

# Expanding the Letter to the Hebrews from Within

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

other articles, all posted on this Lectio Divina site. In the process of composing these documents a kind of unifying realization began to dawn. Actually it had been percolating just below the surface for some time, and I'd catch glimpse of it now and then. The "expansion" approach is perfectly fine but revealed a number of insights in need of expression which I couldn't quite bring to light as I wanted. Now in this document as well as the above mentioned two articles the process finally got under way. How did I start this process? First of all, their relative elusiveness turned out to be an advantage instead of a disadvantage. I decided not to search for insights in a direct fashion but decided upon an indirect approach, from the corner of my eye, but fully attentive to the text at hand.

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

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

A final observation for what it's worth before getting into the text. Composing this document necessitated frequent pauses. The reason? When reading Hebrews in the original Greek with the intent of building ideas around the text as they're presented here, automatically the text puts you in a kind of slow mode. Invariably this leads to

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

frequent pauses in order to take it all in. You don't do it on your own, but it's done to you, an amazing experience, really.

Please note that as we move further into the text, some transliterated words are followed by the minus sign in brackets, [-]. That means the word has occurred previously in one or more places. If the transliterated word is within a pair of parentheses, the minus sign will be free standing.

Additions to this document will be posted on a regular basis until complete. The scriptural translation is from the **Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition** (San Francisco, 2006).

## Chapter One

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

As for any relationship between the author and St. Paul, we don't know if the two were contemporaries, whether or not they knew each other or knew of each other. The question simply is irrelevant for our purposes here. Clearly a cursory look at the text reveals that our mystery man had something profound and original to say and was fully aware of it. Because of his supposedly inferior status, he wasn't recognized and had to live with this. Even if during his life people tended to associate him with St. Paul, he could care less. Usurping the apostle's ideas was the last thing that entered his mind. Instead, he wanted his own ideas to get out there as quickly and as efficiently as possible while at the same time enjoying his anonymity. Regardless, the contents of his book is remarkable. For others to take delight in it was all that concerned him. Everything else would be superfluous. Even much later when the association with St. Paul had been stripped away, the identity of our mystery man managed to elude detection and most likely will continue to do so.

As for the author, he isn't invisible in the absolute sense. Should we be quiet enough, we can hear him encouraging us to read on and not be concerned with his identity, what he'd deem a trivial matter. Nevertheless, we can get to know him on a level just as good if not better than any other New or Old Testament author. So let's us

comply to his silence while being aware of his encouraging support. The text itself is where he wants out attention to be. A caveat, if you will. Should anyone discover this person's identity, please don't inform us. It'd spoil everything.

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

The book <sup>2</sup> starts off with a certain flourish, not unlike a good story teller would. "God spoke of old," "our fathers" and "the prophets" are words that lend a certain drama and nostalgia, getting us in the mood to sit back and enjoy what is to follow. Also these people represent an era when God spoke directly through prophetic witnesses to them. Even though times have changed radically, they remain very much familiar and alive. In fact, readers and listeners of the time when Hebrews was written couldn't get enough of it. After all, what these people of later generations hear and learn of their ancestors is passed on to us. While the written record is important, the oral approach to teaching in the church was just as important if not more so. That means each generation is encouraged to listen in and make sure what he hears registers in his memory. Hopefully one generation will be able to pass it on to the succeeding generation. Such is how a tradition is maintained.

As for starting off with a flourish, note the two adverbs at the very beginning, *polumeros* and *polutropos*. The adjective *polus* (much, many) is prefaced to two nouns, making them into adverbs. They are *meros* and *tropos*, part or share and *tropos*, direct, course or way. And so we end up with many parts and many ways—components that require assembly—which is effected by God speaking or *laleo*. The context of this verb suggests a certain casualness God wishes to communicate to make those on the receiving end relaxed and better disposed to receive its contents. Associated with this

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

verb is the adverb *palai*, formerly, of old. What more could one ask for in order to prep not just the reader but for him to pass on what he is hearing to the generation?

