The Identity of Israel and the Paradox of Hebrews

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Formalities

Abbreviations follow the *SBL Handbook of Style*. Biblical quotations are taken from *New American Bible Revised Version* (NABRE), unless otherwise indicated. Quotations from the Greek New Testament are taken from Nestle-Aland’s 27th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece*. For further references to translations of ancient literature, see the bibliography.
1. Introduction

1.1 The Topic of this Dissertation: The Identity of the People of God

This dissertation investigates how the letter to the Hebrews\(^1\) shapes the notion of what it means to belong to and identify as part of God’s people, and how identity as a member of God’s people is shaped through the Christ event.\(^2\) I am particularly interested in the relationship between continuity and discontinuity in Hebrews. Has the Christ event significantly changed the notion of what it means to belong to God’s people, thus giving birth to a new identity? Or would it be better to understand Hebrews as claiming that the Christ event confirms traditional notions of what it means to belong to God’s people? Scholars have had a hard time answering these questions, because Hebrews seems to make a strong case for both continuity and newness at the same time. This constitutes what I will call the paradox of Hebrews.

Many scholars have articulated this in terms of Hebrews standing in an ambiguous relationship to Jewish traditions (1.2), and they have sought to answer the question of how the message of Hebrews relates to Judaism and notions of Jewish identity. I will begin the investigation (1.3) by presenting three different answers to this question, and the interpretative frameworks within which those answers are placed. The first answer is that Hebrews discourages and de-legitimizes Jewish identity, constructing a new and Christian identity instead. Others have claimed, on the contrary, that Hebrews has no interest in the question of Jewish identity, and that the text is really about other matters. A third option is to argue that Hebrews should be read as a thoroughly Jewish document which implies a thoroughly Jewish identity for its addressees. Having presented these three conflicting interpretative options, I will go on (1.4) to argue that neither answer is entirely helpful, and that we need to rephrase the question we ask. In short, I would argue that it is unhelpful to focus on issues pertaining to Jewish identity, since Hebrews seems so unconcerned with the ethnic identity of its audience. Instead of pursuing questions about the way Hebrews relates to Judaism and Jewish identity, I will present an alternative approach (1.5), focused on the question of what it means to belong to, and identify as part of, God’s people.

Having presented my alternative approach and my questions of research, I will go on (1.6) to discuss some key methodical challenges related to investigating questions of identity. I will define how I use the term, explain why I think the identity concept is useful in answering my questions of research, and discuss how the concept can be used in a responsible way during textual research. Having explained that the identity concept is useful in textual research, I will enquire (1.7) more specifically about the ways in which Hebrews constructs notions of identity for its audience, highlighting some of the characteristic ways in which Hebrews presents its main message. Finally (1.8), I will present an outline of what this dissertation will include, present the main texts and topics I intend to focus on, and explain why I have chosen these.

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\(^1\) Hereafter abbreviated as “Hebrews.” For the question of genre cf. paragraph 1.7.1.

\(^2\) By the “Christ event” I mean the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.
1.2 Hebrews’ Ambiguous Relationship to Jewish Traditions

Hebrews’ ambiguous relationship to Jewish traditions is captured well in the following quote: “Paradoxically enough, it is the writer of Heb. who – while passionately arguing along Jewish lines – moves furthest in the direction of the breach with Judaism that was later to take place.” Hebrews seems from one perspective to contain a very Jewish form of argument, whilst at the same time appearing to argue for some kind of breach with Judaism. It is certainly possible to argue that this description would fit texts other than Hebrews, and thus to question whether this is something pertaining particularly to Hebrews. But the ambiguity in Hebrews’ relationship to Jewish traditions is at least striking enough to provoke comments from different scholars. Stephen Wilson writes that the theology of Hebrews is “articulated largely in terms of, but also radically contrasted with, the traditions of Judaism.” If one wants to investigate how “early Christianity” relates to the “Judaism from which it emerged,” Harold Attridge claims that “Hebrews represents a particularly complex case,” because of its ambivalent attitude toward the “Jewish heritage.” Hebrews seems at the same time both to appropriate and reject that heritage, so Attridge claims. David Horrell voices a similar opinion when he claims that Hebrews presents us with a “thoroughly Jewish picture of Christian identity,” while at the same time maintaining that Christianity for Hebrews is “the reality of which Judaism was merely the shadow, now obsolete and passing away.”

The so called “Jewish” character of Hebrews is often related to its use of Scripture. William Lane claims that the author of Hebrews fully shares “Judaism’s understanding of the role of Scripture in the life of the faith community,” and he therefore concludes that Hebrews

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4 So, for instance, Elke Tönges, who strongly maintains that Hebrews is a very Jewish text. See “The Epistle to the Hebrews as a ‘Jesus-Midrash,’” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights* (ed. G. Gelardin; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 89–105 (100).

5 The same point is made by Knut Backhaus, *Der neue Bund und das Werden der Kirche: Die Diatheke-Deutung des Hebräerbriebs im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1996), 65.

6 Cf. Judith Lieu’s statement on the Gospel of John: “While some see a paradox between the recognition that John is the most Jewish of the Gospels, and the sustained antithesis with ‘the Jews’ that lies at the root of its indictment as a prime source of Christian anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism, these characteristics are but opposite sides of the same coin” (*Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 41).


10 Now it is quite difficult to know precisely which texts and which versions of those texts that would have been regarded by the author of Hebrews as “Scripture.” Nevertheless, it is quite obvious that Hebrews does relate to a body of tradition, regarded as sacred and authoritative, which in many ways resembles what later came to be canonized as Scripture. Thus, I will continue to use the term “Scripture,” although with due caution.
does not set aside “Jewish identity and tradition.” By the same token, several scholars have sought to demonstrate how Hebrews formally resembles contemporaneous Jewish literature. Gabriella Gelardini has argued that Hebrews should be classified as a synagogue homily, and Susan Docherty has demonstrated more generally how Hebrews shows a high degree of formal affinity with Jewish ways of citing and interpreting Scripture. Docherty concludes by claiming that her study has demonstrated that Hebrews testifies to a kind of “Christianity” which was still a form of “Judaism,” and that Hebrews’ use of Scripture is evidence for the “essentially Jewish” nature of early Christianity.

Given this perceived “Jewish” character of Hebrews, it is striking that Hebrews is also viewed by many as the text in the New Testament which is farthest removed from Judaism and most “anti-Jewish.” James Dunn claims that it is “difficult to avoid talking of a parting of the ways in the case of Hebrews,” because in “Hebrews, more than in any other NT passage at which we have so far looked, we find a clear sense of a decisive breach with what had gone before.” Stephen Wilson claims that Hebrews “routinely and starkly contrasts Christianity and Judaism to the detriment of the latter.” The purpose of Hebrews, in his view, is to “assert the superiority of Christianity and the inferiority of Judaism.” The conclusion is therefore that “Judaism is defunct” according to Hebrews, “because it has been surpassed.”

It is only natural that Hebrews’ perceived ambiguity towards Jewish tradition has made it difficult to assess the nature of the identity Hebrews implies for its audience. Consider how Pamela Eisenbaum resorts to paradoxes in order to describe the kind of religious heritage finding expression in Hebrews: “It is in some ways neither Judaism nor Christianity, and in other ways it represents both – a unique form of Judeo-Christian religiosity that perhaps existed briefly . . . before the rhetoric of Christian and Jewish leaders could construct firm boundaries between Judaism and Christianity.” Although eloquently phrased, it seems to me that this conclusion raises as many problems as it solves. There seems, in other words, to be a basic problem in determining how Hebrews relates to Jewish traditions, which also makes it difficult to assess the kind of identity Hebrews implies for its addressees. I will now outline three contrasting frameworks for dealing with this problem.

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12 Cf. also Gabriella Gelardini, ‘Verhärret eure Herzen nicht’: Der Hebräer, eine Synagogenhomilie zu Tischbe-Aw (BIS 83; Leiden: Brill, 2007).
14 Docherty, Old Testament, 205.
17 Wilson, Related Strangers, 117.
18 Wilson, Related Strangers, 120.
19 Wilson, Related Strangers, 123.
1.3 The Problem of Hebrews, Judaism and Jewish Identity in Hebrews Scholarship

1.3.1 The Conflict Theory – Iutisone Salevao

The first main way of approaching the problem of Hebrews, Judaism and Jewish identity, has been to assume that there is a fundamental conflict between Hebrews and Judaism, and that Hebrews discourages and de-legitimizes Jewish identity. This view has been argued forcefully by Iutisone Salevao.\(^{21}\) He assumes a situation in which the addressees were attracted to Jewish communities and ways of life, and maintains that the audience was moving towards a more Jewish identity, a development the author sought to prevent.\(^{22}\) This framework for understanding Hebrews has been quite influential.\(^{23}\) The main argument in its favor is the claim that a negative view of Judaism and Jewish identity is implied in the strong assertions about the superiority of Jesus, his sacrifice, his priesthood, and the new covenant. Wanting to find a concrete situation which might explain this theology of superiority, as well as the general urgency which seems to mark the entire tone of the text, one assumes a pull towards Jewish communities and ways of life, even though this is nowhere explicitly stated.\(^{24}\) Even if we do not have clear evidence to suggest a pull towards Jewish practices or communities, it is argued that the “conflict theory” offers the most plausible social historical scenario available.\(^{25}\) The underlying assumption seems to be that there has to be some concrete and specific situation which explains the theology found in Hebrews. Salevao makes this assumption quite explicit: “…it is very important […] that the interpretation of the New Testament must begin with the concrete, historical communities rather than with an abstract early church. This is essential since the proper understanding of theological ideas can be acquired only in terms of the specific social contexts in which those ideas came to expression and were embodied.”\(^{26}\) In contrast to this, I would maintain that we should be open to the possibility that a text might be addressing a more general problem, which could have arisen in a number of different settings.\(^{27}\)

The social historical scenario offered by Salevao is interpreted in light of a broader theoretical framework, which also deserves comment. Salevao makes the case, drawing on Berger and Luckmann, that Hebrews responded to the alleged problem of a pull towards “Judaism,” by constructing and legitimating an alternative symbolic universe, which rendered


\(^{24}\) There are several passages that warn against apostasy, but none of these specify that the audience stand in danger of (re)turning to Jewish practices and beliefs.


\(^{26}\) Salevao, *Legitimation*, 31, emphasis added.

\(^{27}\) One cannot help but wonder what would happen to New Testament scholarship on the gospels, according to Salevao’s methodology, if Richard Bauckham is actually correct in his assertion that the Gospels were written – not to address one specific community, whose specific situation it is the task of the scholar to reconstruct – but to all Christians. See *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).
Christianity superior to Judaism: “In addressing the specific situation of the readers, it became an essential part of the author’s strategy to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity and the inferiority of Judaism.”28 It is thus vital to Salevao’s argument that there existed two rival and distinct religious systems, i.e. Judaism and Christianity, with their own recognizable institutions, namely church and synagogue, and that it was possible for the author to prompt the addressees to choose between the two. The author calls on the addressees “to completely sever their ties with their former religion, to leave the safe haven of a recognized socio-religious group, in short, to stop frequenting synagogue worship,” according to Salevao.29 This has obvious implications for the question of identity. Salevao sees Hebrews as “a methodical, calculated attempt to legitimate the identity of Christianity... as a religious and social entity independent of and separate from Judaism, a Christian identity utterly distinguished from that of non-Christian Judaism.”30 By constructing such an identity, Hebrews represents a decisive point of transition in the process of the parting of the ways, which ultimately “legitimated the separation of Christianity from Judaism.”31

Apart from the fact that I would have wished for a critical discussion about the use of the term “religion” applied to “Christianity” and “Judaism” in the first century, it seems to me that Salevao once again goes beyond the evidence. How do we know, for instance, that the addressees of Hebrews were part of an institution called “the church” which was clearly distinct from “the synagogue”? This is simply assumed to be the case by Salevao, it is never substantiated by textual evidence from Hebrews.32 The assumption that two different religions existed at the time of Hebrews seems to be conducive to the conclusions reached by Salevao. With the assumption that Hebrews represents “Christianity,” and that the old covenant represents “Judaism,” Salevao’s main thesis is not only possible, but inevitable.33 However, this thesis clearly rests on pre-conceptions about the essences of “Christianity” and “Judaism,” according to which the textual evidence is structured and categorized. If one calls into question the very categories which function as premises for the argument, it seems that the evidence could have been structured and interpreted quite differently.34

1.3.2 The Foil Theory – Ernst Käsemann

The idea that Hebrews addresses a conflict with “Judaism” suffers fierce criticism at the hands of Käsemann, and is dismissed as a mere “prejudice” and a “product of fantasy.”35

30 Salevao, Legitimation, 194.
31 Salevao, Legitimation, 195.
33 William Klassen expresses a similar view to that of Salevao: “How does the author view the relationship between Christianity and Judaism? Clearly he is concerned to compare them” (“To the Hebrews or Against the Hebrews? Anti-Judaism and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in Separation and Polemic [ed. S. G. Wilson; vol. 2 of Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity; Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 1986], 1–16 [5]).
Käsemann claims this, without for a moment suggesting that the critique of the old system in Hebrews is less radical than it appears to be. It is clear to Käsemann that the first and second covenant cannot exist side by side, that the old covenant has been annulled, that the disbelief of ancient Israel is part of the problem, that Israel’s sacred institutions were inferior, and that they therefore needed to be abandoned by “the new people of God.” Thus, Käsemann clearly presupposes a new identity for the audience. However, “Judaism” is only relevant to the author in as much as it provides him with an example of something earthly. The “Judaism actual in the author’s time does not interest him at all.”

The real contrast in Hebrews is between earthly and heavenly, not Jewish and Christian. The issue facing the community was not a pull towards “Judaism,” nor a question about Jewish identity, but the challenge of continuing a movement of faith, holding on to the revelation, moving towards the heavenly, and enduring temporal suffering without giving in. “Judaism” functions merely as a “foil” against which to contrast the revelation of Jesus.

Notice that Käsemann does not hesitate to speak of “Judaism” as something different from, and inferior to, that which is advocated in Hebrews. It just so happens that the community for whom Hebrews was written, was facing other challenges. Judaism is still, therefore, as in the “conflict theory,” seen as something from which the ways of the addressees have parted. It is even possible for Hebrews to treat “Judaism” with some distance. “Judaism” merely represents the earthly material sphere. It is problematic to claim that Hebrews is propounding something quite different from “Judaism,” however, while using “Judaism” as an example to make its point. For how do we know that the author did not think of himself as a Jew propounding a new sort of spiritual “Judaism” centered on Jesus?

For Käsemann, it is no real struggle in Hebrews to come to terms with Jewish practices and ways of life as a living and relevant reality, much less as a prevailing challenge to the identity of the addressees. Jewish identity is something which has already been left behind, and this is why Hebrews is not more polemical than it is. However, as will be argued at length later in this dissertation, there are good reasons for doubting that Hebrews is all about metaphysical distinctions between heaven and earth. Scripture represents something more for Hebrews than merely a set of symbols, narratives, events and characters, which can be used to illustrate general ideas about perseverance while wandering towards heaven. Hebrews is a genuine attempt at coming to terms with Israel’s heritage, for the purpose of carrying it forward.

1.3.3 The In-House Theory – Richard Hays

The recognition of the fact that Hebrews is genuinely interested in Israel’s heritage is crucial to the third approach, which argues that Hebrews should be read as a thoroughly Jewish document. The recognition of the “Jewish” character of Hebrews, together with the

39 I will enter into direct dialogue with views that tend toward the “foil theory” in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, on issues of major importance for the argument of Hebrews, and explain why I find these views unconvincing.
40 For another example of this trend, see John Fischer, who claims that “Hebrews stresses identifying with Jesus as the true center of Judaism; it does not set aside Jewish identity and practice” (“Covenant, Fulfillment and Judaism in Hebrews,” *ERT* 13 [1989]: 175–87 [187]).
tendency to date the so-called parting of the ways later and later, has paved the way for a new framework for reading Hebrews, according to which it should be understood in the context of an in-house debate— as the voice of one Jew among many, trying to sort out what it meant to carry the heritage of Israel forward.41 A very eloquent defense of this position has recently been voiced by Richard Hays. He takes as his point of departure the claim that the terms “Christian” and “Jewish,” if used to denote different and separate identities, are problematic in a first century context. Because there is an increasing awareness of the fact that the “parting of the ways” was a complex and long process, he argues that we need to rethink our categories. As a thought experiment, Hays thus proposes the following: “Forget that there ever was such a thing as Christianity, let alone Christianity as a predominantly Gentile movement. Now reread Hebrews with this renewed absence of knowledge. Is there anything that would lead one to conclude that the author of this homily is anything other than a Jew (albeit a messianic one) weighing in on a controversy within his own religion?”42 Guided by this thought experiment, as well as several observations about what you do not find in Hebrews—the mission to the Gentiles, polemic against Jewish leaders, rejection of the Jewish people, rejection of circumcision and food laws—Hays identifies Hebrews as representing a form of Jewish sectarianism, and concludes that the “identity of the implied reader of Hebrews appears to be thoroughly Jewish.”43

A problem with Hays’ thought experiment, in my opinion, is that the experiment suggests one specific conclusion. It is not only that his thought experiment allows for the possibility that Hebrews might be a thoroughly Jewish document, implying a thoroughly Jewish identity for its addressees, it more or less predetermines that this is exactly the result one is going to get. This means that if we suppose, at least for the sake of argument, that the author of Hebrews really was conscious of being a Christian rather than a Jew, one would be virtually certain that Hays’ thought experiment would lead one to misread Hebrews. But if one wants to make a fresh contribution to the question of how Hebrews relates to the process often referred to as the parting of the ways, and weigh different hypotheses against each other, one cannot work with a model which is only open to one kind of result. Although I think Hays has made several important observations, it seems that his argument presupposes rather than establishes that no breach has yet occurred between the audience and “Judaism.” Furthermore,

41 I am well aware of the fact that the very metaphor of ways parting, as well as the claim that this took place, has been challenged. However, as long as one knows that the ways never did part, in the sense that there at some point ceased to be positive contact between Jews and Christians, and as long as one is mindful of the problems inherent in identifying two “ways,” one called Christianity and one called Judaism, that can both be traced directly back to the first century, it seems to me that the metaphor is still useful. For a critical discussion, see Anders Runesson, “Who Parted from Whom? The Myth of the So-Called Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity,” in Chosen to Follow: Jewish Believers throughout History and Today (ed. K. H. Heyland and J. W. Nielsen; Jerusalem: Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 2012), 53–72; Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam H. Becker, “Introduction: Traditional Models and New Directions,” in The Ways that Never Parted (ed. A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed; TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1–33; and Judith Lieu, “‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?” in Neither Jew nor Greek? (Studies of the New Testament and its World; London: T&T Clark, 2002), 11–29; repr. from JSNT 56 (1994).


43 Hays, “‘Here We Have No Lasting City,’” 165.
as will be argued below, I find the very idea that Hebrews is pregnant with a Jewish or non-Jewish identity for its implied audience, which it is the task of the interpreter to deduce, problematic.

1.3.4 Summary

I have now briefly sketched what I take to be the three major interpretative frameworks for dealing with the question of how Hebrews relates to Judaism and Jewish identity. The conflict theory holds that there is doctrinal and social conflict between Judaism and Hebrews, and that Hebrews seeks to prevent its addressees from adopting or returning to a Jewish identity and way of life. The foil theory holds that Hebrews is not really interested in Judaism or Jewish identity at all. Although some passages might seem to speak negatively of Judaism, the clue is to realize that Judaism merely functions as a foil, used to illustrate the inadequacy of all earthly things. The in-house theory holds that Hebrews should be understood in the context of a Jewish debate, implying a thoroughly Jewish identity for its addressees.

Some would thus suggest a thoroughly Jewish identity for the audience of Hebrews, some imagine Jewish identity to be irrelevant to Hebrews, and others suggest that the very purpose of the text was to de-legitimize Jewish identity. The results contradict one another as clearly as could be imagined. In my opinion, this might indicate that it is not entirely helpful to focus on the question of Jewish identity, when approaching Hebrews.

1.4 Why it is Unhelpful to Focus on the Question of Jewish Identity

1.4.1 From a Lack of Evidence to a Problematic Conception of Jewish Identity

I would argue that we have insufficient evidence for determining whether the addressees were Jews, and whether the author would have wanted the addressees to continue to be Jews. The term “Jew” is not found in Hebrews, and we also lack a discussion of the place and status of Greeks or Gentiles. Moreover, Hebrews provides very little evidence, either positive or negative, with regard to the relationship between the audience and their Jewish contemporaries. We hear nothing about circumcision, Sabbath observance or religious festivals. There is at best sparse evidence concerning dietary regulations. Even though Hebrews contains an elaborate cultic argument, there is no direct mention of the earthly Jerusalem or its temple. In other words: Hebrews does not directly address the issue of whether the addressees were Jews or not, and Hebrews is also silent about several of the most important markers of Jewish identity which could have been used as indirect evidence. In particular, it seems that we know very little about the relationship between the audience and typical Jewish practices.

Given this lack of both direct and indirect evidence in Hebrews, as well as the silence about typical Jewish practices, it is more or less inevitable that scholars have to construct a very ideological and doctrinal conception of Jewish identity in order to allow Hebrews to answer the question of how it relates to Jewish identity. The question one implicitly tends to

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44 Nor is the term “Hebrew,” by the way.
45 For a discussion on 9:10 and 13:9, see 6.5.1.
asks is whether Hebrews represents opinions which could have been voiced by a Jew. As demonstrated above, some answer this question with an affirmative, pointing to how Hebrews grounds its doctrines in Scripture, and how Jews could disagree on a number of different issues. Others argue that the kinds of views put forward in Hebrews lie outside the boundaries of Judaism. But both sides agree that it is possible to start with a conception of “Judaism,” move on to see whether Hebrews fits or does not fit within “Judaism,” and then conclude on the question of whether the addressees are implied to be Jewish or not.  

This method of approach raises the question of how easy it was to choose to become or cease to be a Jew. For only if it is possible to choose to become or cease to be a Jew, and only if that choice could be directly related to holding or not holding certain opinions, does it make sense to argue that to accept the doctrines and opinions put forward in Hebrews, would have implications regarding your standing as a Jew, either one way or the other. However, this does not do justice to the importance of putative common kinship when it comes to discerning who it was that was and was not recognized as Jewish at the time of Hebrews. To recognize the importance of putative common kinship squares with a central concern among those who argue that Ἰουδαῖος should be translated as “Judean” rather than “Jew.” They typically argue that the term Ἰουδαῖος signals membership in an ethnic group, tied to a specific land (Judea), a fact which is obscured if one translates “Jew.” For the term “Jew,” so the argument tends to go, suggests a religious identity which has been abstracted from membership in a concrete people, and which has been disassociated with a particular land. However, as Runesson has convincingly argued, there is no reason why the term “Jew” as such should be taken as referring to an identity which has been thoroughly abstracted from geography or kinship. I will therefore follow the majority praxis of translating Ἰουδαῖος as “Jew,” whilst maintaining that Jewish identity does refer to membership in a people.

I would argue that the minimum requirements for membership in the Jewish people, by the time of Hebrews, seem to have been birth or conversion. For a person to be recognized as a Jew, they must therefore be identified either as having been born a Jew, or as having undergone a conversion which recognizably made them Jewish. I thus opt for a public understanding of the term “Jew”: Jews are those who consider themselves Jewish and who, in

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46 Notice that I am not mounting a global objection toward the praxis of speaking of “Jewish texts” or “Jewish tradition,” with the implication that a text was written by and for Jews, and that it gives expression to “typical” Jewish ideas. Quite often this is a necessary and useful simplification. If (i) we have no independent reason to doubt that a text was written by and for Jews, and if (ii) the text at hand provides relevant evidence to suggest that it was, I have no problem with scholars speaking of “Jewish texts.” However, as far as I can see, Hebrews fails to meet both of these criteria. For a more thorough argument, see 1.5.2.


49 Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity,” 64–70.

50 This is also the definition given of a “Jew” by Oskar Skarsaune in “Jewish Believers in Jesus in Antiquity – Problems of Definition, Method, and Sources,” in Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries (ed. O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 3–21 (3).
turn, were so considered by others, and I would claim that there were in principle only two ways of gaining such public recognition, birth or conversion. It would not suffice simply to participate in synagogue worship, believe in the God of Israel, venerate the Scriptures of Israel, or affiliate with other Jews – much less to imitate some of their habits of speech and writing. It matters little to our discussion whether there was one unified conversion ritual at the time of Hebrews, or if there was one single way of defining what constituted legitimate Jewish ancestry. We should allow for difficult border line cases, as well as local and historical varieties. Public recognition as Jewish would at any rate, to a great extent, be a function of whether or not your parents were considered Jews. It would not primarily be the function of adherence to something called Judaism.

It might be objected that the possibility of joining the Jewish people by way of conversion implicitly undermines the significance of descent. If you could become a Jew by undergoing a ritual, does this not suggest that putative common ancestry was insignificant after all? I think not. To begin with, it is open to discussion whether proselytes really were recognized as having become Jews in the strict sense of the word, through conversion. Notice, for instance, how Acts distinguishes Jews from proselytes when designating those present at the Pentecost (2:11). An even more important observation is that passages which discuss and legitimize proselytism underline the idea that the convert becomes a member of an ethnic group, and that the conversion ceremony is designed to substitute for the lack of common ancestry. In other words, the possibility of proselyte conversion seems an instance where the rule is proved by its exception. To become a Jew through conversion could be interpreted as being “adopted” into a new kinship group, thereby joining a new people. I think Barclay is entirely correct, therefore, when he lists the thorough re-socialization implied in proselytism as one of his main arguments for the importance of descent for Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

51 For a similar statement, cf. the following: “Who were Jews? In general, they were people who were born of a Jewish mother or who converted to Judaism. Another general way of defining ancient Jews fixes on perception: Jews were people who regarded themselves as Jewish and who were so regarded by other people” (Ed P. Sanders, “The Dead Sea Sect and other Jews: Commonalities, Overlaps and Differences,” in The Dead Sea Scrolls: In their Historical Context [ed. T. H. Lim et al.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000], 7–43 [8]).

52 Shaye J. D. Cohen has argued that there were times when such conversions were primarily a matter of political inclusion into the Jewish nation, and that large groups of foreign ethnic groups were included into the Jewish nation during the Hasmonian period; see The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999). Whether the conversion was “religious” or “political” (if it is at all possible to distinguish between these two forms of conversion), matters little to my argument here.

53 Shaye J. D. Cohen distinguishes between seven different levels of association between Jews and Gentiles, of which only the seventh – conversion – granted status as a Jew. See “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” HTR 82 (1989): 13–33.

54 Ross S. Kraemer argues that proselytes really were recognized as having become “Jews.” See “On the Meaning of the Term ‘Jew’ in Greco–Roman Inscriptions,” HTR 82 (1989): 35–53. Lieu (Christian Identity, 242–43), on the other hand, claims that converts probably did not become Jews, in the strict sense of the word.


57 Barclay, Jews in the Mediterranean, 408–409.
Some of those who would argue that putative common descent plays a lesser role for Jewish identity, have claimed that it was possible to cease to be Jew through apostasy, and it is argued that this must mean that Jewish identity was primarily a matter of religious convictions and personal choice after all. Thus, Love Sechrest has recently attempted to argue for “the porousness” of Jewish ethnicity, by pointing out that the boundaries separating Jews from non-Jews could be crossed from both sides.\(^{58}\) Just as you could choose to become a Jew through conversion, you could also choose a way of life which implied that you would cease to be considered a Jew. However, none of the passages she provides for the purpose of demonstrating that Jewish identity could be lost by way of religious choice speak of Jews becoming non-Jews.\(^{59}\) Instead, they speak of Jews who desert their own people, and who adopt foreign customs and practices. 3 Macc. 1:3 speaks of Dositheos, a “Jew by birth” who “renounced the Law and abandoned his ancestral beliefs.” As far as I can see there is nothing in this passage to suggest that Dositheos ceased to be Jew. Moreover, Dositheos’ descent is underlined no less than twice in this short sentence, which is cited as evidence to suggest that descent was of minor importance to Jewish identity. Further, Sechrest also cites Josephus’ statement that, “destruction is just for all who being of the race of Abraham attempt new practices that pervert our normal way” (A.J. 5.113). Once again it is evident that nothing is said about loss of Jewish identity, and it is quite clear that the descent of those who attempt new practices is at the heart of the issue.

Lawrence Schiffmann thus argues that the clue to understanding Jewish texts which speak of apostasy is the fact that the apostate is still viewed as a Jew, and condemned as such.\(^{60}\) Schiffmann even goes so far as to argue that Jewish identity could not be lost at all, whether through heresy nor apostasy.\(^{61}\) Skarsaune similarly highlights that “even if Jewish believers should want to regard their Jewish origin as of no consequence, they were hardly permitted to do so by their Jewish relatives and friends.”\(^{62}\) Skarsaune’s point is to emphasize that even if Jewish believers in Jesus were often seen as adhering to heretical doctrines by their fellow Jews, and accused of having deserted their people, they did not cease to be considered Jews. This said, Skarsaune still allows for the possibility that Jewish identity could be lost through assimilation with other ethnic groups, especially if this process continued over generations.\(^{63}\) Even so, losing your Jewish identity was not just a matter of changing your convictions or

\(^{58}\) Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (LNTS 410; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 102–104. Even though Sechrest retains the word “ethnicity” she thus opts for an understanding of this concept which downplays the role of kinship and descent.

\(^{59}\) One could always ask, of course, whether one could really expect a text to say that the apostate ceased to be a Jew. However, the fact that loss of Jewish identity is not explicitly described in these texts, is still telling.


\(^{61}\) By “heresy” he means a doctrinal deviation from “Judaism,” and by “apostasy” he means a deviation of practice and life style.


\(^{63}\) Skarsaune, “Jewish Believers,” 12.
practices — it was a matter of long term assimilation. Although Jewish identity was therefore not absolute, it was probably quite stable.  

A further objection to the focus on common descent is that it seems to downplay the importance of religious convictions and practices. Passages which in different ways emphasize that descent does not guarantee good standing before God, and that what is really important is to conform to some given standards or norms, are often cited as evidence. However, it is notoriously difficult to distinguish between the religious practices of the Jews and their ethnic customs. If religious practice is understood in terms of ethnic customs and loyalties, then it is evident that those practices cannot be seen as pointing to an identity which can be abstracted from membership of a concrete people through common descent. Moreover, it seems to me that this objection confuses the question of “minimum requirements” for being a Jew, with the broader issue of how Jewish identity was typically expressed or expected to be expressed.

Surely, from the perspective of most Jews, the perceived significance of being a Jew entailed much more than simply having been born a Jew. To be a Jew also entailed immersion in a rich set of practices and relationships, convictions and hopes. There is no reason to doubt that Jews were regularly identified through their specific customs and religious practices, or that many Jews considered such practices fundamental to their own self-understanding and good standing before God. It could also be argued that these practices imply some basic tenets of belief, even though most scholars would agree that ancient Jews did not primarily think of their religion in terms of a “belief system” but rather as a way of life. However, it does not follow from these observations that you could become or cease to be a Jew, simply by accepting or rejecting a given set of practices and beliefs. It is thus important to separate, at least in principle, the question of what the minimum requirements for being recognized as a Jew were, and the question of how one attains good standing before God. For it is perfectly conceivable, and indeed quite plausible, that some Jews held that God required more of his people, than that they simply met the minimum requirements for public recognition as Jews. Thus, when Philo says that what matters is not descent but to honor God (Spec. 1.317–18), or when John the Baptist claims that God could raise children of Abraham from the rocks in the desert (Luk 3:8), this has no direct bearing on the question of who were publicly recognized as Jews in the first century.

In sum it would seem that we are led toward the following conclusions: public recognition as Jewish is not adequately described as a function of adherence to a system called Judaism, if that system is understood in abstraction from putative shared Jewish descent. By this I mean

64 Martin Goodman makes the interesting suggestion that the imposition of the fiscus Judaicus increased the speed of the process of separation between Jews “only” by birth and “religious Jewish,” and that only the latter had to pay the tax (Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 120–27).

65 Daniel Schwartz appeals to such texts in order to make the case that Jewish identity became disentangled from matters of territory and descent, and became a matter of religion. See Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity (WUNT 60; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), 1–24.


67 A further argument to strengthen this case can be made by observing that the very term “Judaism” is seldom used in ancient sources. If nothing else, this should at least serve as a caution against making “Judaism” the key for understanding first century Jewish identity.
that Jewish identity is not something which could be attained by a non-Jew simply by way of accepting (a given version of) Judaism, apart from conversion, and that Jewish identity would not necessarily have been lost, even if one rejected (a given version of) Judaism or adopted practices at odds with it. If these propositions are true, it means that you cannot reason responsibly from a given version of Judaism to Jewish identity. I still believe that the term “Judaism” is useful, though, if used to designate the convictions and ways of life which most Jews in a given period held to be indicative of what it means to be a good Jew.68

1.4.2 Asking the Wrong Question

Thus: to focus on whether Hebrews encourages or discourages its addressees to identify as Jews, is not simply to ask a question which we have insufficient evidence to answer, but also to ask a question which implies a problematic conception of Jewish identity, and which takes the focus away from issues that are more central to Hebrews’ own concerns. I see nothing in Hebrews which should lead us to suppose that the addressees were uncertain about the degree to which they were Jews, or whether or not they should continue in this way. Nor do I see why we would expect that this was a matter of dispute which the author thought he should address, and believed he could do anything about. There is certainly no evidence in Hebrews to suggest that the addressees, if assumed to be Jews, were entertaining the possibility of assimilating more thoroughly with other ethnic groups.69 Neither is there any evidence to suggest that they, if assumed to be non-Jews, considered undergoing conversion. We are therefore left with a very reasonable explanation of why scholars have failed to reach conclusive or helpful answers on the question of Hebrews and Jewish identity. This is simply not the issue at stake in Hebrews, as far as I can tell.70

Even if we did have solid evidence to suggest that the addressees were Jews, we still would not know whether the author and the addressees thought that their Jewish ethnicity was of any importance for their good standing before God. There is thus a crucial difference between the question of whether the author and the addressees actually were Jews, and the question of how the author and the addressees would have valued and assessed the fact that they were Jews. It is conceivable that the author and the addressees “happened” to be Jews, without thinking that this was a very important aspect of their identity.71 Even if we knew that the

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68 The question of how the ancient term Ἰουδαϊσμός translates is a slightly different question, and I am not claiming that my definition of the term “Judaism” is to be taken as an attempt at translation. Moreover, some argue that because the term “Judaism” tends to be associated with a system of belief designed by rabbis, we should stop using the term in a first century context. However, the fact that a term might be misunderstood does not necessarily imply that it cannot be used, with due caution and if properly defined. For an argument against using the term “Judaism” in a first century context, see Daniel Boyarin, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is appended a Correction of my Border Lines),” JQR 99 (2009): 7–36.

69 Mikael Tellbe emphasizes that ethnic identity arises in relationship to other ethnic groups (Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective [WUNT 242; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 59). The fact that Hebrews shows no concern to compare the addressees with other ethnic groups, thus seems to constitute indirect evidence to suggest that the main topic in Hebrews is not ethnic identity.

70 Among those who have convinced me that the ethnicity of the audience seems not to play a big role, is Edvin Larsson, “Om Hebréerbrevets syfte,” SEÅ, 37–38 (1973): 296–309.

71 John C. Turner et al., make a helpful distinction between “membership groups,” which one is simply objectively part of, and “reference groups” to which a subjective experience of belonging and significance
author and addressees were Jews, we still would not know whether they thought that their fellow Jews, who did not identify as followers of Jesus, were in good standing before God. Neither would we know what they would have thought about the standing of Gentile followers of Jesus. We would certainly not know how the author and the addressees would have been viewed, in turn, by other Jews.

I would therefore argue that to ask whether Hebrews discourages or encourages Jewish identity is to ask the wrong question, and is therefore also an unhelpful way of dealing with the paradox of Hebrews and the identity of the addressees. However, there is a different way to approach the problem, which in no way implies that Hebrews is disinterested in Israel’s heritage, or that Hebrews simply used it to illustrate a general point about perseverance while wandering towards heaven. I do think that it is a real struggle to come to terms with Israel’s heritage in Hebrews, and that this does raise some fundamental problems concerning the identity of the addressees, but I do not think that these problems are centered on the question of whether the addressees should become, cease to be, or continue to be, Jews.  

1.5 An Alternative Approach

1.5.1 Historical Minimalism as Starting Point

It seems to me that a commensurable contribution to the relationship between the identity of the addressees and the paradox of Hebrews, which in principle could hope to be taken seriously by all participants in the debate, must take a certain degree of historical minimalism as its starting point. This means that we must proceed with the presupposition that we simply do not know the ethnic identity of the addressees, their historical location, the precise dating of the text or the identity of the author. Neither do we know if Hebrews was written before or after the fall of Jerusalem, a fact which means that we cannot take for granted that Hebrews is designed either to console for the loss of the temple or to prevent participation in its cult. Further, and more important still, it seems that we should not start with a definitive account of how Hebrews relates to the so-called parting of the ways, either one way or the other. We do not know how, or if, the audience related to institutions often referred to as “synagogue” or

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72 One might wonder whether influence from Pauline debates, where ethnic identity really is crucially important, explains why Hebrews too has been investigated from the perspective of Jewish identity.

73 Notice that I am not making a positive argument for an ethnically mixed audience in Hebrews. I am simply saying that we should be agnostic about the ethnic background of the audience. No damage at all would be done to my thesis, if it had turned out that the author and the addressees actually were Jews. Whatever the ethnic identity of the addressees were, I am arguing that the identity discourse in Hebrews is not primarily a discourse about ethnicity.

74 The fact that we do not know when Hebrews was written, gives further force to this caution. For an attempt to argue diachronically, and not only theologically, about the parting of the ways, see Jack T. Sanders, “Establishing Social Distance between Christians and both Jews and Pagans,” in Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches (ed. A. J. Blasi, J. Duhaime, and P. Turcotte; Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2002), 361–82.
“church,” if they were familiar with the terms “Judaism” or “Christianity,” or if they would have identified as “Christians” or “Jews.” Moreover, we lack the evidence that would be needed to profile distinct Jewish opponents in polemical dialogue with which the text is assumed to have been written. We therefore cannot assume from the outset that the discourse of superiority in Hebrews was designed to prevent some kind of “pull” towards Judaism. However, this lack of evidence for some kind of breach with Jewish communities should not simply be taken as evidence of a harmonious relationship.

Historical minimalism is not the same as a non-historical approach, though, where Hebrews is read as if it did not belong to any social or historical context at all. Although a few scholars have suggested otherwise, the overwhelming majority of commentators would argue that Hebrews was written for people who already identified as followers of Jesus. Although I will refrain from using the theologically loaded term “Christianity” and its cognates in this dissertation, I need some kind of term to denote those within the first century who in some sense identified as followers of Jesus, and I have chosen the term “Jesus movement” for this purpose. By Jesus movement I simply mean all the communities of people who identified as followers of Jesus. It would seem that the addressees belonged to the second or third generation of the Jesus movement. In 2:1–4, the author envisages a line of tradition which began with the Lord Jesus, which continued with those who had heard him, and which then reached the author and the addressees. It is also assumed that some time had already passed since the time when the addressees were evangelized, presumably by those who had heard the message of Jesus (cf. 10:32–34).

A plausible dating for the text would then be sometime within the second half of the first century. Further, I accept the commonly held opinion that Hebrews was known to the author of 1 Clement, and this tends to suggest a date before the turn of the second century. Moreover, although some have claimed that Hebrews was written to several different communities, most scholars agree that Hebrews was written to a distinct community of people, who were to some degree known to the author, and who shared a common history.

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75 It is disputed whether the terms “synagogue” and “church” make sense if used to denote separate religious institutions by the time of Hebrews, and it might therefore be futile to determine the identity of the audience by relating them to either term.

76 I have already pointed out that the terms “Jew,” “Judaism,” “Christianity” and “Christian,” are lacking in Hebrews. However, more generally it is also important to note that all these terms, with the exception of “Jew,” are used very rarely in the New Testament. It is therefore problematic, not only in the case of Hebrews but also more generally, to use these terms as if they represented established identity categories in the first century. See discussion in Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity.”


78 Larry W. Hurtado (Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003], 155) notes how some scholars use the term Jesus movement to denote a putative Palestinian movement, distinguished from the “Christian groups most directly reflected in the New Testament.” This is obviously not the way I will use the term Jesus movement.


80 Note, however, that the dating of 1 Clement is disputed. For a discussion on how this relates to the dating of Hebrews, see Eisenbaum, “Locating Hebrews,” 224–26.

81 For instance Eisenbaum, “Locating Hebrews.”
Although we do not know who the author was addressing, it seems that he knew. The fact that Hebrews is written in a sophisticated Greek, and perhaps also the greetings from those from Italy (13:24), suggests a location somewhere in the Greek-speaking Mediterranean. There is no reason to assume, in other words, that Hebrews was written to people located in Palestine, or people whose native tongue was Hebrew.

It is evident that Hebrews purports to be addressing a problem of some sort, and some general clues are found in the text. It seems that at least some within the community had developed the habit of being absent at the common gatherings of the group (10:25), a fact which in turn could be indicative of a wavering commitment towards the group and that which it stood for. On several occasions the author issues warnings against drifting away (2:1), falling behind (4:1), a sluggish attitude (5:11), apostasy (6:4–6; 10:29), and drawing away (10:39). Conversely, the author consistently issues injunctions to persevere and maintain commitment (3:6; 3:12–14; 4:11; 6:12; 10:23–25; 12:3, 13). It thus seems that the very future existence of the group qua group was endangered, according to the author. One possible source of the discouragement seems to have been exposure to hardship and persecution of different sorts (10:32–34; 12:4; 13:13). Hebrews thus appears to be written to a group of people within the Jesus movement, who were facing some sort of crisis, and a central part of the purpose of the text seems to be to encourage perseverance, and to prevent the group from dissolving.

Although it is possible to cast doubt on each and every presupposition presented above, I would maintain that this represents more or less common ground, regardless of the approach.

82 Mathias Rissi takes the minority position in arguing that the intended readers were a group within a congregation. See *Die Theologie des Hebräerbriefes: Ihre Verankerung in der Situation des Verfassers und seiner Leser* (WUNT 2/41; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 24.


84 It is disputed how 13:24 should be read, but many take it as indicating that the addressees are themselves located in Italy. For an attempt to read Hebrews on the premise that it addresses a house church in Rome, see William Lane, “Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 Clement,” in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (ed. K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 196–244.

85 The fact that the text was given the title Πρὸς Ἑβραίους is first attested to in the second century. It is reasonable to assume that the title reflects the assumption that the text stood in some sort of relationship to Jewish tradition, but it is not clear in what way. Some have argued that the title reflects the assumption that the addressees were Jews, or even Aramaic speaking Jews; others that the text was originally written in Hebrew; others that the content of the text is very Jewish, and still others that the title should be translated as “against the Jews.” There are also some who have suggested some sort of symbolic value to the title, for instance that it indicates an attitude of pilgrimage. These diverging and quite speculative suggestions, based on a title which is probably not original, explain why most commentators maintain that the title is of dubious value if one is looking for the “historical addressees” or the purpose of Hebrews. For discussion, see Knut Backhaus, *Der Hebräerbrief: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), 23–24. For a contrasting view, see Ben Witherington, who uses the ascription to argue for a “Jewish Christian” audience, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2007), 24–25.

86 Among the many who have argued that preventing a minority group from dissolving was central to the author’s agenda is David A. deSilva: “Hebrews 6:4–8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation,” *TynB* 50 (1999): 33–57, 225–35.
one takes on the problem of Hebrews, Judaism and Jewish identity. Although many would assume more than I have assumed here, few would assume less.

1.5.2 A Different Focus of Attention: Membership in God’s People

Instead of asking questions about Jewish identity, I suggest that we take a fresh look at many of the central topics which have been interpreted in the context of a dispute over Judaism and Jewish identity – such as sacrifice, covenant, the law, the Sinai revelation, priesthood, the interpretation of Scripture, God’s promises to the fathers, and so forth – from the perspective of membership in God’s people. In contrast to the terms “Jew” and “Judaism,” we actually do find the phrase “people of God” in Hebrews. If we ask what it means to be part of this people, we therefore know that we are asking a question about which Hebrews has something to say, and which we are in a position to check against the text.87

The specific phrase “people of God” is only used twice in Hebrews. It is used once with reference to the past, when it is claimed that Moses preferred to be maltreated together with the people of God, above the treasuries in Egypt (11:25). However, it is also used with reference to the future, when it is claimed that there still remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God (4:9). There is no doubt that the author would have wanted his addressees to identify among those for whom a rest still remains, and thus as members of God’s people. It is significant that the author uses the same term to denote both those with whom Moses associated and those for whom salvation awaits in the future. This strongly suggests a level of continuity between the generation of Moses, the audience of Hebrews, and future recipients of salvation. This continuity is further confirmed when past members of the people of God are designated as “fathers” (1:1; 3:9; 8:9), a term which signals a positive, familial relationship.

Although the precise construction “people of God” is only found twice in Hebrews, we find several equivalent statements. In the quote from Jeremiah, concerning the new covenant, we read: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (8:10). In 10:30 the addressees are warned that God will judge “his people.” The implication is clearly that the addressees belong to God’s people, and that they therefore must take heed lest they fall under God’s judgment. The passages in Hebrews which warn against apostasy (2:1–4; 3:12–14; 6:4–8; 10:29, 39; 12:15–17) do not undermine the idea that being part of God’s people implies good standing before God, they presuppose that idea.88 The term “people” is also used several times alone,

87 Käsemann’s The Wandering People of God is probably the most important attempt to read Hebrews by focusing on the category “people of God.” Commenting on the influence of Käsemann, David Wider correctly maintains: “Dass der auctor ad Hebraeos mit seinen christologischen und soteriologischen Aussagen am Gottesvolkgedanken orientiert sei, ist eine Vermutung, die sich in der Hebr-Exegese als sehr fruchtbar erwiesen hat” (“Christliche Identität im Hebräerbrieft: Beobachtungen zum Aufbau der Paräne,” TS 50 [2003]: 157–70 [157]). Walter Übelacker, however, curiously claims that Hebrews is directed primarily towards individual believers, and that it is therefore problematic to focus on the category “people of God.” See his study, Der Hebräerbrieft als Appell: Untersuchungen zu exordium, narratio und postscriptum (Hebr 1–2 und 13,22–25) (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989), 97.

88 There is, of course, a debate about whether it is possible to reconcile such passages to a doctrine about “eternal preservation,” and if those who commit apostasy cease to be members of God’s people, or if they, in the words of Philip Hughes, “prove to be hypocrites” and “show that they do not in fact belong to God’s people at all” (“Hebrews 6:4–6 and the Peril of Apostasy,” WTJ 35 [1973]: 137–55 [155]). Such discussions are irrelevant to my basic point, which is to emphasize that membership in the people of God
on instances where it seems reasonable to assume that the people spoken of, belongs to God. Jesus is said to be a faithful and merciful high priest, who atones for the sins of “the people” (2:17), and it is underlined that Jesus officiates as high priest precisely for the “people” (5:3; 7:27). In a similar vein, it is said that Jesus suffered in order to sanctify “the people” through his blood (13:12). 89

The passages in Hebrews which seem, on the face of it, to speak about the rejection of the people who left Egypt, could potentially be seen to challenge the continuity of redemptive history argued for above. For instance, we read harsh words about those who put God to the test in the wilderness (3:16–19). It is said that they will not enter God’s rest; and that only “we” who believe will do so (4:1–3). The author clearly distinguishes, between “us” who believe and “those” who rebelled. However, there is no reason to assume that the distinction between “us” and “them” is between Christians and Jews. 90 The story about the wilderness generation is not used to prove that God rejected his old people, in favor of a new one, but to emphasize that there still remains a Sabbath rest for God’s people (4:9). 91 Similarly, the quote from Jeremiah in Hebrews 8:9 clearly criticizes those who were led out of Egypt, and who abandoned the covenant. It is even stated that God grew unconcerned with them. Nevertheless, there is no reason to read this as a rejection of the house of Israel or Judah as such, because it is precisely with them that God establishes a new covenant. Hebrews 11 militates strongly against any attempt to argue that Israel, or the generations who lived before the coming of Christ, have been forsaken by God. On the contrary, Hebrews affirms that those who lived before Jesus will be perfected “together with us” (11:40). 92

In addition to the use of the very term “people” (λαός), there are several other terms and designations which are arguably consistent with the concept of being God’s people. 93 The addressees are cast as ὑιοί (2:10) and παιδία (2:14) of God, and in 2:16 it is emphasized that they are among the descendants of Abraham. In 3:6 they are designated as the “house (of God),” the very same “house” within which Moses served as a servant. The designation

does imply good standing before God, and that apostasy must be understood, somehow, either one way or the other, as deviation from this default position.


90 Contra Richard Dormandy, who writes: “It is the disobedient people of God, the Jews, who will be punished, and the obedient people of God, the Christians, who will be vindicated, as their Leader has already been” (“Hebrews 1:1–2 and the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen,” ExT 100 [1989]: 371–75 [373]).

91 Contra Stephen Wilson, who writes: “The Israelites, through disobedience, lost the promise and did not enter God’s ‘rest’; the promise and the ‘rest,’ therefore, remain open for those who are faithful in Christ, who can become a new pilgrim people . . . It is interesting to note that Moses is praised but superseded, whereas Israel is castigated and superseded” (Related Strangers, 118–19, emphasis added). Luke T. Johnson is surely correct to maintain: “What is noteworthy is that Hebrews makes no distinction between a past and present people, makes no suggestion that one people has replaced another” (Hebrews: A Commentary [NTS; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006], 129).

92 Backhaus (“Das wandernde Gottesvolk,” 198–99) strongly emphasizes this unity, and underlines that Hebrews nowhere presents us with a new people of God.

93 Note that the term λαός is quite rare in non-biblical Greek literature, and that it is used in the Septuagint primarily to refer to Israel. For discussion, see David Horrell, “‘Race,’ ‘Nation,’ ‘People’: Ethnoracial Identity Construction in 1 Pet. 2.9,” in Becoming Christian: Essays on 1 Peter and the Making of Christian Identity (LNTS 394; London: T&T Clark, 2013), 133–63 (137).
ἀδελφοί, used by the author to directly address the audience (3:1; 3:12; 10:19; 13:22), could also be taken as developing the idea that the author and the addressees belong to the same people, understood in terms of an extended family. Finally, you also find the term “Israel” in Hebrews, which definitively points to the idea of being God’s people. In the quote from Jeremiah about the new covenant, the recipients of that covenant are designated twice as the “house of Israel” (8:8, 10), and in 11:22 those who left Egypt are called ὑιοὶ Ἰσραήλ. In all three occurrences the term is used with a positive connotation.

The occurrences of the term “Israel” could be taken as evidence which suggests that Hebrews, contrary to what I have stated above, is concerned with underlining the Jewish ethnicity of its audience. Many would no doubt say that the “default” hypothesis regarding the identity of someone who aspired to belong to the descendants of Abraham (2:16) or to stand in continuation with the children of Israel (11:22) is that it must be a Jewish identity. Although I would agree that this is a reasonable default position, I would also claim that we in fact do have independent reason for thinking that the audience of Hebrews might well have included non-Jews too. Craig Koester argues convincingly that it is intrinsically unlikely that a group within the Jesus movement, situated within the Diaspora, would not have been ethnically mixed, at the time of the writing of Hebrews. Further, it is evident that many documents in the New Testament do understand “the people of God” as an ethnically open category (Acts 15:14–18; Rom 9:24–26; Eph 1:14; 1 Pet 2:10), and Paul explicitly argues that both Jews and non-Jews are reckoned among the descendants of Abraham (Rom 4, Gal 3–4). In fact, the same process seems to have taken place with regard to the term “Israel” too. In Galatians 6:16 Paul pronounces a blessing on the “Israel of God,” and a good case can be made to suggest that his Gentile audience is included. In Ephesians it is said that the Gentile audience once stood outside the commonwealth of Israel (2:12), and the implication seems to be that they no longer do, now that they have become co-citizens with the holy (2:19). Finally, Justin Martyr uses the idea of a new covenant to argue – not that God has forsaken

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94 All of the terms and designations mentioned here are examined in chapter 2.
95 In 8:8, it said that the new covenant is given to the “house of Israel” and the “house of Judah.” Membership in the “house of Judah” arguably implies Jewish identity. However, although 8:8 assumes that the new covenant was given also to Jews, it provides insufficient evidence for suggesting that the new covenant was given only to Jews. For an attempt, which is not convincing in my opinion, to argue that the recipients of salvation in Hebrews are implied to be Jews, see Charles P. Anderson: “Who Are the Heirs of the New Age in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn (ed. J. Marcus and M. L. Soards; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).
96 It is a simple matter of fact that many scholars hold that Hebrews was written for an ethnically mixed community or for Gentiles. For a survey of scholars who have opted for a Gentile or mixed audience, see Matthew Marohl, Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews: A Social Identity Approach (PTMS 82; Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick, 2008), 10–16.
98 For a fuller treatment of this motif, see Horrell, “Becoming Christian,” 321.
100 However, this passage is also disputed. For a survey of some of the relevant alternatives and a helpful discussion, see Roitto, Behaving, 181–93.
Israel – but that those who approach God through Jesus constitute the true and spiritual Israel, the descendants of Abraham (Dial. 11.5).\footnote{For the view that this is the first time the term “Israel” is applied to followers of Jesus, see Peter Richardson, Israel in the Apostolic Church (SNTSMS 10; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1.}

As far as I can see, there are therefore some good reasons for not precluding an ethnically mixed audience in Hebrews, and there are no compelling reasons for excluding the possibility that the author of Hebrews could have used terms like “Israel,” “people” and “descendants” in an ethnically open way.\footnote{For a convincing refutation of the most common arguments for suggesting a Jewish audience, a presentation of some arguments that might suggest that Gentiles were among the addressees, and a compelling case of a mixed audience, see David A. deSilva, The Letter to the Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2012), 27–35.} Instead of presupposing from the outset that these terms necessarily do denote membership of the Jewish people, it seems more prudent to enter the material with an open minded attitude, and ask what membership in God’s people implies in Hebrews.\footnote{Gareth Lee Cockerill correctly recognizes that Hebrews is free of “ethnic distinctions,” but then implausibly suggests that we should still use the term “Jewish Christian” to denote the addressees, proposing that this designation should be understood in a purely religious and not in an ethnic way. He even allows that Gentiles could be called “Jewish Christians” by virtue of their attachment to Jewish beliefs and ways of life. See The Epistle to the Hebrews (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 20, 618. However, this is confusing use of terminology, which seems to rest on a questionably sharp division between Jewish “religiosity” and Jewish “ethnicity.”} Is there anything to suggest that it is predetermined by common Jewish descent? Is there anything to suggest that the region Judea is viewed as a common homeland, or that political association with a Jewish nation is important? Is there evidence to suggest that the distinct customs of the Jewish people play a significant role for the addressees of Hebrews?\footnote{Tellbe (Christ-Believers, 58, n. 8) correctly emphasizes how important shared customs are for ethnic identity.}

If the answers to these questions are negative, as appears to me to be the case, this weakens the case for suggesting that Jewish identity necessarily must have been a prerequisite for membership of God’s people, according to Hebrews. If it is also possible to make a positive case for the claim that Hebrews seems to relativize the importance of a geo-political association with Judea, and distinct Jewish customs, then the reasons for caution would be even stronger.\footnote{In 3.3–3.4 I discuss the implications and scope of the critique of the law, and argue that it probably does extend beyond matters of cult alone. In 4.4 I conclude that the Jerusalem cult is implicitly rejected. In 5.5 and 5.7, I argue that Israel’s history has been denationalized, and that being a part of Israel is unrelated to geo-political considerations, and in 6.5.1 I argue that Hebrews seems to take issue with some sort of Jewish cultic dining. Although this does not amount to an argument against the audience being Jews, the cumulative force of these observations constitutes a strong caution against assuming that the audience had to have been Jews, or that Jewish identity has to have been important for the addressees (if they were Jews).}

I will therefore use the terms “people of God” and “Israel” interchangeably to denote good standing before God, without assuming that they necessarily presuppose Jewish ethnicity.

1.5.3 Does it Make Sense to Speak of an Ethnically Open People?

It could be said in objection that my entire conception of “ethnicity” is too rigid, and that the idea of an “ethnically open” understanding of what it means to belong to a “people” is utterly
confused. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith have provided a much used definition of ethnicity as being composed of six elements (which need not necessarily be salient to the same degree all of the time): (i) a common name, (ii) myth of common ancestry, (iii) shared historical memories, (iv) common cultural habits, (v) a link to a common home land, and (vi) a sense of mutual solidarity. If we take this list as our starting point, and if we allow for a certain amount of creativity, it is evident that Hebrews does use ethnically loaded terms and categories. It could be argued that all of the six features are found in the homily, and used to create a sense of identity for the addressees. Thus, one would think that this identity should be labeled “ethnic.” However, it is one thing to register the presence of ethnically loaded language, and another thing to assess whether that language is used metaphorically or not.

The only kinds of identity that I will label “ethnic” in this dissertation, are those which are based on putative shared descent, and where there is imagined to be a delimited space, situated within the confines of this creation, to which the group belongs. Although an ethnic group could allow for exceptions to this rule (cf. discussion on conversion above), notions of physical kinship and of a concrete homeland have to be default for there to be an ethnic identity, in my terminology. I would not claim that this is the only possible way of defining ethnic identity, but I would maintain that it is useful to have a distinct term for the kind of identity which rests on assumptions of physical kinship, and where a shared relationship to a concrete and delimited homeland is taken for granted, because such assumptions tend to generate specific types of behavior, boundaries and relationships. Note, though, that this understanding of ethnicity does not translate into a distinction between “real” and “fictive” kinship groups. It is problematic to claim that notions of kinship which do not rest on shared physical descent are “fictive” or “unreal.” I would concede that all notions of ethnic identity include a large measure of negotiation, interpretation and social construction.

It is often very complicated to assess whether ethnic language is used metaphorically or non-metaphorically. In the case of Hebrews, it really is very difficult to know whether the addressees thought that they were physically related, and whether they all believed that they belonged to the Jewish people. I am therefore not making a positive claim, to suggest that the ethnic language in Hebrews is metaphorical. I am simply submitting that we should leave open the question of whether the ethnic language is employed metaphorically or not.

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106 For a helpful discussion of how the term “ethnicity” entered biblical scholarship, and the different meanings attached to the term, see David M. Miller, “Ethnicity Comes of Age: An Overview of Twentieth-Century Terms for Ioudaios,” CBR 10 (2012): 293–311.
108 The important thing is therefore that those who claim common ancestry think that it is physical, and believe that there is a physical place where they belong, not necessarily that they are correct in holding this view.
109 Contrast Denise K. Buell who explicitly highlights that common descent should not be made default for a definition of ethnicity/race, and who instead proposes that ethnicity/race should be defined (very broadly) as a (discursive?) tension between fixity and fluidity. See Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2005), 9–10.
110 For a contrasting view, see Buell, Why This New Race, 9.
111 Correctly noted by Horrell, “‘Race’,” 161.
112 On the idea that notions of ethnicity entail social construction, see Jonathan Hall, Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.
1.5.4 Jewish Identity vs. Israelite Identity – In my Terminology

I have now made three distinctions of importance to my argument. First, I have argued that we need to separate in principle, the minimal requirements for being recognized as a member of the Jewish people, and the question of how one attains good standing as part of God’s people (1.4.1). Secondly, I have distinguished between the question of whether the addressees of Hebrews “happened” to be Jews, and the question of whether they thought that being a Jew was what provided good standing before God (1.4.2). Thirdly, I have also argued that it is helpful to distinguish between an identity which is imagined to follow from shared physical kinship, and an identity which, though expressed in ethnically loaded terms, does not presuppose shared physical kinship (1.5.3). Making such distinctions allows me to frame my questions with a greater degree of precision. In order to operate these distinctions, I will now introduce a terminological distinction between Jewish and Israelite identity.

In my terminology, Jewish identity consists of being recognized as a member of the Jewish people, and it is typically expressed through the ethnic customs of that people. It is quite stable, although not absolutely irrevocable or unattainable. However, it does have an irreducible ethnic component to it, which conversion could at best substitute for. It does not necessarily imply good standing before God. Israelite identity, by contrast, always denotes good standing before God, in my terminology. It is therefore possible to articulate the claim that not all Jews are Israelites, meaning that not all Jews are in a good standing before God, and it is also possible to articulate the claim that not all Israelites are Jews, meaning that non-Jews could also attain to good standing among God’s people. I would maintain that it is much more helpful to focus attention on what Hebrews has to say about identity as a member of God’s people in good standing, than to try to determine whether the addressees were Jews or not. My investigation is thus focused on Israelite rather than on Jewish identity, as I define these terms.

Objection may be made to the fact that I, by introducing such terminology, overestimate the significance of the term “Israel” in Hebrews, but this objection mistakenly assumes that it is the very term “Israel” which occupies my main attention. I am not arguing that the term “Israel” seems to be a key epithet used by Hebrews to designate its addressees, however. It is only used three times, and never explicitly (only implicitly) to designate the audience. I am also not making the claim that the term “Israelite” was used by the historical addressees to self-identify. Nonetheless, it is still the case that the term “Israel,” although of no major importance in Hebrews, does at least figure there, and that it is used positively. This seems to allow that the term “Israel” could be used to denote a concept which is of great importance in Hebrews; namely that of belonging to God’s people.

A further objection would be that I, by differentiating between the terms “Jew” and “Israelite,” construct a terminology which has been totally detached from the way these terms were actually used at the time of Hebrews. I would certainly not claim that my terminological distinction between the terms “Jew” and “Israelite” was current in the first century, but I would nevertheless argue that the distinction made by me, develops on the fact that the terms “Jew” and “Israelite” have slightly different connotations. Many scholars have pointed out that the term “Jew” tends to be used more in contexts where the point is to differentiate Jews from non-Jews, and that it is more focused on matters of ethnicity than the term “Israelite.”
Conversely, it would seem that the term “Israelite” was preferred as a self-designation,\textsuperscript{113} that it tended to denote adherence to the promises of Scripture, and that it had a covenantal and honorific ring to it.\textsuperscript{114} This does not mean that there is some absolute rule which says that the term “Jew” never denotes good standing as part of God’s people, or that the term “Israelite” could not be used simply to denote ethnic identity, but I would still maintain that there is an interesting tendency here, on which my terminological distinction develops.

What, then, are the possible gains of using the term “Israel” positively when interpreting Hebrews? To begin with, I use the term “Israel” positively for the addressees, in conscious contrast to commentators who use the term “Israel” as if it referred to others.\textsuperscript{115} I do this because I want to interrupt the prejudice that Israelites are “someone else,” as seen from the perspective of Hebrews. Moreover, as a matter of pragmatism, it is of some significance that the phrase “member of the people of God” is long and strenuous, as opposed to “Israelite” and its cognates. Finally, by distinguishing between the terms “Israelite” and “Jew” I am given a more nuanced terminology, which allows me to articulate distinctions not otherwise available. I am quite aware of the fact that my use of the term “Israel” in this dissertation goes beyond what is found in Hebrews, and what a reasonable reading of Hebrews would demand. However, I would still maintain that my use of the term “Israel” remains within the boundaries of what the text of Hebrews seems to allow for, and that the pragmatic considerations presented above sanction my choice of terminology.

1.5.5 Compensating for the Absence of the Jews Outside the Jesus Movement

What, then, about the questions which have occupied so Hebrews scholarship, concerning the way Hebrews relates to Second Temple Judaism and Jewish identity? What about the socio-historical context of Hebrews and the question of how the addressees would have had to relate, at the end of the day, to those of their Jewish contemporaries who stood outside the Jesus movement? Is there any way in which my alternative approach could cast light on those issues?

A remarkable fact about Hebrews, which makes the questions above very difficult to approach directly, is the fact that Jews outside the Jesus movement are totally absent from the scene in Hebrews. Hebrews is written more or less as if all who aspired to belong to Israel were also followers of Jesus. This means that if I want to bring Hebrews into dialogue with Jews outside the Jesus movement, it will have to be me who sets up the discussion. A fruitful dialogue between different texts presupposes that they share some interests. The attempt to come to terms with the heritage of Israel found in Scripture, and interpret its significance for

\textsuperscript{113} John H. Elliot emphasizes that the Qumran literature shows no use of the Hebrew term for “Jew,” and states: “Here too ‘Israel’ is one of the most preferred self-designations (1QS 8.5, 9, 11; 1QSa 1.1, 6; CD 3.19)” (“Jesus the Israelite Was Neither a ‘Jew’ Nor a ‘Christian’: On Correcting Misleading Nomenclature,” ISHI 5 [2007]: 119–54 [134]).


\textsuperscript{115} Dunn (“Two Covenants or One,” 115) ascribes Hebrews the following view: “the covenant with Israel is obsolete and finished.”
the present situation, is an interest which Hebrews shares with contemporaneous Jewish literature. It is hard to imagine that the author and the audience could have been unaware of the fact that there were others, standing outside the Jesus movement, who also claimed Israelite identity, but on quite different terms. If we ask what it means to be a member of God’s people in good standing, then we are dealing with a question about which both Hebrews and contemporary Jewish texts have something to say.

In comparing Hebrews with ancient Jewish literature, it seems that we might be able to indirectly address the issue of an alleged conflict between Hebrews and Second Temple Judaism, without claiming to know the ethnic background of the addressees, how far the “parting of the ways” had come, or any specific social conflict behind the text. The possible conflict, which it would be our task to assess, would then be a conflict between Hebrews’ account of Israelite identity, and the account we might reasonably assume could have been given by a Second Temple Jew outside the Jesus movement. A possible way of assessing this potential conflict would be to look for Jewish parallels to the views articulated in Hebrews.\(^{116}\) It has been one of the standard claims made by proponents of the in-house theory, that even the passages in Hebrews which are often thought to be in conflict with Jewish views, are paralleled in ancient Jewish sources.\(^{117}\) Another possible way of assessing the alleged conflict between Hebrews and Jewish opinions would be to look for exclusivity. Is Israelite identity in Hebrews construed in such a way that it is open only to followers of Jesus? And does it thereby implicitly exclude all Jews who do not identify as followers of Jesus? Yet another approach would be to ask if Hebrews’ construction of Israelite identity implicitly or explicitly de-legitimizes views on membership of God’s people, which we could assume were held by mainstream ancient Jews who were not part of the Jesus movement.

The assumption, implicit in the questions above, that there were some things which most first century Jews probably did believe, does not imply that all first century Jews basically agreed on all things, let alone that Jewish identity was primarily a matter of agreeing on doctrinal matters.\(^{118}\) It follows that we cannot use the kind of questions presented above to determine whether someone who held the views found in Hebrews would have been a Jew. It seems that what we can do, though, is to ask if there is a conflict between Hebrews and mainstream Second Temple Jewish points of view, as well as to reflect on whether that conflict has implications for the question of identity. Needless to say, there is no room in this dissertation for an independent study of Second Temple Judaism, and I will have to rely on

\(^{116}\) Note, though, that it is difficult to assess the precise implications of an alleged “parallel,” and what kind of valid conclusions follow from it. I will argue that scholars have often too quickly assumed that a proposed parallel is evidence for the “Jewish” character of Hebrews. The problem, as I shall later argue, is that the parallels tend to be too “atomistic” for them to bear the kind of conclusions which are attached to them. For a critical discussion of the implications of the “Jewish parallels” to Hebrews, see 7.4.

\(^{117}\) Carl Mosser comments as follows on the study of Salevao: “Numerous times features of Hebrews are cited as evidence that the community had consciously separated from Judaism and that the author was engaged in deliberate anti-Jewish polemics. Almost every one of these is paralleled in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other early Jewish literature; they can hardly be evidence for a rejection of Judaism” (Review of Iutisone Salevao, Legitimation in the Letter to the Hebrews: The Construction and Maintenance of a Symbolic Universe, JETS 47 [2004]: 545–47 [547]).

\(^{118}\) I find Dunn’s (Partings) concept of Second Temple Judaism as resting on “four pillars” (monotheism, election, covenant [focused on the law], and land [focused on the temple]) quite helpful as a starting point for thinking about the key ideas that most Jews had in common and how those ideas impacted their practice.
secondary literature when I generalize about what a mainstream Jew might have thought about this or that. I shall attempt, though, to make uncontroversial assumptions when I need to generalize.

Moreover, I certainly concede that it is Hebrews, rather than Jews outside the Jesus movement, which is given the privilege of setting the agenda for the dialogues, in the sense that I will take the questions raised in and by Hebrews as my starting point. Based on the material in Hebrews, and guided by the criteria listed above (parallels, exclusion, delegitimation), I will attempt to bring in what seems to be relevant Second Temple Jewish material. The fact that no room is given for a full treatment of Second Temple Judaism, and the fact I will have to take the agenda set by Hebrews as my starting point, certainly imposes some limitations on the dialogue. A genuine debate would have been desirable, going back and forth, where each party was allowed to frame the debate on their own terms, but an artificially arranged debate is better than nothing.

1.5.6. Questions of Research

The alternative approach presented above seems to allow us to frame three distinct questions of research. First, there is the more general question of what it means for the addressees to identify as Israelites. Secondly, there is also the more focused question of how the notions of Israelite identity that are expressed in the homily are influenced by the paradox of Hebrews, by which I mean the fact that Hebrews seems to make a strong case for continuity with Israel’s past, while at the same time arguing for a decisive breach. This creates a tension between newness and continuity, which also influences the notion of what it means to belong to God’s people. Finally, there is also a third question, of whether and to what degree there is some kind of conflict between the image of Israelite identity found in Hebrews, and those found in ancient Jewish sources that originated outside the Jesus movement. Although these three questions are all important to my investigation, most space will be given to the first two. The fact that Hebrews does not directly frame its message in contrast to views held by Jews outside the Jesus movement, makes the third question very difficult to answer conclusively.

If we take the more general question of what it means for the addressees to identify as Israelites as our starting point, we will sooner or later need to make sense of the tension between newness and continuity which permeates Hebrews: that is, we will at some point have to pose the question of how the paradox of Hebrews relates to the identity of Israel, and how Hebrews negotiates notions of Israelite identity in light of the tension between newness and continuity found in the homily. As we try to explore this question, we are arguably given fertile ground for setting up a dialogue between Hebrews and ancient Jewish material that originated outside the Jesus movement. The message of newness in Hebrews, which is grounded in the Christ event, seems to challenge all notions of Israelite identity which are articulated without reference to Jesus. Hebrews’ claim to continuity with Israelite tradition and heritage, in so far as it is based on an interpretation of the significance of the Christ event, also raises the question of whether there is any common ground between the addressees and Jews outside the Jesus movement. A claim to continuity with Israelite tradition and heritage, which is contingent on claims made about Jesus, implicitly tends to preclude claims to that heritage and tradition which are not grounded in propositions about Jesus.
1.5.7 Challenging Previous Interpretative Frameworks

My investigation will not be structured as a response to the three interpretative frameworks I outlined at the beginning of this thesis (1.3). To structure the thesis in that way would have been to attempt to answer the very questions I have claimed that we need to rearticulate. However, although my thesis is not structured as a response to earlier scholarship, I still find it helpful to indicate how my thesis will challenge earlier interpretive frameworks.

The conflict theory has already been challenged for its dependence on questionable social historical presuppositions. Especially problematic is the assumption that Hebrews should be read as if there existed two neatly defined and opposed religious systems, Christianity and Judaism, to which the distinctions in Hebrews between inferiority and superiority could be attributed. This is not simply anachronistic, but entirely foreign to Hebrews’ conceptual world, wherein God is consistently portrayed as dealing with his one and only people. I hope to demonstrate that it is much more plausible to locate the tension between newness and continuity, superiority and inferiority, within Israel’s own history, instead of relating that tension to two distinct religious groups which are imagined to stand in social conflict.

The foil theory is challenged, first of all in its tendency to see the relationship between the audience and the heritage of Israel as being extrinsic to the real message Hebrews attempts to convey. There is a sense in which the narrative of Israel has become more or less irrelevant to the message of Hebrews in the foil theory, since that message consists of general truths which Scripture is taken as illustrating both negatively in positively. In contrast to this view, I will attempt to demonstrate that Hebrews should be read as a genuine attempt at situating the audience in an intrinsic relationship to Israel’s heritage. The tension between newness and continuity is not simply a tension between earthly and heavenly – it belongs within a redemptive historical conception. The very attempt to explicate a conception of Israelite identity, understood as located within a temporal tension between newness and continuity, in the context of a particular narrative, is in and of itself a challenge to the foil theory.

The in house theory has already been challenged in its attempt at reasoning from the so-called “Jewish” character of Hebrews, to a Jewish audience (1.4). However, it is also possible to challenge the specific arguments which have been put forward in an attempt at establishing the “Jewish” character of Hebrews, without arguing that this proves that Hebrews was written for non-Jews. For instance, there is often reason to question the “Jewish parallels” which are held to prove that Hebrews belongs within the confines of a Jewish in-house debate, and there is also reason to question the intuitive assumption that Hebrews’ claim to continuity with Israel’s past necessarily gives birth to a notion of Jewish identity, which Hebrews would have shared with Jews outside the Jesus movement. Paradoxically, I would actually maintain that Hebrews’ positive theology of Israel often proves to be that which is most challenging to the standing of Jews outside the Jesus movement.

1.5.8 Two Disclaimers

There is no implicit claim in my questions of research, to suggest that “the identity of Israel” is the main topic of Hebrews. Although I have tried to argue that it is important, I have not meant to suggest that the author wrote Hebrews for the purpose of clarifying what Israelite identity entails. Moreover, it is not even necessarily the case that all the passages in Hebrews
which bear on the question of Israelite identity, were written for the specific purpose of addressing this topic. I would thus concede that part of my task involves teasing out the implications of texts in Hebrews.

There is no implicit claim in my questions of research, to suggest that the only notions of identity found in Hebrews, are notions of Israelite identity. I would concede that there are many texts in Hebrews which do bear on questions of identity, but which are not specifically focused on membership of the people of God. The fact that I focus my attention on Israelite identity implies that there is a bias in my approach towards Israelite traditions. I have made no attempt at giving an even-handed account of the religious historical setting of Hebrews.

1.6 Investigating Identity – Some Key Challenges

1.6.1 Defining the Term “Identity”

I believe that it is helpful to distinguish between three distinct definitions of the term “identity.” First, there is what I will call “personal identity” which refers to the identity of a specific person, uniquely related to their history, experiences, relationships and social roles. When speaking of personal identity, we are not necessarily addressing the private self-perceptions of individual persons, a question which seems irrelevant to Hebrews. The key feature of personal identity, as defined here, has nothing to do with privacy, it has to do with the fact that specific indicia are related to a specific person. Personal identity could be related to “public” aspects of a specific person’s identity, also accessible and observable to others, such as the roles, names, functions and titles related to a given person (i.e. Paul could be identified as the apostle to the Gentiles).

In addition to “personal identity,” there is also what I will call “social identity.” This term refers specifically to that part of a person’s identity which is derived from their membership of a social group. When speaking of social identity, the indicia related to the person, are therefore necessarily group related. A statement about social identity could, therefore, include a specific name, and thus border on personal identity. For instance, to say that “Paul is/was a Pharisee” is both a statement about his personal identity, and a statement about his social identity. It is a statement about his personal identity in so far as it relates specifically to Paul, however, it is also a statement about Paul’s social identity, because Paul is identified solely in terms of an alleged group membership. It is also perfectly possible, though, to construe a statement about social identity where the person in question is

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119 For an illuminating and more general introduction to the topic of group identity, and the author’s attempt to foster a positive sense of identity for the audience, see deSilva, Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective, 138–65.


