

Enthymemes in Hebrews

By Michael Morrison

In order to study the argument in Hebrews, it is helpful to see how the author supports his points, particularly with enthymemes.¹ Although the enthymeme is not the only type of argumentation used in Hebrews, and not the only way in which Hebrews attempts to persuade the readers,² the enthymeme is a prominent form of argumentation in Hebrews.

People rarely use formal logic in their rhetoric. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca list numerous methods that people use to support their conclusions: the rule of justice, arguments by comparison, the argument of direction, argument from authority, illustration, model, analogy, and many others.³ Rather than following rigorous logic, arguments often appeal to experience, generalities and probabilities. They do not even state all the facts. Don Compier writes, “Any writer assumes that his or her readers could read between the lines; the author did not need to state all the presuppositions and implicit knowledge held in common with contemporary readers.”⁴ In everyday

¹ An *enthymeme* is an incomplete syllogism—an argument in which the logic depends on a premise that is not stated. Aristotle had a different definition of enthymeme; the definition I use goes back to Quintilian and Demetrius (David E. Aune, *Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003], 150).

² Aristotle wrote that there are three components of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, which correspond to 1) the attitude of the audience toward the speaker, which can change during the message, 2) the emotions of the audience, and the way that the speaker can change the mood during the message, and 3) the rational part of the message, the facts and implications that are brought out in the message, coupled with the beliefs the audience had before the message began (Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* I.1.2 [trans. H. C. Lawson-Tancred; New York: Penguin, 1991], 74). Part of a persuasive message, such as the introduction, might be only tangentially related to the main purpose—it is designed instead to increase the audience’s confidence in the speaker, and thus improve their willingness to listen and accept what is said. The warning passages in Hebrews 6 and 10 are good examples of how the author uses *pathos* in the attempt to persuade.

³ Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969), 185-410. These are descriptive of what speakers actually use; they are not prescriptive.

⁴ Don H. Compier, *What Is Rhetorical Theology?: Textual Practice and Public Discourse* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), xx. “The argumentation process begins with premises the audience

argumentation, people rarely argue their case with complete syllogisms. That would be tedious and insult the intelligence of the reader. More often, the argument assumes that the readers can supply the missing premise based on already existing beliefs that the author and readers share in common. Rhetorically, it can be good to use enthymemes because they involve the reader in supplying part of the argument and thereby encourage ownership of the conclusion as well.

Since an ancient writer could omit information that the readers already knew, a modern analyst may probe the logic of the argument to reveal assumptions of the author and readers. Lauri Thurén writes, “One of the most fruitful, but also difficult tasks, is to reveal hidden, implicit elements in an argumentative structure.... We shall ask which basic information he omits, supposing that the addressees are familiar with it, and furthermore, what kind of statements he chooses as a starting-point for his argumentation taking their agreement for granted.”⁵ In charity to the author, we attempt to supply a premise that makes the most sense.⁶ If the argument would be valid only if a particular concept is included, then we may conclude that the audience probably had that concept, or at least that the author *assumed* that the audience had it. An audience with that concept is the audience *implied by the text*. The author may have been mistaken, but the author is likely to know the audience better than we do.

Since much of Hebrews is a carefully structured argument using enthymemes⁷—

accepts” (Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* [3rd ed.; Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 2002], 90).

⁵ Lauri Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy of 1 Peter with Special Regard to Ambiguous Expressions* (Åbo: Åbo Academy, 1990), 85, 56.

⁶ Frans H. van Eemeren gives this principle for analyzing the author: “The goal should be...to determine (1) to which proposition in the context and situation concerned the speaker or writer can be held committed to that not only (2) makes the underlying argument of the argumentation valid, but also (3) adds something informative to the explicit argumentation” (“Argumentation Theory: An Overview of Approaches and Research Themes,” pp. 9-26 in Ericksson et al., *Rhetorical Argumentation*, 20). Van Eemeren wants argumentation to be more logical than it often is, but his principle is correct: If we can make the argument valid by supplying a certain premise, then we give the author and audience the benefit of the doubt by attributing that premise to them, unless we have reason otherwise.

⁷ In a study of Heb 5, Thomas H. Olbricht writes, “Hebrews contains some of the most rigorously argued positions in the New Testament.... His modus operandi is therefore moving from one enthymeme to another, the foundations being laid in the prior enthymemes” (“Anticipating and Presenting the Case for Christ as High Priest in Hebrews,” pp. 355-72 in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference* [ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker; Emory

often using γάρ to indicate a reason or οὖν for a conclusion—it lends itself well to an analysis of enthymemes. But since the analysis of enthymemes tends to focus on the rational aspects of a message, and people are often influenced by their emotions, the analysis should be supplemented at points by consideration of *ethos* and *pathos*.⁸ Further, not every verse involves an enthymeme—some simply report facts or assert a point without attempting to provide support, or make exhortations based on authority rather than providing reasons.

An analysis of enthymemes has three benefits: 1) it forces a close reading of the text, requiring careful attention to grammar and the way that ideas connect with one another, 2) it helps in analyzing the overall flow of the argument, and 3) it helps identify beliefs that the author assumed that the readers would have. In this way enthymemes can shed light on the *readers* implied by the text and the purpose of the writing.

An enthymeme is an incomplete syllogism. A syllogism includes a major premise (a general principle), a minor premise (a specific situation), and a conclusion based on how the specific situation fits into the general principle. Here is a classic illustration:

- Major premise: All humans are mortal (a general principle).
- Minor premise: Socrates is a human (a specific case).
- Conclusion: Socrates is mortal (the specific case applied in the general principle).⁹

Studies in Early Christianity; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002], 355, 363).

For other studies of biblical enthymemes, see Vernon K. Robbins, “From Enthymeme to Theology in Luke 11:1-13,” pp. 191-214 in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), Marc J. Debanné, “An Enthymematic Reading of Philippians: Towards a Typology of Pauline Arguments,” pp. 482-503 in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps; JSNTSup 195; London: Sheffield, 2002), and Marc J. Debanné, “Enthymemes in the Letters of Paul” (Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 2002).

⁸ Thurén criticizes one of the pioneers in argumentation theory: “Despite the rhetorical features in Perelman’s theory, it deals only with cognitive argumentation, not persuasion. In persuasion, convincing techniques and strategies...do not suffice; the critical factors are, according to classical rhetoric, *ethos* and *pathos*...These are to a great extent ignored by Perelman” (*Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis* [JSNTSup 114; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995], 40). He also notes that “some forms of persuasion have little to do with even implicit argumentation (cf. e.g. the persuasive force of repetition...).... It is necessary to add the volitional, emotional aspect to the argumentation analysis, that is, to ask what kind of emotions the author attempts to provoke in order to elicit assent” (ibid., 50, 54).

⁹ Nancey C. Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 33.

This structure may also be cast into other formats. Stephen Toulmin describes the structure of an argument as “warrant” (the general principle), “ground” (the specific situation) and the “claim” (conclusion).¹⁰ In many arguments, the claim is presented first, followed by the ground and/or warrant. For example: Socrates is mortal, because he is a human, and all humans are mortal. If the warrant or claim is omitted, readers can easily figure out what it was. If the text says only that “Socrates is mortal, because he is human,” readers may think to themselves, “We can substitute ‘mortal’ for ‘human’ because all humans are mortal.” However, speakers can sometimes hide faulty logic by using an enthymeme; the listeners supply a premise that seems to make sense of the argument but upon closer examination can be seen to have exceptions.

In some arguments, it is difficult to distinguish between warrants and grounds, or between major and minor premises, and for my purposes, it is not essential that they be differentiated—I am more interested in *identifying* the hidden premises than in categorizing them. I also find that Toulmin’s model of argumentation is more helpful for analyzing hidden premises, whereas the argumentation theory of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca may categorize arguments, but does not suggest further analysis into the beliefs of the readers.

Let us look now at Hebrews. In broad outline, Hebrews may be divided into three major sections, divided by transition passages in 4:14-16 and 10:19-22. Those two transition passages form an *inclusio*¹¹ introducing and then summarizing the central section of the epistle. Heb 4:14-16 announces the topic: “Since we have a great high priest...let us hold fast to our confession.... Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with confidence.”¹² Heb 10:19-22 repeats those key concepts as a summary and launching pad for further exhortations: “Since we have confidence to enter the

¹⁰ Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); see summaries in Murphy 1-42 and Foss et al., *Contemporary Perspectives*, 117-53. For a critique, see Frans H. van Eemeren et al., *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments* (Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1996), 129-58. The warrant is sometimes supported by backing or qualified in some way, such as by giving a rebuttal to possible exceptions, but this is not important in Hebrews.

¹¹ The repetition of words at the beginning and end of a section is called *inclusio*. It is especially distinctive when the words are not used in the intervening text.

¹² Scriptures are quoted, unless noted otherwise, from the New Revised Standard Version.

sanctuary...and a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart... Let us hold fast to the confession.”¹³ The author wants the readers to know doctrine—but that is not his main goal. He informs them about doctrine as a step toward another goal: he wants them to hold fast to Jesus Christ.

Now let us survey the arguments in Hebrews chapter by chapter.¹⁴ Space does not permit me to develop all the observations that will be made, nor all the questions that a survey of this epistle will inevitably touch on. Nor will I be able to comment on all the rhetorical devices and strategies—I am focusing on enthymemes to see what they imply about the audience. For other rhetorical devices, see the commentaries.¹⁵

Hebrews 1—Jesus better than angels

Heb 1:1-4 begins with a number of assertions, most of which are not argued—they are simply asserted.¹⁶ Only 1:4 is followed by any rationale; the others are just stated as if they are already accepted by the readers. It would be foolish for a speaker to begin with several assertions that were neither supported nor accepted by the readers,¹⁷ and assuming that the author of Hebrews is not foolish, I conclude that he believed that his audience would accept these ideas without protest. This implies an audience that accepted the following:

¹³ Paul Ellingworth writes, “4:14-16 prepare the presentation of Jesus as high priest, while 10:19-31 draw consequences from it” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 516).

¹⁴ I use chapter numbers for my subheads primarily to help my readers find material. The argument in Hebrews does not necessarily have a break at those points. I am not presenting an outline of the epistle.

¹⁵ Two recent commentaries pay particular attention to rhetoric: David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle ‘to the Hebrews’* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) and Craig R. Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

¹⁶ Some religious discourse is based on assertion, based primarily on the authority of the one who asserts. But many religious texts, including Hebrews, give *reasons* for some of the assertions that are made. These reasons may eventually rest on authorities such as Scripture or tradition, but argumentation rather than *mere* assertion is used.

¹⁷ Hugh W. Montefiore writes, “It is improbable that any epistle would open with controversial or unfamiliar Christological statements” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1964], 37). deSilva says that an introductory polemic would be “bad rhetorical form, running the risk of alienating the hearers by ‘correcting’ them too quickly (before trust has been fully established within the speech)” (*Perseverance*, 95). Koester writes, “Rhetorically, it was good practice to establish common ground with the audience by reinforcing what they already knew to be true” (*Hebrews*, 182).

- Some Jewish books are authoritative.¹⁸
- The Son of God appeared on earth, spoke, resolved the problem of sin,¹⁹ initiated a new age in history, and is now seated in heaven.
- The Son was the means of creation, and he now has authority over all things and sustains all things.
- The Son is like God in glory, being, and authority.

In short, the readers had a high Christology.²⁰ However, people who believed that the Son had authority over all things, and that he was seated at the right hand of the Supreme Being, would probably *already* believe that he was superior to the angels. Nevertheless, this last assertion is defended in some detail, and this is where the argumentation structure of Hebrews begins. Verse 4 is supported by reasoning in verse 5, signaled by the word γάρ:

- Claim in 1:4: The Son is superior to the angels.²¹
- Ground stated in 1:5: He is called the Son, and angels are not (implied in the rhetorical question).²²
- Unstated warrant, the premise that completes the logic: {The name “Son” is better than the name “angel,” and a better name indicates a better person.} (I use curved brackets to indicate premises that are unstated—ideas that the author apparently assumed that the readers would be able to supply.)²³

We can also state the argument in two syllogisms—the conclusion of one being used as the premise for the second:

¹⁸ We cannot call these books the Hebrew Bible, since the author used the Greek version. It would also be inappropriate to call them the Septuagint, since we do not know whether the author and readers accepted all the books now included in that term. The limits of their canon cannot be determined.

¹⁹ “Purification for sins” may be a disputed point, for it receives extensive support in later chapters.

²⁰ Harold W. Attridge says, “Hebrews does not introduce a high christology to its audience but develops and deepens affirmations that they already have” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 164).

²¹ English translations used in the enthymemes are based on the NRSV, but I have frequently abbreviated or deviated from it.

²² “The link is directly with 1:4, which propounds the thesis for which vv. 5-13 will provide scriptural support” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 111). I quote Ellingworth at numerous points in this study because he pays the most attention to connecting words. He supports my analysis at most points, but I find it necessary to argue against his view in a number of places.

²³ This does not imply that the author is illogical or is doing anything improper; it is just that he is able to draw on the already existing beliefs of the readers.

- Major premise: {The designation “Son” is better than the word “angel.”}
 - Minor premise: The person being talked about²⁴ was called “Son” in Scripture.²⁵ (This assumes that the readers already believe that these verses apply to Jesus—a crucial point that is never defended, again indicating an audience with a high Christology.)
 - Conclusion: Jesus has been given a better name than the angels (1:4b).
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- Jesus has been given a better name than the angels.
 - {A better name indicates a better person.}
 - Conclusion: Jesus is better than the angels (1:4a).

The author makes no attempt to defend the idea that the *magnitude* of superiority in names is proportional to the magnitude in ontological superiority. It seems to be a rhetorical flourish that did not require support, since the audience was already in agreement with the primary assertion, that Jesus is better than the angels. This latter assertion is essential to the author; the *relative* magnitude is not needed for the argument.

Verse 6 then introduces another enthymeme in support of 1:4a. Although the argument, as with most in Hebrews, *could* be presented in the form of a syllogism (with the conclusion last), Hebrews usually presents the claim first, followed by one reason, from which we must discern a warrant. Although the author’s thinking may have begun with premises and ended with conclusions, our analysis must begin with what is stated in the text. Toulmin’s format, stating the claim first, is usually better for presenting the analysis, so I will use that format in most cases:

- Claim: The Son is superior to the angels.
- Ground, based on Scripture: Angels are told to worship the Son (again, it is assumed without argument that the Son is called the firstborn and that this verse is about him.)²⁶
- Unstated warrant: {Worship is given from the inferior to the superior.}

²⁴ The name Jesus is not used until 2:9, but it is used there as if the readers are familiar with it.

²⁵ The first quote comes from Ps 2:7, which was originally about the kings of Israel, but was often understood as a messianic prophecy. The second quote is from 2 Sam 7:14, which was originally about Solomon, but came to be applied to the end-time Son of David, the Messiah.

²⁶ The Greek version of Deut 32:43 says this; the Hebrew version does not. Although the LXX says that the angels should worship God, the author here assumes, without giving evidence, that the verse is actually about worshipping the Son. He apparently believes that these readers already understand the verse in this way. The author was formerly part of the community and knew its beliefs. The second quote is from the LXX of Psalm 104:4; the Hebrew version has a different emphasis.

Verses 7 and 8 also support 1:4a:

- Claim: The Son is better than the angels.
- Ground: The angels are servants, whereas the Son has an eternal throne.²⁷
- Unstated warrant: {A ruler (anyone with a throne) is better than a servant.}

Verse 9 contains its own enthymeme:

- Ground: The Son loved righteousness.
- Warrant: {God rewards those who love righteousness.}
- Conclusion: Therefore (διὰ τοῦτο) God anointed him [as king] above his companions.

This enthymeme supports the claim implied in 1:8, that Jesus has become a king, but the mention of “throne” and “scepter” had already made that clear.

The function of verses 10-12 (quoted from Ps 102:25-27) is less clear—why does the author say that the Son was the Creator,²⁸ and that he, unlike the creation, is eternal? What does this passage have to do with angels? Perhaps the missing thought is that the angels are in the realm of change, which implies that they are lesser beings than the Son, who is in the realm of the eternal and unchanging.²⁹ But more likely, these verses are part of the praise for the Son that begins in 1:8. The angels are servants, but the Son is exalted, and two points of evidence are given in support of his exalted status: 1) The Son has been anointed and given an eternal throne and scepter, and 2) The Son is eternal, unlike the world he created. That the Son is Creator is assumed but not exploited; it is

²⁷ The author makes no comment on the Son being called God, as if this concept would not trouble the readers. The quote is from Ps 45:6-7; the parallel structure indicates that angels are servants. As Ellingworth comments on 1:13, “The messianic interpretation of the text, and more specifically its application to Christ [i.e., Jesus]...are presupposed in Hebrews” (*Hebrews*, 130).

²⁸ It is again assumed that the readers will accept without question this christological interpretation of a verse originally about God. As in 1:2c, the readers are assumed to accept the Son as Creator.

²⁹ It is unlikely that the readers believed that angels would eventually die; angels would also have “years that will never end.” But they are in the realm of change, and in Greek philosophy, it was often assumed that the immutable was automatically better than anything that could change, and this philosophy seems to be reflected in Hebrews.

simply an incidental part of the source quotation. The point made in 1:11-12 is eternity, not creativity. The logic can be schematized in this way:

- Claim: The Son is better than the angels (1:4a).
- Ground: The Son is praised as 1) God and Lord,³⁰ 2) with an eternal throne, 3) with the scepter (representing power) of God's kingdom, 4) anointed and honored above his companions, 5) the Creator, and 6) remaining eternally; whereas the angels are called servants.
- Warrant: {Those who are praised and given authority are better than those called servants.}

The comparison with angels is explicitly resumed in 1:13-14:

- Claim: The Son is better than the angels (1:4a).
- Ground: The Son was exalted to the right hand of God, but angels are spirits in the divine service, sent to serve humans.³¹
- {Those who have authority are better than those called servants.}³²

The rhetorical question that begins 1:13 is similar to the question that begins 1:5, thus forming an *inclusio* that indicates that the discussion is drawing to a close; a similar sense of completion is given by the use of λειτουργικά in 1:14, which forms an *inclusio* with λειτουργούς in 1:7. By mentioning “those who are to inherit salvation,”³³ rather than the simpler word “humans,” the author draws the readers into the discussion and prepares for the exhortation that follows in Heb 2 (which also uses “salvation”).

What is the rhetorical purpose of the catena of quotations used in Heb 1? If the author could assume that the readers would accept all the christological interpretations of the quoted verses, it seems to me that the readers would *already* be in agreement that

³⁰ Although the author does not stress these titles, they support his point.

³¹ The quote is from Ps 110:1, which plays a crucial role in Hebrews. Heb 1:3d alludes to the same verse. The logic ignores the possibility that the Son was *also* sent to serve humans. The stronger point is that it was the Son, and not the angelic servants, who was exalted to power next to God.

³² James Thompson points out the role of authority in 1:14 (*The Letter to the Hebrews* [Living Word Commentary; Austin: Sweet, 1971], 34)

³³ Ellingworth observes that the term σωτηρία “is never explained and must be considered traditional”—i.e., well known to the readers (*Hebrews*, 133).

Jesus Christ is better than the angels.³⁴ Although it might seem that the author is belaboring the point with several supporting texts, the fact that he does not attempt to support his *interpretations* indicates that he assumes that the readers are already in substantial agreement on these points.

Even as early as 1:3, in the exordium, the author assumes that his readers already believe that Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God (the credibility of the entire epistle hangs on this concept, which is never defended), and that would in itself make him superior to the angels. The readers know that Jesus *appeared* to be less than the angels while a human (acknowledged by the author in 2:5, 9), and they may not understand the purpose for that abasement, but they do not seem to challenge that he was exalted above the angels. It would be poor rhetorical strategy to hit the readers with points of contention so soon in the epistle; it would be wiser to establish rapport with the readers by giving several points of agreement. The rhetorical purpose of this comparison can then be seen by the use the author makes of it in the parenthesis that begins chapter 2.

Hebrews 2:1-4—a plea for attention

Heb 2:1 begins with Διὰ τοῦτο, signaling that a conclusion is being drawn—the conclusion that “we must pay greater attention to what we have heard.” We might ask, Greater than what? Verse 2 shows that the point of comparison is “the message declared through angels”—that is, the law of Moses.³⁵ The author wants the readers to be more attentive to a recent message of salvation than to the traditional focus of Judaism. *This* is the parenetic conclusion and the rhetorical purpose of Heb 1:5-14.³⁶ Actually, this

³⁴ “The writer, especially at this early stage in his argument, is not trying to prove theses which his readers were likely to question.... At present, he is building on beliefs which he appears to assume that his readers will readily accept” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 109, 137).

³⁵ Ellingworth suggests two other possible answers to the question, “Greater than what?” First, “closer attention than you have been paying,” and second, “closer attention than the Israelites paid to God’s commandments in OT times” (*Hebrews*, 135). I believe that my suggestion has better support in the context, and it better addresses the readers’ situation.

³⁶ Ellingworth implies the same when he writes, “A clue to the place of angels in the structure of the argument is provided in Heb. 2:2, which...refers to the tradition that angels acted as mediators when the Law was given to Moses” (*Hebrews*, 104). Other scholars who support this view include:

- Kenneth Schenck writes, “The contrast between Christ and the angels is a part of the contrast between the two covenants.... It is very relevant to the author’s contrast between the two

exhortation is the central theme of the entire epistle—in effect, the *propositio*: Look to Jesus, not the law.³⁷ Subsequent exhortations flesh out *the way* in which readers should be attentive to Jesus—to not neglect him, to consider him, to not harden their hearts, to enter the rest he offers, to hold fast to a confession about him, to draw near to God through him, to fix their eyes on him, etc.—and throughout the epistle, Jesus is contrasted over against the law, the old covenant, the message of angels.

The author has begun with points of agreement, and in a sudden shift, has used that agreement as the basis for an attention-getting point of correction. The readers could go through Heb 1 saying, “Yes, yes. I agree with you again and again, so why are you telling me things I already know?” And the author responds by saying, “You³⁸ believe that Jesus is great, but you are not acting like it. You are giving more attention to the old message than to the new and better message.” This allows the author to appeal for the readers to be attentive to what he has to say. “You agree that Jesus is superior, so I exhort you to be attentive to the message about him.” The logic is this:

covenants, even if this contrast is not made very explicit in Heb. 1” (*Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story Behind the Sermon* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003], 75, 43).

- Koester writes, “Angels are important because they were associated with the giving of the Law” (*Hebrews*, 200). From the beginning, the epistle is concerned with contrasting Christ and the law of Moses.
- Edvin Larsson writes, “The whole comparison in Heb 1-2 is to be understood as a demonstration of the superiority of the new revelation over the old. The relationship between the angels and the Old Testament is the very reason why the author discusses their position at all (“How Mighty Was the Mighty Minority?” pp. 93-105 in *Mighty Minorities? Minorities in Early Christianity, Positions and Strategies* [ed. David Hellholm, Halvor Moxnes, and Turid Karlsen Seim; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995], 103).
- C. K. Barrett writes, “There seems to be no evidence for such an angel-christology in the first century.... The heavily underlined contrast in Hebrews 1 must have an internal explanation, and there is no need to look further than Hebrews 2:2-4” (“The Christology of Hebrews,” pp. 110-27 in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology* [ed. Mark Allan Powell and David R. Bauer; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 116).
- Scott Walker Hahn writes, “These verses actually serve to reveal the author’s main purpose in arguing for Christ’s superiority to the angels in the preceding chapter.... He is really intent on showing that Christ is a superior mediator of a new and better covenant, over and against those who mediated the ‘old covenant’ (8:6, 13): the angels (chs. 1-2), Moses and Joshua (chs. 3-4), Aaron and the Levites (chs. 5-7)” (“Kinship by Covenant: A Biblical Theological Study of Covenant Types and Texts in the Old and New Testaments,” [Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1995], 508-9).

³⁷ Normally, the *propositio* is a statement, but in an epistle that consistently drives toward exhortation, it seems appropriate to allow an exhortation to express the main thrust of the work.

³⁸ The author uses the rhetorically softer “we,” but I use “you” to make the exhortation more obvious.

