of the Johannine μονογενὴς, and contrasts Jesus as God’s only Son with others (including the prophets symbolised by the δοῦλοι in the parable) who may think of God as ‘Father’ in a lesser sense.”  

The term ἀγαπητός thus denotes the special relationship between Jesus the Son of God and his father. It is doubtful that we should see a clear reference to Exod 4:22–23 as suggested by Bretscher, however intriguing that might be. He reads ἀγαπητός (beloved) as a paraphrase of πρωτότοκος (firstborn).  

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624 France, *Mark*, 80. Schmithals also possibly adds to the list Isa 44:2; see Schmithals, *Markus 1–9,1*, 84. Gnilka finds it difficult to discover an Isaac typology based on Gen 22:2; see Gnilka, *Markus 1. Teilband*, 53. Yarbro Collins lists Isa 42:1 as a possible background and argues that the passages Isa 41:8–9 and 44:2 “suggest that ‘chosen’ and ‘beloved’ are synonyms”; see Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, 150.  


626 Mark 1:11; 9:7; 12:6 are the only passages where ἀγαπητός (beloved) is found in Mark; see also Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, 547.  

627 See footnote 528 above.  


630 Marcus argues for taking it as “beloved” in the present context; see Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 162. Yarbro Collins states that “ἀγαπητός (‘beloved’) may have the connotation of ‘only (son)’ or ‘favorite (son)’”; see Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, 546.  

Bauckham argues that Bretscher has not given enough evidence as to why בְּּכוֹר (firstborn) should have been translated ἀγαπητός (beloved) and that while the connection between Jesus’ sonship and the sonship of Israel is recognized in the Gospels, it is no more than that here.\(^{632}\)

Apart from the title Son of God and its variations, prior to our text Mark lets John the Baptist present Jesus as the more powerful, to whom he is not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals (1:7). Mark also says that after Jesus has been tempted by Satan in the wilderness, the angels waited on him (1:13). Jesus calls disciples (1:16–20), teaches with authority (1:22), commands unclean spirits (1:27), heals the sick and casts out many demons (1:34, 42; 2:11), and forgives sins (2:5). He describes himself as lord of the sabbath (2:28). Hence, Mark describes him as being powerful, having high authority and extraordinary capabilities, and being a master with disciples. However, none of these descriptions relates him to a status or role as that of being the eldest brother.

### 4.4.3 Conclusions

In Mark 3:31–35, Mark presents Jesus as defining a new family consisting of his followers, that is, of those who do the will of God. In his presentation of this new family, he uses different family roles (brother, sister, and mother) indiscriminately about the family members of this redefined family. The lack of the specific role of father in this new family is noteworthy. To see the missing role of father as reserved for God as father seems unnecessary.

Little is said specifically about Jesus’ role in this new family. The assumption that he is understood to be a brother is justified. We can, however, be more specific. In the broader context, Jesus is presented as being powerful, having high authority and extraordinary capabilities, and being a master that gathers disciples. This gives him high status. Also, by calling disciples, he creates a new fellowship where he becomes their leader. This also gives him an elevated role in comparison with those forming his new

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family. His close and special relationship to God is expressed by the title “Son of God” and by being the “beloved Son of God.” This special relationship to God is not claimed for “those who do the will of God.” Hence, Jesus is placed on a different and higher level in comparison with his new family. Given that in a natural family the eldest brother normally takes the role as a second father in his absence and that the father is absent from this redefined family, seeing Jesus as taking the role of the eldest brother and thereby fulfilling the role of the eldest brother as second father seems plausible. Though elements for understanding Jesus as the eldest brother are found in the text, this understanding of Jesus is not spelled out. The possibility, as voiced by Dunn, that the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother (Rom 8:29) reflects the influence of the Jesus tradition as expressed in Mark 3:35 is at the most implicit.