121 A problem with the term “social identity” is that it implicitly suggests that “personal identity” and “group identity” are somehow non-social entities. This is clearly not my intention in using this term. Richard Jenkins correctly states that “all human identities are, by definition, social identities” (Social Identity [3d ed.; London: Routledge, 2004], 17).
hypothetical or anonymous (i.e. a Pharisee is hallmarked by his zeal for the law). This implies that several persons might share in the same “social identity” in as much as they are perceived to be members of the same group, a possibility which the concept “personal identity” does not allow for.

The development of social identity is based on the fundamental human cognitive capacity to categorize our environment. This implies that several persons might share in the same “social identity” in as much as they are perceived to be members of the same group, a possibility which the concept “personal identity” does not allow for.

When we organize our social world in terms of different groups, and when we understand our own or others’ identity in terms of group membership, we simplify and “map” our social world. This is a way of making sense of human relationships, and a way of differentiating how one relates to other people. It is more or less inevitable that people understand their social environment in terms of “us” and “them,” in terms of in-groups and out-groups. Both persons and groups will naturally strive towards a positive identity. This means that the process of identification will tend to involve an evaluative and emotional, as well as a cognitive, dimension. The way we structure our social world carries with it implicit or explicit value judgments, to which emotions are attached. Social identity thus effects out behavior, as well as our sense of belonging. We are not neutral participants in the process of identification, but personally involved. If a group is able to communicate a strong sense of shared social identity to its members, it is more likely to survive, because a shared sense of identity often results in a favorable attitude towards other in-group members.

In addition to “personal identity” and “social identity,” there is also “group identity.” This term refers not to individual persons, whether specific or hypothetical, but to groups, and it describes what the characteristics of a given group are. If someone were to define “Israel” as being a people separated from all other people by virtue of standing in a covenant relationship with God, this would be to make a statement about the “group identity” of Israel.

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122 Roitto, Behaving, 49.
123 Jenkins, Social Identity, 13.
127 Tajfel, “Social Categorization,” 120.
128 Jenkins, Social Identity, 6.
These three definitions of identity are meant to be complementary, and they are not in competition with each other. The three definitions of identity allow us to distinguish the different questions which are operative in this dissertation. Our questions of research are primarily focused on social identity, that of belonging to Israel. However, what it means to be an Israelite is obviously intimately related to the question of what it is that constitutes Israel as God’s people (group identity). Moreover, on occasion it will also be relevant for us to explore the personal identity of given Israelites – such as Abraham or Jesus – on the presupposition that their identities also cast light on the identity of other Israelites. When doing so it is certainly not the private self-conceptions of Abraham or Jesus which are of interest to us, but the particular roles and functions they are held to occupy within Israel. In as much as Abraham and Jesus are taken to be representative Israelites, and thus can be said to function as prototypes, their identity informs our understanding of Israelite identity on a more general note. All three uses of the term are therefore relevant to the dissertation. Although I think it is helpful to distinguish between personal, social and group identity, I will in the following mainly speak of “identity” without qualification. It should be clear from the context whether I am referring to Israel as a whole, any given Israelite, a specific Israelite, or the entire concept “identity,” comprising all three uses I have now described.

It is quite difficult to say what is essential to the concept of identity as such, regardless of whether we are talking about personal-, social- or group-identity. Jenkins gives the following preliminary definition of identity: “identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know ‘who’s who’ (and hence ‘what’s what’).” Then he goes on to note how this process of knowing is multidimensional because it “involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on.” There seem to be some key concepts with reference to which one acquires the kind of knowledge described by Jenkins. Lieu helpfully lists some of these, when she claims that identity involves ideas about “boundedness, sameness and difference, of continuity, perhaps of a degree of homogeneity, and of recognition by self and by others.” Identity is thus that which emerges when we recognize ourselves and others, either groups or individuals, with reference to notions of sameness and difference, as being bounded and thus as belonging. For such notions to be meaningful, we have to be able to recognize similarities and differences to which we attribute a certain degree of continuity, as well as to put those observations into language.

1.6.2 Why Identity?

Obviously, it would have been possible to approach questions related to the concept “people of God” in Hebrews, without using the term “identity,” but I would argue that there are good, pragmatic reasons for doing so. As demonstrated above (1.2–1.3), it is evident that some key debates in Hebrews' scholarship already have been framed in terms of identity. Given this starting point, it seems better to clarify what is meant by the term “identity,” than to risk the discussion being obscured because different scholars operate with different conceptions about

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130 For a theoretical framework which facilitates reasoning from personal to social identity, see the discussion about “prototypes” in 2.4.
131 Jenkins, Social Identity, 5.
132 Lieu, Christian Identity, 12.
identity, which are not made explicit or subject to critical discussion. By using the term “identity,” I am provided with an analytical concept which has already been stringently defined. Furthermore, whether one likes it or not, the broader question of how the early Jesus movement emerged is presently also framed in terms of identity development, within New Testament scholarship. There have been valuable theoretical discussions within New Testament scholarship about what identity is, how identity is developed, and how the concept of identity could be used in a responsible and fruitful way when investigating the New Testament. This discussion has yielded some relevant results, and there is every reason to take advantage of past efforts to come to terms with issues akin to those which confront us in this dissertation.

In addition to these general considerations, I see at least two reasons for assuming prima facie that Hebrews might be involved in an attempt to shape and communicate a sense of social identity for its audience. First, the crisis facing the addressees seems to have been perceived by the author as threatening the group’s future existence qua group. Enthusiasm was waning, commitment was fading away and the audience seems to have been subject to strong pressure from the outside (10:32–34; 12:4–12; 13:13). Given such circumstances, and the author’s attempt to foster the future existence of the group, a strong sense of shared positive identity would have been an apt tool for accomplishing that end. Secondly, it is reasonable to assume that different groups within the Jesus movement were in the process of “figuring out who they were” by the time Hebrews was written, and that they would have been in need of viable categories in light of which to understand their own existence. It was not self-evident where the groups constituted by the followers of Jesus did fit on the social map of their day. The different groups within the Jesus movement would therefore have had to work out how to understand and legitimize their own existence, qua followers of Jesus.

The uncertain social status which we can therefore plausibly assume for the audience ties in with the historical assumption, which has been argued for above, that Hebrews was written sometime during the second half of the first century, for a group of people who identified as followers of Jesus. Implicit in this historical location of the audience is also the claim that the audience very likely would have been regarded as belonging to an ambiguous social entity, not entirely at home either in the Jewish sub-cultures of the Greco-Roman world or among the

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133 Numerous titles could have been cited, but for a general overview, see Bengt Holmberg, “Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity,” in Exploring Early Christian Identity (ed. B. Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 1–32; and David Horrell, “Becoming Christian,” 309–35.

134 John Dunnill writes: “It is therefore to the maintenance of this group and its self-definition as the people of God that the author’s words are directed” (Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews [MS 75; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 22).


136 Backhaus (“Das wandernde Gottesvolk,” 208) describes the phase within which Hebrews was written as a phase of crisis, where a young group attempted to develop its identity in what could have appeared as a theological “nowhere-land.” To this challenge, Backhaus sees Hebrews as providing the audience with a Scripture-based self-definition as being the eschatological people of God. Note also how Backhaus (Hebräer, 27–29) speaks of the need for “Selbstbewusstsein” and “christliche Identität” as occasions for the writing of Hebrews.
majority. Because the members of the Jesus movement would have been a minority, probably lacking in status, it follows that it would have been crucial to legitimize identity as followers of Jesus vis-à-vis relevant out-groups. This observation is important, for “the ‘positive aspects of social identity’ . . . only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparison with, other groups.” However, as far as I am able to tell, social comparisons with contemporary out-groups are more or less irrelevant to the explicit argument in Hebrews. This fact notwithstanding, it still seems almost self-evident that the audience, who did not live in a historical or social vacuum, would have had to negotiate their minority identity as followers of Jesus, in comparison with contrasting notions of social identity. However, the fact that this process of social comparison is nearly inevitable, and thus could be presupposed as an implicit socio-historical context for the notions of social identity which Hebrews articulates, does not allow us to read concrete social conflicts or particular social out-groups into the argument of Hebrews. We need to distinguish, in other words, between the explicit focus of the identity discourse in Hebrews, where other groups are relatively unimportant, and the implicit social historical context of the argument in Hebrews, which inevitably would have posed issues related to social comparison.

1.6.3 Concentric Circles of Identity: Community, Movement, and People

If social identity presupposes the existence of groups, we need to sort out which groups are on the scene in Hebrews. So far I have been referring to three interrelated groups, all of which have their own social identity. First, there is the community addressed throughout Hebrews in the plural. Second, there is what I have called the Jesus movement, to which the audience are assumed to belong. The trans-local relationship between the author and the addressees, the mention of Timothy and those from Italy (13:23–24), as well as the reference to the line of tradition going back to Jesus (2:1–4), indicate that the author and the audience were conscious of the fact that others also identified as followers of Jesus. Third, there is the group which I have called “people of God.”

I would argue that these three groups – the community, the Jesus movement and the people of God – could be understood as representing concentric circles of identity. That is, seen from the perspective of Hebrews, membership of the addressed community also implies membership of the Jesus movement, which in turn implies that you are part of God’s people. This dissertation only deals explicitly with the relationship between the addressees and the people of God. However, the addressees are never addressed apart from their membership of the “communal we” which permeates the text, nor are they ever addressed apart from their identity as followers of Jesus. This means that our findings will also have implicit bearing on the question of how Hebrews perceives the identity of the addressed community, and the Jesus movement as such, even though my direct focus is on the relationship between the audience and Israel.

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137 On the fact that the addressees probably were members of a group that considered itself, and was considered by others, as a minority, see deSilva, Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective, 44–53.
139 Backhaus (Hebräer, 359) uses the phrase “das ekklesiale Wir.”
1.6.4 The Relationship between the Addressees and Israel – The Site of Identification

When studying a text, the only persons and groups directly available to us are those which are presented to us on the textual level. The site of identification available to us is therefore the textual relationship, created by the author, between the addressees and Israel. Because the author perceived himself to belong to the same group as those whom he addresses, it follows that this dissertation deals exclusively with identity as seen from an insider perspective. Moreover, both “Israel” and “the addressees” are, strictly speaking, textual constructs. Through interpreting Hebrews, it is possible to arrive at an idea about those for whom the text appears to have been written, what kind of concept Israel is, and how the audience relates to Israel. By exploring the relationship between the addressees and Israel, we can arrive at a conception of what Israelite identity would consist of for the audience, according to Hebrews.

But how are we to conceive of the relationship between the textual and historical addressees? This relationship is more complicated than one might think, and it is actually quite difficult to separate neatly between the historical and the textual addressee. Because we lack text-external evidence to say something about the historical addressees of Hebrews, any attempt to reconstruct their profile would have to take the text of Hebrews as its starting point, trying to understand who Hebrews is implicitly written to. In other words, any reconstruction of the “historical addressee” would necessarily have to be based on a textual construct. Conversely, if one wants to investigate the identity of the “textual addressee” one will soon discover that one is led into historical considerations, whether one likes it or not. The “implied addressee” of Hebrews, even if understood as a literary construct, has a historical location, and is not a non-historical anybody. The implied addressee in Hebrews is not situated somewhere beyond history, but as part of a concrete trajectory of tradition, running from Jesus, through his apostles, before arriving at the addressee (2:1–4). Although there is much we do not know about the historical context of the addressees, we still understand that Hebrews appears to be addressing some sort of historical situation. The labels “literary” and “historical” are misleading therefore, inasmuch as they are taken to point to mutually exclusive and alternative methodologies between which one can simply chose when approaching the identity of the addressees.

There are still important distinctions to be made between the historical and the textual addressee, however. To begin with, we have no way of knowing for sure whether Hebrews correctly represents those for whom it implies to be written. I would assume that even those who think that Hebrews provides an accurate description of its addressees would agree that

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140 This implies that even the assumptions made about the addressees under the heading “historical minimalism” in 1.5.1 above, are strictly speaking properties of the “implied addressees.” The fact that I will be writing my dissertation as if these few assumptions hold water does not imply that my actual interest has shifted from text to history; it only shows that some of the properties given to the “implied addressees” are of a nature which suggests a general historical context, in order for these properties to make sense and cohere.

141 I am using the term “implied addressees” to denote those persons which, on the basis of a text internal analyses, can plausibly be proposed as those to whom the text implicitly claims to be written.

the implied addressee in Hebrews is bound to reflect the picture the author had of the audience.\textsuperscript{143} We should also suspect, moreover, that the identity of the implied addressee to some degree reflects how the author would have wanted his addressees to self-identify in the future, and that the very writing of Hebrews is also an act of persuasion, the purpose of which is to make the actual addressees become more like the textual addressees. I still think it is worthwhile investigating the identity projected on the addressees by the text, and will therefore not focus on the actual degree to which the historical addressees identified as members of Israel, whether before or after the writing of Hebrews, but on the image of Israelite identity recommended in the text of Hebrews.\textsuperscript{144}

1.6.5 Entering the Hermeneutics of Identity

Having given a preliminary clarification of how the term “identity” will be understood, and how I intend to investigate Hebrews in light of it, it is immediately clear that we are faced with several potential difficulties. To begin with, there will always be innumerable different factors which together constitute the identity of any given person or group, and only some of the many factors that we can imagine could have been relevant to Israelite identity are actually discussed in Hebrews. Furthermore, any given person could be identified in a number of different ways, depending on the context or the perspective.\textsuperscript{145} Any notion of Israelite identity, which could somehow be translated to real life, would therefore have to be related to other aspects of the self, constructed on the basis of other factors (ethnicity, geographical location, gender, wealth-poverty, etc.). Finally, the identity of any given group or person is not static, but subject to change and development, and affected by complex processes and interaction with others.\textsuperscript{146} Identity is not a stable or straightforward concept, but something which is subject to change, development and ambiguity, and which it is therefore also difficult to describe in a precise manner.\textsuperscript{147}

However, precisely the fact that identity is not something given once and for all, which one can simply locate and describe, means that the process of identity development will always

\textsuperscript{143} Walter Übelacker writes: “. . . insofar as we know something about the character of the addressees [it is] only through the words of the author and how he/she has been able to perceive the recipients’ character in the right way” (“Hebrews and the Implied Author’s Rhetorical Ethos,” in Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse: Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference [ed. T. H. Olbricht and A. Eriksson; ESEC 11; New York, N.Y.: T&T Clark, 2005], 316–43 [318]).

\textsuperscript{144} With regard to terminology I prefer, as a matter of convenience, to refer to the implied addressees simply as the addressees, the audience, or the community. If, on occasion, I find reason to discuss the historical addressees, I shall make this clear. If not, I am operating on a textual level. The same goes for the term “author.” Instead of referring to him as the “implied author,” I shall simply call him “the author,” even though my main interest is clearly the author as he appears in the text and not the anonymous man responsible for the writing of the text.

\textsuperscript{145} There is a difficult question confronting us here, which concerns how the unity and diversity of the person should be understood and conceptualized. This dissertation does not allow for a thorough discussion of this issue. However, I will follow John C. Turner, who holds that there is a relatively stable “self,” which could be described as a cognitive system able to incorporate several different “identifications” that result from a process of categorization. These identifications vary at different times and in different situations, but it does not follow that there are therefore several “selves.” See “Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group,” in Social Identity and Intergroup Relations (ed. H. Tajfel; ESSP; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 15–40 (18–19).

\textsuperscript{146} Underlined by Lieu, Christian Identity, 13–14.

\textsuperscript{147} This aspect of “identity” is well captured by Horrell, “Becoming Christian,” 311.
have to be a hermeneutical endeavor. Every statement about identity, be it our own identity, the identity of someone else, or the identity of a group, will inevitably include and presuppose an act of interpretation. Such interpretations are by nature contestable and open to reconsideration or questioning. It is therefore inevitable that the identity of persons and groups will be made subject to negotiation, a fact which in turn necessitates the development of interpretative strategies for attaining and maintaining a positive identity. Although such strategies often involve recourse to non-verbal aspects of different sorts, what one might call “identity-markers,” these “identity-markers” can only serve as such within the context of an interpretive strategy. The development of such strategies seems therefore to be constitutive of the concept identity itself, rather than secondary to it. Without some (minimal) act of interpretation, where notions of identity are articulated, negotiated, rejected, contested or taken for granted, there can be no identity. Identity is not something which we simply have, and thereafter articulate, but something which emerges through a process of interpretation and articulation.

If identity is essentially something which needs to be “worked out” through a process of interpretation and articulation, as I have argued above, then it seems to follow that texts could be one possible place where such interpretive endeavors take place. This would mean, in turn, that a textual approach to the concept of identity suggests itself as one possible way of exploring this concept. A text always carries with it some implied notion of the identity of those it addresses, it sometimes includes elaborate descriptions of persons or groups, it often somehow articulates what the author and the addressees have in common, and it is thus an apt tool for developing interpretative strategies for maintaining, negotiating and constructing identity. Furthermore, once composed, a text could be used for identity constructive purposes within the context of a community. What one might hope to find in a text if one is investigating identity is not some unified and unambiguous entity called “identity,” which is simply there in the text, and which can be located and described as such, but contributions to an ongoing and open process of interpretation and negotiation, the function of which is to provide resources for articulating the identity of a given person and/or group.

1.6.6 Textual Construction of Identity

This observation leads us to a basic premise in this dissertation, the idea that texts construct identity. The claim that texts construct identity could be taken to mean that texts have a certain impact upon those exposed to them, and that all texts thus participate in the construction of the identity of their recipients. This claim might be grounded in specific

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148 Strongly underlined by Jenkins, Social Identity, 5.
149 I prefer to reserve the term “identity marker” for concrete, visible things, which are drawn upon in order to articulate a certain notion of identity. When talking about virtues, vices, qualities and properties which are taken to be typical of a person or a group, I will use the term “identity descriptor.”
150 On the open-ended nature of the process of identification, see Jenkins, Social Identity, 5–9.
151 Lieu (Christian Identity, 8) states that “the remarkable literary creativity and productivity” of early Christianity produced a “multifaceted self-conscious identity.”
152 The claim that texts construct identity does not imply that the very concept of identity as such is nothing more than a textual phenomenon. This is correctly noted by Lieu, herself sometimes accused of turning identity into a textual phenomenon. Although Lieu maintains notions of Christian and Jewish identity were constructed through texts, she correctly notes that “this does not mean that those identities are
evidence of the reception history of a given document, in general assumptions about the status and significance of texts within a given culture, or in certain criteria according to which one can judge whether a specific text is likely to have had an impact on its recipients. There is a difference, though, between the general claim that texts impact the identity of their readers, and claiming to be able to describe or investigate how this process of transference, from text to cognition, takes place and shape. Although I would hold that Hebrews most likely did have an impact on the identity of its recipients, and although I would submit that one could provide reasonable arguments to suggest that this is the case, the actual degree to which this happened is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

However, the claim that texts construct identity could also be taken to mean that texts construct notions of identity, and this is the claim on which this thesis rests. It is assumed that texts are able to create representations of social reality – in our case that would mean representations of identity – and that such textual representations stand in an analogous relationship to that which is represented. Israelite identity understood as a textual construct thus stands analogously to the thoughts, emotions, attitudes, experiences, etc., that a real person, living within a real social context, could relate to the identity “Israelite.” The text creates textual images and representations, which an addressee could recognize as a potential way of perceiving themselves. Another way to put this would be to say that a text puts forward “roles,” and invites the audience to identify with those roles. My questions of research imply two such “roles,” namely (i) addressee and (ii) member of God’s people, and the challenge facing me is to explore how these two roles “merge” on a textual level in Hebrews. The textual blending of “the implied addressee” with “God’s people” functions as an invitation to the addressee to understand his or her own identity in terms of membership of God’s people.

1.6.7 Distinguishing between the Social Identity Concept and Social Identity Theories

I find it helpful to make a distinction between the very concept of social identity on the one hand, and theories which describe how social identity is attained, expressed or shaped, on the other. I will thus distinguish between the “social identity concept” and “social identity theories.” As already discussed above, I take the “social identity concept” to refer to a person’s understanding of themselves as belonging to a group, as well as the emotional significance and value attached to that perceived group membership. It is crucial to underline that this basic concept was already articulated several years before the most influential theories on social identity were put forward. The social identity concept functioned as a

nothing other than textual constructs” (“‘Impregnable Ramparts and Walls of Iron’: Boundary and Identity in Early ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity,’” NTS 48 [2002]: 297–313 [298]).

Cf. the chapter entitled “Text and Identity,” by Lieu in Christian Identity.

Roitto, Behaving, 35–40.

By “cognition” I mean the entire and complex matrix of sensual input, memories, thoughts, emotions, attitudes, etc., which are processed in the mind of persons. See Roitto, Behaving, 3. I do not mean by the term “cognition” to reduce identity to a merely rational phenomenon, to the exclusion of feelings, experiences, attitudes and deliberations.

The most important theories are “social identity theory” (Tajfel, 1979) and “self-categorization theory” (Turner, 1982). The latter theory builds on and develops some of the premises and findings of the former. Note, moreover, that there is a potentially confusing terminological issue here. The phrase “social
premise for, rather than as the output of, those theories.  

This is an important observation, because it suggests that the social identity concept is logically prior to, and in a certain sense independent of, the subsequent articulation of the social identity theories. This allows a methodical distinction to be made.

The social identity concept is intrinsic to my questions of research, and constitutes part of my very starting point. It only presupposes a very general, minimalistic social setting in order to be meaningful, and it is therefore potentially useful even if one does not have extensive empirical data to work with. Because the construction of in-groups and out-groups is a fundamental part of all human societies, there is reason to believe that the concept would apply to almost any social and historical context. I have also argued above, that there are good reasons for thinking that the social identity concept is a fruitful analytical tool when dealing with textual research. Although quite general, the social identity concept is specific enough to generate a set of interrelated questions which could be posed when reading Hebrews, such as: how do know that you are part of Israel (cognitive dimension)? What is gained by being part of Israel (evaluative dimension)? What is the emotional significance of being part of Israel (emotional dimension)?

Even if the social identity concept might have heuristic value in textual research, it still leaves many questions unanswered. From a social scientific standpoint one would also want to know how social identity is attained in the first place, how it relates to personal identity, in what sort of situations social identity becomes salient, what kind of behavior one would expect to result when people self-identify with reference to a group, how social identity relates to intergroup relations, what kind of strategies groups normally develop in order to foster a sense of social identity for their members, and under what kind of circumstances such strategies would have any affect. These are questions which are primarily for the social sciences to answer, by examining relevant empirical data. In order to answer these and similar questions, the social scientist would need what I will call a social identity theory, that is: a set of interrelated assumptions which could be used to form testable hypotheses, explain empirical data, predict social behavior, and then generate new hypotheses.

identity theory” is sometimes used specifically about the theory advanced by Tajfel, which is concerned with intergroup behavior, however, at other times the phrase “social identity theory” is used in an encompassing way to refer to the entire range of perspectives which have been developed in the wake of Tajfel’s theory, also including the “self-categorization theory.” In this dissertation I shall refer to Tajfel’s theory of intergroup relationship and behavior as “social identity theory” in the singular, and to the entire field of different approaches to social identity as “social identity theories” in the plural. On the terminological issue, see Turner et al., Rediscovering the Social Group, ix.

157 Haslam et al. describes how the minimal group experiments of Tajfel and his colleagues in the early seventies led to the articulation of the social identity concept, which in turn provided a starting point for social identity theory and self-categorization theory. Thus, the concept was articulated before the theories. See “The Social Identity Perspective Today,” 341–43.

158 This is true, even if the concept was first “discovered” by means of empirical experiments.

159 Jack Sanders cites Talcott Parsons, who claims that it is basic to all social systems that they contain “a system of constitutive symbolism, which gives members of the society their own self-definition, or collective identity” (“Establishing Social Distance,” 361).

160 For an overview of some of the most important theories, see Mikael Tellbe, “Identity and Prayer,” in Early Christian Prayer and Identity Formation (eds. R. Hvalvik and K. O. Sandnes; WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014 forthcoming).
Quite clearly, these are not tasks which can be directly carried out in the context of textual investigation. It follows that any use of social identity theories would have to be indirect. A possible approach would be to start with a specific theory (or several specific theories) which suggests how things normally “ought” to be, and to test whether this seems to be the case in Hebrews. I am hesitant about such a methodology, however. For one thing, there is clearly a danger that the theories one brings to the text are so specific and elaborate, and frame the questions to such a degree, that they end up dictating the results. Moreover, it does not seem to me that Hebrews provides the kind of data one would need if the aim was to “test” a social identity theory. As opposed to, say, Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, Hebrews contains very few references to its social and historical context. Furthermore, as compared with documents such as the Gospels or Acts, Hebrews contains very few descriptions or prescriptions of human interaction. We are told virtually nothing about what the audience did, and very little about what they should do. Finally, social identity theories have tended to focus greatly on intergroup behavior and relationship, a topic to which the explicit argument in Hebrews contributes very little. There seems to be a mismatch between the kind of data the social scientific theories presuppose, and the kind of data Hebrews provides.

For these reasons, there is no specific social identity theory which is intrinsic to my questions of research. The selection of texts flows from my questions of research rather than from theories about what I “ought” to find in Hebrews. However, when the investigation leads me into topics, questions and issues to which theories on social identity seem to have something to contribute, I will on occasion bring these theories in as “dialogue partners.” My main purpose in doing this will be to look for analytical terminology which allows me to discuss the text, and the phenomena encountered there, with a greater degree of precision. In several of the chapters in this dissertation, theories of social identity development will enter into the investigation. My commitment to these theories is limited, though, to the degree to which they prove useful in the process of understanding a given passage, theme or motif in Hebrews, exploring its relevance to the processes of identity development.

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162 Cf. 1.4.1. On this I disagree with Marohl who makes intergroup comparison with a symbolic out-group his starting point for a social identity approach to Hebrews, in *Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews*. For a critical discussion, see 5.2.2.

163 On the selection of texts, see 1.8.

164 Thus, I will not primarily use the theories to explain why the argument in Hebrews is the way it is, or to predict how the addressees are likely to have reacted to the argument.

165 In 2.4 and 5.6.1 I introduce the idea of “prototypes,” in 3.7.1 I bring in the idea of “group beliefs,” in 5.1 I discuss how identity relates to “collective memory” and in 6.7 I explore the relationship between rituals and identity. In each case I enter into dialogue with (aspects of) theories on identity development.

166 Thus, it is not part of my investigation to assess the plausibility or adaptability of any specific theory or theories.
1.7 How does Hebrews Construct a Sense of Identity for its Addressees?

It was stated above (1.6.6), quite generally, that texts construct notions of identity. It is now time to be more specific about the way in which this process takes place in the case of Hebrews. In order to give a correct description of this, it seems necessary to discuss what kind of text we are dealing with. 167 I will therefore begin by addressing the question of genre.

1.7.1 The Homiletic Nature of Hebrews

Although Hebrews is often referred to as an epistle or a letter, it is also widely recognized that the texts lacks some of the characteristic features of the ancient letter form. Most notably Hebrews lacks an epistolary opening. It is also recognized that Hebrews displays many of the characteristics taken to be typical of a synagogue homily. 168 The use of verbs of speech rather than of writing, the direct and personal address to the readers as siblings, the use of the “communal we,” 169 the frequent and apparently formalistic exposition of Scripture which leads to exhortations, the use of the hortative subjunctive, and the use of Scriptural exempla, are some of the traits taken to define the genre “homily.” 170 The hypothesis that Hebrews is a homily is strengthened by the label the author himself gave to the text: λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως (13:22). This phrase is also found in Acts 13:15, used to designate a synagogue address, which was to follow upon the reading of Scripture. 171 Many have therefore assumed that the synagogue homily constitutes a distinct genre, and that Hebrews is best understood if viewed as an example of this. I would agree with this verdict, and will refer to Hebrews as a homily in this dissertation.

Some scholars have also attempted to use this genre designation as a starting point for locating Hebrews in a specific institutional context, however. Gelardini, for instance, hypothesizes about the event in the liturgical year for which Hebrews was written, and since Hebrews uses terms that refer to the “sacred geography of the synagogue,” she claims that the text must have been written for the purpose of being delivered in a “‘cultic’ building such as the Diaspora synagogue.” 172 It is true that we do find the term ἐπισυναγωγή in 10:25, which could suggest that the community understood itself as some sort of “synagogue,” however, it does not follow that they met in particularly designated buildings. We could imagine

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167 Although there have been attempts to prove that Hebrews is either “deliberative” (Übelacker, Appell) or “epideictic” (Attridge, “Paraenesis in a Homily”) I side with George Guthrie who claims that “attempts at pegging Hebrews with the species of rhetoric or a pattern of oratorical speeches of the day have been less than successful” (“Hebrews in its First-Century Contexts: Recent Research,” in The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research [ed. S. McKnight and G. R. Osborne; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2004], 414–43 [423]).


170 Attridge, “Paraenesis in a Homily.”

171 It is disputed, though, whether 13:22 is meant to refer to the genre, the content of the text, or both. See discussion in Walter Übelacker, Appell, 32, 37.

synagogues assembling in private houses. The passages in Hebrews which point to a sacred geography, such as “throne of grace” in 4:16, are better explained as referring to heavenly realities, rather than the concrete building of assembly. Even if we do suppose that the audience constituted some kind of synagogue, it is important to emphasize that this is not an entirely precise designation. Runesson has argued that we should distinguish between “public” and “semi-public” synagogues. Public synagogues were officially recognized, and exercised a certain amount of juridical authority. “Semi-public” synagogues, however, could have functioned more like voluntary associations, and could conceivably have stood in a certain opposition to the official synagogue. It follows that the very term “synagogue” alone does not allow one to make precise judgments on the Jewish nature of the doctrines and practices current within this “institution.”

Instead of reasoning from the genre of Hebrews towards a specific institutional or geographical location, it seems more helpful to reflect on the specific rhetorical possibilities attached to a homily. The homily naturally belongs in a liturgical setting, by which I mean a regular setting in which there was a more or less fixed pattern of worship, including readings from Scripture followed by interpretation, exposition and exhortations. I think it is quite plausible that Hebrews was intended to be delivered within such a context. However, at the very least, Hebrews evokes such a context, and I would argue that it borrows rhetorical force from it too. By this I mean that the kind of rhetorical force an interpreter of Scripture would have had, when exposing Scripture in a liturgical context, is transferred to the text of Hebrews. The author is able to cast himself, as if being the one reading and expounding Scripture in the context of worship. The author would have been able to “borrow” the degree of reverence the addressees would have had, then, towards Scripture, the practice of reading Scripture regularly, and the authority of those expounding it. This evoked liturgical context points to the identity of the audience. They are cast as those listening to the word of God, those addressed by Scripture, those assembled to study Scripture, and those in need of its guidance. This is arguably a way of identifying the addressees as the people of God. The very genre in which Hebrews has found its shape thus allows for a setting within which the identity of Israel could be evoked and negotiated.

175 Whether one agrees with Richard T. France’s exegetical verdict or not, it seems to me that the principal distinction he makes between style and content is prudent: “A non-Christian synagogue hearer would no doubt have felt at home with the style of much of Hebrews’ use of the Old Testament, but would have been bewildered by the theological context in which it was set, and therefore also by the results which followed” (“The Writer of Hebrews as Biblical Expositor,” TynB 47 [1996]: 245–76 [275]).
176 Such a liturgical setting might have included other elements as well, such as prayers, rituals, and meals, but for the purpose of establishing the significance of the homily as a genre, the reading and exposition of Scripture is the key issue.
177 Übelacker, Appell, 209, 215.
178 Thus Gelardini (“Synagogue Homily,” 116) comments on how the synagogue was perceived to be a context of learning: “Learning and doing the law was portrayed as the highest ideal of a pious son (and daughter) of Israel.” However, “learning and doing the law” is not the end towards which Hebrews is oriented.
1.7.2 The Relationship between Exhortation and Exposition

The homiletic nature of Hebrews is registered in the dynamic interplay between Scriptural expositions, interpreted in light of the Christ event, and practical exhortations aimed at the situation of the audience. Simply put, one could say that the expositonal passages give a normative description of reality, and that the exhortations provide practical guidance which indicates how to respond to that reality. Although it is impossible to draw a sharp line between exposition and exhortation, this distinction is widely recognized as fundamental to Hebrews. An important source for some of the disagreements regarding the purpose of Hebrews, and the question of how Hebrews relates to Jewish identity (1.3), follows from the fact that scholars hold different views regarding the relationship between exposition and exhortation. If you take the expositions as your starting point, it seems that Hebrews mainly addresses a doctrinal and theoretical issue, focused on the priesthood and the sacrifice of Jesus. If one assumes that this is the main issue in Hebrews, it would be natural to presuppose that the exhortations are aimed at separation from old covenant practices and points of view. However, the problem is that the exhortations are articulate in a more general way, and focus on persecution, lack of enthusiasm and wavering commitment. Some scholars therefore take the exhortations as their starting point, and argue that Hebrews is primarily aimed at fostering perseverance and endurance, for a community which faced some sort of hardship. On that premise, the conflictive nature of Hebrews vis-à-vis “Judaism” seems to disappear. William Lane and Robert Wall thus write: “In the paraenesis there is no differentiation or separation from Judaism; the distinctively Christian perspective of the writer is expressed rather in the thesis. If this generalization can be sustained it is an important observation, since in Hebrews paraenesis takes precedence over thesis.”

Lane provides a helpful presentation of the text-linguistic approach taken by Georg Guthrie, who attempts to structure Hebrews by distinguishing between exhortations and exposition. See Hebrews, 1:xc–xcviii.

Harold W. Attridge writes: “Hebrews, as we have seen, is a balanced combination of doctrinal exposition and paraenesis. Any assessment of its overall meaning needs to take both dimensions of the work equally into account” (Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1989], 21).

It is important to realize, though, that the relationship between exposition and exhortation is dialectical (Übelacker, Appell, 33). Although it would seem that the exposition is logically prior to the exhortation, one could imagine that the situation which occasioned the exhortation has shaped the nature of the exposition. In other words, it might well be that the doctrinal exposition is predicated on and was prompted by a quite practical issue, which was subsequently made subject to “theoretical” discussion. For a similar reflection, see Roitto, Behaving, 14.

Scott Mackie even claims that “Hebrews demonstrates a near perfect integration of ‘doctrine’ and exhortation” (“Ancient Jewish Mystical Motifs in Hebrews’ Theology of Access and Entry Exhortations,” NTS 58 (2012): 88–104 [97]), and John Dunnill states: “The hortatory passages [are] so fully involved with the theological thought as to seem to create it” (Covenant and Sacrifice, 46).

Barnabas Lindars solves this problem by claiming that the author intentionally conceals the “real issue” at the beginning of the text, and that this issue, which is of a practical nature, is found most clearly expressed in 13:9–15. See “Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews,” NTS 35 (1989): 382–406. However, I fail to see plausibility in the suggestion that the author purposely withheld his real intentions.

There seems, in other words, to be a certain kind of mismatch between the exhortation and the exposition. However, the claim that one should let the exhortations “take precedence” over the expositions, or vice versa, seems problematic, for Hebrews is clearly attempting to make a sustained argument. It is striking how many of the exhortations start with words and phrases which suggest logical dependence on the preceding passage: Διὰ τὸ τότε (2:1), Ὄθεν (3:1), Διὸ (3:7), Φοβηθῶμεν οὖν (4:1), Σπουδάσωμεν οὖν (4:11), Ἐχοντες οὖν (4:14), Διό (6:1), Ἐχοντες οὖν (10:19), Διό (12:12, 28). The idea is clearly that the exhortations presuppose the validity of the preceding exposition, and that the exposition is meant to substantiate the exhortations. It would seem that the author imagined that the best possible way of addressing the crises he perceived to be taking place was to give a sustained and thorough exposition on Christ’s death and subsequent exaltation in light of the Scriptures, and to make that exposition the starting point for his exhortations. This suggests that there is an intimate and close relationship between the indicative of the expositions, and the imperative of the exhortations. The expositions are meant to substantiate the exhortations and the exhortations demonstrate the purpose of the exposition.

It seems to me that the best solution, to the problem of how to relate the expositions to the exhortations, is to be found between two extremes. On the one hand, it is possible to read Hebrews on the premise that the author’s intentions are to be found solely in the exhortations, and to see the expositions as standing in an extrinsic relationship to what the author is really trying to communicate. The Scriptural expositions would then be seen as a means of illustrating and exemplifying a more general message about perseverance and endurance. On the other hand, it is also possible to mirror read the expositions, and to claim that there must be full identity between the problems discussed in the expositions and those addressed in the exhortations. The generally formulated warnings against falling away would then have to be taken as warnings against turning towards the old covenant.

However, there is also a way of construing an intrinsic relationship between the expositions and the exhortations, which does not presuppose that there must be an identical problem which is dealt with in the exhortations and expositions, and that would be to assume that the author not only draws on Scripture in order to solve some specific problems facing the audience in their particular situation, but that he also drew on Scripture in order to legitimate their identity as followers of Jesus and heirs to the heritage of Israel. The author wants to demonstrate that there is a plausible way of reading Scripture, which is focused on

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186 Nils A. Dahl notes that to ask whether the “main emphasis” should be placed on the exhortations or the expositions, is a “futile question” (“A New and Living Way: The Approach to God According to Heb 10:19–25,” *Int 5* (1951): 401–12 [401]).


188 Thus Hans-Josef Klauck: “There can be little doubt that the imperatives and the hortatives, though often rather general with regard to their reference, nevertheless attempt to connect the kerygmatic expositions and the practical admonitions” (“Moving in and Moving Out: Ethics and Ethos in Hebrews,” in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* [ed. J. G. van der Watt; BZNW 141; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006], 417–43 [435].

189 This is the basic point made by Lane (*Hebrews, 1:*xcix–c) in his helpful discussion on this subject.
Jesus, which makes sense of the audience’s existence, and which renders it worthwhile to endure suffering and hardship. It does matter that it is precisely Israel’s ancestors which are portrayed as faithfully enduring suffering and hardship, and it matters that it is precisely Israel’s cult which has been fulfilled in and through the Christ event, for the author’s point is not simply to foster faith and endurance, nor simply to solve a concrete social issue, the author is also out to demonstrate that the addressees have been given an identity as part of God’s own people, which they should not give up on.

1.7.3 Bridging the Horizons

I would thus submit that one way of making sense of the relationship between exhortations and expositions in Hebrews, would be to assume that part of the author’s purpose is to demonstrate that the audience belongs to God’s people, and that they are legitimate heirs to the promises and heritage of Israel. This purpose is achieved through the integration of three different horizons: Scripture, the Christ event and the situation of the audience. However, it is also helpful to go one step beyond this general observation, and to enquire about the specific ways in which these three horizons are integrated. What exactly is it that Hebrews does in order to make Scripture and the Christ event relevant to the audience and their situation, and how might this tie in with the question of Israelite identity?

To begin with, Hebrews establishes a sense of narrative continuity with Israel’s past, and explicitly uses this as a foundation for exhortation. We are provided with an example of Israelite infidelity in 3:7–18, followed by an admonition not to make the same mistakes as the forefathers did (4:1–11). By the same token, we are also provided with an entire chapter dedicated to the faithful ancestors of the past (11:1–40), flanked by references to the audience’s present struggle to persevere in faithfulness (10:32–39; 12:1–14). This rhetorical strategy presupposes a certain degree of narrative continuity between the audience and the past of Israel, a presupposition which in turn allows for a shared identity between the faithful ancestors of the past and the audience. Moreover, we also find a portrayal of Israel’s destined future in Hebrews, and ideas about how this future is to be reached. The narrative of Israel has not, according to Hebrews, reached its final fulfillment yet. The author persistently exhorts the audience to position themselves in such a way that they will experience that for which Israel was destined. Since the future of Israel is rooted in its Scriptural past, and the promises found there, this aspect of Hebrews’ message develops the idea that there is a basic narrative continuity between the past, present and future of Israel.

Hebrews not only commemorates the narrative of Israel, it also has something to say about the nature and structure of that narrative. This meta-perspective provides a paradigm for the interpretation of the narrative: Where is it heading? How far has it come? And what is its basic structure and purpose? The entire homily begins with a solemn reflection on two epochs of redemptive history (1:1–2). There was a time when God spoke to the fathers through the prophets, but now, in the final days of Israel’s history, he speaks through one who is son.

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190 Similarly Dunnill, Covenant and Sacrifice, 38–39.
This basic distinction is later developed in terms of “new” versus “old.” Such distinctions provide frameworks for reading Scripture, as well as for understanding the present age. The audience is regularly admonished to listen to God’s word, on the premise that he now speaks in a new and different way (2:1–4; 12:25). The distinctions established in the exposition thus register in the exhortations. Because the shift from old to new, and from the former days to the eschatological age, was brought in and through Jesus, his importance is elevated.  

In addition to the entire temporal discourse there is also an important spatial discourse in the homily. The spatial discourse focuses on notions of sacred space, entrance into a promised land, and the relationship between heavenly and earthly realms. On the face of it, this does not seem to have anything to do with the identity of Israel. However, as we probe deeper into the spatial discourse in Hebrews we will soon come to think otherwise. The space one wants to inhabit and access turns out to be the land promised to Abraham and the sanctuary to which the wilderness tabernacle of Israel pointed. The discourse about how one inhabits such space is centered on institutions and features specific to Israel: the land of Canaan; the Levitical priesthood; the sacrifices; the boundaries of the camp; and the sanctuary. These represent the areas which Israel is called on to inhabit and access, or the means through which Israel is imagined to be capable of doing this. These are therefore issues intrinsically bound to the identity of Israel, which raise the fundamental questions: Where does Israel belong? And how is Israel to reach its destined place?  

1.8 Outline  

It is time to provide an outline of what the thesis will include. In doing this, we need to decide the texts and topics in Hebrews that we will take as our starting point for exploring the questions of research. The best thing would of course have been to examine each and every passage in Hebrews, but space does not permit such an approach. It is therefore necessary to limit the investigation to some key texts and topics. It is difficult, though, to decide which texts and topics to explore, and also quite difficult to provide criteria according to which the decision can be made. A terminological criterion – looking for the terms “people” and “Israel” – is helpful to a certain extent, but seems ultimately to be too narrow. There are other terms which are also of great importance, and the concept of Israelite identity is not limited to one specific term. This suggests that I need some interpretive criteria in addition to the terminological ones. Moreover, I would also like to deal with topics and texts which are central to the main message of Hebrews, which are relevant to the ancient discourse about what it means to be an Israelite, and which have played an important role within scholarly discussions related to the paradox of Hebrews. But I am quite aware of the fact that the application of such interpretive criteria will be preconditioned by my personal judgments and 

192 It should be quite clear that the tension between continuity and newness underlined here is directly relevant to my understanding of the paradox of Hebrews, see 1.5.6.  
preferences. Finally, I have also attempted to choose texts and topics which complement one another, and which together cover different parts of the homily. Based on these criteria, I have attempted to locate some key texts and topics in Hebrews for investigation. There is a certain sense in which a defense of the choices I have made depends on the interpretations they allow. In the following, I can therefore do no more than to indicate why I have chosen the texts and topics I have.

Chapter 2 is entitled “Jesus – the True Israelite,” and takes the presentation of Jesus in the first chapters of the homily as its starting point. My aim is not to give a general account of the Christology found in Hebrews, but to explore how the identity of Jesus is related to the people of God. The identity of Jesus is surely a theme which is of immense importance in Hebrews, and the significance of Jesus is perhaps the key premise in the development of the author’s argument. My thesis is that Jesus is presented in Hebrews as the “true Israelite,” the one who embodies the vocation of Israel, and the one who receives the blessings promised to Israel. Furthermore, it is also my contention that the addressees are called to identify with Jesus as their main role model. What is said of Jesus, and about his identity, therefore has implicit relevance for the identity of the addressees. I will mainly be working with 2:5–3:6.

Chapter 3 is entitled “The New Covenant and the Identity of Israel.” Hebrews is hallmarkened by its frequent use of covenant terminology in general, and the profiled concept of a new covenant in particular. Given the way in which the concept of a covenant seems to be indicative of shared identity, and fundamental to the idea that Israel is identified as God’s chosen people, one could ask whether the concept of a new covenant implies a new understanding of what it means to be Israel. I will explore this question by asking how the new and old covenants relate to each other, and within what sort of redemptive historical scheme they belong. All passages in Hebrews where the term “covenant” is found will be investigated.

Chapter 4 is entitled “Israel Worshipping in the Presence of God,” and it is devoted to questions regarding worship, sacrifice, and sacred space – issues of immense importance in Hebrews. Some of the key questions to be dealt with are the following. What constitutes legitimate worship? And who is in a position to offer it? Does Hebrews de-legitimize typical Jewish conceptions of worship? Are there Jewish parallels to the cult critique found in Hebrews? Does Hebrews’ conception of worship relate to a specific interpretation of redemptive history? What are the continuities and discontinuities with the past? The aim will be to explore whether Hebrews has articulated a conception of worship which implies a new notion of what it means to belong to Israel. Our main text for exploring these issues will be 10:19–25.

Chapter 5 is entitled “Commemorating the Narrative of Israel,” and focuses on the way in which Hebrews retells the narrative of Israel, presents its main characters, defines the major plot of the narrative, includes the audience as part of it, and incorporates the Christ event at its climax. The way one conceives of one’s own prehistory, the way one pictures one’s ancestors, influences one’s perception of one’s own identity. The story about Israel and its main characters is given new shape in Hebrews, and retold in light of the Christ event. This also entails a reshaping of Israeliite identity, new perspectives about what it means to regard the story of Israel as one’s history, and fresh ideas about what it means to carry the identity of
Israel forward. The story of the wilderness generation (3:7–4:11), the chapter on the faithful ancestors (11:1–40), and as the portrayal of Abraham, will be the center of attention.

The sixth and final chapter is entitled “Israel outside its Own Camp,” and is devoted to the exhortation found in 13:7–17. The sanctifying death of Jesus challenges the addressees, as God’s people, to move outside the boundaries of its own camp and to embrace the status as outsider. Our task will be to explore how the identity of those who are called to leave the camp is shaped if they take on the challenge issued by Hebrews. Hebrews 13:7–17 brings together many of the central themes in the homily, and issues a provocative and surprising exhortation. It is a disputed passage, with which one has to come to terms in order to grasp the message and purpose of Hebrews.
2. Jesus – The True Israelite

2.1 The Relationship between the Identity of Jesus and that of his Followers

The first chapters of Hebrews are hallmarked by their emphatic focus on the identity of Jesus. The author expounds on who Jesus is, on what he has accomplished, on his relationship to God, on his present exalted position, and the suffering which preceded it. As part of this larger portrayal of Jesus, a distinct motif emerges, that of the relationship between Jesus and those who follow him. It is to this relationship the present chapter is dedicated. The main thesis, which I want to develop and explore in this chapter, is that there is an intimate and close relationship between how Jesus is identified and the way his followers are expected to identify. It is my contention that this relationship is best understood if it is recognized that both Jesus and his followers belong to the same group: the people of God.

An important aim with of chapter is to argue that the presentation of Jesus, given in the first chapters of Hebrews, is illuminated if it is recognized that Jesus is presented as fulfilling a story which has to do with God’s dealings with his people. In this way I hope to demonstrate that the category “people of God” already assumes central importance in the first chapters of Hebrews, and that the story of God’s dealings with his people provides the implied narrative context for the presentation of Jesus. I will argue that this also has implications for the identity of the addressees. They are identified as part of this larger story, and their destiny is understood in terms of fulfilling it. Because this story goes back all the way to Abraham and Moses, an important line of continuity is created between the time before and after the Christ event. This continuity is explicated through the fact that Jesus and his followers are presented as being part of the very same “house” (3:6) that Moses was part of. There is no hint that an old people has been dissolved, or that a new and different people has entered the stage.

By presenting Jesus as the true son of Israel, the one who brings God’s dealings with his people toward completion, Hebrews also shapes the notion of what it means to belong to Israel. Precisely the fact that Hebrews has a positive theology about Israel, and the fact that Hebrews integrates its Christology into a story about God’s dealings with his people, implies that the notion of what it means to identify as an Israelite has been rearticulated in light of the Christ event. As I will attempt to show towards the end of the chapter, this seems to point towards a notion of Israelite identity which has an irreducible Christological element to it, and which therefore has an implicit exclusivity to it as well.

2.2 The Exaltation of Jesus and the Subjection of the World to Come

In order to grasp the relationship between Jesus and his followers, I believe that it is helpful to start by exploring Jesus’ exaltation, and the context within which this event is set in Hebrews.

195 On the notion of implicit narratives in Hebrews, see Kenneth Schenck, Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Setting of the Sacrifice (SNTSMS 143; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51–54.
In doing this, the puzzling statement found in 2:5 provides a useful starting point: “For it was not to angels that he [God] subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.” This statement points towards the Scriptural quote from Psalm 8 which follows in 2:6–8, but it also claims to be summing up that which the author has been speaking about so far. 2:5 is therefore a key statement for unlocking the author’s train of thought.

The homily as such starts with a solemn presentation of Jesus (1:1–4). Among the many things said about him is that he, by virtue of being the Son of God, has been made heir of all things, and that οἱ ἀἰῶνες were created through him (1:2). The term αἰὼν could either be taken spatially or temporal, meaning either “world” or “age.” The focus on God’s creation suggests that the spatial sense is to be preferred. Although it is possible to translate the plural as referring to the “world” in singular, I will try to demonstrate below that it actually makes good sense to see the plural as being intentionally employed, for the purpose of suggesting that God’s creation included more than “just” this present world. Hebrews 1:2 should then be taken to mean that the “worlds” were created through Jesus. By implication, Jesus’ role in creation thus points to his eschatological lordship. Jesus has been installed as the heir of all things (πάντες, 1:2), by virtue of being the one through whom the worlds were created in the first place, and because he is the one who bears “all things” with his mighty word (1:3). He inherits that which was made through him, and that which he inherits seems to include more than just this present world. As will be made clear in 2:5, Jesus’ inheritance also includes the world to come. The universal inheritance given to Jesus could plausibly be understood as developing a messianic theme in Scripture. It is widely recognized that 1:2 should be viewed as an allusion to Psalm 2:8: “Ask it of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, and, as your possession, the ends of the earth.” This Psalm plays an important role later in Hebrews (cf. 1:5, 5:5). However, if it is alluded to in 1:2, the perspective seems to have been broadened. It is not only the “ends of the earth” which will be given Jesus to inherit, but “all things,” including the world to come.

Jesus’ role as heir of all things clearly relates to his unique identity. In 1:4 it is said of Jesus that he is “as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (1:4). The implication seems to be that Jesus’ position as heir of all things is predicated on the name he has inherited. Some have tried to argue that the name given to Jesus must correspond to a specific title given to him, whereas others have argued that the

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196 The very term ἡ ὀχθομοῦνη μῦλλοσα is unusual, but it clearly points to the idea that there are two main stages in world history, the present age and the age to come (cf. Matt 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:21; Heb 6:5). Similar expressions are also found in rabbinic sources. The novelty in 2:5 is the term ὀχθομοῦνη, which is normally used to describe inhabitable space. See Martin Karrer, Der Brief an die Hebräer (2 vols; ÖTK 20/1–2; Gütersloher, 2002–2005), 1:165–66.

197 Compare also 11:3, where οἱ ἀἰῶνες are said to have been created through the word of God.


199 Hans-Friedrich Weiß, however, seems to opt for a temporal understanding (Der Brief an die Hebräer [KEK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991], 143–44).

200 Thus Lane, Hebrews, 1:5.


202 On the Scriptural background to 1:2, see Lane, Hebrews, 1:12.

203 Koester (Hebrews, 182) suggests that the name must be “son,” whereas Richard Bauckham argues that it must be the Hebrew Tetragrammaton (“The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology [ed. R. Bauckham et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009], 15–36 [21–22]).
“name” of Jesus refers more generally to the “personal position of Christ and his relational capacities.” In either case, the unique identity of Jesus is clearly evoked, and juxtaposed with that of the angels. There is an intriguing link, therefore, between 1:4, where the name given to the angels is said to be that from which the name of Jesus differs, and 2:5, where the angels are cast as those to whom the world to come has not been subjected. This would suggest the following train of thought: Jesus has inherited a name greater than the angels, by virtue of this name he has also been installed as the heir of all things, and this explains why the world to come has not been subjected to the angels: because Jesus is the one through whom the worlds were created (1:2), the world to come has also been made subject to him.

The idea that Jesus, by virtue of his unique identity, has been given something to inherit also finds expression in 1:6: “And again, when he leads the first-born into the world [οἰκουμένη], he says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship him.’” The very title πρωτότοκος develops the description of Jesus as God’s Son, and underlines further the fact that Jesus is God’s heir. The instance God commanded the angels to worship Jesus, and at what point in redemptive history he thus led Jesus into the world, is disputed. Does 1:6 refer to the incarnation, exaltation or parousia of Jesus? The answer you give to this question will be affected by what you understand by the term οἰκουμένη, and vice versa. If you assume that the angels were commanded to worship Jesus upon his incarnation or parousia, you will also tend to understand οἰκουμένη to refer to the inhabitable parts of earth. If you think, conversely, that the angels were commanded to worship Jesus upon his exaltation, it would be more natural to take οἰκουμένη to refer to the heavenly regions into which Jesus was exalted after he had finished his redemptive work on earth.

Several factors suggest that 1:6 is best understood if taken to refer to Jesus’ exaltation. Hebrews generally shows a keen interest in Jesus’ entrance before God in heaven (cf. 4:14–16; 9:11–14). The immediate context of 1:6 which speaks of Jesus being seated at the right hand of God (1:3; 1:13), and of Jesus being given an eternal throne (1:8), squares with the motif of Jesus’ exaltation to heaven. Finally, the fact that οἰκουμένη is used in both 1:6 and 2:5, and the fact that the author claims in 2:5 that he has already spoken about the world to

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204 Albert Vanhoye, A Different Priest: The Epistle to the Hebrews (trans. Leo Arnold SJ.; Series Rhetorica Semitica; Miami, Fla.: Convivium Press, 2011), 25.
205 On the term διάφορος, which could mean both superior to and different from, see “διάφορος,” BDAG:239–40.
206 There is disagreement about whether πάλιν in 1:6 qualifies the verb εἰσάγω or λέγω. I prefer the translation adopted above, because this is a regular way of introducing Scriptural quotes in Hebrews (cf. 1:5; 2:13; 4:5; 10:30). See discussion in David M. Moffitt, Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews (NovTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 57. However, even if πάλιν is taken together with εἰσάγω, as some would argue that it should be, it does not follow that 1:6 speaks of the second coming of Jesus, for it is quite possible to imagine that Jesus is described as being led back again into the realm from which he came: i.e. heaven. Thus Erich Gräßer, Hebräer 1–6 (EKK XVII; Vol. 1 of An die Hebräer; Zürich: Benziger, 1990, 1993, 1997), 1:78.
207 Lane, Hebrews, 1:27.
208 Attridge argues that it refers to the incarnation (Hebrews, 56), Otto Michel argues that it refers to his parousia (Der Brief an die Hebräer [6th ed.; KEK XIII; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966], 113), and Moffitt provides a helpful review of the different proposals, arguing that 1:6 refers to Jesus’ exaltation (Atonement, 53–68).
come, suggests that 1:6 and 2:5 refer to the same realm.\textsuperscript{210} In other words, the world into which Jesus is said to have been led in 1:6 is qualified as being the world to come in 2:5.\textsuperscript{211} Although the world to come by nature would be something to be fully manifested in the future, the implication in Hebrews seems to be that Jesus, through his exaltation, has already entered it. In 1:6 focus is not on some future manifestation of the world to come, but on the fact that Jesus is already worshiped there. It seems that the author wants us to picture an enthronement scene in 1:6, where God leads Jesus forth and presents him to the hosts of angels as the rightful heir of the world to come; whereupon the angels, in turn, are commanded to worship Jesus.\textsuperscript{212} Once again this seems to point to 2:5. The fact that Jesus is worshiped by the angels is explained by the fact that it is to him, the first-born, that the world to come has been subjected, and not to them.\textsuperscript{213} Jesus’ exaltation established him as the heir of the world to come.

Hans-Friedrich Weiß argues that the combination of πρωτότοκος – εἰσάγειν – οἴκουμένη together functions to create a powerful motif, the roots of which are found in the Septuagint.\textsuperscript{214} The term πρωτότοκος is Messianic and indicates universal reign (Ps 88:28 LXX). However, when related to the verb εἰσάγειν and with reference to the οἴκουμένη, the term “first-born” could also be used of Israel, and her entrance into the Promised Land.\textsuperscript{215} If Weiß is correct in detecting this motif, and if Hebrews draws on it, this would suggest that Jesus is presented both as the Messianic king who receives universal lordship, and as the true Israelite who experiences that which God promised to do for his people. I hope to demonstrate in the following that this in fact is a very plausible way of understanding how Jesus’ exaltation is interpreted in Hebrews.\textsuperscript{216}

2.3 Crowning the Son of Man with Glory and Honor

In light of all that has been argued above, it makes good sense to say, as the author does in 2:5, that he is speaking about the subjection of the world to come. However, 2:5 also points to the discussion which follows it. The term “subjection,” found in 2:5, points directly to the quote from Psalm 8 (Heb 2:6–8), which praises the exalted position of the son of man, and claims that God has crowned him with glory and honor, “subjecting” all things under his feet. Many scholars read the psalm as being exclusively about Jesus, and take the expression “son of man” in 2:6 as an implicit Christological reference.\textsuperscript{217} In that case one would also

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Thus Vanhoye, \textit{A Different Priest}, 81. Contra Attridge, \textit{Hebrews}, 56.
\item \textsuperscript{211} An eschatological understanding of the term οἴκουμένη could possibly be inspired by Scripture. On the eschatological use of the term οἴκουμένη in Scripture, see Moffitt, \textit{Atonement}, 53–58. The most important texts are found in the Psalms (Ps 92(93):1; 95(96):10). For the case that Heb 12:28 alludes to Psalm 95(96):10, and a more thorough discussion of this topic, see 4.7.3.
\item \textsuperscript{212} On the enthronement motif, see Michel, \textit{Hebräer}, 116–17.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Thus Lane, \textit{Hebrews}, 1:27.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 163–64.
\item \textsuperscript{215} For the term εἰσάγειν used about the entrance into Canaan, see Exod 3:8; Deut 6:10; 11:29; 30:5 and 31:20–21. For the term πρωτότοκος used of Israel, see Exod 4:22, Jer 38:9, and 4 Esr 6:58.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Moffitt (\textit{Atonement}, 65–68) also argues for an exodus typology underlying the motif of Jesus’ entrance into the world to come.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Thus, for instance, Laub, \textit{Bekenntnis}, 61–66.
\end{itemize}
understand Jesus to be the “him” spoken of in 2:8, where the author presents the “problem” which is at stake: “Yet at present we do not see ‘all things subject to him.’” The problem the author is trying to solve, according to this reading, is the fact that Jesus does not seem to occupy the exalted position which has been attributed to him in 1:1–13. To solve this problem, the author is imagined to have worked out an “already-not yet” scheme, according to which the subjection of all things to Jesus is something which is already a reality but not yet manifested. This interpretation could gain support from 10:13, where it is said of Jesus that he now “waits until his enemies are made his footstool.” In other words, there is still a final and definitive manifestation of the victory of Jesus over his enemies which has not yet taken place. Nevertheless, so the argument goes, those who have come to believe that Christ really is exalted, already “see” Jesus crowned with glory and honor (2:9), anticipating the day when this will be made manifest to the world.

The author is imagined, in other words, to have claimed in 2:8–9 that we do not yet see all things subject to Jesus, but that we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. This would imply that Jesus’ crowning with glory and honor could somehow be separated from the subjection of all things under his feet, but in the psalm quote, these are clearly two ways of expressing the same thing; to be crowned with glory and honor is to have all things subjected to you. This speaks against the exclusive Christological interpretation. But more problematic still, the exclusive Christological interpretation threatens to empty the author’s argument of its force. It would hardly have been consoling to someone who doubted Jesus’ exalted position to hear that “we already see him crowned with glory and honor.” If the addressees doubted the reality of the exaltation of Christ they could simply have replied that Jesus crowned with glory and honor is precisely that which they are unable to see. The exalted position of Jesus is unlikely to be that which is disputed, given the fact that it is premise of the argument.

The argument is better understood, therefore, if it is assumed that “man” and “son of man,” are taken as expressions meant to refer to humans, including Jesus, but not referring exclusively to him. The problem the author is trying to deal with, in this interpretation, is the fact that humans have not risen to take on the position for which they were made. Hebrews 2:8 would then be taken to mean that we do not yet see all things subject to humans, as the psalm claims to be the case. One could certainly imagine this to be a relevant issue for a community of people suffering some kind of oppression and hardship, however, so the argument would go, even though humanity seems to have failed to live up to their God-

220 Harold W. Attridge: “In any case, the ‘him’ to whom all things have not been subjected will soon be identified as Jesus” (“The Psalms in Hebrews,” in *The Psalms in the New Testament* [ed. S. Moyise and M. J. J. Menken; London: T&T Clark, 2004], 197–211 [204]). I fail to see, though, where exactly this “identification” is assumed to have taken place.
221 This is a minority position in present day scholarship. However, see Schenck, *Cosmology*, 54–60; Craig Blomberg, “‘But we see Jesus’: The Relationship between the Son of Man in Hebrews 2:6 and 2:9 and the Implications for English Translations,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts* (ed. R. Bauckham; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 88–99.
223 And, one might be tempted to add, a community who were still, in contrast to many moderns, comfortable with the idea of man’s derivate lordship in creation, and the eschatological ideas to which this conviction gave birth. Notice how Paul, for instance, speaks of humans reigning with Christ (Rom 5:17).
given vocation – or alternatively, even though God seems to have failed to do for humanity that which he had promised to do – we do see one human being, namely Jesus Christ, crowned with the glory and honor of which the psalm speaks. In other words, in Jesus we do see that which we are unable to see in humanity in general, and this would suggest that God has not abandoned his plans for humanity after all.224

Working out the precise nature of how the suffering, exaltation and second coming of Jesus relate to each other within one consistent Christology, is therefore not the problem the author is trying to deal with. Jesus’ exalted position in the present is not contested, but taken for granted, and used as the starting point for solving a different problem, which concerns the apparent failure of God’s intentions, promises and plans for humankind.225 If we assume that the issue at stake is whether and how God will be able to fulfill his promises, this would explain why the author is at pains to emphasize that God was at work, and in control, as the story of Jesus’ life unfolded.226 It was by God’s grace that Jesus tasted death on behalf of everyone (2:9),227 and it is underscored that it was “fitting” for God to lead many children to glory through “the leader to their salvation” (2:10). Hebrews maintains that God is the author of redemptive history, that his plans have not failed, and that they are accomplished in and through Jesus Christ, the human being par excellence.228

2.4 The Leader to Salvation – Jesus Understood as a Prototype

Jesus is not only the representative of humanity, however, but also their leader: “For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering” (2:10). The phrase which translates as “leader to salvation” is τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας. The term ἀρχηγός has a rich variety of nuances and connotations,230 and the suggested translations include: captain, author, pioneer, leader and champion.231 It seems to me that the contexts in which it occurs in Hebrews (2:10; 12:2) clearly suggest that the term ἀρχηγός – whether or not it also points to

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224 Although along slightly different lines, Moffitt (Atonement, 120–29) also argues against an exclusive Christological interpretation of Hebrews’ use of Psalm 8.

225 Koester (Hebrews, 84–85; 213–23) holds that 2:5–9 is the “proposition” in Hebrews and helpfully suggests that it presents the basic problem which is to be dealt with in the homily.


228 The genitive construction δὸ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς σωτηρίας could translate in different ways, but in light of the general focus in the passage on movement, I find it plausible that Jesus is designated as the leader to salvation.

229 This idea seems to square with other key motifs in the New Testament such as “following Jesus” (the gospels), and Christlikeness (Paul).

230 For discussion and references to ancient literature, see Attridge, Hebrews, 87–88, and Lane, Hebrews, 1:56–57. For a study dedicated to this topic alone, see Paul-Gerhard Müller, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΡΧΗΓΟΣ: Der religionsgeschichtliche und theologische Hintergrund einer neutestamentlichen Christusprädikation (Bern: Lang, 1973).

ideas of authorship and Jesus as a heroic champion – at the very least point to the function of Jesus as leader. This translation is therefore to be preferred.232

It is significant to note that Jesus’ leadership function is related to a race which must be finished (12:1–3): “let us . . . persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader (ἄρχηγός) and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”233 In this passage Jesus is explicitly invoked as a model who should be emulated, and the endurance and perseverance which Jesus showed as he finished his race, is exemplary for how the addressees are to finish their race.234 The image of Jesus as the leader therefore implies the idea of Jesus having “followers” who are called to emulate him.235

In this instance I find it helpful to draw attention to the theory of self-categorization and social identity. This theory develops the assumption that social identities emerge as a result of the fundamental human cognitive capacity to categorize our environment into in-groups and out-groups.236 However, so the theory claims, this process of categorization not only includes the construction of the categories “in-group” and “out-group;” it should also be understood in terms of how people self-categorize. A person could self-categorize on a number of different levels of abstraction, one of which would be to understand the “self” in terms of group membership.237 When a person self-categorizes with reference to a group, they identify with the group’s proto-typicality. This proto-typicality is a function both of what is held to be shared characteristics of those in the in-group, and what is taken to be most typical or distinct about the in-group when compared to out-groups.238 When members of a group identify with the prototype, they implicitly also downplay their own personal agendas, and identify with reference to the group.239

The prototype of a group is therefore somewhat stereotyped and exaggerated. Moreover, the prototype also functions as a norm, which demonstrates what should be characteristic of group members.240 This implies that the prototype provides a point of reference, which could be used to identify deviant norms, values and behavior, assumed to be typical of the outsider, or for the purpose of enhancing in-group values, norms and behavior. If the prototype is

232 Here I am in basic agreement with Käsemann, Wandering, 133.
233 For a treatment of this passage, see 5.4.1.
236 Cf. 1.6.1.
238 I will use the notion of “typical” in a normative rather than in a descriptive way here. The Jesus we meet in Hebrews is clearly unique in some respects, as compared to other in-group members. However, I would still argue that he is typical of the ideal in-group member.
personalized, there is a “prototypical group member.” To “draw a portrayal” of the typical group member, embodying in-group values and enacting in-group norms, is a more efficient rhetorical move than simply recommending some norms and values as abstract in-group identity descriptors. If the members of a group are attracted to a prototypical group member, they are also implicitly attracted to the group which they embody. To identify with the prototypical group member, would thus implicitly be to identify with the group in which they are taken to be prototypical.

2.5 The Paradigmatic Suffering and Exaltation of Jesus

It seems to me that the idea of Jesus functioning as a prototype – an ideal in-group member – is quite helpful when it comes to understanding the rhetorical function of the portrayal of Jesus as a leader in Hebrews. The fact that Jesus is the leader is taken to imply that all his followers are somehow identified as taking part of a race or journey, which is understood to be situated within a specific narrative, with its own logic. The journey has already been finished by Jesus, who has thereby also brought the narrative to its climax. He is pictured as the first-born Son of God, who has already reached the world to come (1:6) by virtue of his exaltation. He is presented as the one who was “made perfect” through suffering (2:10). Later in the homily, Jesus is also designated as forerunner (πρόδρομος, 6:20), the one who has reached the sacred space behind the veil, thus also opening the way for his followers. Jesus is the one who has obtained the joy which awaits those who finish the race (12:2).

Jesus’ exemplary role is thus embedded in a narrative about a journey, and it is focused on the fact that Jesus has reached the destiny for which all his followers are heading. The rhetorical efficacy of portraying Jesus in this way hinges on the idea that Jesus’ journey toward glory is paradigmatic for the kind of journey his followers are called to undertake. This explains why the author so emphatically emphasizes that the exaltation of Jesus did not come about because Jesus escaped human hardship and suffering. On the contrary, Jesus is said to have obtained to glory and honor by virtue of his suffering and death (2:9). The life of Jesus is thus understood to consist of two stages: (i) temporal abasement, suffering and death, followed by (ii) glory, honor and perfection. This means that the author subtly changes the focus of the psalm from the present state of affairs in creation, to the eschatological future. The psalm then becomes, as it were, a prophecy. It bespeaks the goal towards which the story of humans is heading, and the life, death and exaltation of Jesus provides the paradigm according to which God’s plans for humanity can be comprehended.

241 Turner et al., Rediscovering the Social Group, 80.
242 Thus, it is noteworthy that the concept has been employed in order to understand processes of conformity and polarization. See Turner et al., Rediscovering the Social Group, 42–88 (46–47, 79–80).
244 For a detailed treatment of this passage, and the entire idea that Jesus opens up sacred space by virtue of his leadership, see 4.2.1.
245 For a very helpful discussion of how Jesus’ faithfulness is presented as exemplary in Hebrews, see Christopher A. Richardson, Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith: Jesus’ Faith as the Climax of Israel’s History in the Epistle to the Hebrews (WUNT 2/286; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 15–107.
246 Lane (Hebrews, 1:47) thus writes that “the author found in the quotation a prophecy that will eventually be fulfilled.”
By capitalizing on the suffering of Jesus, the author is able to offer an “explanation” as to why the addressees experience shame, hardship and lack of perfection. The fact that the exalted status about which the psalm speaks is presently not experienced by the addressees, does not mean that God has failed to keep his promises, for if one looks at what happened to Jesus one will also be able to comprehend that God’s plans might include suffering and denigration, at least for “a little while.” If one experiences suffering, this does therefore not mean that God has abandoned his plans for humanity, for when one looks at Jesus, one will understand the precise way in which God intends to accomplish them. As Jesus’ followers struggle to finish the race, they are therefore to take Jesus as their role model and leader.

They are thus at several instances encouraged to emulate the attitude of Jesus. For instance, it is emphasized in different ways that Jesus was exposed to suffering, shame and denigration, and that his perfection followed upon his death. When faced with such circumstances, Jesus is presented as exemplifying obedience, endurance and perseverance. It is said that Jesus learned obedience through suffering (5:8), and directly following the description of Jesus as obedient, we find a statement claiming that Jesus is the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him (5:9). Quite clearly, therefore, Jesus’ obedience is presented as paradigmatic, and as something which should be emulated. The portrayal of Jesus in 12:2 is likewise designed to encourage endurance and perseverance among the addressees. In 12:3 the addressees are explicitly called to contemplate on Jesus’ endurance, and in 12:7–9 they are asked to endure discipline for the purpose of obtaining life. Although no explicit exhortation of this sort is given in Hebrews 2, the implicit exhortation seems nevertheless to be as follows: do not give up on the journey on which you started out. Look at Jesus, who is now crowned with glory and honor, and you will see what potentially awaits you after “a little while.” God is still in charge, and he has a plan for all those who follow Jesus. That plan has been paradigmatically displayed in the life of Jesus himself, the leader to salvation.

However, it is not only the suffering of Jesus which is paradigmatic, but also his exaltation. Jesus has been crowned with glory (2:9), and he now leads the way εἰς δόξαν (2:10). The promise of the psalm, which speaks of the son of man crowned with glory and honor, is therefore not reserved for Jesus alone. To be crowned with glory and honor is nothing less than to have “all things” subjected under your feet (2:8). This is precisely the position presently occupied by Jesus, the heir of “all things” (1:2). The followers of Jesus are thus pictured as heading toward the place where Jesus now is. The fact that God led Jesus into the world to come as the first-born heir of all things (εἰςαγάγῃς, 1:6) anticipates God’s act in leading many children to glory (ἀγαγόντα, 2:10). Jesus is pictured as first-born heir of the

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247 I would thus side with the majority of commentators and take βραχύ τι (2:7, 9) in a temporal rather than spatial sense, meaning “for a little while.” See Attridge, Hebrews, 76.

248 It seems to me that Laub has overlooked the extent to which the exaltation of Jesus is presented for the purpose of making a point about the many who will inherit salvation (1:14), and who follow Jesus on the path to glory (2:10), when he asserts: “Es würde daher einen unmotivierten Gedankenbruch bedeuten, wenn in 2,5 ff. der Engelvergleich nun plötzlich einer Aussage über den Menschen allgemein dienen sollte, um auf diesem Umweg wieder zu einem neuen christologischen Ansatz zu kommen” (Bekenntnis, 63, emphasis added). In contrast to this statement I would maintain that the change of focus is by no means “sudden” and certainly not “unmotivated.” The “Umweg” taken by the author is precisely what makes the argument relevant for the addressees.

world to come (1:6), but Hebrews also recognizes that many will *inherit* salvation (1:14). Those who inherit salvation must therefore be identical with those whom God leads to glory through Jesus, the leader to salvation, and this salvation would appear to consist of glorification in the world to come, the space which will be given to both Jesus and his followers as an inheritance. The case for thinking that the followers of Jesus will share in his inheritance is further strengthened when we observe how they are identified in Hebrews 2:10–18.

### 2.6 Identifying the Followers of Jesus

The question of how the followers of Jesus, and thus implicitly also the addressees, are identified, not only sheds light on the way in which Jesus is imagined to function as their prototype, the way they are identified also sheds light on the question of what sort of journey Hebrews is speaking of, and what kind of *story* that journey is situated within. The way the quote from Psalm 8 is used in Hebrews, emphasizes that those who follow Jesus are human beings. It is also worth noting, however, that 2:10–18 persistently use kinship language to designate Jesus’ followers. They are called sons (οἱοί, 2:10), siblings of Jesus (ἀδελφοί, 2:12, 17) and children (παιδία, 2:13). Although it is not said explicitly, we must surely imagine that they, by virtue of being the siblings of Jesus, who is the Son of God, are also reckoned as *God’s* children. The kinship relationship between Jesus and his siblings clearly implies solidarity and association. Jesus shares fully in their condition (2:14), and is therefore able to show mercy and provide help (2:17–18). Later in the homily, this solidarity is expressed in terms of the compassion Jesus has for all those in weakness (cf. συμπαθῆσαι, 4:15).

However, I think there is more to the sibling relationship between Jesus and his followers, than just solidarity and association. I find it quite plausible that being the sibling of Jesus also implies being his co-heir, sharing in that which was given Jesus to inherit, thus being among those who “are to inherit salvation” (1:14).

Recognizing this inheritance motif also prepares us for the kinship designation found in 2:16, where it is said of Jesus that he “did not lay hold of (ἐπιλαμβάνεται) angels but rather the descendants (σπέρματος) of Abraham.” We would perhaps have expected the author to write something like: “Surely, it is not the angels Jesus takes hold of, but the sons of men.” To some it would perhaps therefore appear that Abraham shows up in the argument abruptly. On closer examination, however, there is no reason to assume that 2:16 should be read as a strange aside to the general topic discussed. Because Abraham and his family are cast in

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250 Gräßer (*Hebräer*, 1:113) draws attention to how the phrase “those who are to [cf. μέλλοντας] inherit salvation” in 1:14 points to the term “world to come [cf. τὴν μέλλουσαν]” in 2:5.