- Conclusion: The message spoken through Jesus is more important than the message (the law) declared through angels.³⁹
- Ground: Jesus is better than the angels (1:4a, buttressed by 1:5-14,⁴⁰ now used as the premise of a new argument, taking the author one step toward his goal).
- Warrant: {The importance of the message corresponds to the importance of the messenger.}

This conclusion is used in another enthymeme:

- Conclusion: We should pay greater attention to Jesus than to Moses.
- Ground: The message of Jesus is more important than the law of Moses.
- Warrant: {People should be more attentive to important messages than to messages that are of lesser importance.}⁴¹

The purpose of this exhortation is given at the end of 2:1: “so that [μήποτε] we do not drift away from it.” The author explains why this is a desirable goal in 2:2-3, using the word γάρ:

- Claim: People will be punished for transgressing the message of Christ (implied in the rhetorical question of 2:3a).
- Ground: Because people were punished for transgressing the law of Moses. (The word εἰ in 2:2 implies a condition in agreement with fact.)
- Warrant: {If people were justly punished for transgressing an angelic message, people will be justly punished for transgressing the more important message.}⁴²

³⁹ Although Hebrews is concerned mainly with a message *about* Jesus, Heb 2:3 indicates that it was a message spoken *through* him. This may reflect a belief that Jesus applied Ps 110:1 to himself, but it is more likely explained by Hebrews’ pattern of attributing Scripture to words spoken by God, or Christ (cf. 10:5).

⁴⁰ Ellingworth agrees, but offers an alternative: “The author is...likely to be thinking of the entire argument of chap. 1. Another possibility is that διὰ τοῦτο refers to the final words of 1:14, which though grammatically subordinate are a major theme in the epistle. The meaning would then be: ‘because God intends to give us salvation as a permanent possession, we must be all the more attentive to what he and others have said about it’” (*Hebrews*, 135).

⁴¹ The hidden premises in this case, and in many others in this paper, is a commonplace that does not reveal anything significant about the readers. But it is helpful to state the premise as part of the attempt to understand the argument.

⁴² B.F. Westcott writes, “The necessity of heedful care is grounded on the certainty of retribution. This certainty is proportional to the authority of the revelation” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [1903, 1920; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 37).

The argument implies that anyone who neglects the message takes an unacceptable risk of transgression and therefore punishment.⁴³ However, a more important message does not necessarily carry stricter penalties. Indeed, the author later argues that the new covenant (which is at least part of the message of Jesus) is better in terms of *forgiveness*; the author assumes but does not prove that penalties are involved.⁴⁴

It is possible that the author is using—in a rhetorical question rather than in a statement—an *ad hominem* argument that appeals to a belief of the readers, but is not a belief that the author shares. That is, he knows that the readers view their relationship with God in terms of a contract rather than a promise of grace, and he is using their mistaken view for the time being to correct their view. The problem with this explanation is that the author continues to give dire warnings even *after* explaining that the new covenant entails forgiveness. It is therefore likely that he also views the message of Jesus as a contract that requires punishments for transgressions.

The author is using an argument from the lesser to the greater (*a minore ad maius*, or *qal wahomer*),⁴⁵ but changing the terms of the comparison in midstream: If even a small infraction of the Torah deserved punishment, then (he implies) it is virtually certain that *complete neglect* of the new message will also be punished. In general, *qal wahomer*

⁴³ “Hope and fear are intertwined throughout Hebrews” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 139). The argument could be presented as an enthymeme with two unstated premises:

{ We do not want to risk punishment. }

{ If we ignore the message, we take a risk of transgression. }

Consequently, we do not want to neglect the message, which means that we need to give it more attention.

⁴⁴ J. C. Fenton asks whether there is “a flaw in the logic.... It could be that the reason why God provided better things for us was to show that he is merciful and loving; and if that were the case, then the conclusion that he would punish us more severely would not be valid” (“The Argument in Hebrews,” pp. 175-181 in *Studia Evangelica Vol. VII* [ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone; Berlin: Akademie, 1982], 180).

⁴⁵ There is another way to construe the argument—not as *qal wahomer*, but as relying on the readers’ sense of guilt: “Every transgression of the law will be punished—and we have all transgressed, so we will not escape, except through the message of salvation that Jesus brought. If we neglect the rescue that the Lord offers, we will not escape *the penalties of the old message* [cf. 9:15]. Since we need salvation, and Jesus brought a valid offer, we should not ignore his message.” This line of reasoning would be good only if the readers believed that penalties of the law of Moses were still valid (but cf. 8:13). This line of reasoning would also diminish the rhetorical significance of 1:5-14—there is no need to argue that Jesus is *better* than angels if he simply brought a message that counteracted their message. If this had been the thought of the author, I would expect him to argue that because Jesus is better, he had the *authority* to rescue us from punishment, or perhaps that Jesus is better *because* he brought rescue. But neither of these seems to be suggested. Rather, the argument is that people should listen to Jesus because *he* is better, not because his message has better promises (that will be argued later, but it is not the point here).

arguments rely on analogies, not logic, and they are effective only when the analogies are accepted as valid. What the logic proves is simply that the message of salvation is *valid* (βέβαιος, the term used for the angelic message in 2:2).

- Claim: The message is valid.
- Ground: It was declared through the Lord. Evidence of this was given to us by people who heard him.
- Warrant: {A message given by God is valid.}

- Claim: The message is valid.
- Ground: Various miracles and divine gifts accompanied the eyewitness testimony.⁴⁶
- Warrant: {Evidence of validity can be further strengthened by miracles.}

What the author does not prove, however, is that the message entails punishment. The law of Moses promised that transgressions would be punished, and since it was valid, those punishments had to be carried out. But unless the new message threatens punishment, punishments do not have to be inflicted in order for the message to remain valid. If the new message promises only blessings, then any talk of punishment is a *non sequitur*. The author assumes but never proves that the message of Jesus requires punishment; this is apparently an assumption he expected the readers to share.

Hebrews 2:5-18—Jesus made mortal

Verse 5, with the word γάρ, is more difficult to place in the logical flow. It signals that the author is resuming the argument, bringing angels back into the discussion—but (unlike in Heb 1) he does not indicate where he is going, and it is not clear what γάρ should be related to. Ellingworth suggests that it “apparently refers back to 1:4-14.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The text does not say whether the readers have seen the miracles, or only heard about them.

⁴⁷ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 111. Westcott says that it “refers directly to the signs of divine power among believers” (*Hebrews*, 41), but the logic of that eludes me. I prefer a suggestion made by Lee Maxey: It simply indicates that a new topic has begun: “The use of the postpositive completive γάρ is relatively common in Heb. It is partly employed to indicate to the oral reader and auditors of Heb that a long periodic sentence, like that of 10:32-33, has ended (cf. Heb 1:5; 2:5, 16; 4:14; 7:1; 8:3; 10:26; and 12:3)” (“The Rhetoric of Response: A Classical Rhetorical Reading of Hebrews 10:32-12:13” [Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2002], 148).

However, I see most of Heb 2 as continuing to support the exhortation implied in 2:1—*people should pay more attention to Jesus than to the angel-mediated law.*

Why should people listen to Jesus rather than the angelic message? Verse 5 explains why: God has not given angels authority over the world to come.⁴⁸ Instead, Scripture says that a human (ἄνθρωπος or υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, translated as “mortals” by the NRSV) will be given authority over the world to come. Therefore, if people want to be in that world, they should look to a human rather than to angels for the right to be there (i.e., salvation). The eschatological hope does not depend on angels—it depends on a human, because Scripture says that the world to come is under human authority. Consequently, no one should focus on the message of angels. Because of the lengthy quote from Ps 8:4-5, the enthymeme spans several verses:

- Claim: If we want to be part of the world to come, we should be attentive to a message brought by the human who will rule that world {not to the message of angels—implied as the counterpart to the statement of 2:5}.
- Ground: The world to come will be ruled by a human⁴⁹ (2:6-8), not by an angel (stated in 2:5).
- Warrant: {People should listen (i.e., obey) to their rulers.}

The author is responding to an objection that he does not articulate⁵⁰: Jesus may be superior to the angels now, but his message was given while he was a human, and the message concerns what he did as a human, and since humans are inferior to angels, the message is inferior to theirs. In response to this possible objection, the author is pointing out that people should *expect* the message of salvation to center on a human, since everything (πάντα; 2:8) was promised to humanity. Verse 8 has its own enthymeme:

- Claim: Everything will be subject to humanity, even if that cannot be seen yet.⁵¹

⁴⁸ In the thinking of the author, the “world to come” may have already begun, since the “last days” had begun and Christ was seated in glory. However, there is more yet to come (9:28; 10:37; 12:26).

⁴⁹ The logic is this:

{The world to come is included in “everything.”}

Scripture promises that everything will be put under the rule of humanity.

Therefore the world to come will be under human rule.

⁵⁰ It is not clear whether the objection was held by some readers, or whether the author is forestalling *possible* objections. Rather than refuting a serious objection, he may be strengthening his credibility by first developing an argument that the readers are likely to have little objection to.

⁵¹ In Toulmin’s terminology, this latter clause is a rebuttal, addressing an objection.

- Ground: Scripture promises glory, honor, and authority over everything to humanity, without stating any exceptions.⁵²
- Warrant: { Whatever Scripture says is certain, because God said it,⁵³ and he keeps his promises. }

Verses 8d-9 present another step of the argument: “We do not yet (οὐπω) see everything in subjection to [humanity⁵⁴], but we do see Jesus...crowned with glory and honor.” What is the point—that humanity will in the future be given authority over everything, or that Jesus has already fulfilled the promise? It is likely both (the οὐπω shows that the author believes that the promise was given to humanity in general), but the author’s purpose here is not to exalt humanity, but to point the readers to Jesus; he is explaining that it was necessary for this superior being to be a human. Verse 9 shows that the author believes Jesus to be the specific referent of Ps 8:5—“for a little while lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor.”⁵⁵ The result is this syllogism:

- God crowned humanity with glory and honor, with authority over all things.
- Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor (2:9) and is now at God’s right hand (1:13), which means that he has been given authority.
- Therefore, Jesus is the human who has authority over all things, including the world to come.⁵⁶

Other humans may follow Jesus into glory, but they do so *by following Jesus*.⁵⁷ So the purpose of the passage can be paraphrased: Why be more attentive to Jesus than to the

⁵² Westcott suggests that γὰρ in 2:8 “points back to v. 5, so that the connexion is: God did not subject the future world to angels, for He promised man an absolute sovereignty” (*Hebrews*, 45).

⁵³ The psalmist actually said it to God (this may be the reason for the vague introductory formula of 2:6), but the author assumes that the psalmist’s words are inspired.

⁵⁴ The Greek is singular: ἀντῷ.

⁵⁵ The NRSV obscures this connection by the use of plural words. I suggest the following translation as a possible way to preserve the ambiguity that the author exploited—in such a way that Jesus can be “the human”: “What is a person, that you are mindful of each one, or a human being, that you care for one? You have made the human for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned the human with glory and honor, subjecting all things to the human.” It is apparent from 2:9 that the author believed υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου to be Jesus, whether or not he knew the tradition given in the Gospels.

⁵⁶ This is a paraphrase, not a syllogism. If we put this into syllogistic form, the unstated premise would be that *if* someone is given a seat next to God in authority, then that person has been given authority over all things.

angel-delivered law? Because the world to come will be ruled by Jesus, not the angels. If we want to be part of that world, we need to look to its leader.

Verse 9 summarizes: Jesus was made lower than the angels “for a little while”⁵⁸—the fact that he was human does not make him inferior, since that was only a temporary situation. Verse 9 also mentions that Jesus was crowned *because of* his death, but the author does not attempt to support that causation.⁵⁹ Third, 2:9 says that Jesus was made temporarily lower than the angels so that [ὅπως] he could die for everyone. The author does not support “for everyone,” but supports the necessity of death starting in 2:10, which uses γάρ. The author is responding to a possible objection: “Doesn’t the death of Jesus show that he was inferior to angels?” So the author says,

Although he is superior, he had to be lower for a while, because Ps 8 says that the future world will be under humanity, and so the ruler of everything had to become human. I will show that it was necessary for our Savior to die. The fact that Jesus died does not disprove my argument—it is all the more reason that we should be attentive to Jesus, because it confirms his role in our salvation.

The claim is presented in 2:9: Jesus was made mortal so he could die for everyone; this is then supported by 2:10: ...for it was appropriate for God to complete the Savior⁶⁰ through suffering (and death). But this assertion also needs support, so the author supports it with a chain of argumentation that ends in 2:17: The Savior had to be like the people he saved. Koester suggests that the missing thought is God’s desire to save: “Since he created people for glory, it is fitting that he should provide a way for

⁵⁷ “Jesus fulfills the psalm first and is in the process of bringing the psalm to its complete fulfillment for all the ‘human children’” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 114). “Jesus’ suffering led to his glory and made him the source of salvation for others. Listeners can therefore trust that as they follow Jesus, God will bring them to glory as well” (Koester, *Hebrews*, 225).

⁵⁸ This implies that he was originally greater than the angels, in keeping with the author’s Christology. The author has understood Ps 8:5 in a temporal sense, which the LXX permits but the Hebrew text does not.

⁵⁹ Ellingworth says, “To understand the words to mean that Christ’s death was the direct cause of his exaltation is unnecessary and runs counter to the thought of the passage” (*Hebrews*, 155). Even so, this is the way the words would normally be understood. The idea can be explained by including more of the context: He was exalted not just because he died, but because he died to save others. Such a death, enabled by the grace of God, qualified him to be the human given authority over all things. Westcott says that “the grace of God...seems to be the necessary starting point of the argument in the next section” (*Hebrews*, 46).

⁶⁰ The author does not simply refer to “the Savior”—he calls him the author of the salvation of many children, subtly preparing the way for the quotes in 2:12-13.

them to reach this end.”⁶¹ Verse 14 uses the logical connector οὖν, and 2:17 uses ὅθεν, showing that they are drawing conclusions from the previous verses; they express what the passage is driving at—it shows why Jesus could not be perfect (i.e., completely prepared for his salvific role)⁶² without dying. I will put the somewhat repetitious argument into enthymemes:

- Claim: The Savior had to suffer (2:10c).
- Ground: Because (γάρ) the Savior and the saved (the Sanctifier and the sanctified) have a common heritage—they are all human (2:11).
- Warrant: {Humans have to suffer—i.e., to die (cf. 9:27).}

- Claim: Jesus is in the same (human) family as people are (thus this verse supports the premise of 2:11, that we are all from one).
- Ground: Jesus speaks of humans as his siblings in Ps 22:22⁶³ (2:12).
- Warrant: {If he calls them siblings, they are in the same family.}

- Claim: We are in the same family.
- Ground: In Isa 8:17-18,⁶⁴ he refers to children given to him [as siblings].
- Warrant: {If he is given children, he is in the same family as they are.}

Verse 14 uses οὖν to introduce the conclusion:

- Ground: Since (ἐπεὶ) all humans have flesh and blood (2:14a)...
- {and since he is in the same family},
- Jesus became human.

Verse 14 contains an unproven assertion: That Jesus became mortal for the purpose of [ἵνα] destroying the devil through his own death.⁶⁵ Verse 15 gives another

⁶¹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 235.

⁶² Several commentators note that τελειόω is used in Lev 21:10 and other verses to refer to the consecration of a priest. Although this may have been in the author’s mind, the readers would be unlikely to have this technical meaning in mind, for at this point in the epistle, there has been nothing in the context to suggest it.

⁶³ Ps 22 is treated as a messianic psalm several times in the NT; there is no effort to defend its use here. “The author ...expected his readers to be aware, of the already traditional Christian understanding” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 167).

⁶⁴ It is odd that Isa 8:17 is separated from Isa 8:18 by καὶ πάλιν. Perhaps the author wanted to ensure that both verses were given attention.

⁶⁵ This is an incidental claim; the devil plays no role in the argument of the epistle. It is a throw-away comment indicating that the author believed that death was caused by the devil.

reason: He became mortal so that by dying, he might free all humans from death. Why would his death free *others* from death? The author does not say. This, like the similar assertion in 2:9, is not followed by supporting argumentation. The epistle later argues that his death is a means of atonement and cleansing; the unstated premise is that death is due to sin, and permission to approach God (which Jesus enables through his death) shows that sins are forgiven and is therefore tantamount to salvation and eternal life.⁶⁶ The idea is that if sins are forgiven, then that removes the only thing preventing people from having the eternal life that God promised. But the author does not demonstrate that God promised eternal life to the righteous; he assumes that the readers already believe that.

Rather than simply saying that Jesus has freed people from death, 2:15 says that Jesus has freed people from fear and slavery, thus appealing to the emotions of the readers. Verse 16 mentions angels once again, just to dismiss them: “For [γάρ] it is clear that he did not come to help angels.”⁶⁷ Of course—no one thought he did, nor do angels *need* help. They are mentioned here as a rhetorical foil, so the readers have no choice but to agree with the author. There is some sleight-of-hand involved in the logic.⁶⁸ The original question was, Did the Savior have to die? Here it is shifted to, Did Jesus come to

⁶⁶ The author uses a variety of terms for salvation without explicitly saying that they refer to the same thing: purification for sins, the coming world, sanctification, freed from the fear of death, the house of God, the sabbath rest of God, resurrection of the dead, the age to come, the promised eternal inheritance, perfection, entering the heavenly sanctuary, the city with foundations, a heavenly country, Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the firstborn enrolled in heaven, a kingdom that cannot be shaken, etc.

⁶⁷ This assumes the NRSV translation “helps.” It is also possible that the Greek ἐπιλαμβάνεται (“he takes hold”) refers to a transformation: He does not assume the essence of angels, but rather he became one of the children of Abraham. In this way of understanding the verse, it is a restatement, not a supporting argument. Verse 14 says that he became human; 2:16 “would be a mere repetition of v. 14a” (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 55). Verse 17 would then be illogical: He *therefore* had to become like his siblings. The ὅθεν that begins 2:17 implies that a reason rather than a restatement has been given in 2:16. Ellingworth writes, “If this were the meaning of v. 16, it would mark no advance over what was said in v. 14a, and the introductory γάρ would be meaningless” (*Hebrews*, 177).

⁶⁸ C. Clifton Black II notes that rhetoric is sometimes “quasi-logical”: “Quintillian is fully aware that a certain degree of legerdemain characterizes the ‘logic’ of some arguments; he and other theorists, from Aristotle on, describe the *logos* of a speech as either proof or the *appearance* of proof” (“The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills,” *HTR* 81 [1988]: 11). Similarly, Vernon K. Robbins notes that “rationales juxtaposed with assertions regularly break the bounds of any easily reconstructed logic” (“The Present and Future of Rhetorical Analysis,” in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference* [ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997], 36).

save angels, or humans? The readers will have to say “humans, of course,” reinforcing by association the propriety of the Savior being a mortal.

Instead of saying that Jesus came to save humans, 2:17 says that he came to help “the descendants of Abraham.” The author’s earlier argument included all humanity; here (perhaps due to the author’s fondness of variety) it is focused on the family of Abraham. The author makes no attempt to clarify that this means all who believe; he simply assumes that the readers will know that they are included in this designation.

- Datum: He came to help the descendants of Abraham (2:16).
- Conclusion: Therefore (ὅθεν) he had to become like his siblings in every way (2:17).
- Warrant: {A Savior must share in the essence of those who are saved.}

The case for this warrant rests on two points: 1) that all authority was given to a human (2:5-9), and 2) that the messiah used family terms for his people (2:11-14). The author suggests that the humanity of the Savior was not only predicted in Scripture, it is somehow logically appropriate (although the author does not prove this with any logic).

Verse 17 adds a new reason for the incarnation: “so that [ἵνα] he might be a merciful and faithful high priest.”⁶⁹ His role as high priest is not yet stated as a *self-sacrifice*—the purpose is simply “to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.” However, 2:9 argues that Jesus was made human *so that* he could die for everyone; 2:14 says that he was made human *so that* he could conquer death through his death; the implication involved in putting the three verses together is that the “sacrifice of atonement” was himself, that his death brings salvation by atoning for sins. This will be made explicit later, especially in 7:27.

Heb 2:18, using γάρ, gives a supporting enthymeme:

- Claim: Jesus can help those who are tested.
- Ground: Because Jesus was tested when he suffered.
- Warrant: {One who has been tested can help those who are being tested.}

⁶⁹ This is the first use of this title, which becomes a key term later in the epistle. Although the term is used casually, as if the readers were already familiar with it, it is also possible that it was new to the readers—the author expected them to keep listening for an explanation. In previous purpose clauses (2:9 and 2:14), the author went on to provide support for the statement. Ellingworth calls this verse “a nerve center of the epistle” (*Hebrews*, 179); several commentators call it the *propositio* (see list in Koester, *Hebrews*, 219). Scripture did not require priests to be merciful; the mention of mercy here suggests a need of the readers.

This is relevant to 2:17 in two ways: 1) Jesus can be merciful, and therefore willing to help others, because he has been tested. 2) Because he was tested—and *passed the test*—he was able to be called faithful, and to atone for human sins. The key part of point 2 is stated explicitly in 4:15: Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses (i.e., be merciful) because he “has been tested [same word—πειράζω] as we are, *yet without sin.*” Sinlessness is probably implied in 2:18, too, since anyone who collapses under testing is a dubious source of help for others. However, the author’s stress in 2:18 is on mercy, not atonement, since it ends by saying that Jesus is able to help those who are being tested⁷⁰ (which presumably includes the readers). The assumption is that the readers *want* a Savior who is able to help them when they are tested. The connection between 2:17 and 2:18 is allusive, shown in the following enthymeme:

- Claim: Jesus *had* to be made human (2:17a).
- Ground: Because (γάρ) {only a Savior who has been tested *by suffering as a human* can help humans who are being tested (implied in 2:18a).}
- Warrant: {It was necessary for the Savior to be able to help humans in their tests (implied in 2:17b and 2:18b).}

Hebrews 3—Jesus more faithful than Moses

Heb 3:1 uses ὅθεν to move into another exhortation: Since Jesus can help us, let us think more about him. The author calls the readers ὀδελφοί, echoing 2:17, and uses ἐπουράνιος, a word that has important associations in later chapters. He also calls Jesus an apostle, a word that is not developed further, and high priest, which will be. Just as he did in 2:1, the author is using an argument as a rhetorical device calling for attentiveness. He supports what he said in 2:17—first that Jesus was faithful, later that he is merciful.

- Jesus can help us (2:18).
- We should therefore consider Jesus (3:1).
- Warrant: {If we want help, we should be attentive to people who can help us.}

⁷⁰ Atonement is the appropriate help for those who *fail* their tests, but that does not seem to be in the author’s thought at this point.

He makes an assertion in 3:2—that Jesus was faithful—and follows it with a γάρ sentence in 3:3. This sentence does not explain why Jesus was faithful, but rather, why the author can *say* he was faithful.

- Claim: We must consider Jesus faithful (3:1-2).
- Ground: Because (γάρ) Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses (3:3).
- Warrant: {Anyone given more honor than Moses must also be considered faithful, because Moses is honored because he was faithful.}⁷¹

Verse 3 also includes a comparative argument:

- Claim: Jesus has more honor than Moses.
- Warrant: Builders have more honor than the houses they build.
- Ground: {Jesus corresponds to the builder, Moses to the house.}⁷²

Heb 1:2 has already said that Jesus is the agent of creation, so it is not strange that Jesus is here called the builder. However, Heb 3:4, using the word γάρ, takes another step. Ellingworth⁷³ suggests that it refers to 3:2:

- Claim: Moses was faithful in all his house (3:2, quoting Num 12:7).
- Ground: Because God is the builder of all things (3:4).
- Implied conclusion: {It was God’s house, not Moses’ .}

But the logic fails to address the point that Ellingworth claims it does—3:4 says that every house is built by someone, and logically, that “someone” could be Moses, even if God is the ultimate builder. For 3:4 to be relevant, it must say something about Christ—implying that Christ is the divine builder of the house. This takes the parallels in 3:3 as relevant also: Jesus is worthy of more honor because he is the builder of the house, and he is divine. It is true, as Ellingworth points out when he considers this interpretation, that the author does not develop this point,⁷⁴ but the author did nothing to develop the divine vocative in 1:8, either. That is not the purpose of this epistle. The enthymeme is:

⁷¹ “Γάρ appears to connect v. 3, not directly with v. 2, but with κααοήσατε in v. 1, and indirectly (via ὄθεν, v. 1) with the whole previous argument about the supremacy of Christ” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 204).