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

Vs. 2 also uses *laleo* but in a very important way or more precisely, in *the* most important manner, that is, with respect to “a Son.” Note the lack of a definite article which means that in the mind of our anonymous author no alternative exists. Thus we have *laleo* with the dative of “us” and the preposition *en* or “in” prefaced to *Huios*, Son, “in Son.” So if this *laleo* is “to us in Son,” our author needs to specify the identity of this Son who lacks a proper name. Most people know his identity from other sources. The author does too but is coy the way he presents him. That goal is to fix people squarely within a frame of mind to accept an interpretation of Son as he sees the nascent church presenting it. If he can pull it off and get people interested, he will have accomplished a major goal. And so the importance of *laleo* -> us with dative case -> *Huios* [-] with the preposition *en* can't be stressed enough.

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

Quickly our author realized an immediate step had to be taken. He does this by having God appoint the Son as heir of all things, the one through whom he had created the ages. *Kleronomos* consists of two words: *kleros* or a lot and *nomos* or usage,

custom. What the Son has inherited is not something partial regardless of how wonderful it is but literally everything, *panton* (literally, 'of all'). As for the *tithemi* (to put or to place) involved, it's a direct consequence of *laleo* or to speak and implies permanence.

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

While still not divulging the name of the Son, our anonymous author continues reflecting on this equally anonymous person's nature. Perhaps he wants to keep it that way as long as possible, a kind of personal secret preference. Admittedly it's starting to get frustrating for first-time readers. After all, they're new to the faith and feel they feel they have a right to know more about the identity of this Son. Who can blame them?

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

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

representation or a few words or both. It is different from yet similar to the idea of an heir of vs. 2.

The idea of a *charakter* [-] conveying authority to the Son isn't for him alone though certainly it's intended as such. Included is the universe rendered as *ta panta*, literally "the all." That, of course, covers pretty much everything though it is secondary to the divine nature of the Son and the equally divine *charakter* he's bearing. This may seem a matter-of-fact statement but to people new to the faith it's an incredible insight. Despite the enormity of what they see around them in nature, especially the night sky, it's all secondary to the Son and God...actually almost too good to be true.

In addition to the Son with God impressed in him after the image of a stamp, we have him upholding "the all" (*ta panta* -). One can't but help think of the image of Atlas bearing the world. As for bearing this weight, the verb is *phero* meaning to carry around as something laid on oneself. Despite the immensity involved, the Son does it as lightly as we can imagine which is unlike the image of Atlas. That is to say, he does it by a *rhema* which is a spoken word, something for him uttered almost in a casual manner and in one instant. Associated with *rhema*, however, is *dunamis*, power or might which is exerted all at once yet with great discretion.

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

Once the Son had done this ritual *katharismos* he sits down, *kathizo*<sup>3</sup>. That means he could have gotten up from the same place or from another one, did what was necessary, and returned. In the meanwhile he was essentially standing. In the text at hand note the two occurrences of the preposition *en* or "in" with regard to *kathizo*: the right hand of *megalosune* or majesty and the adjective *hupselos* or high which often refers to heaven. That means the *kathizo* is done outside time and space or literally, above space (*hupselos*).

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

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

Not coming out clearly and speaking of the Son's identity is frustrating, all the more so because the name he had inherited is described as being more excellent than that of the angels. The adjective is *diaphoroteros*, the comparative of *prodiaphoros* (different), unlike where the preposition *dia-* (through) assists in making this difference all the more apparent...more excellent being a good choice of words as we have here. *Diaphoros* is used with the preposition *para* translated as "than" but also can mean as set beside or nearby which fits in with the comparison being made. As for that comparison, the Son isn't on the same plane as an *aggelos* but remains as he is in and by himself. This, of course, is all the more frustrating for any newcomers to the faith. While it provides a bit more information, still they don't know his identity, just these various titles which to them could apply to anybody.