251 Mackie (*Eschatology and Exhortation*, 220–23) aptly calls this “language of belonging and identification.”

252 I do not think that females are excluded from this designation, and prefer a gender-inclusive translation.

253 Contra Käsemann (*Wandering*, 149), who holds that they are the children of Jesus.


255 *My translation.*

256 Weiβ (*Hebräer*, 221) argues for an allusion to Isaiah 41:8–9 (LXX).
Scripture as those who have been promised an *inheritance* (cf. Gen 15:7–8), it should come as no surprise to anyone acquainted with Scripture to learn that “those who are to inherit salvation” (1:14) are cast as the descendants of Abraham.\footnote{For a discussion of 9:15 and the “eternal inheritance,” see 3.5.} This perspective is given further emphasis by the fact that Hebrews seems to read Psalm 8 as a prophecy, as something God *promises* to do for the sons of men. Further, it is instructive to notice that 2:16 echoes 2:5:

2:5: Οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις ὑπέταξεν τὴν οἰκουένην τὴν μέλλουσαν

2:16: Οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται

This striking parallel would suggest that when Jesus takes hold of the descendants of Abraham and not the angels, it is for the purposes of leading them towards the world to come which will be made subject to them. The term used for Jesus’ action vis-à-vis the descendants of Abraham, ἐπιλαμβάνομαι, squares with the idea that salvation is interpreted as being *led* into a given realm.\footnote{There is no reason to assume that the term denotes violence, and that the subject must be the devil. Contra Sebastian Fuhrmann, “The Son, the Angels and the Odd: Psalm 8 in Hebrews 1 and 2,” in *Psalms and Hebrews: Studies in Reception* (ed. D. J. Human and G. J. Steyn; New York, N.Y.: T&T Clark, 2010), 83–98 (93).} Notice, for instance, how God is depicted later in the homily as taking hold of (cf. ἐπιλαμβομένου) the Israelites in order to lead (cf. ἔξαγαγαν) them out of Egypt (8:9).\footnote{Hebrews is here quoting from Jeremiah 38:32 (LXX).} The story of Abraham in Hebrews is also focused on a journey towards a promised land (11:8). The intriguing thing is that Abraham is pictured in Hebrews as never reaching this land, as dying without having received what was promised him, only able to greet the promises from afar (11:13–16). This would suggest that when Jesus is pictured as the leader to salvation in Hebrews, the one who takes hold of the descendants of Abraham, he is also described as the means through which God fulfills his promises to Abraham.\footnote{Thus Hughes, *Hebrews*, 118–19.} The implication of this would be that the world to come is understood in Hebrews to be “the land” promised Abraham.\footnote{On creative re-interpretations of what “the land” is, see Liv Ingeborg Lied, *The Other Lands of Israel: Imaginations of the Land in 2 Baruch* (JSJSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2008). For a more general and very helpful survey of Jewish traditions (Qumran, 4 Ezra, 2 Bar, L.A.B.), where the world to come is imagined as the true referent of the promises given to Abraham, see Moffitt, *Atonement*, 81–119.} As we read further, it turns out that the land which Abraham longed for is indeed understood in Hebrews as a *heavenly* fatherland, transcending all normal earthly space (11:13–16).

By being the first to reach the realm promised Abraham, Jesus is also presented as the climax of a story which was never fulfilled in Scripture.\footnote{Note also how the term ἄρχηγος is used of Joshua and the other scouts in Numbers 13:2–3 (LXX), a fact which further substantiates the exodus typology argued for here. For discussion of this observation, see Moffitt, *Atonement*, 129–30.} Abraham is said never to have reached the land, but the problem was not solved through Joshua’s conquest either: “Now if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterwards of another day” (4:8). The implication is clearly that Joshua, even though he did lead the people into Canaan, did not
give rest to God’s people. Finally, even the great chapter about the faith of the ancients in Scripture ends on a note of incompleteness, and with a description of God’s people still waiting to find their true home: “The world was not worthy of them. They wandered about in deserts and on mountains, in caves and in crevices in the earth. Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised” (11:38–39). In other words, given the way the author of Hebrews conceives of the Scriptural narrative, it seems that there is still room for someone to “finish the story,” someone who could reach that which Abraham only greeted from afar. This seems to be precisely the role given to Jesus. Jesus is presented as the true descendant of Abraham, and thus also as the true son of Israel. To be among the descendants of Abraham (2:16), is also to be among the siblings of Jesus (2:17), which in turn implies membership of the people of God (2:17). To be sure, Jesus is presented in Hebrews as much more than “simply” a true Israelite, but certainly not as less.

If it is granted that the story about how God would fulfill his promise to Abraham and his family is part of the implicit narrative of 2:5–18, it seems that we are also right to detect a subtle exodus typology at work, according to which Jesus is pictured as the heroic leader, who liberates death’s captives (2:15) and leads them towards their inheritance. Depicting God’s redemptive actions in terms of being led into a given realm (cf. 1:6; 2:10), is a typical way of depicting the Exodus and the subsequent entrance to the land (Exod 3:8; Num 14:3; Deut 6:10; Jer 2:7). If we assume an exodus typology, this would also explain why immediately after our passage Jesus is compared with Moses (3:1–6), whereupon the story about the failure of the wilderness generation to enter Canaan is retold (3:7–18). The question of how Abraham’s descendants, God’s people, would reach the land promised them as an inheritance, seems in other words to be a major part of the narrative context within which Jesus is presented, and within which his exaltation is understood.

These assumptions shed light on an intriguing statement in 2:11, where we are told that Jesus and his siblings are ἔξ ἑνός. This common origin surely includes being children of the one God through whom and for whom all things are (2:10), as well as sharing in the same

263 What is meant by the terms “rest” and “Sabbath” is highly disputed. Gerhard von Rad argues that “rest” in Deuteronomy means safe and prosperous existence in Canaan (“There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God: An Investigation of a Biblical Conception,” in The Problem of the Hexateuch: And Other Essays [trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; New York, N.Y.: Oliver & Boyd, 1966], 94–102). It seems conceivable that Hebrews could have taken this idea as its starting point, and developed a notion of “rest” which utterly transcends existence in the land of Canaan, although at the same time drawing conceptually on Scriptural “land-theology.” This is the view of Weiß, Hebräer, 269. For an attempt to situate Hebrews’ development of “land theology” and its notion of “rest” within the matrix of Jewish apocalyptic thought, see Otfrid Hofius, Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief (WUNT 11; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1970), 53–54. For a more recent defense of an apocalyptic reading of “rest,” see David A. deSilva, “Entering God’s Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews,” TrinJ 21 (2000): 25–43. For a contrasting view, where “rest” is taken to refer to a mode of existence, and to have lost all relationship with a “place,” see Harold W. Attridge, “Let us Strive to Enter that Rest’: The Logic of Hebrews 4:1–11,” HTR 73 (1980): 279–89. For a discussion of several of the different positions, and how they relate to the eschatology and cosmology in Hebrews, see Herold Weiss, “Sabbatismo in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” CBQ 58 (1996): 674–89.

264 This perspective is significantly developed in chapter 5.

265 This is not to suggest, however, that the “mythic” background of 2:10–18 is exhausted if we propose an exodus typology at work. On the possible “mythic background” of 2:10–18, see Harold W. Attridge, “Liberating Death’s Captives: Reconsideration of an Early Christian Myth,” in Gnosticism & the Early Christian World (ed. J. E. Goehringer and J. M. Robinson; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1990), 103–15.
human nature. However, it also seems to include more. It is worth noting that 11:12 states that a great family emerged from one man (ἀφῄνος), Abraham. Although a distant parallel, this would suggest that the common origin of Jesus and his siblings, their family relationship, should not only be envisaged on a general human level, but also more specifically within the context of God’s dealings with the family of Abraham.

2.7 The People of God or Humanity in General?

There seems to be some tension in 2:5–18, between the followers of Jesus being identified more generally as sons of men, and being identified more particularly as a family, as descendants of Abraham and as a people. This poses the following question: is Jesus primarily fulfilling God’s design for humanity in general, or is he primarily presented as fulfilling the story of God’s dealings with the family of Abraham?

The flow of the argument seems to be moving from the general to the specific, the perspective steadily narrowing. It is in 2:16–18 that the identity descriptors used are first Israel-specific. This could suggest that the author’s main focus is anthropological, and that the more specific descriptors are merely instances of traditional language which are taken from Scripture, but which do not add anything to the argument. The only important distinction for the author, in this reading, is that between angels and humans. To single out a specific people among humans would be of little import. This is clearly a problematic argument, though, because it fails to explain why the author articulated himself in the way he actually did. Moreover, the observation concerning the flow of the argument could be turned on its head to suggest that the Israel-specific descriptors at the end constitute the climax of the passage, and make explicit that which has been implicit all along. If this interpretation is followed, as I think it should be, the question facing us would be: in what way is God’s covenant with Abraham related to his plans and intentions for humanity in general? Is there any plausible way in which statements about Abraham could conclude a section which seems to have started out with general statements about humans? Although the author does not provide us with an answer to this question, plausible explanations could be given.

All one has to assume, actually, is that the author was conscious of the fact that God’s covenant with Abraham was meant to be a blessing for all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3). However, it is also possible to construe a more complicated, yet perhaps also richer and more potent, hypothesis. This hypothesis would be that Hebrews 2:5–18 is really about two different but intertwined Scriptural stories: the one concerning Adam and Eve, and the one concerning Abraham’s offspring. God’s intentions for humankind was that all of creation should be submitted to their wise rule (cf. Gen 1:26–27), however, humans failed at this vocation, and in the present we do not therefore see all things subject to the humans. This is

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266 This general anthropological reading of the passage seems to be explicated by Laub, who is unable to make anything of the fact that it is specifically Abraham who is mentioned in 2:16: “Die Gegenüberstellung ‘Engel-Same Abrahams’ dient keinem anderen Ziel, als an diesem Schwerpunkt noch einmal zu unterstreichen, was bisher schon das Anliegen war und was für die nun einsetzende Hohepriesterchristologie einen fundamentalen Aspekt darstellt, die volle Solidarität des Sohnes mit den Menschen” (Bekenntnis, 87, emphasis added).

267 For the argument that Hebrews 2 draws on Adamic tradition, see Moffitt, Atonement, 133–38.
the problem the author means to evoke through his use of Psalm 8. However, so the argument would go, God has not given up on his intentions for humankind, that they would exercise lordship over creation. Through the calling of Abraham and his offspring, God intends to re-instate humans to the task Adam and Eve failed to carry out. More specifically, Abraham’s offspring are to carry out this task as they are given “a land” to inhabit and inherit. According to Hebrews, this “land” must be understood as the world to come.

Precisely the fact that the “land” in question is of a transcendent nature, seems to lend force to the idea that the stories of Adam and Abraham reach their completion together. There is a universal scope to the covenant of Abraham, just as there also is a universal scope to the creation narrative. When Abraham’s family enters its inheritance, it also enters God’s rest, made ready from the time of creation (cf. 4:3–5). God’s covenant with Abraham is thus the means through which his plans for Adam and Eve will be fulfilled at last. Although this interpretation is no more than a possible hypothesis, and even though the link between Adam and Abraham is nowhere made explicit in Hebrews, I would maintain that this interpretation has considerable explanatory force and scope. At any rate, it is quite unproblematic to make sense of the general concern for all of humanity, even if one takes the story of Abraham as one’s starting point. I would argue that it is more difficult to make sense of the fact that Abraham “suddenly” shows up in 2:16, if one assumes a general anthropological thrust to the argument.

If we assume, as argued above, that the author really does care about Abraham and the story about God’s covenant with him, even though that story has been given a broader context, we seem to be faced with another and slightly different question, and that is whether the phrase “descendants of Abraham” is to be understood in terms of physical kinship. Even if it is granted that salvation to humankind is provided in and through the family of Abraham, so that both the universal and particular aspect of the argument is retained, nothing is said about the requirements for belonging to the family through which salvation is brought to humankind. In particular, nothing is said about whether Abraham’s descendants are identified through fleshly descent, or in some other way. No answer to this question is given in Hebrews. Nonetheless some general remarks can be made. The point of identification between Jesus and his siblings is human weakness and the human condition as such. Moreover, the kind of “exodus” which Jesus brings about is liberation from a general human problem, that of fear of death and captivity under the devil. By the same token, the destiny of Jesus’ siblings is not a delimited space on earth, but is the world to come. All this would seem to point implicitly towards a vision of Abraham’s family which is not focused on ethnicity.

In fact, I see nothing in 2:5–18 which would suggest, let alone demand, that God’s people are delimited ethnically. This could be explained in two totally different ways. Either, it was self-evident to the author and the addressees that only Jews (and converts) belong to God’s people, or it was self-evident that God’s people were defined in a different way. In any case, the ethnic make-up of God’s people is not a matter of dispute. Instead of speculating further on the basis of evidence from silence, it seems more prudent to focus on the positive side of the argument: Abraham’s family is identified in Hebrews as being led towards their inheritance by Jesus; and that inheritance is understood to be the world to come. Abraham’s family is identified, that is, as being made up of followers of Jesus. Hebrews thus makes an
implicit claim of continuity with the past of Israel. This observation is further confirmed when we look at 3:1–6.

2.8 Holy Siblings and the House of God

The first two chapters in Hebrews have the identity of Jesus as their main focus, and I have now argued that part of the picture painted of Jesus consists of him being the true Israelite. The identity of the addressees was first evoked implicitly in 1:14, as those who will inherit salvation, and was later developed in terms of being children of God, siblings of Jesus, descendants of Abraham and members of the people of God (2:10–18). The addressees were not directly addressed though, nor were they directly designated in the two first chapters. But in 3:1–6 the author turns directly to his audience, using the designation ἀδελφοὶ ἡγιασμένοι, and claiming the identity “house” for the addressees (3:6).268 Between these designations, we find a discussion about Jesus and Moses, which is fundamental for understanding what kind of “house” the author claims that the addressees constitute, and what it means to be “the sibling” of Jesus.

2.8.1 Holy Siblings, called with a heavenly calling

The phrase “holy siblings,”269 used as a designation for the addressees, clearly recalls the idea expounded in 2:11 of Jesus consecrating his own siblings.270 Paul frequently designates his addressees as holy (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1). 1 Peter 1:15–16 draws on Leviticus 19:2, and relates holiness directly to the notion of being the special and chosen people, set apart to serve the holy God. Partnership in God’s holy people might also be implied in Hebrews 3:1, because being among those addressed as “holy siblings” also implies membership of the “house” of God (3:6).271 But what does the notion of sanctity add to the idea of being a community, family and people? Sanctity is interpreted in light of “cultic” categories in Hebrews. It is understood as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus (cf. 10:10, 14; 13:12), and this sacrifice is imagined to have provided access to the presence of God, unprecedented in earlier redemptive history.272 The possibility of access implies the existence of boundaries, as well as notions of inside and outside, that are fundamental to the development of identity. Hand in hand with the idea of access into the sacred, follows the notion of separation from the profane.273 To identify as those who have been sanctified, therefore implies some kind of separation from outsiders.

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268 Cynthia Long Westfall correctly notes that 3:1 stands out and marks a shift in the flow of the argument, because the addressees are directly addressed. See A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning (LNTS 297; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 113–15.
270 The title ὁ ἡγιασμένος found in 2:11 clearly refers to Jesus, thus Lane, Hebrews, 1:58.
271 Cf. discussion below, where it is argued that “house” is a metaphor for “people.”
272 Thus David A. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews” (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 133.
273 On the idea of accessing sacred space, see 4.2.
Just as siblingship and sanctity are notions that are rooted in the argument in chapter 2, so also with the other designation used for the addressees: “partakers of a heavenly calling.” For one thing, the language of calling could plausibly be seen as picking up on the theme of the inheritance promised to Abraham. To receive a calling, is language used also about Abraham in Hebrews (11:8), and more generally those who share in an inheritance (οἱ κακλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας, 9:15). The fact that the calling is said to be heavenly, might indicate both the origin and the direction of the calling. We have already seen that Jesus’ exaltation to heaven is understood as the climax of a larger narrative, which has to do with God’s intentions for humankind as well as the promises he gave to Abraham. Later in the homily, it will also be explicitly said that the land for which Abraham longed was heavenly (11:16). Designating the audience as “partakers of a heavenly calling” seems therefore to prepare the audience for understanding themselves as part of this story. It also points to the comparison between Jesus and Moses.

2.8.2 Moses and Jesus as πιστός

The identity of Jesus is presented in 3:2–5 in conjunction with that of Moses. Both Moses and Jesus are acclaimed as πιστός. Nothing is said, however, about the way in which Jesus was πιστός, apart from the fact that he is said to have been πιστός as son. Of Moses, however, it is said that he was πιστός in his role as “servant” and for the purpose of testifying to that which would be spoken (3:5). This suggests that we are talking about Moses serving as mediator of divine revelation, and that πιστός should be understood primarily in terms of Moses being “trustworthy” rather than “faithful.” The immediate context of the main passage alluded to in 3:2 and 3:5, Numbers 12:7, seems to confirm this. What is at stake in Numbers 12:1–8 is not primarily the fidelity of Moses, but his credibility as God’s chosen mediator of revelation.

That it is Moses’ credibility which is at stake is further confirmed in the narrative which follows Numbers 12:1–8. Upon divine revelation Moses commands that scouts be sent to Canaan, for the purpose of preparing entrance into the land for the Israelite people (13:1–3), but when the scouts return most of them doubt that it will be possible to enter Canaan, as do the people. This leads directly to the people questioning Moses’ leadership and credibility as prophet: “So they said to one another, ‘Let us appoint a leader and go back to Egypt’” (14:4).

It is intriguing to notice that Hebrews picks up on the rebellion of the people described in Numbers 14 in 3:7–18. This would suggest that the allusion to Numbers 12:7 in Hebrews 3:5, and the entire discussion about Moses being πιστός, is not taken out of its context in Numbers, but rather inspired by that context. If we follow this lead, and read Hebrews 3 in

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274 For a discussion concerning this passage, see 3.5.
276 A possible way of uniting the designations “holy siblings” and “partners of a heavenly calling,” would be to think of the addressees as participating in a heavenly adoption ceremony. According to this view, participation in the heavenly calling also implies dignity as children of God, because to be present at Jesus’ enthronement also entails being declared as his siblings. For a detailed argument for this view, see Scott Mackie, “Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” JTS 62 (2011): 77–117.
277 This is forcefully argued, against the majority of commentators, by Vanhoye, A Different Priest, 123–24.
278 Lane (Hebrews, 1:76) unconvincingly argues that 1 Chr 17:14 (LXX) is the main passage alluded to in 3:2, whereas Num 12:7 is the passage alluded to in 3:5.
light of Numbers 12–14, it would suggest that Moses’ function as witness to “what would be spoken,” mentioned in 3:5, primarily refers to that which would be spoken to Moses concerning entrance into Canaan in Numbers 13:1–3. In other words, the future tense of λαλήσομαιν in 3:5 (possibly influenced by the future tense of λαλήσω in Numbers 12:6, LXX), should not primarily be taken as referring to Moses prophesying about the coming of Christ, it should rather be understood in the context of Numbers 12–14, and with specific reference to Moses’ ability to lead the people into the Promised Land upon divine revelation.

If this understanding of the function of Moses is granted, it would also provide a very interesting backdrop for exploring the fact that Jesus is πιστός. Although I would allow for the possibility that this might refer to his faithfulness, and that Jesus is presented as being an example of one who succeeded – as the true Israelite – where the wilderness generation failed, I would still argue that the main point in 3:1–6 is to emphasize that Jesus is πιστός in the sense that he is a trustworthy leader, and a credible mediator of divine revelation. This is certainly what the comparison with Moses would suggest. The story about God’s people on their way to their inheritance seems to provide us with the proper narrative context, not only for understanding the role of Moses, but also that occupied by Jesus. Hebrews has already presented us with the motif of Jesus’ being the leader, who takes hold of many children in order to lead them to glory. The very same narrative seems also to cast light on the presentation of Jesus as πιστός, as well as the rare title used for Jesus in 3:1: “apostle.” This title clearly points to Jesus’ role as messenger. Although it is not said explicitly, it would be natural to assume that Jesus is presented as the messenger through whom the heavenly call, in which the addressees have a part, has been issued. Just as the wilderness generation, while on the way to their inheritance, were called to listen to Moses who faithfully transmitted the word of God to them, so now the addressees are called to listen to Jesus.

279 Many commentators assume that 3:5 should be read as pointing to the coming of Jesus. See for instance Johnson, Hebrews, 110. Even less convincing is the claim that 3:5 should it be understood as referring to the Eucharist. Contra James Swetnam, “Τῶν λαληθησομένων in Hebrews 3,5,” Bib 90 (2009): 93–100.

280 Thus Michel, Hebräer, 177. Cf. also Gräßer (“Mose und Jesus,” 14): “Mose wird also weniger in seiner Hauptfunktion als Gesetzgeber herangezogen . . . sondern als der von Gott eingesetzte Offenbarungsmittler, vor allem aber als der Führer der Wüstengeneration.”

281 Todd Still correctly argues that we need not suppose a “mono-dimensional” understanding of the term πιστός (“Christos as Pistos: The Faithfulness of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts [ed. R. Bauckham; London: T&T Clark, 2008], 40–50 [43]).

282 The title “apostle” is linked in 3:1 to the confession. Even though the specific content of the confession is unknown, it must clearly consist of statements about Jesus. See Scott Mackie, “Confession of the Son of God in Hebrews,” NTS 53 (2007): 114–29. For a discussion of the confession, see 4.6.3.

283 Westfall (Discourse Analysis, 114) correctly notes that the focus is more on Jesus’ role as messenger than on his role as priest.

284 David Wider, Theozentrik und Bekenntnis: Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Redens Gottes im Hebräerbrief (BZNW 87; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 143. The idea that God speaks through Jesus from heaven also seems to surface in 12:24–25.

285 Correctly observed by Westfall, Discourse Analysis, 122.
fact, they should have all the more reason to trust God’s messenger, now that God has revealed himself, not through a prophet and servant, but through his own Son.\footnote{286 For a helpful treatment of 3:1–6 which puts emphasis on Jesus’ role as messenger, see Richardson, Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith, 49–69.}

If it is assumed, as I have argued above, that the author is out to make a point about Jesus’ credibility as God’s messenger bringing eschatological revelation, this would also shed light on the exhortation given in 3:6. Here the addressees are called to “hold fast to” their confidence and the “pride” in their hope.\footnote{287 The phrase τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος could be construed in different ways. Johnson (Hebrews, 111) suggests translating as follows: “the boast that is our hope.” But he also notes that it could be understood to mean the boast “that comes from our hope.” I have followed NABRE.} The wider context suggests that this hope consists of the promise of inheriting salvation (1:14), reaching glory (2:10) and entering God’s rest (4:11). This hope, it seems, was wavering.\footnote{288 There might well be a deliberate sense of irony in the author’s use of the word “pride,” because the addressees would have known that both Jesus and his followers would reach their hope only through shameful suffering. On the subversive use of categories related to shame and honor, see 5.4.2.} The author appears to fear that his addressees doubted that the way upon which they had embarked would eventually lead to the goal it promised, and he tried to address this problem by drawing their attention to the one leading the way. If Jesus was trustworthy their hope would be secure.

A possible objection to the interpretation offered above, would be that the voice which is calling the addressees to their destiny, the Sabbath rest which still remains, does not belong to Jesus but to the psalmist from Scripture (cf. 3:7–11). When the author exhorts his readers to meet the word of God with faith, and when he speaks about their hope, he does so by quoting Scripture and by claiming that its message is still valid. He does not quote sayings attributed to Jesus. To this objection I would reply that the dichotomy which is thus assumed, between revelations through Christ on the one hand and Scripture on the other, is unhelpful when applied to Hebrews. The idea in Hebrews is certainly not that Christ has come to supplant Scripture as such with another revelation, but that the meaning of Scripture is revealed in Christ. This means that Scripture speaks of Christ, but also that Christ speaks through the very words of Scripture (2:12–13; 10:5–7).\footnote{289 Thus Attridge comments: “Ironically, the one who delivers the final word of God to the world speaks in Hebrews only in the words of scripture, and principally in the words of the Psalms” (“The Psalms in Hebrews,” 212).} There is no good reason, therefore, to assume that the Spirit which speaks to the community “today” through the words of Scripture (3:7–11), about “the rest” which still remains for God’s people, is conceived of by the author as transmitting a revelation substantially different from, or other than, the words spoken by God in “these last days” through his Son.\footnote{290 On the balance between continuity and discontinuity between the revelation of Scripture and the revelation in and through Jesus, see Markus-Liborius Herman, Die “Hermeneutische Stunde” des Hebräerbriefs: Schriftauslegung in Spannungsfelder (HBS; Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 86–87.}

Furthermore, when the call to “hold on” to the hope is seen in light of the failures of the wilderness generation, it is clear that there is an ethical dimension to the exhortation. If the addressees hold on to their hope, then they will succeed precisely where the wilderness generation failed. The fathers in the wilderness put God to the test, rebelled, and failed to enter God’s rest because they were lacking in faith (3:7–18). They did not hold on to their hope, and they doubted the credibility of the message delivered to them through Moses. Even
though they had embarked upon the journey, and left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, they failed to finish it. It would thus seem that the call to hold on to the hope in 3:6, prepares for the exhortation not to make the same mistakes as their forefathers. This might also mean that there is an implicit call not only to trust the credibility of Jesus, but also to emulate his faithfulness. Faith is taken to be the defining characteristic of those who do enter God’s rest (4:3), and Jesus is pictured as the exhibiting that quality.

2.8.3 The Son and the Servant

If credibility in transmitting God’s word is what Moses and Jesus have in common, and if they are thus both cast as trustworthy leaders of the people of God, the different titles they are given underscores how they differ. Jesus is said to be worthy of greater honor than Moses (3:3), owing to the fact that Moses was a servant in God’s house, whereas Jesus is the son who has been placed over God’s house (3:6). In order to explore the difference between Jesus and Moses, the author uses an example related to a house and the builder of a house. Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses, to the extent that a builder of a house is worthy of more honor than the house itself (3:3). This image is further developed when it is said that all houses are made by someone, but that it is God who is the maker of everything (3:4). Hebrews 3:3–4 should be read as providing two analogies which are meant to emphasize the degree to which Jesus is superior to Moses in honor, rather than as giving substance to the terms “son,” “servant,” or “house.” These analogies are striking nevertheless, because they go a long way in underlining the qualitative distance between Jesus and Moses. Whatever the terms “servant” and “son” denote, it is quite clear that Jesus and Moses do not belong to the same kind of category. The degree to which they differ in honor is actually analogous, somehow, to the way God is greater than his creation.

It appears that the concept of a “house” has influenced the terms “servant” and “son.” One can easily imagine how a servant and a son would occupy quite different roles in the same house, and be honored to quite different degrees, and one could also imagine how all those who are said to belong to the house of God, would therefore be obliged to honor Jesus above Moses, even though nothing negative is said of Moses. This seems also to be reflected in the prepositions used concerning the relationships of Moses and Jesus respectively to God’s house. Moses is a servant ἐν God’s house (3:2, 5), whereas Jesus is son ἐπί God’s house (3:6). The point seems to be that Jesus has been given a position of authority over God’s house, which was never given to Moses.

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291 Notice also how the use of kinship language (“forefathers,” 3:9) to denote the wilderness generation, develops the idea that God relates to a family. This suggests that the family presented in Hebrews 2:5–18, designated as the siblings of Jesus and descendants of Abraham, is the same family as that to which the “forefathers” critiqued in Hebrews 3:7–18 belong.

292 This perspective is further developed in 5.4.1, where 12:1–3 is discussed.


294 Thus Lane, Hebrews, 1:77.

295 On the different prepositions used to describe the relationship of Moses and Jesus respectively to God’s house, see Lane, Hebrews, 1:78–79.
2.8.4 The House of God

The discussion about the different roles of Moses and Jesus culminates in a statement about the identity of the community: “we are his house” (3:6).\textsuperscript{296} The term οἶκος could be understood to mean either: family household,\textsuperscript{297} people,\textsuperscript{298} or sanctuary.\textsuperscript{299} As a matter of fact all these suggestions make good sense in our context.\textsuperscript{300} As indicated in the argument above, the idea of a household seems to have influenced the use of the terms “servant” and “son,” suggesting that house be interpreted as indicating a family. To understand the term “house” in terms of a household family, would also square well with the persistent use of kinship language in the preceding context (2:5–18); the addressees are the siblings of Jesus and the children of God, and thus part of the same household. Nevertheless, the primary meaning of “house of God” in 3:6 seems to be “people of God.”\textsuperscript{301} The allusion to Numbers 12:7, the mention of Moses, the relationship to the discussion about the wilderness generation, and the fact that “house” is used to denote the people of God in 8:8, constitute a powerful cumulative case. Moses, Jesus and the addressees belong to the same house, and this house must be understood to be Israel. Johnson is certainly correct to claim that “this is a dramatic claim to continuity with historic Israel.”\textsuperscript{302}

This does not rule out, however, that the term “house” might also carry certain implicit connotations in the direction of “sanctuary.” Since we are talking about a sacred people, of holy siblings (cf. 3:1), the idea of a sanctuary is not far away. Moreover, in 10:21 it is said that the community has “a great priest over the house of God.” The entire context of that statement, as well as the use of the title high priest, clearly suggests that “house of God” means sanctuary in 10:21.\textsuperscript{303} If one reasons backwards from 10:21 to 3:6, it is at least remotely possible that the same would apply to 3:6.\textsuperscript{304} Further, if one grants that 3:2 alludes not only to Numbers 12:8, but also to 1 Chronicles 17:14 (LXX), as Lane has argued, this would constitute another argument for this reading.\textsuperscript{305} Thus, the term “house” suggests an extended family, a people, among whom God’s presence dwells in a particular way. This community of holy siblings is a continuation of the people among whom Moses served as a prophet. Identity as this house, is what the author claims for the addressees.

It is not entirely clear, though, whether or not Hebrews makes an exclusive claim for identity as God’s house on behalf of the addressees. Is Hebrews saying: “it is we who are

\textsuperscript{296} Although the syntax is ambiguous with regard to whose house the community is said to be, the context clearly suggests that it must be God’s house and not Jesus’.
\textsuperscript{297} Explored by deSilva, Perseverance, 139.
\textsuperscript{298} Exod 16:31.
\textsuperscript{299} Exod 23:19; 34:26; Ps 26:4.
\textsuperscript{300} This could be due to the fact that the motifs “temple” and “people” to some degree “merge” within traditions which could have influenced Hebrews. See Stephen Hultgren, From the Damascus Covenant to the Covenant of the Community: Literary, Historical and Theological Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 66; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 486–90.
\textsuperscript{301} Thus, correctly, Sverre Aalen, “’Reign’ and ‘House’ in the Kingdom of God in the Gospels,” NTS 8 (1962): 215–40 (237).
\textsuperscript{302} Johnson, Hebrews, 110.
\textsuperscript{303} See discussion in chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{304} Thus Vanhoye, A Different Priest, 126.
\textsuperscript{305} Lane, Hebrews, 1:76.
God’s people”? Or is it saying: “we (too) belong to God’s people”?\textsuperscript{306} The condition attached to the identity as God’s house in 3:6 might shed light on this question. The addressees are God’s house only to the extent that they hold on to their confidence and hope. According to our analysis above this should be understood with reference to their hope of future deliverance. In other words, being the house of God is a matter of being on the way towards the destiny for which God’s people were made. The identity of God’s people in the present is construed from the perspective of their future. The question then would be how one knows that one is on the right track, as it were, and heading towards this future goal. In order to answer this question the wider context of Hebrews proves helpful. The conditional statement in 3:6 is echoed in 3:14.\textsuperscript{307}

3:6: σῶ οἶκός ἡμῶν ἡμας, 

ēán[περ] τὴν παρασκήναν καὶ τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος κατάσχωμεν

3:14: μέτοχοι γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ γεγόναμεν, 

ēánper τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς υποστάσεως μέχρι τέλους βεβαίαν κατάσχωμεν

Between 3:6 and 3:14 we find a quote from Psalm 94:7–11 (LXX) which calls the addressees to listen to God’s voice in order that they might enter his rest. This call provides an important part of the context, for both of the statements above. The author’s logic clearly presupposes that the addressees, in their present situation, really are on their way towards God’s rest (cf. also 4:3), and he is exhorting them not to depart from this way (cf. 3:12–13). The statements in 3:6 and 3:14 thus emerge as descriptions of the identity which the addressees now have, and the conditions according to which that identity is preserved. It is reasonable to assume, given the striking similarity between 3:6 and 3:14, that these statements mutually interpret each other.\textsuperscript{308} This would suggest that being the “house of God,” and having become “partners of Christ” are different ways of expressing the same identity.\textsuperscript{309} This identity must have been obtained at some point in the past (cf. γεγόναμεν in 3:14), and it is still a reality in the present (cf. ἡς in 3:6). The clue is to persevere in that identity μέχρι τέλους, and to hold on to the hope which will be realized when the τέλος is reached.

If our analysis above is correct, it would leave us with two interesting results. First, it seems that the identity of the people of God in Hebrews is shaped from an eschatological perspective in a significant way. This does not mean that one is provided with some sort of guarantee in the present which secures one’s position in the future. On the contrary, it rather means that one’s position and identity in the present is judged according to whether one is heading towards the future goal. In other words, God’s people today are those who are on their way towards the future which has been promised to God’s people. Secondly, it seems that to be part of God’s people, and to be partner of Christ, are two ways of expressing the same identity in Hebrews. The expression “partner of Christ” also recalls the notion of being a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{306}] This question is discussed in a helpful way by Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 250.
\item[\textsuperscript{307}] So also Westfall, \textit{Discourse Analysis}, 119.
\item[\textsuperscript{308}] So Gräßer, \textit{Hebräer}, 1:169.
\item[\textsuperscript{309}] Backhaus (\textit{Hebräer}, 139): “Unser Schreiben unterscheidet in keiner Weise zwischen dem Haus Israels und dem Haus Christi.”
\end{itemize}
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partaker of the heavenly calling (3:1), suggesting that this calling is mediated through Jesus. This confirms what has been argued above, about Jesus being identified as the true Israelite, the one who has obtained to that which was promised to God’s people. If Christ is the one who in the present occupies the position which is promised to all of God’s people in the future, it would follow that partnership in Christ is the way of coming to share in Israel’s future inheritance. Once again we see how the author’s logic is fundamentally shaped by an eschatological vision. It is precisely because Jesus has reached Israel’s future destiny that he is able to “communicate” Israelite identity in the present to all who have part in him.310

These two conclusions would also suggest, moreover, that there is a certain degree of exclusivity intrinsic to the vision of Israelite identity which has been discussed in this chapter. Even though it is never said explicitly that being partner of Christ is the only thinkable way of being set on the right track towards God’s rest, this seems nevertheless to be implied.311 The idea in Hebrews is certainly not that Moses and Jesus have been appointed by God to serve in two different houses, and that membership of either of these will provide one with Israelite identity.312 For Hebrews there only is one house, and if one wants to belong to the house of Moses, it seems one has to share the house with Jesus too. Not only that, one will find oneself belonging to a house which has been subjected, not to Moses, but to Jesus. Backhaus thus aptly states: “Das Gotteshaus Israel findet in der christlichen Gemeinde zu seiner endzeitlichen Bestimmung.”313

2.9 Conclusions

What does it mean to identify as a member of God’s people? I have argued in this chapter that this question must be answered with reference to Jesus. To be an Israelite is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to be heading towards the place where Jesus now is, and to imitate the virtues of Jesus while on the way. This notion of Israelite identity is grounded in a specific interpretation of the Christ event. This event is understood in Hebrews in terms of a two stage process, where exaltation and glorification follows suffering and death. This process is situated within a cosmic context, and interpreted in terms of Jesus’ entrance to the world to come. He is led into the world to come by his Father, as its rightful heir, and all the angels are commanded to worship him (1:6). The world to come is thus pictured as an inheritance which was given Jesus, as that which was subjected to him when he was crowned with glory and honor. I have suggested that this way of interpreting the Christ event draws on the larger Scriptural narrative of God’s dealings with his people. The idea that Jesus has completed a “journey” from suffering to glorification, and the idea that Jesus was led by his father into “the inheritance,” seems to draw on the exodus narrative. Moreover, I have suggested that

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310 Hebrews does not elaborate much on the question of how one becomes a partner of Christ, how one is initiated. However, cf. my brief discussion about baptism in 4.5.3.
313 Backhaus, Hebräer, 141.
Hebrews reinterprets the “land” which was promised Abraham as being the “world to come.” This implies that Jesus is presented as the climax of the Scriptural narrative, and as fulfilling Israel’s destiny.

The reason this specific interpretation of the Christ even bears on the question of what it means for the addressees to identify as Israelites is that Jesus is presented as a representative Israelite. God’s dealings with Jesus are interpreted as a paradigmatic expression of how God will deal with his people. God’s people are still living in a context of suffering and unfulfilled promises: they have not yet reached their inheritance, and have not yet experienced the subjection of all things under their feet. However, if they look at Jesus, they will see what awaits them if they endure in their present situation. Jesus embodies the destiny which awaits God’s people, for it is God’s intention not to glorify Jesus alone, but to lead many children to glory. Although Jesus is the sovereign heir of all things, there are many who will inherit salvation (1:14). Jesus is presented as the leader and role model of all those who follow him on the way to salvation. He is a leader, inasmuch as he is the one who has completed the journey from suffering to glorification, and he is a role model by virtue of his obedience, faithfulness and endurance. He functions in some respects like a new Moses, who leads God’s people toward their destiny. I have suggested that Jesus’ function as leader and role model could be illuminated by observing how groups often tend to create a “prototypical group member,” that is, someone who embodies the nature of the group’s identity and with reference to whom one can distinguish between insiders and outsiders. The prototype tells you what group members should look like. Because Jesus is situated as part of Israel’s narrative, as the leader of God’s people, I would thus argue that Israelite identity is tied to Jesus. He has become the true Israelite, the one who embodies what Israelites should look like.

There is thus an intimate relationship between the identity of Jesus and that of his followers. They are described as his siblings, and thus also the children of God (2:11–13). They belong to the family of Abraham and thus constitute God’s people (2:16–17). They are solemnly designated as holy siblings and as partakers of a heavenly calling (3:1). This kinship relationship entails not only mutual solidarity, but also sharing in a common inheritance. The addressees are pictured as belonging to the same house as Moses. They are identified as the house of God, as God’s people, only to the extent that they hold fast to this hope. An important conclusion reached in this chapter is that the identity of God’s people in the present is conceived of from the perspective of their God given destiny in the future. It is those who are on their way towards this future goal, who are identified as God’s people in the present. Hebrews only presents its addressees with one way of knowing that they share in the inheritance promised to God’s people, and that is through participation in Christ (3:14). To participate in Christ and to belong to the house of God are two ways of expressing the same identity in Hebrews.

How, then, is this identity related to a tension between newness and continuity? The continuity is made evident by the fact that both Moses and Jesus are pictured as belonging to the same house, though occupying significantly different roles. Jesus is pictured as the son who has been set above the house within which Moses ministered as servant. This seems to indicate that all those who want to be members of the household to which Moses belongs, also find themselves standing in a relationship with Jesus. If one belongs to the people among whom Moses served as a prophet, one will also find oneself belonging to the household made
subject to God’s uniquely appointed first-born son, Jesus Christ, the leader of God’s people. There is only one house in Hebrews, and that house is now defined and identified with reference to Jesus, the son over the house of God. On the one hand, the positive relationship between the addressees and the wilderness generation, and between Jesus and Moses, strongly suggests a significant level of continuity between Israelite identity before Christ and after Christ. On the other hand, the idea that Jesus is the true son of Israel, and the implicit claim that all Israelites should now follow him in order to reach Israel’s destiny, certainly seems to point to a new vision of Israelite identity, based on commitment to Jesus. Already in the first chapters of Hebrews, it therefore seems that we encounter the paradox of Hebrews.

What, then, about the question of how the message of Hebrews relates to Jews outside the Jesus movement? I would argue that the possible “offense” in the part of the message of Hebrews explored in this chapter, vis-à-vis Jews outside the Jesus movement, has little to do with allegedly derogatory claims about Moses or about the wilderness generation, or indeed with a supposedly negative theology about Israel. Rather, paradoxically, the possible offense seems to lie in Hebrews’ positive claim to continuity with ancient Israel, combined with its radical and innovative claims about the significance of Jesus. There seems to be a certain level of exclusivity pertaining to this positive claim, suggesting that Israelite identity is now only adequately expressed by the followers of Jesus. Hebrews claims and shapes the category “house of God,” in a way that hardly allows for other legitimate claims to the same identity, which are not based on commitment to Jesus.
3. The New Covenant and the Identity of Israel

3.1 Identity and Covenant

Israel’s identity in Scripture is closely tied to the notion that God has chosen Israel to stand in a covenant relationship to him.\textsuperscript{314} The covenant is thus a somewhat exclusive category, predicated on election. Through the covenant, Israel could be said to belong to God, to be his people.\textsuperscript{315} The concept of a covenant between God and his people is closely related to the question of identity. Ellen J. Christiansen claims that “covenant” is the most important metaphor for expressing “common identity and shared relationship with God” in the “Old Testament, intertestamental Judaism and New Testament Christianity.” She thus introduces the concept of “covenant identity,” which is meant to refer to “collective belonging” situated within history, which flows from a relationship with God.\textsuperscript{316} This covenant identity is expressed in the so-called “covenant formula,” which echoes throughout Scripture: “I will be their God and they will be my people.”\textsuperscript{317}

The term “covenant” is used extensively in Hebrews,\textsuperscript{318} and the “covenant formula” is found at the heart of the homily when Jeremiah is quoted (8:10): “But this is the covenant I will establish with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds and I will write them upon their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” By quoting the covenant formula, the author seems to invite the addressees to identify as God’s people, however, the covenant relationship which Hebrews pictures the addressees as having part in is qualified as being new. God is said to have given his people a new covenant, a covenant which is tied to Jesus. This raises all sorts of issues relevant to my questions of research.\textsuperscript{319} Given the importance of the covenant concept in Israelite tradition, it clearly suggests itself as a natural topic for investigation if one wants to explore what it means for addressees to identify as Israelites. What does it entail, in terms of privileges and obligations, to be a recipient of the new covenant?

The new covenant concept clearly also relates to the paradox of Hebrews, and the question of how Hebrews negotiates Israelite identity in the tension between newness and continuity. Does the new covenant imply a total discontinuity in redemptive history, or are there notions...
of continuity which serve to create balance? Is there simply a conflict between the new and old covenant, or are there also elements of continuity between the covenants? How far does the author’s critique of the old covenant go, and to what extent has it been de-legitimized as a source of Israelite identity? Finally, it seems that these issues point towards the following crucial question: does the new covenant imply the creation of a new Israel? Or would it perhaps be more prudent to say that Hebrews pictures the Christ event as renewing Israel? Something new in Israel’s history has clearly occurred, according to Hebrews, but it is an open question whether that implies the creation of a new Israel.

Although it is both possible and necessary to distinguish the internal tension between continuity and newness in Hebrews from the question of what the message in Hebrews implies for relationships to Jewish communities standing outside the Jesus movement, it is also natural to ask how these two issues relate to each other. Even though the new covenant concept in Hebrews is not directly related to external relationships and tensions, it is still possible to approach this issue indirectly, by asking questions such as the following. Has Hebrews, in its critique of the old covenant in effect de-legitimized a central feature of mainstream Jewish claims of membership in God’s people? And is not the rhetoric of newness bound to be particularly subversive at the hands of a relatively new movement, i.e. the Jesus movement, who now see themselves as being recipients of the one and only covenant through which God now relates to his people? Is this not implicitly exclusivist, although not necessarily explicitly polemical? A possible way of approaching these questions is by way of comparison. Are there elements in the theology in Hebrews which are particularly offensive from a mainstream Jewish point of view? And are there perhaps ancient Jewish documents that could provide us with a parallel to what we find in Hebrews?

The covenant discourse in Hebrews thus activates all three questions of research in this dissertation. I will begin the exploration by looking at the relationship between the old and new covenants.

### 3.2 The Relationship between the New and Old Covenants

#### 3.2.1 What is at Stake?

There are two major issues at stake when the relationship between the old and new covenants is made subject of investigation. To begin with, there is the question of whether the new covenant in Hebrews is best described as a distinctly new covenant, or if it is not perhaps better understood as a renewal of some older covenant. If the new covenant is distinctly new, it would point to a distinctly new understanding of Israel’s identity, and also implicitly allow for the possibility that the old covenant could be seen as rejected or replaced. In this case, it would be hard to see how the old covenant could function as a common source of identity for

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Israelites. If, on the contrary, the new covenant is merely a renewal of some older covenant, this would suggest a stronger level of continuity in Israel’s identity, before and after the Christ event, and notions of replacement and rejection would then seem less relevant.

In addition to the question of whether the new covenant is distinct, there is also the question of how to conceptualize the newness of the new covenant. Some have argued that the covenant discourse in Hebrews should be conceptualized on vertical rather than on horizontal terms. If that is correct, it would follow that it is somewhat problematic to relate the covenant discourse to an alleged tension between newness and continuity in Hebrews, as I have attempted to do in this dissertation. I will therefore attempt to demonstrate in the following that it really does make sense to also conceptualize the covenant discourse on horizontal terms, and that it makes sense to situate the new covenant as part of a redemptive historical scheme. This is relevant to my thesis because it implies that it makes sense to ask how the newness of the new covenant contributes in shaping Israelite identity.

3.2.2 Jesus – Priest and Covenant Mediator

The first time the term “covenant” appears in Hebrews is in 7:22. The author states that the covenant for which Jesus is guarantor (ἔγγυος) is better, because its installation was accompanied by a divine oath. Although nothing is said of an old covenant, the statement in 7:22 presupposes that Jesus’ covenant is better than some other covenant. The context (7:11–28) indicates that the superiority ascribed to the covenant Jesus mediates flows from the superiority of his priesthood. This priesthood is said, in turn, to have introduced a better hope, through which one can draw near to God (7:18–19). Being priest and being covenant mediator are thus closely related ministries, which were both given to Jesus on account of an oath, through which a better hope was introduced. Nothing more is said, however, about the covenant itself.

The covenant motif is picked up again, however, in Hebrews 8, and it is once again related to the priesthood of Jesus. Jesus’ priesthood is said to be officiated in a heavenly sanctuary, and to be dislocated from earth (8:2–4). Those who are priests on earth serve only in a shadow and copy of the heavenly sanctuary (8:5), so the author claims. In 8:6, focus is moved from priesthood to covenant, and a logical relationship is established between these two themes. The νῦν with which 8:6 begins picks up on the εἰμέν in 8:4.

8:4 presents the counterfactual premise that if Christ had been on earth he would not have been a priest, whereas 8:6 asserts that Jesus has in fact received a far superior ministry. It follows that Jesus is not on earth, in which case he would not have been a priest. His priesthood is therefore predicated on his exaltation to God’s right hand in heaven (cf. 8:1). With this as the immediate backdrop, it is emphasized once more that Jesus’ priesthood implies covenant

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322 Backhaus thus comments: “Nicht um die διαθήκη an sich geht es, sondern dezidiert um die bessere διαθήκη” (Der neue Bund, 82).
323 Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 130.
324 Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 131.
mediation (8:6): “he has obtained so much more excellent a ministry as (ὁσιοφράστευτος) he is mediator of a better covenant.”

The superiority of the new covenant thus rests on the fact that its mediator ministers as priest in heaven and not on earth. The contrast between heaven and earth, so prominent in Hebrews, is thereby made a premise for the covenant discourse. Some interpreters therefore tend to think that “new” is just another word for “heavenly,” however, if the author’s only interest was the distinction between heaven and earth, then one wonders why he chose to speak of the redemption brought by Jesus in temporal and horizontal terms at all. The hypothesis that the categories “new” and “old” are reducible to “heavenly” and “earthly” thus lacks explanatory power. The default assumption should clearly be that the terms “new” and “old” do fill a function in the author’s argument, which goes beyond being coded language to denote “heaven” and “earth” respectively. In fact, I would even argue that the covenant discourse in Hebrews is intimately related to temporal and horizontal categories.

It would seem that a transition from a vertical to a horizontal discourse is made precisely in 8:6, at the juncture where the covenant is introduced to the argument. Jesus has been acclaimed as seated in heaven, and identified as occupant of a heavenly priesthood (8:1–5). The installation of Jesus into this ministry is thereafter integrated into a redemptive historical scheme (8:7–13). The bridge from vertical to horizontal discourse is found in 8:6. Because this is where the transition takes place, in and through the introduction of the covenant motif, this suggests that the covenant motif functions to relate the heavenly priesthood of Jesus to redemptive history. I thus fully agree with Vogel who argues that it is the heavenly priesthood of Jesus which is placed within a redemptive historical scheme, and not the other way around. The redemptive historical perspective is clearly not the starting point for the author, left behind in order to explore the true significance of the Christ event, which is only found in the contrast between heaven and earth. On the contrary, it seems that the redemptive historical perspective is introduced in order to interpret and explain the significance of Christ’s priesthood.

To sum up, we can thus say that the superiority of Jesus’ covenant flows from his priesthood, and that the covenant concept seems to allow the author to explore the significance of Jesus’ priesthood from a redemptive historical perspective. This last point is significant, because it suggests that the new covenant motif relates to a redemptive historical discontinuity, which is not reducible to a vertical distinction between heaven and earth.

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325 It is worth noting that 8:6 seems to indicate that the priesthood of Jesus flows from his mediation of a new covenant, and not vice versa. Even though the chronology of the author’s argument moves from priesthood to covenant, thus making priesthood the starting point of the argument; the underlying logic seems to be moving from covenant to priesthood, thus making covenant the more foundational category. See Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 129.


327 The νυνῖ δὲ with which 8:6 begins signals a movement towards a horizontal perspective, focused on the Christ event. Thus Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 131.

3.2.3 A Covenant Built upon Better Promises

The redemptive historical perspective which is introduced in 8:6 is further articulated through the statement that the new covenant has been enacted (νενομοθέτηται) upon better promises.\(^{329}\) This statement clearly indicates that the new covenant is related to a redemptive historical tension between promise and fulfillment. However, the terms “promises” and “covenant” do not appear in direct relation to each other in Hebrews apart from 8:6, and it is therefore not immediately clear which promises the new covenant has been enacted upon, or in what sense these promises are superior. One possibility would be to take the better promises as referring to the quote from Jeremiah 31, which speaks of forgiveness of sins and knowledge of God.\(^{330}\) However, this is not an entirely satisfying interpretation, because it allows no independent function for the term ἐπαγγελία,\(^{331}\) which is so important in Hebrews, and which only indirectly relates to the problem of sin.\(^{332}\)

When speaking of promises, Hebrews focuses on those given to Abraham (6:12–20; 7:6), which are arguably also the background for the entire discussion of the promise of entrance into God’s Sabbath rest (4:1–11).\(^{333}\) When it comes to the relationship between Abraham and the fulfillment of the promises given to him, Hebrews is ambiguous.\(^{334}\) Some passages seem to indicate that the promises were fulfilled, and others that they were not. The best way of making sense of this tension is, in my opinion, to distinguish between the promise of progeny and land. With regard to the promise of progeny, Hebrews affirms that Abraham was blessed and did receive a son, from which a great family emerged (6:14–15; 11:11–12), but when it comes to the promise of inheriting a land, it is said that Abraham did not receive what was promised him (11:13). Because Hebrews clearly affirms that there still remains a rest for the people of God to enter (4:9), and because Jesus is pictured as the one leading Abraham’s descendants toward their promised land,\(^{335}\) a reasonable inference would be that the new covenant was enacted upon hitherto unfulfilled promises given to Abraham, which will be fulfilled through the new covenant.\(^{336}\)

In fact, this also seems to be a very reasonable interpretation of what the author states in 9:15.\(^{337}\) There we read that Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood and that he is therefore “mediator of a new covenant.” This covenant mediation is then directly linked to the distribution of an inheritance: “since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.”\(^{338}\) Here it is explicitly made clear that the new covenant relates to a promised inheritance, a concept which is definitively related to Abraham in Hebrews (6:12), and the

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\(^{329}\) On the question of how to translate νενομοθέτηται, see Lane, Hebrews, 1:174.

\(^{330}\) Thus Weiß, Hebräer, 440–41.

\(^{331}\) As will be seen in the subsequent discussion, I basically agree with Käsemann (Wandering, 26–37) in holding that the promise is focused on spatial categories.

\(^{332}\) Rose (“Verheißung,” 189) emphasizes that to be cleansed from sin is a prerequisite for obtaining that which is promised.

\(^{333}\) See 2.6 and 5.6.4.

\(^{334}\) Cf. discussion in Rose, “Verheißung,” 60–63.

\(^{335}\) See 2.4.

\(^{336}\) Rose, “Verheißung,” 76.

\(^{337}\) For further discussion on this passage, see 3.5.

\(^{338}\) Rose (“Verheißung,” 180) points out that the phrase “eternal inheritance” is probably influenced by Gen 17:8 and the “eternal possession” promised to Abraham.
land given to his family (11:8). This suggests that the new covenant was designed to make entrance into the inheritance promised to Abraham – which in Hebrews is interpreted as a heavenly fatherland – possible. One way of testing the validity of this conclusion is to ask if entrance into the heavenly realm of God, is something that could reasonably be said to follow from the specific blessings the new covenant is said to bring, such as forgiveness of sins and knowledge of God. I would argue that it does make good sense to see forgiveness of sins as a means through which God’s people are restored into a state of being which makes it possible for them to approach God’s heavenly presence. A further argument to strengthen this interpretation is the fact that it is totally in keeping with the context of the prophecy in Jeremiah, where forgiveness of sins and restoration in the land are themes which are closely related (cf. Jer 31–33).

But in what sense are the promises of the new covenant better? And what are they better than? Rose has argued that the main contrast to which 8:6 refers, is between the promises of the new covenant and the commandments of the old. When speaking of better promises, the author is speaking of promises which are better than that upon which the old covenant was enacted. The old covenant, however, was not enacted upon promises but on the law. Thus, there is no implicit or explicit critique of inferior “old covenant promises” in Hebrews, according to Rose. The problem with the old covenant is not its inferior promises, but its fleshly commandments. This interpretation would actually seem to intensify the contrast between the old and new covenant, for according to this reading, it is not only that the promises of the old covenant were not as good as those of the new covenant; the point is that the old covenant was not enacted upon promises at all. However, this interpretation strikes me as awkward. Although it is never said explicitly that the old covenant was based on inferior promises, or what the nature of these were, the easiest interpretation of 8:6 seems to be that there were such inferior promises related to the old covenant. Moreover, there also seems to be a very plausible candidate for a promise upon which the old covenant could have been seen to have been enacted, and that is the promise of entrance into the land of Canaan.

As already discussed in chapter 2, and as will be further discussed in chapter 5, there is a negotiation taking place in Hebrews concerning the nature of the land promised Abraham, and the kind of rest towards which God’s people are called. Hebrews claims that entering God’s rest is not just a matter of entering the land of Canaan (4:8); and that there is a better homeland to be sought than the one reached by Abraham and his family (11:13–16). These two statements seem to invite the following interpretation. The new covenant has been enacted upon the promise of entering the heavenly land, the better fatherland which Abraham was seeking; whereas the old covenant was based on the promise of entrance into Canaan.

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339 This is emphasized also by Richard Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City,” 161.
341 Thus also Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 136.
342 Rose, “Verheißung,” 73–75.
343 A further possibility is that it is the words of promise given together with the new covenant which are better than those given together with the old covenant. The content of the promises would then be the same, but the very words of communication would be different. This seems to be the solution suggested by Gräßer, Hebräer, 2:94–95.
The promises of the new covenant are better because they are heavenly. To see the giving of the law in conjunction with entrance into Canaan, would be in keeping with the close relationship between the giving of the law and entering Canaan found in Scripture (cf. Exod 33:1; Deut 4:1). Furthermore, assuming a dichotomy between heavenly and earthly promises seems to do justice to the immediate context of 8:6, the logic being that because Jesus has been given a heavenly ministry, the promises which are conveyed through the covenant he mediates are also heavenly by nature. It is vital to emphasized, however, that the contrast in 8:6 cannot be understood as a contrast between the promises given to Abraham, as the author understands them, and the promises of the new covenant.\footnote{Rose ("Verheißung," 73) seems to think that this is the implication of interpretations of 8:6 where the old covenant is related to inferior promises.}

The Abraham we meet in Hebrews knew perfectly well that the land promised to him was not of an earthly nature. By faith Abraham therefore looked toward a better, heavenly homeland (11:13–16). What 8:6 seems to be saying is that it is the new covenant, and not the old one, which is enacted upon (the deepest nature of) the promises given to Abraham. The better promises spoken of in 8:6 are therefore not new at all, they are the very same which were given to Abraham. What is new, however, is the legal assurance, which has been given to God’s people through the establishment of a new covenant. Jesus Christ is the living embodiment of God’s declarative promise to his people.\footnote{In my opinion, Gräßer overlooks the promises mentioned in 8:6, and focuses too narrowly on 8:7–8, when he writes “daß Jer 31 gar nicht mehr als Verheißungswort für Israel gelesen wird, sondern als Scheltwort” ("Der Alte Bund im Neuen," 108). However, it is worth noting that he writes as follows in his commentary. “Der neue Bund wurde ja nicht gegen Israel geschlossen, sondern mit ihm und allen Völkern” (Hebräer, 2:101).}

Our findings so far seem to indicate that the new covenant discourse in Hebrews is hallmarked by both continuity and discontinuity. The continuity has to do with the promises upon which the new covenant was enacted, which I have traced to Abraham, and we will come back to the question of whether this implies a shared identity for all those who belong to Abraham’s family, living before and after the Christ event (see 3.5). The discontinuity, on the other hand, is indicated by the language of superiority and newness. We will now turn to the question of what this language implies for the standing of the old covenant. If the new covenant is new in the sense that it replaces the old covenant, it seems to follow that one way of articulating Israelite identity has been replaced by another.

### 3.2.4 The First Covenant was not Blameless

It is evident that the covenant motif is introduced from a comparative perspective. It is related to a better priesthood, officiated in a better sanctuary, by a superior covenant mediator, based on better promises, giving birth to a better hope. This perspective has also influenced the way the quotation from Jeremiah is introduced. In 8:7 the language of a first and second covenant is used for the first time.\footnote{Although 8:7 does not specify what is meant by “the first” and “the second,” it must clearly mean first and second covenant.} The perspective is not only comparative, in the sense that Jesus’ covenant is praised as superior, it is also critical with respect to the first covenant. According to the author, the existence of the second covenant depends on the failure of the first. For, as he writes, if the first covenant had been blameless (ἀμεμπτος), then there would have been no
reason to make room for a second. The author’s logic thus presupposes that there must have been something *wrong* with the old covenant.

One possibility is to understand the problem with the first covenant in terms of the people’s failure to keep it.\(^{347}\) This interpretation seems to find support in 8:8, which claims that God blames “them,” saying that he will make a new covenant.\(^ {348}\) The blame of the people is further explained by the content of the quote: the fathers did not remain in God’s covenant after he had led them out of Egypt, and God grew unconcerned with them (8:9). The new covenant, by contrast, would be inscribed on the hearts of the people, and mutual instruction would therefore no longer be needed. The essential difference between the covenants, according to this view, is that the first was broken, whereas the last would be kept. The real problem, therefore, lies in the people’s lack of ability or willingness to keep to old covenant, or, alternatively, in the old covenant’s failure to produce an obedient covenant people. The second possible interpretation would be to understand the problem of the first covenant as something intrinsic to that covenant itself.\(^ {349}\) That is, even if the first covenant had been kept, there would still have been a problem to be solved. Support for this line of interpretation is given by the fact that the first covenant is so tightly and intimately related to the old cult, with its useless legal prescriptions (7:18), its weak and mortal priests (7:23, 28), its earthly sanctuary (9:1) its fleshly prescriptions (9:9–10) and its ineffective animal sacrificial cult (10:4). The problem with the first covenant is not only that it was not kept, but also that it was related to a larger system which fails to accomplish what the author holds it should have done.\(^ {350}\)

However, it is difficult to isolate the fault of the first covenant to the ancient Israelites’ failure to keep it. The author clearly holds that it is also possible to fall away under the regime of the new covenant (2:1–4; 6:4–8; 10:26–31; 12:15–17). If he was trying to argue that the superiority of the new covenant lies in it being unbreakable, he has done an unreasonably poor job in making his case. Understanding 8:7 primarily as a critique of the old covenant itself accords well with 8:13, and also with the critique of the entire “old system” which is so prominent in Hebrews. The fact that there seems to be something intrinsically wrong with the old covenant, tells strongly against the idea that Hebrews is primarily arguing for a *renewal* of the old covenant. I would maintain that this conclusion, which stresses the contrast between the first and second covenant, is strengthened if we explore what the primary rhetorical function of Jeremiah 31 in the argument of Hebrews seems to be. Moreover, I would also claim that the use of Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews, points to the *horizontal* significance of the covenant motif.

\(^{347}\) So Johnson, *Hebrews,* 205. He admits that this argument is awkward, but states that “however illogical, that is the line our author follows.”

\(^{348}\) This reading presupposes the accusative αὐτοῖς instead of the dative αὐτοῖς in 8:8. If the dative were to be preferred, one could understand the sentence as follows: “For God blames [the first covenant] when he says to them: . . .” If the accusative is preferred, as I think it should be, the sentence translates as follows: “For God blames them, saying: . . .”


\(^{350}\) Backhaus, *Der neue Bund,* 160–65.
3.2.5 Why Jeremiah 31?

We have already briefly commented on the function of the covenant motif as such, and suggested that it relates Jesus’ priesthood to a redemptive historical conception. A slightly different question is why the author introduced the covenant motif, by way of precisely quoting Jeremiah 31. It is natural to seek an answer to this question by looking at the content of the passage quoted.\(^{351}\) There we find that the new covenant is different from the first one (8:9); that it will be characterized by internalization of the law (8:10); through a relationship between God and his people constituted on perfect knowledge of the Lord (8:11); and through God showing mercy towards the iniquities and sins of the people (8:12). The most striking thing in all these characteristics of the new covenant is that they seem to have influenced the author’s theology to a very small degree, at least explicitly.\(^{352}\) This is amazing, given the fact that the author has quoted the prophecy twice (8:8–12; 10:16–17). This is not to say that there are no significant points of contact between the content of the prophecy and the homily as such, for there are certainly many points of contact. Apart from the idea that the law would be inscribed on the hearts of God’s people, an idea which is not developed, all the statements in the prophecy find resonances in other parts of the homily. However – and this is the point I am trying to make – the content of the prophecy of the new covenant is not used to such a degree that it explains why the author gave it such a central place in his homily.

Nor can the use of the prophecy be derived from the author’s cultic exposition, although the new covenant is intimately related to it. The prophecy of the new covenant is not articulated in cultic language in Jeremiah, and it is not directly related to sacrifice or priesthood. Even if we imagine Hebrews without Jeremiah 31, it would still be easy to reconstruct a theology about Christ’s sacrifice, and his heavenly priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. It would even be possible to reconstruct a covenantal interpretation of the Christ event, without Jeremiah 31, drawing solely on the Sinai typology developed in 9:15–22. This suggests that the author consciously chose to interpret the priesthood of Jesus in terms of a new covenant, even though this new covenant interpretation was not given by virtue of the subject itself. If this is the case, what could explain the precise choice of Jeremiah 31? Why did he even quote it twice, giving it such a prominent position in the homily?\(^{353}\)

I propose that the key lies in the comment in 8:13, where there is in fact only one feature of the new covenant which is emphasized by the author, and that is its newness.\(^{354}\) The only distinctive contribution of Jeremiah 31 to the author’s theology is the concept of newness. One could perhaps put it this way: the only feature of the argument in Hebrews which would have led one to suspect that Jeremiah 31 had influenced the author, if we imagine that Jeremiah 31 had not been quoted or directly alluded to in the homily, is the idea that there are two different covenants, one which is new and another which is old. All other concepts and

\(^{351}\) Hultgren (From the Damascus Covenant, 84–95) offers a very insightful discussion of the relationship between different Scriptural texts which in some way deal with “covenant renewal,” and argues that Jeremiah 31 is closely related to Deut 28–30, Ezek 36–37 and 2 Chr 15.

\(^{352}\) Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 169; Gräßer, Hebräer, 2:101.

\(^{353}\) Forcefully argued by Gräßer, Hebräer, 2:103.

\(^{354}\) On the entire question of the purpose of the new covenant motif in Hebrews, I am indebted to Manuel Vogel’s insightful discussion in Heil des Bundes, 318–38.
motifs in Hebrews could just as likely have been derived from elsewhere. The concept of newness related to covenant is a distinct contribution from Jeremiah 31 to Hebrews, and thus the feature of the prophecy which best explains its presence and prominence in the homily.

When the author comments on the prophecy in 8:13, he reasons as follows. In saying “new,” God has implicitly also declared the first covenant to be old. The very existence of a new covenant, must therefore affect the standing of the previous one. The quote is thus framed by comments which articulate the qualitative distinction between the two covenants, and that distinction is understood in temporal terms. It would therefore be misleading to speak of a renewal of the old covenant. The author has given a more radical interpretation of the prophecy of Jeremiah. If the covenant motif, as such, functions to relate the Christ event to redemptive history, and if the quote from Jeremiah functions to establish the distinction between new and old, it follows that the new covenant motif is used to demonstrate that a qualitatively new epoch in redemptive history has come. This bears on my questions of research because a redemptive historical conception of newness implicitly elevates the importance of the Christ event, understood as something which took place in the history of Israel. The new covenant is not reducible to some timeless truth about the superiority of the heavenly world, which one in principle could attain in any number of different ways. The new covenant is rather tied specifically to the Christ event. The significance of the Christ event would be even stronger if it turned out that the old covenant has somehow been made obsolete, and I would go a long way in arguing that it has.

3.2.6 God Has Made the First Covenant Old

If the new covenant is distinct from the old one, as I have now argued, this seems to raise the question of whether the old covenant has any abiding validity. This issue is addressed in the comment in 8:13, but this verse is both difficult to translate and interpret: “When he speaks of a ‘new’ covenant, he пепαλαίωκεν the first one, and that which is παλαιόμενον and γηράσκον is close to ἀφανισμός.” The interpretations of all the terms which I have rendered in Greek above are disputed. Some would argue that пепαλαίωκεν simply means that the old covenant has been declared old, in a “neutral” way, whereas others would argue that it also implies that the old covenant has been “made obsolete.” By the same token, some would argue that the term γηράσκω implies loss of vitality and strength (cf. 1 Sam 8:1; Ruth 1:12), whereas others question these negative connotations. Finally, there is the question of whether ἀφανισμός implies destruction as well as disappearance. The term, and its cognates, could be used to denote destruction both in the New Testament and the LXX. Some commentators

355 Backhaus (Der neue Bund, 159) correctly states that 8:7–13 primarily deals with the fate of the old covenant, and not with the content of the new one.
358 Koester, Hebrews, 388: He argues that the author draws on legal language, where the inauguration of one covenant implies the obliteration of the other.
359 So Johnson, Hebrews, 209; Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 166.
361 Deut 7:2; 19:1; 2 Sam 21:5; 1 Kgs 9:7; Jdt 4:1; Mic 7:13; Zech 1:13; Mal 1:3; Ezek 6:14.
therefore argue that the old covenant is “destined for imminent destruction.” However, the term does not necessarily carry this connotation, and the text is therefore ultimately ambiguous.

I believe the answers to these questions lie in the logic of the larger cultic discourse, rather than in the precise wording. The old covenant is part of a larger system which is subject to severe criticism in Hebrews, consisting of the Levitical priesthood, earthly sanctuary, animal sacrifice, and legal prescriptions, and this system seems to have been replaced by a new order. There has been a change of priesthood (7:11), from the Levitical priesthood to the priesthood of Jesus. The useless prescriptions have been set aside, and a better hope through which we can draw near has been introduced (7:18–19). The fleshly regulations for worship have had their time (9:10), the time of correction is at hand (9:10), Jesus has opened new possibilities for serving the living God (9:14), and the old sacrificial cult has been abolished and replaced, through the sacrifice of Jesus’ body (10:8–10). Because a distinctively new covenant has been inaugurated and put into force (9:15–18), the logic of the author’s argument seems to indicate that the old covenant has had its time.

The critique of the old covenant seems to tell against the idea that the old covenant could function as an abiding source of Israelite identity. If we assume that the old covenant used to be one of the defining features of Israelite identity before the Christ event, and if it is correct to say that this covenant has lost this central function, it follows that there is a strong sense of discontinuity between the identity of Israel before and after the Christ event, according to Hebrews. However, this raises the question of what the old covenant represents. How encompassing is the old covenant? And how much has been made old and outdated? A fruitful way of exploring these issues is to investigate how the old covenant relates to the law.

3.3 The Standing of the Law of the Old Covenant

3.3.1 The Old Covenant Law

I have not yet clarified what is meant by the phrase “old covenant,” only argued that it is related to “a larger system” consisting of priesthood, sacrifice, sanctuary and commandments. The citation from Jeremiah contrasts the new covenant with the one which was made when God led the “fathers” out of Egypt (8:9). This clearly indicates that the Sinai covenant is meant, and this is also confirmed in 9:18–22. Thus, the old covenant is not the covenant made with Abraham, and it is certainly not a comprehensive way of referring to the entire redemptive history before the coming of Christ. But if the old covenant is the Sinai covenant, and if it has been made old, what then is the status of the law? This is surely of

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363 See 4.3.2.
364 The fact that the author states that the old covenant is near disappearance, and thus has not yet totally disappeared, is hardly a sufficient basis for articulating a two-covenant theology, according to which the new and the old covenants exist side by side. Further, the term ἐγγύς in 8:13 should probably be understood as “sachlich” and not “zeitlich.” Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 167.
365 It is therefore misleading to say, as Lehne does (New Covenant, 20), that 6:12 and 6:15 refer to promises “obtained within the old covenant,” as if “old covenant” was an apt way of referring to the entire Scriptural history before Jesus.
great importance to our investigation because so many Jews at the time of Hebrews would have articulated their identity as members of God’s covenant people in terms of having received the law, and the obligation to keep it. One could also argue that reverence toward the law in and of itself, and prior to the act keeping of the law, would have functioned as a basic and fundamental conviction uniting Jews as God’s people. However the significance of the law is grounded or articulated, it is hardly controversial to argue for its importance for Jews, in constituting and maintaining Israelite identity. But if the law is related to the old covenant in Hebrews, and if the old covenant has had its time, could the law still function as a source of common identity for the people of God?

There seem to be two major interpretive strategies available for anyone who would want to argue that the critique of the old covenant law is less radical than it appears to be on first sight. One could attempt to demonstrate that Hebrews has a more positive or balanced view of the law, than appears to be the case. Alternatively, one could try to isolate the critique of the old covenant law to particular issues, thereby “saving” the rest of the law. In the following I will begin by assessing Hebrews’ view of the law more generally, to see how radical the critique is, and whether that critique is balanced in some way. I will begin by addressing the view of the law as it is articulated in 7:11–19. Then I will comment on the law’s prophetic foreshadowing of the Christ event. Thereafter I will discuss passages which deal with the law within a reasoning which moves from lesser to greater. Finally, I will highlight some instances in Hebrews where there seems to be a significant silence regarding the law.

When I speak of “the law” in the following, I will not be referring broadly to the five books of the Pentateuch. I will rather be referring narrowly to the legal code of commandments found therein. The question of whether Hebrews has a yet narrower concept in mind when it discusses the law – for instance only the cultic prescriptions within the legal code – will be addressed in a separate section below, where the question of whether it might be possible to isolate the critique of the law in Hebrews will be given attention.

3.3.2 “The Law Made Nothing Perfect”

Apart from the mention of the law regarding tithes in 7:5, the question of the law is introduced and discussed for the first time in 7:11–19. The author begins with a counterfactual premise (7:11): if perfection was attainable through the Levitical priesthood, what reason would there be for a new priest to arise? By the same token as in 8:7, the author’s logic presupposes that the existence of the new order is explained in terms of the failure of the old order. If a new priesthood after a different order is the solution, then the old priesthood and its order must be part of the problem. The author continues by arguing that a change (μετάθεσις) of priesthood has occurred (7:12), presumably in order that perfection could be obtained through the new priesthood. This raises the question of the standing of the law for the author; for a change of priesthood also implies and necessitates a change of law (7:12).

The relationship between the law and the priesthood is addressed in the parenthetical statement in 7:11: ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπὶ αὐτῆς νενομοθέτηται. Does this mean that the law was given to the people on the basis of the Levitical priesthood? Or does it mean that the people

366 Perfection is the standard according to which the “old order” is judged in Hebrews (7:19; 9:9; 10:1)
were given laws concerning the Levitical priesthood? If the Levitical priesthood is understood as the very basis of the entire law, and if that priesthood has been replaced by something else, then it seems to follow that the entire law has lost its foundation. However, the author’s argument points toward the second interpretation. It is the Levitical priesthood which is based on the law, and not vice versa. The law installs weak high priests (7:28), claims the author, and the priests who minister on earth are said to bring forth gifts according to the law (8:4; 10:8). Thus, it seems preferable to understand 7:11 to mean that the people were given laws concerning the priesthood. The logic would thus be that since the Levitical priesthood has been replaced by the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, the specific laws which install Levitical priests cannot be valid anymore, and a change in the law therefore has to have taken place.

This squares well with the argument which follows 7:12, where the author seeks to demonstrate that Jesus is not priest according to the law. Moses said nothing about priests descending from the tribe of Judah (7:14), the author admits, and thus no one from this tribe ministers at the altar (7:13). However, Jesus’ priesthood does not rely on a “commandment which concerns fleshly descent” (7:16); it flows from the power of an indestructible life. The author thus contrasts a fleshly, earthly and inferior principle of heritable priesthood, which flows from the law, with the power of the life intrinsic to the personhood of the resurrected Jesus. The principle of heritable priesthood is one of death, weakness, corruptibility, change and limited time, because it presupposes that new priests need to succeed those who die (7:23). Thus it is fleshly. Jesus’ life, however, is without beginning and end (7:3). He is priest for all eternity (6:20; 7:3, 17, 22, 28), because he always lives (7:8, 25). The death of one priest installed the next under the old order, but the everlasting life of Jesus secures an eternal priesthood in the new order.

This contrast prepares for the conclusion in 7:18–19, which picks up on the premise in 7:11–12. The sentence is governed by a μέν–δέ construction, where the μέν-sentence contrasts the δέ-sentence, at the center of which is a statement on the law:

a. ἀθέτησις μὲν γὰρ γίνεται προαγούσης ἐν τολῆς
b. διὰ τὸ αὐτῆς άσθενεὺς καὶ ἀνωμαλεύς
   – οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐτελείωσεν ὁ νόμος –
   a. ἐπισαγωγὴ δὲ κραίττων ἐξειδίκευσ
   b. δὲ ἦς ἐγγίζομεν τῷ θεῷ

368 Koester, Hebrews, 353, 379. The statement in 8:6 is quite similar: ἡτὶς ἐπὶ κραίττων ἐπαγγελίας νενομοθήτηται. Koester draws attention to the fact that ἐπὶ is used with the genitive in 7:11, whereas it is used with the dative in 8:6. He thus understands 7:11 to refer to laws concerning priesthood, whereas he understands 8:6 to mean a covenant based on better promises. For this use of ἐπὶ with the genitive, Koester refers to Philo (Spec. 1.235; 2.35) and Josephus (C. Ap. 2.276).

369 Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 96.

370 Mackie (Eschatology and Exhortation, 75) rightly notes that the change in the priesthood should probably be understood as part of the author’s conviction that he was living at the turn of the ages.