4.5 Matthew 25:31–46: Jesus and the Least of These My Brothers

4.5.1 Introduction

The last text to discuss is Matt 25:40, part of which is sometimes referred to as the parable about the judgment of the nations (Matt 25:31–46). According to Nkwoka, Matthew presents Jesus in an eschatological scene as the exalted Son of Man that as king sits to reward men according to their works on earth. Jesus identifies himself with the least of his brothers, understood as the outcasts and the very marginal members of society, of whom he declares himself a brother. As this narrative presents Jesus in an eschatological scene, Nkwoka points out that the title “firstborn” is used in a resurrection context, citing Col 1:18 (and Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:20). This leads to the understanding that Jesus is presented as the eldest brother of this family. This interpretation relies on the understanding of the last part of Matt 25:40: “one of the least of these who are

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634 See page 9 above.
members of my family” (ἐνι τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων). The Greek can be translated more literally as “the least of these my brothers” (ESV).635

The challenge in this text is whether we can understand Jesus as a brother, and more specifically, as the eldest brother. Jesus, the Son of Man, is presented as “the king.” How is Jesus portrayed as “the king”? The next question is who these “brothers” are. The term “brother” is used only once in the narrative and is used in a metaphorical sense. To whom does the term refer? Does the use of this term elsewhere in Matthew help in determining its meaning here? These brothers are described as “my” brothers, that is, they are the king’s brothers. What inferences can be drawn about the king as brother regarding his status and role in relation to his brothers? The brothers are also described as “the least.” Does that imply that they can be understood as younger brothers?

The “judgment of the world” is found at the end of the section where Jesus is in Jerusalem (Matt 21:1–25:46). This is the last section before the passion narrative (26:1–28:20). The judgment discourse (Matt 24:3–25:46) comprises the last of the five discourses found in Matthew. It is also the second longest. Hence, our text comprises the last text before the passion narrative.

4.5.2 The King in Relation to the Least of These My Brothers

The term “king” (βασιλεύς) is found only once more in our text in addition to Matt 25:40, namely in Matt 25:34. He is there presented without introduction: “Then the king will say (τότε ἐρεῖ ὁ βασιλεύς) to those at his right hand.”637 The Son of Man is introduced in

635 I use this rendering below.


637 John Nolland lists the following references where “king” language is used in relation to Jesus: Matt 2:2; 21:5; 27:11, 29, 37, 42. Nolland claims that “the uses in 25:34, 40 are in a class apart”; see John Nolland, The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1027, and note 224. Luz also notes that “the transition from ‘Son of Man’ (v. 31) to ‘king’ (v. 34) is abrupt.” Luz claims that “king” does not play a prominent role as a designation of Christ in Matthew. None of them is eschatological; see Luz, Matthew 21–28, 265.
verse 31. Now in verse 34 the Son of Man is identified as the king. Several features of the description of the Son of Man emphasize his elevated status in verses 31–32: He comes in glory (cf. 16:27; 24:30), all the angels come with him (cf. 13:39, 41, 49; 16:27; 24:31). He will sit on the throne of his glory (cf. 19:28), that is, the throne of God. He is depicted as the judge of the world with all the nations gathered before him. He will as a shepherd separate people one from another, an image appropriate for a king. “As everywhere in the New Testament, the Son of Man Jesus is himself the World Judge.”

The identification of “Son of Man” and “king” makes Jesus the king in the judgment dialogs that follow (34–40, 41–45). “Here Jesus is the king in the kingdom of God.” Hence, Jesus as the Son of Man is described as a king with elevated status, highest authority, and ruling power to judge all the nations. Jesus, the king pronounces the judgment in verses 40 and 45–46.

The next question is: Who are those called “my brothers” that are introduced in verse 40? We observe that the first dialog (34–40) ends with the king’s answer to those at his right hand, “and the king will answer them” (40). “Them” refers to those with whom the

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638 This is the only place in Matthew where the Son of Man is designated as “king”; see Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 265, note 21. See also Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 743.

639 Luz argues that the mentioning of the “throne” makes the designation “king” anticipated; see Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 265. To sit on the “throne of glory” is to sit on the throne of God; see Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 274. Gnilka notes (to verse 34) that his royal traits have already appeared; see Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium II. Teil*, 372.


