

CHAPTER II
THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER THE ANGELS
HEBREWS 1:5-2:18



CONFIRMATION of the substantial role of angels in the Hebrew Christian mindset is found in the dominance of this theme throughout 1:5-2:18, with ἄγγελος, angelos, being used ten times in this section. While “messenger” is the primary meaning, the thought of being a “guardian” and “representative” may also be included.¹ Although an “angel” may refer to a human envoy, Luke 9:52, most often, as here, created, holy, supernatural beings are intended who worship and serve God. At this point Adolph Saphir asks a most important question and at the same time supplies a significant and helpful answer: “Why does the apostle speak about angels? . . . [W]hat is the point of this comparison? What is its importance and the inference drawn from it? The argument is simply this: the old dispensation, the law, was given by the mediation and administration of angels. If Jesus was above angels, then His dispensation, the new covenant, His priesthood, are above that of the law.”² This being true, any movement that elevates the importance of angels, especially in a mediatorial sense, brings dishonor to Christ.

A. The witness of Scripture, 1:5-14.

There are seven Old Testament quotations here, six being drawn from the Psalms (II Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; 45:6-7; 97:7; 102:25-27; 104:4; 110:1). All are referenced for the purpose of proving that, “He [Jesus the Son of God] has inherited a more excellent name than they [the holy angels].” v. 4. As a caution, Owen warns us: “There is not any thing in this Epistle that is attended with more difficulty than the *citation of the testimonies out of the Old Testament* that are made use of in it.”³

1. A comparison concerning *sonship*, vs. 5.

To begin with it is well to understand what, by obvious implication, the Hebrew Christian addressees assumed to be true at this point. Plainly they believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Son of God, which title the Jews understood as an indication of deity (John 5:18; 10:33; 19:7; Heb. 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29). But more significantly they believed, according to longstanding Jewish expectation, that Psalm 2 was plainly messianic. Hengstenberg comments: “It is an undoubted fact, and unanimously admitted even by the recent opposers of its reference to Him [Jesus], that the Psalm was universally regarded by the ancient Jews as foretelling the messiah.”⁴ Hence the

¹ Vine, Unger, White, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 26.

² Adolph Saphir, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, I, p. 106.

³ John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, I, p. 106.

⁴ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology Of The Old Testament*, p. 43. Also refer to this author’s fuller explanation of this point, *Works*, V, p. 19. Alfred Edersheim, in commenting on Rabbinic understanding of Messiah in the Old Testament, declares: “Psalm 2, as might be expected, is treated as full of Messianic references, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II, p. 716.

quotation: “For to which of the angels did He [the Father] ever say, ‘You are My Son; today I have begotten You’”? (Ps. 2:7), builds upon an undoubted fact. The addressees would also know it to be a fact that angels, although exalted to a degree, were never given such a transcendently elevated title.⁵ The angels remain created servants; the Son of God solely has “begettal,” which portrays an infinitely higher, eternal rank. This is also inherent in the meaning of “today,” which is more fully understood in the light of Psalm 2:7 also being quoted in Acts 13:32-33; Hebrews 5:5. In comprehending all three quotations collectively, in relation to Mark 1:11; 9:7, this “day of begettal” incorporates Jesus’ coming in flesh and complete earthly ministry that were crowned with his resurrection. Such a perspective, especially from the viewpoint of the addressees who are now better historically positioned to comprehend this “today,” only elevates Jesus Christ to an even greater degree.

Further proof is added: “And again: ‘I [the Father] will be to Him as a Father, and He shall be to Me as a Son’ (II Sam. 7:14). The primary reference here concerns the prophetic ministry of Nathan in which he describes God’s fatherly relationship, in covenant terms sourced in David, with Solomon as a son. That this passage is not a simple prophetic reference to Jesus as the Christ is proved by the following context in v. 14 which adds: “When he [Solomon] commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men.”⁶ On the other hand, the preceding context of v. 13 has promised that, “He [Solomon] shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” Why then does the author of Hebrews make such an association with Jesus Christ? To begin with, probably because II Samuel 7:14 is connected to David, the human author of Psalm 2. In other words, the explicit messianic quotation of Psalm 2:7, in proving sonship, finds historic confirmation, in the use of sonship language, with regard to the Davidic lineage flowing through Solomon, as an earthly son of God, onward to the birth of Christ, the messianic Son of God (Matt. 1:1, 6-7, 16-17). In other words, Solomon’s sonship has lineal identity with Jesus’ Sonship, as II Samuel 7:13, 16 suggests.

2. A comparison concerning *worship*, vs. 6.

There appears to be a further reference here to the “begettal” of v. 5, which now focuses upon that time, “when He again leads the firstborn [πρωτότοκος, *prōtotokos*, cf. Col. 1:15, 18] into the inhabited world,” that is the occasion of Jesus’ birth.⁷ Certainly this period was characterized by numerous angelic appearances (Matt. 1:19-

⁵ Angels are described as “the sons of God” (Job 38:7), which Pink distinguishes as a creaturely understanding even as Adam was called a “son of God” (Luke 3:38), *Exposition Of Hebrews*, I, p. 49. Here “My Son” describes a singular filial relationship expressing unique rank.

⁶ Pink claims: “Competent Hebrew scholars tell us that ‘if he commit iniquity’ may fairly be rendered ‘whosoever shall commit iniquity’ and find their parallel in Psalm 89:30-33.” *Exposition Of Hebrews*, I, p. 51. However v. 15 continues to speak of “him [Solomon]” nevertheless being kept by “My lovingkindness.” Owen, without agreement, refers to Pink’s suggestion, *Hebrews*, II, pp. 141-2, while versions to date do not uphold this translation.

⁷ The connection here of “again” [πάλιν, *palin*] has been vigorously debated. Does it express added emphasis concerning v. 5 (Chrysostom, Calvin, Luther, Owen, Bruce), or make reference to a subsequent appearance of Jesus Christ, plainly his second coming (Alford, Pink, Westcott)? Grammatical considerations aside, which are not conclusive, the context, especially the immediate emphasis upon Christ’s first coming and present intercessory work, 1:3; 2:9-10, 17-18, rather than his second coming, would suggest the former interpretation.

25; 2:13, 19-20; Luke 1:11-20, 26-38, ; 2:9-14). Thus, “He [the Father] says: ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him.’” This follows the LXX translation of ἄγγελοι, angeloi, Psalm 97:7b, while the NKJV, NASB and NIV all render the original עֲלֹהִים, elohim, as “gods.”⁸ Perhaps the simplest solution to this quotation being plucked out of the Old Testament, seemingly without regard to contextual agreement with v. 7a, is to understand it as an illustrative use of Scripture that is logically fitting with regard to the truth that has been previously argued. In other words, Psalm 97:7b is loosely used as an appropriate response to the questions that have been raised: “Whenever did God address an angel as ‘My Son,’ as ‘begotten of the Father,’ as ‘the Son of God,’ as ‘the firstborn’”? The obvious answers all call for the conclusion that the angels, in their inferiority when compared with the Son, ought rightly to “worship Him,” that is bow with reverent acknowledgment [προσκυνέω, proskuneō, to kiss toward] concerning who He is” (John 9:35-38; 20:26-28). At best, angels only offer worship; while at times revered, they are not to be worshipped.

3. A comparison concerning *office*, vs. 7-12.

As the angels have a degree of glory that is acknowledged in v. 7, yet the infinitely greater glory of the Son of God is acclaimed in vs. 8-12; a similar contrast will later be emphasized concerning Moses the servant and Christ the Son in 3:1-6. Isaac Watts has well portrayed this distinction:

Great God! To what glorious height
Hast thou advanced the Lord thy Son;
Angels, in all their robes of light,
Are made the servants of his throne.

Before His feet their armies wait,
And swift as flames of fire they move
To manage his affairs of state,
In works of vengeance or of love.

a. The angels serve the enthroned Son, Ps. 104:4, v. 7.

“And with reference to the angels on the one hand, He says,” sets up an intentional and marked contrast. The angels have a radically different office to fulfill than that of the Son of God. Thus they are described according to, “The One making His angels winds [πνεύματα, pneumata],” which is somewhat a reversal of Psalm, 104:4a, where “He makes the winds His messengers.” Similarly, “And [He makes] His ministers a flame of fire,” is a variation of Psalm 104b, where “[He makes] flaming fire His ministers.” The grammar here can conform to the emphasis of Psalm 104:4, though it is a forced rendering. Further, Calvin strenuously claims that the Old Testament source, in exclusively focusing

⁸ Another possibility is that the quotation here is from the LXX version of Deuteronomy 32:43, being the conclusion of the Song of Moses. However the relevant lines are not part of the Massoretic Hebrew text, and thus not included in the Bible. Nevertheless the Dead Sea scrolls have upheld their ancient authenticity, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 59. Also refer to Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp. 56-7. If this LXX rendering of Deuteronomy 32:43 is the true source of the quotation in v. 6, the inspiration of Hebrews upholds the truthfulness of the statement even if the Massoretic Hebrew text does not include these particular lines (II Tim. 3:16).

on the creation, had nothing to do with angels. There the “winds” and “flaming fire” are God’s “messengers/ministers.” Perowne further explains: “Calvin observes that we are not bound in this and similar instances to regard the application of a passage in the New Testament as setting the question of its meaning where it occurs in the Old.”⁹ On the other hand, Owen argues that “angels are primarily intended by the psalmist.”¹⁰ In support of this the Targum, an Aramaic/Chaldean translation of the Hebrew, translates Psalm 104:4 as: “Who maketh His messengers [hence angels] swift as winds.”¹¹

It would seem unlikely that the Hebrew addressees needed to be informed that God was served by angelic messengers and ministers. What they did need was a graphic description of their distinctive courier and ambassadorial function, and this the writer to Hebrews does by means of the applicatory use of Psalm 104:4. Here is an enhanced representation of the truth that angels are emissaries of God as swift as the wind and at the same time fiery in holy zeal and appearance. Against this backdrop the Son of God stands out in large relief.

b. The Son is to be served by the angels, vs. 8-12.