371 It is difficult to know how to translate the phrase νόμος ἐντολῆς σαρκίνης, found in 7:16. Does it mean that the commandment belongs to the sphere of flesh, as seems to be the case with the regulations in 9:10? Or does it simply mean that the commandment regulated a priesthood which was heritable? I have chosen to translate in a way which captures both nuances. The author’s point is not simply to distinguish two different principles, of equal validity, which in different ways determines who is installed as priests, but also to demonstrate the weakness of the old order.
The setting aside of the former (προάγουσα) command is contrasted with the introduction (ἐπεισαγωγή) of a better hope. The problems related to the commandment (διὰ τὸ αὐτῆς ἀσθενέως) are contrasted with the quality ascribed to the better hope (δι᾿ ἦς ἔγγίσομεν τῷ θεῷ). The syntax thus clearly presents us with a contrast which results in a replacement: there has occurred a setting aside (ἀθέτησις) of the previous commandment. The “former” commandment probably refers back to the fleshly commandment concerning descent, mentioned in 7:16. Stating that a commandment given by God has been set aside is a stunning claim, and it is grounded in a radical assertion: the law made nothing perfect. This recalls the statement made about the Levitical priesthood in 7:11, but pushes the argument one step further. The inability to provide perfection is not only a specific problem related to the priesthood – it appears also to be a general problem with the law. Because the law is incapable of bringing about perfection, it was necessary to introduce a better hope. The better hope spoken of in 7:19 recalls the statement about the hope which the addressees are pictured as fleeing towards in 6:18–19. The image of “movement” which is found in 6:18–19, is also present in 7:19. The hope of the addressees is a hope of entrance and of drawing near. What this hope entails is further developed in cultic imagery in 10:19–25.

Having now looked at 7:11–19, it seems to me that the way in which the author argues is just as important as the conclusions he reaches. Note, first of all, that the author makes no attempt to show how the priesthood of Jesus is compatible with a certain interpretation of the law. Rather, he is actually at pains to demonstrate that the validity of the priesthood of Jesus is not derived from the law, in which case it would have had too weak a grounding. He openly recognizes that the law does not appoint Jesus as high priest (7:14), that other priests are installed instead (7:28), and that Jesus therefore would not have been a priest, if his priesthood was of the kind that was subject to the legislation of the law (8:4).

Moreover, 372 The author plays on the instrumental and causal meaning of the preposition διὰ.
373 Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 105.
374 The same term is used about the way the sacrifice of Jesus takes away sin in 9:26. The term thus seems to imply total removal, and draws on juridical language. Backhaus writes that the term clearly has “die juridische Konnotation einer ‘rechtkräftigen Annullierung;’ dieser technische Gebrauch wird durch die Substanzierung mit γίνομαι (statt ἀθετεῖται) sowie durch die inversive Voranstellung des artikellosen, vom Genetivattribut getrennten Nomens akzentuiert” (Der neue Bund, 106).
375 Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 106. Contra Mary Schmitt who holds that the statement in 7:19, even if it appears to be a general statement on ὁ νόμος, is a specific statement on the laws concerning priesthood (“Restructuring Views on Law in Hebrews 7:12,” JBL 128 [2009]: 189–201).
376 Hughes (Hebrews, 264–65) argues, unconvincingly in my opinion, that the law’s inability to provide perfection is explained by the sinfulness of humans, thus the problem would reside in humans alone. However, it is the commandments of the law itself which are deemed weak and useless, not humans.
378 On the idea of “approaching” God, see 4.6.2.
379 Hebrews 8:4 seems to provide the author with a principle which could have “saved” the law, if the author wanted to. It seems to me that he could have claimed that the law governs all activity on earth with full authority, but that the heavenly realm lies outside the legislation of the law. This could, perhaps, have allowed the author to sustain his theology of the priesthood of Jesus without having to argue that a commandment of the law has been set aside. However, the author does not argue that the priesthood of Jesus lies outside the realm of the law, but that the priesthood of Jesus has caused the abrogation of the legal prescriptions which govern priesthood, and replaced them with a better hope. Thus, I think Schmitt (“Restructuring,” 200–201) is mistaken if she means to suggest that 8:4 implies the (abiding) validity of an earthly Levitical priesthood.
although the author does not attempt to ground the priesthood of Jesus in the law, he does ground it in Scripture. In 7:20–28, the author argues that Jesus, in contrast to other priests, has been installed through an oath. This oath is found in Scripture (Ps 110), which is interpreted as God declaring that Jesus is high priest forever. Thus, it is God himself who has set aside the commandment of the law, by making a declaration which introduces a new order according to the type of Melchizedek, and it is this oath which also implicitly undermines the foundations of the Levitical priesthood. The author finds two different and conflicting principles operating within Scripture, the commandment of the law and a divine declarative oath, and he argues that the oath, which came later (7:28), must take precedence over the commandment of the law. The logic is similar to that found in 8:13, where the inauguration of a new covenant implies that the former covenant has been made old. The author seems to read Scripture from the premise that the ultimate authority lies in the last word spoken by God. This relegates the importance of the law in the interpretation of Scripture.

Third, the author’s claim that the law has been subject to change (cf. μετατιθεμένης, 7:12), contrasts with his view of the divine promise and oath given to Abraham, which are recognized as unchangeable (ἀμετάθετος, 6:18). Their unchangeable quality is grounded – not of course in their eschatological newness – but in the very fact that the words were spoken directly to Abraham by God, who is incapable of lying (6:18). For some reason, the author is not prepared to admit the same unchangeable quality in the prescriptions of the law. This could be explained by the fact that the law had been transmitted through angels (2:2), and that it therefore did not represent the direct speech of God in the same way as a promise (6:18), an oath (7:22), or a prophecy (8:13). Whatever the reason, the commandments of the law are not recognized as unchangeable by the author, even though God’s promises to Abraham are.

3.3.3 The Prophetic Function of the Law

In keeping with the eschatological perspective on Scripture outlined above, the author seems to think that the law fills a prophetic function within redemptive history. When using the term “prophetic” I have a more comprehensive concept than “prediction” in mind. It is not only

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380 This is significant because it indicates that Scripture, for the author of Hebrews, “points beyond itself by indicating its own inadequacy” (Andrew T. Lincoln, “Hebrews and Biblical Theology,” in Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation [ed. C. Bartholomew; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 5; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Paternoster, 2004], 313–38 [323]).


383 Richard Wall and William Lane argue that because the author consistently grounds his argument for the superiority of Christ and his new order in a kind of Scriptural hermeneutics, his argument can therefore be labeled “profoundly Judaic” (“Polemic in Hebrews,” 184). This seems from the outset to rule out, though, that there might be certain kinds of Scriptural hermeneutics which are not “profoundly Judaic.” Before I am ready to accept that the Scriptural hermeneutics in Hebrews really is “profoundly Judaic” I would have liked to have seen examples of ancient Jewish authors making profoundly Judaic arguments, to suggest that certain commandments in the Torah have been set aside because the law, in contrast to other parts of Scripture, is not irrevocable. On the face of it, this seems like a Scriptural hermeneutics astonishingly at odds with mainstream Second Temple Jewish reverence toward the Torah.
that the law contains bits and pieces of predictions which, when they have been fulfilled, lose their relevance. The *entire* law sheds light on and interprets the true significance of the Christ event, according to Hebrews. Furthermore, it would probably be misleading to think of this hermeneutical process as a one-way communication, where the law is imagined to point to Christ. It is just as much the case that the law is re-read and re-interpreted in light of the Christ event.

It is quite obvious that Scripture fills a prophetic function in Hebrews, but perhaps less self-evident that the commandments of the law are also read and interpreted in a prophetic way. However, a good example of what I mean is found in 9:22, where it is said that, according to the law, everything is cleansed by blood, and that without blood there is no forgiveness. This principle also implicitly interprets the effects of Christ’s sacrificial death: the blood of Jesus cleanses and brings about forgiveness. Thus, it seems evident that the author’s interpretation of the Christ event is predicated on the validity of a principle which is articulated in the law. This observation could be pressed further, because the *entire* exposition of the priesthood of Jesus, and his redemptive sacrifice, presupposes the terminology, logic and principles found in the law. Hebrews is not saying that no sacrifice, bloodshed, priesthood, altar, or sanctuary is needed, but that what the law prescribes has found its eschatological fulfillment and expression in the Christ event.

It is important to take note of the fact that it is precisely the parts of the law which are subject to the author’s critique, namely the cultic prescriptions, which also fill a positive prophetic function, in illuminating and interpreting the Christ event. Even though these prescriptions have been set aside, and are even dismissed as fleshly, they still provide the author with terminology and motifs which are vital to his argument. This precludes the assumption that some parts of the law are assumed to be valid, while others are critiqued, because it is the very same parts which are both critiqued and used positively. This has led some to conclude that the argument in Hebrews is simply self-contradictory, and that the author is sawing off the branches upon which he sits. However, before dismissing the argument as self-contradictory, we should look for a principle which makes the argument coherent.

Such a principle is found, I submit, in 10:1. The law, the author says, contains a shadow (σκιά) of the good things to come. This recalls the statement about the earthly tent erected by Moses, which was a shadow and copy of the heavenly sanctuary (8:5). Analogous to how the earthly sanctuary points to its heavenly type the law points towards the eschatological reality. These eschatological “good things” which, from the perspective of the law, are to come (10:1), are the very same “good things” which in and through the Christ event have already

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385 Note how Justin too is able to combine cultic typologies with anti-cultic polemics. See Oskar Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (NovTSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1987), 295–323.


been made present (9:11). The law thus fills a prophetic role; it points forward to the salvation brought by Christ. However, analogous with the way the earthly sanctuary is inferior to its heavenly countertype, the author also clearly emphasizes the limitations of the law: it does not contain the very image of the realities (ἡ ἐικόν τῶν πραγμάτων), therefore it is also incapable of perfecting those who take part in the sacrificial cult it prescribes (10:1). By differentiating between two levels, that of shadow (σκιά) and that of image (ἐἰκόν), the author is able to say things about the law which could appear to contradict one another, but which are both vital to his argument. The cultic prescriptions of the law lack the “image” of the reality to which they point as a “shadow.” The fact that the law retains a positive interpretive function for Hebrews seems to suggest that the practice of reading, interpreting and studying the law is implicitly promoted. It is not, therefore, that the law has simply lost its validity as revelation; it is rather that it must be re-interpreted in light of the Christ event in order to fulfill its function.

3.3.4 From Lesser to Greater

At three instances in Hebrews (2:2–3, 10:28–31 and 12:25), the law is discussed in a context which argues from lesser to greater. Each passage contains warnings against disobeying God, and every time the law is found on the “lesser” side of the argument. The message is similar in each case. It is presupposed that the ancient Israelites were bound to the law, with the consequence that those who transgressed it (2:2), set it aside (10:28) or rejected it (12:25), received just punishment (2:2), were killed (10:28), and did not escape (12:25). The law is explicitly said to have been valid (2:2), and it is acknowledged as a word spoken by God (12:25). However, the author also emphasizes that the addressees stand before an even greater revelation (2:3), and that they will therefore receive even greater punishment if they reject what has been given to them (10:29). The superiority of the revelation given to the audience, through Jesus, is developed in different ways. In 2:2–3, it is explained in terms of the law having been transmitted through angels, whereas the gospel was transmitted directly by the Lord (Jesus) himself. In 12:25 the distinction made is that between admonishment given on earth, at the time of the law, and the fact that God now addresses the audience from

388 There is a text critical issue in 9:11, concerning whether the text speaks of the good things which have come, or the good things which are to come. In my opinion, the best arguments favor the first interpretation. Thus also Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 91, 106.

389 Mackie (*Eschatology and Exhortation*, 117–19) makes an intriguing observation when he underlines how Hebrews in 10:1 denies the law the kind of quality ascribed to it by Philo. For Philo, the law did not contain shadows, but the very archetype of reality (*Plant.*, 27; *Somm.* 1.206).

390 It is striking that the author in 10:28 says that those who “set aside” the law of Moses will be killed, when he has previously said that the weak and useless commandment of the law has been “set aside” (7:18–19). The logic seems to be that God alone stands above the law, and that he alone is permitted to set aside the commandments he has given.

391 12:26 seems to imply that God is also the speaker in 12:25.

392 There is an important strand of tradition which notes that the angels were present when the law was given (cf. Deut 33:2, LXX), and this motif seems to enrich the value of the law for some writers (cf. *Jub* 1:27–2:1; Josephus, *A. J.* 15.136). For Paul, however, the idea that the law was transmitted through angels clearly relegates its importance below that of the divine promise (Gal 3:18–20). The same logic seems to be operating in Hebrews.
heaven. Within the dichotomy between heaven and earth, so important to the argument in Hebrews, the revelation at Sinai is definitively placed within the earthly realm.  

An important question which can be posed with respect to all three texts is whether the author reckons with the abiding validity of the law, or if he is making a historical argument. Is he saying that the addressees still will be punished for abrogating or rejecting the commandments of God, or is he saying that the ancient Israelites were? Is he saying that the law was valid, or that it still is? Several arguments suggest that he is primarily arguing on a historical level. First, the author clearly does argue, at other instances, that some commandments have been set aside (7:18–19, 9:9–10, 10:8–10), and he would not therefore have asked the addressees to observe these. Second, when the author does give ethical exhortations, he does not appeal to the commandments of the law (cf. 13:1–6). Third, the author’s focus in all the three texts is the question of how to respond to the message of, and about, Christ. This is the challenge facing them, the word spoken to them, and the warning given to them. In 12:18–24 the author even explicitly states that the audience has not come to Sinai, the implication being that it is not this revelation to which they stand accountable.

Although 2:2–3, 10:28–31 and 12:25 clearly do affirm the temporal validity of the law, and preclude interpretations which suggest that the law should never have been given or observed in the first place, they provide insufficient evidence for articulating a positive theology about the law as an abiding source of commitment for the people of God.

3.3.5 Significant Silence

The fact that something is not mentioned does not necessarily mean that it is unimportant. Silencing a specific matter could, on the other hand, be a very effective rhetorical tool. Instances where one could expect a reference to the law, but where none is found, could therefore prove to be significant. As already mention, the law’s commandments are absent from the author’s ethical exhortations. Even when he does appeal to Scripture to ground his exhortations, he does not appeal to the commandments of the law. When the author speaks of doing God’s will, this is described as something which God creates in us the ability to do, through Jesus Christ (13:21), and the maturity called for in 5:14, which is focused on the ability to make moral judgments, results from the training of the faculties, not study of the law. Although we certainly do not find any trace of polemic against “ethical legalism,” neither do we find passages where norms for community life are grounded in the commandments of the law. There is every reason to think that the author would have endorsed the content of large parts of the law, though, for the advice he gives in 13:1–5 finds resonance in many of

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393 Contrast m. Sanh 10:1, where it is said that those who deny that the Torah is from heaven, have no portion in the world to come.

394 This point, which I take to be very significant, is further developed later in 3.6.3.


396 In 13:5–6, concluding his ethical exhortations, the author refers to the promise of God’s faithfulness found in Deut 31:6 and Ps 117 (118):6. But this is not a “commandment,” and thus escapes my definition of “law” as referring not to the Pentateuch but specifically to commandments.
the law’s commandments. It therefore seems that he could have grounded many of his exhortations in the law if he had wanted to, but for some reason he chose not to.397

In 6:2 we find some topics which seem to constitute part of the initial instruction given to new members of the community. Some have argued that these instructions are similar to those which would have faced a Gentile who wanted to become a Jew, the implication being that the community addressed in Hebrews must have been delimited in a way similar to Jewish communities, thus demanding a similar rite of initiation.398 However, if we compare 6:2 to instructions alleged to have been given to converts, the absence of injunctions to keep the commandments of the law constitutes a striking difference.399 There is also an intriguing silence regarding the law, in the fact that the inscription of the law on the hearts, mentioned in the prophecy of the new covenant, is left undeveloped by Hebrews. If the author wanted to argue for the abiding validity of the law, the idea of inscribing it on the hearts of the members of the new covenant would have provided him with fertile ground for doing so. The fact that he nonetheless fails to use this opportunity, is therefore striking.400 It is not only that we find no passages which instruct the addressees to keep the law; neither do we find any which speak of fulfilling the law, say, for instance, through loving your neighbor, or following Jesus.401

There are also several instances where the history of ancient Israel is discussed from a positive perspective, and where a reference to the giving of the law might have been expected, but where none is found. Moses is praised as a credible servant, but this service is not related to the giving of the law (3:1–6). The retelling of the Scriptural narrative in chapter 11 includes Moses, but passes over the giving of the law in silence. We are moved directly from Egypt to Jericho (11:29–30). Conversely, the major example of covenant disloyalty found in Hebrews, the rebellion of the wilderness generation, is not construed in terms of transgression of commandments, but in terms of lack of faith when faced with the call to enter God’s rest.402

397 Frey (“Die alte und die neue,” 302) claims that the law has become ethically irrelevant for the author.
398 Hans Windisch, Der Hebräerbrief (HNT 14; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1931), 49.
399 We only have later rabbinic material to suggest the kind of instruction that was given to proselytes. But if we compare that rabbinic material to Hebrews 6:1–2, on the assumption that it really does contain the basic structure of instruction given to proselytes at the time of Hebrews, the absence of any mention of the law and the obligations to keep both the light and heavy commandments, is striking. For a discussion about the instruction given to proselytes, and an (in my opinion somewhat unpersuasive) attempt to compare it with Hebrews 6:1–2, see David Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religions 2; London: Athlone Press, 1956), 106. The rabbinic sources referred to are b. Yev 47 and Gerim 1. Cohen (Beginnings, 209–11) dates b.Yevamot to the second century A.D., while Tractate Gerim is probably post-Talmudic.
400 One could only speculate about why the author chose to quote the statement about the inscription of the law on the hearts of the people twice (!), without commenting on it or developing it. Especially curious is the fact that the inscription of the law is not left out when Jeremiah 31 is quoted in Hebrews 10:16–17, where the quote is significantly abrogated anyway. A possible answer could be that the author is concerned with the fact that the new covenant is focused on internal matters, and speaks to the interior of humans – their hearts and consciousness. According to this view, it is not really the law which is of interest to Hebrews, but the fact that it is written on the hearts of the covenant recipients.
401 Contrary to what David Allen argues (Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Re-Presentation [WUNT 2/238; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 211–14), there is no “new Torah” motif in Hebrews.
402 Gelardini (“Synagogue Homily”) argues, unconvincingly in my opinion, that the gold calf incident is implicit in Hebrews, and of great importance.
3.3.6 Conclusions Regarding the Law

The first real discussion of the law centers on the prescriptions which regulate priesthood. The author had to come to terms with the fact that Jesus was not qualified for priesthood according to the law. He solves this problem by claiming that the priesthood of Jesus is not grounded in the law at all, but in the power of an indestructible life. Further, he claims that the laws which regulate priesthood have been set aside. Although the issue at stake is rather narrow, and only directly concerns priesthood, the way the author argues is relevant on a more general note. The author claims that the law has been changed (7:12), an assertion which implicitly relegates its validity below other parts of Scripture, which are claimed to be unchangeable. He also appeals, in what appears to be a legal way of reasoning, to the fact that Jesus has been installed through an oath which was issued later than the law (7:28). This argument rests on the presupposition that the ultimate authority lies in the last word spoken by God.

All this suggests that the author’s understanding of the Christ event has affected his entire way of reading Scripture, and his understanding of redemptive history, the climax of which lies outside the boundaries of Scripture (cf. 1:1–2). This is significant, because there has been a tendency to focus on the formal similarities between Hebrews’ use of Scripture and that found in ancient Jewish material, to the neglect of hermeneutical differences. There is no doubt that Hebrews manifests a high regard for Scripture, an attitude which it shares with mainstream ancient Jewish tradition. However, because Scripture is read and interpreted in light of the Christ event, and because this results in some quite radical re-interpretations of it, one also has to come to terms with the hermeneutical assumptions which guide Hebrews’ use of Scripture. For Hebrews, the positive function of the law has to be integrated within this larger, eschatological view of redemptive history. Accordingly, the terminology and principles of the law are understood as prophetic shadows which point beyond themselves, towards the image of the true reality not contained within the law itself (10:1). The true significance of the law, therefore, is not legal but prophetic – in the sense that it could only be fully understood in light of the Christ event. The giving of the law is not mentioned as an important part of the history of Israel, nor is the law applied to as an abiding norm for the people of God.

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403 Koester, Hebrews, 373.
405 Joseph Fitzmyer comments on the use of Scripture in Hebrews and Qumran: “The similarities in exegetical practice of the two groups do not affect anything more than the periphery of their theologies. Both depend on the Old Testament, but both have certain presuppositions in light of which they read the Old Testament. It is these presuppositions which distinguish the two groups despite the similarities in their exegetical procedure” (“Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament,” NTS 7 [1961]: 297–333 [332]). For a similar view, see Richard Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 170.
406 It is therefore not persuasive when Wall and Lane (“Polemic in Hebrews,” 172) refer to the “normative character of the Torah” in Hebrews, without further qualification, as evidence for continued emotional and intellectual ties with Jewish communities.
407 I would therefore question the claim, made by Wall and Lane (“Polemic in Hebrews,” 184), that the author “fully shares Judaism’s understanding of the role of Scripture in the life of the faith community.”
Thus, although the question of the law is raised and discussed with specific reference to the priesthood of Christ, and his sacrificial death, the answers given by the author seem to indicate that the Christ event has reshaped the author’s reading and understanding of the law on a more fundamental and general level. The fact that the major function of the law seems to be prophetic rather than legal, and the lack of references to the law as an abiding source of community norms, casts doubt on the law’s ability to function as a source of shared identity for the addressees as well as for Jews standing outside the Jesus movement.

3.4 Does “Law” and “Covenant” Simply Mean “Cult” in Hebrews?

3.4.1 Attempts to Isolate the Critique

The radical critique of the law and the Sinai covenant found in Hebrews seems prima facie to offer considerable support to those who have argued for some kind of conflict between Hebrews and “Judaism.” I have now attempted to argue that there is little in Hebrews which functions to balance the radical critique of the law. The positive statements on the law are either part of a historical argument about how the law was binding to the ancient Israelites, or part of some Christological reading of Scripture, where the law functions as prophecy rather than as legal code. However, a good case could be made to suggest that the critique is mainly directed at the old covenant cult, as well as at the prescriptions in the law particularly related to the cult.  

According to this reading, the critique of the law and the old covenant would be more or less reducible to the critique of the cult. Gräßer gives expression to this view when commenting on the discussion of the new and old covenant in Hebrews 8:7–13: “Selbst das hier so ausführlich wie sonst neutestamentlich nur noch 2Kor 3 aufgeworfene Bundesthema meint in der Sache den Kult und nichts sonst.”

Hays similarly claims that the author “criticizes nothing in the Mosaic Torah except for the Levitical sacrificial cult.” He continues by claiming that the author of Hebrews is “not interested in a blanket abolition of the Mosaic Law. Rather, his concern focuses narrowly on the cultic practice of offering sacrifices for sins under the first covenant.” He concludes that there is no “comprehensive negation of Torah” in Hebrews. This allows Hays to suggest that Hebrews must be understood in line with other Jewish texts where severe criticism of the cult in Jerusalem is leveled. This, in turn, is a vital part of his argument for understanding Hebrews as a “thoroughly Jewish” document, implying a thoroughly Jewish identity for its

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408 Anderson claims that “no break with Jewish tradition” is made in Hebrews “apart from priesthood, sacrifice and temple.” He goes on to argue that “Torah is a larger category” than cult and that “apart from priesthood and other cultic aspects,” the Torah is “left untouched by the critique of Hebrews” (“Heirs of the New Age,” 273).

409 If you also hold that the cult critique is more or less reducible to a critique of the earthly realm, you will tend towards the “foil-theory” (cf. 1.3.2).

410 Gräßer, Hebräer, 2:105.

411 Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City,” 154, 161.

412 Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City,” 154–55.
recipients.\textsuperscript{413} We must therefore ask how his assessment of law and covenant in Hebrews, which is quite common among commentators on Hebrews, fits the argument of the author.\textsuperscript{414}

3.4.2 The Difficulty in Isolating the Critique

It must be recognized that Hebrews’ main interest when discussing the law and the old covenant is the sacrificial cult, and it is not hard to see why an argument against the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifices prescribed by the law, would have forced the author to give a theological rationale for setting these specific commandments aside. Thus, the doctrine of the high priesthood of Jesus, and the sacrificial interpretation of his death, sufficiently explains why the author had to deal with the prescriptions of the law which govern priesthood and sacrifice. However, the cultic interpretation of the Christ event does nothing to explain why the old covenant is made subject to critique. If the author only wanted to deal with some of the cultic prescriptions of the law, why then did he articulate a theology of two covenants succeeding each other, the new superior to the old? If his only interest were some cultic prescription within the law, why did he introduce a concept more comprehensive than the law itself – namely covenant – in order to articulate his point? Whatever the motivations of the author, he has de facto given his critique of the cult a comprehensive covenantal framework which would not have been needed in order to argue that some commandments have been set aside. Thus, the hypothesis that “covenant” simply means “cult” ultimately lacks explanatory power.

Furthermore, the critique of the old covenant and its law, found in Hebrews, goes beyond what would have been needed in order to establish the claim that the old sacrificial system has lost its validity.\textsuperscript{415} The author could, for instance, have argued that the prescriptions for sacrifice and priesthood have simply played their role in redemptive history, now to be surpassed by a different and even better order. He has, however, gone one step further. He not only argues that the regulations for worship under the first covenant were imposed until the time of correction, thus making his point about their delimited temporal validity, he also adds that these regulations were fleshly, thereby attaching them to a negative descriptor (9:10).\textsuperscript{416} By the same token, it would have sufficed for the author to write that the Levitical priesthood and the old covenant sacrifices were ineffective – if that was the only point he was trying to

\textsuperscript{413} Cf. 1.3.3.

\textsuperscript{414} This view is argued by Peter Gräbe, Der neue Bund in der frührchristlichen Literatur: unter Berücksichtigung der alttestamentlich-jüdischen Voraussetzungen (Forschung zur Bibel 96; Würzburg: Echter, 2001), 122–38. Frey similarly maintains: “Mit der alten διαθήκη ist dabei präzise der levitische Opfer- und Sühnekult gemeint” (“Die alte und die neue,” 278). Cf. also Backhaus: “Diese διαθήκη, das heißt: der levitische Opferkult . . .” (“Das wandernde Gottesvolk,” 199); and Backhaus: “Die frühere Heilsdisposition, um die es im Zusammenhang geht, ist allein der levitische Sühnekult” (Der neue Bund, 167).

\textsuperscript{415} Wilson writes: “the positive Christological case he makes could have been made, in principle, without the gratuitous denigration of things central to Jewish tradition” (Related Strangers, 122). A similar point is made by Wall and Lane: “He goes beyond this pastoral strategy to make depreciatory statements about the resources and supports of those who rely upon the provisions of the first covenant for access to God, that is, those who continue to identify themselves with the traditional perspectives and structures of Judaism” (“Polemic in Hebrews,” 176).

\textsuperscript{416} Frey states: “Die am stärksten negativen Aussagen über die Sinai-διαθήκη beruhen somit auf dem ontologischen Vorbehalt, den der Autor gegenüber jedem irdischen Opferdienst geltend macht” (“Die alte und die neue,” 299).
make – but for some reason he also chose to write that the law itself made nothing perfect (7:19).

Hays is also not entirely accurate in his description of which commandments are critiqued. It is not only sin offerings which are abolished, as seems to be the logical inference from the idea that Jesus has dealt with the problem of sin, but every kind of animal offering, summed up as θυσία, προσφορά, ὀλοκαυτώματα and περὶ ἀμαρτίας (10:5–6). Understanding the references to food and drinks in 9:10 and 13:9 as referring to sacrificial practice, and not to dietary regulations, is both possible and plausible. Thus, although I am not convinced by Hays’ metaphorical reading of 13:9, I would agree with him in holding that food laws, understood in terms of food taboos, are not critiqued in Hebrews. However, even if the reference to food and drinks could be understood in terms of sacrificial practice, ablutions cannot. True, matters of ritual purity are closely linked with sacrificial practice, and could plausibly be seen as a prerequisite for taking part in sacrificial practice, but that objection only serves to prove my point, which is to demonstrate how problematic it is to isolate the author’s critique to sin offerings alone, as Hays attempts to do. The Mosaic regulations for sacrifices, priesthood and worship are closely related to other parts of the Sinaitic code, and it is very difficult to know precisely where the author’s critique of the law “stops.” At any rate, it does definitively not “stop” precisely where Hays argues that it stops, namely at sin offerings alone.

But still, it could be objected, the comment about ablutions in 9:10 seems to have fallen casually and off-hand and it is not sustained by a developed theological argument. This is certainly correct. But once again I would argue that this objection serves to prove the point I am trying to make. The fact that ablutions are mentioned only in passing, and dismissed as fleshly without any further argument, is precisely what makes 9:10 so interesting. The author seems to have assumed that his audience would accept the dismissal of ablutions as a fleshly regulation, without any argument to substantiate his claim. But how could the author have expected this to be the case, if he wanted his audience to identify as Torah-abiding Jews for whom the law was a self-evident source of authority? Further, because ablutions are mentioned in 9:10 for no apparent reason, it would not have been possible to guess simply from the exposition of the Christ event that the author would have held that matters of ritual ablutions were fleshly regulations. This shows that the author’s critique of the law cannot be adequately explained by, isolated to, or derived from, matters which pertain directly and strictly to his exposition of Christ’s sacrifice and priesthood alone.

417 Cf. 6.5.1.

418 Hays does not deal with 9:10 in his article, but he (“Here We Have No Lasting City,” 154, n. 8) tentatively suggests that food functions as a metaphor for strange teachings in 13:9. This interpretation is not convincing, however. The fact that the author speaks of people walking in foods which do not benefit them (13:9), suggests that his is talking about practical matters and not about doctrine. Further, 13:9 clearly recalls 9:10, and I see no good reason for suggesting that 9:10 should be taken metaphorically.

419 Backhaus (Hebräer, 311): “Die nahezu beiläufige Weise, in der Hebr hier eines der wichtigsten Elemente frühjüdischer Selbstdefinition abtut, weckt erneut ernste Zweifel an einem bestimmenden Einfluss des Judenchristentums auf seine Adressaten.”

420 This is not to say that the author could not have given a cultic or Christological explanation for what he wrote in 9:10. Perhaps he could have. The point is that if he had not written anything about food, drink and ablutions we would never have guessed that his cultic understanding of the Christ event could have “forced” him to write what he did in 9:10.
from knowing the author’s theology of the Christ event, determine precisely which parts of the law he critiques, as if the critique simply mirrored his positive theology of the Christ event.

There are obviously countless prescriptions in the law, which the author does not deal with in Hebrews, which lie outside his immediate interest, and which we therefore do not know how he viewed. But if one is to guess what the author might have said about such matters – be it circumcision, food laws, festival observance, or Sabbath – one has to build on implications in the text, and if one attempts to expound on these implications, 9:10 makes it almost impossible to assume, as the default position, that the only regulations critiqued in Hebrews are those directly related to priesthood and sacrifice. Hebrews 9:10 is a signpost which suggests that the author’s critique of the law does go beyond the matters which he explicitly discusses and which are directly relevant to his argument, although we don’t know how far beyond. I am not arguing that we can determine precisely which parts of the law the author critiqued, by working from the implications in Hebrews. What I would maintain, though, is that one cannot simply assume that all the prescriptions in the law not directly discussed in Hebrews would have been regarded by the author as of abiding validity. 421

Isolating the author’s critique of the law to its cultic parts is not only difficult because it fails to account adequately for everything in the homily; it also seems to presuppose a problematic view of the law. Koester argues this point convincingly, and emphasizes that the law cannot be neatly divided into an “ethic” part which is kept, and a “cultic” part which is dismissed. Rather, the author would probably have viewed the law from the point of its unity. Thus, changing or abrogating some parts of the law affects the entire system. 422 Further, as we have seen, the parts of the law which the author criticizes are the very same parts which he also uses and interprets prophetically. This suggests that the author has not divided the law into two parts, one which is set aside and another which is kept. 423 Something more fundamental has taken place in the author’s view of the law; his entire perception of it has changed.

One should also pose the following question. If the author did not want the addressees to think that he argued for a comprehensive rejection of the old covenant and its law, would we not have expected him to do more to prevent them from misunderstanding him? 424 It is a striking feature of Hebrews, that although it includes statements about the old covenant and its law which appear to be radical, it entails no clear attempt to balance or isolate that critique. We have nothing resembling Paul’s rhetorical questions in Romans 3:31, 6:15 and 7:7 which help clarify what Paul did and did not mean. Neither do we find statements on the law, claiming that it is good, holy, or spiritual, such as those found in Romans 7:12–16. Even in Galatians, normally a document taken to be less balanced than Romans, Paul is careful to

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421 Contra Anderson (“Heirs of the New Age,” 270), who claims that “inferences concerning other aspects of the Torah or the Torah as such are unwarranted.”

422 Koester, Hebrews, 114.

423 Backhaus (Der neue Bund, 99, n. 141): “Hebr unterscheidet also keineswegs zwischen der Tora im Allgemeinen, die erhalten bleibt, und der Kulttora im Besonderen, die dem Wechsel unterworfen wird.” At the same time Backhaus (Der neue Bund, 251) notes that the law is viewed strictly from a cultic perspective.

emphasize that the promises do not contradict the law (3:21–22), but in Hebrews we find no statements which delimit the author’s critique of the law, no statement which unambiguously establishes its abiding validity, or which counters possible misunderstandings. The fact that the author could write as he did, without explaining, delimiting or defending his radical views more clearly, seems to indicate a certain distance from the law on behalf of both himself and his intended addressees.

Moreover, we could turn the issue on its head, and ask if the author’s new covenant theology goes beyond a sacrificial interpretation of the Christ event and claiming Christ as priest. Does the concept of a new covenant fill functions which go beyond claiming that sins have been dealt with in a way which the old covenant was incapable of doing? If the new covenant does fill functions which go beyond a cultic interpretation of the Christ event, this would, by implication, suggest that the revaluation of the old covenant goes beyond its cultic prescriptions. Thus, we now turn to examine the author’s use of the new covenant concept. The broader the new covenant concept in Hebrews is, the more it would seem to be able potentially to function as an alternative source for articulating the identity of God’s people, now that Christ has come, and if Hebrews has presented an alternative source for articulating Israelite identity, this seems to strengthen the notion of discontinuity with Israel’s past. The implications of the critique of the old covenant and its law for the relationship between Hebrews and its Jewish context will be addressed in a separate section, after the discussion about the nature of the new covenant.

3.5 The Death of Jesus and the New Covenant

In 9:15–18 the author expounds on the relationship between the death of Jesus and the new covenant. Several issues of relevance to our question of research are thereby raised. First, there is the question of the identity of “those who are called,” and “the inheritance” they are said to be given through Jesus’ mediation of the new covenant (9:15). Who are included among those called, and what are they given to inherit? Secondly, there is the question of what is meant by Jesus’ death providing redemption for transgressions “under the first covenant” (9:15). This statement seems to presuppose a redemptive historical relationship between the first and second covenant; but what is the nature of this relationship?

3.5.1 What Does the Author set out to Argue?

In 9:15 the author states that Jesus “for this reason” (διὰ τοῦτο) has become mediator of a new covenant. This statement refers back to 9:14, the meaning being that Jesus is covenant mediator because he sacrificed himself as a blameless sacrifice. In other words: if Jesus had not sacrificed himself, he would not have been covenant mediator. This, I take it, is the claim the author sets out to demonstrate. The author has already argued that Jesus’ priesthood implies covenant mediation; he now seeks to demonstrate that Jesus’ self-sacrifice was also a

425 The phrase διὰ τοῦτο in 9:15 must be understood retrospectively and not prospectively. Thus, it refers back to the content of 9:14. Thus Attridge, Hebrews, 254.
necessary condition for him being mediator of a new covenant.\(^{426}\) To be a covenant mediator in 9:15 seems primarily to be understood in terms of being the one who is able to convey the blessings of the new covenant. These blessings include redemption from transgressions “under the first covenant,”\(^ {427}\) the effect of which is that those who have been called might receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. To receive the promise of “eternal inheritance” should not simply be taken to mean that those who have been called will receive a word of promise concerning some future inheritance, but also that they actually receive their eternal promised inheritance, now that redemption for transgressions has been obtained.\(^ {428}\) The implication seems to be that such redemption was a necessary condition for the promised inheritance to be distributed.

The “digression” in 9:16–17 should be understood as an attempt at explaining the claim which was put forward in 9:15. This suggests, in my opinion, that we must understand the new covenant to be implicitly in focus in 9:16–17, although the statements are put forward as general principles. The new covenant is in focus in 9:18 as well, where we read: “thus not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.” This statement prepares for 9:19–22, where the inauguration of the first covenant is in view. However, even if 9:18 is articulated as a statement about the first covenant, its primary function and purpose is to say something about the new covenant: that the new covenant was also inaugurated through blood. 9:18 thus recapitulates the claim made in 9:15, about the necessary relationship between Jesus’ self-sacrifice and covenant mediation, underscoring once more that it really is necessary that blood be shed for a covenant to be put in force. 9:18 is the author’s claim that he has now demonstrated the plausibility of the proposition he made in 9:15: Jesus is covenant mediator because he presented his own blood before God, as a blameless sacrifice.

### 3.5.2 Covenant or Will?

Given this general understanding of the author’s train of thought in 9:15–18, it seems that we are in a position to reject two otherwise possible interpretations, which both hold that διαθήκη means “covenant” and not “will” in 9:16–17. One such interpretation would be to claim that 9:16–17 sets out the principle that covenants in general demand the ritual death of the ratifying parties in order to be put into force, symbolized in a sacrifice which points to the curse which will be inflicted on those who break the covenant.\(^ {429}\) However, if the relationship between covenants and deaths are understood in terms of a ritually enacted covenant curse, this would hardly provide us with a helpful paradigm for understanding the positive significance of Jesus’ death, which is what Hebrews is concerned to demonstrate. Hebrews is clearly not arguing that Jesus’ death should be understood as the ritual enactment of a covenant curse, as would actually be the implication of this interpretation.

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\(^ {426}\) Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:241.

\(^ {427}\) The Greek expression is τῶν ἔπι τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων. I think Attridge (*Hebrews*, 255) is correct when proposing that it simply means under the regime of the old covenant.

\(^ {428}\) Rose (“Verheißung,” 79–80) argues convincingly, that 9:15 must refer to the “content of the promise” and not only the “word of the promise.”

Another, and more promising, way to read 9:16–17, would be to claim that they are statements made about the Sinai covenant, on the premise that it has been broken through transgressions (cf. 9:15). The blood ritual of which 9:18 speaks, through which the first covenant was inaugurated, must still be understood as a ritual which symbolized the curse of death which would befall those who broke the covenant. However, according to this reading, the author is taken to argue that transgressions lead to death, when there is a covenant which demands it (9:16), and that the death of Jesus must be understood as a consequence of the force of the first covenant (9:17). For when Jesus died, he took the covenant curse of the broken Sinai covenant upon himself, thereby demonstrating that the Sinai covenant was in force. However, the point of 9:17 is certainly not to demonstrate that Jesus’ death proved the force of the first covenant and its curse, but rather that the death of Jesus put the new covenant into force. Moreover, this interpretation fails to explain precisely those things which the author sets out to argue for in 9:15: that Jesus has become the mediator of a new covenant through his death, and that the blessings of this covenant are therefore distributed to those who have been called. Although the idea of Jesus taking upon himself the curse of the sins of Israel is quite plausible in and of itself, 9:15–18 are simply not about how the old covenant curse should and could be dealt with. These verses are about explaining why the death of Jesus has released the blessings of a new covenant by putting it into force.

If we allow that διαθήκη is taken to mean “will” in 9:16–17, we are given a much better starting point for exploring the positive relationship between the death of Jesus and the realization of the new covenant blessings, which the author is clearly trying to establish. In particular, the legal practice related to the making of wills would help make sense of the positive relationship between death and inheritance, which is established in 9:15, for the distribution of inheritance through a will, is normally realized once the testator is dead. In 9:17, death seems not primarily to be understood as the inevitable result of something which was established in the past (a curse), but as an event which has causal significance for the future (distribution of an inheritance). Given the close relationship between the new covenant and God’s promises established in 8:6, it is not hard to imagine how a pun on the word διαθήκη, and the interpretation of Jesus’ death which it invites, could have attracted the author.

3.5.3 Identifying “Those who Have Been Called”

We can now return to the questions we set out to answer. The recipients of the new covenant are identified as “those who are called” (9:15). This designation recalls the description of the addressees in 3:1, which in turn brings to mind the larger motif of a journey towards the

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431 Richard D. Nelson underlines that “death” was not the most central or important part of sacrifice in Israelite ritual, it was rather a necessary starting point. See “‘He Offered Himself’: Sacrifice in Hebrews,” Int 57 (2003): 251–65 (253).
432 Thus Johnson, Hebrews, 240.
433 The fact that it is possible to imagine inheritance being distributed before a testator is dead, does not change the fact this motif is what best explains the idea of that the death of “the one who ratifies” results in a promised inheritance being given.
“world to come,” as well as the exodus typology hallmaking the context of 3:1. However, the language of calling also anticipates the description of Abraham in 11:8. For him too, to be called meant embarking on a journey towards a new “land.” It seems likely that this larger narrative sheds light on the content of the inheritance said to be conveyed through the new covenant. I have already argued that Jesus is presented as the first one of Abraham’s seed to reach the inheritance, and that he is presented as leading many of his siblings and coheirs towards this inheritance. In Hebrews, Abraham is not only the paradigmatic example of one who is called, but also of one who inherits God’s promises, through faith and perseverance (6:12). He is the father of many heirs (6:14; 11:9). Because the same language is used throughout, and because God’s promises to Abraham seem to constitute a vital element of continuity in redemptive history, it seems probable that “those who are called” to inherit an eternal inheritance include the Scriptural forefathers, represented especially through Abraham.

This would explain why it is said that Jesus also provided redemption for transgressions under the first covenant. The fact that Hebrews so emphatically emphasizes that the old order was incapable of providing perfection (7:18–19; 8:7; 9:8–10; 10:1–4), could have raised doubts concerning the fate of those who died before the new covenant was inaugurated. It seems that the author solves this problem by ascribing retroactive power to the sacrifice of Jesus. Through Jesus, God has solved the problem which the first covenant was incapable of solving, the problem which hindered God’s people from receiving their eternal inheritance. This means that the death of Jesus and the inauguration of the new covenant ultimately prove God’s faithfulness to his own promises. Jesus’ death put a new covenant in force, and through this covenant the eternal inheritance will be transmitted to those who have been called to be heirs of God’s promises, whether they lived before or after the coming of Christ. Far from forsaking his people, God has proved faithful towards them, even in the face of their transgressions. If this reading is correct, it would be a strong argument for shared identity between the heirs of God’s promises, living before and after the coming of Christ. In order to explicate what this shared identity might entail, I now turn to explore the communal implication of the new covenant motif in Hebrews.

\[^{434}\text{Cf. 2.8.1.}\]
\[^{435}\text{Johnson, Hebrews, 240.}\]
\[^{436}\text{See 2.4–2.5.}\]
\[^{437}\text{Rose, “Verheißung,” 79.}\]
\[^{438}\text{Rose, “Verheißung,” 79.}\]
\[^{439}\text{Attridge, Hebrews, 255.}\]
\[^{440}\text{Cf. Luz (“Der alte und der neue Bund,” 334): “Die Verheißung kann also nach Hebr. eigentlich erst im neuen Bund zur Wirksamkeit kommen.”}\]
3.6 Covenant and Community

In 9:15–22 Christ’s sacrifice is given a covenantal interpretation; through his blood a new covenant has been inaugurated. Because Jesus’ blood has been poured out, sins have been forgiven (9:22), just as was promised in Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant (8:12). One could reasonably ask, though, why the author chose to give a covenantal interpretation of Christ’s sacrifice. He had already given it one typological Scriptural interpretation of the Christ event, demonstrating that it was the fulfillment of the Yom Kippur ritual (cf. 9:11–14, 23–28). Why not leave it at that? Why did he also argue that Christ’s sacrifice was prefigured in the inauguration of the Sinai covenant? In looking for the purpose of the covenant motif in Hebrews, I have already pointed to how it enables the author to explore the redemptive historical significance of the Christ event, and how the prophecy in Jeremiah provided him with a clear contrast between the epoch before and after the coming of Christ. I would now like to propose a further function that the covenant motif seems to fill for Hebrews: it allows the author to articulate the communal significance of the Christ event. If this is true, it would implicitly bear on my question of research, because it would indicate that the covenant concept is used to articulate a shared sense of identity situated in redemptive history, i.e. what I have called “covenant identity.”

My aim in this paragraph is twofold. First of all, I will seek to demonstrate that the new covenant motif in Hebrews relates to a shared sense of communal identity. Secondly, I hope to show that the inauguration of the new covenant is situated as part of the history of Israel, and that the shared identity which flows from the new covenant is therefore best construed in terms of being part of God’s people.

3.6.1 “The Holy Spirit Bears Witness to us”

In 10:14 the effects of Christ’s once and for all sacrifice are summarized as the perfection of those who have been sanctified. The language of sanctification recalls the interpretation given to Christ’s redemptive actions in 2:10–11 and 10:10. The designation, “those who are being consecrated,” refers to all those who benefit from Christ’s sacrifice, and implicitly functions as an identity descriptor for the audience. We can thus say that 10:14 indicates that the sacrifice of Jesus has resulted in the establishment of a holy community (cf. 3:1). The transition from 10:14 to 10:15 makes clear that the establishment of this community is understood in direct relation to inauguration of the new covenant. In 10:15 the author introduces the prophecy of the new covenant for the second time in the homily, in a way which shows that the new covenant has “immediate relevance for the community addressed in

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442 Lehne (New Covenant, 15–16) seems to turn the issue on its head when she asks why the author might have wanted to understand the covenant in cultic terms. The question, it seems to me, is why he wanted to understand the cultic Christ event in covenantal terms. A strong indication that the argument moves from cult to covenant, and not the other way around, is the fact that cultic terminology is present from the very start of the homily (cf. 1:3), whereas covenant terminology first is introduced in 7:22.

443 See 3.1.
He states that “the holy Spirit also testifies to us” about the new covenant. The holy Spirit is regularly invoked as the one interpreting the true significance of Scripture for the present situation of the audience (cf. 3:7; 9:8). He states that “the holy Spirit also testifies to us” about the new covenant. The holy Spirit is regularly invoked as the one interpreting the true significance of Scripture for the present situation of the audience (cf. 3:7; 9:8).

The prophecy from Jeremiah is this time quoted in a shorter and significantly different way. There is no mention of the first covenant, or of the people who broke it, and the complete knowledge of God which the prophecy promises is not mentioned, although the inscription of the law on the hearts is. The main focus of the author, however, is clearly the forgiveness which the prophecy promises and which is now available (10:17–18). It is worth noting that the recipients of the covenant are no longer the house of Israel and Judah, but simply “them.” It is remotely possible that this suggests that the new covenant is not delimited by ethnicity, but it should not be understood to mean that “Israel” has been replaced by some other group or people. The entire homily clearly presupposes continuity between the community and the forefathers of Israel (cf. 1:1–2; 3:7–4:10; 8:8; 11:1–40), and 10:16 provides insufficient reason for questioning this continuity. The perspective in 10:15–18 is solely focused on the new covenant, whereas 8:7–13 was focused on the dichotomy between old and new. In 8:7–13, focus is on the failure of the forefathers, but in 10:15–18 it is on the eschatological generation which experiences the reality to which Scripture bears witness. The author thus demonstrates that the sacrifice of Jesus has established a sanctified and forgiven “new covenant people.”

It is significant that the cultic exposition (7:1–10:18) climaxes in the realized promise of the new covenant as applied to the audience. This means that it is the new covenant situation of God’s people the author directly relates to, when he moves to apply the significance of the Christ event to the present situation of his addressees (cf. ὀὖν in 10:19). This seems to be more than just a coincidence. The exhortations in 10:19–25 are clearly addressed to the audience qua recipients of the new covenant, the hearts of whom have been sprinkled clean by Christ’s covenant blood (10:22). Hebrews 10:19–25 thus fleshes out what being a new covenant people looks like. The covenant motif is that which bridges the cultic understanding of the Christ event and the author’s hortatory aims.

3.6.2 Profaning the Sanctifying Covenant Blood

The motif of the “covenant blood,” which is established in 9:18–22 and alluded to in 10:22, reappears in a hortative statement in 10:29. The context speaks of the dangers of committing voluntary sins after having received knowledge of the truth (10:26). The author reminds the addressees of the punishment legislated by the law against those who reject it (10:28), found

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444 Lane, Hebrews, 2:268.
445 Lieu (Christian Identity, 34) notes how the idea of having immediate access to the true meaning of Scripture could foster a sense of distinct identity: “. . . an interpretation of Scripture that is available only by special divine revelation establishes an alternative identity.”
446 This is, admittedly, curious given the fact that this motif is not developed. For a possible explanation, cf. n. 400.
447 On the relationship between the new covenant and forgiveness, see Sebastian Fuhrmann, Vergeben und Vergessen: Christologie und Neuer Bund im Hebräerbrief (WMANT 113; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007).
448 Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 211.
449 Lane, Hebrews, 2:269.
450 This is argued in my next chapter.
in Deuteronomy 17:2–7. There the issue is Israelites who break the covenant by turning to idolatry. This suggests that the reason why the Israelites were punished for setting the law of Moses aside is because they had been solemnly covenanted with God through this law. The plausibility of understanding the motif of “rejecting the law” within a covenantal framework is further increased when we explore the comparative nature of the argument in Hebrews. The author claims that the addressees are guilty of punishment worse than death if they reject what they have been offered. Such rejection is vividly described as trampling upon the Son of God, profaning the sanctifying covenant blood, and insulting the spirit of grace. Thus, the issue at stake in 10:28–29 seems to be covenant infidelity.

The phrase “covenant blood” in 10:29 echoes the words of Moses, spoken when the Sinai covenant was inaugurated (cf. Heb 9:20). However, the author is clearly referring to the blood of Jesus, ascribing a sanctifying quality to it (cf. 10:10, 14; 13:12). It is this blood which grants the community access to God (10:19), and it is with this blood their hearts have been sprinkled clean from bad consciousness (10:22). ⁴⁵¹ It is striking that the author can refer to the salvation brought by Jesus using a phrase which is so intimately related to the Sinai covenant, without having to specify that he is referring to the new covenant (10:29). ⁴⁵² This seems to indicate that the new covenant has become the self-evident center of attention, and that there is no longer any need to emphasize that there are actually two different covenants, an old and a new. This could hardly be taken to mean, though, that the old and new covenants are viewed as one covenant. The author’s argument from lesser to greater clearly presupposes that something greater than the Sinai covenant, and its law, is in view. Although the language of a new covenant is absent, the concept is clearly present. ⁴⁵³

The warning in 10:26–31 could be read as a hortatory application of the typological relationship between the old and new covenant established in 9:15–22. One interesting thing about 10:26–31 is that the author not only compares the salvation which is offered through the respective covenants, but also the communal obligations which flow from them. ⁴⁵⁴ The obligations related to the new covenant are analogues to, but also different from, the obligations which faced the recipients of the Sinai covenant. ⁴⁵⁵ It is different in respect to the gravity of judgment which faces those who break the covenant, but also in the sense that the obligation is directed towards a specific person, namely Jesus, the Son of God. If they reject the covenant blood, they also trample on the Son of God who offered his own blood. Thus, the community is pictured as standing in a new covenant situation. This situation entails the privilege of having access to God (10:19–22), of having received knowledge of the truth (10:26), and of being sanctified (10:29). However, the new covenant situation also entails a

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⁴⁵¹ Although it is not said explicitly, the language of “sprinkling” clearly supposes blood as its referent.
⁴⁵² Some manuscripts try to clarify by adding καινή.
⁴⁵⁴ Allen (Deuteronomy and Exhortation, 113–19) convincingly argues that the notion of “obligation” is intrinsically related to the new covenant in Hebrews, and helpfully suggests that Hebrews in this regard resembles Deuteronomy.
⁴⁵⁵ The idea that the new covenant was not “just” a gift of salvation, but also implies a wider concept of how the relationship between God and his people is regulated/legislated, was already implicit in 8:6 through the verb νομοθετέω. Thus Backhaus, Der neue Bund, 134.
strong obligation. God will judge his people (10:30), and apparently his people will be judged in light of how they treat the Son of God, and his covenant blood.

The new covenant motif thus seems to assume functions which to a certain extent replace those which the old covenant used to fill, a fact which in turn seems to reinforce the notion that the old covenant is becoming superfluous. The implicit motif of replacement found in 10:28–29 is brought into sharper focus with the next occurrence of the term “covenant.”

3.6.3 The Blood of the Covenant Mediator in Heaven

The motif of the covenant blood is picked up again in the climactic vision of the heavenly Jerusalem (12:18–24). The vision is cast as a contrast between a place to which the addressees have not come, and a place to which they have. The place to which they have not come is described in a way which clearly alludes to a theophany at Sinai. The place to which they have come is designated Zion; the city of the living God; the heavenly Jerusalem. Among those said to be present in the heavenly city, Jesus is mentioned last and is designated as “mediator of a new covenant.”

An important key for understanding the rhetorical function of 12:18–24, is to observe that it is framed by warnings. The exhortation not to behave like Cain, who traded away his inheritance, is grounded (cf. οὐ γὰρ 12:18) in the foundational experience of coming near to God, described in 12:18–24. The focus on God’s judgment is further emphasized by the fact God is designated as judge (12:23), and by the warning which follows after the vision (12:25).

This warning (12:25) is articulated in terms of an argument which moves from lesser to greater: if judgment befell those who rejected God when he spoke on earth, how much more those who reject him when he speaks from heaven? The distinction between God speaking on earth and from heaven, relates back to the contrast between Sinai and Zion in 12:18–24. Sinai represents that which can be touched (12:18), and thus belongs to the earthly realm, contrasted with the heavenly Jerusalem. It is thus clear that God’s warnings on earth mentioned in 12:25, relate to the revelation at Sinai. But in what way does God speak from heaven? The answer is found in 12:24. In the heavenly city we find the mediator of the new covenant, Jesus, and the sprinkled blood which speaks better than Abel.

The sprinkled blood refers to the blood through which the new covenant was inaugurated (9:18–22). Thus,

456 Harold W. Attridge notes that the warnings against breaking the covenant in Hebrews, are comparable to those found in Qumran (cf. 4Q511 frag. 63, 3.1–4: “Peace to all men of the covenant . . . Woe on all those who break it”). Attridge comments: “In both groups the definition of the covenant community requires the imposition of firm social boundaries” (“The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Scrolls,” in When Judaism and Christianity Began: Essays in Honor of Anthony J. Saldarini [ed. A. J. Avery-Peck, D. Harrington, and J. Neusner; JSJSup 85; Leiden: Brill, 2004], 315–42 [336]).

deSilva has argued convincingly that 6:4–8, a passage which in many ways resembles 10:26–30 in motif, is also strongly informed by the idea that initiation into a covenant, implies obligations that result in blessings if kept, and curse if broken. See “Hebrews 6:4–8,” 33–57.

457 The use of νέα instead of καινή implies no change of meaning, but is purely stylistic. Thus Attridge, Hebrews, 376.

458 The conjunction γὰρ by itself does not prove a close relationship between 12:18 and 12:16–17. This relationship is suggested, though, by the author’s train of thought. Thus Gräßer, Hebräer, 3:302–303.

459 The reading παρὰ τὸν Ἀβέλ should be preferred above παρὰ τῷ Ἀβέλ. The sprinkled blood thus speaks better than Abel, not better than Abel’s blood. It is puzzling that Jesus’ blood is compared with Abel, and the nature of the comparison has been much discussed. For a survey of some relevant alternatives, see Koester, Hebrews, 546.
God speaks from heaven through the sprinkled blood of the new covenant. This seems to imply that the heavenly Jerusalem is understood as the site where the new covenant was inaugurated.\textsuperscript{461} The heavenly Jerusalem is for the new covenant what Sinai was for the old.\textsuperscript{462}

It is not difficult to think of reasons why the author could have wanted to let a description of the heavenly Jerusalem stand at the climax of the homily. He has shown a keen interest in Jesus’ exaltation and expounded on his entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. He has also described Abraham as waiting for a solid city and a heavenly homeland (11:8–16). But why did he describe Zion in contrast to Sinai? Why was he not content to say where the addressees had come to? Why did he also choose to say where they had not come to?\textsuperscript{463} To claim that Sinai simply represents the earthly realm, merely functioning as foil against which to contrast the heavenly Jerusalem, underestimates the symbolic quality specifically attached to Sinai.\textsuperscript{464} Sinai is not just a more or less random place on earth, which happens to be touchable by nature. Sinai represents a specific and fundamental event in Israel’s redemptive history. To understand 12:18–24, it seems to me that we must recognize this symbolic value, and ask what it would have meant if the author had said: you have come to Sinai.\textsuperscript{465}

In order to answer this question, it is helpful to start by exploring how the idea of remembering what took place at Sinai functions in Deuteronomy 4–5.\textsuperscript{466} The narrative context is one where Israel is about to enter Canaan (Deut 3:23–29), and Moses recalls various prescriptions of the law which he exhorts the people to keep as they inhabit the land which God will give (4:1–8). Moses asks the Israelites to remember their history with God, and to retell it to their children and grandchildren (4:9). Thus, Moses explicitly says that Israel’s history in the wilderness is to be kept alive in the memory of later generations of Israelites. At the center of this history, Moses mentions the revelation at Sinai, when they came (προσήλθετε, 4:11) and stood at the foot of the mountain, and God declared his covenant to them (4:10–13).\textsuperscript{467} Moses exhorts them not to forget this covenant (4:23), and when he begins to recall the content of the law, he explicitly relates this to the covenant made at Horeb (5:1–3). Thus, the time when Israel “drew near” to God at Horeb/Sinai, represents something equivalent to the time when they “entered into” a covenant relationship with him. The experience of being present at Sinai has thus become a defining moment, a foundational

\textsuperscript{461} Although this is never said explicitly, it is natural to assume that the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus’ covenant blood presumably was presented, is placed within the heavenly Jerusalem, thus making this the place of the new covenant inauguration.

\textsuperscript{462} Compare 11QMelch 2.24–25 where the terms “Zion” and “covenant” are conjoined to designate the community of the righteous: “[Zi]on is [the congregation of all the sons of justice, those] who established the covenant, those who avoid walking [on the path of the people].” For translation and discussion, see Attridge, “Hebrews and the Scrolls,” 331.

\textsuperscript{463} I agree with Hays in holding that the contrast in question is not adequately described in terms of the joy of the new covenant, against the fear of the old covenant. As Hays rightly points out, the site of the new covenant is actually even more terrifying (“Here We Have No Lasting City,” 164).

\textsuperscript{464} Contra Gräßer, \textit{Hebräer}, 3:303.

\textsuperscript{465} It might be that Hebrews, in juxtaposing Sinai and Zion, is drawing on a broader Jewish tradition. But I do not share James Thompson’s optimism in discerning which parts of 12:18–24 belong to a tradition the author allegedly \textit{redacted}, and which parts are his own additions and accommodations. See “‘That Which Cannot Be Shaken’: Some Metaphysical Assumptions in Heb 12:27,” \textit{JBL} 94 (1975): 580–87.

\textsuperscript{466} For reference to the same text as the background of “coming to Zion,” see Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 670.

\textsuperscript{467} Deuteronomy 4:11–12 is clearly alluded to in 12:18–21, together with Exodus 19–20 and Deuteronomy 9:19.
experience, which is not to be forgotten by new generations of Israelites, and with reference to which Moses exhorted the people to covenant faithfulness.\textsuperscript{468}

An important indication of the fact that the idea of once having been present at Sinai retained symbolical significance in the later history of Israel is found if we look at how proselyte conversion was understood.\textsuperscript{469} The rationale behind Jewish rites of conversion was built on the basic structure of the Exodus narrative. According to the rabbis, “what happens to the proselyte is the same as what happened to the Israelites when they were rescued out from Egypt or when they entered the covenant at Sinai.”\textsuperscript{470} The rites of initiation – acceptance of the Torah, circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice – have Israel’s exodus as their narrative substructure.\textsuperscript{471} Schiffman thus comments on these rites, saying that the entire conversion procedure is understood “as an opportunity for the proselyte to celebrate his own reception of the Torah as Israel did at Mount Sinai, for only through sharing in this historical religious experience could the convert become a Jew.”\textsuperscript{472} Of the proselyte, Schiffman writes that “he must be committed to the acceptance of the Torah. He himself must stand at Sinai, for Sinai was the formative event in the Jewish historical experience.”\textsuperscript{473} One could therefore say that the proselyte “had come” to Sinai, meaning that he “had entered” the Sinai covenant and received a new identity.\textsuperscript{474} Reminding a Jew or a proselyte that he once had come to Sinai, in a context which warns against rejecting the voice of God, would therefore probably have been understood as a call to covenant faithfulness.

It seems likely that a kind of logic, similar to that found in the above mentioned discourse on conversion, is at work in 12:18–24. To use the words of Lane: Sinai and Zion are

\textsuperscript{468} Allen (Deuteronomy and Exhortation, 214–16) thus argues that 12:18–24, although making a contrast between Sinai and Zion, still retains much of the basic structure of the Sinai event, as it is represented and functions in Deuteronomy. Within the contrast, there is therefore also an interesting structural continuity.

\textsuperscript{469} Once again, it is important to keep in mind how difficult it is to date the sources (cf. n. 399), and to emphasize that it is impossible to reconstruct a first century conversion ceremony with a high degree of precision. The comparison is therefore tentative. This disclaimer notwithstanding, I would maintain that it is quite plausible that the “deep structure” of the conversion ceremony, as described in the rabbinic sources, could date back to the first century. In any case, my argument here is not so much about the dating of a certain version of the conversion ceremony, as it is about how the “motif” of drawing near to Sinai functions within Jewish tradition.

\textsuperscript{470} Oskar Skarsaune, In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 356.

\textsuperscript{471} Sipre Num. 108, which is attributed to Rabbi Judah the Prince, reads: “Just as an Israelite enters the covenant in one of three ways only, namely, circumcision, immersion, and the appropriation of an offering, so proselytes fall under the same rule.” Translation from Jacob Neusner, Sifre to Numbers 59–115 (vol. 2 of Sifre to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation; Brown Judaic Studies 119; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986).

\textsuperscript{472} Schiffman, “At the Crossroads,” 122, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{473} Schiffman, “At the Crossroads,” 138, emphasis added. Thus also Daube: “Actually, we might go as far as to assert that, in listening to the commandments during baptism, the proselyte stood at Mount Sinai” (Rabbinic Judaism, 121).

\textsuperscript{474} The term “proselyte” and the verb προσέρχεσθαι, invite an understanding of the proselyte as “one who has drawn near.” This is evident in Philo, Spec. 1:51: “These last he [Moses] calls ‘proselytes’ (προσήλυτοι) or newly-joined, because they have joined (προσέρχομαι) the new and godly commonwealth.” Although Philo does not speak of drawing near to Sinai, he explores the idea that the proselyte has “drawn near” to the Jewish commonwealth. Cf. also Isa 54:15 (LXX): ἵδοι προσήλυτοι προσέλευσόνται σοί.
“extended metaphors” which represent the old and new covenant respectively. The perfect tense in 12:18 and 12:22 – you have come – has been troubling for many commentators. I propose that it could be explained as an allusion to a past moment of covenant initiation. The flow of the argument can thus be outlined as follows. The addressees are exhorted not to trade away their inheritance (12:15–17), the very inheritance which was covenanted to them as they drew near to the living God through Jesus and were initiated into the new covenant. Because they were once initiated into this covenant, with all the privileges and responsibilities this entails, they are still faced with the challenge of responding faithfully to the voice of the covenant blood (12:24–25) which was once sprinkled on their hearts (cf. 10:22). They have come near to the heavenly Jerusalem, and they therefore still stand accountable to the covenant inaugurated there, mediated through the blood of Jesus. Just as the ancient Israelites were called to remember their covenant as they were about to enter the promised land, so now the community is called to exhibit new covenant faithfulness as they are about to enter God’s rest and as they receive an unshakable kingdom (cf. 4:3; 12:28). The merits of this reading are not only that it makes sense of the perfect tense in 12:18 and 12:22, but also that it explains why the concept of a new covenant is evoked in 12:24. It also sheds light on the warnings before and after 12:18–24. Furthermore, the exhortation from lesser to greater in 12:25 seems to presuppose a redemptive historical scheme – a once and a now – within which the new covenant motif would fit perfectly. The new covenant inauguration is thus engrafted into Israel’s redemptive history. The inauguration of the new covenant has become a defining moment in Israel’s history, comparable with, and even superior to, the giving of the law at Sinai. God did once admonish the Israelites at Sinai, but he now speaks (cf. τὸν λαλοῦντα in 12:25) to his people from the heavenly Jerusalem, exhorting his people to new covenant faithfulness. This suggests that the new covenant is supplanting the functions the old covenant used to fill, becoming an alternative source of identity. The fact that 12:18–24 are framed by warnings and are focused on obligations makes it implausible to claim that the Sinai covenant represents the obligations and norms of the community, whereas the new covenant has to do “only” with salvation. If this was the message of Hebrews, and if the old and new covenant simply filled different and non-overlapping functions, you could actually “stand” at both Sinai and Zion at the same time. However, the author emphatically emphasizes that they have come to Zion and not to Sinai, and that the communal obligations of the community now flow from the new covenant, through which God speaks from heaven.

3.6.4 The Great Shepherd and the Blood of the Eternal Covenant

The last reference to covenant in Hebrews appears as part of the final benediction (13:20–21), where the author asks of God that he might accomplish everything good in the community,

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For an interpretation of 12:18–24 which focuses on the covenant motif, see Lane, Hebrews, 2:459–61.

So Barrett, “Eschatology,” 376. This interpretation only presupposes that arriving at Sinai/Zion is a motif with symbolic potential which could be associated with entering a covenant, not that the addressees had taken part in, or were even familiar with, a specific conversion ceremony which explicitly used “coming to Sinai/Zion” as part of the liturgy. Neither does this reading necessary presuppose anything about the ethnic identity of the readers, i.e. that they were former pagans who had undergone proselyte conversion.
through Jesus. God is described as “the God of peace, who brought up [ὁ ἀναγαγόν] from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant.” This benediction is a condensed way of retelling the Christ event, interpreting its significance, and expounding its relevance for the audience. The Christ event is retold in terms of God leading Jesus up from the dead. The language used in 13:20 recalls the picture painted of Jesus in 2:5–18. The verb used for God’s resurrection of Jesus, ἀνάγω,477 echoes God’s decision to lead many sons to glory through Jesus (ἀγαγόντα, 2:10). Jesus death, resurrection, and exaltation, is thus understood as a journey from the realm of death (cf. 2:15), towards God’s heavenly glory (2:10). Because God leads his children through Jesus, he is designated as the leader (2:10; 12:2) and forerunner (6:20) of those who follow him on the path to glory.478 The term used of Jesus in 13:20, “great shepherd,” fits nicely into the motif of him as a leader for God’s people. Thus, the addressees are invited to identify as part of Christ’s flock, following in the footsteps of their great leader. Because Jesus has been brought out of the realm of death so will they.

The idea of Jesus making a journey from death to life, leading the people of God, recalls the larger Scriptural narrative about the exodus. Lane has argued convincingly that 13:20 alludes to two Scriptural passages.479 The designation “great shepherd of the sheep” alludes to Isaiah 63:11–12, where God is designated as the one who brought the shepherd of the sheep up from the sea (cf. ὁ ἀναβιβάσας ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης τὸν ποιμένα τῶν προβάτων, 63:11, LXX), and as the one who led Moses with his right hand (cf. ὁ ἀγαγὼν τῇ δεξιᾷ Μωυσῆν, 62:12, LXX). Jesus is thus pictured as a new Moses.480 The second passage alluded to is Zechariah 9:11 (Καὶ σὺ ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης σου ἔξαπέστειλας δεσμίους σοι ἐκ λάκκου οὐκ ἐχοντος ὄδωρ): “And you brought your captives out of the waterless pit, by virtue of the blood of your covenant.”481 When the motif of God acting ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης is set in the context of Hebrews, it seems to mean that God remembers the covenant blood of Jesus, and that because of it Christ’s “flock” and God’s people can be confident that they will be led from death to life. The covenant motif is thus used in this context to describe God’s commitment towards Christ and his “flock,” on the basis of which God’s people can trust that the promises upon which the covenant was enacted (8:6) will be fulfilled. That is: they will inherit the heavenly land promised to Abraham, they will experience the decisive exodus. Through the covenant blood of Jesus, God has bound himself to his people, and they are bound to him.

It is striking that the covenant is described as eternal. Although the author has been careful to emphasize that Jesus’ high priesthood is eternal (5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28), he has preferred to speak of the covenant mediated through Jesus as either “new” or “second.” The eternal quality of Jesus’ covenant contrasts the old covenant which will vanish (8:13). This


478 Cf. the entire discussion in 2.4 on Jesus as leader and prototype.

479 Lane, Hebrews, 2:561–63.


481 Translation is mine.
emphasizes that it is through Jesus’ covenant, and not the Sinai covenant, that God intends to fulfill the promises he has made towards his people.482

3.6.5 Summary

The investigation has shown that the new covenant is not adequately understood “only” as an arrangement through which salvation is distributed. It is also understood as a communal bond between God and his people, to which obligations are attached, and to which warnings against breaking the covenant apply. Hebrews appears to claim that the communal obligations of the community, vis-à-vis God, now flow from the new covenant arrangement mediated through the blood of Jesus. This obligation is not presented as something which is added to old covenant faithfulness, for it is emphasized that the audience no longer stands at Sinai. The addressees are thus encouraged to identify with reference to the new covenant, both in terms of the salvation they hope to obtain, and in terms of the obligations they now entertain.

Several of the passages we have examined emphasize or indicate that the new covenant obligations face the addressees qua members of God’s people. The warning against trampling on the new covenant blood is given on the presupposition that God will judge his people (10:29–30). The contrast between Sinai and Zion in 12:18–24, the argument from lesser to greater, and the difference between how God once spoke and how he now speaks, seems to presuppose that the old and new covenants belong to the same redemptive history. It is the same God who speaks, but he now speaks in a different way. The inauguration of the new covenant has become a defining event in Israel’s history. Finally, the benediction in 13:20–21 is articulated in a way which suggests that Jesus’ resurrection is interpreted with the Scriptural exodus narrative as its background. Jesus is pictured as a shepherd, echoing the way Moses is described. The implication seems to be that Jesus’ “flock” is God’s people, who will be led from death to life if they follow in the footsteps of their leader. This is the way in which God will fulfill his promises to his people, and display his covenant fidelity.

3.7 New Covenant Identity in the Context of Second Temple Judaism

3.7.1 The Covenant Understood as a “Group Belief” in Second Temple Judaism

I began this chapter by asserting the importance of the covenant concept within Second Temple Judaism, claiming that it is meaningful to speak of Jews within this period as sharing in a “covenant identity.” By this I mean that the covenant concept gives expression to an idea which was widely shared by Jews, namely that they stood in a collective relationship with God, situated in redemptive history. A certain perception of identity is attached to this relationship, that of belonging to the covenant people of God, that of being Israel. These assertions resonate with Dunn’s attempt at defining the “common and unifying core” of Second Temple Judaism, in terms of “covenant election” focused on the law. He thus writes: “Absolutely crucial for any understanding of Second Temple Judaism is an appreciation of the

482 Contrast the many passages in Jewish tradition which maintain that the Sinai covenant is eternal: Sir 17:12; 45:15; 4 Ezra 9:36–37; 2 Bar 77:15; Philo, Mos. 2:14–15; L.A.B. 11.2. For discussion see Johnson, Hebrews, 212.
centrality of the Torah in Israel’s self-consciousness of being God’s chosen people.”

The giving of the law to Israel is understood in mainstream Jewish thought as a function of Israel’s election; and by keeping the law Israel expresses its distinct identity as God’s chosen covenant people.

This last point is important, because it highlights that the law not only functioned as an important symbol for those Jews who identified as part of Israel, but also as a distinctive identity marker which characterized Jews vis-à-vis others. This is especially true of prescriptions of the law that were characteristic to Jews, and/or visible to outsiders if practiced: such as circumcision, ritual purity, food laws, religious festivals, Sabbath observation and the rejection of idolatry. Dunn’s model, of election focused on the law, seems also to be compatible with Ed P. Sanders’ concept of “covenantal nomism.” This concept is meant to describe the “religious pattern” within “common Judaism” in terms of God’s gracious act in electing Israel as his covenant people, the result of which is the requirement, obligation and privilege of Israel in keeping the law. Thus, according to both Dunn and Sanders, Jewish covenantal identity, their consciousness of being God’s chosen people, is focused on and expressed through keeping the law, and the significance of the law is, in turn, understood within the context of this covenant relationship between God and Israel.

The basic Jewish conviction that Israel has been chosen by God to stand in a covenant relationship to him, and that this relationship is focused in and expressed through the law, could be helpfully understood to constitute what is sometimes called a “group belief” within social sciences. Daniel Bar-Tal defines “group beliefs” as convictions which (i) are broadly shared by those who are member of a group, and which (ii) define the “groupness” of the group. Particularly relevant to this investigation is the fact that Bar-Tal relates “group beliefs” to social identity. Bar-Tal argues that “group beliefs” provide the members of a given group with an account about what they have in common, and often also something about how the group came into being. He emphasizes that “group beliefs” are not just a matter of abstract ideas which suggest that there is “something different” about a given group. “Group beliefs” are also enshrined in the life of the group, in terms of norms, values, and goals. “Group beliefs” are established as such through repetition and remembrance, through “epistemic authority,” important symbols and narratives. It is hardly controversial to claim, and it will be assumed in the following, that the inauguration of the Sinai covenant was indeed perceived by many Second Temple Jews as an event through which Israel became God’s people, and that the law functioned as a source for many of the norms, values and goals through which that identity was enshrined in their lives and communities.

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483 Dunn, Partings, 18, 23–25.
484 This is also highlighted by Barclay, Jews in the Mediterranean, 424–28.
485 Ed P. Sanders, Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE (London: SCM Press, 1992), 262. Whether or not Sanders has successfully described the precise relationship between grace and plight within Second Temple Judaism through the term “covenantal nomism” is not crucial for us to discuss at this instance.
487 It was argued in 1.6.1 that social identity entails a cognitive, as well as an evaluative and emotional, component. The concept of “group beliefs” develops on the cognitive basis of social identity.
If these assumptions hold water, it follows that a breach with the Sinai covenant and its law, could have called into question one’s membership of God’s people, as seen from a Jewish perspective. It is prudent to remind ourselves, however, that we do not know the specific situation Hebrews addresses, that we are provided with insufficient evidence for suggesting precisely which norms and values that governed the communal life of the audience, and that we are ignorant about the degree to which the radical critique of the Sinai covenant and its law found in Hebrews translated into concrete practices in the life of its addressees. It is also important to stress that it is impossible to reconstruct the social life of a group from one specific text, however, even if are unable to reconstruct the social implications of the critique of the old covenant found in Hebrews, one still wonders if Hebrews has not in effect de-legitimized a mainstream Jewish way of constructing Israelite identity, whether intentionally or not.

The legitimacy of this question seems also to be recognized by proponents of the in-house theory. Nanos argues that the new covenant has not yet been inaugurated, the implication of which would be that there could be no “competition” between the old and new covenant. But as we have already seen, the new covenant was inaugurated through the self-sacrifice of Jesus, by means of his blood (9:15–18). A more promising line of argument, from the perspective of the in-house theory, would therefore be to focus on the fact that the promise of a new covenant is after all found in Scripture, recognized also by Jews outside the Jesus movement. There should not be anything inherently impossible in that doctrine from a mainstream Jewish perspective, one would think. Furthermore, it is often argued that the use of the phrase “new covenant” in documents from Qumran offers a “Jewish parallel” to the theology found in Hebrews, and because everyone would presumably agree that documents from Qumran should be understood as contributing to a Jewish in-house debate, the argument goes that this would apply to Hebrews also. Thus, we need to explore this parallel, in order to assess the possible implication the new covenant theology in Hebrews has for the question of Israelite identity.