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



similarity (i.e., the sending) and be careful as to make a distinction between how each is sent.

As for the two rhetorical questions, our author presents them in a straight-forward manner not expecting an answer because he knows that the question can't be refuted. For this reason he situates them within the context of scripture, that its authority might step in to help him along. As for the first question from Ps 2.7, <sup>4</sup> he decides to put in the mouth of the Lord words claiming that he has begotten the Son *semeron* or today...not yesterday or the like but right now. The Lord would concur with this; actually any angel would go along as well simply to clarify what the author has in mind. Such a thing in the supernatural order is impossible. That's a given. Because angels are God's messengers, never would he elevate one to the rank of a Son who remains unidentified as far as a name goes. On the human level such an elevation would be equivalent for a head of state to appoint a messenger boy as second in charge of the government.

As for the next rhetorical question, the words *kai palin* noted above serve to present it in a matter-of-fact way, simply to get it along with the first one out there to resolve any confusion so he can move on. The author does this by putting the question in God's mouth, namely, that he will be a father which automatically makes the person being addressed a son. Note that action is in the future both with regard to God and to the son compared with the present tense of the first rhetorical question. That is, the one whom God is addressing is not yet a son but is on the road to being one, if you will.

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

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

text at hand, note two uses of the preposition *eis* or into: literally as “into father” and “into son.” Indeed, that’s full penetration of one with regard to the other.

While vs. 5 attempts to resolve any confusion concerning the Son and angels through the two rhetorical questions, vs. 6 moves on beginning with *hotan de palin* which the **RSV** translates as “and again.” That is to say, we don’t have any rhetorical questions but in their stead have three fairly lengthy scriptural citations. We could say that they flow from them and continue for the rest of the chapter. Our author continues putting scriptural words into God’s mouth. Here it’s bringing the first-born (*prototokos*) into the world, *oikoumene* being not just the world but inhabited regions which for the time was the Mediterranean/Roman Empire. Even mention of *prototokos* suggests other sons and possibly daughters who don’t share the same privileges. Also the way *eisago* or bringing-into (*eis-*) is presented there’s no mother inferred, just the relationship between God and the son.

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

Our author continues in vs. 7 with a fourth scriptural verse concerning angels, presenting these in rapid-fire succession. This time it’s Ps 104.4 which is part of an extended sentence beginning in vs. 1 and reads as follows: “who make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.” Appeal is made to what clearly is the natural world divided into two parts, messenger and ministers or according to the Hebrew, *mal’ak* and the participle *sharath* which connotes a waiting up <sup>5</sup>. So while the first applies to someone going out to deliver a communication, the second implies the opposite, that one remains in the presence of a superior. With regard to the Psalm quote, fire can apply to natural events such as forest fires and flames to lightning.

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

And so this awesome power is a way the Lord conveys to people his transcendence over creation.

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

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

Vs. 10 begins with the simple conjunctive *kai*, nothing more, indicative that the Lord wants to rush through with his remaining psalm references to the Son...not to hurry through them but to get them out there as quickly and concisely as possible that people may be primed to know the Son whose identity cannot be concealed much longer. Again, this is a calculated approach. This time it’s Ps 102.25-27 which is fairly substantial and presented as such: “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end.”

If you were the author, you’d ask what made you associate these verses with the Son, not like what you had done with him as *mashach* or anointed as above? You’re on the hunt for key words...give-away words...that struck you. Here we have a sharp contrast between heaven and earth as created by God. However, they’re destined to

pass away while God remains the same. The two key words in Hebrew? ‘*Avad* and *hamad*, the contrast between to perish and to stand firm. While not speaking directly of angels, the author is building his case to say that while the Son is not unlike them as far as sending goes, in essence they are miles apart. We can assume that the angels are listening in on this and if asked, they’d concur hardheartedly which means not only do they recognize their place and role as messengers but are completely content with it.