“But with reference to the Son on the other hand, [He says],” leads us to “the sun of righteousness . . . with healing in its wings” (Mal. 4:2) whereby the angels are at best merely reflective stars compared to the essential glory of Christ. In much the same way John the Baptist is a diminutive voice, a mere water baptizer when compared with Christ as the coming “LORD,” the baptizer in the Holy Spirit (John 1:23, 33; 3:30).

(1) His royal office, Ps. 45:6-7, vs. 8-9.

This Son of God has regal status, a throne, vested authority, and thus exalted stature that far surpasses those, such as angels, who would submissively serve under such a potentate (cf. Isa. 6:1-3, 6-7).

(a) He is declared to be an eternal Ruler, v. 8.

The announcement, “Your throne, O God [אֱלֹהִים, *elohim*], is forever and ever” (Psalm 45:6) makes immediate reference to the throne of David/Solomon according to the context of vs. 1-5, and thus the earthly king is given the title *Elohim* (cf. Ex. 21:6; 22:8; Ps. 82:6; John 10:34-36) in view of the divine origin of his kingdom. Notice how this is confirmed in Psalm 45:7 which declares: “Therefore God [*elohim*], Your God [*elohim*], has anointed you.” However, that the human author has been moved to rise beyond this perception is born out by Farrar’s comment, “The Targum on this Psalm (45:3) renders it: ‘Thy beauty, O King Messiah, is greater than the sons of men,’ and Aben

⁹ J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary On The Psalms*, p. 237.

¹⁰ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, p. 172-3.

¹¹ F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle Of Paul The Apostle To The Hebrews*, p. 63.

Ezra [Spanish Rabbi, linguist and commentator] says it refers not so much to David as to his son Messiah.”¹² Thus Delitsch concludes:

And since elsewhere earthly authorities are also called אֱלֹהִים, *elohim*, (Ex. 21:6; 22:8 sq., Ps. 82:6, cf. 138:1), because they are God’s representatives and the bearers of His image upon earth, so the king who is celebrated in this Psalm may be all the more readily styled *Elohim*, when in his heavenly beauty, his irresistible doxa or glory, and his divine holiness, he seems to the psalmist to be the perfected realization of the close relationship in which God has set David and his seed to Himself. He calls him אֱלֹהִים, *elohim*, just as Isaiah calls the exalted royal child whom he exultingly salutes in Isaiah 9:1-6.”¹³

“And the righteous [morally straight] scepter [rod of authority, cf. 9:4] is the scepter of your kingdom.” In other words, the fact that the triune God is essentially righteous, that is utterly holy, means that the administration of His kingdom by God the Son will be thoroughly characterized by this quality. While angels acknowledge and even administer aspects of this righteous kingdom, yet their moral interest is derived; with Christ it is of the essence of his eternal being (Ps. 98:9).

(b) He is declared to be an anointed judge, v. 9.

With the authority of the “upright scepter”, v. 8, and now the character of holiness, that is positive and negative righteousness, the final component that completes this portrait of Christ’s exaltation is distinctive “anointing.” Doubtless David and Solomon “loved righteousness and hated wickedness,” (Ps. 6:8; 7:8-9; 40:9; 72:1-2), yet the predominant recorded emphasis during the lives of these saints is that “the LORD . . . loves righteousness” (Ps. 11:7; 33:5; 37:28; 146:8) and “hate[s] all who do iniquity” (Ps. 5:4-5; 11:5). So Plumer comments that Psalm 45:7 “is applicable to Solomon in a very limited sense; to Christ without restriction.”¹⁴ Hence the Lord Jesus, with scepter in hand, has “loved righteousness and hated wickedness” (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:4-5). This qualifies Him for anointing by the Holy Father. Thus, “God [אֱלֹהִים, *elohim*, God the Son], Your God [אֱלֹהִים, *elohim*, God the Father], has anointed You with the oil of joy” (Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). Consequently, this appointment has placed [God the Son] “above Your fellows [חֲבֵרִים, *châbêr*, associates].” Who are these “companions,” μετόχους, *metochous* ? Some suggest “royal associates,” in a remote sense; Owen and Pink incorporate not only “angels,” according to the immediate context, but also “many sons” who Jesus is not ashamed to call “brethren,” 2:10-11; cf. 3:14 where μετόχος, *metochos* is used.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., p. 64.

¹³ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, II, p. 83. Perowne also comments: “[In] the use of such language the Psalmist was carried beyond himself, and . . . was led to employ it by a twofold conviction in his mind, the conviction that God was the King of Israel, combined with the conviction that the Messiah, the true King, who was to be in reality what others were but in figure, was the son of David.” *Psalms*, p. 371.

¹⁴ Alfred Plumer, *Studies In The Book Of Psalms*, p. 517.

¹⁵ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, p. 187; Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 66.

Thus this Son has lordly, anointed regal status that neither angels or the heirs of salvation attain, v. 14; his righteous administration is as God the Son according to the headship of God the Father.

(2) His royal qualification, Ps. 102:25-27, vs. 10-12.

Kings, especially in the ancient world, were known by reputation. Their exploits were grand and impressive (Dan. 4:28-30), while length of reign was a worthy characteristic (Neh. 2:3; Dan. 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:21). So Jesus Christ is elevated to this same level and beyond. His exploits include the creation of the world; his reign is eternal. This quotation of Psalm 102:25-27 is taken from the LXX which inserts “LORD” in v. 25 and reasonably translates a passage depicting Jehovah’s sovereignty in creation and immutable being.

(a) As the Lord who is Creator, v. 10.

In v. 2 the Son of God has already been described as he “through whom also He [God the Father] made the world.” Here then is not so much an explicit messianic prophecy concerning Jesus of Nazareth, but rather an Old Testament portrayal of a truth already established. As Farrar explains: “The writer’s object is not *proof*—which was for his readers unnecessary; he wished to *illustrate* acknowledged truths by admitted principles.”¹⁶ Thus the “Lord [Jesus], in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands.” He is the creative Logos of John 1:1-3, cf. Prov. 8:22-31, as with Colossians 1:16-17 which also describes him as the sustaining agent of all creation. Thus he is as supremely distinct from angels as is the Creator from the creature.

(b) As the Lord who is Eternal, v. 11-12.

Here Jesus Christ is designated as eternal in contrast with a decadent, disintegrating, dissolving world. Further, this truth is presented to man who is himself confronted with personal participation in the process of entropy, the breakdown of materiality. However, as Owen points out: “Man was made for eternity. He was not called out of nothing to return to it again. . . . God made him for his eternal glory, and gave him therefore a subsistence without end. Had he been created to continue a day, a month, a year, a thousand years, things commensurate unto that space of time might have afforded him satisfaction; but he is made for ever.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Farrar, *Hebrews*, p. 65. This writer, with a reference that is complementary to that of Perowne quoted concerning v. 7, makes mention of Calvin’s hermeneutical understanding at this point: “Calvin (on Eph. 4:8) goes so far as to say of such passages that the Apostle ‘by a pious diversion of their meaning (*piâ deflectione*) accommodates them to the Person of Christ.’ The remark illustrates the courageous honesty and stern good sense of the great Reformer.” Ibid. Pink comments that: “Few, if any, of us would have thought of applying it [Ps. 102:25-27] to Christ, or even dared to, had not the Spirit of God done so here in Hebrews 1.” *Hebrews*, I, p. 69.

¹⁷ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, p. 215.

1) The corruptible world, v. 11.

The parallelism here describes the future prospect of the earth and heavens, including human kind, as “perishing,” as the aging, wearing out process that renders a garment as ready for disposal. By way of contrast, the Lord Jesus “remains/continues,” διαμένω, diamenō, and the inference is that he is eternally imperishable, incorruptible.

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

2) The incorruptible God, v. 12.

However the Lord Jesus will reverse the process of dissolution by means of a two step process. First, he will, “like a mantle [costly but worn cloak] . . . roll them up,” as if discarding the old earth and heavens. Second, according to synthetic parallelism, He will provide a “change of clothing” that may be likened to a “new heaven and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; II Pet. 3:13). So Spurgeon comments: “The visible creation, which is like the garment of the invisible God, is waxing old and wearing out, and our great King is not so poor that he must always wear the same robes; he will ere long fold up the worlds and put them aside as worn out vestures, and he will array himself in a new attire, making a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.”¹⁸ Who then shall be the agent of this universal renewal? The incomparable, creative Son of God who is described as, “the same, and [his] . . . years will not come to an end/failure.” Hence beside him, the angels fade into insignificance.