3.7.2 The New Covenant in Hebrews and Qumran

The only place where we find contemporaneous documents that contain language which resembles the new covenant theology in Hebrews, outside the early Jesus movement, is the Dead Sea Scrolls. As in Hebrews, the term “covenant” is used frequently in Qumran. To enter “the Rule of the community” (1QS 1:16), was equivalent to entering the “covenant” (1QS 1:16; 2:12, 18, 25; 5:10). Those who do enter the rule, can call themselves men of the covenant (1QS 1:2–3; 1QS 6:19; 8:16), and they are distinguished from those who do not know the covenant (1QS 5:19). Related to this wider use of the term “covenant,” we also find the expression “new covenant” used four times in the Damascus document. It is said that

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488 Nanos, “New or Renewed.”
489 Cf. the 1.5.5 on the question of Jewish parallels, as well as my concluding remarks in 7.4.
491 In the pesher on Hab 1:5, there is a lacuna before “new” where “covenant” probably should be inferred. If covenant is read at this instance, the text condemns those who turn away from the new covenant.
those who “have been brought into the covenant” (CD 6:11) must “keep the sabbath day according to the exact interpretation, and the festivals and the day of fasting, according to what they had discovered, those who entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus” (CD 6:18–19).492 We thus understand that the “new covenant” has to do with a specific understanding of some commandments. Later we read that those who “entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus, and turned and betrayed and departed from the well of living waters” are condemned and said to stand outside “the assembly of the people” (CD 19:33–35).493 For these apostates “there shall be no part in the house of the law” (CD 20:10), and they will therefore be condemned because they “spoke falsehood about the holy regulations and despised the covenant [of God] and the pact which they established in the land of Damascus, which is the first covenant” (CD 20:11–12). Thus, accepting the new covenant is a prerequisite for membership of “the house of the law.”

The meaning of the phrase “the new covenant in the land of Damascus” is disputed, but it clearly relates to a specific understanding of the law. The wider context in the Damascus Document makes clear that this correct interpretation of the law was provided at a time when the land was destroyed (CD 5:20–6:3), and that it was given only to those who departed from the land of Judah and resided in Damascus (CD 6:5),494 hence the peculiar expression: “new covenant in the land of Damascus.” God provided Israel with the correct knowledge of the law because he remembered the covenant of the forefathers (CD 1:4; 6:2). Even though the majority of the people went astray (CD 1:3), God therefore left a remnant within Israel (CD 1:4–5). The new covenant thus relates to a specific understanding of redemptive history, according to which there has become a division within Israel, between those who keep the covenant in the right way and those who do not.495 Although the phrase “new covenant” seems not to be used specifically as a self-designation in Qumran,496 as it is not in Hebrews, it is clear that the idea of the new covenant is a way of expressing a certain perception of redemptive history, which is vital to the identity of the sectarians. It is only the sectarians who stand in continuation with the founding fathers in Damascus, because only they have separated from the rest of the people, and followed the “new” revelation. Thus, the idea of a new covenant is used to articulate Jewish sectarian identity in Qumran.497

Although there are many interesting points of contact between Hebrews and Qumran, there are also some major differences in the way the new covenant motif is used. In Qumran, despite the language of a new covenant, we do not find a contrast between different

492 The question of why the covenant is related specifically to Damascus is disputed. Hultgren argues that this location is inspired by the phrase “land of the North” in Jeremiah 31:8, which, via Amos 5:26–27, become related to Damascus. Further, he maintains that this is a way of referring to Israel in exile. See From the Damascus Covenant, 96–108.
493 Unfortunately manuscript A1 breaks off just before this mention of the new covenant.
495 Hultgren (From the Damascus Covenant, 56) argues convincingly that the “new covenant” therefore refers to the predecessors of the Qumran movement, and not the sectarians themselves.
496 Contra Lehne, New Covenant, 44.
497 In the words of Craig Evans, the renewal of the Sinai covenant constitutes “the Qumran community’s very raison d’être” (“Covenant in the Qumran Literature,” in The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period [ed. S. E. Porter and J. C. R. de Roo; JSJSup 71; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 55–80 [55]).
covenants, one being superior to the other. Neither do we find any critique of the law, or of the Sinai covenant. Rather, it is quite clear that the sectarians thought that they, guided by the Teacher of Righteousness, observed the Sinai covenant in the right way (CD 1:4; 17–18; 4:9; 6:2), and interpreted the law correctly (cf. CD 20:1; 1QpHab 2:2; 9:9–10). Thus, for the Qumran community “the covenant relationship which they have entered is ‘new’ in the sense that the original covenant has been renewed or reenacted upon them.” The major distinction in Qumran is not between distinct covenants, but between two groups within Israel: the remnant Israel on the one side, who observe the law correctly, and the unfaithful Israel on the other side, who do not (cf. 1QS 5:9–11). Ultimately, therefore, this can be understood as a fierce discussion on what it means to be and identify as a Torah-abiding Jew. The new covenant is still focused on the law. Being a member of the new covenant is what secures one’s place in “the house of the law” (CD 20:10–12). The Sinai revelation remains the foundation upon which the discussion takes place. The use of the concepts “covenant” and “law” in Qumran therefore fits within the model of Second Temple Judaism, as presented both by Sanders and Dunn.

In Hebrews there is no developed language of a remnant group within Israel, although this might be an implication of the exclusive trust expressed in Jesus as the mediator of salvation. We are nonetheless given the impression that the new covenant is given to the entire house of Israel (8:10). Neither is there a developed language of the unfaithful Israel, apart from the picture painted of the rebellious wilderness generation. What we do find in Hebrews, however, which is not found in Qumran, is a developed criticism of the law, and a clear sense that God has given a new covenant, which is different from the one given at Sinai. Thus, the new covenant theology in Hebrews cannot be understood as contributing to a discussion

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499 On the contrary, Hultgren (*From the Damascus Covenant*, 112–15) argues that Qumran understands the “new covenant” to have been fully “present” already at Sinai, only to be actualized in the face of new circumstances. Lichtenberger (“Alter Bund und neuer Bund”, 405) writes: “Sodann hat der ‘neue Bund’ wesentlich mit der Beobachtung dem Tora zu tun.”

500 David Miano and David N. Freedman, “People of the New Covenant,” in *The Concept of Covenant in Second Temple Judaism* (ed. S. E. Porter and J. deRoo; JSJSup 71; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 7–26 (22). On how the Qumran community understood itself as part of a renewed covenant, see also Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Community of the Renewed Covenant: Between Judaism and Christianity,” in *Community of the Renewed Covenant: The Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. E. Ulrich and J. VanderKam; CJA 10; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press: 1994), 3–24. Notice, though, that Hultgren (*From the Damascus Covenant*, 461–86) argues that it is problematic to equate the term “new covenant” with “covenant renewal” because the term “new covenant” refers to the past, whereas the concept of “covenant renewal” refers not only to the restoration of an old covenant but to its expansion. However, even if Hultgren is correct in making this distinction, this does nothing to alter the basic observation that the “new covenant” in Qumran is not new in the sense that it is contrasted to the Sinai covenant or the law.

501 On the possible implications of this motif, for the social and historical context of Hebrews, see 5.8.

502 I therefore find Johnson’s (*Hebrews*, 212) conclusion to be at best inaccurate: “Hebrews’ voice, rather, is like that of covenancers at Qumran who claimed a better covenant mediated by their teacher without in the least rejecting the earlier covenant.”

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about what it means to be a Torah-abiding Jew, or what it means to observe the Sinai covenant correctly. Hebrews is not simply giving a “heretical” or marginal answer to the question of how to correctly observe the Torah, for that question is not even raised in Hebrews. This suggests that Hebrews has developed a covenant discourse which in crucial respects operates on different premises.

In this respect, the new covenant concept in Hebrews finds no real parallel in Qumran, or, at least as far as I have been able to tell, elsewhere in documents from Second Temple Jews outside the Jesus movement. The new covenant theology in Hebrews seems difficult to reconcile with an understanding of Israel’s election and covenant identity which is focused on the giving of, and observance of, the law. There is no room for the law to fill this central function, because it is already occupied by Jesus and his sacrifice. If “covenantal nomism” is taken to refer specifically to the keeping of the Torah, and if “covenantal nomism” therefore cannot be reduced to a general balance between gift and plight, then I would submit that Hebrews is not adequately understood as an expression of “covenantal nomism.” The most radical innovation of the covenant theology in Hebrews is certainly not the language of the new covenant in and of itself, but the fact that the unity between covenant and law breaks down, because the new covenant is viewed as distinctively different from the old one. 504

3.8 Conclusions

In what way does the new covenant motif in Hebrews shape the notion of what it means to belong to Israel? To begin with, the new covenant is presented in Hebrews as that through which Israel will receive salvation, and the means through which the promises to Israel will be fulfilled. It is through the new covenant that forgiveness from sins is made available, and by means of the new covenant that all those who have been called will receive their inheritance. I have traced these blessings to Abraham, and especially the promise of entrance into the “land.” Hebrews seems to hold that this promise – understood as entrance into a heavenly land – will be fulfilled through the new covenant (8:6; 13:20). However, there are also obligations related to the new covenant. God will judge his people on the basis of how they treat the covenant blood spilled by his Son (10:29–30), and they now stand accountable to the new covenant revelation (12:18–24). The idea in Hebrews is certainly not that all the blessings flow from the new covenant, whereas the obligations are still determined by the old covenant. This suggests that the new covenant is not merely added to the old covenant, filling a non-overlapping function, but that it also in certain respects replaces it.

This leads us to our second question, which concerns how the tension between newness and continuity, within which the new covenant motif is immersed, shapes notions of Israelite identity. I have argued that the new covenant is viewed in Hebrews not as a renewal of the old covenant, but as distinct from it. Hebrews emphasizes the qualitative distinction between the

504 Backhaus (“Das wandernde Gottesvolk,” 207–208; “Bundesmotiv,” 215–17) emphasizes that precisely the fact that the law and the covenant are viewed as separate entities in Hebrews, in contrast to several different strands of Second Temple Judaism (cf. 1 Macc 2:27; CD 7:4–8; L.A.B. 11:5; Philo, Det. 67f), means that Hebrews represents a type of early Christianity that has parted ways with contemporary Judaism, and is on its way to becoming a new religion.
first and second covenant, the superiority of the second covenant, and does not develop the idea that the law is supposed to be inscribed on the hearts of the recipients of the new covenant. The distinction between old and new is not reducible to some general and timeless principle, or a vertical contrast. Rather, the key function of the covenant motif is to articulate the significance of the Christ event on horizontal terms. Further, the new covenant is not presented simply as a new arrangement designed to make God’s people keep the law in the correct way. Indeed, the question of how to keep the law is not even raised in Hebrews, and community norms are never grounded in commandments found in the law. There is clearly a breach, therefore, with something from the past, and an older system which is subject to severe criticism in Hebrews.

This implies that there is a tension in Hebrews between continuity and discontinuity with Israel’s past. On the one hand, the new covenant is related to God’s promises, a fact which implies continuity. On the other hand, there is also clearly a difference between the old and new covenant, and something from the old order is no longer valid in the same way. Israel really has entered a new phase of redemptive history, and there really is a breach with the past. This fact notwithstanding, Hebrews clearly holds that the new covenant is given to Israel (cf. 8:10).¹⁰⁵ Hebrews does not argue that Israel has been replaced by another people, or that Jews have been excluded from the blessings of God. Indeed, the question of Gentile inclusion into God’s people is nowhere directly addressed. However, this also means that Hebrews hardly allows for a hermeneutic according to which the new covenant is given to Gentiles, whereas Jews are still supposed to stick to the old covenant.

The fact that the new covenant theology in Hebrews is never articulated in terms of the creation of two peoples should not be taken as a self-evident and trivial observation. A quick comparison with the Epistle of Barnabas serves to demonstrate this fact. In Barnabas the term “Israel” is consistently used to denote the “others,” probably the Jews.¹⁰⁶ There is also a clearly articulated idea about Christians belonging to a new and distinct people (cf. 5:7). The idea seems to be that Israel never really attained a position as God’s people at all; they had already been rejected at Sinai on account of idolatry. This allows Barnabas to articulate a theology according to which there are two peoples, and where the people of God seems to consists almost exclusively of Gentiles.¹⁰⁷ Intriguingly, there is no mention of a new covenant in Barnabas, the idea rather seems to be that the covenant which was once offered the Jews, but which they rejected through idolatry, has now been given to the Christians.¹⁰⁸ Thus, to simplify, we could say that in Barnabas there are two people, but only one covenant. In Hebrews, by contrast, there are two covenants but only one people. Although Hebrews speaks boldly of a new covenant, it constantly refrains from speaking about a new Israel.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ I therefore find it problematic when Dunn (“Two Covenants or One,”115) ascribes Hebrews the following view: “the covenant with Israel is obsolete and finished.” Although the old covenant has had its time, God’s covenantal relationship with Israel has not.


¹⁰⁸ Hvalvik, The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant, 152.

¹⁰⁹ I therefore find it problematic when later interpreters do distinguish between an old and a new Israel in Hebrews. Lane (Hebrews, 2:563–64) writes that: “the Church has become the flock of God, taking the
Paradoxically, I would argue that it is precisely the author’s positive theology of Israel which makes the new covenant concept so challenging to any notion of what it means to be Israel which is articulated on the basis of the Sinai covenant: “What Hebrews seems to say is that God by offering his people Israel a new covenant, has thereby made old the former covenant – precisely for Israel.”\textsuperscript{510} Precisely because Israel is portrayed as the sole new covenant people of God, the new covenant theology in Hebrews is bound to affect Israel’s identity.\textsuperscript{511} The fact that Israelite identity is not left behind as something irrelevant or obsolete, allows the author to reshape the notion of what it means to belong to Israel. But because the new covenant in Hebrews really is presented as distinctly different from the old one, it also follows that Hays is entirely correct to say that the new covenant “not only sustains but also transforms Israel’s identity.”\textsuperscript{512} If the giving of the law to the assembled community of Israel at Sinai once did constitute Israel as God’s people in a significant way,\textsuperscript{513} Israel has now been re-constituted around the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. From the perspective of Hebrews, this must be understood as a renewal of Israel, not as a castigation of her. In giving his people a new covenant, God has not abandoned his people, only done exactly what he had promised to do for her.

What, then, about our third question – what does the new covenant motif imply for Hebrews’ relationship to Jews outside the Jesus movement? Is there a conflict here? And, if so, what is its nature? Quite clearly, such a conflict could have nothing to do with explicit polemic against Jews qua Jews, for the new covenant motif is not polemically addressed to any specific opponents, and there is nothing to suggest that Jews are excluded from the new covenant. Moreover, a conflict with Jews standing outside the Jesus movement could not be traced to the very language of a new covenant in and of itself, for it is found in Scripture. It is possible to argue that there is an implicit conflict, though, on three different levels – exclusivity, de-legitimation, and lack of Jewish parallels (cf. 1.4.7). First of all, it might be argued that the new covenant, by being grounded in the Christ event, implicitly excludes all who are not followers of Jesus from the covenant. Secondly, it is possible to claim that the critique of the law and the old covenant de-legitimizes central sources of identity for place of old Israel.” He (Hebrews, 2:266) also designates the community as part of “the new people of God.” Gräßer (“Der Alte Bund im Neuen,” 109) also speaks of the addressee as the new people of God.


\textsuperscript{511} The positive theology of Israel as God’s covenant people, which is furthered within the context of the new covenant, constitutes a good reason for rejecting a hermeneutic according to which the relationship between God’s people before and after the coming of Christ is seen as analogous or reducible to the relationship between the two covenants. I thus strongly disagree with Käsemann (Wandering, 57) when he writes that “the relationship between the old and new people of God is that of the two διαθήκαι revealed on Sinai and Mount Zion.” There is also no reason to suppose that there is (Wandering, 63) “no earthly continuity between the one people of God and the other,” or even worse: that it was necessary that one “must perish so that the other receives the promise.”

\textsuperscript{512} Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City,” 155. This statement clearly shows that there are several nuances to Hays’ approach, and that he does not hold to the view that Hebrews simply poses no challenge to traditional ways of construing Israelite identity.

\textsuperscript{513} Backhausn (Hebräer, 437) speaks of “Der Bundesschluss am Sinai” as “Israels identitätsstiftende Großerzählung.”
mainstream Jews. I have argued that the critique of the law in Hebrews is quite radical, and that strategies to balance or isolate that critique have proved unpersuasive.514

Third and finally, I have also argued that the proposed parallel between Hebrews and Qumran, with regard to the new covenant motif, fails. Although there are some important similarities, there are also some crucial differences. Most important is the fact that the new covenant motif in Qumran implies no breach with or critique of the law. In Qumran, the question is still what it means to be a Torah-abiding Jew, although the answer is both marginal and exclusivist. However, in Hebrews that question is no longer even raised. The new covenant is not presented as a new and better way of keeping or fulfilling the law. The unity between law and covenant, so crucial to first century Judaism, breaks down in Hebrews, and in contrast to Qumran, the main image in Hebrews is not that of a remnant group within Israel. In Hebrews, we get the impression that God has offered his entire people a new covenant. There is no Israel contemporary with the addressees, who stand outside the new covenant, in Hebrews.515 The new covenant message in Hebrews is not primarily a critique of disobedient Israelite, but a fundamental reimagining of what it means to be an Israelite.

514 Frey ("Die alte und die neue," 304) thus states: "Mit seiner Behauptung der radikalen Unwirksamkeit der Sinai-διαθήκη und des levitischen Opferdienstes steht der Hebr in einem krassen Gegensatz zu allem, was im jüdischen Denken seiner Zeit über Bund und Tora gesagt werden konnte."

515 Compare with Lieu’s (Christian Identity, 40) comments on 1 Peter: “There is no hint that there were others . . . who claimed the same epithets and appealed to the same Scriptures.”
4. Israel Worshiping in the Presence of God

4.1 Israelite Identity, Exclusivity and Worship

What is the relationship between worship and Israelite identity? How is Israelite identity expressed through, and shaped by, the way in which Israelites worship the God of Israel? When attempting to explore such issues, it might be helpful to recall that the phrase “Israelite identity” in this thesis refers to identity as a member of God’s people in good standing. There is thus a normative aspect to the term; those who are Israelites are insiders, and they have obtained a privileged position. In implicit contrast to this position are all non-Israelites, all outsiders, and non-members of the people of God. There is thus something exclusive to being an Israelite, and this exclusivity appears to be relevant when the topic is worship. In order to explore these connections, I find it helpful to start by offering a few general and broad reflections on how the motifs of Israelite identity, worship and exclusivity relate to each other within mainstream Second Temple Judaism. In doing this, I hope to demonstrate the centrality of worship to Israelite identity, as well as to create a backdrop for some of the issues discussed in Hebrews. Although the following survey is a simplification, which omits plenty of interesting ambiguities and internal differences among Second Temple Jews, I hope that it is still accurate enough to put some issues on the agenda, as well as to reconstruct an important part of the social historical and theological background for the message of Hebrews.

I would maintain that the following represents the mainstream view within Second Temple Judaism of how the God of Israel should be worshiped. Only the God of Israel should be worshiped, only Israelites are fully permitted and enabled to do so, and there is only one proper site for such worship. Not only did most Jews reject the worship of foreign deities;

516 The terms “worship” and “cult” are difficult to define and distinguish. In this chapter I shall use the term “worship” referring to all kinds of ritualized devotional communication for which God/the divine is held to be the only appropriate recipient, whereas I shall use the term “cult” specifically as referring to worship which includes concrete sacrificial practice. For more elaborate, and slightly different, definitions of these terms, see Hurtado, Lord Jesus Christ, 38; Larry W. Hurtado, How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 16, 28.

517 On how I use the terms “Jew” and “Israelite” in this dissertation, see 1.5.4. In short, the term “Jew” – in contrast to “Israelite” – has an irreducible ethnic component to it, in my terminology. The term “Israelite” – in contrast to the term “Jew” – has an irreducible normative component to it, in my terminology.


519 To be sure, there are some texts in Scripture that speak of Gentiles coming to Zion in order to worship the God of Israel (cf. for instance Isaiah 2:2). However, those texts also hold to the view that it is the God of Israel that is to be worshiped, and that worship is to take place in Jerusalem. Moreover, Gentile participation in worship is clearly presented as something extraordinary, to be realized in the eschatological era. As far as I know, it was mainly within the Jesus movement that this aspect of the eschatological hope of Scripture was put into social practice. For a discussion of this topic, see Richard Bauckham, “The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why?” in The Jewish World around the New
they appear also to have had an exclusivist view of their own cult. Notwithstanding some evidence to the contrary,\textsuperscript{520} it is evident that the temple in Jerusalem enjoyed considerable support as the only legitimate site for worship.\textsuperscript{521} Sanders states that “the overwhelming impression from ancient literature is that most first-century Jews, who believed in the Bible, respected the temple and the priesthood and willingly made the required gifts and offerings.”\textsuperscript{522} Moreover, only those considered to be legitimate members of the people were permitted full access to the cult.\textsuperscript{523} The concentric circles of sanctity surrounding the holy of holies in the temple provided borders according to which insiders could be distinguished from outsiders.

This tendency towards exclusivity has clear implications for identity, and would have had socially relevant consequences.\textsuperscript{524} An exclusivist stance on worship raises some clear boundaries between Israelites and non-Israelites. To worship Israel’s God, and to refrain from all other forms of worship, would therefore have been a way of expressing Israelite identity. It is also important to bear in mind that to reject the worship of foreign deities in an ancient context would have been much more than simply flagging a theoretical preference for monotheism. Because worship, cult and sacrifices played such an important role in civic life in antiquity,\textsuperscript{525} and because so many Jews lived in the Diaspora, an exclusivist stance on worship could and would have been noticed. This is not least the case because an exclusivist stance on worship, such as that taken by mainstream Jews, seems to have been untypical in antiquity.\textsuperscript{526} The practice of only worshiping one God would therefore, if followed, have functioned to mark out Jews as different.\textsuperscript{527}

However, an exclusivist stance on worship would not only have functioned to create boundaries toward non-Israelites, it is also reasonable to assume that it would have strengthened the sense of shared identity for insiders. The temple, and access to it, was an

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\textsuperscript{520} The fact that, at different points throughout history, there were Jewish cult shrines in Elephantine and Leontopolis certainly complicates the picture, but it does not invalidate the argument for the centrality of the temple in Jerusalem, especially in a first century context. For the argument that these temples could not in any way threaten the status of the Jerusalem temple, see Jörg Frey, “Temple and Rival Temple – The Cases of Elephantine, Mt. Gerizim, and Leontopolis,” in \textit{Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substitution des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum} (ed. B. Ego et al.; WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 171–203.


\textsuperscript{522} Sanders, \textit{Judaism}, 52.

\textsuperscript{523} This prohibition also seems to have been well-known to non-Jews. For discussion, see Richard W. Johnson, \textit{Going Outside the Camp: The Sociological Function of the Levitical Critique in the Epistle to the Hebrews} (JSNTSup 209; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 45–46.

\textsuperscript{524} Hurtado (\textit{How on Earth}, 26) emphasizes how worship practice was the most important way of expressing membership of a religious group in the Roman era.

\textsuperscript{525} Sanders (\textit{Judaism}, 49) claims that “in Rome, Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia and most other parts of the ancient world, religion was sacrifice.”

\textsuperscript{526} Lester Grabbe states, concerning Jews, that “they alone of all ethnic groups refused to honor gods, shrines, and cults other than their own” (“Hellenistic Judaism,” in \textit{Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 3, Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism} [ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner; vol. 3; Handbuch der Orientalistik: Der Nahe und Mittlere Osten 53; Leiden: Brill, 2000], 53–83 [73]).

\textsuperscript{527} On how Jewish exclusivism with regard to worship stood out in the first century, see Hurtado, \textit{Lord Jesus Christ}, 30.
important symbol for insider identity; uniting all members, while excluding all others.\textsuperscript{528} The significance of the temple would not only have been merely symbolic, though, it should also be understood in political, economic and religious terms.\textsuperscript{529} It united Jews who aspired to belong to the Israelite people, on several different levels. Jacob Neusner even states that “what made Israel Israel was the center, the altar.”\textsuperscript{530} The significance of the temple for Israelite identity should not be limited only to those who lived nearby the temple, and who were regularly able to access it.\textsuperscript{531} The temple would also have been important for those living in the Diaspora; as a symbolic resource, as a possible destination for pilgrimage, as a common fiscal obligation, and perhaps as the place towards which one faced while praying. Moreover, it would be a mistake to think that the significance of the temple vanished at the moment of its fall in the year 70 C.E. We must rather assume that most Jews would have hoped that the temple would be rebuilt, and that it took some time before they adjusted to the new circumstances.\textsuperscript{532} The significance of the temple therefore transcends its own existence.

This briefly sketched account of worship and identity within Second Temple Judaism, although admittedly very general and simplified, nevertheless suffices to set some important issues and questions on the agenda, and these questions are highly relevant to my questions of research (cf. 1.5.6). First of all, with regard to the question of what it means to identify as a member of God’s people, I have now argued that worship was a central way of expressing Israelite identity. This indicates that to reshape the notion of what legitimate worship looks like, would also be to reshape the notion of what it means to be an Israelite. Who are the insiders, given Hebrews’ conception of worship? Who is admitted inside the boundaries which separate holy from profane, and how is that boundary configured? And to what degree is the notion of legitimate worship put forward in Hebrews, shaped by particular convictions related to Jesus?

The question of how convictions about Jesus inform Hebrews’ understanding of legitimate worship, indirectly leads us to the question of how worship relates to the paradox of Hebrews. In what sense is worship grounded in the Scriptural past, and to what degree does it challenge that past? As we explore how worship relates to the paradox of Hebrews, we are indirectly confronted with the question of whether there is some kind of conflict between Hebrews and Jewish tradition, on the issue of what it means to be an Israelite. It is possible to argue, for example, that the cult critique in Hebrews de-legitimizes the temple in Jerusalem, as a source of Israelite identity.\textsuperscript{533} This conclusion is by no means obvious, however. It is not only that the temple is not mentioned, we also do not know whether Hebrews dates before or after the fall of Jerusalem, a fact which makes it difficult to assess the precise social implications of the message in Hebrews, and although it is generally recognized that the temple in Jerusalem was

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\textsuperscript{528} Bauckham, “Parting,” 179.
\textsuperscript{529} Dunn, Partings, 31–35.
\textsuperscript{530} Jacob Neusner, Judaism without Christianity: An Introduction to the System of the Mishnah (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, 1991), 28. It is worth noting that this comment is made in a context where Neusner discusses how Israel could self-identify and define herself against other groups and people, and where he claims that cultic exclusivism was important in that regard.
\textsuperscript{531} On the importance of the temple for Jewish diaspora identity, see Tellbe, Christ-Believers, 62.
\textsuperscript{532} Bauckham, “Parting.”
\textsuperscript{533} Bauckham ("Parting") claims that Hebrews is the document in the New Testament most critical of the temple in Jerusalem.
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of great importance for most Second Temple Jews, we do have different strands of cult critique registered in Jewish sources. Many have thus argued that Hebrews belongs within such strands of tradition. It is also prudent to remind ourselves that Jews found ways of expressing their identity as members of God’s people when they were situated in the Diaspora, as well as after the fall of the temple. The implications and importance of the cult critique in Hebrews is therefore not self-evident, but bears investigation.

I have chosen 10:19–25 as the main text in this chapter. The choice of this passage is motivated by its important function in the flow of the argument.534 Following a long section of exposition (7:1–10:18), where the main tenets of the cultic discourse in Hebrews is found, 10:19 signals a shift toward exhortation, drawing out the implications of the cultic discourse for the community (cf. οὖν in 10:19).535 I will begin by exploring the Christological presuppositions for there being access to God, according to Hebrews. This is a key issue in Hebrews, because access to God is a presupposition for legitimate worship, and because having access implies having identity as an insider. I will argue that Christ is presented in Hebrews as providing access, not otherwise obtainable, to the God of Israel. Implicitly this seems to point to a fresh notion of what it means to be an Israelite.

4.2 The Christological Presuppositions for there Being Access to God

4.2.1 Jesus as Forerunner – Access to the Sacred Realm

10:19–25 is a single and very complicated periodic sentence, governed by the participle ἐχοντες. The first thing which the addressees are said “to have” is παρρησία εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ ἁμαρτία Ἡσυχοῦ. The reference to the blood of Jesus should be taken as instrumental, meaning that the addressees have their παρρησία “by virtue of” the blood of Jesus.536 Παρρησία could be taken subjectively to mean “confidence” or objectively to mean “authorization.” A good case can be made to suggest that both meanings should be included.537 Through the blood of Jesus an objective means of entrance has been provided, which should result in subjective confidence for those who follow Jesus. By the same token, εἴσοδος could be taken to refer either to the act of entering or the means of access.538 The context suggests that both meanings are included.539 The mention of the way which has been dedicated (10:20), points to the objective means of access which has been made available. The exhortation to draw near (10:22), however, points to the actual act of entering. The addressees thus have confidence as well as authorization for entrance. The genitive τῶν ἁγίων indicates the direction of entrance: into the sanctuary.540

534 Wilhelm Thüsing claims that it is the most important place to look if you want to understand the purpose of the cultic theology in Hebrews. See “Lasst uns hinzutreten (Hebr 10:22): Zur Frage nach dem Sinn der Kulttheologie im Hebräerbrief,” BZ 9 (1965): 1–17 (5).
536 Cf. also 13:20 and the discussion of this passage in 3.6.4.
540 Gräßer, Hebräer, 3:13. The context suggests that τῶν ἁγίων should not be understood as the holy things, but rather as the holy place.
The language in 10:19–20 clearly picks up on the descriptions that have been given of Jesus’ own entrance into sacred space. In 6:19–20 the author writes of a hope which reaches into (cf. εἰσερχομένη) the realm behind “the veil.” Jesus is said to have entered (cf. εἰσῆλθεν, 9:12) this realm as high priest. Because this entrance is said to be of a high priestly nature, it seems to follow that the “veil” in question must be that which conceals the holy of holies, the inner compartment of the sanctuary, where only high priests are permitted to enter. However, it is not immediately clear that Jesus’ high priestly entrance should be imagined to have any consequences for the rest of the people’s access to sacred space. Normally, access to the inner part of the sanctuary would have been a high priestly prerogative. Not so, however, in the case of Jesus. When he enters the space behind the veil, he is designated πρόδρομος by the author. This title translates forerunner, and it clearly implies that someone will follow after him.541 The expectation created in 6:19–20 is picked up in 10:19–20, when it is said that the addressees have confidence about access into the holy, on a way that passes “through the veil.” The similarities in wording between 6:19–20 and 10:19–20 suggest that the addressees are pictured as having access to the same space that Jesus entered as forerunner.

The realm entered by Jesus as “forerunner,” which is now said to also be accessible for the addressees, is clearly the heavenly sanctuary which Jesus is said to have entered (9:11–14, 24).542 Hebrews operates with the idea that there is a heavenly original of which the earthly sanctuary is a mere copy and shadow (8:5).543 When we read in 9:12 that Jesus “entered once for all into the sanctuary (τὰ ἅγια),” the Yom Kippur typology strongly suggests that τὰ ἅγια must be taken to refer to the inner part of the heavenly sanctuary: the holy of holies.544 The

541 Ottfried Hofius writes that Jesus is pictured as “das Anfangsglied in einer Reihe” and it follows “daß auch die an ihn Gläubigen in das Allerheiligste gelangen werden” (Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6:19f. und 10:19f. [WUNT 14; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1972], 86).

542 There has been considerable discussion of how to understand the “temple symbolism” in Hebrews. The difficulty in discerning how the temple symbolism in Hebrews should be described is probably due to the fact that there were different notions of temple symbolism current at the time of Hebrews. On the one hand, there was what could be called the apocalyptic view, that heaven contained a sanctuary or temple, of which the earthly sanctuary was a copy (cf. 3 Enoch 1:7; Wis 9:8, 4Q400–407). On the other hand, there is also the idea that the entire cosmos is structured like a temple, and that heaven itself represents the holy of holies. This view is recorded in Josephus (A. J. 3.179–187), Philo (Mos. 2.66–108). Cf. also Seneca, De Beneficiis 7.7.3; Cicero, De Republica 3:14. For discussion see Craig Koester, The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989), 60. Commentators differ when it comes to discerning which of these were most influential on Hebrews, and it is perhaps tempting to agree with George MacRae who simply claims that both views are found in Hebrews, side by side. See “Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews,” Sem 12 (1978): 179–99. Even though this might be true and even though there are passages which are difficult to reconcile with the “apocalyptic model,” my own view is still that the “apocalyptic model” is by far the one which comes closest to Hebrews. For a thorough defense of this view, see Hofius, Vorhang. For a more general argument to suggest that not only the temple symbolism, but the entire culitic discourse in Hebrews shows affinity with apocalyptic material, see Iody A. Barnard, The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic in the Epistle to the Hebrews (WUNT 2/331; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

543 This point is grounded in a Scriptural quote from Exod 25:40, a key text for the development in Jewish tradition of the idea that there existed a heavenly sanctuary of which the earthly was a copy. For discussion, see Mackie, Eschatology and Exhortation, 158.

544 In fact, Manuscript P attempts to clarify this. Although this is a disputed issue, it seems to me that Hofius (Vorhang, 50–59) has argued convincingly that τὰ ἅγια consistently refers to the inner part of the sanctuary in Hebrews, whereas ἦν ὁ σκηνή refers to the sanctuary in toto. There is only one exception to this
logic of Hebrews’ argument – whereby Jesus opens the way into the holy of holies as forerunner and high priest – would indicate that τῶν ἁγίων in 10:19 also refers to the inner part of the heavenly sanctuary. I would thus claim that the radical proposition made in 10:19–20 is that the addressees have access to the inner parts of the heavenly sanctuary, the realm which has already been entered by Jesus as high priest. Their identity as followers of Jesus on their way to God’s glory, which was emphasized in 2:5–18, is thereby related to the cultic discourse.\textsuperscript{545} They have access behind the veil, \textit{qua} followers of their forerunner and high priest.

4.2.2 By Virtue of the Blood of Jesus

Access is also said to have been provided by virtue of the blood of Jesus. Quite clearly, the “blood of Jesus” must refer to his self-sacrifice. But is it possible to be more precise as to how that sacrifice could be imagined to grant access to the sanctuary? It is evident that Hebrews sees the blood of Jesus as having a cleansing function. Jesus’ blood cleanses not only the exterior of the human being, as animal blood would have been capable of doing, but also the consciousness of the person (9:13–14). The result is that those who have been cleansed are made fit to serve (εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν) the living God (9:14).\textsuperscript{546} Although the term used for “serving” could denote any kind of devotion toward God, it is also often used particularly for worship and cults.\textsuperscript{547} It would make good interpretive sense if 9:13–14 were taken to claim that cleansing of the heart is necessary if one is to approach God in worship. Just as external cleansing would have been a prerequisite for entering the temple in Jerusalem, the author seems to argue that internal cleansing is also necessary, when approaching God in his heavenly sanctuary. The blood of Jesus could thus be understood as granting access to the sanctuary, because it effectively cleanses the heart and consciousness of the worshiper.\textsuperscript{548}

Another attractive possibility would be to see the blood of Jesus as providing access to sacred space, by virtue of being that through which the new covenant was inaugurated. It is stated in 9:18 that not even the first covenant was dedicated (ἐγκαινίζω) without blood, and it follows implicitly that the second covenant also was.\textsuperscript{549} The dedication of the new covenant is clearly modeled on the dedication of the covenant at Sinai (cf. Exod 24:3–8), and the author retells this event in terms of Moses sprinkling blood on the book, the people, the tent and the artifacts that were used during worship (9:19–21). Although water, crimson wool, and sprigs of hyssop are also mentioned, the blood is obviously most important to the author (cf. 9:20). It is instructive to notice that the author focuses on the dedication of the tent, and that he claims the heavenly sanctuary also had to be purified through blood (9:23–24). This suggests that the...
covenant relationship between God and his people is expressed through worship of God at the place dedicated to it. Whereas the first covenant only had a worldly sanctuary related to it (9:1), the new covenant is related to a heavenly one (9:23–24). It seems to follow implicitly that when the new covenant was dedicated, the heavenly sanctuary was cleansed and made ready for use. This implies that those for whom access have been provided, are identified as the people of the new covenant – as those whose hearts have been cleansed. As we shall now explore, they are also identified as members of God’s house, and as having a great high priest.

4.2.3 “Having a Great High Priest”

The audience is not only said to have “confidence of entrance into the sanctuary,” but also to have a great high priest ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ (10:21). This statement should not be understood simply as referring back to Jesus’ once and for all sacrifice in the past. It should also be interpreted as pointing to Jesus’ continuing priestly ministry, which is sometimes given insufficient attention by interpreters of Hebrews. There are several passages in Hebrews which refer to Jesus’ role as intercessor and mediator. In 8:2 it is said that the addressees have a great high priest, who is designated a “minister of the sanctuary.” The term λειτουργός seems to imply activity, as well as status. A few verses earlier, in 7:25, that continuing activity is described in terms of Jesus interceding (ἐντυγχάνειν) on behalf of those who approach God through him. The term used for “intercession” could be understood negatively in terms of accusation (Acts 25:24; Rom 11:2), or positively in terms of speaking someone’s case (Rom 8:26–27, 34). In 7:25 the latter meaning is clear: Jesus is the one speaking for his people. In this way he is said to be fully capable of saving those who approach God through him (7:25). The word used for “approach” in 7:25, προσέρχομαι, is also used in the exhortation in 10:22. This suggests that the continuing ministry of Jesus as intercessor before God is a prerequisite for being saved when one approaches God. The claim to “have” a great high priest is therefore directly related to the possibility of approaching God. It is not only Jesus’ once and for all sacrifice which grants access to God’s presence, but also his continuing ministry of intercession and mediation.

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550 The expression ἱερεύς μέγας in 10:21 should not be distinguished in meaning from the title most commonly used by the author to denote the high priesthood of Jesus, ἀρχιερεύς. See Lane, Hebrews, 2:285.
552 Thüising (“Lasst uns hinzutreten,” 7) even claims, with reference to 8:1–2, that Hebrews main interest lies in the present and continuing aspect of Christ’s priestly ministry.
553 Contra Laub (Bekenntnis, 203–207), who claims that 8:2 also refers back to the once and for all death of Jesus. Laub seems to take this stance because he assumes that a continuing priestly ministry in heaven would have to mean a durative sacrificial self-offering on behalf of Jesus. However, as will be argued below, I think there are other ways to construe the continuing aspect of Jesus’ heavenly ministry.
554 Lane, Hebrews, 1:205.
555 On Jesus as intercessor and mediator in Hebrews, and on the continuing aspect of his priesthood, see Loader, Sohn und Hohepriester, 142–51.
556 Quite apart from the theological significance attached to the high priesthood of Jesus, and its relevance for the concept of worship, the claim to “have” a high priest could also have been socially significant. Koester (Hebrews, 449) underlines that Jews, Greeks, and Romans had traditions concerning high priesthood. Distinct traditions concerning high priesthood could thus have been seen as indicative of social identity. Ascribing high priesthood to Jesus and claiming that the community “has” its own high
The fact that Jesus’ priestly ministry is described as something continuing rather than as something which has already been finished has implications for the question of identity, for if Jesus ministers continuously as high priest, being the one through whom God is accessed and approached, it seems to follow that each and every act of worship would have been seen as somehow involving Jesus. Even if we are unable to reconstruct the precise practices of worship which followed from belief in the intercession of Jesus, it is difficult to imagine that convictions about the continuing priestly ministry of Jesus would have had no influence on concrete practices, and practices of worship which somehow made references to the priesthood of Jesus would function as a constant reminder that legitimate worship is mediated through him.558

Jesus is said in 10:21 to be high priest over the house of God. Because “house” has already been established as a metaphorical expression for the people of God in 3:6,559 one could plausibly assume that the same is true in 10:21.560 However, the accentuation is different in 10:21. The strong focus on kinship language in the context before 3:6, suggested that “house” was primarily used as a metaphor for God’s people, in the sense that they constitute an extended family. In 10:21, because it is related to Jesus’ priesthood, the term “house of God” seems rather to evoke connotations in the direction of “sanctuary.” The idea that a worshiping community could be designated a sanctuary is found in several places in the New Testament, as well as in Second Temple Jewish sources outside the Jesus movement.561 The term “house” used for sanctuary, points to God’s indwelling presence. This suggests that it is not only the addressees who can approach God in heaven; God is also present in the context of the community, through the priestly ministry of Jesus.562 This means that Jesus’ priestly ministry, although situated within the heavenly reality, is also executed, somehow, among God’s people.563 The distance between what takes place in the community on earth and what Jesus does in heaven before God has been bridged through the high priestly ministry of Jesus.564

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558 For a thorough discussion of practice, see 4.6.
559 Cf. discussion of this verse in 2.8.4.
561 For discussion, see Bauckham, “Parting.”
562 The idea that the community is a/the sanctuary is found several places in the New Testament, and also in Qumran. For references and discussion, see Bauckham, “Parting,” 185–86.
563 Attridge, Hebrews, 111.
564 Koester (Hebrews, 447) even states that the earthly community is a “counterpart” to the heavenly sanctuary.
When it is said that the audience has a great high priest, this is more than just an abstract theological statement. It also implies that what Jesus does in heaven bears on what happens within the community of the addressees on earth. Craig Koester thus aptly concludes: “Hebrews assumes that Christ’s heavenly ministry (leitourgia; 8:2, 6) undergirds earthly Christian worship (latreuein; 12:28).”

4.2.4 The Dedication of a New and Living Way

Entrance into the heavenly sanctuary is also described in terms of a new and living way, said to have been dedicated for the community, and to reach behind the veil. The relative pronoun ἥν in 10:20 must logically relate back to the entrance which has been made possible. The ὁ δῶς spoken of in 10:20 thus relates to the εἴσοδος in 10:19, grammatically as well as stylistically. What 10:20 says, then, is that entrance has been made possible on and through a new and living way. This way is said to have been “dedicated” (cf. ἐνεκαίνισεν), a term also used of the inauguration of the new covenant (cf. 9:18). This emphasizes that the act of dedication was performed by means of Jesus’ self-sacrifice, further developing the idea that Jesus’ blood is the means which grants access. The way which has been dedicated for the community is qualified by two epithets: it is both new and living. When saying that the way is living, this probably means that it leads to life, or that it is life-giving, in an absolute and eschatological sense.

The way is also qualified as πρόσφατος, meaning “not there before.” The mere fact that the way was dedicated by Jesus seems to imply a decisive event in redemptive history through which access, not previously enjoyed, became available. However, there is more to the newness of the way than this. Hebrews has a general tendency to emphasize that the Christ event brought something qualitatively new. This is especially emphasized with regard to the better covenant which Jesus mediates (8:13, 9:15; 12:24). The new way dedicated by Jesus

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565 Koester, Hebrews, 380.
567 The explicative phrase which follows veil in 10:20, τοῦτ’ ἐστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, is open to several interpretations. For a general survey, see Norman Young, “ΤΟΥΤ’ ἘΣΤΙΝ ΤΗΣ ΣΑΡΚΟΣ ΑΥΤΟΥ (Heb. X. 20): Apposition, Dependent or Explicative?” NTS 20 (1974): 100–104. It could be taken as a descriptive genitive dependent on ὁ δῶς. The flesh of Jesus would then be identified with the way leading into the sanctuary. Thus Hermut Löhr, “Thronversammlung und preisender Tempel: Beobachtungen am himmlischen Heiligum im Hebräerbüch und in den Sabbatopferliedern aus Qumran,” in Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult im Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt (ed. M. Hengel and A. M. Schwemer; WUNT 55; Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 185–205 (197). Another possibility would be to take the flesh as referring to the veil, meaning that the way passes through the veil, which is the flesh of Jesus. Thus Attridge, Hebrews, 287. However, in my opinion the best interpretation is to understand the entire explicative phrase as referring back to actual dedication of the way. This is argued by Otfried Hofius who, in contrast to me, understands 10:20 as referring to the incarnation of Jesus and not specifically to his sacrificial death. See “Inkarnation und Opfertod Jesu nach Hebr 10,19f.,” in Ruf Jesu und die Antwort der Gemeinde: Exegetische Untersuchungen Joachim Jeremiass zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet von seinen Schülern (ed. E. Lohse, C. Burchard, and B. Schaller; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 132–41. I think the dedication of the way is better understood as having been accomplished through Jesus’ sacrificial death. Thus Lane, Hebrews, 2:275.
568 Lane, Hebrews, 2:283; Gräßer, Hebräer, 3:15.
570 Weiß, Hebräer, 523.
thus implicitly contrasts with the regime of the old covenant (8:13), a fact to which we will now turn.571

4.2.5 Summary

We have now seen how access to God is described in Hebrews as been predicated on the Christ event. Access has been provided through Jesus’ own high priestly entrance, through his self-sacrifice, the dedication of the new covenant, and the continuing priestly ministry of Jesus. This implies a very Christ-centered conception of worship.572 Moreover, we have also noted how the identity of those who access God’s presence is evoked in different ways. They are followers of Jesus, members of a new covenant, and they belong to “the house of God.” Some of these different identity descriptors used of the addressees will be further explored below. Before we do this, however, more should be said about how the newly gained possibility of access and worship contrasts with conditions under the old covenant.

4.3 The Contrast between Old and New Worship

4.3.1 The Inaccessibility of Sacred Space under the Regime of the Old Cult

The implicit contrast with the old regime, argued for above, is made quite clear if we compare 10:19–20 to 9:6–10.573 In 9:6–7 the author depicts a continuing ministry in the first tent (9:6), and contrasts it to the fact that only the high priest, only once a year, entered the second tent (9:7). This serves as starting point for an intricate and difficult discussion in 9:8–10.574

Hebrews 9:8 starts with τοῦτο, which could grammatically refer either forward or backward. The flow of the argument presupposes, however, that τοῦτο refers to the preceding verses, meaning: “through this (i.e. the ministry in the first and second tent) the holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been revealed, as long as the first tent has standing.”575 This (ἡτίς, 9:9), continues the author, is a “symbol” (παραβολή) for the present time, according to which (καθ᾽ἡν) gifts and offerings are brought forth, which cannot perfect the conscience of those ministering.

572 Hurtado (Lord Jesus Christ, 504) correctly notes how “glorification of God could not be done properly without reference to Jesus,” according to Hebrews.
573 In the following I will be reading Hebrews 9:6–10 on the premise that the phrase “first tent” denotes the first compartment within the sanctuary, and that “second tent” denotes the inner compartment of the sanctuary, the holy of holies, and I will be assuming that the first room is separated from the second by a veil. This is certainly a counter-intuitive use of the terms “first” and “second,” but examples from Josephus show that it is not unprecedented (B. J. 5:193–95, 208). Thus Otfried Hofius, “Das ‘erste’ und das ‘zweite’ Zelt: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung von Hebr 9,1–10,” ZNW 61 (1970): 271–77. Hence, I do not believe that the terms “first” and “second” are used to denote two different tents standing side by side, each with their own veils, nor are they meant to refer to two different epochs of salvation history, each with its own tent. “Allusions” to the first and second covenant are therefore at best secondary inferences, not the direct reference, of that terminology. Thus Norman Young, “The Gospel According to Hebrews 9,” NTS 21 (1981): 198–210 (200).
575 My translation.
The relative pronoun ἥτις at the beginning of 9:9 could be taken with reference to the entire preceding context,576 or with special reference to the first tent. The congruence between the pronoun and “tent,” and the fact that ἥτις is elsewhere in Hebrews is used with specific reference (2:3; 8:6; 9:2; 10:35; 12:5), also suggests a specific reference in 9:9.577 Accordingly, the first tent is a “symbol” for the present time. The gifts and offerings mentioned in 9:9 make clear in what sense the first tent functions as a “parable” for the author; it is according to the ministry taking place in it (cf. 9:6). This ministry is deemed ineffective by the author, on account of its lack of ability to perfect the conscience of those taking part in it (9:9). The inadequacy of this ministry is further emphasized when it is stated that it only concerns food, drink and various kinds of washing. These practices are dismissed by the author as being fleshly regulations imposed until the time of correction (9:10).578

The key issue at stake in 9:8–10 is the fact that the way into “the holy” has yet to be revealed as long as the first tent stands. Several factors indicate that τὰ ἡγία in 9:8 refers to the heavenly sanctuary. Thematic and terminological similarities suggest that 9:8 and 10:19 refer to the same thing, and I have already argued above that 10:19 refers to the inner part of the heavenly sanctuary. The fact that 10:20 claims that the way into the holy has been dedicated through the self-sacrifice of Jesus, demonstrates that it makes good sense to see access to the heavenly sanctuary as something to be realized in the time of correction (9:10). I would thus argue that 9:8 presents us with the problem, which 10:19–20 proclaims has been solved through Jesus.579 The way into the holy, which is now available because of Jesus, could not be revealed as long as the first tent still stood. The standing of the first tent is thus the problem. The term which is used to denote the standing of the first tent, στάσις, could be used literally in the sense of standing (Neh 8:7; Dan 10:11), or it could simply mean “to exist.”580 In this context it makes better sense to take the term in a juridical sense, to mean “holding authoritative status.”581 This interpretation of the term could find support in Hebrews 10:9, where the abolishment of the animal sacrificial system is said to take place in order to validate (cf. στήσῃ) the sacrificial death of Jesus.582 This is also consistent with the context of 9:6–10,583 where the author appears to be more interested in the rules that applied to the ministry in the first tent than with its physical existence.584 Thus, the continuing validity of the ministry conducted in the first tent is contrasted to the revelation of the way into the inner parts of the heavenly sanctuary.585 Dahl captures the meaning in a precise way when he states:

576 Thus Johnson, Hebrews, 225.
577 Lane, Hebrews, 2:224.
579 So also Weiß, Hebräer, 521.
580 Ellingworth, Hebrews, 439.
581 Lane, Hebrews, 2:223.
582 For interpretation of this passage, cf. discussion below.
583 I thus reject the view that the standing of the first tent refers to the existence of the creation, held by Ekkehard and Wolfgang Stegemann, “Does the Cultic Language in Hebrews Represent Sacrificial Metaphors? Reflections on Some Basic Problems,” in Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights (ed. G. Gelardini: BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 13–23 (22).
584 In other words, it is doubtful whether the standing of the first tent relates to the fall of Jerusalem.
585 Koester (Hebrews, 397) writes: “Christ’s entry into the heavenly sanctuary means that the first covenant and its sanctuary no longer have normative ‘standing’ among the people of God.”
“The idea is that the earthly sanctuary with all its ceremonies had to be rendered invalid if the way to the heavenly sanctuary were to be opened.”

But what sense could it make to claim that the tent and the ministry conducted in it, function as a “parable” for the inaccessibility of the heavenly sanctuary? A possible answer would be that a continuing and ineffective ministry in the first tent bears witness to the fact that access to God is lacking. The logic would be as follows. If it is necessary to repeat a sacrificial rite, it proves that the sacrifice is unable to cleanse the consciousness or deal effectively with the problem of sin (10:1–4). However, without a consciousness cleansed from sin, God cannot be approached. Thus: a cult where sacrifices are repeatedly brought forth functions as a recurring reminder that sins have not been taken away, a fact which implies that God cannot be approached. Another possible explanation why the standing of the first tent indicates that God cannot be approached, would be the very fact that the sanctuary is divided into two different compartments, and that the people are only given access to the first of these. The logic would then be as follows. If the people are only given partial access to the outer room of the earthly sanctuary, they cannot have access to the inner room of the heavenly sanctuary. The borders that separate the people from the holy, under the terms of the old covenant, therefore imply that no real access to God’s own heavenly sanctuary has yet been provided. The mere fact that there is a division of the sanctuary into two compartments, and the mere fact of there being a divinely authorized but ineffectual ministry conducted in the first tent, means that access to God cannot have been provided.587 If access to the heavenly sanctuary had been available for the people, there would have been no need for repeatable sacrifices, or for boundaries separating the people from the inner parts of the sanctuary.

It is quite obvious that the author holds that the standing of the first tent is provisional and limited, and that the “problem” the first tent represents was meant to be solved. The ministry in the first tent was based on fleshly regulations which were only valid until the time of correction (cf. μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως, 9:10).588 The time of correction is juxtaposed with the present time (ὁ καιρὸς ὁ ἐνεστηκώς, 9:9). According to the author, who believes that a new and living way into the sanctuary has in fact been dedicated, the time of correction must already be at hand. The “present time” and the time of correction should therefore be understood as overlapping periods of redemptive history.589 The addressees are thus pictured as living within a time period where God has significantly changed the terms and conditions for appropriate worship. There is an old regime which no longer has standing, which no longer holds authoritative status, and a new regime has been inaugurated whereby God can be approached on a new and living way.

4.3.2 The Necessity of Abolishing the Old Cult

Hebrews 9:8–10 seems to indicate, in other words, that the existence of a valid cult conducted in the first tent precludes access to the heavenly sanctuary, and since access to the heavenly

587 Provided that this specific reference to the division of the earthly sanctuary is retained, Young’s (“Gospel,” 201–202) claim that the first tent represents the entire earthly cult is correct.
588 The term which translates as “correction” indicates the making straight of something which has shifted from its true position. See Lane, Hebrews, 2:217.
589 Koester, Hebrews, 398.
sanctuary has now been provided, it follows logically that the cult in the first tent has lost its validity. This is never stated explicitly, however, either in 9:8–10 or 10:19–20, and we should notice that the question of whether the earthly cult is abolished is different from the question of whether the author thought that it effectively provided access to God, dealt with the problem of sin, or provided a definitive means of atonement and redemption. Clearly the author holds that the earthly cult did not (7:18–19; 9:9–10; 10:1–4), however, it does not necessarily follow that the author must therefore have argued for its abolition. He could, for instance, have argued that participation in an earthly sacrificial cult remained a possibility for followers of Christ, but that it is no longer strictly speaking necessary, or he could have argued that the earthly cult has simply lost its relevance, now that a new period of redemptive history has come. It is even possible to imagine the author arguing that it is good to remain faithful to the earthly cult, and its prescriptions, as long as one is still living within the realm of flesh, provided that one knows that this cult is only a shadowy copy of “the real thing.” In other words, the abolition of the earthly cult does not necessarily follow from the view that it is ineffective, or a mere anti-type of the true reality.

Hebrews does argue that the earthly cult is abolished, however. In 10:1–4 the author puts forward two of his main objections to the earthly cult: (i) it needs repetition, and (ii) it is based on the sacrifice of animals. This proves to him that it cannot cleanse the consciousness or take away sin. These facts are then commented on through a Scriptural quote attributed to Jesus as he entered the world. Jesus is recorded as having said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.” The offerings and sacrifices, which God does not desire, are then paralleled with holocausts and sin-offerings which God does not like. The psalm ends with Jesus proclaiming that he is coming to do the will of God (10:7). An interpretation of the quote is given in 10:8–10. Two things from the psalm are repeated. First are all the things that God did not want or like: θυσιαί, προσφοραί, ὠλοκλαυτώματα and περὶ ἁμαρτίας. These four different terms, which with different degrees of precision denote various offerings, should be taken together as referring to the entire Scriptural sacrificial practice. With reference to these sacrifices, the author comments that God did not want them even though these are the sacrifices legislated by the law (cf. αἵτινες, 10:8). The significance of this comment can hardly be overestimated. The sacrificial practices critiqued by the author, and indirectly by the psalm, are the very practices legislated by the law. This rules out the possibility that Hebrews “only” addresses issues pertaining to a current administration of the earthly sanctuary, which he viewed as a distortion of God’s law. Rather, the author is addressing the earthly cult as it is ideally portrayed by Scripture. What is advocated is not a return to the true prescriptions of the law; it is specifically with these prescriptions that

590 I take 10:5 to refer to Jesus’ entrance into the world of humans, rather than as his entrance into heaven. Thus also Moffitt, Atonement, 230–31.
591 This reading differs from the MT which reads “ears” instead of “body.” The LXX tradition is divided between “ears” (La8, Ga) and “body” (8, A, B). Cf. Koester, Hebrews, 432.
592 Attridge, Hebrews, 274.
593 Attridge (Hebrews, 275) correctly maintains that the fact that “law” lacks an article should not lead us to understand it as anything else than the Torah.
594 There is an important Scriptural tradition where sacrifices are either critiqued or “relativized”: Isa 1:10–17; 66:3–4; 1 Sam 15:22; Amos 5:22–24; Mic 6:6–8. See also Jdt 16:16.
595 Koester, Hebrews, 373.
Hebrews takes issue. Koester thus rightly states: “Hebrews’ most radical point is not the rejection of the sacrifice in general, but its rejection of sacrifices prescribed by the Law.”

The second motif from the psalm to be repeated by the author is Jesus’ proclamation that he has come to do the will of God. Regarding this will, it is said in 10:10 that “we” have been sanctified through it. By this the author means that “we” have been sanctified “through the offering” (διὰ τῆς προσφορᾶς) of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all (10:10). The will of God is thus manifested in the offering of the body of Jesus. There is a deliberate contrast here, between the sacrifice of the body of Jesus, which is according to the will of God, and the offerings legislated by the law, which are not according to the will of God. This contrast is brought out in a powerful statement in 10:9, where it is said that when Jesus proclaimed that he would do the will of God, he abolished “the first” in order to make “the second” valid. The first (cf. τὸ πρῶτον 10:9), that which is abolished, recapitulates the first thing Jesus is recorded as having said (cf. αὐτὸτερον 10:8), concerning the sacrifices and offerings not wanted by God. What is inaugurated or confirmed, “the second” (τὸ δεύτερον, 10:9) refers to the second thing (τὸτε, 10:9) quoted from the psalm, namely Jesus’ proclamation that he will do God’s will. In other words: the animal sacrifices are abolished in order to validate the self-sacrifice of Jesus. The term which translates as “abolish,” ἀναρέω, is mostly used in the New Testament to denote murder (Matt 2:16, Acts 2:23) or extermination (2 Thess 2:8). It can also denote removing something, or abolishing it. This latter meaning is to be preferred in 10:9, because it is juxtaposed with ἱστάνω which should be understood in the sense of “inaugurate,” “make valid” or “confirm.” The validation of the sacrifice of Jesus and the abolition of the sacrificial cult are causally linked. Jesus abolished the animal sacrificial cult in order to (ἵνα) validate his own self-sacrifice.

There is a profound sense, therefore, in which the logic of the author’s understanding of the once and for all death of Jesus by necessity also entails a definitive “no longer” with regard to the earthly cult. The earthly cult is neither a remaining necessity nor a possibility. In 10:18, concluding his lengthy exposition, the author states that there no longer (οὐκέτι) remains an offer for sins where there is forgiveness. The forgiveness which is now is available

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596 Koester, Hebrews, 438.
597 The ἐν with the dative should be taken instrumentally. Thus Ellingworth, Hebrews, 518.
598 Georg Gäbel proposes a “non-cultic” reading of this statement, claiming that it “only” refers to the obedience of Jesus in his earthly life. See Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie (WUNT 2/212; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 187–200. This fits well with the focus on doing the will of God, and perhaps also with the “original” meaning of the Psalm. However, the term προσφορά clearly means sacrifice in 10:5 and 10:18, and probably also in 10:14. Furthermore, Gäbel’s reading fails to account for the ἐφάπαξ in 10:10 which elsewhere clearly refers to the death of Jesus (cf. 9:28). In contrast to Gäbel, I therefore propose that 10:10 refers specifically to Jesus’ obedience unto death, understood in sacrificial terms, and not generally to his earthly life.
600 I find Mackie’s (Eschatology and Exhortation, 122) tentative suggestion, that the entire law is abolished, unconvincing.
601 Weiβ, Hebräer, 508.
602 “ἀναρέω,” BDAG:64.
603 Gen 26:3; Exod 6:4; 1 Macc 2:27; Rom 3:31.
604 Note how Hebrews uses “the first” to denote both the first covenant, the first tent, and the first cultic regime.

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refers to the blessings of the new covenant (10:17). If one continues to bring forth offerings for sin, one therefore acts as if these sins had not been taken away once and for all through Christ’s sacrifice. The belief that Christ’s sacrifice has provided definitive forgiveness and the practice of still bearing forth offerings for sin thus mutually exclude one another. The negative aspect of this truth is that there no longer (οὐκέτι) remains an offer for sin, if one sins knowingly after having received the truth (10:26). In other words, this is not just a theoretical doctrine put forward by the author; it has concrete bearing on his practical exhortations to the community. The earthly sanctuary with its sacrificial cult is thus decisively understood in terms of οὐκέτι, both with respect to the theological necessity (10:18) and the possibility (10:26) of still taking part in it.

4.3.3 The Critique of the Old Cult and the Tension between Newness and Continuity

The critique of the earthly cult is hallmarked by a tension between newness and continuity. It is evident that there are important lines of conceptual continuity between the old order and the Christ event, even if Hebrews is very critical of the old order. Hebrews is not saying that having a priest is unnecessary if one wants to approach God, but that the addressees have one; not that sacrifices are superfluous or immoral, but that Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice; not that there is no need for cleansing, but that the inside of the person needs to be cleansed too; not that having a temple is unnecessary, but that the true temple, to which the addressees have access, is located in heaven. Even though the notion of legitimate worship is reshaped in several ways, and even if there is a definitive contrast between the old and new order, there is still a high degree of conceptual continuity between the old and new order. The new order is not comprehensible if viewed apart from the old order, even if they cannot coexist.

The author draws on a Scriptural passage from the psalms, in order to argue that the cult legislated by the law has been abolished. This reminds us of the conclusions reached in chapter 3, where we saw that Hebrews tends to view other parts of Scripture as more authoritative than the law. The author is clearly attempting to prove that his interpretation of the Christ event, and his critique of the old order, is based on Scripture. This implies that it is important for the author to show that there is continuity between his own views and those found in Scripture, even though he also admits that the sacrifices he holds to have been abolished are the very sacrifices legislated by the law. There is an intriguing tension, therefore, between newness and continuity in the critique of the earthly cult. The Christ event stands in stark contrast to the old cult, but also in conceptual continuity with it. The abolition of the earthly cult presupposes that the commandments of the law are set aside because they no longer represent God’s will, but this radical move is evidenced in Scripture.

605 Morna Hooker writes: “Those who insist that the sacrifices are still necessary are therefore holding the crucified Christ up to contempt” (“Christ, the ‘End’ of the Cult,” in The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology [ed. R. Bauckham et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009], 189–212 [195]).

606 Koester writes (Hebrews, 441): “The singularity of Christ’s sacrifice also means that there is no other source of forgiveness.”

607 See 3.3.2.
4.4 The Cult Critique in Hebrews and Second Temple Judaism

4.4.1 Exclusivity and De-legitimation

The radical critique of the old cult, and the alternative Christ-centered conception of worship, seem to raise the question of whether there is some kind of conflict between Hebrews and Jewish traditions, regarding the question of how to identify a member of the people of God. To begin with, it is hard to see how Hebrews’ concept of worship is open to anyone else than followers of Jesus. This follows from the Christological presuppositions which are said to make entrance possible (4.2). Access to God is not presented in Hebrews as something which is self-evidently granted to all humans, but as something which must be mediated and provided through Jesus. Moreover, Hebrews is not content to celebrate the significance of the Christ event, and the possibilities it opened. There is also a radical critique of the old regime, which tends to de-legitimize it as an abiding possibility for God’s people. There was no real access to God within the context of the old regime, and the old sacrifices conveyed no real cleansing or perfection. It seems to follow that anyone whose worship is based on the prescriptions of the law which governed the old regime stands excluded from the presence of God.

On the face of it, this would seem to point to a clear conflict with Jewish traditions, with possible implications also for the question of how to identify a member of God’s people. However, there are at least two reasons why that conclusion is less self-evident than it might appear to be at first sight. First of all, it is not entirely clear how the cult critique in Hebrews relates to the temple in Jerusalem, which is never even mentioned. Secondly, there are important strands of cult critique within Jewish tradition. A good case could therefore be made to suggest that Hebrews belongs within a Jewish in-house debate. Further discussion is therefore needed.

4.4.2 Six Propositions Regarding Hebrews and the Cult in Jerusalem

So far I have consistently followed Hebrews in speaking of two sanctuaries, one in heaven and one on earth, without determining how this might relate to the historical and social context of Hebrews. In particular, I have not discussed whether the earthly cult is identical to the cult in Jerusalem, or whether the critique of the earthly cult is meant to target the Jerusalem temple. In the introduction to this dissertation, I dated Hebrews to the second half of the first century, and left the question of its relationship to the fall of Jerusalem open. Instead of suggesting a more concrete answer to the question of the dating of Hebrews, I will argue for six propositions regarding the relationship between Hebrews and the temple in Jerusalem, which I believe to be equally valid with regard to whether the temple stood when Hebrews was written. Note, however, that I am not primarily making an argument about whether Hebrews intentionally attempted to target the temple in Jerusalem through its cult critique, I am rather attempting to draw out the implications.

First, the discussion of the earthly sanctuary in Hebrews, and the conclusions drawn by the author, apply also to the Jerusalem temple, even though it is not mentioned. In fact, any

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610 See 1.5.6.
611 See 1.5.1.
earthly cult which involves animal sacrifices which are repeated, and which are dependent upon being performed in a certain sanctuary “made by hands,” would have been subject to the critique of the author. This includes the cult in Jerusalem.

Second, the temple in Jerusalem not only represents a possible cult which could have been associated with the discussion in Hebrews, but is the best and closest analogy for the earthly sanctuary spoken of by the author. It therefore follows that if the audience were to relate the discussion of the earthly sanctuary to a contemporary cult, the temple in Jerusalem would have been the most likely candidate. The temple stands in continuation with the wilderness tabernacle, within the Scriptural narrative to which they both belong. The temple is the successor of the tent, as the dwelling place for the same God, worshiped by the same people according to similar prescriptions. Furthermore, many of the features, emphasized by the author with regard to the tent, are features also characteristic of the Jerusalem temple: the Levitical priests, the division of the sanctuary in two compartments separated by a veil, the ministry of the high priest on the day of Yom Kippur and offerings and sacrifices legislated by the law. The author’s critique of the cult takes issue with these specific features, not only with the general idea of sacrificial cults on earth.

Third, if the temple still stood as Hebrews was written, the author’s argument suggests that he would not have endorsed participation in its cult. It is also hard to see why paying temple tax in order to sustain the priesthood in Jerusalem, and the daily offerings, should have been approved.

Fourth, if the temple had fallen when Hebrews was written, this event alone would not account for the author’s critique of the earthly cult. If the fall of Jerusalem was in fact the occasion for the writing of Hebrews, and if the author wanted to articulate his theology in light of this fact, he could have done so without criticizing the earthly cult in the way that he did. For instance, he could have claimed that the earthly cult was fully effective and valid as long as it stood, although now surpassed by a new and better solution. Even if it is possible to speculate that the fall of the temple was the psychological occasion for critique of the cult, this critique is not logically dependent on, nor adequately explained by, the fall of the temple. As it is currently articulated, the critique of the cult does not presuppose the fall of Jerusalem to be either valid or meaningful, and there is no indication in Hebrews that the audience is distressed because they are unable to participate in the Jerusalem cult, or that Hebrews thus should be read as a response to this event.

Fifth, if the temple had fallen when Hebrews was written, the author’s argument implicitly precludes any legitimate attempt to rebuild it. As Richard Bauckham rightly stresses, the issue of the temple did not disappear with the fall of Jerusalem. Although we, as historians, know that the temple was not to be rebuilt shortly after 70 CE, and that this meant that Jews would eventually need to find new ways in which to practice and understand their relationship with God, this would not have been equally clear to most Jews contemporary with the fall of

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612 Koester (The Dwelling of God, 48, 58, 72–74) argues that the tabernacle, for many Jewish writers represented continuity in the commemoration of Israelite redemptive history, precisely by virtue of being the predecessor of the temple. And in Qumran, he argues that the terms “tent” and “tabernacle” generally are understood in terms of temple (The Dwelling of God, 40).


Jerusalem. Rather, most Jews would probably have expected or hoped that the temple would be rebuilt, as it had been before.\(^{615}\) Therefore, “the temple did not cease to be central to Jewish identity” after 70 CE.\(^{616}\) The fact that Jewish Christians did not participate in any movement dedicated to the rebuilding of the temple, “probably sealed their exclusion from common Judaism,” according to Bauckham.\(^{617}\) For Hebrews, a continuing sacrificial cult in Jerusalem, structured after the architecture of the two separated compartments, has not only lost its significance; it also serves as a “symbol” which proclaims that the access to God’s presence has not been revealed, and that definitive forgiveness has not been provided. It has therefore been abolished through the will of God, and rebuilding the temple in order to re-instate the cult is a cause for which theologically legitimate arguments cannot be given.

Sixth, given the fact that the cult critique in Hebrews implicitly de-legitimizes the cult in Jerusalem, it follows that Israelite identity has been detached from a concrete earthly cult shrine, and implicitly also from a concrete earthly land.

4.4.3 Comparisons with Jewish Cult Critique

A wholesale rejection of the Jerusalem cult, even if indirect and non-polemical, and even if it was perhaps articulated after the fall of Jerusalem, is clearly a radical move. Quite obviously, this would tend to de-legitimize any vision of Israelite identity where the temple in Jerusalem played a central role. However, there are also important Jewish traditions of cult criticism with which Hebrews could be compared for the purpose of exploring whether there is something particularly novel or offensive in Hebrews’ cult critique. James Thompson has made a helpful distinction between two different strands of Jewish cult critique, one which he labels “prophetic” and one which is more influenced by “Hellenistic philosophy” and metaphysical assumptions.\(^{618}\) These are certainly not watertight compartments, but are helpful distinctions.

The prophetic critique of the cult is noted in several places in Scripture, and tends to focus on the moral short comings of the people. Some passages in Scripture emphasize that God rejects sacrifices, if they are not conjoined with piety and obedience (Isa 1:10–17; 66:3–4). Many texts go one step further, and indicate that obedience and piety are more important than sacrifices (1 Sam 15:22; Amos 5:22–24; Mic 6:6–8). This also seems to be the premise according to which prayers and acts of loving-kindness could be reckoned as sacrifices well pleasing to God (Ps 51:18–19; 141:2; Sir 3:3, 30; 20:28; Tob 4:10–11; 1QS 9:4–5; ’Abot R. Nat. 4). A radical example of this line of tradition is found in Jeremiah 7:1–8:3, where the Israelites’ confidence in the temple as a means of protection, seems to be presented as

\(^{615}\) Cf. Tob 13:16. Indeed, this hope was also enshrined in liturgy: \(\text{b Betzah} 5b; \text{b Rosh Hashanah} 30a; \text{b Bekahorot} 53b.\)


\(^{617}\) Bauckham, “Parting”, 189.

bordering on paganism, however, as far as I can see, none of these texts make a definitive argument for the necessity of abolishing all animal sacrifices, as is done in Hebrews.

Even if we suppose for the sake of the argument that Hebrews was composed after the fall of the temple, and compare Hebrews with Jewish documents which are written conscious of the fact that participation in the cult no longer was a possibility, a fact which meant that certain practices therefore had to replace animal sacrifices, I believe that the novelty of Hebrews is evident. Take the famous passage in Rabbi Nathan (‘Abot R. Nat. 4), where Rabbi Joshua is recorded as mourning the loss of the temple, stating that the place where Israel’s sins were atoned for is laid waste. Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai consoles him, saying that Israel has another atonement as effective as animal sacrifices, and argues with reference to Hosea 6:6 that acts of loving-kindness count as a means of atonement. Notice that Rabban Johanan does not argue that acts of loving-kindness are superior to sacrifices, that there was anything wrong with animal sacrifices, or that the temple will never be rebuilt, he simply argues that in the absence of the temple, there is another means of atonement which will suffice. The entire discourse still operates on the premise that God loves the temple services more than any other service, but God still accepts acts of loving-kindness as means of atonement. Quite clearly, this is not what is argued in Hebrews.

On a more general note, I would also argue that the criticism of the law and the Sinai covenant found in Hebrews, discussed in chapter 3, is also indirectly relevant to the cultic discourse. It could be argued that in the absence of the temple, either because of physical distance or because the temple had fallen, the law became the most important source of Israelite identity for Jews. This seems to be part of the solution advocated in 2 Baruch. The temple has been lost, alright, but the law still remains with God’s people (48:22; 85:3–5). Indeed, in later rabbinic tradition it is explicitly stated that to study the law, and to keep its commandments, is a substitute for animal sacrifices. Thus, once again returning to the passage in Rabbi Nathan, it is stated that “study of the Torah is more beloved still for the Omnipresent than burnt offerings” and that “a sage who sits and expounds [the Torah] in the community” is

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619 Armin Lange argues that Jer 7:1–8:3 should be viewed as the most developed and radical cult critique in Scripture (“Gebotsobservanz statt Opferkult: Zur Kultpolemik in Jer 7,1–8,3,” in Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substitution des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum [ed. B. Ego et al.; WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 19–35). However, it is important to note that this implies an elevation of the Torah, a move not made in Hebrews. The moral shortcomings of the people are therefore underscored in Jeremiah, in a way which is not done in Hebrews. Moreover, even though there is a critique of the cult in Jeremiah, there is nonetheless a strong focus on inhabiting “the land,” understood as a physical space. This too seems to conflict with Hebrews (cf. discussion in next chapter).

620 Contrast Hebrews where “the new’s fulfillment of the old is seen to entail not only that the old’s institutions are no longer valid, but also that they never really worked properly at all” (Lincoln, “Biblical Theology,” 324).

credited “as though he had offered fat and blood on the altar” (‘Abot R. Nat. 4:9b).\textsuperscript{622} In terms of particular practice and worship, you could therefore lean on the law, if participation in the temple no longer remained a possibility. Given the critique of the Sinai covenant and the limited role assigned to the law, this is clearly not the “solution” offered in Hebrews. It is remarkable that Hebrews shows no concern whatsoever to “secure” the law as a firm basis for communal life, practice and worship, given the fierce criticism of the cult. The critique of the law and the critique of the cult stand side by side in Hebrews, reinforcing each other. If one is looking for a “Jewish parallel” to what is found in Hebrews, one therefore has to present a document where the cult is critiqued together with the law.

It is sometimes argued that Qumran offers us a helpful analogy to Hebrews, with regard to the cult critique. The sectarians seem to have abandoned the Jerusalem temple altogether, and to have viewed their own community as constituting the true eschatological temple of God,\textsuperscript{623} however, it is also evident that the sectarians seem to have elevated the importance of the law, albeit their own specific interpretation of it, in the absence of the temple.\textsuperscript{624} Moreover, their critique of the temple appears to be contingent on its present administration. The critique does not take issue with the cult as such, or with Jerusalem as the site where Israel’s God should ideally be worshiped. Evidence even suggests that they awaited a future restoration of the cult in Jerusalem in the eschatological fulfillment (1QM 2:5–6). In sum, I therefore think that Qumran fails if one is looking for an example to prove that the kind of cult-critique you find in Hebrews is also evidenced in other Jewish sources.