642 Luz relegates the discussion of whether “king” refers to God to the question about tradition history. He concludes that it is possible that “king” referred to God, but that “this hypothesis is clearly the most difficult of the two.” In the present context he claims that it refers to Jesus. See Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 266–67; see also Frederick D. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: Vol 2: The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28*, Rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 568. Robert H. Gundry argues that “the king cannot represent God the Father, for the king refers to God as his Father”; see Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 513.

643 W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew: Volume III*, ICC 1/3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 425; they refer to Col 1:13 in this connection.

king has been in dialog from verse 34. His answer is: “Truly I tell you (ὑμῖν), just as you did it (ἐποίησατε) to one of the least of these my brothers you did it (ἐποίησατε) to me.” The three times repeated “you” in his answer refers to those on his right hand. Hence, “the least of these my brothers” must be distinguished from those on the right hand of the king in the judgment scene in the first dialog in verses 32–39. The parallel answer to those on the left hand at the end of the second dialog in verse 45, where they are also distinguished from “you,” suggests that “the least of these my brothers” is a third group distinguished from those on both the left and the right side of the king.

To determine who these called “my brothers” are, we should give priority to how the term “brother” is used in Matthew. In those occurrences where the term is not used of natural brothers, it is in Matthew used predominantly of the disciples, in some of these instances also in relation to Jesus. The disciples are called “brothers” in Matt 18:15, 21; 23:8. In Matt 12:46–50, the parallel text to Mark 3:31–35 (discussed above), those who do “the will of my Father in heaven” are Jesus’ disciples, his true family, that is, they are his brother, sister, and mother. After the resurrection, Jesus also calls the disciples his “brothers” (28:10). The other occurrences where the term is used about disciples or fellow believers are: Matt 5:22–24; 47; 7:3–5; 18:35. This use of the term “brother” in

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645 Verse 33 states that those on the right hand are the sheep.

646 This does not mean that “the least of these my brothers” cannot be part of one of the two groups already mentioned; see Hans Kvalbein, Jesus og de fattige: Jesu syn på de fattige og hans bruk av ord for “fattig.” (Oslo: Luther, 1981), 277. David Cortés-Fuentes also identifies three groups; see David Cortés-Fuentes, “The Least of These My Brothers: Matthew 25:31–46,” Apuntes 23.3 (2003): 100–109, here 106. Nolland, on the basis of “these,” includes them in the group on the right; see Nolland, Matthew, 1032.


relation to Jesus ("my brothers") in Matthew suggests that Matt 25:40 also refers to the disciples, especially considering that the Matthean Jesus uses "my" about the "brothers" in all these texts (Matt 12:50; 25:40; 28:10).\(^649\) Several commentators refer to Rom 8:29 and Heb 2:11–18 when commenting on the use of "my brothers" in Matt 25:40.\(^650\) Egon Brandenburger argues that Rom 8:29 and Heb 2:11–18 together with Mark 3:20–21, 31–35 share a common idea and thought world where brotherhood with Jesus is a common denominator. While his arguments have not met general acceptance, not least because of his tradition-historical argument, he points to a similar understanding of Jesus in relation to his brothers and sisters in these texts that is striking.\(^651\)

The next question is whether the description of the brothers as "the least" (τῶν ἐλαχίστων) may be of help in determining what kind of brothers is meant.\(^652\) Since most commentators are interested in whether this added description suggests a special and more narrow group (of disciples), I am interested in whether the description can be

\(^649\) Luz argues that "the few references from the church's tradition to 'brothers of Jesus' point in the same direction." He refers in the adjacent note to Mark 3:34–35; John 20:17; see also Rom 8:29 and Heb 2:11–18. See Luz, Matthew 21–28, 279, and note 143. See also Craig S. Keener, The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 605–6; J. A. Overman, Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew, The New Testament in context (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 348–49; Hagner, Matthew 14–28, 744; Stanton, A Gospel for a New People, 216. Konradt interprets "the least of these my brothers" as all suffering people; see Konradt, Matthäus, 392. Gnilka thinks it is possible that it was first used about Christian brothers and then extended to include all needy; see Gnilka, Matthäusevangelium II. Teil, 375. Bruner admits that the term "brother" elsewhere designates other Christians, but argues that the universal setting tilts the interpretation in a universal direction; see Bruner, Matthew 13–28, 574.