4. A comparison concerning *exultation*, vs. 13-14.

The similarity of v. 5a with v. 13a suggests the completion of a unit of proof. Here the doctrine of angels has assumed a strictly biblical portrayal. However we must not forget that Rabbinic Judaism had accumulated much tradition concerning angelology that was decidedly unbiblical.¹⁹ Thus while Christ continues to be exalted, angelology is indirectly purged of speculative fables, especially in v. 14.

a. The exultation of the Son of God, Ps. 110:1, v. 13.

“But to which of the angels has he at any time said, ‘Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet.’” In the kaleidoscope of Old Testament quotations commencing with the significant mention of Psalm 2:7 in v. 5, yet none equal the undoubted messianic stature of the climactic reference here

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury Of David*, IV, p. 426.

¹⁹ Edersheim has an illuminating appendix on “Jewish Angelology,” *Life And Times Of Jesus*, II, pp. 748-63.

to Psalm 110:1, also elsewhere quoted in the New Testament (Matt. 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:34-35;), with other allusions (Mark 16:19; Rom. 8:34; I Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1). The messianic use of this passage by Jesus went unchallenged by the critical and fundamentalist Pharisees, undoubtedly because, as Edersheim points out, it is “throughout [the rabbinic writings] applied to Messiah.”²⁰ Hengstenberg adds: “The grounds of the Messianic interpretation are here as strong, as in any prediction of the Old Testament.”²¹ So here the Hebrew Christian addressees would undoubtedly have accepted this reference as applying to the heavenly session of Jesus Christ beside his Father following his earthly humiliation. The instant response that is expected would be that it is unthinkable to identify angels, the totality and even the greatest of them, with Messiah’s undoubted elevation. To God the Son alone was the promise made by God the Father of subjection by the Son’s enemies, as a conquering king would triumphantly place his foot on the neck of a conquered foe. Such a divinely Paternal promise is grounded upon the completed obedience of the Son; having returned from his earthly atonement ministry, the Father guarantees that the fruit of obedience will be total victory. The only angelic participation will be adoring wonder and worship in the light of such an accomplishment (I Pet. 1:12a).

But does the “until,” ἕως, heōs, here indicate a period whereby submission by an unbelieving world is gradually obtained, and thus not immediately realized? Yes, in the sense that Jesus presently reigns as King while his kingdom awaits the day of its consummation. So 2:8 confirms: “For in subjecting all things to him [the Son], He [the Father] left nothing that is not subject to him [the Son]. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him [the Son]”²² Yet that day is coming, “when all things are subjected to Him” (I Cor. 15:27-28).

- b. The subjection of the ministering spirits, Ps. 103:20, v. 14.

“Are they [angels] not all consecrated/ministering spirits [λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα, leitourgika pneumata, cf. v. 7]”? They are distinguished from human carnal embodiment and residency on earth. Their highest calling, for which they were created, is not to be served, but to serve, as directed by God from His heavenly throne (Gen. 28:12; John 1:51). There may be allusion here to Psalm 103:20-21: “Bless the LORD, you His angels, mighty in strength who perform His word, obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will.” This ministry in general includes: 1. The praise and adoration of God, often with musical accompaniment (Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 5:11-14; 7:11-12). 2. Involvement in national conflict (Dan. 10:10-14; 12:1). 3. Conflict with bad angels (Rev. 12:7-9). 4. Guardianship of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10-12). 4. Encouragement of the Son of God, at his birth (; Matt. 2:13; Luke 1:26-38), during his earthly ministry (Matt. 4:11), during his atonement ministry (Luke 22:43; 24:4-7; Acts 1:10), at his second coming (Matt. 25:31).

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 720-1.

²¹ Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p. 63.

²² Refer to the christological interpretation of 2:5-9, supported by Bruce, Calvin, Hughes, Owen, Saphir; contra, Brown, Pink, Westcott.

More specifically, these angels are, “being sent out to provide service [*διακονία*, *diakonia*] for the sake of those who inherit salvation.” Obviously they are in constant communication with God concerning their identification of His elect. John Owen lists eight distinctive forms of this ministry.²³ 1. “They are sent in an *extraordinary manner to make revelations* of the will of God, about things tending unto the obedience and spiritual advantage of them that do believe (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2; Rev. 1:1).” 2. “God by them *suggests good motions unto the minds of his saints*. . . . God employs his holy angels to provoke them to that which is good, by suggesting that unto them which is suitable unto the principle of spiritual life and grace that is in them.” 3. “God sends forth his angels unto this ministry for the good of believers, to *preserve them from many dangers* and ruinous casualties that would otherwise befall them (Ps. 91:11-12).” 4. “By this ministry of angels doth God in particular *preserve us from the sudden and violent incursions of Satan*. . . . And hereon depends the safety and security of our lives.” 5. “They are in their ministry appointed to be *witnesses of the obedience, sufferings, and worship of the disciples of Christ*, that they may give testimony unto them before God, and in the great assembly of the last day (I Cor. 4:9; 11:10; I Tim. 5:21).” 6. “God useth the ministry of angels to *avenge his elect of their enemies* and persecutors, to render unto them a recompense and vengeance even in this world, in the due and appointed season (Dan. 7; Acts 12).” 7. “They *carry the souls departed into Abraham’s bosom* (Luke 16:22).” 8. “Lastly, the ministry of angels respects *the general resurrection* and day of judgment. The Lord Christ is everywhere described coming to judgment at the last day attended with all his holy and glorious angels (Matt. 24:31; 25:31; II Thess. 1:7-8; Jude 14-15).”

Notwithstanding the great usefulness of this ministry, and the perversion of it in some circles that necessitated this present initial argument (Col. 2:18), yet it pales before the glory of its Master. So we look to Isaac Watts again in his tribute to the God of these helping hosts:

Great God! To what glorious height
 Hast thou advanced the Lord thy Son;
 Angels, in all their robes of light,
 Are made the servants of his throne.
 Now they are sent to guide our feet
 Up to the gates of thine abode,
 Through all the dangers that we meet
 In traveling the heavenly road.
 Lord, when I leave this mortal ground,
 And thou shalt bid me rise and come,
 Send a beloved angel down
 Safe to conduct my spirit home.

B. The warning to Hebrew Christians, 2:1-4.

The practical reason for the preceding doctrinal thrust concerning Jesus Christ’s superiority over the angelic order now becomes apparent. This is the first of a series of warnings

²³ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, pp. 249-54.

directed toward the Hebrew Christian readers who, in one way or another, have allowed aspects of Judaism to detract from the Son of God's incomparable supremacy (2:1-4; 3:6-4:3; 4:14-16; 5:11-6:12; 10:26-39; 12:3-17, 25-29). Again, the role of the angels in the Old Testament was in no way trivial, but rather significant with regard to the mediation of the law. Herein lies the cause of the author's concern. An extreme elevation of the whole economy of the law inevitably results in an exaggerated regard for the messengers of the law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). However such ministry concerning the messengers and the message is at best elementary (Col. 2:16-23); a renewed grasp of the grandeur of Jesus' historic holy bursting upon the sordid human scene, 1:1-4, in conjunction with his unique person and gospel, is a matter of vital importance for reverent living in the present. Thus Owen comments at this point that, "in the handling of the doctrines of the gospel concerning the person and offices of Jesus Christ, we should not satisfy ourselves in a bare *notional speculation* of them, but endeavor to get our hearts excited by them unto faith, love, obedience, and steadfastness in our profession."²⁴

1. The present need of renewed focus on the apostolic gospel, v. 1.

"On account of this it is necessary that we more earnestly give careful attention to what we have heard lest we lose our grip on it." The danger is conveyed by *παρᾰρέω*, *parareō*, which describes "slipping away," like a ship that loses its anchor and drifts away, like a swimmer that loses his footing and is swept away from the shore. Here is the subtlety, the gradualism of spiritual decline; we are exposed to good Christ exalting ministry, yet there is neglect of serious and singular focus; we hear yet our reception is clouded by the static of religious tradition and legalism. The remedy is an exhortation to, "more intently pay attention" *περισσοτέρως προσέχειν*, *perisoterōs prosechein*, to the apostolic witness which passed on the "so great salvation," having been "first spoken through the Lord," v. 3. In other words, like a child in school looking out the window and dreaming, who is suddenly told to pay attention by the teacher, so the Christian here is told to snap out of it, so it speak. There has been too little thinking about who Christ is, especially in relation to the Scripture, and exaggerated "delighting in . . . the worship of angels" (Col. 2:18).²⁵

2. The present danger of neglect of the apostolic gospel, vs. 2-3a.

In using an *a fortiori* form of argument, that is a lesser point of undoubted truth that enhances the force of a greater parallel truth, the author of Hebrews offers compelling proof that draws upon the cumulative effect and weightiness of the truth expounded in 1:5-14. Farrar explains it as: "An argument *a minori ad majus*, of which indeed the whole Epistle is a specimen. It was the commonest form assumed by the Rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, and was the first of the seven exegetic rules of Hillel, who called it 'light and heavy.'²⁶

²⁴ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, p. 257.