In a masterful stroke our author returns (and concludes) with the angels, putting the last Psalm verse of this chapter as a rhetorical question followed by a second one. The first in vs. 13 is from Ps 110.1: “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.’” This bears out the introductory *pros tina de* or “but to what” where these words clearly don’t belong to a messenger regardless how exalted it may be. Even more impressively, we have two lords which in Hebrew are YHWH and ‘*adony*, the famous, untranslatable name for the Lord and the other one, if you will, ‘*adony* (also as master) though not on the same level as the former. Nevertheless, this apparent address from a superior (transcendence, if you will) to one below him never can be applied to an angel. This is sufficient for now, an introduction to the author’s listeners who are Hebrew. He’s doing all he can to prime them to show that Jesus Christ is equivalent to the Lord or YHWH. I.e., one step at a time.

As for the sitting at the right hand of YHWH, it’s a sign not of subjection in the sense of being inferior but of being equal. Sitting (*yashav*) can be taken two ways. On one hand it can suggest equality as well as permanence. On the other hand, *yashav* can be taken as a temporary state, this governed by the small but important *had* (until) while *shyth* is being enacted which means to put in the sense of place. I.e., there’s a parallel between two types of putting, *yashav* and *shyth*<sup>6</sup> which our author seems to have in mind. What happens after that isn’t presented but suggested and left to our imagination once it has been informed properly.

Vs. 14 is the very last rhetorical question for this chapter, one to take to heart, because it sums up all the others as the author prods his listeners to pay further attention. “They all” being the various types of angelic/messenger functions described from vs. 5 through vs. 13. They fall under the category of ministering spirits, *pneuma* which are *leitourgikos* or ministering, the performance of public duty.

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6 This is pushing it a bit, admittedly but consider the letter “y” or yod in the three words involved here, giving them a certain distinction, a kind of broadness detectable by the letter’s very pronunciation: YHWH, *yashav* and *shyth*.

Clearly the Son doesn't engage in this. However, they are like the Son in being sent (*apostello* is the verb here) literally "into service" or *diakonia* (also as ministry) with the preposition *eis*. This *diakonia* is specified as at the disposal of persons to obtain salvation. The verb is *kleroneo*, more to inherit with *mello*, as being on the verge of this inheritance. Such is the location of the author's listeners...on the verge of accepting the Son as Jesus Christ but not quite there yet. The biggest hurdle is not to confuse him as an angel or messenger but as God, a pretty big step by any standards.

## Chapter Two

A lot more than meets the eye lays behind this chapter's opening words, *dia touto* or "therefore." You feel a need to pause and reflect on what had been said with regard to the Son and angels before moving on. Actually *dia touto* impels us to go forward but only after we have met this important condition. What's attractive here is that our author uses the first person plural with regard to hearing (*akouo*). He doesn't hesitate to put himself in the same position as his audience, a recognition of personal humility and a way to win them over without forcing himself. In a way this collective "we" sounds similar to 1 Jn 1.1: "That...which *we* have heard, which *we* have seen with our eyes, which *we* have looked upon." It'd come as no surprise that our author knew John or was familiar with his letters as well as his Gospel. Chances are that of yet they haven't taken on a written form but still part of an oral transmission.

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

Such *prosecho* comes with a warning, that is, that the collective "we" must not drift away from what the author and others have heard, the verb *pararreo* literally as to flow beside or in company with (the preposition *para*). Keeping in mind the important role of prepositions, this *para* can be seen as impinging upon the directness of the *pros* of *prosecho*. The **RSV** has "from it" whereas this is lacking in the Greek text.