⁷² This is the more common interpretation, but Ellingworth denies that the parallels are intended: “The meaning is simply ‘A is greater than B, just as C is greater than D’” (ibid., 203). But it would be odd to compare something totally unrelated; the proximity suggests some similarity.

⁷³ Ibid., 205.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 206.

- Claim: Jesus is worthy of more honor, just as a builder is (3:3).
- Ground: For (γάρ) the builder of all things is divine (3:4).
- Implied warrant: {Jesus is the builder of all things, and the builder of this house in particular.}

It would have been sufficient to argue that Jesus was the builder of the house—e.g., “for every house is built by someone, and the builder of this house is Jesus.” However, the author *expands* it by talking about the builder of *all things*.⁷⁵ Once this has been done, the builder analogy is abandoned; only the house analogy is used in 3:5-6. These verses argue that 1) Moses was faithful as a servant and 2) Christ was faithful as a son. The assumption seems to be that the faithfulness of a son is more honorable than the faithfulness of a servant—an assumption that may have been accepted in the first century, but is not necessarily true. The passage assumes part of what it labors to prove: that Jesus was faithful in all his tests. Again, the readers are assumed to have a high Christology.

The other argument in this passage is that Jesus is more honorable than Moses. The author could have pointed out incidents in which Moses fell short, but he did not. In keeping with Greek rhetorical conventions of praise by comparison (*synkrisis*), he does not denigrate the lesser person (except the hint in 3:17).⁷⁶ Rather, he bases the argument on ontological difference, not behavioral difference. Both persons were accepted as thoroughly faithful, but Jesus was counted as more honorable simply because of his ontological superiority.⁷⁷

The argument could have been simple: A son is better than a servant, so Jesus the son is better than Moses the servant. So why has the author used a more circuitous and less logical route? Probably because the question revolved not just around Moses, but also around faithfulness. The author appeals to readers who valued faithfulness and viewed Moses as a good example of faithfulness. They apparently wanted to be faithful

⁷⁵ Since Jesus is the maker of all things (1:2), and the house is a thing, he is the maker of it as well. The argument assumes that Jesus is divine.

⁷⁶ As Robert H. Smith observes, “It would have undermined his proportional comparison to point to any flaws in the character or work of Moses” (*Hebrews* [ACNT; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 57). It is more surprising, then, that when the author compares new and old covenants, he points out flaws in the old.

⁷⁷ Schenck points out that the passage supports the author’s eventual goal of contrasting the old and new covenants: “The author’s discussion of Christ and Moses in Heb. 3:1-6 implicitly contrasts the two ‘covenants’ with which these two individuals are associated” (*Understanding*, 60).

to Moses. The author grants their argument, but tries to trump it in two ways. Yes, Num 12:7 says that Moses was faithful in all of God’s house, but Jesus is more worthy of allegiance because he is 1) the builder and 2) the son. He has been given more glory than Moses, showing that he had a better faithfulness—and since he set a better example, people should be faithful to him, more than to the good-but-lesser example.

The author uses the “house” concept again in 3:6, saying that the readers are the house of God and/or Christ⁷⁸ if they hold firm—i.e., if they are faithful. This becomes an implied exhortation: If they want to be part of his household (i.e., his family, used here as a metaphor of salvation), then they will hold firm to the confidence they have in him.

In 3:7, the author launches into a more direct exhortation, using the word *διό*.

- Ground: Christ is a faithful son (3:6a).
- Conclusion: We should therefore listen, not harden our hearts (3:7).
- Warrant: { We should listen to faithful examples. }

Or it could support a different claim:

- Ground: We want to hold firm to our confidence (implied in 3:6b).
- Conclusion: We should therefore listen, not harden our hearts (3:7).
- Warrant: { If we don’t listen, we won’t hold firm. }

The first possibility treats 3:6bc as a parenthetical thought; the second possibility takes it as a step in the argument, which is why I prefer it.

Heb 3:7-11 contains a long quote from Ps 95:7-11⁷⁹; Heb 3:10 includes another enthymeme using *διὸ*. Although the enthymeme originates with the LXX, the author quotes it with approval:

- Claim: God was angry with them.
- Because that generation provoked and tested God.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The *οἰκουμένη* is ambiguous. The author may not have seen much distinction between the house of God and the house of Christ, and was willing to let the ambiguity stand. “House of God” could remind readers of the temple, but the author does not do anything to reinforce that association.

⁷⁹ This section of the epistle may have originated as a sermon based on Ps 95. Ellingworth notes in chapter 4 that the “cyclical nature of the argument... can perhaps best be understood on the presupposition that the author is not primarily concerned to give new teaching...but to strengthen the readers’ conviction about truths which they already accept” (*Hebrews*, 237).

⁸⁰ Verse 9 says that the people saw God’s works for 40 years. In the Torah, however, 40 years was the punishment, not the cause of the punishment.

- {God is angry with persistent rebels.}

Verse 11 says that a consequence of God's anger is that he did not give that generation the blessing he had offered. This could be viewed as an enthymeme, or simply as a synonym or expression of God's wrath.

Verse 12 includes a direct exhortation with strong, emotionally charged words: Be careful that you do not have an evil, unbelieving (or unfaithful) heart that falls away from God. These words, immediately following a description of disobedience and punishment,⁸¹ make the warning here much stronger than the warning in 2:1-3. The second-person imperative in 3:12 is more direct than the first-person plural indicative and hypothetical question of 2:1-3, indicating that the author believes that he is dealing with a real possibility for the readers.

What he suggested in 2:1-3 becomes here a direct command. The author first suggested that the readers would not want to *drift* away; here he implies that they need to avoid a *deliberate* refusal to do God's will. The argument implies that the readers are in a comparable situation: God is still angered by rebellion, and the readers do not want to experience punishment the way the ancient Israelites did, so they do not want to provoke him the way the ancients did. The readers may not think they are moving a significant amount, but the author warns them that they are in danger of moving too far. The implication is that they will provoke God if they do not hold on to their confidence (3:6) and assurance (3:14). How do they hold firm? By paying attention to the message of Christ (2:1), and remembering that he was faithful and worthy of more honor than Moses (3:1-3).

In brief, the argument is: "They disobeyed and God punished them. So readers, be careful—you might experience the same, if you go down the path that you are tempted to go." The author has yet to demonstrate that the "path" they have in mind is really tantamount to apostasy (he never directly says that, for he never directly describes their temptation), but he says here that the danger is indeed that serious. The solution he offers

⁸¹ Strictly speaking, the text says not that the Israelites were punished, but that they were not given a blessing. Anyone who knew the history would know that this was a punishment.

(without supporting argumentation) is mutual encouragement (3:13).⁸² He implies in a ἵνα clause that *if* the readers encourage one another daily, none of them will be deceived by sin and thereby have their hearts hardened. He does not say what sort of sin might deceive them, but it is apparently the sin of ignoring Jesus, which amounts, in the author's analysis, to rebellion against God.

What were the readers to encourage one another to do? In context, it was the admonition of Ps 95:7: Listen to God, and be willing to obey.⁸³ (And as the epistle argues, the readers can listen to God only if they are attentive to the message of Jesus.)

Heb 3:14 amounts to a paraphrase of 3:6: If we hold fast, then we belong to Christ—we are his house, and we have become his partners (μέτοχοι, used previously in reference to Christ in 1:9 and for the readers in 3:1). In brief, the argument is: Exhort one another, because (γάρ) you are partakers of Christ if you keep your faith in him. Although 3:14 uses γάρ, the logic is too weak to construct an enthymeme. A more direct conclusion is the logical contrapositive: If a person does not hold firm in the future, then that person is not now a partner of Christ.

The author repeats the exhortation of Ps 95:7-8 and in 3:16, uses γάρ to resume the argument with a series of rhetorical questions. As a supporting reason, he asks, Who were the people who heard and yet disobeyed? He answers: “All those who left Egypt...” He could have stopped there, but he adds the words διὰ Μωϋσέως. Why did the author mention Moses in this negative context? In 3:16-18, the author asks three times: Who was it...who was it...who was it? And the answer he gives is: The people led by Moses... those who sinned...who were disobedient. Through parallelism, Moses is put in bad company. There is an obvious parenetic response to the problem of disobedience, and an obvious response to the problem of sin. But what is the alternative to the “problem” of following Moses? The author leaves it to the imagination. The rhetorical questions have pointed out that it is not enough to follow Moses.⁸⁴ The enthymeme is:

⁸² The mutual exhortation that is explicit in 3:13 is also implied in 3:12, when the author tells them to take care that “none of you” falls away. He wants the readers to make sure that everyone remains together.

⁸³ “The addressees are urged to exhort one another by saying the words of the psalm itself” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 120).

⁸⁴ Robert P. Gordon points out that in Heb 3 and 11, “the role of Moses as law-giver is played down” (*Hebrews* [Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000], 57). Pamela Eisenbaum observes that “Moses is held at least partly responsible for the people’s failures” (“Heroes and History in Hebrews 11,” pp. 380-

- Claim: We should exhort one another daily, hold our confidence firm, and not harden our hearts (3:13-15).
- Because (γάρ) they followed Moses, sinned, and disobeyed... (3:16-18).
- {Daily exhortations will help us be faithful and avoid making the same mistakes.}

Verse 19 draws the conclusion: “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief [ἀπιστία].” However, the author has said nothing up to this point about πίστις (the first occurrence is in 4:2, two verses below). But he has used πίστος (faithful) three times; he is concerned about faithfulness. It seems that with ἀπιστία, the author is referring more to unfaithfulness than introducing a new thought about unbelief. At this point in the epistle, it would be a *non sequitur* for the author to say, “God punished the disobedient and we can see from this that the people did not believe.” This would presuppose the point made in 11:6, that a person must have faith to please God. The author may be moving *toward* the concept of faith, but at this point faithfulness seems to be the dominant concern.

Verse 18 repeats the thought from Ps 95:11 that the blessing God offered the Israelites was to enter his rest. Verse 19 repeats the word “enter” in preparation for the argument in chapter 4.

Hebrews 4—entering God’s rest

Chapter 4 begins with an enthymeme using the word οὐδὲν, but some connecting thoughts are unexpressed:

- God withheld the promise from them because of disobedience (3:17-19).
- {That will also happen to us, if we do the same thing.}⁸⁵
- Conclusion: {God will withhold blessings from us if we disobey.}
- Claim: We should take care, so that we do not fall short (4:1).
- If we fall short (disobey), we will not enjoy the promise (implied in 4:1b).
- {We should make every effort to receive the blessings.}

96 in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* [ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997], 388).

⁸⁵ The more general premise is that God *always* punishes disobedience—probably based on the belief that God does not change, coupled with the observation that he punished the Israelites who disobeyed in the wilderness. Contraindications could heavily qualify this premise.

The argument assumes that the rest is still available, a point also assumed in 4:6, but not proven until 4:9. Verse 2 reasons on the basis that the readers' situation is comparable to the ancient one:

- Claim: We should take care not to fall short (4:1).
- For [γάρ] we have blessings offered to us, just as they did (4:2a).
- {Those who are offered blessings should strive to get them.}

Verse 2b makes two claims about the Israelites: 1) The message did not benefit them (3:17-19) and 2) They lacked πίστις.⁸⁶ The author has already argued that the people were not *faithful*, and that is the meaning of πίστις that is most likely meant here. But the participle implies that the association is due to causation, and most English translations supply the word “because”: The message did not benefit them *because* they were not faithful, implying that πίστις is essential for enjoying a divine promise.

Verse 3, by using γάρ, looks like a supporting argument,⁸⁷ but it is really another assertion: Those who believe, and (it is implied) *only* those who believe, receive the promise of God (in this case, rest). By using a form of πιστεύω, the author mentions belief, but he does nothing in subsequent verses to reinforce the necessity of belief *per se*.⁸⁸ Nothing is said about the *content* of the belief, although the author eventually exhorts the readers to be faithful to their “confession” (4:14).

- Claim: We enter his rest (4:3).⁸⁹

⁸⁶ My truncated statement at this point works with both textual variants: They were not united by faith with those who did hear, or the people who heard did not unite the message with faith.

⁸⁷ Ellingworth argues that 4:3 supports the claim made in 4:2a (*Hebrews*, 244). The enthymeme might be: The good news came to us, for we who have believed enter that rest. This indicates that the rest is equivalent to the salvation offered by the gospel, but it is more by assertion than logical support.

⁸⁸ “The theme of faith [like many others]...is first introduced in passing, and later becomes more prominent” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 243).

⁸⁹ The present tense suggests that believers are currently entering the rest. However, it is also possible to understand the verb as a gnomic present, talking about a future entry. Ellingworth says, “Nowhere else does the author suggest a full and unconditional realization of the Christian hope in the present... It is therefore preferable to understand εἰσερχόμεθα as an emphatic equivalent of the future tense” (*Hebrews*, 246). However, Ellingworth is unfairly stacking the deck by implying that the rest is in the present only if it is a “full and unconditional realization.” As in other areas of NT eschatology, a partial realization (“already but not yet”) should be considered. Smith points out that “The rest is not a completely future quantity. If it were, the ancients could hardly be faulted for failing to enter” (*Hebrews*, 64). The rest, like salvation, is a future reward that people begin to experience in this life. Dmitri Royster writes, “The rest of which the

- God offers us rest, and we believe (it? him?).
- {Only those who believe receive God’s blessings (cf. 11:6).}

Subsequent verses, instead of supporting the necessity of belief, argue that the rest is still a valid offer (4:3b-11) and urge the readers to hold fast and approach God through Christ (4:14-16). Presumably the readers will be blessed only if Christ has a central role in their relationship with God. The reasoning begins in 4:3b, but I cannot put it in the form of an enthymeme. The point is that the rest is still available, but the evidence given is that God rested in the past, at creation (4:3c-4).⁹⁰ The connecting link may be that the psalmist was not talking about occupying the land of Canaan, that God is still resting from his creative work, so it is still available.

The author proves that the rest began in the past with a quote from Scripture: His works are finished, for⁹¹ it says, “And God rested...” But the author did not need to prove that the creation rest was in the past! I suspect that this is included as a subtle devaluation of the Sabbath. The author says “on the seventh day” as part of the quote from Gen 2:2—that seems reasonable—but there was no need for the author to preface the quote with a reminder that God is talking “about the seventh day.” He is drawing extra attention to the seventh day, including it in the comparison. The author is implying that not only is the “rest” that God offers not the creation rest, it is not the weekly Sabbath (a memorial of the creation rest), either.⁹² Just as Moses is not directly denigrated but is less than Jesus, the Sabbath is not directly criticized, but it is not what God exhorts his people to enter.

- God exhorts⁹³ people in the psalm: Listen right now, and do not be like those who failed to enter my rest (4:5).

Apostle speaks is the kingdom of heaven. But a foretaste of that kingdom is already provided in the assembly of the faithful... So the faithful do enter (or better, ‘are entering’) into the rest even now” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* [Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2003], 59).

⁹⁰ Michael Magill writes, “God entered His rest on the seventh day. This proves that the concept of ‘rest’ in Ps 95 is not limited to the promised land in Moses’ day, but refers to something existing since the seventh day of creation” (*New Testament Transline* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], 831).

⁹¹ The word γάρ is used to introduce a scripture; it does not form an enthymeme.

⁹² The logic used in 4:8 could easily be applied to the Sabbath: If the weekly Sabbath had given them rest, then God would not have spoken in Ps 95 of another *day* (the word “rest” would have been sufficient; the word “day” hints that the author is talking about the Sabbath).

⁹³ The argument assumes that not only did God exhort people in the psalmist’s day (4:7), but that he continues to exhort people through the psalm.

- Conclusion: Therefore [οὖν] the offer of rest still remains open (4:6a).
- Warrant: {When God exhorts people to listen to a warning about failure, it means that the possibility of success is still open.}
- Claim: God offers the blessing to others (indirectly supporting the author's assertion that the "rest" is still an open offer).
- The first group of people failed to enter because of disobedience (4:6c).
- {God will always make good on his plans, so if the first group fails, the offer will be extended to others.}

In 4:8, he uses γάρ to respond to a possible objection:

- Claim: {The "rest" is not the land}, which the people received in Joshua's day (4:8).
- God exhorts people in David's day (who were in the land) to enter his rest (4:7b).
- {If the land of Canaan was the "rest" he spoke of, he would not exhort people in the land to enter his rest.}⁹⁴
- Claim: {Since there are no other possibilities}, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God (4:9).
- The rest is not the creation rest (4:3c-4), nor the land (4:8).
- {If the "rest" has not been claimed, the offer is still open, since God always makes good on his plans.}

"Sabbath rest" is a translation of σαββατισμός, but the logical connectors in 4:9-11 make no sense unless the author is using it as a synonym of κατάπαυσις. He apparently uses the new word to indicate that the weekly Sabbath typifies the eschatological rest.⁹⁵ What the original Sabbath pictured still remains as an offer from God. Verse 10 then gives a reason: A rest still remains, for (γάρ) a person at rest is no longer working.⁹⁶ The person being exhorted is apparently still working, but it is not clear

⁹⁴ The author does not address the possibility that Joshua could have given the people military rest, which was subsequently lost—thus the psalmist exhorted people to experience national security by obeying God.

⁹⁵ See a longer discussion in Michael Morrison, *Sabbath, Circumcision, and Tithing: Which Old Testament Laws Apply to Christians?* (San Jose: Writers Club, 2002), 157-58.

⁹⁶ This logic implies that "the person" is not Jesus, as some have suggested. It would not be logical to say that a rest remains for us because Jesus has rested from his works. It also indicates that the "rest" is future, and 4:3 is a gnomic present.

what sort of “work” is in view⁹⁷:

- Claim: We have not entered his rest, and God still exhorts us to, so the offer of rest still remains open (4:6, 9).
- The person who has entered God’s rest is now resting (4:10a).
- { We are not yet resting. }

The author draws the discussion to a close by using οὖν in 4:11:

- Claim: We should therefore make every effort to enter that rest (4:11).
- God still exhorts us to enter his rest.
- { We should strive to receive the blessing God offers. }

How do people “strive” to enter God’s rest? The author does not say, although the discussion implies that people enter by believing something (4:3), being obedient (4:6), and maintaining their confession (of Christ) (4:14b). The purpose (ἵνα) of diligence is that no one will fall though disobedience (4:11b).

This concludes the discussion of “rest” that began in 3:7—but what was the purpose of this discussion? It does not seem well suited to the overall parenetic purpose of Hebrews. It uses rest as a metaphor of salvation, but this metaphor is not used in the remainder of the epistle. It stresses the need for obedience, but does not specify what commands are in view, with the possible exception of 3:14. The passage could be removed from Hebrews with little damage—the thought would go immediately from Jesus as a faithful Son (3:6) to an exhortation to hold fast to him (4:14). I get the impression that 3:7-4:11 (perhaps 4:12-13 as well) was originally an independent sermon based on Ps 95.

Even if this theory is correct, we must still ask why the author included this passage in his epistle. Perhaps we can deduce the situation from the author’s emphasis—although he states that people who *believe* enter God’s rest, he makes no attempt to prove that point. Rather, he tries to prove that the offer of rest *is still valid*, as if that is the primary question that the readers had. Since the author does not draw attention to the meaning of “rest,” nor does he use the word later in the epistle, the readers probably were

⁹⁷ Donald A. Hagner observes that the “work” is never defined: “It is the idea of rest itself that is important, not the nature of the work that one no longer needs to do” (*Encountering the Book of Hebrews* [Encountering Biblical Studies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 75).

not concerned about this word; it just happened to be in the psalm the author used. The stress seems to be that God has an offer that extends beyond Moses, and beyond Joshua, perhaps in response to readers who looked only to the past.

The passage stresses obedience, but it is difficult to imagine an audience that viewed the Scriptures as authoritative (which is assumed throughout the epistle) and yet did not already accept the importance of obedience. Indeed, the author has already assumed the need for obedience in the warning he gives in 2:2-3, and faithfulness is assumed to be a virtue in 3:2-6. When the author argues for obedience, he is probably appealing to a value that the readers already held (building rapport, or *ethos*), but he says that the call to listen (3:7) is not just about the past—it is also about the future. But he does little to specify what the readers were to obey, and he will later argue that the law has been changed (7:12, 18, etc.). Although the epistle has some miscellaneous exhortations in chapter 13, the primary “obedience” advocated is being faithful to the confession of Christ.

Heb 4:12-13 have no vocabulary connections with preceding or subsequent verses—no hook words or theme words—and may have been a preexisting unit. They are used here (with γάρ) as a reason for diligence. They make assertions that the author makes no attempt to support—presumably the readers would be in substantial agreement with the idea.

- Claim: We should make every effort to avoid disobedience (4:11).
- God’s word exposes everyone’s thoughts for judgment (4:12-13).
- {Disobedience will be punished.}

Verse 14 continues the thought: Since disobedience will be punished, people should therefore (οὖν) hold fast to the confession, *because they have help in heaven*. It again assumes that the readers have a high Christology, that they believe that Jesus is the “great high priest” in heaven. This is presented as a reason for the readers to hold fast to their confession—and presumably the confession entails a belief that Jesus is now in heaven, as 1:3 implies, and that he helps people avoid punishment.⁹⁸ However, what is

⁹⁸ Ellingworth recognizes that the surface logic is inadequate: “Οὖν does not draw an inference from what immediately precedes” (*Hebrews*, 266). However, the logic is good if the high priest helps people avoid punishment, which is implied in 5:1. I paraphrase: God will punish all sin. Therefore, since we have an intermediary who can give us the help we definitely need, we need to stay in his good graces. It is not clear

the logical connection between having a high priest and holding fast to the confession? The connection is given in 4:15-16, culminating in the thought that this is the (only) way that the readers can find the mercy and grace they need.

- Claim: Jesus our high priest can sympathize with us (4:15a).⁹⁹
- Jesus was tested just like us, but he did not sin (4:15b).
- {Sympathy comes from similar experiences.}

- Claim: We can be sure that Jesus will give us mercy and grace when we need it (4:16b).¹⁰⁰
- Because (γάρ) Jesus can sympathize with us (4:15a).
- {Someone who has sympathy for us will be merciful to us.}

- Jesus will give us mercy and grace.
- {We need mercy and grace.}¹⁰¹
- Conclusion: We should therefore (οὖν) approach the throne with boldness (4:16).

Why should the readers approach the throne of grace? So that (ἵνα) they can receive grace. This implies that the throne is occupied by the source of grace—and the context says that this is Jesus, the merciful and sympathetic high priest—and the readers should maintain their confession about him because they need the grace that only he provides. Since disobedience will be punished (4:11), and God judges all people (4:13), they need the help of Jesus Christ, the intermediary, the source of mercy and grace. They can go to his throne confidently because they know that he sympathizes with their weaknesses. That is why they need to maintain their confession—because in the face of judgment, they need the help of Jesus.

whether the confession included “high priest.” The author used that title without comment earlier, as if it were an already accepted idea. But he develops the concept later in the epistle as a new teaching. Perhaps the readers had accepted the word without giving it much content; the author therefore uses it several times early in his epistle to make it seem like he is building on something they already believed.

⁹⁹ “By the negative form of the sentence he recognizes the presence of an objection which he meets by anticipation” (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 106).

¹⁰⁰ Although it is possible that the “time of need” is the eschatological day of judgment, the passage seems to presume it is a present reality.

¹⁰¹ The need for mercy may be a conclusion implied from the judgment mentioned in 4:12. The author assumes that all people fall short of God’s requirements and therefore need mercy.