²⁵ H. C. G. Moule comments on Colossians 2:18 concerning "the worship of angels," that it was a "practice highly developed in later Judaism, while entirely absent from the apostolic teaching, and indeed clearly condemned here, and in Rev. 19:10; 22:9, and implicitly in Heb. 1." He also points out that this heresy had some alignment with Gnosticism and presented a rival mediatorial role to that of Christ. *The Epistles To The Colossians And To Philemon*, pp. 15, 31, 33, 111.

²⁶ Farrar, *Hebrews*, pp. 67-8.

- a. The force of the lesser truth about Old Testament revelation, v. 2.

Here the protasis of an *a fortiori* argument, though the lesser element, yet establishes the considerable authority of the Word of God that was mediated through angels during the old dispensation. “For if [and it is assumed to be true] the word which had been spoken through [διὰ, dia] angels proved to be firm/unalterable/steadfast [cf. 3:14], and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, . . .” Here no Hebrew would dispute the settled, inviolate character of the Mosaic revelation when added to Israel, especially its righteous demands and severe punitive justice against transgressors. Further, as already indicated, the Jew had developed an elaborate angelology in this regard. Farrar further adds:

The presence of Angels at Sinai is but slightly alluded to in the O. T. in Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; but these allusions had been greatly expanded, and very prominently dwelt upon in Rabbinic teaching—the Talmud, Targums, Midrashim, &c.—until, at last, we find in the tract Maccoth that God was only disposed to have uttered the First Commandment, while all the rest of the Law was delivered by Angels. This notion was at least as old as Josephus, who makes Herod say that the Jews ‘had learned of God through Angels’ the most sacred part of their laws (Jos. Antiq. XV, 5, 3).²⁷

- b. The force of the greater truth about New Testament revelation, v. 3a.

Here the apodosis of the *a fortiori* argument, obviously the greater element, proclaims the surpassing revelation of Christ. “How will we escape having neglected so great salvation?” The diagnosis of “drifting away” in v. 1 is now described as “neglect,” ἀμελέω, ameleō, the lack of concern/care for the gospel, that leads to indifference and eventual turning away from the truth. Our Savior uses the same type of argument in Luke 10:10-15 where the greater revelation of Christ given to the citizens of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum will make them more accountable than Sodom, Tyre and Sidon where a lesser revelation was received. So a man who fails to rightly value a pearl of great price is to be more severely judged than he who lacks the appreciation of average pearls (Matt. 13:45-46). The truth is, that those who neglect to pay attention to the “great salvation” embodied by Jesus Christ will face the most severe condemnation. The same radical responsibility and consequences of neglect are considered in 4:14; 10:28-29; 12:25.

3. The significant proclamation of the apostolic gospel, vs. 3b-4.

The unparalleled stature of “so great a salvation” receives further explanation in terms of its proclamation by Christ to his apostles. Here the gospel is not understood as something the apostles derived from their more recent Spirit illumined study of the Old Testament. Rather it is a specific message, doubtless laced with references to the Old Testament, that has come from the very lips of Jesus Christ, as was the case with Paul (Gal. 1:11-12), who in turn exhorts Timothy: “Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the [gospel] treasure which has been entrusted to you” (II Tim. 1:14).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

Hence the revelation transmission of the gospel is literally described as follows: “Which [salvation] a beginning having been received [at its beginning], spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard [the apostles].” Significantly the angels play no direct part in this new and distinctive revelation.

a. The gospel revelation spoken by the Lord, v. 3ba.

The first stage is the Lord Jesus revealing the gospel by speech while at the same time being the very embodiment of that identical gospel. But here the emphasis is upon the “spoken gospel,” that which Christ expounded. There being an apostolic audience, this was verbal ministry, so that Jesus was the first gospel minister. Moreover this first gospel ministry that commenced after Jesus’ baptism was, implicitly in Jerusalem (John 2:13-23) and Judea (John 3:22-23), though explicitly in Galilee (Matt. 4:17, cf. vs. 15-16; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15). However more and more is revealed (Matt. 11:4-5; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 24:14) until following Jesus’ resurrection there seems to be even greater explanation concerning his atonement (Luke 24:25-27; 44-49).

b. The gospel revelation mediated through apostolic hearers, v. 3bb.

Hence what the apostles heard, and upon being commissioned concerning “teaching them [disciples] to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20), so they delivered to others (Acts 4:19-20; I Cor. 11:23; 15:3; Gal. 1:11-12). After Christ’s resurrection great emphasis was placed upon the authority of the apostolic witness, namely that the apostle’s doctrine was of foundational authority with the fledgling church of God (Acts 2:42). According to Peter such a body of teaching could only arise from, “men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22). Similarly Peter declares at Caesarea that, “we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem . . . witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:39, 41-42). Similarly John writes that, “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you” (I John 1:1-3). Thus the apostles were burdened with the responsibility of proclaiming “sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Tim. 6:3).

c. The gospel revelation confirmed to hearers of the apostles, v. 3bc.

The author of Hebrews includes himself among the “us” who heard the transmission of the gospel from the apostles. This saving message was “confirmed/made firm/guaranteed” **βεβαιώω**, *bebaioō* (verb), to those who heard the apostles; this would include Luke (Luke 1:1-2). Note the “proven,” **βέβαιος**, *bebaios* (adjective), quality of the angel’s testimony in v. 2. So the gospel proclamation of the apostles had the “confirming/making firm/guaranteeing” authority of the Son of God, not mere angels, since their declaration as eye-witnesses also displayed the marks of their being divinely commissioned and spiritually anointed (Acts 4:13; 5:42). It is likely that the addressees here had

heard reports concerning this Jesus of Nazareth being regarded as the Messiah. However the apostolic testimony was a convincing and converting witness. Hence the author of Hebrews being part of “us” and not a direct apostolic auditor of Christ, Calvin, along with many others, has concluded that Paul was not the author of this epistle.²⁸

- d. The gospel revelation signified through apostolic hearers, v. 4.

Furthermore, “God testifying together with them [the apostolic auditors] both by signs and wonders and various powers/miracles and Holy Spirit distributions according to His [God’s] own will.” Thus it pleased God to supernaturally attest to the initial apostolic witness by means of supernatural phenomena that were distinctively associated with the apostles. The word *συνεπιμαρτυρέω*, *sunepimartureō*, is a compound of *σύν* (with) + *ἐπί* (on) + *μαρτυρέο* (I witness), that collectively means “to witness together with someone.” So God worked with the apostles, the divine with the human, in such a way as to indicate the inauguration of a new gospel dispensation. Here was God’s premiere celebration accompanied with the authenticating “signs of a true apostle” (II Cor. 12:12). These were “signs,” *σημεῖα*, *sēmeia*, significant miracles, “wonders,” *τέρατα*, *terata*, awesome miracles, “powers,” *δυνάμεις*, *dunameis*, dynamic miracles, all three terms being used in Acts 2:22; cf. v. 43; II Corinthians 12:12.²⁹ Concerning these Owen writes: “[A]ll which agree in the nature of works supernatural, and in the especial end of attesting to the truth of the gospel, being wrought according to the promise of Christ (Mark 16:17-18), by the ministry of the apostles (Acts 5:12), and in special by that of Paul himself (Rom. 15:19; II Cor. 12:12).³⁰ However such a bestowal was according to God’s disposal, His distribution (I Cor. 12:11; Rom. 12:3), and not human appropriation.

- C. The Son of man in relation to the world to come, 2:5-18.

Concerning the future, “the world to come,” there is a vast chasm that separates the ministry of angels and Jesus Christ, which his incarnate ministry of humiliation should not be allowed to obscure. This point was alluded to in 1:13: “But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” The “until” anticipates a future day of consummated triumph concerning which rank the angels never remotely attain.

1. The world to come subjected to Christ, negatively considered, v. 5.

The expression “the [inhabited] world to come,” *τὴν οἰκομένην τὴν μέλλουσαν*, *tēn oikomenēn tēn mellousan*, being the key expression here, must be understood according to the Hebrew presuppositions of the addressees. Hence Saphir rightly concludes:

²⁸ John Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 54; Luther comes to the same conclusion. Refer to Owen’s opposite opinion which is by no means conclusive, *Hebrews*, II, pp. 280-1.

²⁹ See Calvin, *Hebrews*, pp. 54-5; Hughes, *Hebrews*, pp. 80-1.

³⁰ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, p. 281. Similarly Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 91.

[T]his world to come is something future, to which all the apostles were looking; for Peter testifies, “We look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” [II Pet. 3:13, cf. Is. 65:17-25; 66:22], and again, that the heavens must receive Jesus “until the times of the restitution of all things” [Acts 3:21]. The world to come, according to the opinion of the ancient synagogue, means the renovated earth under the reign of Messiah; it means the time predicted in the prophets, when the kingdom shall be given to the Son of David, and Israel shall dwell in their own land in peace and righteousness, and all the heathen nations shall walk before Him and worship the God of Jacob; when abundance of food and raiment shall be for all the poor and needy; when oppression shall cease on the earth, and the voice of cruelty shall no longer be heard; when even the outward creation shall manifest the presence and the peace of God and of the blessing of the Most High; when from the river even unto the great sea the King shall reign; when war shall be learnt no more by the nations; when the will of God shall be done upon earth as it is done in heaven.³¹

“For He did not subject/subordinate to the angels the inhabited world [order] that is to come [present participle, μέλλω, mellō, is coming], concerning which we are speaking.”³² In other words, the angels have never known elevation to coronation over a kingdom such as that bestowed upon Messiah. This kingdom has been the focus of 1:2-2:4 in a broad sweep that has included: “in these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son;” 1:2, the fact that “when He made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;” 1:3, the assurance of the Father, “Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet;” 2:3, and “so great salvation” that is in progress and will come to glorious completion. Note that it is not “the kingdom that *has come*,” but rather the kingdom that has been inaugurated and will attain a glorious fulfillment according to the promises of the prophets (Acts 3:20-21; 14:22; II Thess. 1:5; Heb. 12:28, “receive” being a present participle.”).