Vs. 2 is the beginning of a lengthy rhetorical question spilling into the next two verses concerning the message spoken by angels. It is a *logos* which had been spoken

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

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

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

The turning point in this rhetorical question is the first word of vs. 3, *pos* or “how” with the first person plural where again our author identifies himself with his listeners or readers. Failure to pay attention to the incredible salvation being offered will make us escape the gift of salvation, where the preposition *ek* prefaced to the verb *ekpheugo* intensifies its meaning along with *soteria*. What does the author mean by this? We have no real answer, this being a rhetorical question meant to provoke reflection.

As for this *soteria*, the Lord is first to have declared it. The noun *arche* is more along the lines as the first principle of anything and rightly applied to him as originator of *soteria*. As for the Lord, this is the first instance where we find *Kurios* with respect to the Son. We're getting very close now to this *Kurios* being identified as Jesus Christ but quite there yet. Nevertheless, it's a step that much closer to full realization. Note that the author seems to have heard the Lord first hand, he using the verb *bebaioo* or to attest (literally 'into us,' *eis* being the preposition) as well as to make strong this witness. Also by it he has the authority to continue addressing the Hebrews and to perk their interest as well.

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

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

In vs. 5 our author returns to the familiar subject of angels, *aggelos*[-] once again to be taken as messengers which, of course, applies to beings who shuttle back and forth. Awareness of this function his listeners picked up right from the start, hence their concern as to who or what they might be with regard to the Son. God did not subject the world to come to these messengers, *hupotasso* to place or to arrange under (*hupo*). It would be crazy to entertain this, for no responsible person would hand over what's so valuable to mere subordinates. That would be equivalent of mistaking the message for the messenger, literally in this case. *Oikoumene* [-] or the world which is inhabited and spoken of lays in the future, *mello* implying intent. It doesn't have the usual implications but in the context of this documents something akin to the salvation alluded to in vs. 3. It's important for our author to make this clear lest his listeners

look for a future reality that has no bearing upon all the scriptural verses cited thus far. For this reason he adds “of which we are speaking” to bring home this point.

True to his manner of approach, in vs. 6 our author has recourse to scripture, notably the Psalter, and quotes in a sort of off-hand way, “It has been testified somewhere,” *diamarturomai* with the adverb *pou* (somewhere) having the verbal root *martureo* [-] with the preposition *dia* prefaced to him, a testifying-through. I.e., *dia* intimates a thorough sort of testimony, a solemn one.

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

Keeping in line with the general format of this document, we’ll follow the Psalm verses as presented here. After all, the author of Hebrews is using them. The first sentence is a rhetorical question, a method he’s fond of employing in an attempt to elicit a response from those in his charge. He’s fascinated by the mere fact that God is mindful of human beings, *mimnesko* more than just remembering but a keeping close to one’s heart. In other words, he’s fascinated by the fact that God is sustaining each person in his memory regardless of where they are in space and time. It’s as though they’ve been inserted there from all eternity. Vs. 6 adds “son of man” (*huios anthropou*) which alludes to the Son mentioned a number of times and whose name our author is inching closer to reveal. This son of man is someone whom the Lord not only has in his memory but cares for, *episkeptomai* or the root *skeptomai* (to look about carefully) prefaced with the preposition *epi* or upon, to look upon. Thus we’re dealing with someone special made all the more as such by reason of the way it’s presented.

We could attribute the words of vs. 7 to the “son of man” of vs. 5 whom God made a little less than the angels. Again with the author’s audience in mind, this can be even more confusing. They could respond that while the Son may enjoy special status, ultimately he’s no different from these spiritual beings who after all are created. *Elassoo* is the verb to make less or small and implies diminishment. Despite being applied to the Son, it’s limited to a short period of time, *brachu* not unlike *elasso* and implies something that lasts for a moment after which it goes away. To put it like this is a bold move, really, and hopefully the fact that it’s taken from scripture will assuage any doubts.