\(^651\) Egon Brandenburger, Das Recht des Weltenrichters: Untersuchung zu Matthäus 25, 31–46, SBS 99 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1980), 76–86. He argues for Hellenistic Christianity as its origin because of the close parallels to these texts. Luz, however, argues against Hellenistic Christianity as its origin. He finds it more likely that the text "comes either from Jesus himself or from an author in an early Jewish Christian community"; see Luz, Matthew 21–28, 267. See also Gnilka, Matthäusevangelium II. Teil, 368, note 6. France contends that "this sense of solidarity between Jesus and his people will be creatively developed by the author of Hebrews when he explains how it was necessary for the Savior to share the experiences of those he saves, so that he rightly calls them his brothers and sisters (Heb 2:10–18)"; see France, Matthew, 965.

\(^652\) Luz understands ἐλαχίστος "as an irregular superlative with an elative meaning, 'very small'"; see Luz, Matthew 21–28, 279, note 142. He refers to BDF, 32–33, § 60 (2).
understood as referring to younger brothers. Apart from Matt 25:40, 45 the term ἐλάχιστος is used in Matt 2:6; 5:19. In 2:6 it is used in a quote from Mic 5:2 where Bethlehem is not the least among the rulers of Judah. In Matt 5:19 it is used twice. Whoever breaks the least of the commandments is the least in the kingdom of heaven. In these instances in Matthew, it is used as the superlative of μικρός (small). When used about persons the sense is “being the lowest in status,” and when used about the commandments, “(relatively) insignificant.” In none of these other references in Matthew is the term ἐλάχιστος used to qualify the term ἀδελφός. The other occurrences in the NT where it is used about persons are found in 1 Cor 15:9 where Paul says that he is the least of the apostles, and similarly in Eph 3:8 he is the least of all the saints. These two verses do not describe a brother relationship. I am not able to find any references in the NT, LXX, Philo, or Josephus where ἐλάχιστος is used to qualify the term ἀδελφός. It has been argued that because Semitic languages do not differentiate between positive and superlative we can juxtapose ἐλάχιστος and μικρός. Therefore the instances where οἱ μικροὶ is used are also relevant (Matt 10:42; Mark 9:42; Matt 18:6; Luke 17:2; Matt 18:10, 14). In these texts “the little ones” designate the disciples. This suggests that we should not understand “the least of these my brothers” as meaning “younger brothers.” The term ἐλάχιστος is used to designate them as disciples and contrast them with the king, not to specify the sense of brother. However, the identification of what has been

653 Luz, Matthew 21–28, 280. He argues for understanding them as itinerant radicals, but not by an identification of ἐλάχιστος with μικρός. Gundry argues that “the least of these my brothers” echoes Matt 10:42 and the king who identifies himself with these “the least of these my brothers” echoes Matt 10:40; see Gundry, Matthew, 514. See also Nolland, Matthew, 1032.

654 The term used in Mic 5:2 LXX is ὄλιγοςτός, the superlative of ὄλιγος.

655 BDAG, 314, s.v. ἐλάχιστος.

656 The closest usage is found in Gen 27:6 LXX where ἐλαχύς (small, short, mean) qualifies υἱός (son): “Then Rebekka said to her lesser son (τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν ἔλασσω) Jacob” (NETS).

657 Kvalbein, Jesus og de fattige, 282. Luz argues that “μικρός is not simply identical with ἐλάχιστος”; see Luz, Matthew 21–28, 280, note 147. He claims that Matthew could, if he wanted to, simply have said τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν μικρῶν.

658 Kvalbein, Jesus og de fattige, 282–84. See Stanton and Hagner who also interpret 10:42 and 25:40, 45 as being very closely based on the use of ἐλάχιστος and μικρός in these verses; see Stanton, A Gospel for a New People, 215; Hagner, Matthew 14–28, 745.