2. The world to come subjected to Christ, positively considered, vs. 6-9.

“But somewhere one [David] solemnly testified in [Psalm 8:4] saying, ‘What is man that you remember him?’” The indefiniteness here, cf. 4:4, assumes the Hebrew familiarity of the addressees with the Old Testament; the author has not forgotten the reference, rather he deems it not worth the mention. Hughes explains: “It is characteristic of our author, however, that he is not concerned to provide a precise identification of the sources from which he quotes. It is sufficient for him that he is quoting from Holy Scripture, whose inspiration and authority he accepts without

³¹ Adolph Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 119-20. Similarly Pink adds: “As we sought to show in our exposition of that verse [1:6], the words ‘when again He brings in the Firstborn into the world’ (oikomenē) refer to the second advent of Christ to this earth, and point to His millennial kingdom. This, we are satisfied, is also the reference in 2:5.” *Hebrews*, I, p. 96. Again, this would especially be the opinion of Hebrew Christians. To the contrary is Owen who proposes: “But the world here intended is no other but the promised state of the church under the gospel.” *Hebrews*, II, p. 324-6. Farrar suggests: “[A]lthough the Messianic kingdom, and therefore the ‘future age,’ began at the Resurrection, there is yet another ‘future age’ beyond it, which shall only begin when this age is perfected, and Christ’s kingdom is *fully come*.” *Hebrews*, p. 71; likewise Alford, Brown, Bruce, and Calvin; Hughes also agrees suggesting a parallel with 6:5; 13:14.

³² A. T. Robertson points out: “See a like use of *mellō* (as participle) with *sōtēria* (1:14), *aiōn* (6:4f.), *agatha* (9:11; 10:1), *polis* (13:14).” *Word Studies*, V, p. 344.

question. God being its primary author, the identity of the human author is relatively unimportant.”³³

While the quotation of Psalm 8:4-6 does not draw upon a widely acknowledged lineage of Messianic interpretation, yet the Apostle Paul made such an application (I Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22); further “Son of man” was a Messianic title (Dan. 7:13). Some have seen a contrast here between angels and man,³⁴ while others have upheld a contrast between angels and Christ.³⁵ Here the application of Christ to the whole of Psalm 8:4-6 as quoted is maintained for the following reasons. The preceding context is wholly concerned with angels and Christ without any mention of man. The proceeding context of vs. 8b-9 strongly suggests ongoing reference to Christ. The free Christological application of Old Testament quotations in 1:5b-12 would suggest that the same free, applicatory hermeneutic is intended here. The suitability of such a course is rooted in Jesus Christ being the perfect Son of man who identifies with sinful mankind in such a way that, “we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin” (4:15). In this regard Jesus as the Messiah is further seen to be superior to angels who have had no such humiliation/exaltation, redemptive role, “so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone,” v. 9b.

a. The humiliated Man, v. 6.

Psalm 8:4 is translated: “What is man that you remember him, or the Son of man that you caringly look upon him?” The synonymous parallelism, of two lines presenting identical truth, provides an enhanced portrayal of man’s humble status under the glorious God’s benevolent concern. Yet the applicatory focus here is more upon Christ’s humiliation as “the Son of Man” who takes upon himself “the form of a bond-servant” to the end that “every knee will bow . . . and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:5-11). Saphir points out that here, “he is called the Son of man because He is the sum and substance of the human race, the representative and restorer of humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He is the second Adam; in Him there is a new commencement of humanity given unto us. . . . This Son of man, made a little lower than the angels, is to be the King; and through Him the knowledge, love and life of God shall be brought to the ends of the earth.”³⁶ Such elevation is foreign to the angels.

b. The humiliated and exalted Man, v. 7a.

While the interpretation concerns man’s diminutive rank in the face of the majesty of Jehovah,³⁷ yet Christological application swells through the antithetical

³³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 83.

³⁴ Brown, Pink, Westcott.

³⁵ Bruce, Calvin, Hughes, Owen, Saphir.

³⁶ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 126-7.

³⁷ Calvin comments: “[This] Psalm which he [Paul?] quotes must be examined, for it seems to be unfitly applied to Christ. . . . He [David] does not, then, speak of any particular person, but of all mankind. To this I answer, that all of this affords no reason why the words should not be applied to the person of Christ. . . . [I]t was not the Apostle’s design to give an exact explanation of the words. For there is nothing improperly done,

parallelism, of contrasting lines, in the translation of Psalm 8:5: “You lowered him [for] a little while, in rank, less than the angels [ἀγγέλους, angelous, מַלְאָכִים, elohim, in the O.T.]; you crowned him with glory and honor.” Bruce concludes: “Our author, however, applies these words not to the First Adam but to Christ as the last Adam, the head of the new creation and ruler of the world to come.”³⁸ For man this would presently be a partial reality, but for Christ it is a fulfilled reality through his triumphant session with the Father. As such, the angels recede in importance.

c. The conquering Man, vs. 7b-8.

By further synthetic parallelism, with the second line adding to the truth of the first line, Psalm 8:6 is translated: “And appointed Him over the works of Your hands;³⁹ you subjected/subordinated all things under His feet.” Again, by application, Christ has been elevated from the humiliation of being less than the angels to that of Divine Potentate before whom the whole created order, all things great and small, yield in submission. So Psalm 2:6, 8: “I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain; . . . I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.” While it is possible to include “the new redeemed race of mankind in union with Christ” in this humiliation and exaltation,⁴⁰ yet the primary emphasis remains on the superiority of the Son of Man over the angels, themselves being part of, “the works of your hands” and “all things.”⁴¹

Now follows a necessary explanation that is more to be expected with Christ being the subject here rather than man. Man has present dominion, but on the other hand how is it possible for Christ to be presently understood as having dominion over “all things”? Hence: “For in subjecting all things to him [Christ], He [God] left nothing unsubjected to him [Christ]. But now, we are not yet seeing [ὄρω, horaō] all things having been subjected to Him [Christ].” The force of logic leads to the conclusion that the angels, without exception, must be part of the “all things” subjected to Christ. Of course, as Paul also logically concludes: “For He [God] has put all things in subjection under his [Christ’s] feet. But when He [God] says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is evident that He [God] is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him [Christ]” (I Cor, 15:27). Hence God alone is excepted from subjection to Christ. Hence Christ is on a par with Deity; the angels are not. But “now, we are not yet seeing (present tense) all things having

when verbal allusions are made to embellish a subject in hand, as Paul does in quoting a passage in Romans 10:6, from Moses.” *Hebrews*, pp. 56, 58.

³⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 72.

³⁹ “And appointed Him over the works of Your hands,” is excluded in the NIV. However the manuscript and contextual evidence for its inclusion, as in the NASB and NKJV, is substantial. It is highly unlikely that the author of Hebrews would leave out the first line of his quotation of Psalm 8:6 while retaining the second line, and of course, the preceding two verses of Psalm 8:4-5.

⁴⁰ Bruce comments: “It is as the true representative of humanity that Christ is viewed as fulfilling the language of the psalm.” *Hebrews*, p. 74. Similarly Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 86.

⁴¹ Again Calvin comments on the author’s intent here: “[H]e only bids us to consider the basement of Christ, which appeared for a short time, and then the glory with which he is perpetually crowned; and this he does more by alluding to expressions than by explaining what David understood.” *Hebrews*, p. 59.

been subjected to him [Christ].”⁴² Thus: “All people that on earth do dwell, all people to the furthest islands of the sea, shall know and worship the God of Israel. God’s name shall be excellent on the earth while He has exalted His glory above the heavens; that is, the whole earth shall see the manifestation of grace in the church which is to the praise and glory of His name.”⁴³

d. The humiliated and redeeming Man, v. 9.

“But we are seeing [βλέπομεν, blepomen] Jesus who was made for a little while lower than the angels having been crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for all [men/everyone].”⁴⁴ For the present, while not able to “see all things subjected to him,” in “the world to come,” vs. 8, 5, yet we see the triumphant Christ through the eye of faith. Thus in 10:23-35 believers are presently to be “encouraging one another; and all the more as you see [βλέπετε, blepete] the day [of the consummated kingdom] drawing near.”