Hebrews 5—a subject hard to explain

Heb 5 begins by giving a reason for the exhortation in 4:16:

- Claim: People should approach the throne with boldness (4:16a).
- Because (γάρ) high priests are assigned to help people in their relationship with God and offer sacrifices for sins (5:1-2).¹⁰²
- {People can be bold when asking people to do their assigned jobs.}

Verse 1 says that high priests are appointed for a purpose (ἵνα): to offer sacrifices. This assertion is common knowledge,¹⁰³ but is stated so that the author can develop the thought. He has already named Jesus as the high priest, so he implies here that Jesus “is put in charge of things pertaining to God” and that he offered a sacrifice.¹⁰⁴ The author has already hinted at the sacrifice Jesus offered (see 2:17), and will develop it later. Here he speaks in general terms. Verse 2 adds that Jesus can deal gently with people, since he also experienced weakness (cf. 2:18; 4:15):

- A priest can deal gently with people (5:2a).
- Since (ἐπεὶ) he is also subject to weakness (5:2b).
- {A person who has been weak will have sympathy for the weak.}¹⁰⁵

Because (διὰ) of weakness, priests had to offer sacrifices for their own sins:

- Claim: They had to offer sacrifices for their own sins.
- Human high priests sin because they are weak.
- {Priests offer sacrifices for sin.}

¹⁰² Ellingworth argues against the connection I have drawn above, saying that γάρ “does not, as P. E. Hughes believes, express a logical connection with what precedes, and it is not directly related to the exhortations κρατῶμεν (4:14) and προσερχώμεθα (4:16)” (*Hebrews*, 272). He advocates a connection to 4:15 instead, but the connection with προσερχώμεθα seems to make more sense. Westcott also says that “γάρ is explanatory and not directly argumentative” (*Hebrews*, 117). William L. Lane argues for a connection with 4:15-16 as a whole (*Hebrews 1-8* [WBC 47A; Dallas: Word, 1991], 111). The connection I have sketched implies that the “throne of grace” is occupied by the high priest.

¹⁰³ Olbricht observes that the author “offers no warrant for this claim, under the assumption that it is common knowledge” (“Anticipating,” 361).

¹⁰⁴ Heb 5:1 uses the plural—*sacrifices*—but neither the number nor the tense should be pressed—the author later uses the aorist to say that Jesus offered one sacrifice (7:27b).

¹⁰⁵ Olbricht offers a similar syllogism (“Anticipating,” 363), but my other enthymemes differ considerably from his syllogisms. First-century high priests were hardly known for their gentleness with common people—the author is describing “the way things ought to be.” Ellingworth observes, “The general description of high priesthood is selective and from the beginning has in view the person, and probably the earthly life, of Jesus” (*Hebrews*, 271-72; cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 144).

Although verses 4-5 present similarities rather than claiming to be a logical conclusion, they advance the argument with a complete syllogism:

- Priests do not appoint themselves (5:4a; Aaron is cited as a supporting illustration).
- Christ is a priest (4:14).
- Therefore, he did not appoint himself (5:5, supported by the citations in 5b and 6 in which God calls Christ a Son and priest).

Heb 5:5b cites Ps 2:7 for the second time (the first time was in 1:5), but 5:6 cites Ps 110:4 for the first time (Ps 110:1 was cited in 1:14). In this verse the author introduces—without drawing attention to it—a crucial component of the epistle’s main argument. He implies that Ps 2:7 and 110:4 are parallel in meaning: the appointment as a Son is equivalent to appointment as a priest forever. The author does not say that directly, but suggests it by the juxtaposition of the citations. Ps 110:1 (already assumed to be about the Son) provides the bridge between those thoughts: The one who called him Son is also the one who set him at the right hand and declared him to be a priest forever. The name Melchizedek has also been introduced, so far without comment.

Verse 7 supports 4:15—that Jesus had weakness, but without sin. It is asserted that he offered prayers,¹⁰⁶ and was heard “because of his reverent submission,” but this is not defended; the author assumes that the readers already view Jesus as fully obedient, and he probably assumes that they know the Gethsemane tradition.

Heb 5:8 asserts that the Son learned obedience from his difficulties. This is not essential to the author’s argument, but is probably given as an example that the readers could readily apply to themselves—that they should also learn from their difficulties.¹⁰⁷ Verse 9 has an implied imperative—that the readers should obey Christ.

- Since Christ saves all who obey him, we should obey.

¹⁰⁶ The author has stated that all high priests offer something (5:1), then that Jesus was appointed to be a priest (5:6); the readers could be expected to conclude that Jesus will offer something. Although the author will eventually say that he offered himself (7:27), the use of the word “offered” in 5:7 cannot be accidental—it “probably...corresponded in some sense to the high priest’s sacrifice for himself” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 292).

¹⁰⁷ deSilva suggests that “Jesus provides a model here for what the audience is being called to do.... The pattern of enduring hardship and calling upon the Lord for help is affirmed as the ‘normal’ condition” (*Perseverance*, 191-92).

Verses 9-10 imply a connection between salvation and the high priesthood:

- Claim: The Son is the source of eternal salvation...
- {because} he has been designated a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.
- {The priest according to the order of Melchizedek is a source of salvation.}

The author has brought the discussion back to Melchizedek and says that he will address this¹⁰⁸ further, but first he gives a long appeal for attention and a warning that implies that the subject is a matter of life and death. The difficulty is blamed on the readers:

- Claim: This subject is hard to explain (5:11).¹⁰⁹
- Since (ἐπει) you have become dull.
- {It is hard to explain things to anyone who is dull.}

Verse 12 then presents evidence in support of the claim that the readers are dull:

- Claim: You are dull of understanding.¹¹⁰
- Since (γάρ) you are old enough, but have forgotten the basics of God.
- {A person who forgets the basic elements is dull of understanding.}

This conclusion is mixed with an analogy about infants being unable to handle solid food; the implication is that the basic teachings are not wrong, but are milk; the teaching about Melchizedek is solid food (and therefore necessary for maturity). The logic implied in the metaphor is allusive, not exact:

- Claim: You need the basic elements again—the doctrinal milk (5:12b).

¹⁰⁸ The author says that he has much to say “about him” (or “it”), which could mean salvation through Christ in general (chapters 7-10) or Melchizedek in particular (chapter 7 only). But since the author has just brought the discussion back to the word Melchizedek, that is probably the intended meaning. Westcott disagrees, saying that the reference is to Christ: “The mysteries to which the apostle refers do not lie properly in his person, but in Him whom he foreshadowed” (*Hebrews*, 131). Ellingworth notes that the author has a “tendency to use personal pronouns without specifying to whom they refer” (*Hebrews*, 219).

¹⁰⁹ Another possibility is that the author says he has much to say because the people are dull, but it seems more natural to take the difficulty rather than the quantity as a consequence of the dullness.

¹¹⁰ deSilva says that the passage cannot be used “as an accurate reading of the hearers’ spiritual pulse” because the author has used hyperbole to shame the readers (*Perseverance*, 210-11). This is verified by the fact that the author presses onward into the difficult topic, and it suggests caution for similar passages.

- Since (γάρ) only those who are experienced in distinguishing good and evil, who are skilled in the word of righteousness, can handle solid food (5:13-14).
- { You are unable to handle advanced teaching. }
- Milk-drinkers are unskilled in the word of righteousness.
- For (γάρ) they are infants.
- { Neophytes are unskilled in the word. }

The author implies that what he wants to say about Christ/Melchizedek requires skill in “the word of righteousness”¹¹¹ and it is a matter of distinguishing good and evil, but the epistle does nothing to support this connection. It seems instead that the author is presenting his message in terms that are attractive to the readers: the readers valued righteousness and discernment, and the author is implying that if they value these things then they will want to listen to what he has to say. The passage insults the readers, but also appeals to them: If you want to grow, if you value righteousness, if you want to know what is good, then listen to what I have to say.

Hebrews 6—a plea for diligence

“Therefore [διό],” Heb 6:1 begins, “let us go on to perfection”—showing that the point of 5:11-14 was (despite the initial appearance) not to say that the readers were infants who could handle only milk. Rather, the focus is on 5:14: Solid food is for the mature, so we are therefore going to go toward it. Although the passage is an insult on the surface, the logic of 6:1 implies that the readers are able to be mature.

- Claim: You want solid food, so I will give it.
- Solid food is for the mature.
- { You are able to be mature, skilled and trained. }

Heb 6:1 indicates that the author will leave behind the basic teaching about Christ and will not lay the foundation again, which he defines as six doctrines in 6:1-2 (which are not specifically about Christ). This suggests that “the basic teaching” is about Christ,

¹¹¹ “The most natural understanding of the ‘word of righteousness’ may thus simply be the ‘oracles of God’ themselves, that is, the LXX” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 212).

and the author has already reviewed it.¹¹² The “foundation” is different, and he will *not* address it. The six teachings are remedial topics¹¹³ that the readers do not need to review. The rhetorical effect is to assure the readers: We are not going back to that extreme—I will not treat you like babies. A more subtle rhetorical result is that the readers will complain about the conclusion only at the risk of categorizing themselves as babies who could not comprehend the argument.

Verse 4 supports the decision to go forward with an important unstated premise:

- Claim: We will go forward toward maturity (6:1, 3).
- Since (γάρ) terrible punishment awaits apostates (6:4-6).
- {If we don’t go forward, we will drift away.}

If the premise had been put into words, it might have been disputed, but by leaving it as an implication, the author minimizes the chances of dispute and proceeds as if it were true. The author further eliminates objections by stating in 6:9 that the scenario does not apply to the audience. Nevertheless, the point is still implied that the readers are in mortal danger if they are not willing to go forward with the author. Another rhetorical strategy can be seen in the author’s use of allusive metaphors: “enlightened,” “tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,” “tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come.” By using metaphors, the author avoids direct accusation—and invites the readers to see themselves in the metaphors—before the negative action and result is mentioned at the end of v. 6.¹¹⁴

¹¹² As noted above, many of the arguments in Heb 1-5 assume that the readers already have a high Christology, and the author is reminding them of things they already believe but have neglected.

¹¹³ The six doctrines may have been appropriate for proselytes, though the absence of circumcision indicates that it is not conversion to Judaism that is being discussed. Jean-Pierre Delville argues that it is a list for conversion to belief in Jesus (“L’Épître aux Hébreux à la Lumière du Prosélytisme Juif,” *RCat* 10 [1985]: 323-368). If the readers were Gentiles, as Delville believes, the author means that he will not regress to something they once had to learn; if the readers are Jews, as I believe, he means that he will not regress to doctrines they had known from childhood, and which only late-comers had to study. The author demonstrably uses hyperbole in 5:11-12, so it would not be odd for him to refer here to doctrines that are ridiculously remedial, corresponding to “milk.”

¹¹⁴ Thompson makes the helpful observation that the author’s rhetoric is shaped by the fact that he “is not speaking to apostates who wish to return to the church; he is warning those who might commit apostasy of the gravity of such an act” (*Hebrews*, 141). Olbricht notes ways in which argumentation in this warning passage differs from the author’s style elsewhere: 1) “the language is...interlaced with second person pronouns,” 2) “the warrants do not depend upon texts from Scripture,” and 3) “the author depends much more on widespread metaphors” (“Anticipating,” 366).

Verse 6 implies causation with a participle: They cannot be renewed, crucifying the Son of God again.¹¹⁵ The logic is again allusive rather than direct—it implies that those who fall away are crucifying Jesus again and (by?) holding him up for public contempt. The enthymeme is nearly tautological:

- Claim: They cannot be restored.
- {They are crucifying him again.}
- {Those who put Christ to public shame would never reverse themselves.}

Verse 7 uses γάρ to introduce a supporting analogy. As usual, the author does not directly say that apostates will be punished, but he implies it by analogy. As in 5:12-14, the readers are expected to draw the connections and combine the analogies into a coherent argument:

- Claim: Such people cannot be restored to repentance (6:6) {and will be burned.}
- Those who have tasted the things of Christ and then crucify and ridicule him are like land that gets rain and then produces thorns (implied in 6:8).
- {If people produce thorns, they will be treated like thorns—with fire.}

Right after this implied threat, the author eases the pressure by assuring the readers that they are not in this category.¹¹⁶ He gives a reason for his opinion in 6:10:

- Claim: We are confident that you will fare better than apostates (i.e., that you will continue in your good works) (6:9).
- Since (γάρ) God can be counted on to reward good works...
- and you have done good works (6:10).

The logic implied in 6:10 (and 5:9b) is soteriologically interesting, for it implies that a person's salvation is based, at least in part, on works: It would be unjust for God to condemn a person who had done good works. However, the author probably does *not* mean "...even if the person falls away from Christ." If we take 6:9 literally, the author would say that a person who has done good work *will not* fall away, perhaps because God will ensure that the person does not. In effect, it would be unjust for God to allow a good

¹¹⁵ Although ἀνασταυρόω means "crucify," "again" seems to be implied by the context, not just the prefix.

¹¹⁶ Attridge observes that "the expression of confidence is a conventional rhetorical device...as part of an attempt to persuade the addressees" (*Hebrews*, 174). The warnings *and* the assurances may be colored by rhetorical exaggeration.

worker to fall away and thereby deserve condemnation. However, the author wants to motivate the readers to continue their work, not rest on past accomplishments, and he implies in 6:11-12 that salvation is contingent on perseverance.

There is some inconsistency in saying that salvation is certain (6:9-10) and the rhetorical tone exhorting the need for perseverance, which implies contingency (6:11-12). The author is writing a motivational exhortation, not a treatise about how people are saved, so it is unwise to assume that the soteriological implications are abstract truths. Rather, they serve a rhetorical function: to balance threat with assurance. If the warnings of 6:4-8 could not possibly apply to the readers (as 6:9 suggests), it is strange that the author would even include this “soteriological” digression in his motivational treatise. For the exhortations to be rhetorically meaningful, the warning must have at least a potential relevance to the readers.

Heb 6:11-12 gives two equivalent purpose clauses: We want you to be diligent so that you will inherit the promises, and your diligence is for the purpose of realizing the eschatological hope. The implication is that if the readers are sluggish, they will not inherit the promises. The logic again implies the need for works:

- Claim: We want you to be diligent (6:11).
- We want you to have that assurance.
- If you are diligent, you will realize the full assurance of hope.¹¹⁷ {That is, since God saves the diligent, you can be assured of salvation if you are diligent.}

- Claim: We want you to be diligent so you are not sluggish.¹¹⁸
- People inherit the promises through πίστις¹¹⁹ and patience (6:12b).
- {If you are sluggish, you will not be patient and faithful and you will fall away.}

The author supports the argument with 6:13-20. Although we might expect this section to support the claim it follows—that people are saved through πίστις and patience (6:12b)—the emphasis of the section is assurance, mentioned in 6:11b. Although the

¹¹⁷ The parallel between 6:11 and 6:12 implies an equivalence between the assurance of hope and inheriting the promises—i.e., salvation. To have assurance until the end, it is necessary to be diligent until the end.

¹¹⁸ This is a truism. Ellingworth says that ἵνα probably refers to result rather than purpose (*Hebrews*, 333).

¹¹⁹ Again, the best translation is faithfulness. It is contrasted with indolence and inactivity, not doubt.

author mentions that Abraham was patient (6:15), there is no further mention of diligence or the necessity of perseverance. Rather, the focus is now on God's guarantee.

- Claim: You can be fully assured that you will receive what you hope for (6:11).
- Since (γάρ) God made the strongest possible oath (6:13).
- {We can be confident in anything that God promises.}

- Since (ἐπεὶ) no one is greater than God...
- God swore by himself (6:13, alluding to Gen 22:16).
- {Oaths generally refer to someone greater (made explicit in 6:16, and a principle used again in 7:7).}

A simple assertion from God is as good as an oath, so why did God swear? Apparently to give Abraham (and his heirs—6:17) more assurance, even though the promise would not be immediately fulfilled.¹²⁰ Verse 15 associates Abraham's patience with receipt of the promise, but there is no logical connection. Due to God's oath, the promise was certain whether or not Abraham was patient—and he had no choice *but* to wait. So why does the author point out that Abraham was patient? Presumably the author wants the *readers* to be patient. This otherwise unnecessary point may hint that the readers were giving up hope on a promise associated with Christ (the parousia?). The author supports his point by supplying the premise involved in 6:13: that people swear by someone greater than themselves in an attempt to confirm their words. In 6:17-18, he transitions toward God's promise *to the readers*.

- God gave an oath to stress the certainty of his promise¹²¹ so that (ἵνα)...
- we would be encouraged to seize the hope set before us.
- {We are more willing to persevere when we know the promise is certain.}

However, *what* has been sworn to the readers? The author implies that they are “the heirs of the promise”—heirs of the promise God gave Abraham. But Gen 22 does not promise salvation to either Abraham or his heirs—the author assumes that the readers *already believe* that God promises eternal life to Abraham's descendants, and this is so

¹²⁰ Westcott points out that “the interposition of an oath implied delay in the fulfilment of the promise. No oath would have been required if the blessing had been about to follow immediately” (*Hebrews*, 158).

¹²¹ Two unchangeable things (the purpose [i.e., the promise] and the oath) are not logically more certain than one, but are psychologically more reassuring.

strongly taken for granted that it can serve as a foundation for the author's argument. The readers have no doubt that God offers salvation; the question seems to be whether Christ is a necessary agent in that salvation. Heb 6:13-20 is not needed to prove the availability of salvation, but it serves several rhetorical purposes: 1) it conveys an expectation that the readers will be successful and hence should not give up hope, 2) it introduces the principle that the blessing is given by a superior, a belief that is used in 7:7, and 3) it underscores the validity of God's oath—a point that will be used in 7:21 to support Christ's role as high priest.¹²²

Heb 6 concludes with some assertions—that the hope of salvation is reliable, that Jesus has entered God's presence, that he is a forerunner on our behalf, and that he is “a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The author implies, by the participle, that Jesus is a forerunner *because* he became a high priest. The author has subtly expanded the role of a high priest—Levitical high priests served as representatives, not forerunners; there was never any suggestion in the Torah that other people would eventually enter the Holy of Holies because of the work done by the high priest. Just as the author does with some other concepts, he introduces this idea without drawing attention to it, allows it to lie dormant for a while, and will develop it later.

Hebrews 7:1-10—Melchizedek greater than Levi

In chapter 7, the author resumes the discussion of Melchizedek. He calls Jesus a high priest in 2:17; 3:1, and 4:14-15; he enlarges this to “high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (quoting Ps 110:4) in 5:6; 5:10; and 6:20. After telling the readers in 5:11 to expect more on this subject, and after a lengthy plea for attentiveness, he addresses it in detail in Heb 7.¹²³ The first three verses describe Melchizedek and serve several rhetorical purposes. Verses 1-2a present data that will be used in later verses; 3:2b-c presents etymologies that will *not* be used, but imply parallels with Christ; they

¹²² Thompson notes, “The author is here laying the groundwork for a point that he does not state explicitly until 7:20ff.: that Christians have an oath as ground for faith” (*Hebrews*, 92).

¹²³ Heb 7:1 has γάρ, but no enthymeme can be constructed; the word simply indicates that the argument continues. “Τάρ is explanatory, introducing a development from 6:20 rather than a logical consequence” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 354).

show the author to be knowledgeable. The eloquence of v. 3 is used to mention a point that will be crucial later in the chapter—that Melchizedek “remains a priest forever.”

Heb 7:4 implies an argument: “See how great Melchizedek is! Even Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils.” This makes a claim, and then offers a supporting reason.

- Claim: Melchizedek is great¹²⁴ (7:4).
- Ground: Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham {who is great}.
- Implied warrant: {The person who receives tithes is superior to the one who gives them.}¹²⁵

Verse 5 is the first use in Hebrews of νόμος. It is an unnecessary word here (“commandment in the law” is redundant), but it puts the word “law” into the discussion, subtly preparing readers for more discussion in 7:12, 19.¹²⁶

In 7:6-7, the author moves from tithes to blessings, and argues that Melchizedek is *greater* than Abraham: “Melchizedek collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior” (7:7).

- Major premise: The inferior is blessed by the superior.¹²⁷
- Minor premise: Melchizedek blessed Abraham (7:6).
- Conclusion: {Melchizedek is superior to Abraham.}¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Although the author will soon argue that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, at the beginning of the argument he is content to say “great.” Verse 5 presents the Levites as kindred (a term of equality) of the other Israelites. As with other topics, the author reserves the more forceful words for later in the epistle.

¹²⁵ “It is assumed throughout that the receiver of tithe is greater than the giver of tithe” (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 175).

¹²⁶ The law is associated in 7:5 with the Levites, who are inferior to Melchizedek, giving a hint (which later verses will make explicit) that the law is inferior to the new Melchizedek, Jesus.

¹²⁷ The principle has exceptions, not only of people blessing God, but also blessing human superiors (e.g., 1 Kings 1:47). Wilhelm C. Linss argues that the statement “presupposes...a certain meaning of εὐλογεῖν. Once this meaning is granted, the axiom is clear” (“Logical Terminology in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *CTM* 37 [1966]: 367). The context here may assume that the Levites gave a blessing (Deut 10:8) *when the people gave tithes*; in such a context the superior person blessed the inferior.

Since no logical connectors are used, it is possible for the argument to be constructed the other way: As we can see in the matter of tithing, Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, and here we see that Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, so in this case the lesser was blessed by the greater. But such an argument would not only be based on a conclusion the author did not make, it would be pointless, not advancing the argument. The blessing seems to be introduced to support Melchizedek’s superiority.

¹²⁸ Magill writes, “Levitical priests had a commandment authorizing them to collect a tenth, even though

This is one of the rare cases in Hebrews that the major or general premise is stated, and the conclusion is *not* stated—perhaps because in this case the conclusion might have been offensive; it was better that readers formulate the conclusion on their own. As Weiß says, the construction asks the readers to use their own judgment: “Das ist rhetorisch-didaktischer Stil, der an das eigene Urteilsvermögen der Adressaten appelliert, und zwar in dem Sinne, daß die Größe und Überlegenheit des Melchisedek gegenüber Abraham aus der in Gen 14 geschilderten Abgabe des Zehnten an Melchisedek durch Abraham notwendig zu folgern ist.”¹²⁹

Verses 9-10 make the point that “Levi” (meaning the Levitical priests—7:9 refers to people who receive tithes, but Levi himself never did) paid tithes to Melchizedek.

- Claim: Levi/the Levitical priests paid tithes through Abraham.
- Grounds: For he was (they were) in the loins of Abraham when Abraham tithed.
- Warrant: {Whatever ancestors do, they do it for all their descendants.}

Such a warrant might be questioned.¹³⁰ As the author admits, the logic is irregular (perhaps it is intended to be humorous¹³¹). But he is putting the Levites back into the discussion. Whereas 7:5 used them as an illustration of equality, 7:9 now sets the scene for a comparison of Levites and Melchizedek. Since the readers probably considered Abraham superior to Levi, and tithe-receivers as superior to tithe-givers, the implication could already be drawn that Melchizedek is greater than Levi, and from this the author could argue that any priest *like* Melchizedek is also superior to the Levitical priesthood.

collecting it from their own brothers. Melchizedek had no commandment, yet collected it from Abraham, to whom he was no relation! Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, and by extension, the Levitical priests” (*Transline*, 837).

¹²⁹ Hans-Friedrich Weiß, *Der Brief an die Hebraer: Übersetzt und erklärt* (KEK; 15th ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 388-89. See also Olbricht, “Amplification,” 370.

¹³⁰ Montefiore writes, “The patriarch acts in the name of all his future family” (*Hebrews*, 122). Ceslas Spicq agrees: “L’ancêtre d’une race agit au nom de tous ses descendants et les représente, surtout en Israël où la descendance charnelle était la garantie de toutes les bénédictions et de l’espérance du salut” (*L’Épître aux Hébreux* [SB; Paris: Gabalda, 1977], 123). If the logic is correct, then *Jesus* also paid tithes to Melchizedek (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 107). But the author acknowledges that the argument is irregular.

¹³¹ “Listeners may even have found it humorous to think that Levi paid tithes while he was still in Abraham’s loins. Such humor was often useful for speakers because it helped maintain rapport with the listeners and revive those who had grown weary by more weighty arguments” (Koester, *Hebrews*, 352).

The author is not interested in comparing Christ with Melchizedek, or even with Levi—the goal of the passage is to show that Christ is superior to the Levitical priests.¹³² But the author leaves this last step to the readers’ imagination for now (stronger arguments will come in 7:16, 20)—the argument is left implying that Melchizedek (and by implication, Christ) is greater than Levi (and by implication, his descendants).