659 Luz, Matthew 21–28, 280, note 147. Cranfield argues that its purpose is to ensure that “my brothers” is understood in the widest possible sense; see Cranfield, “Who are Christ’s Brothers,” 129.
done to the needy as having been done to the king gives the needy a new status: They are the king’s brothers.\textsuperscript{660}

To summarize, Jesus is the Son of Man who as the king calls his disciples his brothers. In other words, the disciples are the brothers of the king. The text does not specify the role of these brothers as younger brothers, but they are described as the least, that is as lowest in status. The king, on the other hand, is highest in status. There is thus a clear status difference between Jesus and his brothers. However, because they are now designated brothers of the king, their relative status is heightened.

The last question to discuss is whether the text gives any help in understanding the king as the eldest brother. Are there any roles or statuses attributed to him that support such an understanding?

Within the text about the judgment of the world (Matt 25:31–46), the only other reference to family language is found in verse 34 where the king tells those on the right hand: “come, you that are blessed by my Father.” God is here understood to be the father of the king, hence Jesus as the king is the son of the father.\textsuperscript{661} However, that does not make him the eldest brother, because the vertical relationship is specified, not the horizontal. Elsewhere in Matthew, there are two texts where the disciples are described as Jesus’ brothers, both already mentioned. In Matt 12:46–50 his disciples are described as his family.\textsuperscript{662} Though elements for understanding Jesus as the eldest brother are found in Matt 12:46–50, the understanding of Jesus as eldest brother is not spelled out. Matthew replaces the phrase “whoever does the will of God” with “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven,” thereby adding “father” to the family vocabulary, but nothing more specific is said about Jesus as brother.\textsuperscript{663} Hence, it is at the most implicit in

\textsuperscript{660} Konradt, \textit{Matthäus}, 394.

\textsuperscript{661} Nolland claims that the reference to “my Father” is surprising considering that normally kings would not have living fathers in hereditary dynasties. Hence, he asks, “Is the relationship of Jesus as Son to the Father being allowed to obtrude through the imagery?” See Nolland, \textit{Matthew}, 1027. Bruner argues that the title “Son of God” is implied; see Bruner, \textit{Matthew 13–28}, 567.


\textsuperscript{663} Luz argues that the missing mentioning of “father” corresponds to the theological language of Matthew where God alone is Father; see Luz, \textit{Matthew 8–20}, 225, note 15.
Matt 12:46–50 as well. The other text is Matt 28:10 where the risen Jesus tells Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to go and tell his brothers to go to Galilee, where they will see him.664 Again, Jesus is understood as their brother, but his status and role as brother are not specified.

4.5.3 Conclusions

In Matt 25:31–46 Jesus is presented as king and judge of the world. Using metaphorical language, the king is in the judgment scene presented with a family consisting of a father (34) and brothers (40). I have argued for an understanding of the brothers as being the disciples. There is an explicit brother relationship expressed between Jesus and those designated “my brothers.” The added description of these brothers as “the least of these my brothers” cannot be interpreted as describing them as younger brothers in relation to an elder brother. However, this phrase conveys their inferior status in relation to the king, even though in itself it is honorific to be brothers of the king. I have not been able to find descriptions of Jesus as king that describe his role and status as brother. The description of him as king shows that his status is elevated above the others. His authority is given by being the world judge. Hence, he stands above his brothers by having higher status and different roles, as would have been expected of the eldest brother. Thus, elements for understanding Jesus as the eldest brother are found in the text, but this understanding of Jesus is not spelled out. Several commentators have pointed to Heb 2:11–18 and Rom 8:29 as relevant texts, texts that I have shown have developed the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother in a fruitful way. Matt 25:40 might have been one text that has played a part in inciting this understanding.

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5 Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to examine the understanding of the eldest brother and its possible relevance for the understanding of Jesus in the New Testament. The interest in Jesus as the eldest brother dates back to the years when I was a missionary in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. There I encountered a widespread use of family language when people were interacting with each other. If people met outsiders that became part of their society, they wanted to attach the outsider to one of their families to enable themselves to interact with and relate to the new members of their society in a polite and meaningful way. In addition, what generation one belonged to after the first ancestor of one’s lineage determined relative honor. Jesus was also an outsider, but instead of attaching him to one of the existing families, in Christian preaching he became the founder of a new family. What was distinctive with this new family of Jesus was that there was only one generation in his lineage. All who believed in him became his siblings. Hence, Jesus became the eldest brother of all the believers. This use of family language brought forth the question about what Christology is implicit, a question that I wanted to pursue further.