Here reference to Psalm 8:5 is clearly applicable to Jesus. More specifically, we are presently seeing that which Psalm 8:4-6 has well illustrated: 1. The *fact* of Christ’s humiliation, “made for a little while lower than the angels, . . . the suffering of death.” 2. The *fact* of Christ’s exaltation, “crowned with glory and honor.” Both *facts* have already been described in 1:3 as “purification for sins,” and “session at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” 3. The *purpose* of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation, “so that by the grace of God⁴⁵ He [Christ] might taste death for all [everyone/men].” To “taste” here, γεύομαι, geuomai, means, not to sample, but to eat in such a way as to “fully experience.”⁴⁶ Grace here is magnified in that the preceding historic *facts* of redemption are wholly according to the kindness of God’s determining will, and not conditioned by man’s free will veto! The meaning of Christ experiencing death “for all men,” ὑπὲρ πάντος, huper pantos, does not describe all men potentially, contingent upon autonomous faith. Rather the context indicates the “all men” to be the “many sons” brought to glory, v. 10, “those who are sanctified . . . brethren”, v. 11, “My [Christ’s] brethren,” v. 12, “the children whom God has given me [Christ], v. 13, “the children [who] share in flesh and blood,” v. 14, “the descendant [seed] of Abraham,” v. 16, “His [Christ’s] brethren,” v. 17.⁴⁷ This *purpose* then is the climactic argument, as vs. 10-18 confirm regarding Christ’s superiority. We exclusively see Jesus, not angels.

⁴² Reference to Christ here is according to Calvin, Hughes, Saphir; contra, with reference to man, are Bruce, Brown, Owen, Pink, Westcott,

⁴³ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, p. 127.

⁴⁴ Westcott comments that: “The change of the verb from ὀρώμεν [to βλέπομεν] in v. 8 cannot be without meaning. βλέπειν apparently expresses the particular exercise of the faculty of sight (comp. John 1:29; 5:19; 9:7 ff.), while ὀρᾶν describes a continuous exercise of it (c. 11:27).” *Hebrews*, p. 45. See also *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 556.

⁴⁵ Refer to Hughes’ informative “Note on the Variant Reading χωρὶς θεοῦ (apart from God) (2:9), *Hebrews*, pp. 94-97.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

⁴⁷ Refer to John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, pp. 54-5, for a more complete refutation of universalist claims concerning this verse. Note that πάντος here can be translated as masculine “person/man,” or neuter, “thing.” Also consider Hughes, especially his footnote reference to Barrett and Bernard who, in commenting

3. The world to come subjected to Christ, paternally considered, vs. 10-18.

The purpose statement that concludes v. 9 becomes the stimulus for what follows. Christ's humiliation and exaltation over all things was not intended to be a mere display, a panorama of divine humility, sufficient in itself. Rather the Father's plan, generated by gracious intent, had a participatory, productive purpose. His design was a method of personal, compassionate, sacrificial identification, "for everyone" enslaved to "the power of. . . the devil . . . [and] fear of death," vs. 9, 14-15.

a. The suitability of Christ's sufferings, vs. 10-13.

Here the overall thought is that of the produce of Christ's "tasting death for everyone" is "brethren" to whom the Savior delights to boast about concerning the Father. It may be likened to a mother who, having just given birth to a son, holds the babe in her arms and whispers what a wonderful father the child has.

(1) The appropriateness of his sufferings, v. 10.

"For it was fitting/suitable [πρέπω, prepō, cf. I Tim. 2:10; Tit. 2:1] for Him [the Father], for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons to glory, to complete/perfect the leader/pioneer/divine captain [ἀρχηγός, archēgos, cf. 12:2; Acts 3:15] of their salvation through sufferings." In the character of God, His headship over everything, which proceeds from Him and focuses upon Him (Rom. 11:36), means that the singular necessity and unique suitability of His plan of salvation incorporates the Son of God being perfected through suffering, 5:8-9. This is the pathway to "the world to come" when "all things [will be] subjected to him [Christ]," v. 8. The necessity of Christ's humiliation and exaltation, as unnecessary as man might esteem it, is rooted in God's essential being and holy will (Luke 24:26). Calvin explains here that the author,

first assumes it as granted, that we ought to be satisfied with God's decree; for as all things are sustained by his power, so all things ought to serve to his glory. No better cause, then, can be found out than the good pleasure of God. Such is the purport of the circumlocution which he employs, *for whom, and by whom, are all things*. He might by one word have named God; but his purpose was to remind us, that what is to be deemed best is that which he appoints, whose will and glory is the right end of all things.⁴⁸

Bruce adds: "There are many who are ready to tell us confidently what would and what would not be worthy of God; but in fact the only way to discover what is a worthy thing for God to do is to consider what God has actually done."⁴⁹ But further, if the Leader has gone this appointed route, so have his brethren, v. 18; 10:32-36; 11:24-26; after temptation and endurance, "the world to come" will come.

on the same "neuter singular" construction as used in the *Gospel of John*, indicate that such references are to those collectively begotten of God. *Hebrews*, pp. 93-4. The following context would support such an idea.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 62.

⁴⁹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 79.

Yet in what way does the Father “perfect/complete” [τελειώω, teleioō] the perfect Son of God here? In the same way that this Son, “learned obedience from the things which He suffered, and having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,” 5:8-9. This was not moral improvement but rather progress in obedience and “consecration”⁵⁰ according to the redemptive course that the Father judged to be suitable. In other words, it was advance toward completion of the demanding plan of the Father.

(2) The effectiveness of His sufferings, v. 11.

It is the Father’s hierarchical direction of the Son, in His appointed role as the Savior of those who are described as sanctified, that arouses Him to declare them to be His “brethren,” as it were for the Father’s sake. The Son has not saved a nondescript group that He has nominated, but rather those given to Him by the Father (John 6:37-40), to the end that He would save/sanctify them. Hence literally: “For the one sanctifying [the Savior] and those being sanctified [the saved] are all from one [Father⁵¹]; for this reason He [Christ] is not ashamed [intensive form, ἐπαισχύνομαι, epaischunomai] to call them brethren.” Here is revealed the Son’s intense commitment to the will of the Father (John 4:34); it is the Father’s gracious desire, according to decree, to “sanctify” sinners, that stimulates Christ not only to “sanctify” them, according to sacrificial humiliation and exaltation, but also gladly identify with them as family brethren (Matt. 12:49-50; 28:10; John 20:17). It is total devotion to the Father that is at the root of Christ’s commendation of the Father to His blood-bought brethren. Saphir well comments:

[H]ere we are reminded of the teaching of Scripture, that all things are of the Father, and to His glory. Christ is the vine, we are the branches; but the Father is the husbandman. Christ is the bridegroom, and we are the church, the bride; but it is the Father who is the King, which made a marriage for His son [Matt. 22:1-10]. Christ is the Head; we are the members; but as we are Christ’s so Christ is God’s, “The head of Christ is God” (I Cor. 11:3). . . . Christ is of the Father; we are of the Father. As the Lord Jesus Christ Himself says, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me” [John 17:6]; and as in the epistles of John, we are taught that we are of God, and the seed of God abideth in us. What a wonderful brotherhood is this, rooted in the mysterious election of eternal love!⁵²

Hence in vs. 12-13 we have Old Testament illustration of Christ’s avid endorsement of His Father, as if to say: “I have saved and sanctified you; now let me introduce you to the Head and passion and director of My ministry. It is through Him and His plan of salvation through humiliation in incarnation that I unashamedly, heartily claim you as brethren [ἀδελφούς, adelphous]”

⁵⁰ Both Calvin, *Hebrews*, pp. 63-4, and Owen, *Hebrews*, p. 384, prefer the term, “to consecrate.”

⁵¹ The pronoun ἐνός, henos, is probably masculine, hence “Father,” so Alford, Bruce, Saphir, Westcott; however if taken as neuter, then “source/origin” is intended, so Brown, Calvin, Hughes, Owen.

⁵² Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 145-6.

(3) The approval of His sufferings, vs. 12-13.

Having learned of the way the author of Hebrews has already freely and illustratively quoted from the Old Testament, 1:5-13; 2:6-8, we ought not to be surprised that this same hermeneutic is applied here, except that whereas references have been made concerning the Writings (II Samuel, Psalms), now a quotation from the Prophets (Isaiah) is included. The expression “saying,” along with “and again,” in conjunction with v. 11, provides the clearest indication that these two verses represent the boastful affirmation of Jesus Christ concerning the Father to “My brethren, . . . the congregation, . . . the children whom God has given Me.” In other words, it is not only fitting for the Father to ordain the humiliation and exaltation of the Son, v. 10, but also fitting for the Son to gladly acknowledge this wisdom to the brethren he has “sanctified.”

(a) The Son’s praise of the Father before his brethren, v. 12.

“I will proclaim Your name to My brethren; in the midst of [the] assembly [ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, as in the LXX]; I will in song praise [ὑμνέω, *humneō*, in hymn praise] You.” This quotation of Psalm 22:22 draws upon an acknowledged Messianic reference, indeed the whole Psalm has likewise been universally acknowledged (cf. v. 1, Matt. 27:46), though v. 22 commences the second major division that focuses on thanksgiving in deliverance. Thus Christ has begotten a “brotherhood” that is synonymous with “the congregation/church.” It is in such an environment that Christ delights to praise the headship of the Father, that is in conjunction with his brethren. John 17 presents a representation of this activity, namely the pillars of the church being taught through prayer of the Son’s passion for His exaltation of the Father, vs. 1, 6, 8, 12, 21, 23, 25-26; cf. I Corinthians 15:27-28. Thus the Son expects that similar praise of the Father will characterize the church over the centuries that follow. Here is strong justification for Trinitarian worship of the Father through the mediation of the Son.