Hebrews 7:11-19—a major change in the law

The author begins to approach the subject from another angle in 7:11,¹³³ showing that the Levitical priesthood was inadequate. He begins, not by citing inadequacies (that could make him sound like a complainer), but by showing that Scripture *implied* an inadequacy: “Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood—for the people received the law under this priesthood—what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek?”¹³⁴ If we transpose the rhetorical question into the statement it implies, we get:

- Claim: The Levitical priesthood did not bring people to completion.¹³⁵
- Ground: Ps 110:4 describes a new priesthood.¹³⁶
- Implied warrant: {If one arrangement produces the desired results, there is no need to predict another. }

¹³² “Dans l’épître, la comparaison-contraste de base est entre le sacerdoce lévitique et Jésus (cf. 5.1-10); après 7.17, Melchisédek va disparaître définitivement de la scène” (Samuel Bénétreau, *L’Épître aux Hébreux* [CEB; Vaux-sur-Seine: Edifac, 1990], 2:29).

¹³³ The verse begins (postpositively) with μὲν οὖν, implying that a conclusion is being drawn, but in a rhetorical question it is difficult to translate this. “Ὁὖν zu Beginn von V. 11 leitet also nicht eine Schlußfolgerung aus dem vorangehenden Abschnitt ein, sondern will von vornherein auf die diesem Bedingungssatz selbst innewohnende Logik aufmerksam machen” (Weiß, *Der Brief*, 394).

¹³⁴ Linss notes that in Hebrews, all rhetorical questions with an interrogative pronoun have the answer “none” (“Logical Terminology,” 368).

¹³⁵ It is unfortunate that translations continue to use “perfection” for τελείωσις and cognates; the meaning is “to bring to a goal”—in this case the word seems to be used as a synonym of salvation. Westcott gives “destiny” as an equivalent (*Hebrews*, 187). “Completion” sounds odd in English because it does not specify the goal—but then neither does τελείωσις. For more, see the excursus in deSilva, *Perseverance*, 194-204.

¹³⁶ It is not known whether the author viewed Ps 110:4 as a prophecy. He never addresses the idea that the Davidic kings were appointed as priests in the order of Melchizedek. That would have reduced the effectiveness of his argument, though he could still have argued that only Jesus fulfilled the verse, for only he had an eternal life. Montefiore suggests that the author is countering an argument that the Levitical priesthood, since it came later, superseded the Melchizedek priesthood (*Hebrews*, 123). But even *after* the law was given, God promised to restore the Melchizedek priesthood—a point the author repeats in 7:28.

A hidden assumption here is that there can be only one priesthood¹³⁷—that the Melchizedek priesthood necessarily *replaced* rather than supplemented the Levitical priesthood. The author does not consider the possibility that one priesthood could be in heaven while the other worked on earth. The author also assumes that the *announcement* of another priesthood implies the *need* for a new priesthood.¹³⁸ This could have been argued (such as by noting that Ps 110:4 indicates that the new priesthood will last forever), but the author does not; the assertion is enough.

Heb 7:11 again mentions “the law” (even though it is not necessary for the argument) because important conclusions will soon be drawn about it in this section. “Now if perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood—for the people received the law under this priesthood—what further need would there have been to speak of another¹³⁹ priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek?” The verse presents the following argument:

- Claim: The old priesthood could not accomplish what God wanted (7:11a).
- Ground: God promised a new priesthood in Ps 110:4 (implied in 7:11c).
- {If God promises a new priesthood, it means that the previous one was inadequate; God does not do unnecessary things.}

The verse implies a logical connection between salvation, priesthood, and law. The author asks whether the priesthood can bring τελείωσις because he wants to know whether *salvation* can be attained through that priesthood. Notice the reason he gives:

- Implied claim: We want to know whether salvation was attainable through the levitical priesthood.
- Because (γάρ) the law was given under the priesthood... (7:11b).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Spicq (*Hébreux* SB, 137) and Westcott (*Hebrews*, 216) make the same observation. It suggests that the readers came from a Jewish background, since Gentiles would be aware of a multiplicity of priesthoods and might question this assumption. deSilva observes another assumption: “Another ‘given’ within the institution of priesthood is that individuals may not volunteer their services or select themselves for the honored office” (*Perseverance*, 188). Gentiles would be less likely to hold that assumption.

¹³⁸ Ellingworth notes that the argument “presupposes that God would not have done anything unnecessary” (*Hebrews*, 372).

¹³⁹ The author uses an inoffensive term (“another, different”) before using the stronger word “better.”

¹⁴⁰ Donald A. Hagner writes that this “cannot be taken literally, since that priesthood did not precede the Mosaic law. What seems to be meant is that the priestly system is basic to the entire superstructure of the

Why does he mention this?

- Unstated connection: {Because we want to know whether *the law* brings salvation, so we are asking first about the priesthood, because that is the context in which the law was given.}¹⁴¹

Γάρ at the beginning of 7:12 connects it to 7:11—salvation was *not* through the priesthood, because a change in priesthood implies a change *in the law*.¹⁴² As Otto Michel puts it, “Am Schicksal des Priestertums hängt nach Hebr das Schicksal des Gesetzes.”¹⁴³ However, the logic seems circular:

- Claim: Salvation was not available through the priesthood (7:11a).
- Ground: For when there is a change in priesthood, there is a change in the law (7:12)—{and the priesthood *has* been changed}.
- {Since the law was given on the basis of the priesthood, it loses validity when its basis does; they stand or fall together.}¹⁴⁴

law” (*Hebrews* [NIBC 14; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990], 103-4). Spicq notes that “La thèse peut paraître excessive et accorder au sacerdoce un rôle exorbitant. Il ne faut pas la radicaliser; le v. 5 a rappelé que l’ordre de prélever la dîme émanait de la loi, c’est-à-dire que le sacerdoce était également fondé sur la loi” (*Hébreux* SB, 37). Thomas Lea notes that priests, including Aaron, “had no part in receiving the Law” (*Hebrews and James* [HNTC; Nashville: Holman, 1999], 144). Heb 7:13-14 also implies that the law assigned the priests.

Lane (*Hebrews* 1-8, 174) and Koester (*Hebrews*, 353), citing similar uses of the Greek words in Philo, argue that the meaning is “the law was given *concerning* the priesthood.” This would eliminate the problem in 7:11, but 7:12 still reasons as if the priesthood is foundational to the law, and 7:19 still draws conclusions about the law as a whole because the commandment about priesthood has been changed.

Since the priesthood and the law were inseparable, it is unlikely that the readers would notice any inconsistency as to which is logically prior. Erich Gräßer argues that “In der Sache ist natürlich beides richtig... das levitische Priestertum seine Begründung in der Tora hat (7,5; 8,4; 10,8), wie umgekehrt die Tora auf jenem basiert (7,11). Sie stehen und fallen miteinander” (*An die Hebräer* [EKK 17; Zurich: Benziger, 1993], 2:37, 39).

¹⁴¹ “It is assumed that the object of the Law was to bring or to prepare for bringing the people to ‘perfection’” (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 180). The analysis shows the purpose of the passage (which is otherwise not stated)—the readers were interested in salvation by means of the law. The parenthetical comment “for the people received the law under this priesthood” makes the crucial link from priesthood to law.

¹⁴² Lane calls the γάρ in 7:12 “explanatory” (*Hebrews* 1-8, 181). Westcott says, “The γάρ may refer to the main thought of v. 11 or to the parenthesis.... The former connexion appears to be the more natural” (*Hebrews*, 181). As shown above, I believe that the connection with v. 11 is logical.

¹⁴³ Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer: Übersetzt und erklärt* (13th ed; KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936, 1975), 270.

¹⁴⁴ This is an example of what Robbins calls “abductive reasoning”—it “works off of suggestion rather than formal logic” (“From Enthymeme,” 193). Debanné argues that some enthymemes “invite the listener to perform a mental step that is best described neither as a syllogism nor even as logical” (“Enthymatic

The author first shows that the priesthood has been changed, and concludes from that, that the commandment about priesthood has also changed, and he broadens that conclusion to argue that the entire law has changed. But he states the conclusion *as if* it were a premise, a general principle that did not need to be proved.

Some commentators have taken 7:12 as support for the parenthetical comment in 7:11b, but that logic does not work. It would go like this: The law was given under the priesthood, for when the priesthood changes, the law also does. However, the real flow of the passage is the reverse: The law changes when the priesthood does, because the law was given in association with the priesthood.¹⁴⁵ The evidence does not support as much as is being claimed—the author has given evidence for a change in the priesthood, but not specifically about the law. The author apparently believes that any change in the priesthood automatically entails a change in the law, for the law is the only legitimate source of priestly appointments, and if God did something outside of the law, it could only mean that the law itself had been changed—not just one particular commandment about priests, but the law as a broader category.

The author is shifting the discussion from the priesthood to the law, treating them as an inseparable pair. He could have argued more simply that the priesthood did not bring salvation, for God changed it, with the assumption being that God changes things for the better. This is essentially the argument of 7:11. But the author expands the discussion to the law in 7:12-19, then goes back to the priesthood in 7:20 *without building anything on his conclusion about the law*.¹⁴⁶ This passage about the law might

Reading,” 484). He argues that these illogical constructs can be called “enthymemes,” but it does not seem necessary to dilute the definition of “enthymeme”—illogical constructs can be called “arguments.”

¹⁴⁵ Ellingworth writes, “The force of γάρ has been differently assessed. Bleek believed it to link v. 12 with the main clause of v. 11; that is, to indicate that a change in the priesthood would not have taken place without urgent reason, since it would have entailed a complete change of law. If meaning is given precedence over grammar, it seems more natural to take the γάρ as linking v. 12 with the parenthetical ὁ λαὸς... ἐπ’ αὐτῆς νενομοθέτηται, v. 11; so most later commentators” (*Hebrews*, 373-74). As explained above, the “link” is rhetorical rather than logical.

¹⁴⁶ That is, he does not base further conclusions on the word “law.” When the author states that cleansing rituals were imposed for a limited time (9:10), he *may* be basing that conclusion on the fact that the laws were ineffective (7:19), but more likely, on the conclusion that the old covenant is terminated (8:13). Even then, the connection is not made explicit.

look like an unnecessary tangent, but we should ask why the author goes out of his way to make this point.

Apparently the readers needed to know not just that the Levitical priesthood was obsolete, but also that the law of Moses was no longer valid. The author makes this point forcefully in 7:18-19, and then goes back to the topic of priesthood, a topic on which the readers were more likely to be in agreement (it was addressed with no argumentation in earlier chapters).¹⁴⁷ The law will again be declared obsolete in 8:13, after which the author describes the tabernacle, another area of agreement. The law is again rejected in Heb 10, culminating in the declaration that offerings are unnecessary (10:18); the author then moves immediately into an exhortation for faithfulness (10:19-25) and a strong warning (10:26-31). The author says three times that the law is obsolete, he makes its termination the conclusion of his longest doctrinal exposition, and he makes it the launching point for his most vigorous exhortation. This is also the first exhortation in the epistle (2:1-3)—the readers are told to pay more attention to the message of Christ than to “the message declared through angels” (a circumlocution for the law of Moses). The exhortations for the new over against the old grow stronger from that point, and are the focus of the final contrast in Heb 12:18-24.

The author’s treatment of “the law” is consistent with the thesis that this was a sensitive subject for the readers.¹⁴⁸ In 7:12 the word “change” (μεταίθημι) is vague—it could mean a slight revision or a major overhaul. The author will soon argue for the latter (the law is “changed” as thoroughly as the priesthood is—a total replacement), but he initially uses a less offensive term. As with the priesthood, he assumes that the law was exclusive—there could not be an *addition* to the law, such as a law appointing an additional priesthood. As later verses show, the author viewed the law as a monolith that was either valid in entirety, or obsolete. A change in the priesthood implied that the whole law was obsolete, since the law was built on the basis of the priesthood.

¹⁴⁷ “The priesthood of Christ is accepted without dispute” (Lea, *Hebrews and James*, 134). “The author assumes the priesthood of Jesus now to be established beyond the shadow of a doubt. This was probably part of their learned Christian culture” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 281). However, the readers had apparently not explored the implications of Christ’s priesthood.

¹⁴⁸ Ellingworth refers to the author’s “tact in approaching readers who appear to have held the OT cultus in high esteem” (*Hebrews*, 408).

Heb 7:13 also includes γάρ, supporting 7:12:

- Claim: The law has been changed (7:12).
- Ground: For God appointed a priest who was not from Levi (7:13).
- Warrant: No one from that other tribe was ever a priest {Num 18:7 did not allow it}.

The author takes the unusual step of *repeating the points in the very next verse*, even though they were common knowledge: Jesus was descended from Judah, and Moses¹⁴⁹ never authorized anyone from Judah to be a priest. God acted contrary to the law, showing that the law is no longer valid. The author is stressing the connection between priesthood and law.

“It is even more obvious,” the author says in 7:15, assuring his readers that the logic is secure. Heb 7:14 begins with “it is evident” and 7:15 begins with “it is even more obvious”; the conceptual similarities suggest that these verses support the same point—verse 12: The change in the priesthood implies a change in the law.¹⁵⁰

- Claim: The law has been changed (7:12).
- Ground: The law appointed priests descended from Aaron; the new Melchizedek was appointed not by a law about genealogy, but by having the power of an eternal¹⁵¹ life (7:15-16).
- Implied warrant: {When a priest is appointed on a completely different basis, it shows that the law has been changed.} (Again assuming the priesthood is a replacement, not an addition.)

The scriptures in Heb 1, which are offered with little attempt to prove that they apply to Jesus, imply that the readers had a high Christology—they already accepted

¹⁴⁹ “Moses” is here a synonym for the law. Although the author normally says that Scripture was spoken by God, as part of his rhetorical strategy, he avoids saying that for the law.

¹⁵⁰ However, Westcott argues that 7:15 supports 7:11a: “Is it the abrogation of the Law which is more abundantly proved by the language of the Psalm? or the inefficacy of the Levitical priesthood?... The thought of the abrogation of the Law is really secondary” (*Hebrews*, 183). But that would mean that 7:15 merely restates the point already made clear in 7:11. Verse 16 indicates that the argument in 7:15 has to do with the law.

¹⁵¹ “Indestructible” may imply a contrast with the Levitical priesthood, but it may just be part of the author’s fondness for word variety. Ellingworth suggests that it refers to “destruction by death” (*Hebrews*, 379)—Jesus died, but death could not destroy him. Westcott says, “Other priests were made priests in virtue of a special ordinance: He was made priest in virtue of His inherent nature” (*Hebrews*, 185).

Christ as living eternally. However, the author supports this point by again citing Ps 110:4:

- Claim: Christ became a priest through the power of an eternal life (7:16).
- For (γάρ) he was appointed a priest forever (7:17).
- {Someone appointed forever must live forever.}

Heb 7:18 uses γάρ; this verse again supports 7:12:¹⁵²

- Claim: The law itself has been changed (7:12b).
- We know this because (γάρ) the earlier commandment (i.e., the law restricting the priesthood to Levi) has been abrogated... (7:18).
- {If a key commandment is abrogated, the entire law has lost its authority.}

If the author had tried to argue the unstated premise, the readers might have balked. But as a matter of rhetorical strategy, the author has glossed over the possibly controversial statement and has simply expressed his conclusion, along with the frequent¹⁵³ use of γάρ (and the words “necessarily,” “evident” and “obvious”¹⁵⁴) to assure the readers that the conclusion is well supported with logic.

Verse 18 calls the commandment about priesthood weak and ineffective, terms much more pointed than 7:11, which merely said (gingerly, in the form of a rhetorical question) that the commandment did not bring us salvation. It then says that the commandment is abrogated—cancelled in entirety—because it was ineffective.¹⁵⁵ Verse 19 expands this to the law as a whole—and although this is really a conclusion, it is expressed as a premise, as if it had already been proven:

¹⁵² Westcott says that “the γάρ goes back to v. 15” (ibid., 186). I argued above that v. 15 itself supports 7:12b. In Westcott’s view, the argument would flow like this: The inefficacy of the old priesthood (7:11) is obvious when another priest arises (7:15), because the commandment about priesthood was abrogated (7:18). But the author stated that much in 7:11-12; the subsequent verses seem designed not to belabor the point but to expand it to include the word “law.”

¹⁵³ Heb 7 uses γάρ 13 times, more than any other chapter in Hebrews. It is used nine times in 7:10-20, showing the author’s concern to argue (or at least to make it appear like he is arguing) very carefully—suggesting to me that the topic is a sensitive one for the readers.

¹⁵⁴ Ellingworth calls these words “rhetorical devices intended to enhance the persuasiveness of the argument” (*Hebrews*, 371).

¹⁵⁵ “In unserem Fall wird davon ausgegangen, daß der rechtliche Akt der Ungültigmachung dann geschieht, wenn ein Gebot oder eine Verordnung sich als ‚schwach und nutzlos‘ erweisen” (August Strobel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* [NTD 9/2; 13th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991], 86).

- Claim: The commandment about priesthood was weak and ineffective (7:18b).
- For the law¹⁵⁶ made nothing perfect (i.e., did not bring anyone salvation) (7:19a).
- {If the law as a whole is ineffective, individual laws are, too. }

The logic goes like this: The law as a whole could not bring salvation; therefore we can say it was weak and ineffective, and the law was therefore set aside (the commandment about priesthood demonstrates that for one of the key laws). Ontologically, the ineffectiveness of the law predated its abrogation, but epistemologically, it is when we *see* that a key commandment is abrogated, that we then understand that the law was ineffective, for God would not set aside an effective law, nor appoint a new priesthood if the old had been effective. Rhetorically, 7:19a serves to remind the readers that the author is not just arguing that *one* commandment has been abrogated—the law as a whole has the same problem and shares the same fate.¹⁵⁷ The author has moved in this section from the priesthood to the law, from a rhetorical question about an unreal condition to a clear statement: The law cannot bring salvation.

Hebrews 7:20-28—the new priesthood superior to the old

But the author does not take away something the readers valued without also offering something better as a replacement. The criticism of the law is sandwiched by a μέν...δέ construction: On one hand, the law is abrogated; on the other, a better hope is offered, through which readers may approach God (this “approach,” it is implied, is tantamount to the τελείωσις that the law and priesthood could not bring). This is followed by another μέν...δέ construction in 7:20-21, again contrasting the old priesthood with the new: There was no divine oath for the Levites, but there was one for the new

¹⁵⁶ Heb 7:11 had said only that the priesthood did not bring perfection; the author has again expanded the scope of his criticism to the entire law. “On note dans cette section un décalage, ou plutôt un élargissement: le non-accomplissement mis au compte du sacerdoce lévitique au départ (v. 11), est référé à toute la loi (v. 19)” (Bénétreau, *Hébreux*, 2:41). The author views priesthood and law as two sides of the same coin, but begins with priesthood and moves toward the law as a whole, suggesting that the point about priesthood was more palatable to the readers; the law was a more sensitive topic.

¹⁵⁷ Spicq writes, “Cette abrogation officielle et comme judiciaire, c’est d’abord celle de l’ordonnance mosaïque (*entolè*) prescrivant un sacerdoce héréditaire, mais sa suppression entraîne celle de toute la Loi, puisque le sacerdoce était la base de toute l’institution mosaïque” (*Hébreux* SB, 126).

Melchizedek, as shown by Ps 110:4, this time quoted to include the word “sworn.” *Γάρ* in the middle of 7:20 introduces the supporting scripture rather than creating an enthymeme: It was with an oath, for the scripture says that the Lord has sworn that Christ is a priest.¹⁵⁸

The words immediately following *γάρ* are not about the better hope, but about the old priesthood. These words are included because the author is creating a proportional argument, signaled by the comparative words *καθ’ ὅσον* in 7:20a and *τοσοῦτο* in 7:22. Just as much as Jesus’ appointment by oath is better than the Levites’ appointment without an oath, his covenant is equally better than theirs. As is usually the case in Hebrews with an argument from lesser to greater, it is an argument by analogy, which cannot be logically proven. But as Weiß says, the statement has the character of a conclusion that the readers are expected to find obvious.¹⁵⁹

The author introduces the word *covenant* here, which will be prominent in coming chapters. As he has done with other key words, he simply mentions it here, but will address it at length later. The assumption may be that that a priesthood must be given in conjunction with a covenant,¹⁶⁰ but the text does not give a rationale. The author assumes that the readers want to approach God by means of a covenant—a Jewish idea, since *διαθήκη* meant “last will and testament” in non-Jewish Greek.¹⁶¹ He implies that the “better hope,” which replaced the law (7:19b), is found in this “better covenant.”

¹⁵⁸ “The final paragraph of chap. 7 leaves Melchizedek entirely behind, to the extent of omitting the last line of Ps. 110:4. The focus is now on Jesus” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 382). Ellingworth also suggests that the author is implicitly dealing with a problem—Scripture says that the Levitical priests were appointed forever (Exod 29:28; 40:15). The author’s thought may be that “a simple command...is less binding than an oath” (ibid., 384-85). As Simon Kistemaker says, “A law can be annulled; an oath lasts forever” (*Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* [NTC 19; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 200).

¹⁵⁹ “Die Aussage in V. 22 hat somit den Charakter einer Schlußfolgerung, mit der sich der Autor wieder an das Urteilsvermögen seiner Adressaten wendet” (Weiß, *Der Brief*, 409).

¹⁶⁰ A less likely assumption is that a divine oath implies a covenant, but the author says nothing about a covenant with Abraham even though he mentions God’s oath with Abraham. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes favors the connection between covenant and priesthood: “The new and better covenant and the new and better priesthood are closely bound up with each other” (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 267). “Hebrews...presumes that priesthood and cult constitute the cornerstone of a people’s relationship to God” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 253).

¹⁶¹ Westcott writes, “The idea of a ‘testament’ was indeed foreign to the Jews till the time of the Herods” (*Hebrews*, 299). If the readers were Gentile proselytes, it could be risky for the author to assume a uniquely Jewish view of *διαθήκη*.

- Claim: Jesus is the guarantee¹⁶² of a better covenant.
- Ground: Levites were appointed without oath; Jesus was appointed by a divine oath, coupled with a promise to never change, to be a priest forever.
- Warrant: {The quality of the covenant is reflected in the way that priests are appointed.}¹⁶³

Verses 23-24 use another μέν...δέ contrast: There was a long succession of Levitical priests because they died,¹⁶⁴ but Jesus never dies and therefore one priest is good for eternity.¹⁶⁵

- Jesus holds his priesthood permanently.
- Because he lives forever.
- {Priests lose their appointment only by death.}

Verse 17 seems to imply that he lives forever because he was appointed forever; verse 24 argues almost the reverse: that he serves forever because he lives forever.¹⁶⁶ The readers would probably not notice this circularity because they did not question Jesus' eternity. His eternal priesthood is then used to draw a conclusion in 7:25:

- Claim (introduced by ὅθεν): Jesus is always able to save people who approach God through him.

¹⁶² Bénétreau comments on the appearance of the word “guarantee”: “Le raisonnement développé dans le v. 22 surprend. On s’attendrait à ce que l’Ecriture et le serment qu’elle atteste servent de garantie à l’excellence du statut de prêtre éternel. Mais il n’en est rien : c’est Jésus lui-même qui est déclaré *garant, répondant* (terme juridique). En fait, l’auteur a sauté une étape du raisonnement, qu’on pourrait aisément reconstituer. Le serment divin garantit le sacerdoce du Christ : établi dans cette fonction centrale de médiation, le Christ, qui est aussi le Fils, devient la garantie, le point d’inébranlable solidité, pour les dispositions nouvelles voulues par Dieu” (*Hébreux*, 2:42).

¹⁶³ “The comparison implies a reason: because Jesus’ appointment involved God’s oath, it was superior to the old dispensation” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 383).

¹⁶⁴ “Christ’s ‘indestructible life’ made it possible for him to fulfill the *for ever* of Psalm 110:4 (vs. 16). The corollary is stated here: Levitical priests were prevented by death from being priests *for ever*. . . . The author assumes that *for ever* cannot apply to a hereditary succession of priests and can therefore apply only to one who has been raised from the dead” (Thompson, *Hebrews*, 104, bold type changed to italics).