Unfortunately, I found no suitable written material from Northern Sumatra to interact with. I was, however, made aware of the fact that the same topic was discussed within an African context. In various African societies there were authors who presented Jesus as the eldest brother. This means that the status of Jesus is special, and that his role is that of a mediator, protector, and leader. The interesting question was whether this understanding of Jesus implied more than a noteworthy, but culturally dependent understanding of Jesus. I decided to clarify whether I can argue for this understanding of Jesus as a New Testament scholar. If we were to search for an exegetical basis for this
understanding of Jesus—read in light of its first-century Mediterranean context—what understanding of the eldest brother would we then find?

In order to understand what some African authors meant when they called Jesus the eldest brother, I had to survey whether their understanding of the eldest brother was in accord with this understanding within their respective societies and not merely a contrived understanding on their part. This survey had the added benefit of providing relevant data concerning what to look for when investigating the literary and cultural context of the New Testament. Based on the ethnographic data I have surveyed in chapter 2 the understanding of the eldest brother as presented by the African authors is in general substantiated. What I found in my survey includes the following: Differences in status and role are most easily seen in connection with rules of inheritance and succession. This does not mean, however, that the status and role of the eldest brother are limited to rules of inheritance and succession. While seniority can be more important than sex as a social qualifier in some societies, the eldest brother is still often given certain prerogatives. The kin term “eldest brother” is sometimes used in a sense that extends beyond the kin type that it refers to and indicates that the kin term is sometimes used in a figurative or extended sense. Characteristics of the role of the African eldest brother include his exemplary function, his responsibility for the welfare of younger siblings, and that he is founder of the filial generation. He often has a priestly role in the family, he has the role of mediator and spokesperson between his father and his younger siblings, and he often has special inheritance rights. Hence, his status is also special.

The next step in my investigation was to ask for the importance of the eldest brother in the first-century Mediterranean literary and cultural context of the New Testament. This is my first research question and it has been discussed in chapter 3. It applies to the importance of being the eldest brother, i.e. his status and role. The closest we can get to the cultural context of the New Testament is through literary sources. What texts became relevant was determined by pursuing several paths of investigation. My aim was to find texts that dealt with family relations where the eldest brother’s status and role were specifically mentioned. By searching for texts that deal with the eldest brother as social reality in relation to his younger siblings I ended up with the following main texts:
selected texts from the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint (in particular the patriarchal narratives in Genesis), the writings of Philo, the writings of Josephus (mainly Antiquitates judaicae), Herodotus’ Histories, Plutarch’s De fraterno amore, Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ Antiquitates romanae, and Livy’s Ab urbe condita libri. The fact that both Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy wrote their histories of Rome, but from Greek and Roman perspectives respectively, also allowed me to look for possible differences between a Greek and Roman historian.

The findings from my reading of these texts show that there is no discernible preferential status or role for the eldest brother among the Romans. At most, their tendency to honor seniority enabled them to appreciate the preferential status and role of the eldest brother among other peoples. This is seen in Livy when he comments on the role of the eldest brother among the Greeks compared with his comments on his own people, the Romans. The general tendency among the Romans that granted the eldest son the economic authority after his father points in the same direction.

Among the Greeks we do not find a preference for the eldest brother concerning inheritance and succession. However, the evidence still points to the eldest brother having a preferential status and role among them. He would have a claim to the family name and was commonly trained to become the leader. He was thus better suited to succeed his father than younger siblings. It was also expected of him that he looked after his younger siblings and hence became their role model. In the religious sphere, he took the role as the religious head of the family after their father had died. In Herodotus’ Histories, the preference for the eldest seems to be the norm. Several episodes reveal this preference for the eldest brother: when it must be decided who is the eldest among twins, and the extraordinary reasons given when younger brothers are preferred instead of the expected eldest brother. Sometimes competition of preferences is found: Ability may triumph over seniority; likewise, when succession to the throne is to be decided, the status of one’s mother may be decisive instead of seniority. While Plutarch favors and praises friendship and good companionship among brothers in his treatise De fraterno amore, status and role differences are still discernible. Younger brothers are expected to respect and honor elder brothers while responsibility and good leadership, including
 guardianship, should characterize the eldest brother. Plutarch also writes about the inferior and the superior brother. The superior brother is often, but not always, the eldest brother; no one can excel in all things, but all can show brotherly love.