(b) The Son’s trust of the Father before his brethren, v. 13a.

The broad context of Isaiah 8, especially vs. 14 (cf. Rom. 9:33; I Pet. 2:8), is Messianic. Literally we translate: “I will be having been persuaded in Him,” hence, “I will put my trust in Him.” This probable quotation of Isaiah 8:17 is fitting here in that Christ leads the way, as a model for his brethren, in trusting the Father in the midst of sufferings that the Father has considered appropriate, as a result of His design for the Son to share in flesh and blood, vs. 10, 14.⁵³ The Gospel of John in particular is saturated with expressions of Christ’s trust in his Father’s plan for his humiliation and exaltation. Consider the Son of God’s consciousness of being sent by the Father, from His bosom (1:1-2, 18),

⁵³ Brown, Calvin, Owen identify the quotation with Psalm 18:2; contra re Isaiah 8:17 are Bruce, Hughes, Pink, Westcott.

in John 4:34; 5:23-24, 30, 36-37; 6:38-39, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44-45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). Pink further adds:

“I will put my trust in Him.” This was ever the expression of His heart. Christ could say, and none but He ever could, “I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother’s belly” (Ps. 22:19). Never did another live in such complete dependence on God as He; “I have set the Lord always before Me; because He is at My right hand, I shall not be moved” (Ps. 16:8) was His language. So evident was His faith, even to others, that His very enemies, whilst standing around the Cross, turned it into a bitter taunt: “He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him” (Ps. 22:8).⁵⁴

(c) The Son’s trust, with the brethren, of the Father, v. 13b.

“Behold, I and the children whom God has given to Me.” This quotation of Isaiah 8:18, although intended to have Messianic *application*, yet has a primary reference to the children of Isaiah, namely Shearjashub and Mahershalalhashbaz (Isa. 7:3; 8:1-4).⁵⁵ Thus Westcott explains: “Isaiah with his children were ‘signs’ to the unbelieving people. In them was seen the pledge of the fulfillment of God’s purposes. Thus the prophet was a sign of Christ. What he indicated Christ completely fulfilled.”⁵⁶ Here a separate point is made that builds upon v. 13a. Since Christ is the “firstfruits” (I Cor. 15:20-23) of the brethren, so He is the model of faithfulness for these same brethren, who the Father has, with electing particularity, given to him (John 6:37-39). He has taught them to likewise look to the Father, even in the midst of the trials of suffering, temptation, flesh, and blood. Thus the brethren join in solidarity with the Son in their trust of the Father. Saphir explains: “Brotherhood is now the relationship subsisting between Him [Christ] and us, a relationship which can never be altered. We may lose friendship; but brotherhood is fixed and unchangeable. Thus our Lord Jesus and we are rooted and united in God the Father.”⁵⁷ Calvin describes this relationship as follows: “

[T]he Apostle concludes that we are one with him [Christ], because he unites us to himself, when he presents himself and us together to God the Father: for they form one body who obey God under the same rule of faith. What could have been said more suitably to commend faith, than that we are by it the companions of the Son of God, who by his example encourages us and shows us the way?⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 125.

⁵⁵ Calvin comments on this verse: “It is indeed certain that Isaiah was speaking of himself. . . . See then how this passage may be fitly applied to Christ.” *Hebrews*, p. 68-9. Hughes also describes “application” here, *Hebrews*, p. 110, similarly Bruce, Farrar, Westcott; contra Brown, Owen.

⁵⁶ Westcott, *Hebrews*, pp. 51-2.

⁵⁷ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Hebrews*, pp. 69-70.

b. The empathy of Christ's sufferings, vs. 14-18.

It is well at this point to recall the reference to "brethren" in v. 11 which is subsequently associated with "my brethren, . . . the congregation, . . . the children," in vs. 12-13, and of course suggests that Christ himself takes on a relational/seminal role, which we might qualify as the "elder/saving/senior brother." Essentially we have here a familial relationship that is based upon humiliation in incarnation that results in glorification, 1:1-3; 2:9, and a seed; "As a guilt offering, He will see His offspring" (Isa. 53:10). Thus "He would be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). But in particular Christ is the saved sinner's brother through identification with the human condition. The love and devotion of Jesus for "the brethren" (John 17:12; 18:8-9) is now identified as not only solidarity in faith in the Father, but also divine empathy, that is experiential compassion at the human level, even "sympathy with our weaknesses," 4:15.

(1) His common participation with flesh, vs. 14-16.

There is something consoling about a person who can empathize with our sorrowful experiences on account of having participated in similar trials. However modern medicine now provides opportunity for more intimate identification with a loved one's mortal condition, such as with a life saving compatible kidney transplant or blood transfusion. In such cases we literally "share in flesh and blood," and feel a deepened sense of kinship with the donor. How much more transcendently impressive is it the case when God similarly stoops to "share in flesh and blood" for the purpose of performing divine surgery that delivers from the root cause and symptoms of human decadence. Hence Christ's specific identification with man in his corruption was not simply born of vague sentimental concern, but rather a specific saving agenda that, quite apart from angels, focused on the weak and pitiful condition of the race of Adam.

(a) Concerning conquest of the power of the devil, v. 14.

"Therefore, since the children have shared [over the ages] in blood and flesh [human kind], also He himself in like [identical] manner participated [aorist] in the same [blood and flesh] in order that through death he might nullify [abolish, render impotent, aorist] he who has the power of death, this one being the devil." The seed (brethren) of Christ is of a common natural stock (Acts 17:26), and this universal brotherhood of all humanity is not to be discounted (Luke 10:30-37). So Christ identifies with his redemptive stock also at a natural level, as if to enter, like a Champion, the battlefield where his brethren encounter a terrible foe, that is the devil; this analogy is fitting for He who is "the author [pioneer, divine captain] of their salvation," v. 10, that is he who has received from the Father, "authority over all flesh" (John 17:2). Thus Jesus Christ "participated/shared" in human kind even unto death (Phil. 2:5-8), at a point in history, becoming true man as distinct from the mere appearance of a man according to early church heresies such as Docetism and Gnosticism; these were offended at the thought of deity being associated with materiality. Yet "the Word

became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), this incarnate Christ “being tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin,” 4:15. Saphir explains:

In all things He became like unto us. In everything; in His body, for He was hungry and thirsty; overcome with fatigue, He slept. In His mind, for it developed. He had to be taught; He grew in wisdom concerning the things around Him; He increased, not merely in stature, but in mental and moral strength. In His affections He loved. . . . He was astonished; He marveled at men’s unbelief. . . . Sometimes He was glad, and rejoiced in spirit; sometimes angry and indignant, as when He saw the hypocrisy of the Jews. . . . He was grieved; He trembled with emotion; His soul was straightened in Him. Sometimes He was overcome by the waves of feelings when He beheld the future that was before Him. In all things He was made like unto us. . . . His supplications were with strong crying and tears; His soul was exceedingly sorrowful; He was sorely pressed, and He agonized in Gethsemane. He suffered being tempted. The temptation was a reality to Him. He felt most keenly and painfully the weight and the pressure of the test. His soul was full of love to Israel, and eager to gather children of Jerusalem. The broad road, easy and attractive to the flesh, would have led to immediate recognition and reception by Israel; the way of humility and obedience, of faith and suffering, was narrow to Jesus also. He felt hunger, reproach, hatred; Satan was permitted to test Christ’s most sensitive heart, with the most penetrating and painful trial.⁵⁹

However the divine purpose of this identification with humanity was not merely the moral influence of condescension, like some moving display designed to prompt man to better things, but rather the accomplished death of death’s propagator through conquest, that tyrant which held man in hopeless captivity, the devil, *διάβολος*, diabolos. Hence, “the Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8). The only means to this end, v. 10, is the necessary death of the elder brother for his brethren, those given to him by the Father (John 6:37-39; 17:1-2, 6, 9, 24). Owen comments: “This [conquest by Christ’s death] of all others seemed the most unlikely way and means, but indeed was not only the *best*, but the *only way* whereby it might be accomplished.”⁶⁰ But how does this come about, rightly given that God has always been sovereign over death (Gen. 2:17; Deut. 32:39; Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:5; I Cor. 15:25-28; Rev. 1:18)? Through the moral consistency of a holy God who remains, “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).⁶¹ Thus “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (I Pet. 3:18). This whole work of humiliation and exaltation for the sake of the brethren was yet grounded upon the cause of the

⁵⁹ Saphir, *Hebrews*, I, pp. 151-2.

⁶⁰ Owen, *Hebrews*, II, p. 450.

⁶¹ “The necessity of Christ’s death on the cross is bound up with the demands of the moral structure of God’s world. The seriousness of sin and its consequences cannot be ignored. Only by the meeting of its penalties can sin be removed.” Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 113.

righteousness of God, whether in the saving of the brethren or the conquest of Satan.

(b) Concerning conquest of the fear of death, v. 15.