¹⁶⁵ The author did not need to mention that there were “many” priests, but by doing so, he would refute an argument the readers *might* have been facing: Someone might say that the Levitical cult is good because it has a long history and a long line of priests, whereas this new sect has none. The author takes this argument in favor of the old covenant and turns it into an argument against by pointing out that *death* is the reason that there were so many priests in the old system. If a priest is really effective in salvation, the author believes, there is no need for any more than one.

¹⁶⁶ Bénétreau also observes “l’impression d’un raisonnement circulaire” (*Hébreux*, 2:43).

- Ground: Jesus holds his priesthood permanently (7:24).¹⁶⁷
- {A priest can help people only while he lives.}

In order for the readers to conclude that Jesus can always save people, simply because he holds his priesthood forever, the readers would need to hold several beliefs about the priesthood: 1) that people try to approach God through a priest, 2) that people are to be saved in doing this,¹⁶⁸ and 3) that the readers *want* to approach God and be saved. The Levitical priests could not save people because they were themselves in need of salvation. Jesus is an effective priest because he continues forever, is therefore always able to intercede, is therefore always able to save. The implied exhortation is that the readers *should* approach God through Jesus (this is made explicit in 10:22).

Verse 25b uses a participle to imply cause:

- Claim: Jesus is always able to save.¹⁶⁹
- {Since} Jesus always lives to intercede for his people.
- Assumption: {As long as Jesus can intercede for his people, he will save them; or since Jesus *has* the soteriological goal, he is able and willing to help others get it.}

Here it is assumed that salvation is possible only because of intercession; although the Levitical priests acted as intercessors through their sacrifices, they were ineffective.

Verse 26 supports the efficacy of Jesus' intercession and salvation:

- Claim: Jesus is able to save his people (7:25).
- Warrant: For it was fitting¹⁷⁰ for us to have a high priest¹⁷¹ who is holy, sinless, and in heaven (7:26).

¹⁶⁷ Westcott paraphrases the argument in this way: "Because His priesthood is absolute and final, He is able to fulfil completely the ideal office of the priest" (*Hebrews*, 190).

¹⁶⁸ The author, looking to Christ, has expanded the function of a priest beyond the initial description in 5:1.

¹⁶⁹ "Able to save *completely*" (NRSV footnote) does not follow well from Jesus being alive forever. The author would probably deny that a Levitical priest was able to save at all, even while he was alive. The key concern is not whether the priest is alive, but whether he is alive forever—i.e., he cannot give something he does not himself have.

¹⁷⁰ Here, as in 2:10, *πρέπω* implies necessity, not just suitability. As George Wesley Buchanan comments, "The author's logic is consistent: He reasoned that something's existence proves its necessity" (*To the Hebrews* [AB 36; Garden City: Doubleday: 1972], 137).

¹⁷¹ The author uses "high priest" here for the first time since 6:20. The author has already argued that Christ is a priest like Melchizedek, who was "great"—and "great priest" (cf. 4:14) is a synonym in the LXX for high priest. If anyone claims that Christ is a priest, but not a high priest, the author might argue that Christ

- Ground: {Jesus supplies what is “fitting”—he is holy, sinless, and in heaven. }

Verse 27 introduces the topic of sacrifices, stating that Jesus does not need to offer daily sacrifices, “first for his own sins, and then for those of the people.” Why not? We might expect the answer to be “because he had no sin,” but that is not the answer given at the end of 7:27. There, the reason is simply that Jesus did this “once for all when he offered himself.”¹⁷² It is taken for granted that Jesus had no sin (4:15), and so did not need to offer a sacrifice for his own sins. His sacrifice was therefore for others—but why was his one sacrifice good for *all* other people? Although this is presented as a premise supporting a previous conclusion, it is actually an assertion that needs support.¹⁷³ Although previous verses have indicated that Jesus’ death was salvific (2:9, 14, 17; 5:9), the author has not explained the rationale.

Verse 28 provides support for the contrast given in 7:27. Two thoughts are intertwined; they might be separated in this way:

- Claim: Levitical priests had to offer sacrifices for themselves and for others (7:27b; 5:3).
- Ground: For *the law* appointed priests who were weak and who sinned (7:28a).
- Warrant: {If priests sin, they have to offer sacrifices for their own sins. }
- Claim: Christ does not need to offer daily sacrifices (7:27a).
- Ground: For the oath appointed a Son who is sinless (7:28b).
- Warrant: {If priests do not sin, they do not have to offer sacrifices for their own sins. }

entered the heavenly holy place, fulfilling the symbolism of a ritual that only the high priest could do. The author might also point out that Melchizedek, as the *first* priest mentioned in Scripture, was the ἀρχὴ ἱερός.

¹⁷² This is the first use of ἐφάπαξ in the epistle, and the first overt mention that his death was a self-sacrifice. “Once again our author mentions in passing for the first time a doctrine which will, in a later chapter, receive extended explanation” (Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 130).

¹⁷³ The conclusion is stated, and one premise is stated, but it is not clear what the missing premise is.

- {unstated premise }
- Since (γάρ) Jesus offered himself once for all...
- Claim: He does not need to offer daily sacrifices.

If we try to supply the missing premise in such a way as to create a complete syllogism, we might end up with something like, If a holy, blameless, undefiled high priest offers himself, it is not needed for his own sins and is consequently effective for all the sins that anyone might ever commit. However, this is simply a restatement of what needs to be proved. I conclude that this γάρ clause does not form an enthymeme.

In verse 28 the author again goes out of his way to remind the readers that *the law* is weak; he now adds the comment that the oath came afterwards—the sequence implies that the law was not enough, and also implies that the oath *replaced* the law. Further, this verse says that Jesus has reached the goal that the readers want.¹⁷⁴ He is able to deliver the goods because he *has* them.

Hebrews 8—end of the old covenant

The author summarizes his main point¹⁷⁵ in 8:1—“We have such a high priest”—that is, one described in 7:26 as sinless and in heaven, able to save those who approach God through him. Heb 8:2-6 presents a number of ideas in a short chain of arguments, which are later developed in more detail: Jesus must offer something, he serves in heaven, the Levitical sanctuary is a copy, and the covenant and ministry of Jesus is superior to the old covenant and old ministry. Verse 2 says that Jesus is a minister in the true and heavenly sanctuary, and this is supported with a reason in 8:3.

- Claim: Jesus is a minister in the true sanctuary (8:2).
- For (γάρ) as high priest he must minister somewhere (8:3).¹⁷⁶
- Jesus does not minister on earth, in the human-made copy (8:4-5).

Since Jesus is not on earth, he must be in heaven (Ps 110:1 could have been cited), and since he is serving as a high priest in the presence of God, he must be serving in the true tabernacle. Verse 3 is a simple enthymeme:

- All high priests offer sacrifices.
- {Jesus is a high priest, appointed in Ps 110:4.}
- Therefore (ὁθεν) he must have something to offer.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ The verb is τελειόω. Here again, the translation “perfect” is misleading. Although Jesus is perfect in the sense of being without sin, it is not true that he was *made* perfect. Rather, he was brought to a goal, that of being a leader who blazes a trail for others. When humans are brought to completion through the intercession of Christ, they presumably have a life similar to his—life in the presence of God.

¹⁷⁵ Heb 8:1 serves not just as a summary of the preceding paragraph, but also describes the main doctrinal point of the entire epistle. Yet the author’s purpose is not simply to convey this bit of information—he has a hortatory goal: to exhort the readers to remain loyal to this high priest.

¹⁷⁶ Contra Ellingworth, who does *not* see γάρ in 8:3 as indicating a reason: “It does not connect v. 3 directly with v. 2” (*Hebrews*, 403).

¹⁷⁷ Gräber sees no purpose in the verse: “Dabei ist nicht ganz klar, welchen Zweck die Aussage von V 3

Verse 4 then reasons from this conclusion to another:

- If he were on earth, he could not be a priest, since the Law assigns Levitical priests to make offerings {and forbids all others}.¹⁷⁸
- He is a priest and must offer something (8:4).
- {Therefore he serves in heaven, not on earth} (supporting verse 2).¹⁷⁹

Verse 5 argues that the Levitical priests served a copy of the heavenly sanctuary, then supports this with γύρ and a quote from Exod 25:40. The purpose of this citation is not just to prove that the tabernacle was a copy, but more to prove that the true sanctuary is in heaven, and (it is implied) that this is where Jesus is serving as a high priest.¹⁸⁰

- Claim: Levitical priests serve a copy of the heavenly sanctuary.
- Ground: Scripture says that Moses made the tabernacle according to a pattern shown him on the mountain.
- Assumption: {The pattern shown Moses indicates the existence of sanctuary in heaven.}

The readers have been told: 1) Jesus offers something, but not on earth; 2) there is a true heavenly sanctuary; 3) Jesus is a high priest in heaven. The conclusion is obvious: Jesus offers something in a true heavenly sanctuary. The author will discuss that in more detail in chapter 9, where the first tabernacle is described and found deficient, and then Christ's sacrifice is described. The author could have gone from 8:5 directly to 9:1, but instead he includes a section about the old and new covenants.

verfolgt. Wenn er fehlte, würde ihn jedenfalls niemand vermissen" (*Hebräer*, 2:84). The verse states the obvious, so perhaps its absence would not be noticed, but rhetorically it not only helps support 8:2, but it also suggests a question—"what did he offer?"—that will be answered in 9:26.

¹⁷⁸ This is a logical problem: If the covenant is obsolete, then the law restricting the priesthood to Levi is also obsolete (7:18), and Jesus *could* function on earth—the problem is not the law, but that Jesus is not on earth. But the readers, who apparently accepted the legitimacy of the Levitical priesthood, would not notice the problem. Besides, the author's purpose is to argue that Jesus does not minister according to the law. Steven K. Stanley resolves the logical error by assuming that Jesus would remain on earth only if he had not died: "The meaning of this phrase is that if Jesus were still on earth, *if he had not died*, then he could not be a priest" ("A New Covenant Hermeneutic: The Use of Scripture in Hebrews 8–10" [Ph.D. diss., University of Sheffield, 1994], 72, italics added).

¹⁷⁹ Ellingworth has essentially the same syllogism, saying it is the argument of 8:1-6 as a whole (*Hebrews*, 399). Weiß also notes the implied conclusion: "Also—so die unausgesprochene Schlußfolgerung—ist das hier gemeinte Hohepriestertum notwendig eines von nicht-irdischer, himmlischer Art!" (*Der Brief*, 435).

¹⁸⁰ "This section stresses the ministry of Jesus much more than that of the Levitical priests.... The contrast is mainly one of place (heaven/earth)" (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 399).

Verse 6 asserts: Just as the ministry of Jesus is superior, his covenant is equally superior. The author apparently takes the superior ministry as a point just proven (based on the assumption that a ministry in the true sanctuary is superior to ministry in a copy), and then states that the new covenant is superior to the same degree (ὄσῳ).¹⁸¹ As in 7:22, he assumes that each priesthood has a covenant associated with it.

The covenant of Christ was associated in 7:19 with a better hope; in 8:6 it is said to have better promises. The author does not say what those promises are—that does not seem to be a concern—other than implying that the new covenant is effective in bringing completion (7:19, 22).¹⁸² Some “promises” might be seen in Jer 31:31-34, but the author does not highlight any of them,¹⁸³ nor adopt any of the key terms, other than “new covenant”; his focus in this long quote is 1) to show that a new covenant was prophesied, and from that, 2) to argue that the old covenant is obsolete.

The author will highlight one benefit of the new covenant in 10:17, but in chapter 8 his purpose is not to describe the new covenant, but simply to argue that it has rendered the old one obsolete.¹⁸⁴ The readers need to be persuaded that the old covenant is obsolete before they are willing to consider any benefits of the new. Heb 8:7-13 does not even argue that the covenant is *better* (although we might expect such an argument to follow 8:6)—it simply argues that the old is obsolete, implying that the new covenant is now operative.¹⁸⁵ Any covenant is better than an obsolete one, of course; the assumption is that

¹⁸¹ “The author does not go on to defend the proportion or the correlation he is making. He assumes that his audience will accept it based on a common axiom of cause and effect—what is produced by a greater cause will be a greater good (Aristotle *Rh.* 1.7.7)” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 283). Ellingworth writes, “It is assumed that the copy is inferior to the original” (*Hebrews*, 408).

¹⁸² If the patriarchs could hope for eternal life with God (11:13), in what way are the new covenant promises “better”? Perhaps they are no better than what the ancients hoped for—but they *are* better than what the old covenant promised, for it promised only physical blessings in this life. Eternal life was offered to the patriarchs not on the basis of the old covenant, but by grace.

¹⁸³ Even after Jer 31 is quoted, Lane can say, “The writer shows no interest in the promises attached to the new covenant” (*Hebrews* 1-8, 210). Ellingworth also notes that Jer 31 “is presented not as a promise but as a divine complaint” (*Hebrews*, 411). Gräßer says, “Von den vier Verheißungen interessiert den Hebräer nämlich nur die Vergebungsverheißung (V 12)” (*Hebräer*, 2:98).

¹⁸⁴ Gräßer remarks that the author “zitiert Jer 31,31-34 mit dem *einen* Ziel, die Aussage von V 13 als Quintessenz des Ganzen zu erreichen: Weil die zweite Diatheke »neu« heißt, muß die erste veraltet sein” (*ibid.*, 101, italics in original).

¹⁸⁵ Bénétreau writes, “On s’attendrait à ce que soient explicitées les *meilleures promesses* qui fondent la nouvelle alliance annoncées en 8.6. Au contraire, c’est le sort de l’ancienne alliance qui retient l’attention”

when God gives a new covenant, it is an improvement over the old.

The author begins in 8:7 by arguing that the old covenant had a fault: “For if that first [covenant] had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one.” The author’s criticism of the old covenant is indirect in two ways: 1) the word “covenant” is not in the text, so readers must supply it, and 2) he pairs the old covenant with the word “faultless,” but then argues against that pairing; readers have to supply the conclusion.

- Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant (8:6).
- For the first covenant had a fault (8:7).
- { God will resolve the problem, and he has done it in Christ. }

- If the first was perfect, God would not promise a second (based on the assumption that God does not do unnecessary things).
- God promised a second covenant (as will be shown).
- { Therefore the first covenant did have a fault. }

Heb 8:8 explains that the fault was “with them” and then Jer 31:31-34 is quoted.¹⁸⁶ The author does not attempt to argue that Jesus brought the covenant that Jer 31 described—he does not show, for example, a correspondence between the prediction and the fulfillment—it is sufficient for his purpose here to simply note that a new covenant was predicted, showing that the old was inadequate. If the readers accept that the old covenant is obsolete, then it is assumed that their only alternative is to accept the claim that the new covenant has been put into effect through Jesus Christ (rather than being yet future).¹⁸⁷ Contrary to his usual procedure, the author offers no comment on the

(*Hébreux*, 2:59). Ellingworth observes, “At this stage of the argument, the author’s main concern is with the supersession of the old covenant and thus with the negative part of the prophecy (v. 9), rather than with its stronger positive aspect (vv. 10-12), which is explored later (especially in 10:15-18)” (*Hebrews*, 413).

¹⁸⁶ Γάρ in 8:8 introduces the supporting quote. Hughes argues for the textual variant “he finds fault [with the covenant] when he says to them” (*Hebrews*, 298), but this possibility does not affect the argument. Ellingworth says that γάρ “probably links it with v. 7a... Riggensbach links v. 8a only with v. 7b” (*Hebrews*, 415). Such connections would create an enthymeme similar to what I outline above.

¹⁸⁷ If the readers used eucharistic words similar to Luke 22:20 or 1 Cor 11:25, they would already be favorably disposed to the idea that Jesus instituted a new covenant; they just had not realized that this implied the end of the Mosaic covenant. Gordon observes, “That ‘the days’ (v. 8) of Jer. 31.31 had now come would not have been doubted by a writer who could claim in the first sentence of his letter that the Christian era belonged in the ‘last days’ (1.2)” (*Hebrews*, 93). *The primary argument in favor of the new covenant is simply that the old is obsolete*. The only thing that the author argues against—implying that it is

vast majority of the quote. As Gräßer comments, the disproportion between the quote and the terse commentary points out the main goal of the argumentation: “Der zweite Bund ist nicht die restitutio des ersten, sondern seine substitutio.”¹⁸⁸

Although Scripture describes the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants as being in force at the same time, the author assumes that only one covenant can be in force at a time. If a new is promised, the old is slated for elimination.

Verse 9 includes an argumentation structure within the quote from Jer 31:

- Claim: God will make a covenant that is *different* from the Sinai covenant (8:8).
- Ground: Because (ὅτι) they did not continue in my covenant (8:9b).
- Assumption: {The new covenant will be made in such a way that the people will not break it.}¹⁸⁹

This implication is verified in 8:10-11, which I summarize: Because [ὅτι] in the new covenant, God will change people so that they will *want* to be loyal. The author does not do anything with the details of Jer 31—he says nothing about law in the heart, God being their God, or everyone knowing the Lord (he even omits most of those details when he quotes Jer 31 again in Heb 10:16-17).

Heb 8:12 includes more reasoning from Jer 31: “For [ὅτι] I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” Does this mean that everyone will know the Lord *because* he forgives them—as if knowing God is an automatic result of forgiveness? No, the logic seems to be that God will *make a new covenant* because he forgives them, and knowing God is a consequence of the new covenant. The old covenant required punishment, and it would be necessary to remove that punishment before a new covenant could be enacted. Although the author of Hebrews does not develop the thought, the text indicates that forgiveness is the rationale

the only thing vying for the readers’ attention—is the Mosaic covenant.

¹⁸⁸ “Das »Mißverhältnis« zwischen dem ausführlichen Zitat und dieser lapidaren Feststellung fällt natürlich auf, stellt aber das eigentliche Argumentationsziel um so deutlicher heraus” (Gräßer, *Hebräer*, 2:103).

¹⁸⁹ The logic may be paraphrased: “I will make a different kind of covenant, because they kept breaking the old one.” The clause apparently explains why it is not good enough to “renew” the old covenant—a new and different kind of covenant is needed—and the difference will presumably correct the fault of the old. This is also suggested by the author’s introduction of the quote: God finds fault *with them*. Although “them” is initially unclear, the context eventually shows that it refers to the Israelites, who disobeyed.

preceding the new covenant rather than its result.¹⁹⁰

- God will make a new covenant (8:8-11).
- For he will forgive the people (8:12).
- {The old covenant required punishment, so forgiveness has to come before a new covenant can be made.}

In verse 13, the author highlights the point he wants to make from this citation: “In speaking of ‘a new covenant’ [“covenant” is again not in the text and must be supplied by the readers] God has made the first one obsolete.” The conclusion implies that the Mosaic covenant became obsolete when Jeremiah wrote the words.¹⁹¹ The logic is similar to verse 7, but goes further:

- Claim: God has made (perfect tense) the first covenant obsolete.
- Ground: God predicted a new covenant.
- Warrant: {When the new is predicted, the old is made obsolete—rendered obsolete not by the new covenant itself, but by the prediction.}

The author reiterates the point by saying, “And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.”¹⁹² He will soon describe some details of the old covenant and show how Christ is different. But before I examine Heb 9, I want to comment on the author’s strategy of comparing Jesus and his covenant to an obsolete and useless arrangement. What does this imply about the attitude of the readers toward the old covenant? Some commentators argue that the readers were not tempted by the Jewish rituals—the author was merely using the rituals as a literary foil to stress the efficacy of Christ. But it would be faint praise to say that Christ was better than an arrangement that everyone knew

¹⁹⁰ However, in chapter 10, the ὄτι is omitted, thereby making forgiveness part of the *content* of the new covenant (even though forgiveness would not be needed if everyone knew the Lord and had God’s laws written in their hearts).

¹⁹¹ Kistemaker writes, “God himself in the days of Jeremiah had already declared the covenant made with Israel to be obsolete” (*Hebrews*, 230, see also Westcott, *Hebrews*, 225). Attridge is similar: “In Hebrews’s eyes, the old covenant was near its end as soon as the oracle of a new was spoken” (*Hebrews*, 229). If the covenant became obsolete in Jeremiah’s day, there was a hiatus between the exile and Christ in which neither the Sinai covenant nor the new covenant was operative (but God was honoring the promises he made to Abraham). That might explain for the author why there was no Davidic king, no Zadokite priests, and no mercy seat in the temple. It would render the second temple and its sacrifices irrelevant (hence the author’s focus on the tabernacle). Support for this concept might be seen in the quote from the LXX of Jer 31, especially in a part that deviates from the Hebrew text: “and so I had no concern for them” (8:9d).

¹⁹² By this, the author could mean that the old covenant was destined to disappear shortly after Jeremiah made the prediction. Or he could be saying that it would disappear shortly after Hebrews was written.

didn't work—that is, better than nothing.¹⁹³ For a comparison to be an effective form of praise, it must compare with something still respected. Timothy Seid writes, “It is ridiculous to compare an obviously inferior subject to one which is clearly superior.”¹⁹⁴

The author never says, “The law is good but Christ is better.” Rather, he argues that the law was never effective. Theodore Stylianopoulos writes, “The author throughout the epistle clearly intends to separate and reject the Mosaic cult as completely valueless. He shows little interest in establishing unity and continuity between the Old and New Covenants.”¹⁹⁵ He is not just presenting Jesus as the better of two alternatives—he is saying that Jesus is effective whereas the law is not. He goes beyond the rhetoric of comparison¹⁹⁶—he is arguing against the law, arguing for supersession.¹⁹⁷ As Manson says, if the author simply wanted to highlight the superiority of Christ,

he could have dispensed with the so-often repeated reminder to his readers that the order, the rites and the sacrifices of Judaism *were ended*. It would have been enough to show that Christianity transcended Judaism, the noblest religion of the past, without insisting *pari passu* and all the time that it abrogated and superseded it. But the latter insistence would be of the very essence of the matter if he were writing to Jewish Christians on whom the hand of the past still lay very heavily.... The character of his particular emphases all gain in intelligibility and point if we suppose the

¹⁹³ It might be like a historian saying that the U.S. Constitution is the best possible national charter, because it is at least better than the Articles of Confederation—it is better than something weak and useless.

¹⁹⁴ Timothy W. Seid, “Synkrisis in Hebrews 7: The Rhetorical Structure and Strategy,” in *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps; JSNTSup 180; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 347. In personal communication, Seid wrote that he probably based this sentence on Aelius Theon’s *Progymnasmata*, section 10. If the readers already considered the law obsolete and useless, and the author wanted to compare Jesus with that law anyway, he would need to acknowledge the problem and bolster the comparison by praising the law—e.g., “Even though the law is obsolete, it was the best thing anyone had, but now we have something much better in Jesus.” But the author’s persistent polemic against the law suggests that the readers had too high a view of the law.

¹⁹⁵ Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, “Shadow and Reality: Reflections on Hebrews 10:1-18,” *GOTR* 17 (1972): 218. He concludes, “The Epistle to the Hebrews, except in the case of the interpretation of Old Testament ‘prophetic’ quotations, never suggests fulfillment of the one covenant by the other, but μετὰθεσις, ἀναίρεσις, σάλευσις, and ἀθέτησις of the former” (230).

¹⁹⁶ A *synkrisis* normally argued that a person is better than an earlier respected person; it did not say negative things about the first person. For example, the author says nothing negative about angels, and only a hint of anything negative about Moses. For these comparisons, the author might say, They are good but Jesus is better. He says the law was valid, but he never says that it did anything good.

¹⁹⁷ The new covenant supersedes the old because it is the reality that the old covenant dimly portrayed.

group to be conservatively Jewish-Christian in sentiment and tendency.¹⁹⁸

To praise the sacrifice of Jesus, it would have been sufficient to comment about sacrifices, but the author goes further, to the law as a whole, to the covenant, apparently because it is also a subject of concern.¹⁹⁹ Throughout chs. 8-10 he weaves the theme of covenant, expanding the significance of his conclusions beyond the superiority of Christ over the old priesthood, sacrifices and sanctuary, although his point could have been made without mentioning covenant at all. The argument implies that the readers valued the old covenant as still valid. Kenneth Schenck concludes that many of the readers “believed that the Levitical system not only provided legitimate means of atonement in addition to that provided by Christ but perhaps even that it was essential for complete and continuous atonement.... The Levitical system in some way stands as the audience’s main alternative to Christ.”²⁰⁰

Hebrews 9:1-14—Jesus entered heaven by his own blood

“Even²⁰¹ the first [covenant] had regulations for worship,” the author says in 9:1,

¹⁹⁸ Manson, *Hebrews*, 147, 157.