Since an important part of this study is to interpret some New Testament texts, I had to look into what we could call the narrower literary context of the New Testament, namely the HB/LXX and Jewish texts commenting on biblical texts.

In the HB/LXX, and especially in the patriarchal narratives, I found a strong longing for sons to carry on the family line. The father’s eldest is expected to become the successor and heir irrespective of his mother’s status. His inheritance rights are special. He will eventually take the role as the leader in the family, and in their father’s absence the eldest present is expected to take his role, thereby becoming a second father. Both discipline of younger brothers and responsibility for them is assigned to the eldest. He becomes their protector and mediator. The special status of the mother’s firstborn is seen in that as the opener of the womb he is to be consecrated to the Lord, because he belongs to the Lord.

While Philo is heavily indebted to the HB/LXX in his writings, the character of his writings does not invite extended discussions relating to the social reality of the family. What he says about the eldest brother can for the most part be regarded as a byproduct of his main topics. His interest in the firstborn also shows more of a cultic character than a legal or familial character. He adds reasons not found in the biblical text for why the firstborn is eligible for a double portion. He also expounds on why the second eldest brother should take the role of the eldest brother in the latter’s absence. The high value attached to the eldest is seen in Philo calling him the dearest of the parents. He is also flexible regarding vocabulary in his description of the eldest brother.

Josephus also seems to take over the understanding of the eldest brother as found in the biblical texts. He moreover tends to be more explicit about who is the eldest brother in places where the biblical text leaves that open. Deviations from the expected preference for the eldest brother need explanation from him. He also emphasizes rights and statuses associated with being the eldest brother. The right-hand side is a position for the eldest brother; he is also often wealthier than his siblings and gets easier access to
honorific positions. The status associated with being the eldest brother also safeguards him because the father’s freedom of action toward him is restricted if he fails to comply with expected ethical standards.

When the eldest brother is used as a metaphor in the HB/LXX and Philo we have found that the focus is vertical. It is the elevated status and not the different roles associated with that status that is emphasized. Neither in the HB/LXX nor in Philo is his elevated status explained, it is taken for granted.

Given the plurality of roles found for the eldest brother, none of the texts mentions all of them. The exemplary role, being the confidant of the father, and the mediating role are those roles missing most often in the texts describing the eldest brother as social reality. Taken together, the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, Philo, and Josephus share more concerning the status and roles of the eldest brother than what we have found in the Greco-Roman texts. Hence, their description can be described as richer and more detailed. The investigation of the eldest brother as social reality in the literary and cultural context of the New Testament also confirms the general picture of the African understanding.

The relevance of understanding Jesus as the eldest brother relates to New Testament Christology. I claim that (at least part of) the eldest brother Christology can be supported by an exegesis of New Testament texts read in light of their first-century Mediterranean literary and cultural context. The selection of texts is based on whether Jesus is described in relation to others by using family language and thus somehow makes him a brother to younger siblings. By also including those texts that were considered important for the African authors I ended up with the following texts discussed in chapter 4: Matt 25:31–46, Mark 3:31–35, Rom 8:28–30, Col 1:15–20, and Heb 2:10–18. These texts thus span from a pronouncement saying and an eschatological judgment dialog in the Gospels to epistolary expositions and a hymnic text in the letters. My findings in these texts are presented here in approximately canonical order because that also unfolds the results of my findings in a natural way.