What then of the philosophically informed critique of the cult, which probably entered into Jewish tradition through Hellenistic influences? Does this, perhaps, offer us a parallel to what is found in Hebrews? Among Hellenized Jews, it would seem that many not only accepted that acts of virtue could count as legitimate sacrifices, but that many also claimed that moral character was valued more highly than sacrifices (Let. Aris 234; Philo: Spec. 1.201, 253, 277, 290).\textsuperscript{625} However, even Philo, who could on occasion question the importance of sacrifices, still claims to have made pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Providence 2:64).\textsuperscript{626} He emphasizes the genuine value of sacrifices (Spec. 1.67–68), and argues that a spiritual interpretation of the sacrifices does not preclude their performance (Migr. 89–93).\textsuperscript{627} In fact, it seems that the only recorded global rejection of animal sacrifices among Hellenized Jews is found in the fourth book of the Sibylline Oracles (8–30). This critique is clearly informed by a kind of philosophic reflection, whereby God’s transcendence is held to stand in conflict with the practice of offering material sacrifices in sanctuaries raised by humans. Even though the text

\textsuperscript{622} Translation from Jacob Neusner, The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan: An Analytical Translation and Explanation (Brown Judaic Studies 114; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986).


\textsuperscript{624} Cf. 3.7.2 and the discussion of the new covenant in Qumran.

\textsuperscript{625} For comments on these texts, see Koester, Hebrews, 439.

\textsuperscript{626} On the importance of Jerusalem for Philo, see Sarah Pearce, “Jerusalem as ‘Mother-City’ in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria,” in Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire (ed. J. M. G. Barclay; LSTS 45; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 19–36.

\textsuperscript{627} One could claim, though, that this constitutes indirect evidence to suggest that some Jews thought that a metaphorical understanding of sacrificial practice should supplant its concrete actualization.
clearly reflects the fall of Jerusalem (115–129), it is noteworthy that the critique of sacrificial practices and temples is not directly related to the Jerusalem temple, but seems to be related to all temples. Relying on visible sacrifices and temples is likened to idolatry. As far as I can tell, this seems to be the only document which offers a rejection of animal sacrificial practice which is as absolute as the one found in Hebrews, although for quite different reasons.

In summary, I would claim that Hebrews does not fit nicely in the prophetic critique of the cult, for several reasons. The critique of the cult in Hebrews is not contingent on the moral shortcomings of the people, and Hebrews’ point is not that moral character is more important than sacrifices. The point is not that there are some things which are more pleasing to God than sacrifices, but that there is a sacrifice which is more pleasing to God than the ones legislated by the law. Moreover, there is no critique of a certain corrupt cult administration, and no hope of a renewed cult in Jerusalem. The abolition of the cult is not simply a punishment which follows from Israel’s sins, but a theologically necessary abrogation of a system which hindered God’s people from accessing God. Finally, the author makes no effort to elevate the importance of the law in the absence of the temple. This is arguably the key solution to the problem posed by the absence of the cult in Jewish tradition, but it is not the solution presented in Hebrews.

Hebrews does not fit nicely within the philosophically informed critique of the cult, either. Although we were able to find one example of a global rejection of sacrificial practice, in the Sibyl, the novelty of Hebrews is evident. In Hebrews we find critique which is directly related to the Mosaic cult, which could have been formulated either before or after the fall of Jerusalem, and which only by implication extends to other cults as well. In the Sibyl, on the other hand, we find a generally formulated critique of animal sacrificial practice, which is clearly formulated on the presupposition that the temple has fallen, and which only by implication extends to the temple in Jerusalem. The point in Hebrews is not simply to emphasize that the materiality of cults is not fitting when one approaches a transcendent God. True, the author does make metaphysical distinctions, between that which is fleshly and that which is not, that which is eternal and that which is shakable, and so forth, but he makes use of those distinctions not to argue against sacrifices as such, but rather to argue for a specific and unique sacrifice, claiming that the bloody death of a human being was what it took to fulfill the cult, as well as to abolish it. The guiding presupposition in Hebrews’ cult critique is not a philosophical principle, but an eschatological event. The contrast in Hebrews’ cult theology is not moral character and sacrificial practice, but two different, distinct, and mutually incompatible sacrificial systems – which belong to the same redemptive history, related to the one and same people.

Even if there are important parallels between Hebrews and Second Temple Jewish documents with regard to critique of the cult, I would thus maintain that there is something novel to Hebrews, and I would claim that this novelty has implications for the question of Israelite identity. The fact that the cult criticism is focused on the cult itself, as it is ideally legislated in the law, implies that Hebrews’ cult critique entails a critique of the law as well. Key sources of Israelite identity, from a traditional Jewish perspective, are thus challenged. The fact that Hebrews criticizes the old cult on the basis of a unique, eschatological sacrifice, implies a real “conflict” between two incompatible entities. The view advocated in Hebrews is not simply that the law must be read in light of different and more adequate
presuppositions, although this is necessary too. Hebrews’ view is also that a specific event has changed the way Israel is called to approach God. What Israel needs is therefore not simply better knowledge or better moral character, things which in principle could be attained in a number of different ways, what Israel needs is to respond to the Christ event, which has made available a new and living way into God’s presence. By locating the solution in a specific eschatological event, Hebrews makes a specific person the center of attention rather than a general moral or philosophical principle. Israeli identity, as expressed in worship, is thus tied to Jesus.

We have already seen how the Christological presuppositions for there being access to God imply certain ideas about how to identify those who approach. We will now give full attention to this question.

4.5 Identifying Those Who Approach God

4.5.1 True Hearts in the Fullness of Faith

Hebrews 10:22 puts strong emphasis on the hearts of those who approach God. This could indicate that although there is a clear focus on the entire community approaching God together, the personal approach to God is not to be ruled out. The focus on the heart permeates Hebrews. When God speaks, one should not harden one’s heart (3:8). The author urges his audience to make sure that no evil or unfaithful heart is in any of them, because this could potentially lead to apostasy (3:12). The fullness of faith and the trueness of heart urged in 10:22, is thus a contrast to the condition of the heart leading to apostasy. The focus on the heart also recalls the promise of the new covenant. It is by virtue of the new covenant that access to God has been provided, and it therefore logically follows that those who worship God under the regime of the new covenant should bear its hallmark: transformed hearts.

Those who enter shall do so in the fullness of faith. Faith is a defining characteristic of those who stand in a right relationship to God in Hebrews, and represents the right way of responding to God’s call and promise. It is those who respond to God’s word in faith who shall enter his rest (4:2–3). It is through faith and perseverance one inherits God’s promises (6:12). Faith even becomes the hermeneutical key to the entire Scriptural narrative, as it is retold and commemorated in Hebrews 11. Jesus is designated leader and perfecter of faith and

628 This point is made by Dahl, “New and Living,” 409. Regarding the balance between personal and communal approaches I think David Peterson (Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the “Epistle to the Hebrews” [SNTS 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982]) goes too far in underlining the personal aspect of drawing near. He understands drawing near to be primarily “personal appropriation of salvation” (p. 155), and “invisible acts of faith” performed by the individual (p. 140). Although I would also include this personal aspect, I think the author’s focus is primarily on communal approach. However, my disagreement with Peterson could be a matter of accentuation, because he also clearly affirms that drawing near does find communal expression, and since he does include “prayer and praise” as part of what it means to serve God (p. 140).

629 A true (ἀληθινός) heart should be understood in terms of sincerity, stability and faithfulness (cf. Isa 38:3; T. Dan 5:3). See Ellingworth, Hebrews, 523.

630 Lane, Hebrews, 2:286.

631 See 5.2.
(12:2), and when the former leaders of the community are commemorated and praised, it is their faith the author wants his addressees to imitate (13:7). Faith is thus, in different ways, emphasized as something which should characterize God’s people. At the beginning of Hebrews 11, we find a description of what faith is: “Faith is (belief in) the reality of things hoped for, the proof of things unseen.” This description of faith throws light on the call to enter the heavenly sanctuary, which could be understood as an invitation to “inhabit” a world which cannot be seen, and to participate in a reality which has been promised but which is yet to come. Koester points out that Hebrews’ conception of worship logically entails elevating the importance of faith, given the fact that the addressees “cannot see their priest, sanctuary, or altar.”

4.5.2 Hearts Sprinkled from Bad Consciousness

The focus on the inner being of the believers recurs when it is said that they should enter with their hearts sprinkled clean from bad consciousness. Although it is not stated, we must assume that the blood of Jesus is that with which their hearts have been sprinkled (9:13–14; 12:24).

I have already discussed how the blood of Jesus could be understood as the means through which entrance to the sanctuary was granted. His blood cleanses from dead works (9:14), it inaugurated the new covenant (9:18), and cleansed the heavenly sanctuary (9:23–24). The most obvious meaning of the sprinkling of the hearts of those entering is cleansing from sins. They can approach God with boldness because they have been forgiven (cf. 10:4, 18). This is a direct contrast to the old covenant which could not perfect the conscience of those approaching (9:9; 10:1), however, two further points should also be made.

First, being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus indicates that one is a recipient of the new covenant. When Moses inaugurated the first covenant, he sprinkled blood on the book, the tent and the people (9:19–20). This analogy would suggest that those who have been sprinkled by the blood of Jesus are the people of the new covenant. Because the new covenant was to be written on the hearts of the people, the sign of the new covenant is that one has been sprinkled on the heart. Nelson correctly notes: “the blood that Moses sprinkled on the people and the altar unified God and Israel covenantally. Similarly, Jesus mediated a new covenant through his own sprinkled blood.”

Second, the phrase “sprinkled blood” could also be interpreted as an allusion to the consecration of a Levitical priest under the old covenant (Exod 29:4, 21; Lev 8:6, 30; Jub 21:16; T. Levi 9:11; m. Yoma 3:3). This allusion is made even more probable by the fact that cleansing through blood is paralleled by a washing of their bodies with pure water. Unlike some of the other New Testament documents, the community in Hebrews is never designated

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632 For a defense of this translation, see 5.2.1.
640 For Jesus’ sprinkled blood understood as forgiveness, see Barn. 5:1
641 Nelson, “‘He Offered Himself,’” 256.
as priests. In 1 Peter this designation is explicitly related to membership of the house of God (1 Pet 2:5), and in Revelation it is directly related to the idea that they have been cleansed through the blood of Jesus (Rev 1:5–6). Thus, the author is quite clearly using language which could convey the idea of priesthood. It is all the more curious, therefore, that Hebrews does not make this designation explicit. The idea that the addressees have been cleansed to serve God in his sanctuary, as were the priests of the first covenant, is definitively present in Hebrews although the designation of priests is not. If anything, the category of priesthood is too “low” for the addressees, because they are all granted access, not only to the sanctuary, but to the holy of holies. Rose thus states that they have become, in reality if not in terminology, a “people of high priests.”

4.5.3 Bodies Washed with Pure Water

The statement that those who enter have had their bodies washed with pure water is puzzling, first and foremost because the author flatly rejects regulations concerning food, drink and washings (βαπτισμοί) as fleshly (9:10). These were precisely the type of prescriptions which characterized the kind of ministry which was said to “block” the way into the presence of God. Now, in the context of 10:22, the washing of the body appears to characterize those who do enter the heavenly sanctuary. I would argue that the best solution to this problem would be to assume that the author distinguished between different forms of baptism (cf. the plural βαπτισμῶν in 6:2), and assigned different efficacy to them. For some reason he must have held that the kind of washing mentioned in 10:22 really was effective, whereas the kinds he dismisses in 9:10 were not. In my view, the best and simplest explanation is that the baptism he refers to in 10:22 was performed in the name of Jesus, whereas those in 9:10 were not.

It is also quite curious that the author specifically emphasizes that it is the body which is washed, given the fact that he explicitly opposes the old regulations as fleshly. One could ask what sense it makes to remove one set of fleshly regulations to make room for others. There seems to be two possible answers. One is to suppose that the author did in fact relegate baptism in the name of Jesus, to the sphere of external cleansing. In this case, one must assume that he held the view which is rejected by 1 Peter 3:21, namely that baptism primarily provides cleaning of the flesh. However, a more attractive interpretation would be to assume that the body and the heart are mentioned for the purpose of conveying the total impact of

642 For an interesting, although perhaps somewhat overstated, argument to suggest that the addressees are presented as priests, see John Scholer, Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews (JSNTSup 49; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). Cf. also Dahl, “New and Living,” 406–408; Backhaus, Hebräer, 189, 360.


644 See paragraph 4.3.1.

645 I am not convinced by Barnard (Mysticism, 196–202), who argues that 10:22 refers to typical Jewish washings.

646 This is recognized by the majority of scholars. For a recent treatment, see Samuel Byrskog, “Baptism in the Letter to the Hebrews,” in Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism in Early Judaism, Graeco-Roman Religion, and Early Christianity (ed. D. Hellholm et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 585–602.
4.5.4 The Renewed People of God

All the characteristics of those who approach the sanctuary seem to find resonance in an allusion to Ezekiel 36:25–27: “I will sprinkle clean water over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them.” This quote is taken from a passage which speaks of a renewal of the relationship between God and Israel, a restoration of Israel following her rebellion, a return to the land, and a reestablishing of the covenant relationship between God and his people (36:28). There are therefore many similarities between Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant. This similarity of motif is in and of itself a factor which makes an allusion to Ezekiel 36 probable. In addition to this, there are also many direct similarities between Ezekiel 36 and Hebrews 10:22: a focus on cleansing, a focus on the heart, a focus on clean water and a focus on an act of sprinkling. Together, these motifs convey an image of a renewed covenant people, made fit to draw near to God in worship.

It is telling, perhaps, that there is no mention of a renewed commitment to God’s ordinances and statues in Hebrews, as there is in Ezekiel. Although an argument from silence, it indicates that Hebrews does not primarily think of Israel’s renewal in terms of keeping the law, as Ezekiel seems to have done, but in terms of faithful worship. This does not mean that “doing well” no longer matters to Hebrews, but that doing well is not directly linked to keeping the law. This poses the question of what it looks like, in terms of concrete practices, to worship the God of Israel in light of the Christ event.

4.6 Practices

If one is no longer to practice animal sacrifices, what is one to do, quite practically, when worshiping God? This question relates to identity, because what is done repeatedly is likely to impact the way a person perceive who they are. In approaching this issue, it must be conceded that the evidence is quite meager. Furthermore, it is prudent to remind ourselves of the fact that Hebrews does not provide us with direct evidence of historical practices. At best we are given a picture of how the author would have wanted the addressees to behave, a textual

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647 Michel, Hebräer, 346.
649 Peter Gräbe writes: “The author of Hebrews has chosen the term ‘New Covenant’ in order to confirm the self-understanding of the church he addressees. This identity has roots in the cultic heritage of Israel. Hebrews, however, gives primacy to the fact that the church participates in a new, qualitatively superior, worship and identity rooted in a heavenly reality” (“The New Covenant and Christian Identity in Hebrews,” in A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts [ed. R. Bauckham; London: T&T Clark, 2008], 118–27 [126]).
image of true worship, and it is with this image we must work. Although 10:19–25 remains our main text, other passages will be discussed as well.

4.6.1 Indirect Evidence for the Use of Scripture in Worship

It could be argued that the very writing of Hebrews, as a homily which was probably designed to be delivered in the context of worship, constitutes indirect evidence for a setting of worship which included readings from Scripture and a homily. The very writing of Hebrews and its genre, would thus remind the audience of a setting of worship.650 This seems to suggest an intimate relationship between the kind of worship the author attempts to promote, and the message he intended to convey. Moreover, it is also possible to argue that Hebrews’ use of hymnic material, especially in the first two chapters, constitutes indirect evidence to suggest that praise and devotion to God was articulated in the words of Scripture. This argument could be strengthened by looking more closely at how the hymnic material is used in the two first chapters.

Different portions of Scripture are cited, and they are either applied to Jesus, or put in his mouth. The result is what one might call a Scriptural “dialogue” between God and Jesus. This dialogue seems to be related to the presentation and enthronement of Jesus before the hosts of angels in heaven who are commanded to worship Jesus (1:6). Mackie therefore argues for an implied liturgical context to the Scriptural quotes. The dialogue between the father and the Son, and the implied context of worship, constitutes what he calls a “liturgical drama” unfolding.651 Further, Mackie argues that the addressees are imagined to be present in heaven, listening to the mutual acknowledgement offered between God and Jesus. Their participation in the liturgical drama is indicated by an interesting detail, namely the shift from second to third person. In 1:5a, God first speaks directly to Jesus about begetting him, but then he speaks of Jesus and the familial relationship they enjoy (1:5b). In other words, God is presenting Jesus to some people, and Mackie argues that the addressees are among these. Later, it is the other way around. First, Jesus speaks directly to God, promising to proclaim his name (2:12). Thereafter, he speaks of God, and the trust he will put in him (2:13). Thus, in the second instance, Jesus must be understood to speak to the ἐκκλησία, in midst of whom Jesus says that he will proclaim God’s name (2:12).652 This ἐκκλησία includes Jesus’ siblings, among whom the audience belongs.

The ἐκκλησία within which Jesus proclaims God’s name is thus the proper context of worship. This is where the liturgical drama unfolds. To belong to this ἐκκλησία is therefore to participate in the heavenly worship, articulated in words taken from Scripture. On the premise that earthly worship should imitate heavenly worship it follows that Hebrews indirectly encourages the use of Scripture as a way of articulating praise to God. Because the words of Scripture are proclaimed in the heavenly liturgy, the same should happen on earth.

650 On the genre of Hebrews, see 1.7.1
651 Mackie, Eschatology and Exhortation, 170–71; Mackie, “Confession of the Son of God in Hebrews,” 115–16. This point is also underlined by Attridge, “Psalms in Hebrews,” 208.
652 Attridge, “Psalms in Hebrews,” 208.
4.6.2 Approaching God – Through Prayer and Praise

The call to draw near to God (10:22), seems to tie in with the idea that true worship is participation in the heavenly liturgy. The term προσέρχεσθαι is also used in Hebrews 11:6, in what appears to be a rather general statement on the need for all those who “approach God” to have faith. There is nothing in that context to suggest a communal setting of worship. It seems to mean something like “the one who seeks contact with God.”\(^{653}\) In Hebrews 10:1, however, the term is used in a more specific way. The old cult is said to be unable to perfect οί προσερχομένοι, meaning “those who come to worship.” The context clearly implies that approaching God is done in order to bring forth a sacrifice.\(^{654}\) Using the term in a specific sense to denote cultic worship has antecedents in Scripture.\(^{655}\) The context of the exhortation in 10:22, speaking of the entire community entering into the sanctuary, suggests that the use of προσέρχομαι is taken from a context of cultic worship.\(^{656}\) However, the fact that προσέρχομαι is taken from a cultic “source domain” does not answer the question of how the term is used in Hebrews. For, provided that the author does not mean that God is to be approached for the purpose of bringing forth animal sacrifices, what is one to do when approaching God’s presence? And granted that God cannot be approached in any sanctuary made with hands, how does one approach a heavenly sanctuary? As has already been pointed out, Hebrews clearly holds that God is accessed through Jesus, who functions as mediator and intercessor (7:25), but this only begs the question of what it means to approach God’s presence through Jesus.

An important part of the answer seems to be given in 13:15: “Through him, then, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.”\(^{657}\) Here, Jesus is presented as the one through whom sacrifices of praise are continually brought forth (cf. ἀναφέρωμεν). This suggests that to approach God through Jesus could be understood in terms of praise and thanksgiving. This interpretation seems to be strengthened if we look at 12:18–24, where the addressees are said to have come (προσεληλύθατε, 12:22) to the heavenly Jerusalem. As argued in chapter 3, I take this to allude to the time when the addressees entered into the new covenant. There is no reason, though, to see 12:18–24 only from the perspective of a past event. Rather, the initiation into the new covenant has as its consequence that the heavenly Jerusalem is where the addressees now stand. Although there is no specific mention of a sanctuary in the city, several things suggest a context of worship. The presence of the festive assembly, consisting of the myriad of angels, reflects an image of

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\(^{653}\) For “approaching” used in a general sense, see Philo *Opif.*, 144; *Deus.*, 161; *Plant.*, 64; *Conf.*, 55; *Mut.*, 13.\(^{654}\) Nothing, however, suggests that only priests are meant. See Koester, *Hebrews*, 431.\(^{655}\) For Lev 9:5–8; 21:17, 21; 22:3; Num 4:19; 10:3–4; 18:3.\(^{656}\) Thus correctly Käsemann (*Wandering*, 48–56) who, based on this observation, goes on to argue that the very phrase “people of God” denotes a “cultic fellowship” in Hebrews.\(^{657}\) The most thorough treatment of this passage, to my knowledge, is Jukka Thurén, *Das Lobopfer der Hebräer: Studien zum Aufbau und Anliegen von Hebräerbrie* 13 (Acta Academiae Abonensis 47/1; Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1973), 105–75. Interestingly, he concludes that the motif of confessing the name of God in praise is understood within a covenantal context in most Jewish sources, as both the expression of and preservation of Israel’s covenant relationship to God (p. 153).
heavenly worship. This recalls the image of angelic worship from 1:6. The idea that the angels worship God in heaven is found both in Scripture and the New Testament. The term which translates as “festive gathering,” πανήγυρις, is often used to denote those gathered to celebrate a religious festival.

The idea that one can partake in heavenly worship and the liturgy of the angels, while still on earth, is found in Qumran and also suggested in the New Testament (1 Cor 11:10). It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that this possibility is what is described in the vision in 12:22–24. It is a proleptic participation in the eschatological and heavenly worship.

However, there might be another important aspect to the notion of approaching God, in addition to praise. In 4:14–16 we find a passage which in many ways resembles 10:19–25. Key words such as “confidence” and “confession” are found in both texts. Both texts refer to what “we have got,” with specific reference to the high priesthood of Jesus, and both passages exhort the audience to approach. Whereas 4:14–16 precedes the first discussion of the high priesthood of Jesus (5:1–10), 10:19–25 follows the author’s exposition of this theme. The call to approach thus frames the entire cultic exposition, a fact which emphasizes the importance held by the idea of approaching within the homily.

The fact that Jesus is said to have gone through the heavens (4:14) logically anticipates the idea that Jesus is the forerunner who opens the way to God’s presence (6:19–20). This suggests that the throne of grace must be imagined to stand in heaven. The throne of grace is to be approached, in order that one might receive grace and mercy and find help in the time of need (4:16). The idea that help is to be found at God’s throne recalls the expression in 2:18 that Jesus is able to help those who are tempted. The mercy and grace which is available through Jesus, as one approaches God, is rooted in Jesus’ solidarity with his brothers. There is thus a logical link between the compassion ascribed to Jesus, grounded in him being similar to humans in all things apart from sin, and the grace, mercy and help one can hope to receive as one approaches the throne of grace. This seems to suggest that one approaches God’s presence through prayer and petition.

The fact that the compassion of Jesus is so strongly emphasized seems also to point to his role as mediator and intercessor, and suggest that prayers are delivered to God through Jesus (7:25).

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658 It is disputed whether the “myriads of angels” and the “festive assembly” refer to the same entity, as I have suggested above, or not. This does not affect my argument, however, because both the presence of the angels, and the idea of a festive assembly, suggest an image of worship and praise.

659 Cf. Isa 6:1–3; Psalm 137:1–2 (LXX); Rev 7:11–12.

660 Hos 2:13 (LXX), 9:5; Amos 5:21.


663 Hebrews 2:17 and 3:1 mention the high priesthood of Jesus, without further discussion.


665 For references to Jewish material which notes that the throne of God is located in the celestial holy of holies, see Barnard, Mysticism, 144–45. Although I believe that 4:14–16 is colored with cultic terms, Backhaus is correct to underline that approaching God’s “throne” also has strong political connotations. Backhaus (Hebräer, 186–88) further notes, however, that cultic and political motifs overlap in Hebrews.

666 Koester, Hebrews, 284.

667 More generally on Jesus’ significance for the prayers of the audience and their identity, see Ole Jakob Filtvedt, “With Our Eyes Fixed on Jesus: The Prayers of Jesus and his Followers in Hebrews,” in
4.6.3 Confession

The second exhortation of 10:19–25 which points to a certain form of action, is the call to hold fast to the confession (10:23), grounded in the faithfulness of “he who made the promise.” The confession called for is designated “confession of hope.” Although the confession is probably articulated in terms of statements about Jesus, and not in terms of statements about the eschatological future, it is evident that the confession is understood as the foundation of the hope of the addressees. It is worth noting that hope, in Hebrews, is directly related to the possibility of approaching God. 6:18–20 speaks of a hope which reaches through the veil, and according to 7:19, the addressees have a better hope, through which they can draw near to God. Dahl therefore states that there is a “virtual identity of hope and worship” in Hebrews, because worship is realized eschatology in practice – it is “hope in action.”

The way the author introduces the confession to his argument, without explanation, assuming his addressees would know what he refers to, and with a definitive article, suggests that the confession had a fixed content. This is also evident in the expression “our confession,” in 3:1. The call to consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of “our confession,” strongly suggests an Christological content to the confession (3:1). Regarding the content of the confession the most important point is to emphasize that it probably did in fact have a fixed content, and that it did include central Christology.

Heinrich Zimmermann helpfully distinguishes between two different types of confessions in the New Testament. First, there are confessions which are addressed directly to Christ in the form of acclamation. These confessions would function to glorify Christ, and are formulated as short statements about who Jesus is. Second, there are confessions which are addressed mainly to other members of the community. These confessions would function to relate the confessor to central beliefs of the community, and would include statements on

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669 I thus disagree with Eduard Riggenbach, who understands the author as exhorting for perseverance in the general act of confessing. See Der Brief an die Hebräer ausgelegt (KNT 14; Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1922), 319. Furthermore, I see no reason for claiming that 4:14 refers to a concrete confession whereas 10:23 does not. Contra Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:288.

670 On the assumption of affinity between Hebrews and other New Testament traditions, many have suggested that the emphatic expression Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (4:14), was part of the confession the author refers to. Thus Günther Bornkamm, “Das Bekenntnis im Hebräerbrief,” in *Studien zu Antike und Uitcheschrnentum (Gesammelte Aufsätze)* (vol. 2; München: Kaiser, 1959), 188–203 (190).

671 Walter Übelacker plausibly suggests that the confession represented “common ground” between the addressees and the author, and that appeal to the confession was therefore an attractive rhetorical avenue for the author. See *Hebreerbrevet* (KNT; Stockholm: EFS-förlaget, 2013), 63.

672 Heinrich Zimmermann, *Das Bekenntnis der Hoffnung: Tradition und Redaktion im Hebräerbrief* (BBB 47; Köln: Hanstein, 1977), 44.

673 Among those who view the confession in Hebrews in terms of acclamation are Rissi, *Theologie*, 47 and Zimmermann, *Bekenntnis*, 44.

what Jesus has done to bring salvation. In principle, the confession mentioned in Hebrews could be either of these types. There is no reason to assume that only God could be acclaimed in worship, and that Jesus could not, according to Hebrews. If the relative pronoun ὃ in 13:21 is taken with reference to Christ, and not God, then Jesus is praised and glorified in the final benediction of the homily. According to Attridge, the Christological reading of 13:21 certainly represents “the most natural construal” of the sentence. It is in any case hard to see anything in the Christology in Hebrews which would have prevented the practice of addressing praise to Jesus. The homily even begins by ascribing God’s glory to him (1:3), whereupon the angels are commanded to worship him. The call to hold on to the confession could therefore be a call to continue to acclaim Christ in the context of worship.

However the practice of confession is understood, the call to hold on to the confession is evidence for a Christ-centered conception of worship.

4.6.4 Charity

Perhaps somewhat surprising, I would also list good works as a practical expression of legitimate worship. I am conscious, though, of the fact that this entails “stretching” my definition of worship (4.1), because it is questionable whether the acts of charity mentioned in Hebrews could be said to be ritualized communication with God. However, on the other hand, there is no reason to preclude the idea that acts of charity could take on a ritualized character. Be this as it may, it is in any case evident that the call to charity stands side by side with the call to confess and approach, suggesting that one cannot easily separate these phenomena.

Generally, the concrete guide-lines for practical behavior in Hebrews are hallmarked by being directed toward other members of the community, and as such they seem to fill a community-maintaining function (cf. 13:1–5). This is also reflected in the reciprocal exhortation to observe one another εἰς παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργον (10:24). This recalls the language from 6:10; that God would not forget what they had done, or the love they had shown his name by serving the holy. A concrete example of what this might have entailed is caring for imprisoned fellow believers, stressed several times in Hebrews (10:34; 13:3, 23). In his final prayer of the homily, the author asks of God that he provide everything which is good for the community in order that they might do his will, and that God might

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676 Bornkamm ("Bekenntnis,"192) strongly emphasizes the public commitment entailed in an act of confession called for in Hebrews.
677 Bornkamm ("Bekenntnis," 188–203) suggests that we are talking about a baptismal confession, while Dahl (“New and Living,” 408–11), even more tentatively, suggests a Eucharistic setting.
678 Herbert Braun argues that it refers to God. See An die Hebräer (HNT 14; Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1984), 480.
679 Attridge, Hebrews, 408.
681 More generally, on the significance of confession to Jesus for early Christian worship, see Hurtado, Lord Jesus Christ, 140–43.
“carry out” in them everything which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus (13:21). The author thus makes it clear that a life which is pleasing to God is mediated through Jesus. It is especially interesting for our discussion of worship, that good works are interpreted in terms of sacrifice in 13:16: τῆς δὲ εὐροίας καὶ κοινωνίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε · τοιαύτας γὰρ θυσίας εὐφρεστέται ὁ θεὸς. Acts of charity are seen to be sacrifices well pleasing to God. This contrasts with the animal offerings of the law, not wanted nor liked by God (10:5–10). This strongly suggests that acts of charity are understood by the author as the sort of practice which was meant to substitute for animal sacrifices.

4.6.5 Distinct or Traditional Practices?

Apart from confession to Christ, there is nothing particularly novel in these concrete expressions of worship, compared to Jewish piety. Prayer, praise, confession and good works are hardly new inventions. Such practices are actually typically listed as possible substitutes for animal sacrifices in Jewish sources, and there is precedence in Scripture for understanding such practices in sacrificial terms. It is thus somewhat ironic that Hebrews presents this as something entirely new, given the fact that the actual practices are quite traditional. However, the perceived distinctiveness of a given practice is not necessarily reducible to its actual novelty. For Hebrews, there is a real difference between prayers which are offered to God apart from the intercession of Jesus, and prayers that are not. There is a real difference between the praise which is mediated through Jesus, and praise which is not. In contrast to all other forms of worship, and especially the old cult, worship mediated through Jesus really does grant access to God, and really is based on a full, internal cleansing. Even good works are seen as something which is made possible through Jesus. It is not so much the actual practice of worship, therefore, as it is the interpretive framework within which that practice is situated, which gives its distinctive flavor. The interpretative framework for understanding worship is Christological through and through in Hebrews. Israelites are now to worship their God through Jesus.

4.7 Worship and the Purpose of the Cultic Theology in Hebrews

4.7.1 The Practical Situation Addressed in 10:19–25

Although Hebrews’ exposition on the heavenly nature of the Christ event and the elaborate exploration of the cultic theology could appear somewhat theoretical on first sight, I would argue that an important part of its rhetorical function has to do with quite a concrete problem. The call to draw near to God (10:22) is followed by an exhortation not to forsake assembling

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683 Attridge, Hebrews, 407.
684 Thürén (Lobopfer, 177–78) correctly notes that this might be Hebrews’ way of retaining an important aspect of the old covenant sacrificial cult, namely that there was a charitable aspect to bringing sacrifices to the temple, and letting those in need eat what was not burnt.
685 There is a long-standing Jewish tradition for using sacrificial language metaphorically: Ps 51:18–19; 141:2; Sir 3:30; Tob 4:10–11; 1QS 9:4–5; ‘Abot R. Nat. 4; Let. Arist. 234; Philo Spec. 1.201, 253, 272, 277, 290.
686 See further discussion of this passage in 6.7.6.
together (10:25), and there is no reason to see these exhortations as being unrelated to each other. The term which denotes the “gathering,” ἐπισυναγωγή, could denote either the very act of assembling or the actual assembly. In this case, the one meaning would imply the other, and the distinction is therefore not important.  

Syntactically the participle construction μὴ ἐγκαταλείποντες depends on the exhortation to observe one another (10:24). Not to neglect the assembly is therefore a way of observing the other members of the community. It is instructive to notice that this exhortation is reciprocal, because it indicates a communal situation of mutual responsibility.

Any number of reasons could be imagined to explain why some were absent from the gatherings. However, the author obviously chose to address the problem on theological terms. He tried to motivate attendance at the gatherings by claiming that the addressees have direct access to God’s own presence through Jesus. This suggests that it is “likely that the author has particularly in mind the assembly of his addressees as a worshiping community.”

The fact that the author gave a theological answer to the problem he perceived to be threatening the audience, indicates that he also thought the problem was theological. For him “the neglect of worship is symptomatic of a catastrophic failure to appreciate the significance of Christ’s priestly ministry and the access to God it provides.”

The fact that a central part of the author’s rhetorical purpose with his exposition of the Christ event has to do with worship is supported by two important passages in Hebrews: 9:14 and 12:28.

4.7.2 Serving the Living God

It is stated in 9:14 that Jesus’ sacrifice cleanses our conscience of dead works in order that we might serve the living God. This statement is the conclusion of 9:11–14, a paragraph which Knut Backhaus labels the soteriological and compositional center of Hebrews. The entire Christ event is given a climactic description, and its purpose is that the addressees be equipped to “serve the living God.” The term used for “serve,” λατρεύειν, could be used without direct reference to worship, but it is consistently used to denote those partaking in worship in Hebrews (cf. 9:8; 10:2, 13:10). Just as there was a ministry related to the first covenant, there is also a ministry related to the new covenant.

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687 It is worth noting in this regard, that the term ἐπισυναγωγή could be used with specific reference to the eschatological community gathered by God (Matt 24:31; 2 Tess 2:1). Cf. Weiß, Hebräer, 534.
688 Johnson writes: “The call to mutual stimulation to faith, love, and hope, as well as to mutual exhortation, indicates the communal character of the composition’s commitment, and its awareness that a distinctive manner of life within this ‘house of God’ will depend on the sort of shared construction of identity upon which all intentional communities – since they are inherently fragile – depend” (Hebrews, 260, emphasis added).
689 Koester, Hebrews, 382.
690 Attridge, Hebrews, 290, emphasis added.
691 Lane, Hebrews, 2:290.
692 Mackie (“Ancient Jewish Mystical Motifs in Hebrews,” 88) claims that entrance into the heavenly sanctuary is “the author’s ultimate hortatory goal.”
693 Backhaus, Hebräer, 314.
695 The cognate substantive λατρεία denotes this service (9:1, 6).
In 9:1 we read that the first covenant had regulations for worship (δικαιώματα λατρείας), and an earthly sanctuary. These are discussed in reversed order. First the earthly sanctuary is described (9:2–5) and then the service taking place in it (9:6–10). There is a text-critical issue with implications for our discussion in 9:1, regarding the presence or absence of καί before first covenant. If the καί is included, the verse states that even the first covenant had its regulations regarding service. The implication would be that the new covenant also has such regulations. The witnesses that omit the καί are quite strong, but do not outweigh those who include it. If 9:1 is read with the καί it seems to invite the audience to compare the sanctuary and ministry of the first covenant, to the sanctuary and ministry of the second covenant, and indeed, this is precisely what is done in 9:11–14. The tent Jesus entered, which is not part of this creation (9:11), contrasts with the worldly sanctuary (9:1). Jesus’ once-and-for-all entrance (9:12) is contrasted with the many entrances made by the high priests who minister in the earthly tent (9:7). The sacrifice of Jesus, his blood, is contrasted with the animal blood brought forth on Yom Kippur (9:7). The cleansed consciousness of the audience (9:14), is contrasted with the non-perfected consciousness of the one who served (cf. τὸν λατρεόντα, 9:9) under the regime of the old covenant.

Given this general structure of contrast, it seems natural to see the newly found possibility to serve the living God with a clean consciousness as a ministry which contrasts with the worship of the old covenant. In this interpretation, 9:11–14 could be taken to answer the questions which 9:1 begs, if it is read with the καί: does the new covenant have its own sanctuary? Does it have its own distinct ministry? It seems to me that Hebrews answers both these questions with an affirmative. Not only that, the possibility of partaking in new covenant worship is presented as the very purpose of the Christ event.

4.7.3 Serving God in Light of the Coming Kingdom

New covenant worship is not only a possibility in light of the Christ event, it is also a duty. In 12:28, following the climactic vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, we find a call to serve (cf. λατρεύωμεν) God. This exhortation is grounded in the fact that the addressees are receiving an unshakable kingdom. The motif of “shaking” relates back to the Scriptural quote from Haggai 2:6 (cf. 12:26–27), where it is said that God’s voice will shake both heaven and earth. The context of this saying in the book of Haggai is God’s promise that a new temple shall be raised, even greater than the first temple which had fallen (Hag 2:7–9). The author seems to view the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22) as the fulfillment of God’s promise of a new temple.

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696 The very term “covenant” is only implied.
697 Cf. the analogy between the first and second covenant in 9:18.
698 B. Ψ 46, A, D,
700 Johnson (Hebrews, 222) even states that the “major comparison is that between the worship of the first covenant . . . and that of the second covenant mediated by Christ.”
701 The hortatory subjunctive is to be preferred above the indicative reading (λατρεύομεν). Thus Lane, Hebrews, 2:444; Attridge, Hebrews, 378.
702 Löhr underlines (“Thronversammlung und preisender Tempel,” 203) that “receiving the kingdom” is an expression derived from the political sphere. Cf. 2 Macc 4:7; 10:11.
703 Cf. also Hag 2:21.
The word used for “shaking” in the quote from Haggai (σείω) is not cogent with the term used for the “unshakable kingdom” (ἀσάλευτος). This has led some to suggest that another Scriptural passage is alluded to. Michel proposes the vision of the kingdom that will not be destroyed, spoken of in Daniel 7:14. However, the suggestion that Psalm 95:9–11(LXX) is alluded to is more convincing. Lane argues this by taking the superscription in the LXX, where the psalm is ascribed to the time “when they constructed the House after the exile,” as his starting point. This ascription relates the psalm to the same situation as that addressed by Haggai, a fact which could have invited readers to interpret the two texts in light of each other. The psalm reads as follows (95:9–10):

Worship the Lord in his holy court
Let all the earth be shaken (σαλευθήτω) before him
Say to the nations, ‘The Lord has inaugurated his reign (ἐβασίλευσεν)
For he will complete the world (τὴν οἰκουμένην) which will not be shaken (ήτις ού σαλευθήσεται)

The term which translates “world” (οἰκουμενή) is identical to that used by Hebrews about the eschatological world (1:6; 2:5). The terms used to denote God’s “reign” and act of “shaking,” are cogent with those used in Hebrews 12:27–28. These verbal links suggest an allusion. An allusion to Psalm 95 (LXX) would also explain the author’s call to worship in light of God’s reign and judgment, a motif not accounted for by Haggai 2. The appropriate response to the coming of God’s kingdom is thankful praise and worship; serving God in gratitude. It is significant that such service is qualified as pleasing (εὐαρέστως) to God. This is a deliberate contrast to the service no longer wanted by God (10:8), anticipating the practices which are labeled as God pleasing offerings in 13:16. The call to serve God also relates to the practical exhortations which follow (13:1–5). However, this wider concept of worship, through a life in obedience to God’s will, should not be separated from a more ritualized form of worship, expressed in the praise, prayer and confession offered as the community assembled to worship God.

4.7.4 From the Christ Event to a Worshiping Community

The author seems to hold that a proper understanding of the Christ event should result in the creation of a worshiping community. The evidence explored above suggests that the cultic theology in Hebrews represents something more than an attempt at solving an abstract theological problem, concerning how one could come to terms with the sacrificial legislation in Scripture. The author was not merely addressing a personal problem for each and every individual in the audience, explaining how they could have their sins forgiven in the absence...

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704 Michel, Hebräer, 475.
705 Lane, Hebrews, 2:485.
706 Translation from Lane, Hebrews, 2:485.
707 Cf. discussion in 2.2.
708 Attridge (Hebrews, 382) notes that the fact that the service should be conducted in gratitude (χάρις δι’ ἡς λατρεύωμεν), suggests that thankfulness is part of the “worshipful response that Hebrews tries to evoke.”
709 Weiss, Hebräer, 694.
710 Michel, Hebräer, 476.
of a tangible cult. The cultic theology in Hebrews has both practical and social implications. It is related to a very concrete problem, the fact that some of the addressees are absent from the worship gatherings of the community, and the author offers a solution to this problem which focuses on the social implications of the Christ event; the establishment of a worshiping community. This indicates how identity as a follower of Jesus is intimately tied to a new communal way of worshiping the God of Israel, through Jesus.

4.8 Conclusions

*How does the conception of worship found in Hebrews, shape the notion of what it means to identify as part of God’s people?* The conception of worship found in Hebrews is fundamentally Christ-centered. Access to God is mediated through Jesus. The way into the true, heavenly sanctuary has been opened by Jesus, as forerunner and high priest, and Jesus now stands before God’s throne, offering continuous intercession for God’s people. Prayer, praise, confession, and even good deeds, are practices centered on Jesus. This implies a Christ-centered notion of the “insiders,” of those who are able to cross the boundaries. These insiders are clearly portrayed in Hebrews in a way which indicates that they are the people of God. They are presented as members of the new covenant, which God has given his people. Echoing Ezekiel 36, they identified as the cleansed and renewed Israel who have been made fit to serve the living God.

*How is the notion of Israelite identity, which is implied in Hebrews’ conception of worship, shaped by a tension between newness and continuity?* The conception of worship advocated in Hebrews is presented in clear contrast to an older regime of worship, centered on an earthly sanctuary, the legislation of the law, animal sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood. This old system is not simply deemed old, surpassed and outdated, it is also viewed as unable to provide perfection, definitive forgiveness and real access to God. Indeed, Hebrews even holds that the old cult blocked the way into the heavenly sanctuary, and that it therefore had to be invalidated and abolished through the will of God. There is thus a clear sense of discontinuity with the past. However, there are also important lines of continuity. Hebrews does not claim that there is anything inherently wrong in approaching God through sacrifices, through a specific priesthood or in a temple. What Hebrews claims is that there has come a better priest who offered a perfect sacrifice in the heavenly temple. Moreover, Hebrews does ground its radical claims about the inefficacy of the old system in Scripture. Hebrews is not simply advocating a notion of worship which has been totally *detached* from the old system which is subject to critique. There are important conceptual similarities between new and old, even if there is also a radical breach. This seems to imply a notion of Israeliite identity which, although rooted in the Scriptural past, has also been reshaped in a significant way.

This raises the question of *whether the conception of worship in Hebrews implies some kind of conflict with Jewish traditions that originated outside the Jesus movement, regarding the question of what it means to be a member of God’s people.* Hebrews’ conception of worship is arguably quite exclusive, and it is difficult to see how it could be open to anyone who is not a follower of Jesus. This follows from the fact that worship in Hebrews is centered on and mediated through Jesus. Apart from the blood of Jesus, there is no way into the holy.
This would seem to suggest that anyone who does not identify as a follower of Jesus, including Jews outside the Jesus movement, find themselves excluded from God’s presence. This conclusion could be further strengthened by observing how Hebrews not only celebrates the importance and significance of Jesus, but also de-legitimizes the old sacrificial system. Although the critique of the old system is directed at the cult of the wilderness tabernacle, and even if it would be a mistake to read this as coded polemics against contemporary Jews, it is still the case that Hebrews takes issue with the old cult as it is ideally portrayed in, and legislated by, the law. In-as-much as Jews contemporary with Hebrews saw these prescriptions as determinative for their own identity, it follows that there would also be a conflict between Hebrews and those Jews, regardless of the author’s intentions.

However, if Hebrews is written after the fall of the temple, in a situation where it would have been impossible to maintain the sacrificial cult anyways, it seems to follow that the potential conflict described above would lose at least some of its force. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to think that the significance of the temple vanished at the moment of its fall. The temple did not disappear from Jewish imagination and discourse after the year 70 CE. The fact that the temple cult in Jerusalem is implicitly de-legitimized, although never explicitly attacked, seems to bear on the question of Israelite identity regardless of when Hebrews was written. The critique of the old cult, which implicitly bears on the cult in Jerusalem, suggests that Israelite identity is detached from a concrete earthly cult shrine, and thus implicitly also from a concrete earthly land. The cult theology in Hebrews thus affects the land theology as well.

It is important to note, however, that much of the cult critique in Hebrews is paralleled in Jewish sources that originated outside the Jesus movement. The notion that there is a heavenly sanctuary, of which the earthly one is a type, is found in several ancient Jewish sources, and the view that prayers and acts of charity could also count as offerings is attested to in various documents. There are also examples of fierce criticism of the priesthood in Jerusalem. Many texts even emphasize that moral character and acts of piety are more important to God than animal sacrifices. There were resources available, in other words, when Jews were forced to find a way to maintain their identity as God’s people in the absence of the temple in Jerusalem. Even though it is quite obvious that Hebrews draws on notions taken from these traditions, I have nevertheless argued that cult critique in Hebrews stands out in several respects. The critique in Hebrews is not contingent on the fall of Jerusalem. It takes issue with, and speaks negatively of, the ideal prescriptions of the law, and it is not conjoined with elevating the importance of the law. It is not articulated as a general critique of sacrificial practice, for the purpose of elevating moral character of interior spirituality. The cult discourse in Hebrews is designed to celebrate the importance of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus – the sacrifice of his body and blood.

The fact that the cult theology in Hebrews is focused on a specific event, rather than some abstract principle, implies a clear contrast between old and new in the history of Israel. It also implies that the importance and significance of Jesus is elevated. What Israel needs to do is not simply to focus more on piety and moral character, or to put less emphasis of material things. What Israel needs to do is to center its worship of God on Jesus.
5. Commemorating the Narrative of Israel

“Jesus has brought Israel’s story to its paradoxical climax.”

5.1 The Narrative Israel and Israelite Identity

This chapter is dedicated to the relationship between the narrative of Israel and Israelite identity. By narrative, I simply mean a sequence of events which are given meaning by being interpreted in relation to each other, and in light of some goal or end. We have already dealt with Israel’s narrative in the previous chapters, but all the “narratives” we have so far dealt with have tended be schematic or implicit. They have been schematic in the sense that they have focused on some basic stages: suffering and exaltation, old and new, and they have been implicit, in the sense that they have functioned as a sub-structure, in light of which the arguments about the Christ event make sense. In this chapter we will be dealing with narratives which are made more explicit, which have several named characters besides Jesus, and which contain several events. The fact that there are several events implies that patterns are developed, in light of which the addressees might interpret the flow of events which make up their own lives and experiences. The fact that there are enough events in the narrative to allow for the development of patterns means that there is also more room for continuity. The narratives explored in the earlier chapters have been hallmarked by their contrastive nature. However, as Lieu helpfully puts it: “Without continuity there can be no identity, and it is continuity over time, with all its inherent ambiguities of change and sameness, that offers the greatest challenges and the greatest rewards.”

The observation that identity implies continuity points to how notions of identity are embedded in time. Groups often take an interest in their own origin, and invest great importance in it. It is often imagined that the way a group came into being, says something about the worth of the group, and its characteristic nature. A narrative about the past also provides groups with what Marco Cinnirella helpfully calls “possible social identities.” The narrative puts forward roles, as it were, with which members of the group can identify. In-as-much as the past of a group is taken to be indicative of its abiding “nature,” the narrative of

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712 See the definition of “narrative” in Roitto, Behaving, 13.

713 On the notion of implicit narratives in Hebrews, see the very helpful introduction in Schenck, Cosmology and Eschatology, 51–54.

714 Lieu, Christian Identity, 62.


716 Buell (Why This New Race, 63–93) helpfully underlines how notions of having a past are generally important to the construction of ideas about being a people, and that texts from the early Jesus movement draw on that notion.

the past will function as a reference point for encouraging specific types of behavior. Although the logic of a narrative tends to move from past to present, the dynamics of identity development might just as well move in the opposite direction. Even if the narrative claims to explain why things are as they are today, it is often reasonable to assume that the way things are today explains why the narrative came to take the shape it did. This suggests that narratives can be used to justify and legitimize a specific conception of identity, by rooting it in the past. Thus, narratives are not only oriented toward the past, a narrative might also provide the members of the in-group with a possible goal or end, to which all group members should orient their lives.

In addition to these general observations of how identity relates to narratives, I would argue that it is reasonable to assume that some specific issues were at stake, for a community consisting of followers of Christ, who claimed to identify as God’s people in a first century context. For one thing, the Jesus movement must have appeared to lack something which was very much appreciated in antiquity, namely a long and honorable past. One could reasonably ask how plausible it would be to claim to be heir to the promises of Abraham, if there was no narrative continuity between the community and ancient Israel. It might also have been important that the narrative past of Israel was (in the process of being) enshrined in a collection of Scriptures, the importance of which we can assume was very high for all those who claimed to belong to the people of God. When members of the Jesus movement claimed to know what the ancient past of Israel was really all about, this could easily translate into the claim that Israel’s sacred Scriptures now belonged to them. Moreover, because Hebrews seems to take such a radical stance towards the law, the old covenant, the priesthood and the Mosaic cult, one could reasonably ask whether the author stood in danger of casting away the very source of his entire argument – Scripture itself. A possible way of answering that objection would be to demonstrate that it is precisely the followers of Jesus who now carry the narrative of Scripture forward. If the author succeeded in demonstrating this, it would have constituted a very powerful claim to Israelite identity.

In an article which focuses on Hebrews 11, Philip Esler has proposed a very helpful theoretical perspective for discussing how the history of Israel, and its main characters, relates to the identity of the addressees. He begins from the premise that Hebrews was written in

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718 Lieu, Christian Identity, 62.
719 Note how Justin, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch and Eusebius, when faced with accusations from Greeks who claimed that they lacked an ancient history, drew attention to how Moses predates the founding fathers of Greece. This rhetorical strategy seems to presuppose a shared preference for ancient ancestry. For comments and discussion, see Lieu, Christian Identity, 84–86.
721 On the importance for the early Jesus movement of having “ownership” in Scripture, in order to legitimate its own existence, see Hvalvik, The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant.
and for a predominantly oral culture, where shared group memories were even more important than in contemporary western society. When illiteracy rates are high, and access to written tradition is limited, one has to rely on shared memory. Memory is not just something one possesses, but also something which is produced through social activity; through the telling and retelling of what the past looked like. To commemorate the past is a creative process, whereby the past is shaped, not simply “passively” recollected. In commemorating the past, one also shapes a “collective memory” of what the past looked like – and thus, implicitly, how that past might function as a source for articulating identity today. This kind of “memory-production” often takes place in social groups, which thereby come to share an agreed version of the past.

In this chapter I will explore how the commemoration of Israel’s past shapes a “collective memory” of what Israel’s past looked like, and how that memory functions as a source for articulating what it means for the addressees to identify as Israelites. In keeping with our questions of research (1.5.6), particular focus will be placed on the tension between newness and continuity. In this chapter that tension is particularly related to the relationship between events in the narrative of Israel that are found in the Scriptural past, the Christ event, and the experiences of the audience. In exploring this relationship, we are also implicitly confronted with the issue of whether the way Israel’s narrative is commemorated in Hebrews creates some sort of conflict with Jews outside the Jesus movement, regarding the question of what it means to identify as a member of God’s people. Has the narrative of Israel been reshaped to such a degree that it could only function as the past of followers of Jesus? Are Jews outside the Jesus movement implicitly put in a position where they lack a positive Scriptural past, because alternative versions of Israel’s past are de-legitimized?

5.2 Israel’s Narrative – Between Faith and Lack of Faith

5.2.1 What is πίστις?

There are two main texts in Hebrews where the past of Israel is commemorated, 3:7–4:11 and 11:1–40, and it is notable that 3:7–4:11 focuses on the lack of faith of the forefathers, who died in the desert, whereas 11:1–40 celebrates the faithful ancestors. Faith is thus given a central role in the commemoration of Israel’s past, both positively and negatively.

In 11:1 we are given a “definition” of πίστις. The author claims that πίστις is the ὑπόστασις of things hoped for, the ἔλεγχος of things we cannot see. How ὑπόστασις should be translated is highly disputed. Some suggestions are “subjective” and others are “objective”: assurance, solid foundation, resolved steadfastness, essential reality and legal guarantee. It seems to me that the clue to resolving this problem is to realize that ἔλεγχος and ὑπόστασις relate to each other within the context of a parallelism. Although it is possible to construe a

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723 The term is also used in 1:3 and 3:14. In 1:3, it is clearly used in an objective sense, whereas 3:14 makes sense in both a subjective and objective translation.
724 See the discussion in Attridge, Hebrews, 307–13.
subjective understanding of ὑπόστασις, for instance in terms of steadfastness, it is difficult to do this with ἔλεγχος.726 This suggests that ὑπόστασις should also be translated as something objective.727 Further, Helmut Koester has helpfully suggested that the terms ἔλεγχος and ὑπόστασις primarily qualify that which πίστις refers to, and that they do not qualify πίστις as such.728 This suggests an “objective” translation of ὑπόστασις, and that 11:1 should be taken to mean that there really is substance and a solid reality to that which is promised, and that there really are proofs of things unseen. However, if this line of interpretation is followed, as I think it should be, it seems that we are faced with a different problem.729 What does it mean to say that faith is the reality and proof of something?

Attridge deals with this problem by suggesting that the author has appealed to metonymy. Πίστις is thus strictly speaking not described in 11:1 in terms of what it is, but in terms of its goals and ends, and πίστις should be understood as the act or virtue which brings one into contact with the ultimate reality.730 Arguing from a different angle, Lane has come to a similar conclusion. He points out that ἔστιν is curiously placed at the beginning of the sentence, and that the author normally does not include a copula. He therefore suggests that ἔστιν functions emphatically, and translates ἔστιν as “celebrates.”731 Thus, both Attridge and Lane opt for understandings of 11:1 which allow for a more complicated relationship between πίστις and that which πίστις is said to be, than a straightforward understanding of ἔστιν invites.732 It seems to me that a more elegant solution, which does not demand that one introduces a new verb to the sentence, is to understand the act of having πίστις to be implicit in the definition. 11:1 could then be translated as follows: faith is (belief in) the reality of things we hope for and the proof of things unseen.733 This solution has the advantage of coming to terms with the best arguments from both those who opt for a subjective and those who argue for an objective translation. Those who have seen a philosophical description of an objective reality in 11:1, and who have argued that this is also the best way to understand the terms ἔλεγχος and ὑπόστασις, are found to be right. However, those who have argued that 10:39 suggests that a subjective attitude of faith is present also in 11:1,734 and who have argued against seeing faith

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727 So also Weiβ, Hebräer, 561.
729 This difficulty seems to surface in Peter T. O’Briens commentary, where it is argued that the terms ἔλεγχος and ὑπόστασις should be understood in an objective sense, but where the translation is still subjective: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” See The Letter to the Hebrews (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 397–400.
730 Attridge, Hebrews, 310.
731 Lane, Hebrews, 2:325.
733 I have not come across this “solution” before, but Weiβ (Hebräer, 561) comes pretty close when he writes that the author presents faith in terms of “die Haltung des Glaubenden.”
734 This is convincingly argued by Christian Rose, Die Wolke der Zeugen: Eine exegetisch-traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 10,32–12,3 (WUNT 2/60; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994), 99–108.
as some kind of mystical power which proves and realizes that which it believes, are also found to be right. To have faith and to be faithful is a subjective attitude, but it is oriented towards an objective reality.

There is both an ethical and epistemic aspect to faith in Hebrews. To believe the proofs of that which is unseen seems to point to 11:3, where faith is described as that through which the unseen reality which undergirds the created order is comprehended. This suggests that there is an epistemic side to faith, which relates to holding a certain view of reality to be true. However, faith is more than just a cognitive ability, or a correct world view. In 10:39 faith is contrasted with shrinking back, and thus seems to be understood as standing firm.

5.2.2 Unfaithful Ancestors

The ethical side of faith seems to be the key focus in the commemoration of the failures of the wilderness generation. It was the unfaithfulness (ἀπιστία, 3:19) of the fathers, materialized in a rebellious attitude, which resulted in their exclusion from the promised rest. Lack of faith is thus related to disobedience (3:18). The object of faith, as presented in the story of the wilderness generation, is the promise of God. The wilderness generation failed because they considered returning to Egypt. They did not trust that God would actually provide what he had promised. They are presented as standing on the border of God’s promised rest, a situation which resembles that in which the addressees are said to be standing. A new hope has been made available (7:19), new possibilities for entrance are at hand (10:19–22), an unshakable kingdom is on its way (12:28), and the crucial question is whether they will respond in faith or with lack of faith. In the choice between faith and lack of faith God’s people will be divided, between those who fall away and those who receive the promises. For it is only those who believe – only “we,” from the perspective of the author – who will enter the promised rest (4:3). Faith is thus established as an identity descriptor for God’s people, for whom a rest still remains (4:9).

Marohl has made 3:7–4:11 his main text, in his exploration of how Hebrews shapes the social identity of its audience. He argues that “faith” is the key identity descriptor in Hebrews, and that the author wanted his audience to identify as “the faithful.” His main thesis is influenced by the assumption that groups generally tend to develop their identity by way of contrast, by comparing themselves with an “outgroup.” In the lack of any real “outgroups” in the argument of Hebrews, Marohl suggests the wilderness generation functions as a symbolic “outgroup.” However, the idea that the wilderness generation should be conceptualized as an “outgroup” strikes me as problematic. A crucial premise in Hebrews’ retelling of the wilderness story is that it concerns the addressees’ own forefathers (cf. οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν 3:9). It is thus presented as an “in-group” narrative, and should therefore be read as one.
Only members of the “in-group” could have made the kind of mistakes the forefathers made, for it is only to the “in-group” God’s promises are given.

Moreover, the social identity recommended in Hebrews is not adequately described in terms of belonging to “the faithful.” As several critics note, this identity category is too abstract, and because there is nothing to suggest that “the faithful” really was a socially recognized identity category, to identify with “the faithful” seems reducible “to having faith.” However, faith in 3:7–4:11 is not an abstract virtue. It is tied to a very specific narrative to which there is attached a specific identity: that of being God’s people on the way towards God’s promises. The question in Hebrews is not simply whether someone is among “the faithful” or “the unfaithful,” but if one is a faithful Israelite. What it means to be a faithful Israelite is fleshed out in Hebrews 11.

5.2.3 Celebrating the Faith of the Ancestors

The term “faith” is repeated throughout 11:2–31, and occupies a central place in both the introduction and conclusion of Hebrews 11. The author presents Israel’s narrative as a story about ancestors of faith. The faithful are called the πρεσβύτεροι in 11:2. A straightforward translation of this term would be “elders,” but the designation πρεσβύτεροι surely signals more than age. It is also an honorific title which implies a certain degree of reverence. Moreover, to be an elder is to be an elder vis-à-vis someone, and the πρεσβύτεροι are clearly presented as being “the elders” of the audience. I therefore think the term “ancestors” is an appropriate rendering of the term. The fact that faith is given such a central position when the ancestors are celebrated is in and of itself a bold rhetorical move. It is striking, for instance, that the term “covenant,” so important elsewhere in Hebrews, is not found in Hebrews 11. Noah, Abraham, Moses and David are mentioned by name, but the covenants God made with them are not. The inauguration of the Sinai covenant is not recalled. It is therefore misleading in my opinion, when commentators speak of Hebrews 11 as if it was about “the Israel of the old covenant.” By leaving the term “covenant” out of Hebrews 11, and by not giving attention to the Sinai covenant, the ancestors of faith are implicitly disentangled from the “old covenant,” and the “old covenant” is disallowed any positive function in the commemoration of Israelite history. The ancestors are, to their credit, not

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740 It seems to me that this insight is the starting point for answering the critical questions posed by Patrick Gray in his review of Marohl: “To argue that the audience identifies as ‘the faithful’ leaves unanswered key questions: faithful to what or to whom? In terms of concrete actions or specific beliefs?” See his review of *Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews: A Social Identity Approach*, Int 64 (2010): 103.


743 Cf. also how the ancients are designated οἱ πατέρες (1:1; 3:9; 8:9).

744 Compare and contrast with Sirach 44:12, 20; 45:5, 7, 15, 24–25; 47:11.

745 Markus Bockmuehl calls them “saints of the Old Covenant” (“Abraham’s Faith in Hebrews 11,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* [ed. R. Bauckham et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009], 364–73 [365]), and Pamela Eisenbaum speaks of Hebrews 11 as biblical history which is part of “the Old Covenant” (*Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in its Literary Context* [SBLDS 156; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997], 177, 184).
presented as members of a flawed covenant, but the old covenant is, to its discredit, not presented as that which held or holds the Scriptural narrative together.

Some scholars have argued that it is misleading to speak of the faith of the ancestors as the defining feature of Hebrews 11. Mary D’Angelo claims that faith is related to the events that happened in the past and not to the persons themselves, and I would concede that the relationship between that which took place “in faith” and the motives and attitudes of the person mentioned is sometimes very obscure, to say the least (cf. 11:30). Eisenbaum thus describes faith as an external power in which the ancestors participated, but even though the relationship between faith and the ancestors is more complicated than many imagine, it is also closer than D’Angelo and Eisenbaum argue. In 11:8, for instance, faith is clearly not only an external power according to which some event took place, it rather describes Abraham’s character and is linked to his obedience. Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac also pertains to attitudes and convictions which were hardly external to him; he reckoned with a God capable of raising the dead (11:19). Moreover, it seems to me that the rhetorical aims of the author are obscured if we divorce faith from the characters. The author has encouraged the addressees to be faithful (4:3; 10:39), and he clearly wants them to imitate those who persevered in faith (6:12). The author seems to presuppose that faith is a virtue the addressees should cultivate, and it seems almost incredible that Hebrews 11 was not meant to foster an attitude of faith among the addressees, an observation to which we now turn.

5.3 The Narrative Continuity between the Addressees and the Ancients Israelites

5.3.1 With the Narrative of the Community as the Starting Point

The author has provided the audience with descriptions of both faithful and unfaithful ancestors, with one image of Israel with which they should identify, and one with which they should not. The author has made several efforts to make such identification possible. In 10:32, he commemorates the recent past of the addressees, drawing attention to the initial days when they were enlightened (10:32). The author paints a picture of a community accepting suffering, ill-treatment, and shame (10:32–33). They showed solidarity with each other and joyfully accepted being robbed of their possessions. This they could do, the author maintains, because they knew that they possessed something better (10:34). This way of existing in the world draws on both the ethical and epistemic side of faith. Because they knew what they had been given, they stood firm. The implicit message conveyed is therefore the following: you once were a community of faith.

In 10:35–36 the “story” moves from the initial days towards the present situation. The author exhorts the audience not to throw away their boldness, but to persevere in order to do the will of God. Then he points to their future goal, which he describes as obtaining that which is promised (10:36). This goal recalls the promise of entering God’s rest (4:1), and anticipates that which is said to be the goal of the ancestors too (11:39–40). In order to cast

746 So also Käsemann, Wandering, 64.
747 Mary Rose D’Angelo, Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews (SBLDS 42; Missoula, Mo.: Scholars Press, 1979), 25.
748 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 146.
light on the sort of life which reaches this goal, the author introduces a composite Scriptural quotation, made up of Isaiah 26:20 and Habakkuk 2:3–4 (10:37–38). The quotation emphasizes the eschatological perspective of the author’s exhortation: it is only a little while until he who shall return will return. When living in this eschatological time, being righteous entails living in faith. The author’s comment in 10:39 emphasizes the contrast between living in faith and shrinking back. We, the author states, are among those who believe and thus save our lives. The author thus exhorts the audience to persevere as a community of faith in order to reach that which is promised.

Faith has thus become the central identity descriptor in the commemoration of the addressees’ past, and that faith is said to be directed towards receiving God’s promises. It is the recent past, the present situation, and the future hope of the community which constitutes the immediate “back-drop” for the story about the ancestors. This strongly suggests that faith has been chosen as a uniting concept of Israel’s past, because it made that history relevant for the community in their present situation. The author has thus prepared the addressees to interpret the story of Israel as their narrative. The faith of the community is thereby grounded in Israel’s past, and the author’s faith-driven commemoration of Israel’s past is grounded in the identity of the addressees.

5.3.2 The Unfinished Narrative of Israel

The relationship between the addressees and their forefathers is further strengthened when we reach the conclusion in 11:39–40. Although all the ancestors received testimony for their faith, they did not receive that which was promised. It is striking that the story climaxes in a note about that which was not fulfilled. Israel’s narrative is presented as unfinished and unfulfilled. Just as the promise of entering God’s rest is said still to be open (4:1–10), the promises given to the ancestors are described as yet to be fulfilled. The reason the fulfillment did not occur in the lifetime of the ancestors, the author explains, is that God foresaw something better for “us”: that “they” would not be perfected without “us” (11:40). This suggests that “being perfected” and “obtaining the promises,” are different ways of describing the same thing. The addressees are placed at the crucial stage of Israel’s narrative, in the time at which perfection has been made attainable. This is not to say that there is nothing more to be realized or perfected for the addressees. They too await the final entrance into God’s rest (4:11), and they too look towards the visible victory of Jesus (2:8; 9:28; 10:13). Even so, the new covenant has brought about a realization of perfection (10:14), which was not experienced by the ancestors. The addressees have already been given access to the heavenly realm (10:19–20). It is not only that they happen to appear at a later stage in Israel’s narrative, and therefore stand temporarily closer to the realization of God’s promises than did their

749 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 138.
750 Gräßer (Hebräer, 3:217) is entirely correct to observe that the ending of the chapter is surprising, and that we would rather have expected some sort of practical application akin to 1 Clement 17:1.
751 Compare Wis 10; Rom 9:6, Sir 44:2–7; 1 Mace 2:53–60 which all record the history of Israel, focusing on rewards and gifts which were given, goods which were possessed, and honorable positions which were occupied.
752 Thus, Matthew Thiessen argues that Hebrews 11, in addition to highlighting the faith of the ancestors, also “serves to demonstrate the unfulfilled nature of the promise throughout Israel’s history” (“Hebrews and the End of the Exodus,” NovT 49 [2007]: 353–69 [361]).
ancestors, there is not only a quantitative but a qualitative difference between the period of Israel’s narrative in which the addressees find themselves and that in which their ancestors lived.

It is striking that the author does not write: “God foresaw that we would not be made perfect without them.” He is not primarily saying that the community has a share in the blessings of the ancients, but that the ancestors of Scripture will be given a share in the blessings which are available to the addressees. He is not only creating a past for the community, he is also creating a future for the ancestors.753 The addressees are thus invited to view Israel’s Scriptural past as their own past, and to view the faithful ancestors as their forefathers.754 Something radical happens to Israel’s narrative when it is rendered as unfulfilled apart from the Christ event. The last “chapter” of the story sheds light on all which preceded it, and reveals what the story was ultimately about, and where it was always heading.

5.4 Jesus – The True Israelite

5.4.1 Leader and Perfecter of Faith

Jesus is not mentioned in Hebrews 11, but that is made up for in 12:1–3, in a paragraph which is clearly tied to Hebrews 11.755 The author’s main point in 12:1–3 is to exhort the addressees to persevere in faith and endurance. This exhortation is given by means of an athletic metaphor: they have to run the race set before them.756 The author appeals to two sources of encouragement: the cloud of witnesses surrounding them and the example of Jesus himself. The cloud of witnesses must be understood to be the ancestors. Within the athletic image they function as spectators cheering those still running the race.757 This further emphasizes that the author presented the ancestors of Scripture with the specific purpose of strengthening the community in their own struggle to persevere in faith.

The second source of encouragement is Jesus. He is said to have endured hostility from sinners,758 and to have despised the shame of the cross for the sake of759 the joy which lay before him. This joy should be understood in terms of his vindication and exaltation to the

753 Gräßer, Hebräer, 3:221.
754 Lieu’s (Christian Identity, 34) comment on the pesher interpretation of Scripture undertaken in documents found in the Dead Sea Scrolls is relevant also here, when she claims that Scripture, by means of such interpretation, “is shown to anticipate and so to confirm the community’s own self-understanding.”
756 More generally on the athletic imagery, and for numerous antique parallels, see Croy, Endurance in Suffering.
758 The difficult question of whether the plural (Lane, Hebrews, 2:416–17) or the singular (Attridge, Hebrews, 353–54) pronoun should be preferred in 12:3 is not relevant for our purposes. The main point is that Jesus’ crucifixion is presented as resulting from hostility from sinners.
759 Lane translates: “who rather than the joy set before him endured a cross” (Hebrews, 2:399). In this reading, Jesus gave up a joy which he possessed and accepted the cross instead. However, it is preferable to understand ἀντί in the sense of “for (the sake of),” as in 12:16. Thus Koester, Hebrews, 523–24.
right hand of God’s throne. Jesus is described as having met his own fate with endurance (cf. ὑπομένω) and disdain (cf. καταφρονέω). The endurance exemplified by Jesus is clearly evoked as a model for the addressees, who are exhorted to endure in the race set before them (12:1; cf. also 10:36). The call to emulate Jesus’ endurance is even made explicit in 12:3. The fact that there was a joy which was set before Jesus, and which Jesus obtained through faithful endurance, indicates that there is a prize to be won also by the addressees, if they finish the race which has been set before them. As we have already thoroughly discussed, Jesus is presented in Hebrews as leader and role model. This implies that the race run by Jesus is somehow analogous to the one in which the addressees find themselves.

The disdain shown by Jesus, towards the shame of the cross, draws attention to the part of Jesus’ suffering which was not merely physical. The notion of Jesus being shamed on the cross is central to the author (6:6; 13:13). Shame and honor are cultural constructs which depend upon a “court of reputation.” By disdaining the shame afflicted on him through crucifixion, Jesus displayed an attitude of indifference towards the “court of reputation” made up by those who carried out the crucifixion. By acclaiming the crucified Jesus as Lord, the cultural codes which regulate honor and shame are not simply rejected, they are utterly subverted. That which looked like a shameful death was in fact part of God’s plan, and it was followed by vindication and exaltation. David A. deSilva helpfully comments: “Jesus was not merely ‘disdaining the shame,’ roughly equivalent to braving or being unafraid . . . Rather, he was providing a paradigm for the Christian minority group of counting as nothing the negative evaluation from the outside world, thinking only on the evaluation of God.” He continues by noting that this implies a major shift in orientation, from majority culture to a counter-cultural minority: “While in public court of opinion Jesus took the most disgraceful seat – on a cross – in God’s court of reputation, Jesus was worthy of the highest honor.”

The addressees are exhorted to emulate Jesus’ attitude toward being shamed. They are praised because they joyfully accepted being robbed of possessions (10:34), and they are asked to reckon suffering as a loving discipline, indicating that they are true children of God (12:4–11). In the eyes of humans they might be shamed (10:33), but they are invited to wear this shame as a badge of honor. This prepares them for the climactic exhortation in the last chapter of the homily; that they should bear Christ’s shame with him (13:13). To accept shame is an invitation to downplay your identity as a member of mainstream society, and to identify through the “cross-shaped” norms which regulate shame and honor for Jesus’ followers. Jesus’ death and vindication thus constitutes the pattern for the race which has been set before the addressees, and which has already been run by their ancestors. This pattern consists of temporal suffering and shame, followed by eternal joy and honor.

Jesus knew that something better awaited him at the end of his suffering (epistemic side), and he faithfully fulfilled the vocation given to him (ethical side). He thus proved himself

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760 The verb which translates “set before,” προκείμενος, is used in both in 12:1 and 12:2. Furthermore, this echoes the hope which is set before (προκειμένη) the addressees, towards which they flee (6:18).
761 This was a major point in 2.5.
763 On the honor and shame perspective in 12:1–3, see deSilva, Perseverance, 433–35.
765 Cf. 5.2.1 and the definition of faith.
to be the faithful one *par excellence*. The narrative of Jesus’ death and subsequent vindication is thus the proper context within which to understand the designation given to Jesus: ὁ τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγός καὶ τελειωτής. The term which translates “leader,” ἀρχηγός, points, in keeping with the image of the race, to Jesus as the one who leads the way (cf. 2:10; 6:20). He is the champion, and one must follow in his footsteps. However, the play on the stems ἀρχ and τελ, suggests that Jesus is also the source of faith on a more fundamental level, not in the sense that faith was not a possibility before Jesus, for Hebrews 11 clearly shows that it was, but in the sense that faith is ultimately defined in and by Jesus. The faith of the forefathers therefore ultimately points towards Jesus himself. Faith has its fundamental source in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is also designated as faith’s τελειωτής, the one who completed and perfected faith. This epithet adds to the image of Jesus exhibiting the ultimate and perfected example of faith. The faith of the ancestors never attained the goal to which it pointed; it was never brought to perfection. In striking contrast to this, Jesus is presented as the one who has reached the goal, who has obtained the joy, who has perfected faith, and who is seated at the right hand of God. Only with him did the perfecter of faith enter Israel’s narrative. Jesus brought faith to its ultimate goal, by reaching that to which faith points. Whereas the faith of the ancestors always pointed beyond the situation in which they were found, towards the unseen, promised reality which faith holds firm, Jesus is pictured as having reached that unseen reality. He is thus the true Israelite, in the sense that he is the perfect example of what Israel was supposed to be.

5.4.2 The Cross of Christ and the Shame of Israel

The idea that faith is thus ultimately defined in and through the life of Jesus seems to have left its mark in one particular instance of the story of Israel’s past. When discussing the life of Moses, and the exodus of Israel, the pattern of Jesus’ faithful life and death is explicitly brought to bear on an event which predated his earthly life. It is said of Moses that he considered “the reproach of the Anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (11:26). This comment interprets Moses’ choice not to be recognized as the son of the Pharaoh’s daughter, preferring rather to be maltreated together with the people of God (11:25). Although the majority of commentators have seen this as anachronistic comment referring to Jesus, and have sought explanations as to how Moses could have known what it was to bear the reproach of Jesus centuries before his birth, there have also been attempts at taking τοῦ χριστοῦ generically, applying it to the chosen and anointed people of God.

The generic interpretation is based on an allusion to Psalm 88:51–52 (LXX): “Remember, O Lord, the shame of your servants, which I suffered in my bosom, [the shame] of many nations, [with] which your enemies have insulted, O Lord, [with] which they have insulted the

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766 Attridge, Hebrews, 356.
769 Richardson (*Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith*, 167–224) argues that the faith of *all* the ancient Israelites is presented as ultimately pointing to Christ.
reward of your anointed (τοῦ χριστοῦ σου)."\textsuperscript{772} Although the phrase τοῦ χριστοῦ is singular, and in the psalm refers specifically to David, the parallelism between “your servants” and “your anointed,” might indicate that the anointed one is taken as a representative of all the people, \textit{pars pro toto}.\textsuperscript{773} The psalm shares several motifs with 11:25–26: shame, the anointed, reward, and fate of the people, but commentators still tend to dismiss the allusion, on the grounds that it is hard to see how the addressees could have missed a specific Christological reference in the phrase τοῦ χριστοῦ.\textsuperscript{774} Richardson has argued convincingly, however, that it would be possible to maintain the Christological reference while at the same time allowing for the allusion to the psalm, and the communal reference to the people of God.\textsuperscript{775}

This interpretation would have to presuppose that the phrase τοῦ χριστοῦ functions on two different levels at the same time in Hebrews, just as was the case in the psalm. The primary meaning of the phrase would certainly be “the Anointed one,” and there is no reason to think that the addressees would have paused before identifying him as Jesus. The reproach of the anointed one must certainly refer to Jesus’ crucifixion (6:6; 12:2). However, Hebrews strongly emphasizes that Jesus’ willingness to bear shame must be understood as an act of solidarity. Jesus did not regard it a shame to share conditions with his siblings (2:10–14), even though he would have had every reason to do so. The shame borne by Jesus is thus implicitly the shame of all his siblings too – the shame of God’s people. In his crucifixion, Jesus not only bears his own shame, but also the shame of God’s suffering and maltreated people. By virtue of being “the anointed one” Jesus represents the entire chosen and anointed people of God. By the same token, Moses’ willingness to bear the reproach of the anointed one must be understood on two different levels. It means that Moses, together with the people of God, accepted the kind of shame Jesus later came to bear. However, Moses willingness to bear the reproach of the anointed one, \textit{together} with the people of God, must also be understood as prefiguring Jesus’ own willingness to show solidarity with his people. Moses acted in a Christ like way. By identifying with the shame of the anointed one Moses \textit{simultaneously} also identified as part of the people of God.