¹⁹⁹ Gareth Cockerill writes, “By affirming in v. 8 that ‘the law required’ these sacrifices ‘to be made’...the author of Hebrews reminds his readers that the sacrifices are part of a covenant or legal system that stands or falls together” (“Structure and Interpretation in Hebrews 8:1-10:18: A Symphony in Three Movements,” *BBR* 11 [2001]: 195 n. 58).

²⁰⁰ Schenck, *Understanding*, 102, 107. It is not difficult to imagine Jewish readers attracted to the old covenant, but it is more difficult to imagine readers with a high Christology (implied in Heb 1 and throughout Heb) looking to the old covenant for atonement. Could they accept Jesus as Lord, as an exalted being, but not as Savior? We do not need to posit that the readers *had* such a view—only that they were pressured to accept such a view, and the author combats that view. The readers’ more traditional Jewish relatives may have been saying, “You can believe in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus if you want to, but in order to be faithful to the Scriptures, you have to look to the Levitical rituals for atonement, for being right with God. Your belief about Jesus is harmless if you show solidarity with the Jewish people by participating in the synagogue traditions. You don’t have to give up your cherished belief, as long as you do what good Jews are supposed to do.” The readers may have been tempted to think that this was an acceptable compromise, a position that would avoid persecution, but the author is saying that it amounts to apostasy, and it is based on an obsolete law that can never provide access to God.

²⁰¹ The *καί* is lacking in some early manuscripts, perhaps because the new covenant does not have “regulations...and an earthly sanctuary.” The author is setting up a contrast, suggested by the word *μέν*—but in this case the corresponding *δέ* is not found until 9:11—after an intervening *μέν...δέ* sequence in vv. 4, 6. Ellingworth thinks that the *μέν* and *δέ* are too far apart “to be directly related” (*Hebrews*, 420), but after six *μέν...δέ* contrasts in Heb 7, readers might well expect that *μέν* in 9:1 introduces another contrast. Magill notes that in all three times that *μέν οὖν* is used, “it introduces a comparison between the Levitical

and then backs up that statement (using γάρ²⁰²) in 9:2-5 by describing the tabernacle and its furnishings.²⁰³ These details were apparently common knowledge, and the author does nothing with them, so why does he include them? They may have a rhetorical purpose—they could strengthen the author’s rapport with the audience by reporting details they are attracted to;²⁰⁴ they could also raise the author’s credibility by demonstrating his knowledge;²⁰⁵ they could make an implicit contrast between the many details of the old covenant with the simplicity of the new,²⁰⁶ or they could simply provide a change of pace, a pause in the argumentation to relax the audience. The author draws on the basic geography of the tabernacle—the fact that the Holy of Holies was behind the curtain—but ignores all the furniture. There is no argumentation until 9:8, where the author draws a conclusion about what he has said in 9:7:

- Claim: The way into the (true) sanctuary was hidden while the first tent stood (i.e., had legal standing).²⁰⁷
- Ground: The Levitical high priest could enter the Holy of Holies only once a year,²⁰⁸ only with the blood of sacrifices.²⁰⁹

system and the priesthood/ministry of Christ” (*Transline*, 839).

²⁰² “Γάρ indicates, not a direct logical consequence of v. 1, but a more specific statement” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 422). Spicq likewise says that “le « donc » qui ne conclut rien” (*Hébreux* SB, 144). Γάρ is used here, as elsewhere, to introduce evidence from Scripture, although no specific passage is quoted here.

²⁰³ Norbert Hagedé comments on the author’s unannounced switch from first [covenant] to first [tent]: “C’est le type de pièges que l’Épître aux Hébreux réserve au lecteur inattentif : les arguments sont supposés plus qu’explicités, encore une fois parce que les premiers chrétiens étaient plus à l’aise que nous dans tout ce raisonnement. Le pire risque étant aujourd’hui de passer d’un verset à l’autre et de rester devant un ensemble incohérent, exposé aux exégèses fantaisistes” (*De Sacerdoce du Fils: Commentaire de l’Épître aux Hébreux* [Paris: Fischbacher, 1983], 115).

²⁰⁴ “The author follows his usual practice of giving, first, a favourable or at least neutral description of circumstances under the old dispensation, and next, mentioning their negative aspects, thus opening the way for positive statements about Christ” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 419). In this, 9:4-5 is like 7:2b-c—a summary of information from Scripture, but information that plays no part in the author’s argument.

²⁰⁵ However, the author makes no attempt to support the details that might be questioned, such as the location of the incense altar. If the author is drawing on common knowledge, it would not demonstrate any expertise to do so.

²⁰⁶ The author contrasts the *frequency* of sacrifice, but not complexity of the rituals.

²⁰⁷ The tent stopped standing in the literal sense when the first temple was built. The author would probably say that the way into the sanctuary was disclosed by the death and ascension of Christ, which happened while the temple was still standing but at that moment became obsolete. As noted earlier, the author may believe that the old tent lost its legal standing when its covenant became obsolete in the days of Jeremiah.

- Assumptions: {The Holy of Holies was a symbol of the true sanctuary in heaven; the entry of the priest represented the entry of the redeemed; the rituals and restrictions represented barriers to access.}

Some people might have said that the high priest's entry, even if only once a year, showed that the people *could* approach God through the old covenant,²¹⁰ since the priest represented the people, and Lev 16:30 states that their sins *were* atoned. However, the author says that it showed the opposite, and he will support that in 9:9-10.

- The offerings do not give people access to God (9:8).
- {Because} sacrifices cannot bring the conscience of the worshipper²¹¹ to completion (9:9—τελειῶσαι).
- Assumption: {People would have access if their conscience was clean.}

Verse 9 contains an important point: Sacrifices cannot cleanse the conscience (the first use of συνείδησις in Hebrews). This is a critical point, and it could have been contested. One argument in support of this is given in 9:10; another will be given in 10:2.

- Conclusion: Sacrifices cannot cleanse the conscience (9:9).
- Reason (or corollary): Gifts and sacrifices are only for foods, drinks, washings and other regulations for the flesh (9:10).²¹²
- Warrant: {External rituals cannot affect the inner person.}

However, the implied warrant might be contested. Someone who believed in the efficacy of the Levitical rituals could say, "I made the offering that the law prescribed. I

²⁰⁸ He had to enter several times on the same day: to offer incense, to sprinkle blood, and to retrieve the censer. Although the rituals of Yom Kippur are important because the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies only on that day, the day does not have a special role in the author's argumentation. Rather, he paints a *composite* picture of the sacrifices and rituals, whether they are daily, yearly, with blood, with water, for covenant inauguration or covenant maintenance. On 9:13, Ellingworth writes, "The author is moving away from specific reference to the Day of Atonement liturgy to the underlying principles of OT sacrifice" (*Hebrews*, 454).

²⁰⁹ "This is the first of many references to blood" (*ibid.*, 436).

²¹⁰ Westcott seems to accidentally support such an argument when he writes in another context, "In a figure year by year the people had access to the Presence of God in the person of the High-priest" (*Hebrews*, 280).

²¹¹ The worshipper here, in context, is only the Levitical high priest, representing all of Israel.

²¹² This verse "contains one of the author's most negative judgments on the levitical order, comparable with 8:13" (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 442). "Hebrews' language raises the question whether such regulations remain in force after the new age is inaugurated. The strong implication is that they do not; but the author does not say so explicitly" (*ibid.*, 444). But if the covenant is obsolete, the regulations are as well.

did what was required, so God will give me what he promised. I *feel* forgiven, so why do you say there is something wrong with my conscience?” In other words, the person says, “The offerings are effective because God says they are,” and our author asserts, “No, they aren’t.” He is apparently using *conscience* as an objective status, not a subjective feeling.

Further, he says that the offerings were “imposed until the time comes to set things right.” The author assumes that he lives in that time—in the “last days” (1:2). The offerings were required for only a temporary time—but how did the author conclude that? The author does not make it explicit, but it seems to be built on 8:13—the old covenant is rendered obsolete by the prediction of a new covenant.²¹³ Therefore the old was *designed* to be temporary, which implies that it was not effective, and the rituals therefore symbolized restriction rather than success. Even if all the rituals had been done right, the prediction of a new covenant means that the rituals were never effective for salvation, and the deficiency is so serious that the solution involves not just a renewed heart, but also a new covenant.

In verse 11, the author begins to describe the ministry of Christ, who is introduced as the high priest of good things that were predicted²¹⁴ (perhaps a reference to Jer 31).

The author makes several points in contrasting Christ with the old covenant:

1. Christ entered the sanctuary in heaven (resuming the topic started in 8:1-6),
2. he did it through his own blood rather than animal blood,
3. he did it once for all (ἐφ’ ἅπασι), and
4. he obtained eternal redemption.²¹⁵

He supports the claim of redemption with an argument from lesser to greater:

- Claim: Christ obtained eternal redemption.

²¹³ “This ‘time of reformation’ has already been defined in the terms of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant” (Hughes, *Hebrews*, 325).

²¹⁴ Some ancient texts say “good things that have come.” Even if the original is “good things to come,” it would seem to correspond literally to “the time to set things right” in the previous verse, and thus refer to something that Christ has already brought.

²¹⁵ Verse 14 implies that the redemption he obtained is for others, thus addressing a point left unresolved from 7:27.

- Because (γάρ) just as animal blood cleanses the exterior,²¹⁶ the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without (spiritual) blemish, cleanses the conscience (9:13-14).

If we try to make this an enthymeme, the assumed warrant would almost have to be the same as the claim—unless the words “eternal spirit” offer a rationale. Montefiore argues that the phrase “through the eternal spirit” means “through his eternal nature,” since πνεῦμα can refer to a person’s self. “He, who in self-sacrifice offered to God his full and perfect humanity, was himself eternal by nature; and because of this, the salvation that he procured is everlasting.”²¹⁷ He was perfect in conscience and therefore able to help others become perfect in conscience. This would then provide a logical premise for the enthymeme: {The eternal spirit, since it is of infinite value, indicates that the sacrifice is sufficient for all humans for all time.}

The author assumes that the Levitical priests, who were “without blemish” on the outside, while flawed on the inside, could be effective only on the outside.²¹⁸ The priests were guilty of sin and could not cleanse themselves, much less anyone else. Another assumption is that the death of Christ, since it was not needed for himself, is somehow effective for *all* other people (2:9), once for all time. This is not explained,²¹⁹ but see my note on 9:28, below. The blood of a sinless person is obviously more significant than the blood of animals, but the *extent* of that significance is not self-evident.²²⁰ We can see the more assumptions in the following paraphrase: If hundreds of rituals cleanse the *flesh*, then we can be sure that Christ’s death cleanses the *conscience* (which gives permission

²¹⁶ Although Ellingworth believes that some of the readers were Gentile, he also notes that “many non-Jewish readers would refuse to accept the premise expressed in v. 13” (*Hebrews*, 453).

²¹⁷ Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 155; also Westcott, *Hebrews*, 261, Spicq, *Hébreux* SB, 155, and Thomas Hewitt, *Hebrews* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 148. Ellingworth does not give his own view, but says that if the “eternal spirit” refers to Jesus’ eternal existence, “it would mean essentially the same as” the phrase found in 7:16—“the power of an indestructible life” (*Hebrews*, 457). Elsewhere, he refers to “the author’s facility in using different expressions with the same meaning” (*ibid.*, 478).

²¹⁸ “Animals are not moral creatures; the unblemished condition...was merely external” (Hughes, *Hebrews*, 357).

²¹⁹ Jean Héring writes, “How is it to be understood that the sacrifice had supernatural effects, by canceling sins and gaining a victory over the devil? Here is a mystery which no New Testament author explains to us” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock; London: Epworth, 1970], 81).

²²⁰ Even if Jesus saved only *one* other person, that would be more than the animal rituals did.

to approach God, and salvation).²²¹ The author is changing the terms in the middle of the argument. He implies that the ministries are analogous, but does not prove it.²²² This is not to say that his conclusion is wrong—it is just to observe that his rhetorical strategy does not always delineate all the steps in the logic.

Hebrews 9:15-28—new covenant had a better sacrifice

Another conclusion is drawn in 9:15—marked as a new paragraph in most translations, but introduced as a logical consequence of 9:14:

- Datum: The blood of Christ, who offered himself to God, is able to purify the conscience so that people can worship God (9:14).
- Conclusion: For this reason (διὰ τοῦτο) he is mediator of a new covenant (9:15).

How does the author go from 9:14 to 9:15? The assumption seems to be that worshipping God with a clean conscience is tantamount to salvation (cf. 7:19), and since Christ brings a new means of reaching the soteriological goal, he mediates a new covenant.²²³ This implies that *salvation must be based on a covenant*—an idea that is reflected in 9:15 when the author states the *purpose* of the new covenant: “so that (ὅπως) those who have been called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.” A covenant brings salvation.

Why can people be saved through the covenant Christ brought? Heb 9:15 gives this reason: “because (διὰ τοῦτο) a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.” The logic would have been simple if the author had said a little less:

²²¹ “Approaching God” is a synonym of salvation in 7:19, 25; it can be done only with a clean conscience, only if sins are forgiven.

²²² We cannot expect an epistle to address every question in equal detail. The readers apparently had received a lot of teaching about Christ already, and if key questions were resolved to their satisfaction, then other claims would probably be accepted as part of the doctrinal package.

²²³ Smith writes that the “therefore” of 9:15 “does not look back to the preceding but forward, and the verse might better be translated as follows: ‘For the following purpose he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance’” (*Hebrews*, 114). However, if a clean conscience is the guarantee of salvation, the “therefore” functions in the normal way, as I have outlined it above. Ellingworth says that the transition is gradual: “If διὰ τοῦτο is forward-looking, it makes a link, not primarily with v. 14...but with the whole of the preceding argument...as far back as 7:22” (*Hebrews*, 459). This is unnecessarily vague; a clear link with v. 14 can be constructed.

- People can be saved through the new covenant.
- Because a death has redeemed them from transgressions.
- {Sins are the only obstacle to salvation, and death atones for sin.}

The problem is that the author says that Christ’s death redeemed people from transgressions *under the first covenant*. However, if the first covenant is obsolete, then transgressions of it would be irrelevant for the readers²²⁴—the law no longer applies, the penalty no longer applies, and there is nothing to redeem. The author seems to be thinking of those who lived under the first covenant—thus he uses the perfect tense participle *κεκλημένοι* rather than a present tense participle, and he has moved from the first person “our” of 9:14 to the third person “those” of 9:15. The ancients committed transgressions, but the first covenant was not able to remove sins from their record, so they “did not receive what was promised” (11:39). The death of Christ redeems them retroactively, and thus they could be made perfect along with “us” (11:40).

The author has argued that the rituals of the old covenant were ineffective in salvation (9:8-10); readers might well wonder about Moses, David, the prophets, and other people God called during that time period—how will they be saved? After saying that Christ brings salvation (9:11-14), the author returns to the old covenant in the section that begins with 9:15. Since Christ brings salvation, he is the mediator of a new covenant, *with the result that* those formerly called might be saved, because a death has occurred to redeem them from their transgressions. The argument is this:

- Claim: The Israelites who were called may be saved.
- Ground: Because a death has taken place to redeem them from transgressions that occurred when they lived, under the first covenant.
- Warrant: {The first covenant required a death for redemption, and this is the only barrier to salvation.}²²⁵

²²⁴ However, if the readers did not *know* that the old covenant was obsolete, they would *want* redemption, and hence they would think that the argument was relevant to their needs. The warrant involved would be similar to what I propose above: The covenant required a death for redemption.

²²⁵ “In his death Jesus identified himself with the transgressors and took upon himself the curse sanctions of the covenant that were invoked whenever the stipulations of the covenant were ignored” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* [WBC 47B; Dallas: Word, 1991], 242). “The establishment of a New Covenant...required as its preliminary condition the discharge of man’s existing obligations” (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 264). “Die Verheißung eines neuen Testaments hat nicht wahr werden können, ohne daß zugleich radikale Befreiung von der alten Ordnung geschehen ist” (Strobel, *Der Brief*, 110).

The logic implies that the first covenant required a death, and 9:16 supports this.²²⁶ “For where there is a covenant, death of the covenant-maker must be borne” (my literal translation). That is, when transgressions have taken place *in the context of a covenant*, the transgressors must die. I am following here the proposal of Scott Hahn, which notes that 9:15 presents the context of a *broken* covenant.²²⁷ For most covenants, the parties took an oath invoking their own death as the punishment if they should fail to keep the covenant.

However, the meaning of διαθήκη in Heb 9:16-17 is debated. The majority view is that the author is using it in the sense of “will,” its common meaning in non-Jewish Greek writings.²²⁸ The author is talking about death and inheritance, and although the logic is not tight, the point is illustrated by an analogy: Just as a will becomes effective on a person’s death, so also a covenant becomes inaugurated with a death. Just as the Mosaic covenant was ratified with blood, so also the new covenant was put into effect through the death of Jesus. But Hahn, building on the word of J. J. Hughes,²²⁹ points out some problems with the traditional view:

- 1) In other Greek literature, ισχύω and βέβαιος (9:17) refer to validity, not execution, and a will is valid when signed; it does not become valid only on the death of the testator.
- 2) Inheritance before death was sometimes permitted, contra 9:17b.
- 3) Φέρεσθαι in 9:16b is a peculiar way to say that a person has died.
- 4) Ἐπὶ νεκροῖς (plural, 9:17) is a peculiar way to refer to death.
- 5) Hebrews uses διαθήκη to mean covenant, and the term is important to the argument; a play on words would weaken it. The argument assumes a

²²⁶ “The internal logic of the argument indicates that vv. 16-22 should be regarded as a parenthetical explanation of v. 15, which in turn is the climax of vv. 11-14” (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 234).

²²⁷ Scott W. Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 416-36.

²²⁸ Ellingworth begins by arguing, “There is *prima facie* no reason to press the various occurrences of διαθήκη in vv. 15-20 into a single meaning” (*Hebrews*, 462). But *au contraire*, the logical connectors in vv. 16 and 18 are *prima facie* evidence that the author is working with a consistent meaning. Westcott writes, “The connexion of vv. 15-18 is most close: v. 16 ὅπου γάρ... : v. 18 ὅθεν οὐδέ... This connexion makes it most difficult to suppose that the key-word (διαθήκη) is used in different senses in the course of the verses” (*Hebrews*, 300, ellipses in original).

²²⁹ J. J. Hughes, “Hebrews IX 15 ff. and Galatians III 15ff.,” *NovT* 21 (1979): 66-91.

consistent meaning of διαθήκη from 9:15 to 9:22; there is no indication that the logic is irregular.²³⁰

- 6) Nowhere else in Hebrews does the believer's inheritance come through testamentary means, since God is the testator and cannot die.²³¹
- 7) A mediator is not involved in the vast majority of testaments.
- 8) Hebrews always builds its case on the old covenant cultus, not secular law.

Hughes, following Westcott, suggests that the meaning of "covenant" works if vv. 16-17 refer to the animal sacrifices that were done during covenant ratification to represent the death of covenant-breakers. But Hahn points out two difficulties with this:

- 1) Contra v. 17, not all covenants required animal sacrifices—some involved only an oath. Hebrews is not making a general statement about all covenants.
- 2) Vv. 16-17 more naturally refer to the *actual* death of the people who make the covenant, not merely to a death symbolized in a ritual.²³²

Hahn suggests that these verses refer to a *broken* covenant—and v. 15b sets that context by referring to transgressions of the first covenant. "The purpose of vv. 16-17 is to explain *why a death* [i.e., of Jesus] *was necessary.*"²³³ I will summarize Hahn's view by paraphrasing vv. 15-18:

Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant so that people can receive the promises, because a death has occurred to redeem them from the penalty that they deserved under the first covenant. Since²³⁴ the transgressions occurred in the context of a covenant, the transgressors must die, for this covenant can be considered valid only if death is carried out on transgressors,²³⁵ since the covenant specified that death is the

²³⁰ Since an analysis of enthymemes attempts to give the author the benefit of the doubt in logic, it has a bias toward consistent meanings, rather than an illustration or play on words.

²³¹ Hahn, "A Broken Covenant," 422.

²³² Ibid., 430-31.

²³³ Ibid., 431, italics in original.

²³⁴ This takes ὅπου with the meaning "since" rather than "where." "Under different circumstances, . . . transgressions might have been inconsequential or given rise to some lesser punishment, but 'since there is a covenant' . . . entailing a curse of death for unfaithfulness—'the death of the covenant maker must be borne'" (ibid., 432).

²³⁵ Hahn's proposal for v. 16 seems to fit the text well, but v. 17 is more difficult. Literally, v. 17 says, "For a covenant is valid on dead persons, since it has no force as long as the covenant-maker lives." In the context of the first covenant, it would mean that the covenant was valid for the dead (i.e., the Israelites); as long as they lived, the penalty was not being carried out. But to give them life again, they would need to be

penalty for transgression; the covenant is not being enforced if the transgressors are allowed to live. That is why the first covenant was inaugurated with blood—to symbolize the death of the covenant-breaker. Since the penalty has been carried out in Christ, the old covenant has no further claim, and a new covenant can be made. In brief, people can receive the new promises because a death has occurred to redeem them from the legal claims of the Sinai covenant.

Hahn’s proposal acknowledges that a covenant does not cease to exist when it is broken; rather, the penalties are invoked. The covenant could not simply be *declared* obsolete—v. 15 indicates that the transgressions incurred legal consequences that had to be fulfilled. The people who died under the old covenant could not be saved without being redeemed by a death. The purpose of this passage in Hebrews 9 is to defend the necessity of and the efficacy of the death of Jesus in terminating the old covenant and inaugurating the new. Here it is in enthymeme form:

- A death (i.e., of Christ) redeemed people under the first covenant (9:15).
- For a covenant requires death of any party who transgresses (9:16).
- {The death of Christ paid the penalty for them.}

- A covenant requires death of any covenant-maker who transgresses (9:16).
- For a covenant is valid only when transgressors are dead (9:17a).
- Since (ἐπει) the covenant (involving a self-maledictory oath) is not being carried out as long as transgressors are alive (9:17b).

A covenant requires the death of transgressors—therefore (ὅθεν) the first covenant was inaugurated with blood (9:18). Why? Because that blood showed the penalty of transgressing the covenant: death.²³⁶ To substantiate that the first covenant was enacted with blood, the author summarizes the events of Exod 24 (with a few

redeemed. The Israelites could not be saved under the terms of the old covenant, since it required their death.

²³⁶ “Die Verfügung des alten Bundes hat des Todes bzw. des Opferblutes bedurft, woraus sich Folgerungen für die Einsicht in die innere Notwendigkeit des Todes Jesu ergeben” (Strobel, *Der Brief*, 111). Ellingworth writes that ὅθεν “should relate, as elsewhere in Hebrews (2:17), to what immediately precedes; in this case, to the illustration of the will” (*Hebrews*, 465). However, the logic would not work if “will” were meant—a will requires the death of the one who made it, so the first one was inaugurated with blood—but “the first one” was not a will, and it was not the blood of the one who made it. Further, contra v. 17, a will *is* legally valid before the testator dies.

additions).²³⁷ This story was most likely common knowledge, so the author's effort to *prove* the point suggests that he is dealing with something the readers may resist. As part of his evidence, he summarizes, "under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22).²³⁸ There can be no forgiveness without blood because the old covenant required death for transgressions, as pictured not only by the sprinkling that accompanied the covenant inauguration, but also by the ongoing operation of the covenant rituals. This section of Hebrews argues that under the old covenant, death was necessary for transgression (not just inauguration), all in support of the point that Christ could save the people of the old covenant *because* he died to redeem them (9:15).

- Datum: A covenant requires death for transgressors (9:16).
- Conclusion: Therefore (ὅθεν) the first covenant was inaugurated with blood (9:18).²³⁹
- Hidden premise: {The blood symbolized the penalty of infraction.}

- Datum: A covenant requires death for transgressors (9:16).
- Other part of the conclusion: Almost everything is cleansed by blood, and forgiveness is by blood (9:22).