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

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

Because this is not self-evident, the author admits that we don’t see it, *horao* as seeing in the sense of looking. This is a very important concession to make, valid now as it was then. Note the opening words of vs. 8, “As it is” (*nun de oupo*) which lead to a statement so obvious even today that nevertheless must be stated. Violence and suffering was all-pervasive, an unfortunate part of daily life and still with us.

Stating the obvious as in the above paragraph is the perfect lead-in for what our author had in mind right from the beginning, introducing the person of Jesus Christ as Son. Now all his words of comparing him with angels and subjection come to the fore. Hopefully those reading or listening to his letter will acknowledge Jesus, but that will have to wait. Actually we don’t have any follow-up in this regard. The connecting point lays in the verb *blepo*, to see in the sense of having the power of sight, to discern mentally. Why posit it as such? In vs. 8 we have *horao* [-] as to look or to give heed concerning the violence around us. Now the shift is from that type of looking to one of seeing with one’s whole being. Actually the difference between the two verbs can be overlapping or similar. Nevertheless, this difference is absolutely huge in the context at hand, and the author is fully aware of it.

As for the *blepo* with regard to Jesus, it’s in the present tense as with *horao* and directed toward a specific period of time designated as “a little while,” *brachu* [-]

being the same adjective used in vs. 7 repeated here in part but with an addition. That consists of being crowned with glory and honor; to both is added the suffering of death, *pathema* also a calamity or misfortune. However, this *pathema* has a specific purpose ordered by divine grace or *charis* which is tasting death for everyone, *geuo* being the verb. It implies that Jesus took death within himself...ate it, if you will...and digested it as to become part of his body. It's precisely this ultra-close assimilation with the human condition our author wishes to convey. An angel simply is incapable of such intimacy.

As for mention of "everyone" or *pas*, we can take that as a shift from the earlier preoccupation with angels to human beings. This will continue through the rest of Chapter Two in light of the incarnation of Jesus Christ though that term isn't used.

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

Interestingly, vs. 11 has Jesus (though his name isn't mentioned) as the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified as having one source. The verb here is *hagiazō* which involves the act of consecrating: active with regard to Jesus Christ and passive or receptive to it. Such an interaction reveals that they are literally "from one" (*ex henos*), a rather vague wording at first but most likely indicative of the unity between the divine and the human. Because of this inextricable unity, "he" (again, lack of proper name) isn't ashamed to call those with whom is "from one" as his brethren. *Epaischunomai* is the verb, to be ashamed which is intensified by the preposition *epi* prefaced to the root, "to be ashamed upon," if you will.

Vs. 12 is a continuation of the previous verse where the author puts the words of three scriptural sources in the mouth of Jesus. The first is Ps 22.22 which runs close

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

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

The third scriptural source (Is 8.18) comes right on the heels of the second. Actually the first and second can be taken as one since they are in succession. All three are connected with the conjunctive *kai (palin -)*, the first as in the text and the second as in the **RSV**: "Here am I and the children God has given me." "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion." Both are characterized by the respect *idou* and *hineh* which are equivalent to "behold," a readiness to be attentive to the Lord along with those children or persons entrusted to his care, insinuating Jesus Christ.

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

adjective *paraplesios*, literally coming along side of (*para*) or resembling to the point of being equal.

This *para*-ness is done with a specific goal in mind, namely, that through death “he”<sup>7</sup> might destroy not so much death but the one who has the power of death. The verb *katargeo* literally as to be unemployed or idle (*kata* here as down prefaced to *ergo* or to work) may be applied to nullifying *kratos* or strength. And this *kratos* belongs to the devil or *diabolos* which as a noun means slandering or backbiting. In actuality this is the very heart or essence of what death is all about which puts physical death on a different plane, as something ultimately not to be concerned about.

By making-idle the devil’s strength, “he” will deliver those who were subject to a bondage lasting a lifetime as a result of death. Note “those” (*toutos*, singular) which implies not everyone, this in turn suggesting that there might be others not falling under this category. As for “those,” they will be the object of *apallasso*, to set free (*apo* or from) a *douleia* that has lasted a lifetime. Although that means from one’s birth to the present, it isn’t spelled out but inferred through fear of death. The point seems to be that while death still happens, it isn’t an ultimate reality.