Because Jesus’ suffering is interpreted in terms of solidarity with Israel, it follows that to associate with the shame of Christ also entails identifying as part of the people for whom and with whom Jesus suffered. Moses is presented as the prime example of one who was willing to bear the shame of the anointed one – i.e. Jesus himself – thus also identifying as part of God’s people. In doing this, Moses becomes a role model for the addressees.\textsuperscript{776} They too will be called to bear the reproach of Jesus (13:13), and if they do this, they also identify as part of Israel.\textsuperscript{777} Jesus has become the epitome of the shame of Israel, the one with whom all Israelites must show solidarity, in order to express their identity as members of God’s people. However, Jesus not only embodies Israel’s suffering, he also embodies her vindication. Moses is also an example in this regard, because he confidently looked ahead to his reward (11:26). Moses trusted that God would provide a vindication for him, and indeed for God’s people.

\textsuperscript{772} Translation from Richardson, \textit{Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith}, 205.
\textsuperscript{773} Note also how the phrase οἱ χριστοί σου is used to denote the people, in Hab 3:13 (LXX).
\textsuperscript{774} So Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 502.
\textsuperscript{775} Richardson, \textit{Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith}, 203–207.
\textsuperscript{776} Commenting on 11:25, Ellingworth (\textit{Hebrews}, 612) writes: “Nowhere does the author express more strongly his sense of continuity between Israel and the Christian community.”
\textsuperscript{777} This perspective is further developed in 6.7.3.
together with whom he accepted maltreatment. This vindication, it turns out, was accomplished once and for all through Jesus, who was raised to glory after his suffering (12:1–3). The reward to which Moses looked ahead has been realized and accomplished in and through Jesus. Both Moses and the people, together with whom he suffered, will therefore also partake in the reality of Jesus’ vindication. Hebrews’ argument seems to suggest that all those who share in the reproach of Christ also share in his victorious exaltation.

5.5 Is Hebrews 11 a Narrative about Israel?

I have argued above that Hebrews 11 is constructed in a way which makes it the narrative of the addressees, and have attempted to demonstrate that Israel’s narrative is contained in the Christ event. Thus, there are good reasons for claiming that Hebrews 11 functions not only to encourage and inspire the addressees, but also to legitimate their identity as followers of Christ and heirs to the promises of the ancestors. Implicit to the discussion, has been the assumption that Hebrews 11 is somehow a narrative about Israel, to which the addressees are now attached, however, some interpreters have found reason to doubt this premise. Eisenbaum has argued that the author has avoided attaching the ancestors of faith to a narrative about the establishment of the Jewish nation, and instead articulated a retelling of the Scriptural narrative which portrays the ancestors as “outsiders” and “marginalized individuals.” According to her, these individuals stand apart from the Israelite people and nation, and if they constitute a community at all, it is a select elite group within Israel. Abraham and Moses are not portrayed as Israelites or Jews, but as Christians. Eisenbaum argues her point by underlining how defining moments in the history of the Jewish nation are “forgotten”: the giving of the law at Sinai, the entrance into Canaan, the constitution of the Davidic dynasty; the building of the temple and the return from exile. Furthermore, the author breaks off his commemoration of the story precisely at the point where the people came into possession of the land. The summary of Israel’s history in 11:33–38 gives the impression of a story which is not heading anywhere particular. The author’s rhetorical purpose was to denationalize the story, in order to make it an appropriate narrative of the ancestry of the community of Jesus-followers, thereby legitimating the existence of the Jesus movement.

It must be recognized that Eisenbaum has made a strong argument regarding the denationalization of Israel’s narrative. Not only are important aspects of Scriptural history pertaining to the making of a nation “forgotten,” it is also noteworthy that the named ancestors are never praised on account of their “political” accomplishments. There is no

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778 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 187.
779 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 184.
780 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 165.
781 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 220.
782 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 188.
783 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 177.
785 The brief allusion to a military victory in 11:34 cannot overturn the picture painted above, although it does nuance it.
image of a golden age which can be regained in the future, or of a prior state of redemption which will be experienced in a yet greater way. The author focuses on the faithful lacking a home (11:9), lacking power (11:35–37), and living in the wilderness (11:38). He has told a story of faithful men and woman who have not received that which was promised to them (11:39–40). However, it does not follow that the ancestors are portrayed as “marginalized individuals,” as Eisenbaum claims. Although they might be marginalized, they are not presented as individuals. The fact that they are couched within the same narrative, which is driven by a specific plot, gives us the impression that there was something uniting these characters across time, and beginning with the narrative of Abraham and Sara, the idea of family inheritance is introduced. Isaac and Jacob are co-heirs with Abraham (11:9), and Sarah is said to ground a new seed through the power of God (11:11–12). The idea that God deals with the family of Abraham is thus by no means suppressed (cf. also 2:16). The contexts which state that Abraham did receive promises (6:14–15; 11:17) focus on Abraham’s offspring.

Eisenbaum claims that the seed of Abraham constitutes an “elite group” which is separated from Israel’s history in general, through the supernatural progress of its history. Thus, “they are not the founding fathers of Israel, they are ancestors of an elite group. They are distinct from Israel, rather than representative of Israel.” As far as I can see 11:21–22 points in the exact opposite direction. The blessings which pertain to Abraham’s family are given narrative expression through the retelling of how Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, and how Jacob in turn blessed the sons of Joseph (11:20–21). The story of Abraham’s offspring reaches its climax in Joseph “remembering” the exodus of τῶν ἴσραήλ (11:22). The term “Israel” appears at a pivotal point in the narrative, as a way of portraying the descendants of Abraham, the heirs of the blessings. The exodus event itself is implicitly understood to flow from the blessings which follow the family of Abraham, and this family is understood to constitute that which became the children of Israel. Nothing suggests that Abraham’s family stand in contrast to or apart from Israel.

The problems with Eisenbaum’s interpretation become even more pressing when she comments on Moses: “Like Abraham, Moses leaves his nation of origin, only neither ancestor does so in order to become part of Israel.” This interpretation goes against the grain of the text. The author explicitly emphasizes Moses’ solidarity with “the people of God,” as that which caused him to reject membership of the Egyptian people. He did not want to be reckoned as the son of the Pharaoh’s daughter (11:24), he chose instead to be maltreated together with the people of God (11:25). Moses’ conflict was not “marginalized individuality” against “collective identity,” but Egyptian identity against partnership in the people of God.

786 This point is also acknowledged by Eisenbaum (Jewish Heroes, 142), who states that the narrative “partly functions as a retelling of Israelite history,” and that there is therefore a “diachronic” perspective in the author’s retelling of the Scriptural story.
787 The context (11:13) in which it is said that Abraham did not receive that which was promised focuses on the promise of a land.
788 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 165–66.
789 It is curious that Jacob is depicted as blessing the children of Joseph, and not his own twelve children. This might be a subtle way of bringing focus away from the Jewish nation which was established on the basis of the twelve tribes, and instead to focus on the exodus people. Cf. Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 165.
790 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 168.
Moses is not portrayed as an individual. It is emphatically emphasized that he considered himself a member of a people, and there is not the slightest hint that Moses only joined an elite group within Israel.

Although I do agree with Eisenbaum in holding that the story of Israel has been denationalized, I do not agree that its characters are portrayed as individuals who stand apart from Israel’s history, or who represent an elite group within Israel. I therefore only partly agree with her when she claims that “the most striking characteristic of each hero as portrayed in Hebrews 11 is that they are divorced from Israel and her history as told in Scripture . . . Hebrews 11 portrays each character as standing apart from Israel as a nation.”

This quote shows that there is no clear distinction in Eisenbaum’s terminology, between belonging to Israel and her story, and belonging to a nation. I think this is unfortunate, because it seems to me that the rhetorical force of Hebrews 11 lies precisely in the fact that the author retains Israel as the basic designation of God’s people, and thus retells and interprets the story of Israel. The story of Israel is commemorated – not as the story which led to the establishing of a nation – but as the story which points to the coming of Christ, and the establishing of a community of Christ followers. Eisenbaum seems to have started out with a definition of “Israel” as being essentially a political nation consisting of Jews, and on the basis of this definition she concludes that Hebrews 11 is not about Israel. However, I would maintain that Hebrews 11 is about Israel, albeit not the kind of Israel Eisenbaum was looking for.

Eisenbaum’s claim that Abraham and Moses are portrayed as Christians rather than as Israelites only makes sense if you know from the outset that “Christian” and “Israelite” are mutually incompatible identities, but nothing in Hebrews suggests to us that this is the case. The logic of the narrative in Hebrews 11 seems rather to indicate that being a member of the Jesus movement is the way of expressing Israelite identity.

5.6 Abraham – The Forefather of the Community

5.6.1 Abraham Understood as a Prototype

Abraham is the character given most attention in Hebrews 11, and I would argue that it is helpful to think of Abraham as a prototype. The crucial assumption in calling Abraham a prototype is the idea that the portrayal of Abraham provides an image of what in-group identity could and should look like. It is worth noting that textual representations of Abraham which invest him with significance beyond his own person, are by no means unique

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791 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 141–42, emphasis added.
792 In all fairness, it should be noted that Eisenbaum does write that Hebrews 11 is a retelling of “Israelite history” (Jewish Heroes, 187). This seems to stand in some tension with the quote above, and this could result from the fact that she thinks that Hebrews 11 is divorced from the history of Israel “as told in Scripture,” in which case I would argue that she assumes a too stable concept of what Scripture says and does not say. However, sometimes she specifies that she is talking about “the national history of Israel,” (p. 187) although it is not entirely clear to me what this is. In any case, this might suggest that my disagreements with her are partly due to terminology.
794 The idea that communities can develop their identity with reference to a prototype was advanced in 2.4.
to Hebrews or the Jesus movement. A good example is the question of Abraham and the law. The fact that Abraham lived before the giving of the law, poses an obvious problem, because it seems to suggest that Abraham himself, imagined to be the forefather of the Jewish people, did not keep the law. However, by building on passages such as Genesis 18:19 and 26:5, as well as on the general idea of the law transcending human history, different texts were able to portray Abraham as keeping the law. It is hard to imagine how the memory of Abraham keeping the law could have arisen without a community where Abraham functioned as an in-group prototype, and where keeping the law was an important identity marker. This example therefore clearly shows that Abraham could function as a representative figure, and that textual representation of him could serve rhetorical ends related to identity formation and maintenance.

5.6.2 Imitating Abraham and Inheriting the Promises

In Hebrews 6:12 the author exhorts the addressees not to develop a sluggish attitude. The sluggish attitude he warns against picks up on 5:11, and the lack of progress of which he accuses the audience. They have not yet fallen away, but the author warns that there is no possibility of repentance for those who do (6:4–10). The contrast to having a sluggish attitude, which leads in the direction of apostasy, is to demonstrate eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end (6:11), and in doing this, the audience should imitate those who through faith and perseverance inherit the promises (6:12). The hope of the addressees is thus interpreted in terms of inheriting the promises. The author then goes on to argue that the promises upon which the hope is founded stand irrevocably firm (6:17). Abraham plays a key role in the argument, on several levels.

Abraham is, first of all, presented as the one who received promises from God (6:13), a fact which suggests that the hope of the addressees flow from the promises given to Abraham. Moreover, Abraham also became the forefather of a great family (6:14), and that family must be understood to constitute the community of those who are “heirs of the promise” (6:17). Finally, Abraham is also presented as receiving the promise on account of his perseverance (6:15). He is thus the prime example of one who inherits the promise through faith and  

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795 Backhaus (Hebräer, 246) writes: “Israels Stammvater Abraham hat im Frühjudentum wie im Urchristentum als Paradigma... eine zentrale Ur- und Vorbildfunktion.” This idea is also implicit in Isaiah 51:1–3.


797 Generally to this motif in Hebrews, see Otfried Hofius, “Die Unabänderlichkeit des göttlichen Heilsratschlusses: Erwägungen zur Herkunft eines neutestamentlichen Theologumenon,” ZNW 64 (1973): 135–45.


799 To receive the promises should probably be understood here to mean that Abraham did receive offspring. Thus Rose, “Verheißung,” 69.
perseverance, and who should therefore be imitated (6:12). To imitate the attitude of Abraham implies something more than cultivating a timeless virtue. It also implies identifying as part of Abraham’s family, as heirs to the promises given to him. The addressees’ identity as belonging to Abraham’s seed (2:16), and the larger narrative of how Jesus leads God’s children to their promised “land,” is thus recalled.

The notion of a journey towards the promised inheritance, so crucial in Hebrews’ discussion of Abraham, seems to be implied in the idea that the addressees should hold fast to the hope which is “lies before” them (6:18). The mention of the hope that “lies before” the addressees anticipates the mention of the race which “lies before” the addressees (12:1), as well as the joy which was once “laid before” Jesus, and because of which Jesus endured the shame of the cross (12:2). The image of a race which must be run should probably also be seen as informing the designation used of the audience in 6:18: “we who have taken refuge.” To speak of the addressees as refugees anticipates the designation of Abraham and his family as aliens and sojourners, found in Hebrews 11.

Uncertain alien existence is the context in which Abraham faithfully persevered, and the audience is called to imitate his faithful perseverance under similar circumstances. The addressees are thus identified in 6:18, in a way which makes it easy for them to identify with the picture which will be painted of Abraham’s family in chapter 11. Abraham’s story is their story.

The hope of the audience, that towards which they flee, is likened to an anchor which reaches into the interior of the (heavenly) sanctuary, behind the veil, the implication being that entrance into this realm represents that which they hope for, and that towards which they flee. Because the hope of the addressees flows from the promises given to Abraham, it follows that those promises are interpreted in terms of entrance into the heavenly realm which Jesus entered as high priest. There are, in other words, two images of entrance in Hebrews, which are closely related to each other. There is entrance into the land promised to Abraham, understood in Hebrews as the world to come (2:5), and there is entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, said to have been made available through the blood of Jesus (10:19–21). Jesus is “forerunner” (6:20), in the sense that he opens the way into the sanctuary, but also in the sense that he enters the inheritance promised to Abraham. Jesus’ high priestly entrance into heaven (cf. εἰσήλθεν, 9:12) prefigures the entrance of God’s people into the rest promised to them (εἰσελθεῖν, 4:11), and entrance into this rest entails the possibility unhindered access to God’s presence.

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800 Rose (“Verheißung,” 66–67) argues that the present tense of the participle “inheriting” in 6:12 suggests a general rule, and that the author refers to both past and present figures who inherit God’s promises. However, both the specific mention of Abraham in 6:13, and the general focus on imitation, suggests that past examples of faithful perseverance are in focus.

801 See 2.6.

802 Cf. 5.4.1.

803 Attridge, Hebrews, 182.

804 Cf. 4.2.2.

805 Rose (“Verheißung,” 64) thus argues that Jesus has entered God’s rest as πρόδρομος, for the purpose of one day leading God’s children into this rest.

806 It is worth noting that the motif of “rest” is often related to worship in Scripture, a fact which might further contribute to uniting the motif of entering God’s rest and Jesus high priestly entrance. Zion is the resting place of God (Ps 132 (131):8, 13–14; Isa 11:10) and God rests in his temple (1 Chr 28:2; 2 Chr. 6:41). Randall Gleason thus suggests that the possibility of worshiping God is entailed in the promise of
To imitate Abraham is thus not only to exemplify a specific virtue, it is also to identify as part of a larger narrative, focused on the question of how God will fulfill his promises to Abraham and his family, through Jesus. In imitating Abraham, the addressees are also invited to see themselves as part of that family, and as followers of their forerunner, Jesus.

5.6.3 Melchizedek Blessed the One who had Received God’s Promises

Jesus’ priesthood is said to be after the order of Melchizedek (6:20), and this idea is elaborated in 7:1–10.\(^{807}\) In 7:3, Melchizedek is clearly described as a “type” for Christ: “Without father, mother, or ancestry, without beginning of days or end of life, thus made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.” In 7:4–10 the author explores the deeper significance of the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek. It is noticeable that when Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, this is interpreted to have significance beyond what took place between them. Abraham is given a representative role, by virtue of which Levi too, as if present in the loins of his forefather, somehow gave a tithe to Melchizedek (7:9–10).\(^{808}\) Abraham is thus taken to represent his own ancestors, whereas Melchizedek is taken to represent Christ.

In 7:6 we read that Melchizedek blessed Abraham. The author only interprets this to mean that Melchizedek must have been greater than Abraham, however, he also entitles Abraham as “him who had received the promises.” This designation is curious, because it seems to have nothing directly to do with the author’s main point, in establishing the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood. Why emphasize that Abraham had received promises? A possible answer would be that the inner logic of the entire paragraph invites a subtle symbolic interpretation of Melchizedek’s blessing; the priesthood of Melchizedek was meant to bless Abraham, and all those who would come from his loins. Through the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, God would one day prove himself faithful to the very promises which Abraham had received. God had promised to bless Abraham’s family, and 7:6 indicates that he intends to do so through the one whom Melchizedek prefigures.

5.6.4 Abraham the Sojourner

In order to flesh out what it entails to identify as a members of Abraham’s family, it is necessary to look at the most extensive portrayal found of Abraham, that in chapter 11.\(^{809}\) The story of Abraham in Hebrews 11 begins, as in Genesis 12, with Abraham being called to leave his country (11:8). God’s calling of Abraham reminds us of the designation used of the

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\(^{807}\) For a helpful review with emphasis on the Jewish background, see Eric Mason, ‘You Are a Priest Forever’: Second Temple Jewish Messianism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 74; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

\(^{808}\) Luke T. Johnson claims the idea that “deeds of ancestors affect their descendants” is “a widespread Scriptural conviction” (“Scriptural World of Hebrews,” Int 57 [2003]: 237–50 [244]).

\(^{809}\) I will focus my attention on the portrayal of Abraham as sojourner, rather than his sacrifice of Isaac (11:17–19). If the sacrifice of Isaac is read as prefiguring the death and resurrection of Jesus, one might conclude that Abraham is enlisted as one who believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, even before it took place, and that this is a subtle way of making Abraham’s faith conform to the confession of the Jesus movement. However, I find such a reading of 11:17–19 unwarranted. For discussion, see Lane, Hebrews, 2:362–63.
community in 3:1: they are called with a heavenly calling. When it is said of Abraham that he did not know wither he was going, the author introduces the motif of Abraham as a sojourner, lacking a stable home.\textsuperscript{810} This perspective is further emphasized when it is said that Abraham went forth – not to a land (cf. εἰς τὴν γῆν Gen 12:1 LXX) – but to a place (τόπος, 11:8), which he would inherit.\textsuperscript{811} The ambiguity concerning the place towards which Abraham was heading, is furthered in 11:9: Πίστει παρώκησεν εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ὡς ἄλλοτριάν. Lane understands the preposition εἰς to mean that Abraham migrated to the land of promise,\textsuperscript{812} but this would undermine the force of the phrase ὡς ἄλλοτριάν. Furthermore, the fact that Abraham dwelt in tents together with his children, strongly suggests that the phrase must be understood to mean that Abraham “sojourned in the land of the promise.”\textsuperscript{813}

This creates a problem, however, for everything in Hebrews suggests that the earthly land in which Abraham sojourned was not “the land of the promise.” Possession over the land of Canaan plays absolutely no positive role in Hebrews 11, and the author bluntly states that Joshua did not bring rest to the Israelite people (4:8). Abraham’s family is emphatically said to have died without experiencing the fulfillment of the promise.\textsuperscript{814} They even confessed in faith that they were strangers (ξένοι) and sojourners (παρεπίδημοι)\textsuperscript{815} in the land (11:13).\textsuperscript{816} The fact that they confessed to this status emphasizes that they acknowledged and accepted their sojourner identity in faith. Confessing oneself to be a stranger and sojourner is the language of faith when spoken in a context of unfulfilled promises. It represents an attitude of faith on their part, because they reckoned with a reality beyond their visible situation. The solid reality of God’s promises is not just a better future in the land of Canaan, but a reality which utterly transcends existence in any earthly land.\textsuperscript{817} Abraham’s family is said to have greeted the promises from afar,\textsuperscript{818} and to have longed for a heavenly πατρίς (11:14).\textsuperscript{819} The term “homeland” represents identity loaded language, which denotes belonging. The very fact that they longed for a homeland while residing in Canaan, indicates that Canaan was not what they longed for, and that they belonged elsewhere. Further, the author reasons, this homeland cannot have been the land from which they had migrated, in which case they would have had plenty of time to return. It must therefore be a better and heavenly land, better than Canaan,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item This point is well made by Halvor Moxnes, \textit{Theology in Conflict: Studies in Paul’s Understanding of God in Romans} (NovTSup 53; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 180–82.
  \item Rose, “Verheißung,” 180.
  \item Lane, \textit{Hebrews}, 2:343–44.
  \item Thus Attridge, \textit{Hebrews}, 323; Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 485.
  \item The phrase “all these” is probably a designation that pertains primarily to Abraham’s family, and not to the ancestors of 11:4–7. See Attridge, \textit{Hebrews}, 329.
  \item The terms πάροικος and παρεπίδεμος both translate “sojourner.” However, πάροικος also denotes the legal status of a non-citizen, whereas παρεπίδεμος more loosely denotes the transitory status of someone sojourning. See John H. Elliot, \textit{A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, its Situation and Strategy} (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 30.
  \item Although ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς could be translated “on earth,” and probably includes being an alien in the world as such (11:38), the primary reference in this context is the land. The phrase clearly recalls the land of the promise in 11:9. See Allen, \textit{Deuteronomy and Exhortation}, 151–53.
  \item Contra George W. Buchanan, \textit{To the Hebrews: Translation, Comments and Conclusion} (AB 36; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), 190–94.
  \item This could allude to Abraham gazing at Mount Moriah from afar (Gen 22:4), or perhaps Moses looking into the promised land he did not enter (Deut 32:49; 34:4).
  \item In 2 Maccabees, Jerusalem and the land of Israel are regularly presented as the πατρίς (8:21; 13:10–14).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
that is. Together, the images of a city, a heavenly land and a homeland, depict the inheritance. The stability of the city made by God (11:10; cf. also 12:22; 13:14) clearly contrasts with anything which belongs to the shakable earthly realm (1:8–12; 12:27; 13:14).

How, then, can we make sense of the claim that Abraham sojourned in the land of the promise (11:9)? One possibility would be to claim that the phrase γῆ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας should be understood in a way which does not make the land the object of the promise. Hofius suggests that it means the land in which Abraham would receive his inheritance. According to this view, the land is only the context in which the promise would be realized in the future, not necessarily the content of that promise. Rose moves one step further, and suggests that ἐπαγγελία in 11:9 refers to the word of the promise, rather than the content of the promise. From this perspective, Canaan is not in view at all, and γῆ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας simply means “a place” where Abraham received the word of promise. However, I cannot see anything in Hebrews which indicates that a specific earthly locality represents the context in which the fulfillment of God’s promises would be realized in the future, as Hofius suggests, and the problem with Rose’s interpretation, apart from it being counter-intuitive, is that it undermines the rhetorical force of the story Hebrews is telling. This force is best grasped if we allow γῆ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας to mean exactly what a straightforward understanding of the phrase would suggest: even in the land promised to Abraham he lived in no more than a tent, as a simple sojourner, as though the land belonged to someone else! The implication is clearly that the land did not belong to someone else, but to Abraham himself.

This suggests an interpretation of 11:9, which allows for a certain degree of tension regarding the nature of the promise given to Abraham. Hebrews does seem to reckon with the fact that Abraham was promised an earthly piece of land, to which he migrated, and it seems as if Abraham, according to Hebrews, had a prima facie reason to think that this piece of land was the land of the promise. However, by faith Abraham also perceived that the land he was promised pointed beyond itself, towards a much better reality. In faith, Abraham was therefore able to embrace his existence as sojourner, and it seems to be precisely this attitude of faith, the willingness not only to accept but also to confess your identity as sojourner in “the land,” which establishes the relationship between God and Abraham’s family.

The author expresses this through litotes: Because they long for a heavenly land, God is not ashamed to be called their God (11:16). This expression has a covenantal ring to it, not totally unlike the formula “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” The expression can be turned on its head: God is proud to associate with those who confess themselves as strangers on earth. The language of shame is once again subversive, as with the interpretation of Jesus’ death on the cross, because it overturns cultural assumptions of shame and honor. Being a stranger and sojourner, without civic rights, living in a tent, is by no means an honorable status, however, the author claims that what is shameful on earth is honored by

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820 On the idea that Abraham would be given a city by God, cf. Philo Leg. 3:83.
821 Hofius, Katapausis, 147.
823 Lane, Hebrews, 2:350.
824 Weiβ, Hebräer, 584.
825 Cf. deSilva (“Despising Shame,” 448): “In the Greco-Roman world, the sojourner or foreigner held a lower status than the citizen.”
God. He can thus conclude, by the same ironic token, by saying that the world was *unworthy* of all those who were never given a stable home on earth (11:38). It presupposes, that is, a countercultural social identity.

It has often been recognized that groups tend to construct a negative stereotype of outsiders in order to strengthen in-group identity. Lieu helpfully describes how texts and communities create an image of who they are, by contrasting themselves with an image of who they are not. One needs the “others” in order to articulate a positive identity for one’s own group, however, in Hebrews it is not the others who are portrayed as outsiders, but Abraham himself, and Hebrews explicitly invites its readers to take on this outsider-status (13:13). Hebrews is engaged in an act of “self-othering,” so to speak. It is the insiders who are the aliens and the sojourners. The fact that one knows and confesses that one does not belong here – wherever “here” might be – makes one an insider. The identity-forming dynamic is very similar to that which takes place when others are described as outsiders, but the value system which regulates how the discourse works has been turned upside down. The outsiders are the real insiders.

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827 Backhaus, “How to Entertain Angels,” 172.

828 David A. deSilva (*Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* [SBLDS 152; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995]) helpfully describes how interpretation of shame-honor might contribute to shaping a counter-cultural social identity. He describes this process both in terms of the reinterpretation of what counts as honorable and disgraceful (*Despising Shame*, 145–208) and as the creation of new standards (*Despising Shame*, 276–313).


832 This could reasonably be seen as a strategy for coping with negative response from the outside, and I think it could also helpfully be conceptualized in terms of what Tajfel and Turner call “social creativity” (“An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *Rediscovering Social Identity: Key Readings* (ed. T. Postmes and N. Branscombe; Key Readings in Social Psychology; New York, N.Y.: Psychology Press, 2010), 173–90 (184); repr. from *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (ed. W. G. Austin and S. Worchel; Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1979)). This concept refers to a process whereby groups redefine and alter the elements which regulate a comparative situation, in order to render presumably negative characteristics as something positive. For a helpful discussion about how this concept illuminates identity development within the early Jesus movement, see David Horrell, “The Label Χριστιανός: 1 Peter 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 361–81 (378–81).
5.7 Does Hebrews’ Version of Israel’s Past Stand in Conflict with Jewish Traditions?

I began this chapter by claiming that to commemorate the past is a creative enterprise which shapes a collective memory, with reference to which one could develop notions about identity, and I have now attempted to demonstrate that Hebrews does shape a certain notion of Israelite identity, when commemorating the Scriptural past. Does this identity stand in some kind of conflict with Jewish claims of membership in God’s people? One way of addressing this question, would be to ask whether Hebrews de-legitimizes alternative versions of Israel’s past as well as the identities to which those versions gave birth. In commenting on Hebrews 11 from the perspective of collective memory, Esler has drawn attention to the fact that there were Jewish groups who were not part of the Jesus movement, but who also claimed the history of Israel as their pre-history. He goes on to argue that when different groups make claims to the same history, and the same forefathers, we can speak of “contested memory,” that is, different versions of the same past which implicitly compete with each other. Furthermore, if a given version of the past directly contrasts with rival versions, then we can speak of a “counter-memory.”

It is not obvious that Hebrews explicitly attempts to counter rival versions of Israel’s past, but it is quite clear that Hebrews implicitly de-legitimizes some ways of remembering what Israel’s past looked like. When the author states that Joshua did not lead the people into the promised rest (4:8) attempts to “remember” that Joshua did do are invalidated. When the author states that Abraham lived as a stranger in Canaan (11:9), and that he did not receive that which was promised (11:13), the importance of the past realization of those promises is diminished. The same can be said regarding the elements the author has chosen to “forget”: the giving of the law, the conquest of the land, the establishing of the Davidic dynasty, the building of the temple, and the return from exile. He is, implicitly at least, contesting other versions of Israel’s past, where the things which are forgotten in Hebrews play a major role. This seems to imply that at least some Jewish traditions about Israel’s past, and the identities which they encourage, are de-legitimized.

Moreover, with regard to possessing the earthly “land,” Hebrews does something more than simply “forget” its significance. Hebrews also idealizes the attitude of Abraham, who confessed to his status as sojourner while living in the land, and who fixed his hopes on the heavenly reality. To invest theological significance in possession over the land of Canaan is not simply irrelevant in Hebrews, it seems to conflict with the attitude of faith exemplified by

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834 Lieu (Christian Identity, 64) notes how “forgetting” the past is particularly important when facing times of great upheaval, rapid change and new beginnings. At such junctures, history tends to be “up for grabs,” and emendable.
835 These observations challenge the very common intuition that shared history, tradition and Scriptures give birth to shared identity. I think proposed common heritage is just as likely to give birth to distinct identities. If one shares common ground with other groups, one needs to articulate what is distinct to one’s own group. This is convincingly argued by Pamela Eisenbaum, “The Role of the Old Testament in Ancient Christianity and the Problem of Anti-Semitism,” in American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings 50 (1996): 210–23. For a similar argument, see Jon Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 219.
Abraham. This would certainly tend to challenge some Jewish claims to Israelite identity, where possessing the land really did play an important part. However, we do have Jewish texts that originated outside the Jesus movement, where sojourner identity is praised. The most notable examples are probably documents stemming from Qumran and Philo. In the Damascus Document, withdrawal from the land is presented as a sign of covenant faithfulness. God is understood to have preserved a remnant within Israel in the “land of Damascus,” a phrase which clearly evokes a kind of voluntary wilderness existence. Philo, on the other hand, interprets sojourning allegorically, in terms of being estranged from wickedness and materiality (Conf. 75–82). This is explicated in terms of heavenly souls who long for the place they came from (77–78):

This is why all whom Moses calls wise are represented as sojourners. Their souls are never colonists leaving heaven for a new home. Their way is to visit earthly nature as men who travel abroad to see and learn. So when they have stayed awhile in their bodies, and beheld through them all that sense and mortality has to shew, they make their way back to the place from which they set out at the first. To them the heavenly region, where their citizenship lies, is their native land; the earthly region in which they became sojourners is a foreign country. For surely, when men found a colony, the land which receives them becomes their native land instead of the mother city, but to the traveler abroad the land which sent him forth is still the mother to whom also he yearns to return.

Even though there are, as demonstrated above, examples of Jewish texts where sojourner identity is praised, I would argue that Hebrews differs in significant ways from both the Dead Sea Scrolls and Philo. The praise of sojourning identity in the Dead Sea Scrolls does not conflict with the notion that Israel is supposed to experience redemption in a specific piece of earthly land, and the temporary wilderness existence which is encouraged seems to be contingent on the failures of the people, rather than an alternative understanding of the nature of God’s promises to Abraham. In this regard, I would argue that Hebrews’ breach with traditional Jewish land theology is more radical than that found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in that Hebrews dislocates Israel’s future redemption from existence in the earthly land. In some respects, one could therefore argue that Hebrews stands closer to Philo, who clearly does encourage orientation towards a transcendent reality. This similarity notwithstanding, there are some crucial differences between Philo and Hebrews with respect to sojourner identity and “the land.”

The central “problem” in Philo is not the redemptive historical issue of whether and how God’s promises to Abraham will be fulfilled, but the question of how the eternal soul is to live in the material world, and the “solution” is not faith in God’s promises, but contemplation and learning, oriented towards the divine word, enshrined in the Torah (Conf. 81). It therefore

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836 Reinhard Feldmeier states that “the relatively rare Old Testament self-description of the nation or of individual believers as strangers” is mostly forgotten, and sometimes even suppressed (“The ‘Nation’ of Strangers: Social Contempt and its Theological Interpretation in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity,” in Ethnicity and the Bible [ed. M. Brett; Biblical Interpretation Series 19; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 241–70 [247]).

837 For discussion, see Feldmeier, “The ‘Nation’ of Strangers,” 249–51.

838 On the phrase “new covenant in the land of Damascus,” see chapter 3.7.2.

seems that Philo is dealing with a question which is only *loosely* tied to the fulfillment of concrete promises given to a specific people, to be realized within the context of a specific narrative, anticipating an eschatological consummation.⁸⁴⁰ Even if Philo does take the story about Abraham and the patriarchs as his starting point, it seems mistaken to read Philo as giving an *alternative* answer to the question of how Israel, corporately, will experience the eschatological fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham.⁸⁴¹ For this is not the main issue Philo sets out to deal with. Philo does not simply replace “the land” in a heavenly transcendent realm. As Betsy H. Amaru puts it: “the Promised Land becomes knowledge of God, Wisdom and Virtue,” and it is towards these realities that the soul must sojourn according to Philo.⁸⁴²

In contrast to this, I would maintain that Hebrews really does enter into a discussion about how Abraham’s promises will be fulfilled, and how Israel will experience redemption. The sojourner motif in Hebrews is not reducible to the general idea that all wise men are strangers and sojourners in the material and perishable world. The story about Abraham is not simply used as an example to discuss how humans with eternal souls are to live amidst perishable and material things. Even though Hebrews clearly does emphasize the metaphysical contrast between earthly and heavenly realities, Hebrews is *also* genuinely engaged in an attempt to make sense of Israel’s narrative, and to give an answer to the question of how Abraham’s descendants will receive their inheritance.⁸⁴³ The Abraham we meet in Hebrews is not just a stranger in the world as such, but also in his own land,⁸⁴⁴ and this is a crucial part of the problem Hebrews sets out to solve, by presenting us with an account about how God’s people will eventually receive that which was promised to them. Since Hebrews’ account of sojourner identity deals with an issue which is directly related to the fulfillment of specific promises given to Israel, it follows that there is also a potential conflict between Hebrews and other accounts about how those promises would be fulfilled.

It is therefore far from obvious that either Qumran or Philo provide us with Jewish parallels to the interpretation of sojourning identity which is found in Hebrews. It is evident, however, that Jews held different views about the nature of “the land” to which they belonged, and I see no strong reasons for thinking that a Jew outside the Jesus movement could not have articulated something very similar to the land theology found in Hebrews. On the other hand, I fail to see that Hebrews 11 provides us with any positive evidence to suggest that being part of Abraham’s family is a matter of belonging to the Jewish people. By denationalizing the narrative of Israel, and by “forgetting” the giving of the law and other

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⁸⁴⁰ Note, though, that Philo appears to hold that salvation is tied to membership of the Jewish people, even though Philo seems to be operating with a conception of salvation as strictly individual. On this tension in Philo, see Sanders, “The Covenant as a Soteriological Category,” 25–39.


⁸⁴³ This is an important instance where my reading of Hebrews would depart from a typical interpretation within the framework of the “foil-theory” (1.3.2).

⁸⁴⁴ *Pace* Thompson (“Faith in Hebrews,” 76–77), who interprets the sojourning motif solely in terms of being a stranger in the cosmos.
seminal events of Israel’s past which were specifically related to the Jewish people, the author seems to have created an image of Israel’s past with which it would be quite easy for a Gentile to identify. The points of identification offered by Hebrews, between the ancestors and the addressees, are quite general: faith, perseverance, endurance and exposure to challenging circumstances. This observation does not constitute positive evidence to suggest that the addressees were non-Jews, but it demonstrates that Hebrews 11 tells Israel’s story in a way which makes the construction of a Jewish nation more or less irrelevant to the major plot of the narrative.

In addition to “forgetting” some potentially significant events, which have disappeared in Hebrews’ version of Israel’s past, the author has also added some crucial elements. Hebrews’ version of Israel’s narrative climaxes in the Christ event. Jesus is presented as the true Israelite, the epitome of God’s plans for his people, and Jesus’ followers are presented as those apart from whom the ancient faithful will not be made perfect (11:39–40). Hebrews thus legitimizes identity as a follower of Jesus, by claiming that it represents the way of being faithful to Israel’s narrative. Esler describes this rhetorical move in terms of a new group “colonizing the past.”

The metaphor of “colonization” is problematic, though, because it seems to presuppose an ancient past which is already occupied by certain people, who therefore have some sort of legitimate right to possess that past, but who are nonetheless violently replaced. It is more helpful to say that the author re-imagines the past in light of recent events, thereby proposing a new vision of the identity of Israel. However, the same could also be said of Jews who were not part of the Jesus movement. They too re-imagined and interpreted the past in light of their present situation.

We do well, moreover, to repeat once more that Hebrews, in contrast to many modern commentators, consistently refrains from juxtaposing a new and old Israel. For Hebrews the Christ event has become the hermeneutical key for understanding what it means, and always did mean, to identify as an Israelite. The Christ event is never used, though, to claim that the narrative of Israel has become irrelevant, that it has been brought to an end, or that it has been taken from “the Jews” and given to “the Christians.” It is thus the author’s positive theology of Israel, and the fact that he does not leave Israelite identity for someone else to occupy, which makes Hebrews so challenging, if read from the perspective of someone who aspired to Israelite identity, but who did not share the author’s belief in the significance of the Christ event. The fact that Israel’s narrative climaxes in the Christ event implies a certain sense of Christological exclusivity to Hebrews’ vision of Israelite identity.

5.8 Faithful Ancestors – A Possible Starting Point for Developing a Positive View on the Standing of Jews Outside the Jesus Movement?

Although we do not find polemic against Jews who did not accept Jesus as their Messiah in Hebrews, it could be argued that Hebrews’ exclusive focus on Jesus implicitly calls into question their good standing before God. This observation is given further force by the fact

846 Lieu, Christian Identity, 62–75.
that certain aspects of Israel’s past, as conceived of by most Jews, are forgotten or even suppressed. By de-legitimizing certain memories of who the Israelites were, it could be argued that Hebrews implicitly also renders invalid some possible visions of what it means to be an Israelite in the present. However, some possible resources for challenging a negative judgment concerning Jews not part of the Jesus movement seem to be found in Hebrews 11, in the positive picture painted of the Scriptural ancestors. Based on Hebrews 11, Hays has tentatively proposed an interpretative framework which would encourage a more hopeful assessment of the standing of Jews outside the Jesus movement. Hays suggests that the “logic of Hebrews’ own symbolic world” allows us to propose that they greet the promises from afar, “insofar as they continue to trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,” and, so he continues, if Hebrews’ logic does allow us to view Jews on par with the ancient faithful, would this not imply that the followers of Jesus will reach perfection together with Jews outside the Jesus movement (cf. 11:40)?

Now, one could always question whether one should attempt to tease out possible implications of the “logic” inherent in the “symbolic world” of a given text. However, if one wants to explore the standing of Jews outside the Jesus movement from the perspective of the logic of Hebrews’ own symbolic world, there are at least two reasons why I am unconvinced by Hays’ otherwise attractive proposal. To begin with, there is obviously a problem in comparing the faith of ancestors, who died before the coming of Christ, with that of Jews living after his coming. It seems to me that the logic of Hebrews’ symbolic world, suggests that Abraham, who believed in the resurrection, and Moses, who accepted the reproach of Christ, lived in a way which shows that they would have believed in Christ if they were still alive to witness his death and exaltation. It is therefore difficult to see how the faith of the Scriptural ancestors can serve as a paradigm for Jews who lived after the coming of Christ but who did not belong to the Jesus movement.

Furthermore, and perhaps equally problematic: if we are to use the history of Israel as a hermeneutical key for assessing the standing of Jews outside the Jesus movement, as Hays attempts to do, we also have to deal with the negative paradigm found in 3:7–18. This is the story of how the majority of Israel resisted entrance into God’s rest, failed to trust God’s promises, failed to listen to his voice, distrusted the appointed leader of Israel, and missed out on the salvation offered them by God. It is striking that the paradigm of disbelief in Hebrews is not idolatry, or breaking the law, but failing to receive God’s promises. The author clearly argues that God’s voice has put his people in a similar position, now that God, at the end of the ages (1:1–2), speaks to his people through his Son. God speaks “today” and the clue is to not make the same mistake as the forefathers. One could certainly argue that 3:7–18 is a more appropriate Scriptural typology for Jews outside the Jesus movement, than is Hebrews 11.

It is still problematic, though, to transfer warnings that are aimed at the addressees for the purpose of fostering their perseverance, to Jews standing outside the Jesus movement, and I am not claiming that 3:7–18 were written for the purpose of saying that no salvation is offered

847 Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City,” 167.
848 It is not entirely clear to me whether Hays proposes this as a historical, if tentative, interpretation of Hebrews, which explores the implications of the text, if he proposes this is a possible way of integrating Hebrews into a more comprehensive biblical theology about the relationship between Jews and Christians, or if he is primarily asking how one deals responsibly with Hebrews as Christian theologians today.
to Jews outside the Jesus movement. Nor am I claiming that it would have been impossible for the author of Hebrews, given what he had written in 3:7–18, to articulate a more hopeful vision of the fate of Jews outside the Jesus movement, than the wilderness paradigm suggests. My point is simply this: if we are looking for an ancient paradigm for discussing the situation of the Jews who did not recognize Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant, it seems to me that 3:7–18 is more fitting than 11:1–40. This would also imply that the logic of Hebrews’ symbolic world, if used to address the standing of Jews outside the Jesus movement, points in the opposite direction than that suggested by Hays.

5.9 Conclusions

How does Hebrews’ commemoration of Israel’s past shape the notion of what it means to identify as part of God’s people? First of all, it must be emphasized that Hebrews does care about Israel’s past. Hebrews 11 is not a story about some elite group within Israel, nor is it a story about isolated individuals, and 3:7–18 is not about an out-group, but about the ancestors of the addressees. The ancestors in Scripture can therefore function both as an example of disbelief, and as a positive source for articulating an abiding identity for the people of God. Although the author does remind the community of the failures of the forefathers (3:7–18), he is also able to present a history of the faithful ancestors. Although the old covenant has been set aside, the Scriptural narrative of Israel has not. The ancestors are not viewed as members of an old covenant but as ancestors of faith. Both the ancient Israelites (11:25) and the present community (4:10) are designated as God’s people, without distinguishing between an old people and a new people.

Hebrews’ version of Israel’s past is focused on the fulfillment of God’s promises, and the question of whether his people respond in faith or lack of faith. What it means to be faithful is fleshed out in several ways. It entails willingness to bear suffering and hardship for the sake of future reward. To be a faithful member of God’s people also entails an attitude whereby cultural values related to shame and honor are challenged and subverted. The shame afflicted on the ancestors, Jesus and the addressees is not forgotten, but reinterpreted. The author is thereby capable of presenting a positive notion of outsider identity. It is the outsiders who are the real insiders. Indeed, Hebrews even emphasizes the shame and suffering of the Israelite ancestors, to such a degree that the Scriptural narrative in itself is left unfulfilled and unfinished.

This raises the question of how Hebrews’ notion of Israelite identity is shaped by a tension between newness and continuity. In remembering Israel’s history as being unfulfilled within the context of Scripture, the author makes room for both Jesus and his followers. Israel’s narrative would have been unintelligible without them. Jesus is presented as the Israelite par excellence, as the epitome of God’s intentions for his people. The Christ event becomes the hermeneutical key for making sense of Israel’s sufferings. His death is interpreted as an act of solidarity with God’s people, and his vindication is interpreted as pointing to Israel’s vindication. The suffering of the faithful ancestors thus prefigures Jesus’ own faithful suffering. Jesus’ followers appear at the decisive point in the narrative, and none of the ancestors will experience perfection apart from them (11:39–40). Israel’s past is
commemorated in a way which is guided by specific convictions about the significance of the Christ event. There are certainly important lines of continuity in the narrative of Israel, before and after the Christ event, constituted by the promises of God, however, that continuity is established on the basis of the climax of the narrative, and that climax is Christ.

The fact that the Christ event assumes such a central role in the commemoration of Israel’s narrative raises the question of whether Hebrews’ version of Israel’s past implies a conflict with Jews outside the Jesus movement, regarding the question of membership of God’s people. Quite clearly, such a conflict could not, if it exists, be based on a purely negative view of Israel’s past or Israel’s ancestors. By contrast, I would argue that it is Hebrews’ positive claim to continuity with Israel’s past, combined with Hebrews’ specific conception of what Israel’s narrative is all about, which turns out to represent the potential challenge to the standing of Jews outside the Jesus movement. Israel’s narrative, as Hebrews perceives it, is not about the establishing of a political nation or the possession of an earthly land. Important events such as the giving of the law, the conquest of the land, the establishing of the Davidic dynasty, the building of the temple, and the return from exile, are “forgotten.” Israel’s narrative is rendered unfinished apart from Christ, and this implies a certain degree of Christological exclusivity to Hebrews’ vision of Israelite identity.

This does not amount to positive evidence to suggest that Hebrews discourages Jewish identity, or that Jews outside the Jesus movement stand outside God’s people. These issues are never directly addressed in Hebrews, and cannot be answered conclusively. I have still argued against attempts at taking Hebrews’ positive view of the ancient faithful as evidence for a positive view of Jews standing outside the Jesus movement. Moreover, I have drawn attention to the fact that there is nothing in Hebrews’ commemoration of Israel’s past which conclusively suggests that you have to be a Jew in order to identify with the ancient Israelites. The “site of identification” between the addressees and the ancients is quite general: faithfulness, endurance, perseverance and willingness to experience suffering. Although Hebrews never explicitly claims that non-Jews can be members of God’s people, it seems that Israel’s narrative is commemorated in such a way that it would be quite easy to combine that narrative with an ethically open conception of membership of God’s people. Some key moves have already been made in separating between membership of an ethnic group and good standing as part of God’s people. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that Israelite identity is decisively detached from any earthly land.
6. Israel Outside of its Own Camp

6.1 Identifying with the People Outside the Camp

In the last chapter of Hebrews, the author issues a daring exhortation: let us leave the camp (13:13). In doing this, the author invites the addressees to take on a certain kind of outsider-status, to identify as those who do not belong in the camp. In doing this, he also creates a boundary between insiders and outsiders, between those within and outside the camp. Dunning has drawn attention to the way boundaries, otherness and outsider-status are helpful concepts for constructing a sense of identity, belonging and difference. By casting yourself as being “outside” something, you implicitly also construct a strong sense of insider-identity. Hebrews 13:12 paradoxically identifies the insiders as those who leave the camp, and as “the people” who have been sanctified through the death of Jesus. This raises the question of how the call to leave “the camp” shapes the notion of what it means to belong to “the people.” In order to answer this question we would have to know what kind of camp the people are called to leave, and what it would mean to leave it.

In pursuing these issues, it is crucial to recognize that an important part of the rhetorical function of 13:13 resides in the surprising nature of the exhortation. The author has structured the homily in such a way that one would have expected it to reach its climax in a call to enter. Commenting on how Hebrews leads it addressees, step by step, towards an awaited climax, and how the hope of one day finally entering God’s heavenly city has grown increasingly stronger, Hays writes: “But unexpectedly, in the final chapter of the homily, they are not invited to enter the city. Instead they are called to go ‘outside the camp.’” The story about Israel’s journey is thus given an unexpected twist at the very end of the homily. For Hays, this observation suggests something about what kind of text Hebrews is. It is not a text which confirms and stabilizes the world views of the audience. All who dare to enter the symbolic universe of Hebrews “will find themselves challenged, destabilized, and ultimately transformed.”

The surprising nature of the exhortation in 13:13 could be described as a paradox. Part of the provocative twist of 13:13 follows from the fact that the author has given the addressees every reason to think that they belong inside the camp. For, in-as-much as the addressees identify as belonging to the sanctified people mentioned in 13:12, their most natural assumption would be that the camp spoken of in 13:13 is their camp. This is certainly what the Yom Kippur typology undergirding 13:11–13, would suggest. The place where the Yom

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849 The notion of “outsider” status implies the existence of boundaries, and boundaries are fundamental to the notion of identity. For a helpful introduction to the topic, which underlines how boundaries are not given or unchangeable, but the product of interpretation and negotiation, see Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 98–146.

850 Dunning, “Alien Status and Cultic Discourse.”

851 Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City,” 172.

852 In spite of this radical turn, I remain unconvinced by the attempts which have been made to argue that chapter 13 was written by a different author, addressing a different situation. For one such attempt, see Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, “The ‘Letter’ to the Hebrews and its Thirteenth Chapter,” *NTS* 50 (2004): 390–405.

853 Hays, “Here We Have No Lasting City,” 172.
Kippur ritual is conducted in Israel’s camp, and part of the purpose of the ritual is to cleanse the camp, in order that the people might continue to live there, as God’s holy people. When the people are called to leave this camp a powerful tension is created. For what sense could it make for the people to leave their own camp, now that they have been sanctified? And what does it mean to be an insider when you are suddenly told to go outside? Clearly there is now a new situation, which calls for a new way of expressing Israelite identity.

If it is true that 13:13 calls the addressees to leave the camp of Israel – an assumption which is not self-evident and which therefore will be made subject to critical discussion later in this chapter – it seems to raise the question of whether the call to leave the camp encourages or implies a breach with Jewish practices and/or Jewish communities. If such a breach is encouraged or implied, it raises the question of whether Hebrews’ vision of Israelite identity stands in some sort of conflict with typical Jewish notions of what it means to belong to God’s people. In order to answer this question, we need to explore why the camp is to be left, what the camp represents, and whether Hebrews envisages someone as being left inside the camp.

6.2 The Inner Structure and Limits of 13:7–17

How Hebrews 13 should be structured, and how one delimits the different sub-paragraphs of the chapter, are disputed issues. Instead of discussing all the relevant proposals, I will simply try to make a case for what I take to be the best way to deal with these issues. I hold, with most commentators, that 13:7 introduces a new paragraph, even if there is a smooth transition from 13:1–6 to 13:7–9, because the life of the community is in view. The Scriptural quotations in 13:5–6 seem to conclude the injunctions which preceded them (13:1–4). I would argue that the discussion which begins in 13:7, with the first mention of the leaders, continues until the second mention of the leaders in 13:17. The two mentions of leaders thus constitute an inclusio.

There is a coherent argument running from 13:7 to 13:17, which could be outlined as follows. The faith of the leaders (13:7), who preached the word of God, is manifested through the confession-like formula in 13:8: “Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” This confession constitutes the firm ground from which the community must not drift away, and as such it contrasts with the diverse and strange teachings which the community are warned against in 13:9. These strange teachings function as the backdrop, against which the altar of the community is presented in 13:10. The mention of the altar furthers the discussion about food which was started in 13:9. Within 13:10–16 the internal coherence of the argument is emphasized by conjunctions: γάρ (13:11), διό (13:12), τοίνυν (13:13), οὐ γάρ (13:14), οὖν (13:15). The injunction to obey the leaders in 13:17 indirectly relates to that which has gone before, for, by implication, it is precisely on such matters as those discussed in 13:9–16


\[855\] I would argue that the logical coherence of the argument would persist, even if it is uncertain whether the conjunction οὖν in 13:15 is original.
that the addressees must follow the lead of their leaders, lest they heap judgment upon themselves on the day when an account of their souls must be given. In this way 13:17 rounds off the argument.\textsuperscript{856}

Furthermore, I would claim that 13:7–17 seem to display a chiastic pattern.\textsuperscript{857} Assuming that I am able to argue convincingly that this is the case, it would constitute an independent argument for the integrity of 13:7–17. At the center of 13:7–17 we find the word ἔξοω three times: outside the camp (13:11), outside the gate (13:12), and outside the camp (13:13). The two mentions of the camp envelope the statement about Jesus’ death outside the gates, and thus enable us to locate 13:12 as the climax and center of the entire passage. The three mentions of ἔξοω are, in turn, framed by two contrasting statements concerning the “property” of the community: we do have an altar (cf. ἔχομεν in 13:10), but we have no remaining city (cf. οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν in 13:14). Bracketing these two statements we find references to different and contrasting concepts of worship.\textsuperscript{858} In 13:9 various strange teachings concerning foods are refuted, whereas thanksgiving and charity are said to constitute pleasing service to God in 13:15–16. Enveloping the entire paragraph are the two mentions of the leaders of the community, past (13:7) and present (13:17). This results in the following structure: \textsuperscript{859}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[A Μνημονεύετε τῶν ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν (13:7)]
  \item[B The everlasting identity of Jesus contrasted with worship which is of no benefit (13:8–9)]
  \item[C ἔχομεν θεοαυτήριον (13:10)]
  \item[D τὰ σῶματα κατακαίεται ἔξοω τῆς παρεμβολῆς (13:11)]
  \item[E Διὸ καὶ Ηησοῦς . . . ἔξοω τῆς πολύς ἔπαυεν (13:12)]
  \item[D’ ἔξερχόμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔξοω τῆς παρεμβολῆς (13:13)]
  \item[C’ οὖ γὰρ ἔχομεν ὃδε μένουσαν πόλιν (13:14)]
  \item[B’ Continuing worship which is well pleasing to God – mediated through Jesus (13:15–16)]
  \item[A’ Πείθεσθε τοῖς ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν (13:17)]
\end{itemize}

This structure helps clarify both the boundaries, the center and the coherence of the passage, and it will be assumed in the following discussion. I will begin by focusing on the framing of the text, namely the two references to the leaders of the group, and then I will move to what I take to be the center of the text, the interpretation of Jesus’ death. After having dealt with the interpretation of Jesus’ suffering in 13:12, we will look at 13:9–11 and 13:13–16 respectively.

\textsuperscript{856} I take 13:18–25 to be the epistolary ending of the homily, hallmarked by typical features of such as prayer request, benediction and greetings. Thus also Floyd Filson, \textit{Yesterday: A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13} (London: SCM Press, 1967), 23–25. Because the prayer request found in 13:18–19 is a typical feature of such epistolary endings (cf. Rom 15:30–31; 1 Tess 5:25), and because it moves focus towards the author himself, 13:18–19 are more closely related to the benediction and greetings (13:20–25) than to the mention of the leaders in 13:17 (contra Lane \textit{[Hebrews]}, Attridge \textit{[Hebrews]}, Thüren \textit{[Lobopfer]} and Gräßer \textit{[Hebräer]}). The fact that we find the word ἀναστρέφη in 13:7 and the word ἀναστρέψθαι in 13:18 provides a weak \textit{inclusio}, and constitutes insufficient reason for counting 13:18–19 as part of our paragraph.

\textsuperscript{857} Lane \textit{[Hebrews], 2:503–504} has proposed a chiastic structure for 13:10–16 which differs from the one I suggest. I would argue that he arrives at an unconvincing structure because he has failed to pay attention to the words which most clearly structure our text, namely the two occurrences of ἔχομεν, the two occurrences of παρεμβολή and the \textit{three} occurrences of ἔξοω.

\textsuperscript{858} It remains to be argued, of course, that the “foods” dismissed in 13:9 really do relate to a context of worship. See discussion below.

\textsuperscript{859} Gäbel \textit{(Kulttheologie, 449)} argues for the same chiastic structure.
6.3 The Leaders of the Community – The Function of the Framing

13:7 begins by drawing attention to the past leaders of the community. They are to be remembered, the outcome of their life (ἡ ἐκβασις τῆς ἀναστροφῆς, 13:7) should be contemplated, and their faith should be imitated. The past leaders thus function as role models, as prototypical group members.\(^{860}\) They embody what it should look like to be an insider. The past leaders are presented in such a way that their convictions and way of life appear to mutually reinforce each other. They were authoritative transmitters of the word of God. Although we are not told what this teaching consisted of, we are given an important hint in 13:8. Abruptly, it appears, the author introduces a confession-like statement about Jesus: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” This could indicate the content of what was preached by the former leaders. The author might also have wanted to show how the faithful perseverance of the former leaders matched their stable confession to Jesus.\(^{861}\) Just as Jesus remains the same throughout all ages, the leaders also conducted their lives – from start to finish – in faithfulness. The unchanging identity of Jesus Christ resembles the unwavering commitment which is expected of those who follow him, and it points to the call to worship God continuously through Jesus (13:15). The faith and life of the leaders thus contrasts with drifting away and adopting various and strange teachings (13:9).\(^{862}\)

13:7–17 ends with an exhortation to obey (cf. πείθεσθε) and defer to (cf. ὑπείκετε) the leaders. This time the author is clearly referring to the present leaders of the community. The leaders seem to have received their authority from God, because they are presented as standing accountable to him. The very fact that leaders are referred to, indicates that the audience knows itself to be a group. Regardless of what kind of institution the term “leader” referred to, one must suppose some kind of structured communal practices in which the leadership of the leaders were embedded. When addressing someone in the plural, asking them to obey and defer to their leaders, you are clearly addressing a group of people who know that they constitute a group. If the author had concluded by asking that each and every one should defer to the authority of Jesus Christ, because judgment has been handed over to him, then the tone of 13:7–17 would have been much more individualistic. The author chose to give his exhortations a communal rather than an individual imprinting. The implication of this choice is that the issues discussed in 13:7–17 not only relate to how each and every individual of the group should conduct their life, but also to what it means to abide as a community which is well pleasing in the eyes of God.

By referring to the life of the former leaders, and the authority of the present leaders, the author has implicitly sketched a short “narrative,” spanning from past to present leaders. This is a story with a promising beginning (faithful leaders), which is waiting for an appropriate ending. We understand, though, that there is some sort of challenge facing the community, the outcome of which will also determine what kind of report the present leaders will be able to give on the final judgment. It is as yet undecided whether the “story” will end in a good way. The story which is implicitly told in 13:7–17 is thus remarkably similar to those found in 6:7–

\(^{860}\) On the notion of prototypical group members, see 2.4.

\(^{861}\) O’Brien, Hebrews, 516–18.

\(^{862}\) For this understanding of 13:8 and its rhetorical function, see Filson, Yesterday, 30–31.
12 and 10:32–39. What is new in 13:7–17 is the introduction of the leaders as “characters” in the story. They provide the addressees with a concrete pattern which can be followed, as they try to navigate between different visions of what it means to abide as a God-pleasing community. 13:7–17 flesh out what it looks like to be this community.

6.4 The Death of Jesus Outside the Gates – and Leviticus 16:27–28

6.4.1 A Subversive Interpretation of the Yom Kippur Ritual

At first glance the sanctuary symbolism in Hebrews appears to follow a straightforward type-antitype structure, according to which the earthly sanctuary resembles the heavenly one as a copy resembles its original (8:5; 9:24). On this basic structure, the author has developed his sacrificial interpretation of Jesus’ death. The rituals conducted in the earthly sanctuary, as prescribed in Scripture, point to the reality of what happened in heaven when Jesus entered as high priest. In this sense the Christ event stands in a typological relationship to the Yom Kippur ritual (9:11–14). Because we have already familiarized ourselves with this type-antitype structure, there is a danger that we might think that we know what 13:11–12 means before we read it, and assume that 13:11–12 only repeats once more the fact that Jesus is the perfect Yom Kippur sacrifice. As we shall see, however, this is not necessarily the case.

In order to see this, I think it is helpful to start by outlining the part of the sacrificial ritual which is prescribed in Leviticus 16:27–28. Here we read that the carcasses of the sacrificial victims are separated from the atoning blood spilled on the altar, thereafter to be burned outside the camp, whereupon the one who burns it is washed before he reenters the camp. The realm outside the camp represents the sphere of impurity, and the realm inside the camp represents the sphere of purity and sanctity, therefore one can only reenter the camp after having washed oneself, if one has been dealing with the dead body of a sacrificial victim. The ritual ends with the people located inside the camp, their sins having been atoned for through the blood of the ritual. They are located within the sacred and cleansed realm which the camp represents, together with the high priest, but separated from the carcasses of the sacrifices. The boundaries of the camp, representing one of the concentric circles of holiness guarding the holy of holies, are thus integral to the sacrificial ritual itself.

In Hebrews 13:11 the author recapitulates the part of the ritual which demands that the blood be separated from the body of the Yom Kippur sacrifice. This clearly alludes to Leviticus 16:27. In Hebrews 13:12 the author moves to apply this to the death of Jesus, but we are not told about how the body and blood of Jesus were separated as he died, nor are we told about how Jesus entered the holy of holies with his own blood, as high priest. It is this scene of entrance which has served as the basis for interpreting the Christ event in light of

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863 See discussion in 5.3.1.
864 In this section I am very much indebted to Helmut Koester’s insightful discussion of Hebrews 13 (“‘Outside the Camp’: Hebrews 13.9–14,” HTR 55 [1962]: 299–315), and I will later enter into critical discussion regarding his main thesis.
865 It seems to me that James Thompson makes this mistake when he claims that the use of the Yom Kippur symbolism in Hebrews 13:11–12 “corresponds to the author’s regular interpretation of the levitical cultus as a prototype of the work of Christ” (“Outside the Camp: A Study of Heb 13:9–14,” CBQ 40 [1978]: 53–63 [59]).
Yom Kippur earlier in the homily. Instead of having this interpretation rehearsed, we are told that Jesus himself, not just his body, suffered outside the gates in order that he might sanctify the people through his blood. This indicates that the Yom Kippur typology is used in a significantly different way than has been the case previously. This shift of focus prepares for the surprising application which confronts us in 13:13: “let us therefore leave the camp.” In Hebrews’ version of the ritual, it does not end with the people located inside the camp, but with a solemn exhortation to leave the camp, in order to be where Jesus is. The sanctified people are called to be where the suffering body of Jesus was, not to be separated from it by the boundaries of the camp.

Michel comments on 13:11–13, claiming that the parallel between the Yom Kippur ritual and Jesus’ death is inaccurate. However, the typology is not inaccurate, it is subversive, that is, not necessarily with regard to the opinions of some specific “opponents,” but to the Yom Kippur ritual itself, as prescribed in Leviticus 16, as well as the “ritual map” that the Yom Kippur ritual presupposes. I would argue that there is every reason to believe that the author is conscious of what he is doing, for the structure of the Yom Kippur ritual is not abandoned, nor is it followed only half-way through. It followed quite closely; but only in order to be overturned. 13:13 seems to fill its rhetorical function in the author’s argument, precisely by virtue of the surprising nature of the call to go outside. This surprising turn in the author’s argument is best explained through the fact that he, for the first time so far in the homily, brings his sacrificial interpretation of the Christ event to bear on the concrete circumstances of Jesus’ death. When doing so he was faced with some obvious problems. Jesus’ death did not take place in any earthly sanctuary, and was not carried out by priests as

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866 Michel, Hebräer, 508.
867 Thus correctly Mackie, Eschatology and Exhortation, 141.
868 Now, there is certainly no way of knowing exactly which written or oral traditions were available to the author. There is therefore also no way of knowing for sure if he was familiar with Leviticus 16 and what sort of Vorlage he would have had available. However, there is one important factor which suggests that the author was relying on written tradition with regard to the Yom Kippur ritual, which at the very least had a high degree of affinity with the Septuagint version of Leviticus 16, and that is the terminology employed to describe the different portions of the sanctuary. See the helpful discussion in Hofius, Vorhang, 56–58.
869 I thus disagree with Thompson (“A Study,” 59), who writes: “The author is not concerned that this typological correspondence breaks down, inasmuch as the blood of Jesus, unlike that of sacrificial animals, is shed ‘outside.’” It seems to me that the author is very much concerned with precisely this fact, and that he consciously focuses on this “typological break-down.”
870 David Allen correctly perceives that there is a mismatch between Leviticus 16:27 and Hebrews 13:11–12, and he argues convincingly that it is problematic to assume that Hebrews simply makes an inaccurate argument at this juncture. However, the solution he offers, when he argues that 13:11–12 allude to a variety of different Scriptural passages, is not convincing. See “Why Bother Going Outside?: The Use of the Old Testament in Heb 13:10–16,” in The Scriptures of Israel in Jewish and Christian Tradition: Essays in Honour of Maarten J. J. Menken (ed. B. Koet, S. Moyise, and J. Verheyden; NovTSup 148; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 239–252.
872 I thus take the comment on Jesus’ death outside the gates as a reference to his historical death. Thus also Thurén, Lobopfer, 91. Contra Filson (Yesterday, 45), who writes that the author was not “concerned seriously with earthly geography,” and that “even the relation of the crucifixion to Jerusalem and specifically to a spot ‘outside the gate’ (13:12) is a minor point in his total view.”
part of a ritual. Jesus’ death thus seems to directly conflict with the typology the author has tried to develop. Jesus surely did cross the concentric circles of holiness in Jerusalem, but he did so in the “wrong” direction. In dealing with these concrete circumstances, the simple type-antitype structure could simply not be retained. That which took place in the holy city Jerusalem, did not at all resemble that which according to the author took place in the heavenly sanctuary. The temple in Jerusalem did not house the fulfillment of the Mosaic sacrificial cult; this fulfillment took place in the realm of the impure. If Jesus’ death did resemble the Yom Kippur ritual, it did so in a very disturbing way.

6.4.2 “In Order to Sanctify the People through His Blood”

The provocative and creative reconfiguration of the Yom Kippur event has implications for the identity of the people who partake in the ritual. In the context of the old covenant, the Yom Kippur ritual was an annual event which was meant to reestablish Israel’s identity as standing in a covenant relationship with God. The people are cleansed in order that they might live in the presence of God (Lev 16:30), and their sanctuary is cleansed and atoned for (16:20) in order for it to be a sacred place wherein God can dwell among his people. All the sins of the people are symbolically removed from the camp through a solemn ritual (16:21). The camp functions as the locus for a renewed, re-stabilized and re-established relationship between God and his people. The Yom Kippur ritual functions to establish the relationship between God and his people in Hebrews 13:11–13 too, but in a very different way. Jesus’ suffering outside the gates of the city is said to have taken place, in order that the people would be sanctified (ἵνα ἁγιάσῃ διὰ τοῦ ἱδίου αἵματος τὸν λαόν, 13:12). The purpose of the ritual is, according to Hebrews, that God’s people should be established as a holy people, set apart for God, and it is implicitly emphasized that this sanctification is to take place through the new covenant, for when it is emphasized that Jesus sanctified the people through his own blood, this points back to the already established contrast between animal blood and the blood of Jesus (cf. 9:11–14). This phrase thus recalls the superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice, in implicit contrast to the old covenant.

It is paradoxical that Jesus’ suffering in the realm of the impure results in sanctification. God’s people are consecrated and set apart, but still called to cross the boundaries which set them apart from the realm of the impure. God’s people are not equipped once again to inhabit the camp, nor are they called to enter the most sacred parts of the camp. The camp is not re-established as the locus for a God’s covenant relationship with Israel. Instead, the people are now exhorted to go to Jesus, to be with him, outside their own camp. God’s people are to leave the sphere which was assumed to be sacred space, in order to bear Jesus’ shame with him. The ritual map, upon which boundaries between sacred and impure are drawn, is redrafted, and God’s people are relocated on the map. The death of Jesus turns out to have

873 Cf. Ina Willi-Plein who writes: “All this shows clearly that the purpose of the special ritual of the day is the ‘repair’ of communication with God that has been endangered by contamination of the sacred place and persons” (“Some Remarks on Hebrews from the Viewpoint of Old Testament Exegesis,” in Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights [ed. G. Gelardini; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005], 25–36 [31]).

874 Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra writes: “The author exhorts his readers to leave the camp after Jesus sanctified them by his suffering outside the camp. The sanctification is no longer a condition to enter the camp but to
destabilized the boundaries presupposed in the ritual of Leviticus 16, and the interpretation of his death is therefore ripe with potential for rearticulating what it means to be an insider, to belong to God’s sacred people. This provocative re-interpretation of the Yom Kippur ritual, and the playful re-imagination of inside and outside, provides a helpful starting point for understanding 13:9–11.

6.5 Hebrews 13:9–11

6.5.1 Strange and Unbeneficial Teaching Concerning Foods

In 13:9 the community is exhorted not to be led away by different and strange teaching. This openly phrased exhortation, which might include several different heresies, is then specified by the author, who sets up a contrast between two ways of strengthening the heart: food and grace. Having one’s heart strengthened by grace is said to be good, whereas those who “walk in” (cf. περιπατοῦντες) foods are said to receive no benefit from it. The γάρ in 13:9 indicates that the contrast between the two different ways of strengthening the heart is meant as a comment on the strange teachings. The strange teaching is to be dismissed as useless because food does not strengthen the heart. The strange teachings must therefore include teaching about food.

That which is of benefit (cf. ὁφελήσαται) should be understood to mean that through which one effectively obtains salvation (cf. cognates of the same term in 4:2 and 7:18). Grace conveys such benefit (2:9), but food does not (9:10). Hebrews regularly emphasizes that only the things which affect the inner part of a person – the heart, and the consciousness – provide the kind of redemption which humans need (9:10; 9:13–14; 10:2; 10:22). The contrast in 13:9, between food and grace, between that which builds up the heart and that which is of no benefit, seems therefore to tie in with this established discourse. If we situate 13:9 within this discourse, we are also given a clue about what kind of teachings concerning foods the author might be referring to. In 9:9–10 the author dismisses gifts and offerings brought forth in the first tent as merely being a matter of (μόνον ἐπί) food, drink and ablutions. These are fleshly regulations not capable of perfecting the one who serves, and which were therefore only imposed until the time of correction. Not only does the key term βρώματα appear in both texts, it does so within a context which discusses effective and ineffective means of perfecting the consciousness/strengthening the heart. Whereas it is quite difficult to discern what kind of teachings the author might be referring to in 13:9 – a fact which has led some commentators to assume that he is not referring to any particular heresy at all – the issue in

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875 Taking note of the subversive nature of the re-interpretation of the Yom Kippur ritual, Ellingworth (Hebrews, 709) even speaks of a “complete rupture with the old system.”
876 Thus Ellingworth, Hebrews, 707.
877 Thus Thompson, “A Study,” 57.
878 I thus hold, with Koester (“Outside the Camp,” 307), that these are analogous expressions.
879 For instance Thompson, “A Study,” 56.
9:9–10 could be determined with a greater degree of precision. In 9:9–10 we understand that foods, drinks and ablutions are related to the bringing forth of gifts and offerings (δῶρα τε καὶ θυσίαι, 9:9) within the context of the old covenant. This strongly suggests that the author is speaking about food and drink employed for sacrificial purposes. According to this view, it would also be natural to associate the term βαπτισμοί in 9:10 with ablutions which prepare for participation in sacrificial rituals and meals.

There seems to be a strong case suggesting that 13:9 also addresses the sacrificial employment of food in the context of the old covenant cult. The author is probably not refuting doctrines about abstinence from food, because he is not claiming that all kinds of food are permissible to eat (cf. Rom 14:14; Col 2:20–21; 1 Tim 4:3). The claim that it is grace and not foods which strengthens the heart, seems by implication to refute teaching which somehow highlights the benefit of eating. Moreover, in addition to the parallels already mentioned between 13:9 and 9:9–10, the reference to those who serve in the tent (ὁι τῇ σκηνῇ λατρεύοντες) in 13:10, closely parallels ὁ λατρεύων in the first tent mentioned in 9:9. There are therefore good reasons for holding that the author is recapitulating his discussion about cultic practice in the first tent in 9:9–10, when he takes issue with the strange doctrines concerning food in 13:9.

Internal textual evidence does not allow us to determine the practice referred to in 13:9 with a greater degree of precision than this. It is possible that the author simply refers to the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem, whether or not participation in it remained a realistic opportunity for the addressees. However, we do also have evidence for the celebration of cultic meals in the Diaspora. Philo seems to suggest that the Passover was not only celebrated in Jerusalem, but also occasionally in Jewish homes. He draws attention to how the people who escaped Egypt were so joyful that “they sacrificed at that time themselves out of their exceeding joy, without waiting for priests” (Spec. 2:146), and he continues by writing that “each house is at that time invested with the character and dignity of a temple, the victim being sacrificed so as to make a suitable feast for the man who has provided it and of those who are collected to share in the feast, being all duly purified with holy ablutions” (Spec. 2:148). Although there is some disagreement about whether Philo is to be taken allegorically, the plain understanding of this text suggests that he is talking about concrete sacrificial practice.

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880 Whether the food, drink and ablutions are viewed as an example of, or the basis of, offerings and gifts, is not crucial for us to discuss, and depends on how you take the preposition ἐπί. Cf. Lane, Hebrews, 2:216.

881 Thus Ellingworth, Hebrews, 708.

882 Contra Michel, Hebräer, 495.

883 Thus Koester, The Dwelling of God, 168.

884 I am unconvinced by the hypothesis that 13:9 is meant to reject a sacramental interpretation of the Eucharist, which is argued by Gerd Theissen, Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief (SNT 2; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1969), 76–79. I am also unconvinced by the hypothesis that it is meant to reject the eating of food offered to idols, argued by James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924), 233. Finally, I also find Franz Schierse’s suggestion, that 13:9 refers to a tendency towards syncretism, unpersuasive. See Verheißung und Heilsvollendung: Zur theologischen Grundfrage des Hebräerbriefs (MTS 9; München: Karl Zink Verlag, 1955), 187.

885 Because there is clearly a contrast between the new and old covenant, I find it unlikely that the practices in question are internal to the community. Contra Gräßer, Hebräer, 3:374.

886 Thus Sanders, Judaism, 133–34.
Further evidence for sacrificial dining in the Diaspora is found in Josephus, who discusses decrees concerning what Jews in the Diaspora were allowed to do and not do. According to Josephus the Roman authorities granted the Jews that they may “perform their sacred rites in accordance with the Jewish laws,” and they also promised to the Jews that “a place be given them in which they may gather together with their wives and children and offer their ancestral prayers and sacrifices to” (A. J. 14.258–260). Josephus also says that they were permitted to “contribute money to common meals and sacred rites” and even “to hold common meals” (A. J. 14.214–215). The fact that contributions are brought in both for common suppers and sacred rites could suggest that the suppers are somehow related to the sacred rites, possibly as a means through which Diaspora Jews could “participate” symbolically in the rituals taking place in Jerusalem.  

Regardless of whether Philo and Josephus provide us with credible information concerning actual practice in the Diaspora, they prove that it was possible to refer to sacrificial dining in the Diaspora as if this was an established practice, and if Philo and Josephus could do this, I see no reason to assume that the author of Hebrews could not have done the same. It is also conceivable that Hebrews could have written about such meals, as if they somehow represented the cult in Jerusalem, and thus also old covenant practice. Whatever the author might have attempted to refer to in 13:9, and however he might have been understood, it seems that there is a concrete reference in the comment about strange teaching concerning foods, which has something to do with the old covenant. The parallel between 9:9–10 and 13:9 is so close that it is difficult to dismiss it. The author rejects some kind of old covenant sacrificial practice related to foods, and claims that it is strange and without benefit.