In both Mark 3:31–35 and Matt 25:31–46, Jesus is presented as a brother. In Mark, he defines his new family as consisting of his followers by using various family roles
indiscriminately in relation to the members of his new redefined family. Jesus’ role in relation to them is not given explicitly, but we are justified in understanding him as their brother. In Matthew, the brother relationship is given explicitly in relation to those designated “my brothers.” In neither of these two texts are Jesus’ status and role as the eldest brother expressed directly. Taking both the narrower and broader context of these two texts into consideration, Jesus is presented with characteristics that are in agreement with the status and role of the eldest brother, but the connection is not made explicit.

Paul uses family language in Romans 8 to relate Jesus to the believers. As God’s “own” Son and sons of God, Jesus and the believers share common parentage, hence they can on the basis of implicit language be described as siblings. Paul further uses adoption language and family metaphors both to express what differentiates the sonship of Jesus and the sonship of the believers and to emphasize what they share. Read together with the statement in Rom 8:29 that Jesus is the firstborn among many siblings, the understanding of him as the eldest brother is strengthened. As the firstborn, Jesus’ exalted status is emphasized, yet he is subordinate to God as father. Roles applied to Jesus include prototype, example, mediator, and protector. These roles are, however, not ascribed to him in the capacity of being the eldest brother, but if we consent that Jesus is here described as the eldest brother, these roles expound on what that understanding of Jesus entails.

In Colossians, we have found that Col 1:1–20 implicitly supports an understanding of Jesus as brother of the believers because they share common parentage. The title “firstborn” is found twice in Col 1:15, 18, but only the second relates Jesus to others. In the immediate context, Jesus is described as the head of the church, he holds the first place, and he is the firstborn from the dead. Jesus is thus described as the leader, protector, and founder of the church and the first to rise from death, with others expected to follow him. Noting that when the title “firstborn” is used in a resurrection context in the New Testament, the dead refer to the believers who have died, this enables an understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother of many siblings, understood as believers in him. This understanding is more reserved and is not expressed as directly as in Romans.
The final text is found in Hebrews 2:10–18. Family language that focuses on sonship, brotherhood, and inheritance is used to describe the relation between Jesus and the believers. In addition, Jesus is presented as a brother to the believers in agreement with the relation between the high priest and the priests as that of a brother relationship. In the same context where Jesus is described as a brother, he is given roles that warrant an understanding of him as the eldest brother of the believers. He is described as their leader and he takes care of their eternal well-being. As high priest and brother he atones for their sins. His status is special and so are his inheritance rights. He is God’s spokesperson both in words and deeds. God has also appointed him to rule over God’s household, thereby becoming second in command. Hence, Hebrews presents Jesus with the richest description of roles typical of the eldest brother in the same context as where he is described as the brother of the believers. Given the understanding of the eldest brother found in the literary and cultural context of the New Testament, the conclusion is that in Hebrews Jesus is presented as the eldest brother of the believers, his siblings.

Thus, in the texts in the Gospels and Hebrews, the brother relationship is expressed most explicitly, while this must to a larger extent be argued based on sonship and common parentage for the texts in Romans and Colossians. The understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother is merely indirect in the Gospels and is based on the status and roles assigned Jesus in the narrow and broader context. In the text in Romans, and even more so in the text in Hebrews, the connection between Jesus as brother and status and roles typical of the eldest brother is more explicit, thereby making a strong argument for understanding him as the eldest brother. To a certain extent, this is the case for the text in Colossians too. While the term “firstborn” is part of the understanding of him as the eldest brother in the texts in Romans and Colossians, it is not decisive in the text in Hebrews. Hence, arguing for Jesus as the eldest brother based primarily on the use of the term “firstborn” shows only a partial understanding as the text in Hebrews confirms where this term is not decisive for the understanding of Jesus as the eldest brother.

In this dissertation, I have followed up and brought into the Western type of scholarly discourse a particular understanding of Jesus that is widespread in Africa. My conclusion shows that this African understanding of Jesus has to a certain extent a
biblical foundation. Hence, this reading of the Bible from a non-Western point of view has discovered a “concept” also found in the Mediterranean literary and cultural context of the New Testament, a reading used by many Africans in their efforts to understand how Jesus is presented. For this, the African reading of the Bible is to be commended.
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