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

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

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<sup>7</sup> For the rest of this chapter Jesus will be referred to as such because his name isn’t mentioned.

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

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

### Chapter Three

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

Vs. 1 continues with the exhortation to consider or *katanoeo*, literally as to have the mind operate or think in accord with (*kata*) a given plan of attack. And the object here is Jesus whom our author calls an apostle and high priest with regard to our confession. We’ve encountered the latter *archiereus* in 2.17 but not *apostolos*, that word normally reserved for Jesus’ closest associates. *Apostolos* means one who is sent and thus parallels the role of a messenger or *aggelos* [-] already discussed. It seems this word is chosen by reason of Jesus being sent...*apostello*...from the Father.

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

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

Vs. 3 begins with *gar houtos* translated as "yet"<sup>8</sup> which sets Jesus apart from Moses where the verb *axioo* or to deem worthy applies to someone else who's inferred but not explicit. It's in reference to a *doxa* [-] or glory far worthier than that of Moses. The comparison here is with him who had constructed a house, *kataskeuazo* more along the lines of equipping or furnishing in full. The root is *skeuazo* (to prepare, to make ready) with the preposition *kata*, in accord with a given plan. While the *oikos* [-] or house at hand can apply to the nation of Israel, Moses is singled out as greater than that nature posited as a kind of structure. It is this separate-ness applicable to both Moses and Jesus that the author of Hebrews is getting at.

The **RSV** has vs. 4 in parentheses which makes it almost as a comment on the previous verse though this is not the case in the Greek nor in the **NIV**. Regardless, the author states simply that the builder of a house (*kataskeuazo* -) is responsible for

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

the structure whereas God is the one who *kataskeuazo* everything. This emphasis upon *skeuazo* [-] according to (*kata*) a plan is something to be aware of because it's something that is ever present.

Vss. 5-6 set up a comparison between Moses and Jesus followed by several scriptural quotes in the ensuing verses. The first verse begins with the conjunctive *kai* translated as “now.” It introduces Moses, quoting again part of Num 12.7 as in vs. 2 inferring once again the troublesome behavior of Miriam and Aaron. Both were not *pistos* [-] or faithful, this applicable to *therapon* which is more than a servant but more along the lines of an attendant devoted to performing service. With this in mind, we can appreciate the relationship between the two described famously in Ex 33.11: “Thus the Lord used to speak with Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.” And so such a *therapon*-friend testifies to be spoken later, *laleo* [-] with *marturion* which has the preposition *eis*, “into witness.”<sup>9</sup>

Vs. 6 shifts attention to Christ which is the first time in Hebrews that our author refers to him as such, having favored the name Jesus instead. Perhaps this signals a more formal approach or recognition of Christ as the one who is anointed. Also he's designated as a son (lower case in the **RSV**), a name we've encountered earlier and as such is upon (*epi*) his house as it reads in the Greek text. With this clarification our author makes the switch of *oikos* [-] or house to the first person plural being as such. However, a condition applies here. We are to hold fast to both confidence and pride, *katecho* literally as to hold down where *kata* means this instead of “according to.” As for the first, *parresia* is a kind of outspokenness and freedom from reprisal enjoyed by a citizen of a city-state. The second is *kauchema*, subject of boasting and infers being loud when speaking. *Kauchema* belongs to hope of *elpis*, “pride of hope” as it reads literally.