In labeling the sacrificial use of food as ξένος, the author has chosen to frame the issue of sacrificial eating as a challenge to the identity of the community. That which is strange naturally belongs to the others and the outsiders. The implication would be that if the addressees only knew their identity they would also have been able to recognize old covenant teaching and practices as strange, and thus to be rejected. Windisch objects to this reading, claiming that Hebrews could not have referred to regulations of the old covenant as strange. However, if the author was addressing Jews who were familiar with the old covenant regulations, and perhaps also accustomed to taking part in the cultic practice about which it legislates, there might be a considerable degree of provocative irony in the author’s comment that precisely these teachings are strange. Such a use of irony in 13:9 would square with the overall reading I am trying to argue for, where notions of inside and outside are subverted and redefined in a surprising way. The result is that what was previously familiar has become strange.

887 Lindars (Theology, 10) claims that “the reference is probably to synagogue meals, held especially at festival times to give the worshippers a stronger sense of solidarity with the worship at the temple in Jerusalem.”

888 The fact that “food” seems to be used in this way in both 9:10 and 13:9 might also have implications for 12:16, where it is said of Esau that he traded away his birth-right for food.

889 Contra Moffatt (Hebrews, 233) who rejects the hypothesis that 13:9 might refer to what is described in 9:9–10.

890 “Strange” should probably not be taken in a strict geographical sense here. Thus Ellingworth, Hebrews, 706–707.

891 Windisch, Hebräer, 233.
6.5.2 The Exclusion of the Ministers in the Tent from the Altar

In 13:10 the argument takes a new turn, when the author claims that the audience has an altar, from which those who serve in the tent have no authority to eat. This claim is grounded in the Yom Kippur ritual (cf. ὅν γάρ ἐστιν in 13:11). The sacrifices on Yom Kippur were not to be eaten by those serving in the tent, but to be destroyed outside the camp. Taking this as her point of departure, Marie Isaacs has argued that the clue to 13:10 is to realize that there is simply no eating which takes place at the altar of the community, because Jesus did not die as the kind of sacrifice which could be eaten. Therefore there is also no “dining fellowship” – whether literary or symbolically – from which the ministers in the tent are excluded. There is also no polemic against “those who serve the tabernacle,” whoever they might be, not even on an implicit or literary level. The point is not to make an argument about exclusion per se, and we are therefore relieved of the task of proposing different solutions to the question of who the ministers in the tent might be. It is not the identity of the ministers in the tent, nor the nature of their exclusion, which is the focus, but the nature of Jesus’ sacrifice. The point is simply to emphasize that the kind of sacrifice Jesus’ death represented is one which could not be eaten. The discussion in both 13:9 and 13:10 is thus focused on whether or not sacrificial eating is a practice which should be endorsed, and the conclusion after 13:9 and 13:10 is that the death of Jesus does not give rise to such practices.

There is no doubt that the argument somehow draws upon the prohibition of eating the carcasses on the day of Yom Kippur. However, if the author simply wanted to say that the community possessed an altar from which one does not eat, there would have been no need to articulate this in terms of a prohibition, or lack of authority. Instead, he could simply have written that “we possess an altar from which one does not eat.” And even if the author – for some strange reason – found it helpful to articulate the “non-eating” in terms of a lack of authority, Isaacs’ interpretation fails to explain why it is precisely the ministers in the tent who are said to be excluded. Why did he not write that “we have an altar from which no one has been given authority to eat”? Claiming that 13:10 is focused on identifying the kind of sacrifice that Jesus’ death represented also fails to account for the introduction of the term “altar.” The author does not write that “we have a sacrifice from which the ministers in the tent have no authority to eat.” Isaacs’ reading thus fails to explain why the non-eating is framed in terms of exclusion, why the exclusion is phrased in terms of a lack of authority, why it is precisely the ministers in the tent who lack this authority, and why this lack of authority concerns the altar.

We are given a better starting point in Wright’s observation that what the author has to say in 13:10 is “full of irony.” I would argue, first of all, that there is a deliberate contrast

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892 Thus Marie Isaacs, “Hebrews 13:9–16 Revisited,” NTS 43 (1997): 268–84. Sverre Aalen, by contrast, argues that the critique of the old covenant cult lies precisely in that it did not allow the people to eat from the sacrifice, see “Das Abendmahl als Opfermahl im Neuen Testament,” NovT 6 (1963): 128–52 (146). However, Thurén (Lobopfer, 79) correctly objects that this reading fails to account for the δόλος in 13:12, which presupposes that the burning of the carcasses provides a positive explanation for the death of Jesus outside the gates.

893 Thus Windisch, Hebräer, 118–19.

894 Thus Koester, Hebrews, 570.

895 This point is made by Thurén, Lobopfer, 75–76.

between what is said in 13:9 and 13:10, a contrast which is lost if one assumes that 13:10 simply reinforces and grounds the rejection of sacrificial dining found in 13:9. After having read 13:9, it would have been natural to assume that the community in Hebrews, who only feed on the grace of God, would have been a community without an altar, and it is precisely this implicit assumption which is the rationale behind the statement in 13:10: quite contrary to what you might have thought, we do in fact have an altar. The claim to possess an altar is made in a creedal-like formula which is found several times in Hebrews: “we have a great high priest” (4:15; 8:1), “we have confidence for entrance into the sanctuary” (10:19), “we have an altar” (13:10). It is striking that the things the author claims the community has are the very things which they might appear to have lacked. 13:9 seems to say that the community should stay away from certain altars belonging to “others,” whereas 13:10 maintains that there are certain “others” who must stay away from the altar of the community. It is as if the tables have suddenly turned. It is not the “others” who are in possession of something attractive which the community must struggle to keep away from, it is the community which is in possession of something attractive and exclusive, in which the “others” are prevented from taking part. To claim that some others are excluded is also implicitly to create a sense of inclusion for those who identify as insiders. By creating a boundary, and by placing someone else on the outside, a “space” is created inside the boundaries for the addressees to “inhabit.”

For the contrast between 13:9 and 13:10 to be effective, it seems to presuppose that the “others” in 13:9 are somehow related to the “others” in 13:10. Granted that 13:9 should be read as a rejection of food employed for sacrificial purposes, with specific reference to the old covenant cult, it would also be natural to assume that the ministers in the tent should be understood as priests who minister in the context of the old covenant cult. It is certainly paradoxical that it is precisely the priests who are said to lack an altar. This alludes to and subverts a specific priestly prerogative (cf. Lev 7:6). The logic underlying the priestly prerogative is that it follows from their duty in ministering at the altar (Num 18:8–9; cf. also Heb 7:13). This is also how Paul understood it (1 Cor 9:13): “Do you not know that those who perform the temple services eat [what] belongs to the temple, and those who minister at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?” To claim that a priest has no right to eat from an altar, would therefore implicitly also mean he has lost his authority to minister. Appealing to this logic explains the fact that it is precisely the ministers in the tent – those who would normally have had privileged access to the altar and that which was sacrificed upon it – who are now said to be excluded. It is the very authority (cf. ἐξουσία, 13:10) of the priests which is made subject to discussion, and which is subverted (cf. Jub 31:16). The author is

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897 Thus Thurén, Lobopfter, 83. Contra Windisch, Hebräer, 234.
898 Thus also Weiß, Hebräer, 722.
899 Gäbel (Kulttheologie, 456–57) too argues that 13:10 must be understood in light of the priestly prerogative.
900 Ellingworth (Hebrews, 710) helpfully notes how 13:10 mirrors the statements made about Christ’s relationship to the old covenant altar in 7:13, the point being that Jesus’ priesthood has nothing to do with the old covenant altar, and that the Levitical priesthood has nothing to do with the new covenant altar.
901 I am thus claiming that the argument presupposes that the phrase “those who serve the tabernacle” should be taken with a specific reference to Levitical priests, and that the nature of the argument presupposes that it is precisely a priestly prerogative which is discussed. However, I would also allow for the possibility that the phrase “those who serve the tabernacle,” might be taken to more broadly represent
thus re-imagining what it means to be insider and outsider, and creating boundaries which function differently from those of the old covenant. It is those who are on the inside of the camp, the priests, who lack access to the altar. It is they who have become outsiders, even though they are inside the camp. The ritual map has been redrawn.

To realize this also seems to be a helpful way of explaining why the term “altar” is introduced to the discussion. Instead of trying to determine one specific referent for the term “altar,” it seems more helpful to reflect on what kind of function the altar is imagined to fill within the symbolic world created in Hebrews. My suggestion would be that the altar primarily symbolizes access to sacred space, and that it is introduced as a symbol because it relates to boundary crossing. We learn from Leviticus 17:6 that the altar, within the context of the old covenant, was placed near the entrance of the tent, in the outer court. This is so, claims Isaacs, because “in this thought-world, sacrifice is principally the means by which one enters sacred territory, not what goes on there once entry is attained.” Richard Nelson also maintains that the altar facilitates movement from the profane to the sacred. To sacrifice is to transfer a sacrificial victim from one sphere to another, from the sphere of human beings to the sphere of God. The altar represents the “intersection” of God’s world and the human world.

To have an altar is therefore to have access to the sacred. Focus on such access permeates Hebrews. The blood of Jesus, mentioned as the means of sanctification in 13:12, is that through which Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary, and through which a new and living way into this sanctuary has been dedicated. Jesus’ blood is thus that which makes entrance possible in Hebrews. In Hebrews 13:10–13, the author seems to introduce a new aspect to his theology of access. To access the true sanctuary in heaven, turns out to entail leaving the camp of the old covenant on earth. The priests of the old covenant have no authority within the context of the new covenant; they have no privileged access to the sacred. Conversely, the

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the old covenant cult as such, and anyone who takes part in it. On the ministers in the tent as representatives of the entire cult, see Thompson, “A Study,” 59.
902 Some have suggested that it refers to the Eucharistic table, but the evidence is sparse. I am inclined to think that Hebrews is primarily making a point about exclusion, and only implicitly about “eating.” It is notoriously difficult to know to what extent one could speak of “eating” from the altar of the community, whether that “eating” is literal or metaphorical, and, if metaphorical, what kind of metaphor we are talking about. This problem is not least created because Jesus’ death is interpreted in light of Yom Kippur, and because such sacrifices were normally not eaten. Thurén’s ingenious proposal for this problem is to distinguish between “sin offerings” and “sacrifices of praise,” and to suggest that the body of Christ is present on the altar to be “eaten,” qua “sacrifice of praise” and not qua “sin offering.” Although I would agree that the primary “activity” Hebrews envisions as taking place at the altar is a sacrifice of praise, I see no evidence to suggest that this sacrifice of praise is directly related to the body of Jesus, as Thurén’s interpretation seems to presuppose, or that this body could somehow be “eaten,” as Thurén (Lobopfer, 81) suggests: “Unser Altar ist durch das Lobopfer des Leibes Christi geweiht worden!”
903 Isaacs, “Revisited,” 275.
905 Isaacs (Sacred Space, 67) speaks of Hebrews as developing a “theology of access.”
906 Cf. 4.2.2
907 Thus Laub, Bekenntnis, 270. Mackie (Eschatology and Exhortation, 139–40) disputes this interpretation, on the grounds that the “milieu” of 13:13 is so different to the one in 10:19–25. It would seem me, though, that changing the “milieu” while discussing a similar topic is part of the author’s creative rhetorical move.
addressees have become strangers and outsiders with respect to the sacrifices of the old covenant; they stand outside such practices. I would thus suggest that the symbol of the altar should be understood in light of the subversive interpretation of the Yom Kippur ritual, according to which the sanctified people of God are led out into that which supposedly constituted the realm of the impure. According to this interpretation, the “inside” of the old covenant has become the “outside” of the new covenant. The author’s effort to redefine sacred space explains why he mentions the altar. The contrast with the old covenant cult explains why it is specifically the priests who are said to be excluded. The fact that this exclusion is framed in terms of authority seems to point towards a new covenant community, which is governed by alternative norms, and which is to be found outside the camp.

6.6 The Discourse on Outsider Status

6.6.1 Attempts at Detaching the Camp from the Old Covenant

There are many who have argued that it is a mistake to see 13:13, and the call to leave the camp, as specifically related to the old covenant cult, as I have argued above. Thompson explicitly claims that the Levitical cult is used in our passage as a “foil” for contrasting “the heavenly work of Christ.” His reading of 13:13 is therefore a good example of how the “foil-theory” is fleshed out in a specific passage. He emphasizes that we should not envision a specific heresy threatening the community, and he explicitly rejects the view that the passage is a call to leave “Judaism” or “Jerusalem.” Instead, he sees the real contrast in our passage as pertaining to the relationship between heaven and earth, that which does and that which does not remain. What the community needs to disassociate from, according to this view, is the realm of flesh, and all forms of material security. The cultic categories are employed in order to articulate what essentially amounts to a metaphysical claim, with social implications. The addressees must attach their aspirations and hopes to the abiding heavenly realm. The passage is a call to depart from the confines of this world, to embrace unworldliness.

Helmut Koester has a very different take on the passage. He agrees with Thompson in assuming that the author, despite the fact that he relies so heavily on language related to the old covenant cult, has no particular interest in this tradition. It is “not specifically the Jewish understanding of cult and sacrifice” which is discussed, but “all cultic performances anywhere . . . It is each and every way of salvation by means of cultic performances and sacrificial rites as such, that has become anachronistic and absurd.” The passage thus deals with cults on a meta-level. Mosaic regulations are discussed not because the author bothered specifically with these, nor because the audience was situated in a context where these were particularly important, but because they represent and exemplify the entire phenomena of cultic

908 Thompson, “A Study,” 58.
910 Moffatt (Hebrews, 234) also focuses on the passage as a call to unworldliness, but he claims the major dichotomy of the passage is interior-exterior: “Inwardness is the dominating thought of the entire paragraph.” He thus labels our author a “spiritual idealist.”
911 Koester, “‘Outside the Camp’,” 311.
sacrality.\textsuperscript{912} Hebrews presents us with an “anticultic antithesis.”\textsuperscript{913} This should not be understood as an attack on the material world as such, much less does it constitute a call to pilgrimage towards the heavenly reality. On the contrary, the addressees are challenged to live in the “uncleanliness of the world” – to move from the safe realm of the sacred, towards the secular.\textsuperscript{914}

Craig Koester offers yet another interpretation. For him it is the social side of the matter which stands at the center.\textsuperscript{915} The passage is not primarily a call to unworldliness or secularity, but an exhortation to accept social marginalization. However, he too thinks that some of terms taken from the cult are used to represent something more general: “Hebrews identifies the tent not so much with the Law as with the ‘camp,’ that is, the earthly ‘city’ in which Jesus’ followers are denounced.”\textsuperscript{916} This statement suggests that it is the “city” which is the dominating concept in his interpretation of the text. He can therefore conclude that the term “camp” means “urban life, with all its complexity.”\textsuperscript{917} The realm outside the camp is therefore quite generally described by Craig Koester, as “wherever one is denounced for Christ.”\textsuperscript{918}

The most radical of these suggestions is perhaps that offered by Thompson, where the cultic language functions almost as a “coded” way of bespeaking metaphysical matters.\textsuperscript{919} It is quite obvious that our author does operate with metaphysical distinctions, and that the old covenant is critiqued as fleshly in Hebrews, but it does not follow from these observations that the critique of the old covenant cult is reducible to a critique of the realm of flesh. As far as I can see, there is only one word in our entire passage which explicitly points to a metaphysical distinction between different realms of reality, namely μενώ in 13:14.\textsuperscript{920} This is less than what one would expect, if one held that metaphysical distinctions are the clue to the entire passage. Furthermore, it is striking that our passage does not portray Jesus as making an entrance into heaven, as one might perhaps have expected in Thompson’s interpretation. More generally, I also fail to see in what way the passage presents us with “the heavenly character of Jesus’ death.”\textsuperscript{921} Finally, Thompson relies heavily on Philo’s reading of Exodus 33:7, in order to suggest that “outside the camp” means outside the realm of flesh,\textsuperscript{922} but the primary Scriptural allusion which governs the phrase “outside the camp” in Hebrews is clearly

\textsuperscript{912} For a more recent defense of a similar interpretation, explicitly agreeing with Helmut Koester, see Gäbel, \textit{Kulttheologie}, 436 (n. 40), 445–46, 458–61.
\textsuperscript{913} Koester, “‘Outside the Camp’,” 303.
\textsuperscript{914} Koester, “‘Outside the Camp’,” 303.
\textsuperscript{915} Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 570–77. Although he also allows for the possibility that there might be something specifically Jewish or cultic, either in terms of teaching or practice, which the author perceived as a challenge to the community, he ultimately favors a more general reading of the passage, focusing on the challenges posed to the community by society as such, and by Roman authorities.
\textsuperscript{916} Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 570.
\textsuperscript{917} Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 571.
\textsuperscript{918} Koester, \textit{Hebrews}, 577.
\textsuperscript{919} For Thompson (“A Study”) “food” is understood to refer to worldliness in general (p. 57), “altar” means “heavenly sanctuary” (p. 59), the “ministers in the tent” are evoked to suggest “that the heavenly sanctuary of Christ is far more beneficial than the cultic activities which belong to the sphere of \textit{sarx}” (p. 59), and Jesus’ death outside the camp “shows that the Christian altar is not in the earthly sphere” (p. 60).
\textsuperscript{920} Another candidate might be βεβαιόω, in 13:9.
\textsuperscript{921} Thompson, “A Study,” 60. This critique against “dualist” interpretations of 13:13 is succinctly made by Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 734.
\textsuperscript{922} Cf. \textit{Leg.} 2.54–55; 3.46; \textit{Det.} 160; \textit{Ebr.} 95–100; \textit{Gig.} 54.
Leviticus 16:27–28. Even if one grants a secondary allusion to Exodus 33:7, there is nothing to suggest that our author would necessarily have interpreted this text in the same way that Philo did.\footnote{Attridge (Hebrews, 399) writes that “if our author was aware of the sort of symbolism represented by Philo, he exploits it for different purposes.” The most plausible “link” between Hebrews and Philo seems to be the idea that “leaving the camp” is somehow related to worshiping God. Thus Thurén, Lobopfer, 100–104.}

I am much more comfortable with the interpretation offered by Craig Koester, who correctly emphasizes that the call to accept social marginalization is part of the challenge of persevering in faith.\footnote{Cockerill (Hebrews, 700–702) argues convincingly that the realm outside the camp not only entails suffering and shame, but also exposure to impurity. Similarly, he maintains that the camp not only represents unbelieving society in general, but also the old covenant.} I agree with him in holding that such marginalization might take on different shapes in different contexts, since the audience “defined itself in a complex way in relation to Greco-Roman culture and Jewish subculture.”\footnote{Koester, Hebrews, 567.} I would also concede that there is a complex mélange of metaphors in our passage, suggesting more than one possible application of the call to leave the camp. My major disagreement with him seems to concern the train of thought in the passage, and what this implies for an understanding of the terms “camp” and “city” in 13:13–14. I would argue that there is a consistent focus on the rituals of the old covenant in 13:9–14, beginning with the critique of “foods,” continued in the mention of the ministers of the tent, climaxing in the interpretation of Jesus’ death, and registered in the exhortations in 13:13–14. It seems to me that the logic of this sequence of thought suggests that the terms “camp” and “city” have already been related to a criticism of the old covenant cult in 13:11–12, and that this relationship must also influence our reading of “camp” and “city” in 13:13–14. The camp in 13:13 must be understood in light of the camp in 13:11, and the city in 13:14 must be understood in light of the city in 13:12.\footnote{To be sure, I am not making a global argument to suggest that the key idea in a passage could never be found toward the end, or that the earlier parts of a passage always determine the meaning of what follows. Indeed, I have myself made a case for seeing 13:12 as the climax of 13:7–17 and interpreted 13:9–11 in light of 13:12. This perspective is further developed below.} This suggests that there is an implicit but specific critique of Jerusalem in 13:13–14, which is not reducible to a critique of “urban life.”\footnote{A possible way of accounting for the cultic flavour of the argument, and still retaining the most important insights from Craig Koester’s interpretation, would be to assume that the addressees were in a situation in which closer association with Jewish practice and communities, would somehow exempt them from harassment from Roman authorities. According to this view, one would have to assume that Jewish communities were treated with a higher degree of respect by Roman authorities than were non-Jewish communities within the Jesus movement. Disassociating with Jewish practice and community would then have had social implications vis-à-vis Roman authorities and urban society as such. However, it is not at all obvious that association with Jewish communities would yield social security.} The concept of a city integrates quite seamlessly into a discourse on the old cult and its ritual boundaries. I would argue that it is much harder to see sacrificial food, the ministers in the tent, and the realm outside the camp, as ways of depicting “urban life” more generally.\footnote{A possible way of accounting for the cultic flavour of the argument, and still retaining the most important insights from Craig Koester’s interpretation, would be to assume that the addressees were in a situation in which closer association with Jewish practice and communities, would somehow exempt them from harassment from Roman authorities. According to this view, one would have to assume that Jewish communities were treated with a higher degree of respect by Roman authorities than were non-Jewish communities within the Jesus movement. Disassociating with Jewish practice and community would then have had social implications vis-à-vis Roman authorities and urban society as such. However, it is not at all obvious that association with Jewish communities would yield social security.} I also fail to see that “urban life” is presented elsewhere in Hebrews as a major challenge, as is the case, for instance, in the book of Revelation.

I would also argue that one can make a strong positive case for suggesting that Hebrews 13:13 really is concerned with the crossing of ritual boundaries, not only social boundaries,
and that the author really is discussing a cultic matter. Helmut Koester is among those who have convinced me of this. He has drawn attention to how Hebrews 13:11–13 interprets not only Leviticus 16:27, but also 16:28. He is entirely correct in my opinion, to argue that there is a deliberate contrast between the Yom Kippur ritual as prescribed in Scripture, and the interpretation of Jesus’ death given in Hebrews, and he is also correct to argue that this provides the clue to the call to leave the camp. However, I am not convinced by the categories Helmut Koester employs to interpret this call, namely “sacred” and “secular.” Apart from the fact that the term “secularity” strikes me as problematic as an interpretive category for a first century text – let alone context – Helmut Koester’s interpretation seems to presuppose that all notions of sanctity have been deconstructed, and replaced by secular reality. This is simply not the case in Hebrews. Notions of sanctity are used to interpret the results of Jesus’ death, and the identity of his followers (2:11; 3:1; 10:14; 12:10; 12:14; 13:12). I thus agree with Isaacs who maintains that what we find in Hebrews is not a replacement of the sacred for the secular, but a “relocation of the sacred.”

If we assume that both the author and the addressees are situated in the Diaspora, they would have been exposed to a wide range of cultic practices, but the homily is steeped in language from one cultic tradition only. Although Hebrews’ argument by implication would deny the efficacy of all sorts of animal sacrifices, the author never actually argues against anything but the Levitical cult. Not once does he write anything to indicate that what he is arguing would also apply to all cultic practices, much less does he write anything to indicate that all cultic practices were equally relevant to him and his audience. Although we must assume that the author and his addressees were surrounded by all sorts of cultic practices, this fact is nowhere registered in the argument. As far as I can see there is therefore no positive evidence whatsoever to commend Helmut Koester’s thesis, that Hebrews argues against cultic performances as such. True enough, the texts in Hebrews which seem to address concrete practices, such as 9:9–10 and 13:9, are quite elusive, but elusive is not the same as general. It is possible to assume that there really were concrete practices which the author warned against, and that the addressees would have known precisely what was at stake, although we do not. However, even if we, for the sake of the argument, assume that no specific old covenant practices represented a challenge to the community, and that this is the reason why the author does not warn against specific practices related to the old covenant, it still does not follow that the author therefore had a general interest in cultic practices, social marginalization or unworlilness. It is quite conceivable that the author was specifically interested in the old covenant cult because that cult somehow represented a theological challenge which he thought that it was particularly important to address, although he was not interested in specific old covenant practices which he perceived as threatening the addressees.

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929 Isaacs, “Revisited,” 283.
930 Unlike Helmut Koester (“Outside the Camp,” 310–11), I fail to see anything in 9:1–10 to suggest that the “first tent” represents cultic performances as such. See my interpretation of this passage in 4.3.1.
931 Cf. 1.7.2, where I argue that there are other alternatives than to take Hebrews’ theological expositions as (i) comments on a specific social situation, or as (ii) general and universal ideas which are only extrinsically related to matters which have to do with Israel’s narrative and identity.
One thing that could have motivated the author to use terminology and imagery taken from Israel’s Scriptures, thereby situating the Christ event as having taken place in relation to Israel’s camp, is that it allows him to negotiate and reshape the notion of what it means to belong to God’s holy people. By drawing on terminology and imagery taken from Israel’s Scriptures, the author is able to qualify the exhortations he gives, by relating them to a specific conception of Israelite identity. To be located outside the camp is not simply a general description of social marginalization, secularity or unworldliness, it is a specific call to God’s holy people to transcend their own boundaries in face of a seminal event which took place in the context of a specific narrative. To bear Christ’s shame with him is not simply a matter of social ostracism, although it is this too, it is also a token of solidarity with God’s afflicted and chosen people, who have always experienced maltreatment while waiting in faith for the realization of God’s promises. It therefore does matter to the author that the camp in question is Israel’s camp.

6.7.2 Israel Outside of its Own Camp

I thus remain unconvinced by some of the major attempts which have been made at dislocating the call to leave the camp from Israel and the critique of the old covenant cult. The most plausible way to understand the term “camp” in 13:13 is to assume that it has something to do with the old covenant cult, with sacrificial dining and with Jerusalem, however, it does not follow that 13:13 should be read as a call to leave “Judaism,” as some commentators have suggested. Norman Young, for instance, writes concerning 13:13 that “the most obvious import of this exhortation is to make a clear break with Judaism and to embrace Christianity fully as a religion in its own right.”932 The addressees are thus to “sever the ties with Jerusalem . . . to make a clean break from Judaism both in understanding and practice.”933 This would mean to “leave the camp of Israel,” and to “cut their ties with the relatively safe ancestral religious environment of the synagogue.”934

This interpretation is also problematic, not least because it presupposes that there existed two more or less neatly defined entities, Judaism and Christianity, between which the addressees were in a position to choose. To assume this is not simply anachronistic, it is also to impose an interpretative framework which is entirely “foreign to the whole scope of the author’s thought, which moves consistently within the category of God’s twofold action on behalf of his one people.”935 Moreover, this interpretive framework does not allow for the paradoxical nature of the exhortation. I do agree with Young in holding that the camp the addressees are called to leave is the “camp of Israel.” I think there is no way of getting around this fact, by claiming that the “camp” symbolizes the material world, all sacred realms, urban life in general, or something else. However, what both Young and many others seem to miss is the fact that the addressees are called to leave the camp of Israel qua Israelites.936 Hebrews 13:13 does not address a group within Israel who are called to leave the rest of their people.

933 Young, “‘Bearing His Reproach,’” 243.
934 Young, “‘Bearing His Reproach,’” 249.
935 Ellingworth, Hebrews, 716.
936 Contra Filson (Yesterday, 63) who takes the “camp” to refer to “the people of Israel,” without taking note of the fact that it is precisely “the people” who are called to leave the camp.
behind (although that might, of course, be the result of the call). It appears as if it is the entire Israelite people who receive the call to leave their own camp, and to do so as Israelites.

The call to leave the camp should be understood to follow from a specific event which took place in the context of the history of a particular people. It is Israel’s cultic regulations which are discussed, it was outside Israel’s capital that Jesus suffered, and it is the people of Israel who are sanctified and called to leave their own camp. The audience is called to identify as Israelites in a fresh way. They are voluntarily to adopt a kind of wilderness existence, which – whatever else it might include of political, social and cultic outsider status – also renders them strangers to the cultic practices of those who are still occupied somehow with old covenant ways of worshiping God. In contrast to this, Hebrews maintains that being God’s people is a matter of bearing the reproach of Christ, while waiting for the city which is to come, and while bringing forth sacrifices which God will accept. This is what it looks like for Israel to be outside the camp.

6.7.3 Bearing the Reproach of Christ – and of God’s People

In 13:13 we are confronted with the motif of Christ’s shameful death. This motif has appeared several times in Hebrews (6:6; 12:3), as has the shame and suffering experienced by the community (10:32–34). The addressees are invited to reinterpret presumably shameful experiences as something positive; for instance to accept the loss of property with joy (10:34), or to view hardship as a sign that they truly are children of God (12:4–11). Of the ancestors of Scripture, who were apparently exposed to all sorts of shameful experiences, it is said ironically that the world was unworthy of them (11:38). They are presented, with Abraham as the key figure, as sojourners and strangers. Precisely their willingness to acknowledge this identity is said to be that which makes God proud to associate with them (11:16). This way of reconfiguring presumably shameful experiences, and claiming outsider identity as something positive, is ultimately grounded in the example of Jesus himself, who despised the shame of the cross (12:2–3). The fact that the Christ event provides the paradigm for re-interpreting shame and honor is evident in the comment about Moses, who is said to have deemed the reproach of Christ more valuable than the treasures of Egypt (11:25–26). This statement more or less prefigures the call to bear the reproach of Christ with him, found in 13:13.937

I argued in the previous chapter that the phrase “reproach of Christ” should be taken to refer to the crucifixion of Jesus, which, in turn, should be understood as an act of solidarity on Jesus’ behalf towards his own people. Jesus was willing to partake in the flesh and blood of his siblings, to share in their weakness and to bear the maltreatment that God’s people have always had to bear. This explains why Moses’ act of solidarity with the Israelites in 11:25, could be understood as pointing to Jesus’ crucifixion. This also implies that when the addressees are asked to bear the reproach of Christ in 13:13, they are simultaneously also asked to identify with the suffering people of God. They are asked to identify with those for whom this world was unworthy (11:38), as members of the people of outsiders. To take part in this existence is to accept temporal hardship and loss of status, which will be followed by reward and perfection. The Christ event is the hermeneutical key for unlocking the true positive significance of the suffering and shame experienced by all who, because they trust in

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937 For a more thorough treatment of these passages and the motif of shame in Hebrews, see 5.4.2.
the promises of God, are willing to suffer temporal denigration. The cross of Jesus is the starting point for a subversive theology of shame.

Craig Koester presents a possible objection to my interpretation of what it means to “leave the camp,” by pointing out how shame is quite a general concept in Hebrews, not necessarily bound up with standing outside the old covenant cult. He also draws attention to the way Moses, who is said to have partaken in the reproach of Christ (11:26), did not leave behind Jewish practice, but the Egyptian people. The question, though, is not whether the shame of the cross of Christ is exclusively interpreted in terms of a break with the old covenant cult, or communities related to it. The author clearly has a wider concept of what kind of experiences might render one a partaker of Christ’s cross, and its shame. There is obviously nothing in 11:25–26 or its immediate context, to suggest that Moses left behind Jewish practice, whatever that might have meant. The question seems to be whether Hebrews would have been able to include shame inflicted on those who leave behind the practices and/or communities of the old covenant as part of the shame which a follower of Jesus might be called to bear in a given situation, for the sake of the cross. I see no compelling reason to suppose that the answer to this question must be no.

6.7.4 Identifying with the City which is to Come

The call to leave the camp and bear the reproach of Jesus is grounded in the fact that the addressees have no remaining city here, but await the one which is to come (13:14). This relates back to the story about Abraham and the promises given to him. It is said of Abraham, as part of the story about his wandering towards the land promised to him (11:8–10), that he “was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God.” It is significant that it is emphasized that the city had “foundations,” because this indicates that it is hallmarked by its stability. The stable quality is further emphasized by the fact that the city is said to have God as its architect and maker, and when it is said that God has prepared (ἡτοίμασεν) this city for Abraham’s family (11:16), Hebrews 11:14–16 indicates that this city must be understood as part of a heavenly fatherland, which the patriarchs are said to have been seeking (cf. ἐπιζητοῦσιν, 11:14). This is the same word which is used about the audience in 13:14, when it is said that they seek (cf. ἐπιζητοῦμεν) the city which is to come. This suggests that they are seeking the same reality, while exhibiting the same kind of attitude.

Like Abraham and his family, they too are to regard themselves as sojourners on earth, and as citizens of the city to come.

It is natural to assume that the stable city spoken of in 11:10–16 and 13:14 is identical with the city described in 12:22–23, designated as the heavenly Jerusalem. This city must be understood as part of the unshakable kingdom which the addressees are said to be receiving (12:28). This kingdom is what will emerge when all that has been made will be shaken, in order that only that which cannot be shaken will remain (cf. μένη, 12:27). This points to 13:14, because it is precisely this lack of ability to remain (cf. μένουσα) which characterizes the cities which the addressees are said not to have. The contrast to such shakable cities, which will not remain, is a city which is “to come.” In 2:5 we are told about the coming world (ἡ οἰκουμένη ή μέλλουσαν, 2:5), which has been given Jesus to inherit, and of which Jesus’

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938 Koester, Hebrews, 571.
siblings have become coheirs. The city which is to come (ἡ μέλλουσα) partakes in this coming world. The addressees are thus invited to regard themselves as citizens of the city prepared for Abraham’s family, and to identify as members of that family. But how does this affect their relationship to the earthly Jerusalem?

6.7.5 Leaving Jerusalem

On the distinction between that which remains and that which does not, it matters little if the city which one does not have is named Rome, Corinth or Jerusalem, but we need to ask whether there is a specific reference to the earthly Jerusalem in 13:14, in addition to this general perspective. The earthly Jerusalem clearly does figure in 13:12, and the nature of the author’s argument suggests that this is more than a coincidence. I have argued that it is precisely Jerusalem’s status as the cultic center of the old covenant, which allows the author’s subversive Yom Kippur typology. I will now argue that Jerusalem never disappears completely from the scene, and that this does influence our understanding of 13:14. In order to argue this case, a helpful place to start is to observe how the argument moves back and forth between “camp” and “city.” That which according to Scripture takes place outside the camp (13:11), explains what happened to Jesus outside the gates of the city (13:12), and that which happened to Jesus outside the city, demands a reaction vis-à-vis the camp. This reaction is grounded in their relationship with cities here on earth, and the city which is to come (13:14). The argument thus presupposes some kind of identity between camp and city, which allows the author to move back and forth between these two entities, presupposing that what holds for the camp is relevant to the city, and vice versa. Because the “camp” mentioned in 13:11 clearly points to the earthly Jerusalem mentioned in 13:12, there is at least a strong possibility suggesting that “camp” in 13:13 might also do so.

Carl Mosser has correctly reminded us that, “for most of Israel’s history laws formulated in terms of camp and tabernacle had to be implemented in a world of city and temple.” The hermeneutical task of moving from camp and tabernacle to city and temple demanded that certain hermeneutical presuppositions be sorted out. One of the ways in which this was done was simply to say that “camp” equates to “city,” and “tent” equates to “temple.” Evidence for this hermeneutic is found in Qumran. The Temple Scroll takes legislation, which in the Pentateuch concerns the camp, and confers it directly to the city. In 4QMMT the rationale for doing so is made explicit (32–33): “And we think that the temple [is the place of the tent of meeting, and Jerusalem is the camp; and outside the camp is [outside Jerusalem].” Further (59–60): “For Jerusalem is the holy camp.” There is thus precedence for a stable symbolism...
according to which speaking about the “camp” was a way of referring to Jerusalem. The fact that the author moves from camp to Jerusalem in 13:11–12, in the context of a Scriptural exegesis, and without explaining what he was doing, suggests that he might have relied on an already established pattern of exegesis.

As we try to determine what it could mean to understand 13:13 as a call to leave Jerusalem, it is worth noting that the motif of a “righteous retreat from Jerusalem” has some prominence in Jewish tradition. The most striking example is perhaps the book of Jeremiah, where God asks Jeremiah and the entire people to surrender to the Chaldeans (21:9). This motif is picked up in both 2. and 4. Baruch, where Jeremiah and Baruch are asked to leave Jerusalem before God destroys it (2. Bar 2:1; 4. Bar 1:1). In the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 2:7–8, it is vividly described how Isaiah withdraws from Jerusalem and the people of Israel, in order to live in the mountains together with a group of prophets. If Hebrews is drawing on such traditions, as seems quite plausible to me, it is striking to note how Hebrews differs. There is no mention of any external power threatening Jerusalem in Hebrews, and there is no developed idea of a minority within Israel, a faithful remnant, who are called to separate from the people. Although the idea of a faithful remnant might be implied, we are given the impression that the entire people are to leave the camp, because a new covenant situation for God’s people has arrived.

More generally, I would argue that if my general take on 13:7–17 is correct, and if the call to leave the camp really is a call to leave behind the sphere of the old covenant cult, Jerusalem would have been the obvious city which one would associate with the old covenant cult. An implicit reference to Jerusalem in 13:14 as the city which the audience does not have would also have agreed well with the chiastic structure argued for in the beginning of this chapter. According to this structure, the claim to have an altar contrasts with the claim not to have any earthly city. I would argue that this contrast makes much better sense if we assume an implicit but specific reference to Jerusalem in 13:14. Precisely the fact that the addressees have an altar, which grants access to the realm outside the camp, explains why they cannot also have the earthly Jerusalem as their city. Finally, our analyses of the outsider motif in Hebrews 11 showed that Abraham and his family were not only outsiders in the world as such, although they were this too, but that they were also outsiders in the land of Canaan. Sojourner identity is not only developed in terms of a general contrast between heaven and earth in Hebrews, but also with specific reference to the promises given to Abraham. Abraham’s family figure as sojourners within a redemptive historical context, focused on how and when God would fulfill the promises he gave to Abraham. By way of analogy it would have been natural to assume that the outsider motif in 13:13–14 conformed to a similar pattern, and that there is a specific reference to Jerusalem in this passage, just as there was a specific reference to Canaan in 4:9 and 11:10.

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945 Cf. also 1QM 3:11–16.
946 Thus also Attridge, “Hebrews and the Scrolls,” 340.
947 Cf. also Pesiqta Rabbati 26:6.
948 It is worth noting that Hebrews 11:37–38 shows affinities with the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah.
949 Thus correctly Gäbel, Kulttheologie, 448, 454.
950 Cf. discussion in 5.6.4.
There is thus a strong cumulative case for seeing an implicit reference to Jerusalem in 13:13–14. The call to “leave the camp” would thus entail the call to “leave Jerusalem,” and the author is probably thinking particularly about the earthly Jerusalem, when he says that we have no abiding city here. This is not to say that our passage says nothing more than this, but that it does not say less. The question remains, though, what it would mean to leave Jerusalem, granted that this city does not remain. Stökl Ben Ezra claims that “the author is asking his audience in a concrete, geographical sense to leave Jerusalem and its temple and wait for the real, future sacred space.” This presupposes both that the addressees are situated in Jerusalem, and that Hebrews predates the destruction of the temple. Although this cannot be ruled out, both of these claims are highly contestable. It seems more prudent to articulate an understanding of 13:13–14 which includes a reference to Jerusalem, without presupposing a specific and contestable historical location for the text and the addressees.

If one supposes that “Jerusalem” is alluded to as an evocative way of targeting the cultic, political and geographical center of the old covenant, “leaving Jerusalem” might take on different meanings depending on the precise historical location of the addressees. It would, in any event, imply a way of identifying as God’s people which was not focused on Jerusalem as the key geographical, political and cultic center. This disassociating with Jerusalem would entail the implicit judgment that it, like all other cities on earth, would be subject to decay and shaking when the judgment of the Lord comes. Not even Jerusalem will survive. However, it would also imply that Jerusalem, unlike all other cities, has been made subject to this judgment, at least partly, because Jerusalem rejected the true high priest of God’s people. God’s people must therefore risk existing outside these boundaries, while they wait for the coming of the heavenly Jerusalem. They are exiled outside the gates of their own city, just as their leader was, and they will not enter God’s city again, before they fully share in the life of the heavenly Jerusalem.

6.7.6 Worship While Waiting for the City to Come

If we suppose that the earthly Jerusalem does figure implicitly in 13:13–14, this would better explain why the author in 13:15–16 “suddenly” exhorts the community to bring forth spiritual sacrifices. If 13:13–14 were only concerned with more general matters such as the experience of shame, the willingness to accept social ostracism, or disassociation from the material world, we would have expected 13:15–16 to sound something like the following: “Let us therefore endure in the race set before us, unconcerned about the shame and hardship inflicted on us by those in charge in this perishable world.” If, on the contrary, Jerusalem is implicitly

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953 There is reason to think that attachment to Jerusalem would have been quite strong, even among Jews living in the Diaspora. Such a connection could have been created through the praxis of praying faced towards Jerusalem, or feasting in the synagogues during feasts in the temple. For discussion, see Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 65.
954 There might even be an implicit irony in the fact that Moses left *Egypt* in order to bear Christ’s reproach, while the addressees are now called to leave behind *Jerusalem* in order to do the same. Compare Revelation 11:8: “Their corpses will lie in the main street of the great city, which has the symbolic names ‘Sodom’ and ‘Egypt,’ where indeed their Lord was crucified.”

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targeted as the city which the addressees lack, then it makes perfect sense that they now have to bear forth sacrifices in a spiritual and not concrete sense, through their high priest. Worship which is mediated through Jesus is understood in Hebrews in terms of approaching the heavenly sanctuary that Christ entered, and to partake in the reality which is to come, even before it is at hand.955 It is, as it were, to practice the identity as citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, while one is in the process of receiving the unshakable kingdom. The kind of worship which Hebrews promotes in 13:15–16, thanksgiving and doing good, are interpreted as sacrifices which are well pleasing to God, and as such it contrasts with the old covenant sacrificial cult.956 The reconfiguration of the ritual map, the redefinition of inside and outside, holy and profane, is thus interwoven with a new conception of worship mediated through Jesus. To approach God’s presence in heaven, qua recipients the terms of the new covenant, is at the center of the vision of what it looks like to belong to the Israel which has been called to leave its own camp.957

6.7 God’s People on the Margins – A Theoretical Perspective

Our passage deals with an event – the death of Jesus – which is given a sacrificial interpretation, and which is said to have affected the standing of God’s people. The death of Jesus is understood as fulfilling the Yom Kippur. It is important to note that an intricate relationship exists between rituals and identity. Rituals provide the participant with an identity qua participant which transcends their personal identity: “In ritual the personal identity of participants is temporarily suspended, as their subjective self-definitions are irrelevant for the definition of the practices as ritual. What ritual performances seem to achieve is a distinctive way of relating the individual person to superindividual structure, while at the same time realizing that structure by means of individual embodiment.”958 Rituals thus grant access to a reality which transcends everyday life, a “superindividual structure,” on the basis of which it is possible to articulate an identity which all the participants of the ritual share qua participants in the ritual. Rituals could thus function as a site for developing identity, in light of some perceived notion of transcendent reality.

Now, my suggestion is that we explore what happens on a rhetorical level in the text of Hebrews, when the Christ event is interpreted as a fulfillment of the Yom Kippur ritual, in light of how rituals function on a performative level vis-à-vis the formation of the identity of their participants. Nelson helpfully distinguishes between three different types of sacrificial practice in ancient Israel: (i) those which aim at status maintenance, (ii) those which aim at

955 See 4.2.
956 On the motif of offering praise, see Ps 50 (49):14, 23. On the phrase “fruit of the lips,” see Hos 14:3 (LXX).
957 It is noteworthy that Thurén argues that the call to bring forth worship is the center of chapter 13. Although I would agree that this is the central hortative outcome of 13:7–17, I am not entirely convinced by his structure and the limited role he allows for 13:10–14 (Lobopfer, especially 74–75).
status reversal, (iii) and those which aim at status elevation.\(^{959}\) The daily sacrifices in the temple represent sacrifices, the aim of which, were to maintain a given status. The Yom Kippur ritual, however, functioned to reverse a given status. It was meant to restore a situation in which the sins of God’s people were atoned for, with the result that their relationship with God could go on.\(^{960}\) Finally, there were also rituals which conferred unto someone an irreversible transfer of status. Such rituals function to transpose persons from one social role to another. An example of this would be priestly installations. The rituals which aim at status elevation are particularly potent when it comes to the shaping of the identity of its participants. The “passengers” in such rituals, those who are in the process of being given a new social status, are for a short time left in a state of being that is in between two well defined social statuses.\(^{961}\) They are on the threshold, on the margin, in a so called “liminal state.”\(^{962}\) Nelson elaborates: “This liminal state is a period of humiliation and ordeal, but also of sacrality and power. The logic of the ‘cultural map’ is in abeyance in the liminal state. The boundaries between clean and unclean, holy and profane soften. The rules of society are temporarily suspended.”\(^{963}\)

It has long been recognized that Hebrews emphasizes the once and for all nature of the death of Jesus, as opposed to the continuing and repeatable nature of the old covenant sacrificial cult, and the annual celebration of the Yom Kippur ritual. To my knowledge this contrast has not been explored from the perspective of ritual theory, let alone discussed in terms of how it functions vis-à-vis the identity of the addressees of the text.\(^{964}\) It seems to me that it would be possible to describe what takes place in Hebrews, in terms of the Yom Kippur ritual changing function. What used to be a scheduled and repeatable ritual aimed at reversing a given status and bringing things back to normal, has been transformed into a once-and-for-all ritual event conferring an irreversible transfer of status to God’s people.\(^{965}\) That which used to be a socially stabilizing ritual which brought the world back to its proper order, and secured the place of God’s people in it, has become a destabilizing ritual which places God’s people in a liminal state, preparing them for entering a new mode of existence.\(^{966}\) This would suggest that the Yom Kippur ritual has become, as it were, a “rite of passage,” the passengers being God’s people.\(^{967}\) It is not only Jesus who partook in the fulfillment of the Yom Kippur

\(^{959}\) Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 55.

\(^{960}\) Some would perhaps disagree with Nelson, and claim that the Yom Kippur ritual mainly maintained, rather than reversed, the situation of God’s people. But the distinction is not really vital to my argument.


\(^{962}\) Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 58

\(^{963}\) Nelson, Raising up a Faithful Priest, 58.

\(^{964}\) There have been attempts, though, to explore Hebrews in light of the concept “liminality.” See Karrer, Hebräer, 1:48–53. For a “liminality” perspective on the call to leave the camp, see deSilva, Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective, 152–58; and deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 308–12.


\(^{966}\) I am, of course, using the term “liminal” in a metaphorical sense, and not to refer to a time span within an actual ritual.

\(^{967}\) William G. Johnson has arrived at a similar conclusion, by means of a phenomenological approach to “pilgrimage.” He claims that “pilgrimage” as such must be understood as a rite of passage, involving (i)
ritual; the audience also participated in the ritual event of the death of Jesus. They too will
have to cross a ritual boundary, and leave the camp. It is striking to observe how the identity
of God’s people, as described in our passage, matches the way the liminal state is described in
ritual theory. They find themselves living in a world where old rules have been suspended,
and where boundaries are softened or re-configured. They are vulnerable, but at the same time
filled with power and sanctity. The once and for all death of Jesus has therefore not only
changed the Yom Kippur ritual as such, it has also significantly shaped the identity of its
participants, God’s people.

6.8 Conclusions

The last chapter in Hebrews ties membership of the sanctified people of God, to the notion of
standing outside the camp. This raises the question of how Israelite identity is shaped by the
call to leave the camp. I have argued that the addressees, in being called to leave their camp,
are enlisted in the long line of Israelites who were unable to find a stable home on earth, and
that they are pictured as waiting for the city which God prepared for Abraham. There is an
important element of social marginalization entailed in the call to leave the camp, interpreted
in terms of lack of citizenship and exposure to shame. However, the key concepts for
understanding what it means to belong outside the camp are cultic. The outsiders have their
own altar, and they are to regard old covenant sacrifices as strange teachings without benefit.
Instead of partaking in such practices, they are called to bring forth “sacrifices” of
thanksgiving, praise and good works, through Jesus. The only concrete issue discussed is
sacrificial dining of some sort, but the precise shape even of this practice is unknown to us.
We must concede that we do not know precisely what it would have looked like for the
addressees to break with the old covenant cult, but this agnosticism does not allow us to
assume that the issue at stake is reducible to some general principle. There might have been
strong theological reasons for the author to take issue with the old covenant and its cult, even
if it is hard to tell whether there was some pressing social issue at stake.

The contrast with the old covenant cult raises the question of how Israelite identity is
shaped by the tension between newness and continuity. In answering this question, I find it
crucial to maintain that the logic of the passage is best understood on the presupposition that
the camp in question is Israel’s camp. It is outside this camp that Jesus suffered and died, and
he did this according to the logic of the “ritual map” which undergirds the Yom Kippur ritual.
The Christ event should be understood as being situated in redemptive history, as part of the
history and ritual life of a particular people. There is a deliberate contrast between the Christ
event, as interpreted in Hebrews, and the way the Yom Kippur ritual is prescribed in

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968 Although I agree with Richard W. Johnson (Outside the Camp, 81) in holding that Hebrews is
concerned with the crossing of (ritual) boundaries, I think it is incorrect to infer from this observation that
Hebrews is written to an “implied society” with weak boundaries separating it from the outside. It is not
boundaries per se which are challenged and crossed, Hebrews is rather concerned with the specific
boundaries of the old covenant with which it takes issue. Nothing would therefore prevent the author from
upholding a different set of “boundaries” which could function to delimit and define the audience.
Scripture. The call to leave the camp is therefore surprising and paradoxical. The audience would have had reason to think that they belonged inside the camp, but something new has happened which makes it necessary to express Israelite identity in a fresh way.

It is possible to conceptualize the interpretation of Jesus’ death given in Hebrews, in terms of a central ritual in Israel changing function. The Yom Kippur ritual, which used to have a stabilizing function, and which reputedly secured the existence of Israel and its relationship to God, has become a once-and-for-all event which destabilizes and transforms Israel. It has become, as it were, a “rite of passage” which confers unto Israel an irreversible change of status. God’s people are thus called to accept existence in a “liminal” state, between secure social statuses. They find themselves in a situation in which the social and ritual map has been reorganized, where old rules and boundaries no longer apply in the same way. They are in the process of being integrated into a new reality and context, the world to come. When the process is finished, then the identity of Israel will become – through Jesus – that which it was always meant to be. The great paradox is that Israel needs to leave her own camp, in order to become this Israel.

This raises the question of whether Hebrews’ vision of Israel outside the camp challenges the good standing and Israelite identity of Jews that stood outside the Jesus movement. In answering this question, I find it important to state, that although I would maintain that the audience is called to leave Israel’s camp, I would also claim that they are called to do so qua Israelites. I have therefore rejected interpretations where the call to leave the camp is interpreted within an interpretative framework, where there are two different religious identities, Christian and Jewish, between which the addressees are challenged to choose. The camp which the addressees are called to leave does not belong to “others.” It is the people who are called to leave their own camp, now that they have been sanctified. This is not self-consciously articulated in terms of a break with the majority of Israel, by a faithful remnant. We are given the impression that the entire people is called to leave its camp, in order to wait for the city which is to come. However, Hebrews does mention some “ministers of the tent” who lack authority over the altar of the community (13:10), and Hebrews does reckon with some “others” who celebrate cultic meals, which Hebrews takes as representing the old covenant. Although the language is elusive, this could indicate that Hebrews is conscious of the fact that not all the people will want to leave their camp in order to bear the shame of Jesus. Those who remain within the camp are never explicitly identified as being Jews in Hebrews. However, since Jews outside the Jesus movement did not identify as followers of Jesus, one could argue that they by implication are identified as still standing within the boundaries of the camp. From the perspective of Hebrews, this is no longer where Israel belongs.

969 Ellingworth (Hebrews, 716) claims, with reference to 13:13, that the present location of the addressees by its very nature is “ambivalent and transitional.”
7. Conclusions

7.1 Which Questions Have Been Asked?

Paragraph 1.5.6 presents my three questions of research. My main question, asks what it would mean for the addressees to identify as part of God’s people. Secondly, there is the question of how this vision of Israelite identity relates to the paradox of Hebrews, understood as a tension between continuity and newness. The third question concerns whether the vision of Israelite identity found in Hebrews stands in conflict with Second Temple Jewish accounts of Israeliite identity that were current among Jews who were not part of the Jesus movement.

7.2 Israelite Identity in Hebrews – Some General Tendencies

The question of what it means for the addressees of Hebrews to identify as Israelites, has already been answered in the concluding summaries of all five main chapters, and there is no reason to repeat it all here. Nor is there any reason to anticipate my conclusions to the second and third question, which will be given below in the subsequent paragraphs. Instead, I will try to say something about the general tendency of the conclusions that have been reached.

The most obvious tendency is the recognition that convictions held about Jesus influence the conception of Israelite identity found in the homily. No matter what the issue at stake, it is interpreted in light of the Christ event. Jesus is the leader of God’s people, their priest, mediator and intercessor, the agent of God’s salvation, the one towards whom all previous redemptive history points, the one through whom a new covenant was inaugurated, the bringer of eschatological revelation, the perfect sacrifice, and the one Israel is obliged to go to even if it means leaving their own camp. The author seems almost incapable of unpacking what it means to be a member of God’s people, how one should act and behave as an Israelite, and what privileges are entailed in Israelite identity, without saying something about Jesus. To be an Israelite is therefore fundamentally construed in Hebrews in terms of being a follower of Jesus.

Another general tendency, related to the focus on Christ, is the way in which Israeliite identity is construed from an eschatological perspective in Hebrews. The question of how to reach the final goal, of how to obtain salvation, occupies the center of attention, and there is a clear consciousness of living within the final and decisive “last days” of history. This tends to lend a certain degree of absoluteness to the message in Hebrews; anything that does not bring about perfection has now become obsolete.

There is also a tendency in Hebrews to move focus away from earthly particularities, towards heavenly or transcendent absolutes. Worship is not focused on a specific earthly cult shrine, but a heavenly one. To reach the land promised to Abraham is to inhabit the world to come, not to reach an earthly land. To experience the exodus is to be liberated from the devil and from fear of death, not to triumph over some particular human opponents or enemies. There is no institutionalized priesthood on earth, although there are leaders. There is only one priest, and he is located in heaven. Israel is not presented as a nation, and not invested with
political power. There is no country and no city here on earth which could ever constitute the home of Israel, not even on a secondary level.\footnote{To be sure, this is not a statement about the present day political situation.}

A further general tendency, which arguably ties in with the disentanglement of Israelite identity from all kinds of worldly possessions, is the positive appropriation of presumably negative characteristics. To be an Israelite is to bear shame, to be an outsider, to lack a home, to be excluded from the camp, to experience temporal sufferings, and still to persevere in faith and hope. In all this, the crucifixion of Jesus functions as the paradigm and hermeneutical key. The positive appropriation of negative characteristics enables and equips the audience to maintain identity as God’s people, even in the face of suffering and hardship, and points towards a notion of identity which is countercultural.

Finally, I would argue that it has been made abundantly clear through my thesis that the addressees are encouraged to identify as members of God’s people. Nowhere does the author distinguish between identity as a follower of Jesus and identity as an Israelite, and there is no clear suggestion (although perhaps some indirect indications) that the Jesus movement only constitutes a remnant group within Israel. It almost appears as something self-evident and unproblematic in Hebrews that the narrative of Israel had to reach its climax in the Christ event, and that to be an Israelite now entails following Jesus.

However, this having been said, I would still maintain that there are some important tensions in Hebrews’ portrayal of Israelite identity that need to be dealt with, pertaining to the paradoxical relationship between newness and continuity in the homily.

7.3 Israelite Identity – in the Tension between Newness and Continuity

A fundamental continuity in Hebrews’ vision of Israelite identity, concerns that of terminology. Both those who lived before and after the Christ event, are designated as members of God’s people. There is no suggestion that a new name has been given to the followers of Jesus. Nowhere do we read about the creation of a new Israel or the rejection of an old Israel. However, it is one thing simply to retain a terminological continuity between Israel before and after the coming of Christ, and something different to make a substantial argument to demonstrate the plausibility of this implicit claim of continuity. Hebrews’ argument for the case of continuity is focused on the promises given to Abraham. God’s promises stand firm, have not changed, and are fulfilled in and through the Christ event. To belong to God’s people is therefore also to belong to the seed of Abraham. A crucial premise in this argument is that “the land” promised to Abraham is of a heavenly nature, reachable only in the world to come. This way of construing the nature of “the land” makes it more plausible to think of Jesus’ exaltation to heaven as the climax of God’s plan in fulfilling that God’s promise to Abraham. One could, I imagine, object on the grounds that this is hardly a persuasive argument for continuity, given the fact that the nature of the promise given to Abraham has been reconfigured. However, from the perspective of Hebrews, there is nothing new in this understanding of the promises – Abraham too knew perfectly well that God
intended to give him something substantially different from the piece of land to which he migrated in the days of his flesh.

The fact that “the land” promised to Abraham is understood to be of a heavenly nature, implies that several parts of the history of Israel, as retold in Scripture, have become irrelevant and that they are therefore “forgotten.” This is especially true, naturally enough, of those parts which somehow center on (re-)entering Canaan, the building of the temple, the establishing of the Davidic dynasty and political victories. It is primarily the parts of Israelite history that tell of suffering, homelessness, and faithful endurance, which are used as positive sources for articulating identity. The narrative of Israel is thus “filtered” through the Christ event. The author sees a line of continuity from the Scriptural ancestors, who lived as sojourners and strangers, to the audience. That line of continuity reaches its climax in the Christ event, where Jesus is understood to have borne the shame of God’s people on the cross, and to have experienced Israel’s future vindication in and through his exaltation. Hebrews certainly does claim, in other words, that there is a basic coherence to redemptive history, and that the audience shares in the same kind of identity as Abraham, Moses and the other faithful ancestors. That continuity is constituted by and interpreted in terms of a specific understanding of the Christ event.

This implies that there is a clear sense in Hebrews that something new has occurred, which has created a totally unprecedented situation for God’s people. The element of newness is focused on the cultic interpretation of the Christ event, and the contrast which has been created between the new and the old covenant. Although the Israelite is never castigated it is quite evident that some of her institutions are, such as the Levitical priesthood, the old covenant, and the earthly sanctuary. It is not only that, for historically contingent reasons, these institutions no longer “happen” to be available; they have become theologically impossible after the Christ event. In place of these institutions, Hebrews sets up an entire Christ-centered, heavenly cult, which now constitutes the legitimate site and context of worship, and argues that God has bound himself to his people through a distinctly new covenant. Hebrews is not adequately understood as supplementing the old order with a new one, or as renewing the old order, it should rather be understood as supplanting something old with something new.

The question, however, is how much of the old order has been rejected, and what kind of consequences this could have. Although Hebrews is quite reluctant to tease out the practical consequences, I have argued that the shift from the old to the new order cannot be reduced or isolated simply to cultic matters, although this issue occupies central attention. The shift from old to new also affects how the law is viewed and read, how legitimate worship is understood, how the earthly Jerusalem is viewed, and how notions of sanctity and impurity are construed. Although it is difficult to know how this would have translated into norms for community life, it is also hard to imagine that it would have had no practical consequences. Indeed, Hebrews uses quite strong language to describe the kind of breach with the past which the Christ event necessitates. Israel cannot continue to live as if nothing has happened. In highly evocative language, Hebrews calls Israel to leave her own camp, in order to be where Jesus is. Surely we must imagine that this has some kind of practical consequence.

Although it is quite clear that Hebrews does not envisage the covenant relationship between God and Israel as being over, it is equally clear that the terms of God’s covenant
relationship with his people have changed. Even if there is a basic coherence to redemptive history, according to Hebrews, that history also includes a fundamental shift from old to new. That shift will not leave Israel’s identity unchanged. It would seem, though, that the process of change is still “in progress” in Hebrews. Israel is destabilized and transformed, but it does not seem to have been fully worked out how Israel will emerge after that process of change. I have tentatively attempted to conceptualize this in terms of Israel being part of a rite of passage, now found in a “liminal” stage, between two stable identities. In other words, it seems to me that the ambiguities created through the tension between newness and continuity, are not finally resolved in Hebrews. Perhaps the author did not think it necessary to sort out all the tensions, because he perceived himself and his audience as standing on the threshold to the world to come.

7.4 Hebrews and Jews Outside the Jesus Movement

Given the fact that it is hard to imagine that the author could have been totally unaware of the fact that much of what he wrote would have been controversial, Hebrews seems curiously silent on the question of the standing of Jews outside the Jesus movement. Even in the face of this evident silence, I have tried to compare Hebrews to contemporaneous Jewish documents that originated outside the Jesus movement, attempting indirectly to address the question of whether there is some sort of conflict between Hebrews and typical Second Temple Jewish points of view. I have particularly focused on three issues. Does Hebrews present a vision of Israelite identity which implicitly or explicitly excludes all Jews who are not followers of Jesus? Are the ostensibly most offensive and radical assertions in Hebrews paralleled in contemporaneous Jewish sources that originated outside the Jesus movement? And does Hebrews de-legitimize sources of Israelite identity that we can reasonably assume were central to most Second Temple Jews standing outside the Jesus movement?

I would also argue that many of the results recorded above, concerning the tension between continuity and newness, implicitly pose the question of what a Jew outside the Jesus movement might be thought to say if confronted with the message of Hebrews. To be sure, this is in some ways a question which it is impossible to answer adequately, and it is also not the question to which I have given the most attention in this dissertation. The following reflections therefore remain somewhat tentative.

The very fact that one can attempt to set up a dialogue between Hebrews and Second Temple Jewish literature would seem to concede a crucial point to proponents of the in-house theory, since this is precisely the claim made by them – that it makes good sense to see Hebrews in the context of a Jewish in-house debate. This does indeed make very good sense, because Hebrews shares so many common interests, so much common terminology and so many central presuppositions with Second Temple Jewish literature that originated outside the Jesus movement. However, important though this observation might be, it does nothing to clarify the question of whether a “dialogue” between Hebrews and ancient Jewish literature

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971 Note that I have already explained in the introduction (1.5.6) that the three questions I pose will not be given equal attention, and that the third question will be given the least attention.
that originated outside the Jesus movement would unveil some fundamental conflicts, let alone what the implication of those conflicts might be in terms of identity.

I assume no one would dispute that there are significant points of difference and disagreement between Hebrews and the Second Temple Jewish literature that originated outside the Jesus movement when it comes to determining what it means to be a part of Israel. For one thing, Hebrews puts so much emphasis on the significance of Jesus, claiming that salvation is ultimately brought to Israel through him, and that he is the true leader and priest of God’s people. To be a faithful Israelite is therefore to be a follower of Jesus, now that God speaks to his people through him. These are viewpoints which obviously would not have been shared by Jews outside the Jesus movement. There clearly does seem to be an element of exclusivity to the vision of Israelite identity found in Hebrews, owing to the unique position given to Jesus. Secondly, and perhaps just as important, Hebrews also seems to de-legitimize several potentially “common sources” for articulating Israelite identity: the Levitical priesthood, the Sinai covenant, the temple in Jerusalem, the land of Judea, and the very idea that political nationhood is an ideal. In short, Hebrews seems to present its own fundamentals for Israelite identity, whilst at the same time rejecting several others.

True as this might be, I would imagine that a proponent of the in-house theory would reply as follows. Fierce debates went on all the time among Jews. Jews were accustomed to disagreeing on all sorts of matters, and there is nothing particularly offensive or problematic about Hebrews. Even if it is true that Hebrews is exclusivist, so were many other sectarian groups, and even the supposedly de-legitimizing claims found in Hebrews, are paralleled in Jewish sources. It would be possible, in light of this investigation, to challenge this line of argument in at least two ways. First, it would be possible to challenge the premise that the most radical assertions in Hebrews are paralleled in Jewish sources outside the Jesus movement. I have argued in both chapters 3 and 4 that providing Jewish parallels to the critique found in Hebrews of the old covenant and its cult is harder than many imagine. The claim that there was something inherently inferior to the Sinai covenant, and that a distinctly new covenant therefore had to be provided, is perhaps the feature of Hebrews where a parallel seems hardest to find, even though the language of a new covenant in and of itself is entirely traditional.

Secondly, however, it would also be possible to challenge the in-house argument on a more fundamental level. For it is one thing to provide a parallel to different paragraphs, claims and motifs found in Hebrews, and quite a different thing to provide a parallel to the entire argument in Hebrews. The argument from Second Temple Jewish parallels often seems to me to be too “atomistic,” when it is put to use to substantiate the in-house theory, for it might very well be that it is the combination of different motifs and claims in Hebrews, together with all the things one does not find in the homily, which ultimately constitutes the most significant “offense” in the homily. On the one hand, there is critique of the law, the Sinai covenant, the priesthood, animal sacrifices and any land theology with earthly-political implications. On the other hand, no emphasis is put on circumcision, Sabbath regulations, religious festivals, food taboos, or common ancestry. There are also no injunctions to keep the law or its commandments. In my opinion, the most significant of these observations is the fact that the critique of earthly cults and earthly land-theology is not in any way balanced by elevating the significance of the law. In addition to all of this, a very controversial doctrine –
the claim that Jesus is Son of God and high priest – assumes central and all-determining significance in the world view of Hebrews. I simply fail to see that this entire combination of motifs is paralleled in any Second Temple Jewish source or party outside the Jesus movement.

Another way to put this would be to say that Hebrews is on its way to creating a discourse which is quite different from the one which dominates among Second Temple Jews outside the Jesus movement. It is not only that Hebrews has a different or idiosyncratic conception of what it means to be a Torah-abiding and covenant-faithful member of God’s people. The case is rather that covenant faithfulness is discussed in a way which detaches it from being a Torah-abiding member of God’s people. Even though Hebrews does focus on what it means to be faithful to the covenant, and even though Hebrews grounds its argument in Scripture, the question of what it means to keep the Torah is never even raised, and therefore never answered. The Mosaic law is subject to quite strong criticism in Hebrews, but there is no apology to balance it. If nomism is taken to refer specifically to the Torah, and not abstractly to “plight,” Hebrews therefore cannot be labeled a representative for “covenantal nomism.” If the aspiration to keep the Torah in the right way is constitutive of Second Temple Jewish discourse on the question of what it means to identify as a member of God’s people, there is therefore a clear sense in which Hebrews, despite its so-called “Jewish” character, is not adequately understood as belonging within the boundaries of a Jewish in-house debate.

7.5 Beyond the Conflict Theory, Foil Theory and the In-House Theory

On the question of how my thesis relates to the conflict theory, foil theory and in-house theory (cf. 1.3), I would hope the answer is that it points beyond each of them.

The theory from which I am farthest removed is probably the foil theory. According to that theory, the concepts, stories, characters and problems in Scripture, which are dealt with in Hebrews, tend to be seen as merely extrinsic and instrumental to the issues that really are of interest to Hebrews. The characters are seen merely as examples of some general attitude or virtue. The Mosaic covenant is understood to represent cultic performances as such, and so forth. This implies a reading of Hebrews which is not focused on the horizontal and temporal perspectives of the text, but rather on its vertical aspects. Indeed, the foil theory tends to assume that the alleged tension between newness and continuity in Hebrews, which has occupied much of my attention, is not really a tension between newness and continuity after all. It is really a tension between heavenly and earthly, stable and perishable, fleshly and eternal.

Note that I am not here making a claim about the historical author and the historical addressees, and the question of whether keeping the law was important to them. For all I know, it could be that the author would have had many things to say to balance the views which are articulated in Hebrews, if he had been given a chance, and it might well be that the audience were keen on keeping the law, even if we suppose that this was not an important issue for the author. My claim is strictly confined to the argument in Hebrews, and the question of what kind of discourse we find there. As I have now attempted to argue, that discourse is not adequately labeled “covenantal nomism.” Especially in chapters 3, 5 and 6, I enter into direct dialogue with attempts to see the message in Hebrews as really being all about general principles, arguing against that view. To be sure, I would allow...
In contrast to this, I have maintained that Hebrews should be read as a genuine attempt to come to terms with issues concerning newness and continuity, which are understood as part of the quite specific story, which have to do with God’s dealings with a particular people, and which are not reducible to general principles. Proponents of both the conflict theory and the in-house theory would tend to agree with this claim. Moreover, they would actually also tend to agree with each other in holding that the question of newness and continuity in Hebrews translates (among other things) into a question about whether the (implied) addressees were Jews. Where they would tend to disagree, however, would be on the question of how the balance between newness and continuity in Hebrews should be assessed, how much disagreement Second Temple Judaism could bear, what kind of socio-historical context we should assume for Hebrews, and how typical or un-typical Hebrews is if compared to Second Temple Jewish texts. There is therefore a sense in which the in-house proponent would have to make a case for continuity, while the conflict proponent would have to make a case for newness.

In some ways, I have tried to enter this debate and assess the balance between newness and continuity, in other ways I have tried to reframe the debate. I have attempted to reframe the debate by taking focus away from the ethnic background of the addressees, and by claiming a minimalist view on the socio-historical setting Hebrews addresses, including assumptions regarding the process of “the parting of the ways.” Another way to put this would be to say that I have not taken the tension between newness and continuity in Hebrews to refer directly to some external matter – say, a contrast between two religions, two different religious institutions, or between the past and present identity of the addressees. Instead, I have attempted to interpret the tension between newness and continuity as being internal to the argument in Hebrews, and I have conceptualized this internal tension in Hebrews as being about God’s dealings with his one and only people, Israel. I have argued that Hebrews is not about two different peoples, or two different religious identities. It is the past, present and future of Israel which is subject to negotiation in Hebrews, as well as the question of what it means to identify as part of God’s people in good standing, now that the Christ event has taken place.

On the face of it, this would tend to suggest that I am closest to the in-house theory. It is clearly the conflict theory which suffers more from my choice of historical minimalism, given the fact that it has tended to be based on a clear assessment of the social historical context of Hebrews, how Hebrews relates to “the parting of the ways,” and what the past of the addressees looked like. Moreover, I agree with the in-house theory in holding that there is no advocacy for “Christianity” in Hebrews, and no rejection of the Jews. Rather, Hebrews sees Jesus as fulfilling Israel’s story without dissolving its identity. Indeed, the author even explicitly states that both Moses and Jesus and the addressees belong in the same “house” (3:5–6). These facts notwithstanding, my reading of Hebrews seems to differ from a typical in-house interpretation in at least two ways.

First of all, as concerns the balance between newness and continuity in Hebrews, it seems that I quite often tend to agree with proponents of the conflict theory. For instance, with

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for a vertical aspect to the message of Hebrews, but I would maintain that there is an important and non-reducible horizontal aspect as well.
regard to my account of the new covenant in Hebrews, the implications of the cult critique, or the call to leave the camp, I suspect that proponents of the in-house theory will not necessarily find my conclusions entirely congenial. Although I am not always comfortable with the conceptual framework within which the radical texts in Hebrews have tended to be read on the conflict theory, I also remain unconvinced by many of the typical attempts that have been made to suggest that these texts are less radical than they appear to be.

Secondly, as demonstrated in 7.4 above, I am not entirely convinced by the claim that Hebrews fits within a Jewish discourse, or that the radical texts in Hebrews are paralleled in Second Temple Jewish sources that originated outside the Jesus movement. I would not claim to know exactly how much disagreement Second Temple Judaism would be able to bear, and what kind of consequences it would have for a Jew if they adopted the views articulated in Hebrews. What I would maintain, though, is that it is very difficult to make a positive case for the Jewish identity for Hebrews’ addressees, by way of appeal to proposed Jewish parallels. At the end of the day, it seems to me that those proposed parallels go a long way in demonstrating the fact that Hebrews differs from Second Temple Jewish texts that originated outside the Jesus movement. The question of how to deal with this is not primarily for me to answer, though, but for those who have made Hebrews’ “fit” within an inner-Jewish discourse, a premise for their own views about the identity of the addressees.

All this seems to lead me towards a distinct position, which is not adequately described as a combination of the conflict theory and the in-house theory, because it in some respects moves beyond both of them. I have consistently tried to argue against a very intuitive assumption, which seems to underlie both the in-house theory and the conflict theory, and that is that a positive theology of Israel would necessarily tend to support the in-house theory. Paradoxically enough, I would maintain that the most challenging feature of Hebrews, for a Jew outside the Jesus movement, is the fact that Hebrews construes a very novel, radical and new vision of what Israelite identity is, while simultaneously claiming that this identity is entirely traditional, legitimately grounded in Scripture and applicable to God’s people.

This implies that the claim to continuity with the Israelite past does nothing at all to “balance” the provocative claim that something entirely new has happened in the history of Israel, it seems rather to make that challenge all the more pressing. The fact that Hebrews has a positive view of the Israelite past, and of certain Israelite ancestors, claiming that the promises of Abraham stand firm, does not create “common ground” with Jews outside the Jesus movement as long as that claim of continuity is grounded in controversial propositions regarding Jesus and the new situation brought about through him. The fact that the Scriptural past is claimed as heritage for the Jesus movement, by an author who shows a great measure of reverence towards the Scripture, and knowledge of typical Jewish ways of expounding it, would hardly have attracted the sympathy of Jews standing outside the Jesus movement, as far as I am able to understand.

7.6 The Relationship between the Message of Hebrews and its Reception

The question of how a Jew outside the Jesus movement might be thought to respond to Hebrews, which has been dealt with above, raises the question of the relationship between the
message of Hebrews and its reception. Early in this dissertation I presented the following quote: “Paradoxically enough, it is the writer of Heb. who – while passionately arguing along Jewish lines – moves furthest in the direction of the breach with Judaism that was later to take place.” This statement suggests how difficult it is to separate the message of Hebrews entirely from its reception. If we imagine, as a thought experiment, that the message in Hebrews was received and welcomed by all ancient Jews, and recognized by them as the legitimate way of expressing Israelite identity, it follows that much of what I have hypothesized concerning “Jews outside the Jesus movement” would simply have been irrelevant. In this scenario, we would actually have a historical situation which corresponds to the one in the text of Hebrews, where Jews outside the Jesus movement are absent. To a certain extent we must actually allow for the fact that the author could not have known how the message preached by the Jesus movement would be received by Jews, or how many would accept it, although he would probably have had some clue that it was controversial. The implications of the message of Hebrews, in terms of a potential identity conflict, are thus to a certain extent predicated on its reception, and on the question of whether the main tenets of its theology would have been accepted or rejected by the majority of Jews.

However, it is not only Hebrews’ reception among Jews that is of consequence, the message of Hebrews would also have been shaped if internalized by non-Jews. For a non-Jew to internalize the message of Hebrews, they would have to answer a question never directly posed or answered in the homily: what would it take for a non-Jew to be reckoned among Abraham’s descendants and as heir of the promises given to him? Although no answer is given to this question in Hebrews, I would maintain that there are few obstacles for an answer to be found there. Precisely because being a member of God’s people is not positively construed in terms of Jewish ethnicity, it would be quite easy to make a claim which is never actually made in Hebrews; that all ethnic groups are welcomed into the people of God, by virtue of being followers of Jesus.

History eventually did provide Hebrews with a reception, and it is nearly impossible for us to think that history away as we read the text. The homily primarily came to be read and interpreted in a context where most members of the Jesus movement were non-Jews, and where most Jews were not members of the Jesus movement. Such a context seems to me to pose the following challenge to anyone wanting to be faithful to the message of Hebrews: how do you distinguish between identity as Jewish, on the one hand, and identity as a member of God’s people in good standing, on the other? In the scenario outlined above, and given the message found in Hebrews, these two identities cannot simply be identical. Admittedly, this question is never raised and never answered in Hebrews. I have nevertheless attempted to demonstrate that it is possible and fruitful to give an account of what it means to be a member of God’ people in good standing according to Hebrews, without presupposing anything about the ethnic background of the historical and/or implied audience. The very fact that this has

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975 When I speak of non-Jews internalizing the message of Hebrews, I have in mind a positive reception, where the reader accepts the “role” the texts invites them to occupy. To internalize the message of Hebrews would therefore, among other things, imply seeing oneself as part of God’s people and as a follower of Jesus. It is certainly possible, though, to imagine that the message of Hebrews could have been difficult for some non-Jews to internalize, precisely because it is not explicitly said that non-Jews are welcomed into the people of God.
proved possible, suggests to me that identity as a Jew and identity as member of God’s people are already implicitly distinguished in Hebrews, as two, in principle, separable issues. Given a certain kind of reception history, it is not hard to see how that implicit distinction could have been made explicit.
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