“And that he might set free those who, through fear of death, were held as slaves through all of their lives.” The release here, ἀπαλλάσσω, apallassō, was used to describe freedom from a legal contract, a business arrangement, or formal employment (Luke 12:58). By implication, the devil, in subjecting man to death and its inevitability through the tyrannical imposition of sin, ensures that man lives in fearful captivity and frustration all of his life. Bruce adds: “Since Satan is chief prosecutor in the heavenly court, there is no difficulty in regarding him also as executioner-in-chief. Cf. I Cor. 5:5, ‘deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.’”⁶² Thus man is hopelessly bound to the devil’s hellish administration, except for the emancipation that Jesus Christ provides through atonement and implicit resurrection. As Charles Wesley has written:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Satan is “the strong man” who has “property” under his charge through demonic agency. Thus Jesus Christ “first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house,” that is set the property free (Matt. 12:28-9). Thus His conquering of death has taken away the fear, hence sting of death. Every Christian funeral should so testify. Thus:

By his [Christ’s] death he has removed the sting of death, which is sin, and has turned our defeat into victory (I Cor. 15:56f.). True, the new-man-in-Christ still faces the ‘first death’; but he does so with the assurance that the resurrection of Jesus, with whom he is one, guarantees his own resurrection to the fullness of eternal life (I Cor. 6:14; 15:20ff. II Cor. 4:14), that God will indeed bring many sons to glory, v. 10).⁶³

(c) Concerning condescension for the seed of Abraham, v. 16.

“For certainly not to angels does He take hold with firm resolve [ἐπιλαμβάνο, epilambanō], but He does take hold with firm resolve the seed of Abraham.” The expression “to take hold,” is used of Paul being seized in the temple at Jerusalem (Acts 21:30); then there is the exhortation in I Timothy 6:12 to “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.” In Hebrews 8:9, quoting Jeremiah 31:32 concerning Israel, God declares, “I took them by the hand to lead them out of the

⁶² Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 86n.

⁶³ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 114.

land of Egypt.” The classic understanding here is that the taking hold of the seed of Abraham involves the appropriation by Christ of human nature through that means, but not the nature of angels, per Chrysostom, Aquinas, the Reformers, Owen, also Brown, Pink. More modern commentators, Alford, Westcott, F. F. Bruce, the NASB, NIV, understand that Christ “gives help” to the seed of Abraham and not angels. But as Hughes responds:

[W]hat would be the point of saying, ‘It is not angels but men whom he helps’? Could anyone ever have imagined that Christ came to earth for the purpose of assisting *angels*? Moreover, our author will shortly come on to speak of Christ as the one who *helps* us in the hour of need (v. 18), using, however, and perhaps significantly, a different verb [βοηθέω, boē-theō].⁶⁴

It should also not be overlooked that God’s saving design for “the descendant of Abraham” suggests a particularity that is confirmed in v. 17 where Christ “make[s] propitiation for the sins of the people.” Thus John Brown exalts: “What an overwhelming subject of contemplation is this! He is not the Savior of angels, but of the elect family of man.”⁶⁵ Simply put, to save sinners Jesus Christ assumed human nature. But such condescending grace, such brotherly identification, has never been directed toward angels, rather the seed of Christ. Calvin adds:

That he preferred us to angels was not owing to our excellency, but to our misery. There is therefore no reason for us to glory as though we were superior to angels, except that our heavenly Father has manifested toward us that ampler mercy which we needed, so that the angels themselves might from on high behold so great a bounty poured on the earth [I Pet. 1:12].⁶⁶

(2) His common confrontation with sin, vs. 17-18.

The “therefore” ὁθεν, hothen, directs us to a profound conclusion concerning the preceding context. Hence the classical interpretation of v. 16 is confirmed here in that Christ, of necessity as “a faithful high priest,” became like the nature of his brethren.

(a) As a propitiatory High priest, v. 17.

“Therefore he was obligated/under moral necessity to become like the brethren in all things, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the things concerning God for the purpose of making propitiation for the sins of the people.”

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 117-8.

⁶⁵ John Brown, *Hebrews*, I, p. 133.

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Hebrews*, pp. 73-4.

1) The necessity of identification.

The “necessity,” ὀφείλω, *opheilō*, cf. Rom. 15:1; Eph. 5:28; II Thess. 1:3; 2:13; Heb. 5:3, 12, here more strongly reiterates the thought of v. 10, that is participation in human nature. “The Son could not have represented men before God, offering, as their high priest, the sacrifice of himself on their behalf and in their place, had he not first become their fellow man. Representation requires identification.”⁶⁷ It is not uncommon for sinful man to enquire, in wishing to avoid the claims of the gospel, as to whether there was any other way for God to make satisfaction for “the sins of the people.” However the sinless, holy God declares the exclusive necessity of incarnation unto propitiation. Further note that Christ’s human identity extends to “all things,” even in an absolute sense with regard to unpolluted or perfect humanity, but not fallen man. British Poet, Alexander Pope, was incorrect when he wrote: “To err is human, to forgive divine.” In Adam being innocent prior to the Fall is the indication that true humanity does not of necessity require sinfulness. The human Son of God was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin,” 4:15.

2) The necessity of propitiation.

Again we must remind ourselves that the author addresses Hebrew Christians who are familiar with the saving identity of a “high priest,” a mediator who acts on behalf of sinners in the presence of God, but especially once a year on the Day of Atonement (Ex. 30:10; Ex. 16:29-34; Heb. 10:3). This theme will be enlarged upon in 3:1-10-25; cf. 3:1; 4:15; 5:1-10; 6:19-20; 7:11-17, 23-28; 8:1-6; 9:7-8, 11-12; 10:11-12, 19-22. At the heart of this role of reconciliation was the satisfaction of a holy God who is offended by unholiness. Yet Christ’s identification with humanity allowed him at the same time to demonstrate his intent to “become a merciful and faithful high priest.” Christ’s self-offering was not some professional religious transaction, but the merciful, focused labor of a mediator for his beloved brethren (Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:51). Such self-sacrifice combined both unwavering commitment and compassion. Further, such redemptive consecration was always with the perspective of “the things pertaining to God,” (Mark 14:36; Luke 2:49; John 4:34), the divine rather than the human agenda.

The high-priestly work of Christ, according to the divine requirement, is now specified. It was the purpose of God “to make propitiation [ἱλάσκομαι, *hilaskomai*] for the sins of the people.” Again the necessity is moral, namely God’s holiness being confronted with the unholiness of man. But how could God

⁶⁷ Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 120.

possibly turn enemies into brethren and maintain His integrity? By satisfaction which He himself supplies! Here “propitiation” means the sacrificial cooling of the wrath of an offended triune God that results in peaceful reconciliation (Rom. 3:24-6; I John 2:2; 4:10). This is distinct from the erroneous teaching that the more conciliatory Son placates the stern, angry Father. While incorporating the truth of “expiation” whereby sin is forgiven, a penalty having been paid, “propitiation” includes the satisfactory turning of wrath of God into concord on His terms as the result of such a payment.⁶⁸ Thus “the people” or “brethren” or “congregation” or “children” are the defined target of this saving work, who elsewhere are named as “His people” (Matt. 1:21) and “the [My] sheep” (John 10:11, 14). This is a particular atonement which is the basis of particular aid for the tempted, v. 18.

(3) His common temptation as a qualified Helper, v. 18.

“For in which [work of propitiation] He himself has suffered in having been tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.” Here the temptations of Christ are portrayed as exceedingly real, even to the point where he was deeply disturbed by them. These are principally recorded concerning the wilderness encounter with Satan (Matt. 4:1-11) and at Gethsamene (Matt. 26:36-39; Luke 22:39-44) where, on both occasions, angels came to minister. Thus He was “tempted,” *πειριάζω*, *peirazō*, better “tested/tried” (cf. I Pet. 1:6, ‘distressed by various trials’); to Him was applied the acid test that proved Him to be pure gold, yet the presence of the acidic enticement was intensely aggravating. Brown expounds:

He was exposed to every variety of suffering to which innocent human nature could be exposed. He speaks of His whole life as one scene of trial: “Ye have continued with Me in My temptation”—during My trial (Luke 22:28). Poverty, reproach, hunger, thirst, weariness, pain even to agony, unkind treatment from relations and friends, temptation in the strict sense of the term, especially from the great enemy of God and man, and the loss of the delights arising from sensible communion with His Father,—these are some of the things in which “He suffered, being tried.”⁶⁹

However the brother of Christ can draw near to his Elder Brother with a sense of His understanding at an experiential, comforting, assisting and overcoming level. Indeed Christ, remaining impeccable during His earthly trial, is best qualified “to help/aid [*βοηθέω*, *boētheō*] those who are being tempted.” Westcott explains:

[S]ympathy with the sinner in his [Christ’s] trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain (cf. 5:8; 7:26). Sin indeed dulls sympathy by obscuring the idea of evil.

⁶⁸ Concerning the implication here of God as being wrathful, refer to the detailed vindication of this truth by Leon Morris in response to C. H. Dodd in *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 144-213.

⁶⁹ Brown, *Hebrews*, I, p. 138.

O Savior Christ, Thou too art Man;
Thou has been troubled, tested, tried;
Thy kind but searching glance can scan
The very wounds that shame would hide.
Thy touch has still its ancient power;
No word from Thee can fruitless fall;
Here in this solemn evening hour,
And in Thy mercy heal us all.

- Henry Twells