In vss. 7-11 the author shifts emphasis from Christ to the Holy Spirit whom he has as uttering words from Ps 95.7-11. They are inserted here from the **RSV** so we can compare them with the text at hand although we'll be concerned with the text at hand: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation and said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my ways.’ As I swore in my wrath (*orge*, also as passion, anger), ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

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

As for the quote at hand, once our author makes clear it's the Holy Spirit speaking, he brings attention to the importance of the immediacy at hand, the adverb *semeron* [-] for today...not yesterday nor tomorrow but right now. Compare *semeron* with *hemera* or day with regard to testing. I.e., two frames of references are presented, identifying both as the same is to be avoided. However, a condition is present, *ean* (if, when). This has to be made with regard to hearing the Lord's voice, the words of which aren't specified but inferred, this making it more conditional and subject to acceptance or rejection.

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

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

To conclude this lengthy citation from the psalm, in vs. 11 our author quotes the Lord as having sworn an oath in his anger, *omnumi* also as to confirm. Such an oath pertains to the Israelites not entering the Lord's rest where the preposition *eis* (into) occurs twice: prefaced to *erchomai* and with regard to *katapausis* or rest which also is a stopping, a putting down: the root *pauo* (to put an end) with the preposition *kata* prefaced to it.



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

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

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

The antidote our author offers is a sharing in Christ (i.e., not Jesus), *metochos* [-], a having-with him which implies having everything he has and visa versa. This comes with a loaded concession indicated by *eanper*, “if” with *per* attached to it, also as “however, at least.” What’s at stake is the necessity to retain our first confidence firm to the end, *katecho*<sup>10</sup> [-] also as to check. It’s direct object? Not just confidence or *hupostasis* (literally, a standing under) but its first principle, *arche* [-]. If we have this *arche*, everything else falls into place because everything hangs from it. In addition to the *kata* of *katecho*, two more elements confirm this: the adjective *bebaios* [-] or firm as along with *telos* or end, the final goal which also can apply to death.

Vs. 15 is a continuation of the previous verse which quotes Ps 95.7-8 as with vss. 7-8 above in the text at hand. Why so? Our author wishes to stress three things, the first two being pretty much the same, that is, “today” along with hearing (*akouo* -).

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

Should this pair be put into practice, there will be no hardening of the heart. As for what this hearing consists of, we have no straight-forward answer but an intimation which leaves it up to each person.

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

## Chapter Four

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

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

As for the destination of this double *eis*, it's *katapausis* [-] or rest, also as a stopping or more literally, a putting down (*kata*) in the sense of a cessation. Reference is being made to Ps 95.11 quoted in 3.11 where the Hebrew noun is *menuchah* which has the

fuller sense of habitation. However, a danger remains of falling short of this rest/habitation, *hustereo* meaning to be behind, to come late or essentially to miss the boat. And so the author's audience is left in a kind of in between state not knowing how things will turn out. However, he has in mind transforming this incertitude into an adventure and not so much an impending judgment. Those listening to him will see that Joshua succeeded in leading Israel into Canaan, but even that was fraught with all sorts of danger.

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

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

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

For our author the association between hearing and rest or *katapausis* [-] is of highest importance because faith (that is, the verb *pisteuo*) is a precondition for actually entering the divine rest. The **RSV** has this verb in the first person plural which can be taken as the author again associating with his listeners with regard to the same

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our author also is very conscious that the *logos* [-] of the Lord is operative, that is, word-as-expression. In vs. 12 he describes it as both living and active, *zon* and *energes* (the latter as having the capacity to produce an *ergon* [-] or work). The image he comes up with is the maneuverability of a *machaira*, also a large knife as well as a short dagger which has two edges. Note that the *machaira* acts on its own. Nothing is said of it being put in the hand of someone to wield. And so this weapon...this *logos*...has the ability to pierce the finest of all divisions or *merismos* also as partition, the verb being *diikneomai* also as to pass through (*dia*) or to penetrate. As for the example at hand, it’s the unity between soul and spirit (*psuche* and *pneuma*, -), the closest physical example being that of joints and marrow. Most likely when coming up with this our author had in mind Is 49:2: “He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.”

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

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

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

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

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

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