²³⁷ The support from Scripture, as usual, is introduced by γάρ. Ellingworth writes, "Γάρ introduces, not a reason, but a confirmation of the general statement of v. 18 by something more specific" (*Hebrews*, 467). Exod 24 says nothing about water, wool and hyssop, and the tabernacle and vessels did not yet exist. Leon Morris surmises, "Perhaps we are meant to see the dedication of the tabernacle as a kind of renewal of the covenant" ("Hebrews," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] 12:89). As with the offerings, the author is creating a composite picture based on the entire law. This improves the analogy with the new covenant, in which the covenant was inaugurated and the heavenly sanctuary dedicated by means of the same offering. In 9:19, the author again mentions "law" without any need to do so.

²³⁸ Montefiore notes that the author does not explain this principle. "It is not even true, for there are other means of receiving forgiveness actually prescribed in the Old Testament, such as prayer (Dan. ix. 19), fasting (Joel ii. 12), almsgiving (Ecclus. iii. 30), penitence (Psalm li. 17)" (*Hebrews*, 158). However, the principle is explained if Hahn's view of 9:16 is correct—the covenant required death for transgression, and redemption could come only through a better death.

By using a double negative, the author avoids saying that forgiveness could be obtained through Levitical rituals. Ellingworth notes that the author is "careful to avoid stating that the old cultus offered forgiveness of *sins*" (*Hebrews*, 472, italics in original—the Greek does not include "of sins.>"). The author later argues that the blood of animals could *not* bring forgiveness of sins (10:4). He might argue that animal blood (or other actions) gave only a "shadow" (10:1) of forgiveness, symbolizing but not actually giving it.

²³⁹ Manipulation of blood did not have any role in sacrifices until the law of Moses (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 285). Blood was important in the first Passover, then in the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai; after that, it became part of many Levitical sacrifices, including those on the Day of Atonement.

- Premise: {Forgiveness and cleansing come by blood because it represents death.}

It was *necessary* (ἀνάγκη), 9:23 says, for the tabernacle and other things to be “cleansed” (dedicated for sacred purposes) with blood, apparently because that blood showed the penalty of covenant transgressions. Since the copies were cleansed by blood, the author reasons that the true sanctuary needed better sacrifices.²⁴⁰ Here he is returning the discussion back to self-offering of Christ, last mentioned in 9:14.

- Earthly copies required rituals involving animal blood.
- { Since reality is better than an imitation... }
- Therefore (οὐν) heavenly realities required better sacrifices (9:23).²⁴¹

Since the tabernacle was an earthly copy of a heavenly reality, it is assumed that the old covenant *rituals* were also copies of heavenly or spiritual realities. Since the old covenant required death (pictured by sacrifices and blood rituals) to cleanse the flesh (9:13), a better sacrificial death was needed to cleanse the conscience, which the author seems to include among the “heavenly things” (9:14, 23).²⁴² He assumes that the new covenant requires death for transgressions (because all covenants did), and salvation

²⁴⁰ An argument from lesser to greater could have easily gone the other way: Since heavenly realities are better than earthly copies, they need *less* cleansing. But the author is confident of his assertion because he believes that the death of Christ was an efficacious sacrifice.

Ellingworth argues for another meaning for “purifying” the heavenly things: “The explanation which best accords with the context is well expressed in the (N)JB note: ‘The “purification” of the sanctuary, whether the earthly or the heavenly one, does not necessarily imply any previous “impurity”’: it is a consecratory and inaugural rite” (*Hebrews*, 477). Spicq has the same view: “Le ciel n’a pas besoin d’être purifié (le verbe *katharizesthai* n’est pas répété), mais d’être consacré pour devenir un sanctuaire, apte à la liturgie dont le nouveau grand prêtre sera l’officiant; c’est une « dédicace »” (*Hébreux* SB, 159-60). Again, an argument from lesser to greater could have argued that an eternal reality in heaven needed *less* inauguration.

²⁴¹ Ellingworth writes, “The precise force of the logic depends on how οὐν is interpreted.... It relates naturally to v. 22b: because there is no remission without blood-shedding, both old and (still more) new covenants required sacrifice for...inauguration” (*Hebrews*, 475).

²⁴² Attridge, *Hebrews*, 262. Smith also notes that the conscience is in the spiritual realm—the words *flesh* and *conscience* “are code words describing the basic components of the human being as bodily and spiritual” (*Hebrews*, 112). N. T. Wright suggests a similar equivalence when he writes, “The effects of his sacrifice are to be felt...in the inward depths, the ‘holy of holies’ at the core of each individual person” (*Hebrews for Everyone* [2nd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004], 96-97). See also Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 160, and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 228.

could be effected only through a better sacrifice—giving a life more valuable than the lives that were forfeited by sin. The author apparently believes that the death of Christ redeemed people who transgress the *new* covenant as well as those who transgress the old, but he does not have occasion to say this because the focal point of the argument is the old covenant.

To recap: The old priesthood did not work, or else God would not have promised another. The old covenant did not work, or else God would not have promised another. That means the old rituals did not work, and something different was needed to cleanse the conscience, forgive sins, and allow people to approach God and live forever. Transgressions require death, and the fact that God sent Christ shows that the previous arrangement was ineffective—animal sacrifices offered by priests who have sins of their own could only illustrate redemption, not give it. The priests cannot even save themselves—they all die. The author then argues that Christ accomplished everything that was needed:

- Claim: Heavenly things must be cleansed with better sacrifices (9:23).²⁴³
- Ground: For (γάρ)²⁴⁴ Christ entered the true holy place, heaven itself (9:24).
- Warrant: {Christ’s entry into heaven means that the cleansing has been done.}²⁴⁵

Verse 25 presents another way in which Christ offered a better sacrifice:

- Claim: Heavenly things must be cleansed with better sacrifices (9:23).
- Ground: Christ offered himself only once (9:24-25).²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Claus-Peter März argues that the verse implies a heavenly victim: “Die formelhaft verkürzte Aussage will wohl andeuten, daß der Eintritt ins himmlische Heiligtum nicht durch irdische, sondern nur durch ein »himmlisches« Opfer ermöglicht werden kann” (*Hebräerbrief* [NEchtB; Würzburg: Echter, 1989], 59).

²⁴⁴ Here γάρ might introduce a conclusion: *Because* heavenly things required better sacrifices, Jesus entered heaven. But the way it is stated, the sense is epistemological: *We know* that heaven needed better sacrifices because that is where Christ went, and we know that better sacrifices were needed because that is what Christ offered.

²⁴⁵ This verse does not say whether the cleansing was done when Christ died, or when he went to heaven. It does say that his purpose in heaven is “now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”

²⁴⁶ Verse 25 includes a small comment that may reveal the thinking of the author: He seems to fault the Levitical priest for offering “blood that is not his own.” Since the priest sinned, he deserved death, and killing an animal could not fulfill the real requirement of the covenant oath.

- Warrant: {A truly effective sacrifice does not need to be repeated.}

Verse 26 offers support:

- Claim: Christ offered himself once, not repeatedly (9:24).
- Ground: If he had to offer numerous sacrifices, it would have been necessary for him to suffer often even from the beginning of the world (9:26a).
- Warrant: He appeared only recently, not at the beginning (9:26b) {therefore once was enough}.

If Christ had to die once for every sin, or once for every person, or even once for every generation, he would have had to appear at the very beginning and offer a never-ending series of sacrifices,²⁴⁷ but since he did not appear then, the author concludes that repetitious sacrifices are not necessary, and only one sacrifice was needed. Actually, the author begins with the belief that Christ was efficacious, and he reasons not from logical necessity toward fulfillment, but from what actually happened, to make a conclusion about what was necessary.²⁴⁸

The author then presents death as a parallel (not a proof)²⁴⁹—just as people die once, Jesus died only once to bear the sins of many (probably an allusion to Isa 53:12).²⁵⁰ Just as judgment follows death, Christ will return, bringing salvation (the positive counterpart of judgment) to “those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:27-28).²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ This may be another example of humor. Spicq calls it a “preuve par l’absurde” (*Hébreux* SB, 161). Westcott says, “It is assumed that the repetition of Christ’s suffering in the future is inconceivable” (*Hebrews*, 275). Ellingworth notes that “the author does not seem to have resolved, and perhaps did not ask, the question of the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice in respect to future sins” (*Hebrews*, 484). Yet the author’s logic would indicate that if Christ’s sacrifice was good for all people, once for all, it would necessarily include future sins.

²⁴⁸ As Ellingworth comments on 7:26, “Such statements are consequences drawn from what he believes God has in fact done” (*ibid.*, 393). “The starting-point is not, at least not directly, the historical fact that Jesus was crucified only once, but the conviction that his death and enthronement do not need to be repeated, because the enthronement shows the permanent efficacy of the death” (Paul Ellingworth, “The Old Testament in Hebrews: Exegesis, Method and Hermeneutics” [Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1977], 192).

²⁴⁹ Ellingworth says that καθ’ ὅσον “suggests not only a comparison but a reason” (*ibid.*, 485). It is suggestive of propriety, but it is not logical proof. In Perelman’s terminology, it is an argument from analogy, but it does not form an enthymeme.

²⁵⁰ Isaiah 53 is probably the source of the author’s conviction that the death of Jesus paid for all others.

²⁵¹ Magill develops the force of καθ’ ὅσον: “Just as one follows the other for people, so one will follow the

The author repeats at the end of 9:26 that Christ *removed sin* by the sacrifice of himself; in 9:28 he repeats that Christ was offered *to bear the sins of many*. Although this idea is not supported with rationale, it has occurred so often in the midst of argumentation that readers are likely to feel it *has* been proven. This will happen again in chapter 10.

Hebrews 10:1-18—Christ’s sacrifice renders all others unnecessary

Chapter 10 begins in the middle of an argument:

- Claim: Christ will save his people when he returns (9:28).
- Ground: For (γάρ) the law can never bring anyone to completion (10:1).²⁵²
- Warrant: {If God cannot use the law, he will use Christ. }

This assumption—either the law or Christ—pervades the epistle, suggesting that this was the choice the readers faced. Although they accepted the ascension of Christ into heaven, they looked to the law for worship, atonement and salvation. Although they accepted the messianic prophecies that called Jesus the Son of God, he was a figure without a function, at least without a function that was defined in the Scriptures the readers accepted as authoritative. So the author argues that Jesus is not just sitting in heaven, he is the source of salvation, and his death, rather than being an embarrassment, was actually the means by which he brought salvation.

In general, the author gives better reasons for saying that the old approach is ineffective, than for proving that Christ is effective. Since the readers apparently had only two choices, it was enough to disprove one, and the readers’ positive view of Christ would encourage them to accept the author’s view as the only rational choice.

Heb 10:1 includes another argument:

- Claim: The law cannot bring anyone to completion.
- Ground: Since it has only a shadow of the predicted blessings.

other for Christ. As certain as judgment follows death for us, so certain is His second appearance for us” (*Transline*, 847). There may be an allusion here to the reappearance of the Levitical high priest after completing his work in the Holy of Holies. The author here indirectly exhorts the readers to wait.

²⁵² Ellingworth sees the connection not with 9:28 specifically, but with 9:23-28 as a whole, especially 9:23 (*Hebrews*, 492). There are some conceptual parallels between 9:23 and 10:1, but the connection is not a logical one. Hugedé notes here, “On voit bien que le ton est celui d’une conclusion. Les remarques concernant l’ancien rituel prennent une valeur générale; on ne parle même plus de l’ancienne alliance, mais de la loi” (*De Sacerdoce*, 158).

- Warrant: {A shadow, since it is not the reality, cannot be effective—otherwise it would *be* the reality.}

Then he argues from a contrary:

- If sacrifices were effective, they would not be repeated.
- Because the worshippers would be cleansed once for all, and no longer have consciousness of sins (10:2).
- {If they are clean and not conscious of sins, no sacrifice is needed.}

The argument illustrates rhetorical strategy, but not tight logic. First, the author creates a high criterion of effectiveness—a sacrifice is not considered effective at all unless it cleanses “once for all” (ἄπαξ)—a person’s future as well as the past.²⁵³ Here, the author is using a subjective sense of conscience rather than the earlier objective sense. Spicq observes that the author does not consider the possibility that a sinner could be forgiven but unaware of it²⁵⁴—a neurotic conscience, perhaps. He does not consider the possibility that a sacrifice might effectively cleanse a person retroactively but not provide coverage for future infractions.²⁵⁵ In essence, he requires what he is trying to prove—that the only effective sacrifice is a singular one. Further, it could be argued that this criterion of effectiveness is not yet met, even in the new covenant, since believers still have consciousness of sin, or a conscience tainted by sin. Some of those feelings are valid and some are not, but they exist, and they do not mean that sacrifices are again necessary.²⁵⁶ Most likely, the author began reasoning with the belief that Christ’s sacrifice was effective, and since it was given only once, he concluded that once is all that is needed, and therefore that repetitious sacrifices are a sign of ineffectiveness.

²⁵³ “The unstated assumption here is that cleansing the conscience should be a one-time act, that sins will not return to beset the conscience anew” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 317). The argument works for sacrifices, but not for other Levitical rituals.

²⁵⁴ Spicq, *Hébreux* SB, 165. “Les avantages des dispositions divines paraissent soumis à l’appréciation de leurs utilisateurs” (Bénétreau, *Hébreux*, 2:97).

²⁵⁵ Since people continually fall short, a sacrifice that is retroactive only could never be the basis of salvation—but that is an argument the author does not make.

²⁵⁶ If the readers were troubled by an experience of guilt feelings about post-baptismal sin, as Barnabas Lindars suggests in *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10-14, this verse would mention but not alleviate their concerns. Since the author’s argument would not be supported by personal experience, it would be unpersuasive.

The author makes another assertion in 10:3 and supports it in 10:4:

- Claim: The Levitical sacrifices are a yearly reminder of sins (10:3).²⁵⁷
- Ground: Because it is impossible for animal blood to take away sins (10:4).
- Warrant: {Sins must be removed, and an ineffective ritual is only a reminder.}

Verse 5 draws a conclusion:

- Animal sacrifices cannot take away sins (10:4).
- Therefore (διό) Christ²⁵⁸ {did something different, as described in 10:5-9}.²⁵⁹
- Hidden premise: {The divine plan is to save people by taking away their sins, so if one approach did not work, another would be used.}

The author quotes Ps 40:6-8 as words of Christ: “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body²⁶⁰ you have prepared for me.” He then regroups the quote into two parts: First, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings”—after which the author inserts the reminder that “these are offered according to the law,” thus making sure that the readers

²⁵⁷ Jer 31:34 may be another source of the author’s conviction that sacrifices are a reminder of sin—it predicts that a day will come when God will no longer remember the people’s sins; this implies that under the old covenant God did remember sins (Thompson, *Hebrews*, 131).

²⁵⁸ The text has “he”—Christ is not named until 10:10—the author assumes that the readers will accept without question that the psalm is messianic. “There is no attempt at argument or justification.... It is probable that this Christ-centered understanding of Scripture was generally accepted in the community to which *Hebrews* was originally addressed” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 499).

²⁵⁹ Ellingworth agrees: “Διό is best understood as drawing a conclusion from v. 4” (*Hebrews*, 499). Spicq says that 10:1-5 has “la forme d’un syllogisme presque régulier” (*Hébreux* SB, 163). Verse 2 is the major premise; vv. 3-4 the minor premise; and v. 5 the conclusion. However, the real conclusion to vv. 2-4 would be only that the sacrifices were not effective; nothing could be concluded about the efficacy of Christ.

²⁶⁰ The MT has “ears you have dug for me,” perhaps indicating that God has given the person ears that can hear in order to obey. “The ‘body’ is the instrument for fulfilling the divine command, just as the ‘ear’ is the instrument for receiving it” (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 308). The author finds the LXX congenial to his argument (he uses the word “body” again in 10:10), but his argument does not depend on the word “body.” It would be illogical for the psalm to say that God did not want sacrifices, but that he did want someone to sacrifice the body. Perhaps that is why the author is content to let the word echo, rather than support it with argumentation. He does not even repeat the “body” clause when he regroups the psalm.

The author stops the quote just before Ps 40:8b, which says, “your law is within my heart.” Although this clause would have tied in well with the quote from Jer 31:33, it would make it more difficult for the author to contrast the law with the new covenant (Heb 10:8-9).

know that he is dealing with the law as a whole, not just the sacrifices. The author resumes the quote by saying, “Then he added, ‘See, I have come to do your will’” (10:9). Since “your will” comes last, it is emphasized.²⁶¹

After this regrouping, the author asserts: “He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.” In context, “the first” is simply the first part of the quote—the sacrifices—but by implication, it also involves the law as a whole. The author has earlier used “the first” as a substantive for the old covenant, and as a substantive for the tabernacle. The entire Levitical cluster—priesthood, law, covenant, tabernacle, sacrifices and rituals—is obsolete.²⁶² In its stead, Christ has established “the second”—in context, doing the will of God, but by implication, the new covenant and new priesthood, effective access to the presence of God, and eternal salvation.²⁶³

Verse 10 makes another assertion: “By this will, we have been sanctified [i.e., given what we need for salvation] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The implication is that Christ’s self-offering was effective *because Christ came to do God’s will*. This may be because Christ did God’s will perfectly, had no sin, did not deserve death, and hence his body²⁶⁴ was able to atone for others. But would his death atone for others if it were an accidental death? Probably not—it seems to be important that Christ gave his life *willingly*.²⁶⁵ The author has already de-emphasized the importance of the flesh, and it is not likely that he would argue that a physical body was

²⁶¹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 501.

²⁶² “Ἀναρῶν is the strongest negative statement the author has made or will make about the OT cultus: Christ by his sacrifice ‘abolishes’ or ‘destroys’ it” (ibid., 504).

²⁶³ The author does not develop a new law or new rituals. He does not describe the content of the new covenant as well as he does the old; the connections between covenant, law, and priesthood are explicit for the old but not described for the new.

²⁶⁴ “The offering of his body is simply the offering of himself (cf. 9:26)” (Thompson, *Hebrews*, 133). The author could have also said “flesh,” or “blood,” but probably chose “body” here as an echo of Ps 40:6; the word “body” is not the way that the author usually describes Christ’s sacrifice. Koester points out the irony: “A dead human body ordinarily brought defilement, not sanctification.... Hebrews argues that if sanctification occurs through the crucified Christ, then the Law is supplanted” (*Hebrews*, 440).

²⁶⁵ His body and blood were in essence no different from that of other humans; the significance of his sacrifice must be seen in the spirit, not the flesh, although it was essential (as argued in Heb 2) that it was done in the flesh. Attridge writes, “The reality of that sacrifice consists not simply in its physical quality, but in the willingness with which it is made. Hence, it is the interior disposition of the act which makes it the heavenly or spiritual event that our author holds it to be” (*Hebrews*, 269).

effective in removing a spiritual problem, or that flesh (even the flesh of Jesus) could cleanse the conscience. Rather, the author seems to believe that sin and the conscience are nonmaterial, and must be cleansed by nonmaterial means—in this case, the will. In effect, Christ has given a spiritual sacrifice (his will) in a material body, thus accomplishing the heavenly reality in an earthly form.²⁶⁶

With a μέν...δέ contrast, 10:11-12 repeats the thoughts of 9:25-26: In contrast to the repetitious sacrifices of the old covenant, which “can never take away sins,” Christ made one sacrifice effective for all time. This is stated again in 10:14 as an explanation for Christ being seated (the appropriate part of Ps 110:1 is quoted):

- After offering a single sacrifice, Christ sat down at the right hand of God (10:12-13).
- For (γάρ) by a single offering he has brought people to completion (10:14).
- {A priest sits down only when the work is completed.}

These restatements indicate the author’s main point in this section: a single sacrifice as opposed to an endless series of sacrifices. The stress on frequency suggests that the readers had viewed the repetitive nature of the Levitical rituals in a positive way, and the author responds by arguing that repetitions indicate ineffectiveness.

As a conclusion to the doctrinal section that began at 7:1, the author again quotes from Jer 31 (introduced by γάρ). After citing God’s promise to make another covenant, he cites the promise that God will forget their sins.

- Claim: Christ has made a single offering that atones for all sin (10:14).
- Ground: God promised to make a new covenant and forgive sins (10:16).
- Warrant: {Christ was the means by which God dealt with sin.}

The author never attempts to prove that only two possibilities exist—he simply assumes that salvation is either by the law, or else it is by Christ. He argues that a new priesthood was predicted, and asserts that it was fulfilled by Christ. He argues that a new covenant was predicted, and asserts that Christ brought it. He argues that the tabernacle was a copy of reality, and asserts that Christ ministered in the reality. He argues that the

²⁶⁶ “Christ’s unique ‘heavenly’ act is ultimately seen to be an earthly one, done in and through a bodily sacrifice” (ibid., 216-17). “The sacrifice is that of a completely obedient will, but it finds concrete historical expression in a death as real as that of any bull or goat offered in the temple” (Barrett, “Christology,” 124).

Levitical rituals were ineffective, and asserts that Christ's sacrifice was effective. He assumes that *the readers will accept Christ's death as efficacious if only the Levitical rituals are shown to be inadequate*. This indicates that the biggest problem that the readers had was not objections to the new, but a continuing attraction to the old.

The longest doctrinal exposition of the epistle ends with these words: "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (10:18). The climax²⁶⁷ of the argument is about sin offerings, not thank offerings, peace offerings, or other rituals. Although a few verses in Hebrews indicate that all rituals are equally obsolete, the focus in the epistle is on sin offerings, suggesting that they were the primary concern of the readers. The grand finale of the longest doctrinal passage in the epistle is that the sacrifices are obsolete—suggesting that the readers had been attracted to those sacrifices.²⁶⁸ The verse is a simple enthymeme:

- There is no more offering for sin.
- {Because} sins are forgiven and forgotten.

²⁶⁷ Walter G. Übelacker says that we should go to the end of the argument (i.e., 10:18) to see the purpose of the central section. "Da der Vf. grundsätzlich immer zusammenfaßt, erwarten wir uns auch hier einen Leitfaden" (*Der Hebräerbrief als Appell* [ConBNT 21; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell: 1989], 226). He concludes that the main purpose of the central section therefore has to do with forgiveness and sacrifices to achieve this (ibid.).

²⁶⁸ Westcott writes, "This is the last—the decisive—word of the argument" (*Hebrews*, 317). "For the person of Jewish descent in the second half of the first century, these words must have struck with thunderous finality" (Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 283). They may have had political overtones, as well.

Stanley writes, "The author of Hebrews has chosen to use these verses from Psalm 40 because he is able to show by them that abandoning the levitical sacrifices is not as shocking as the readers might believe, since these sacrifices never were the ultimate focus of God's will or desire anyway" ("New Covenant," 176). Stanley notes that 10:1-18 includes four arguments that sacrifices are obsolete: 1) repetition shows ineffectiveness, 2) Ps 40 shows that God wanted something else, 3) Ps 110 shows that Christ sat down, and 4) the Jer 31 prophecy promises forgiveness (ibid., 182).

Strobel writes, "Dieser Lehrsatz, der die umfangreiche theologische Erörterung des Hohenpriestertums Jesu 4,14-10,18 abschließt, betont die Abschaffung der Opfer, weil Christus eine vollkommene Vergebung ermöglicht hat. Das Gesamtergebnis der überaus vielfältigen Überlegungen wird in schlichtester Weise noch einmal zusammengefaßt. Man hört heraus, daß mit solcher Grundsatzklärung eine judenchristliche Hörerschaft zu jener Gewißheit gebracht werden soll, die sie die Bindung an das Alte endgültig aufgeben läßt" (*Der Brief*, 124).

The context implies that the readers desired sacrifices. However, this does not in itself indicate when the epistle was written. People could want sacrifices and rituals *after* the temple was destroyed just as well as they could before. Sensitivities about the temple (fears of impending destruction, or angst about a recent destruction) may be one reason that the author never mentions it—he keeps the argument more objective by dealing with the original tabernacle. And since the tabernacle was a temporary place of worship, it may have subtly supported the author's argument that the rituals were temporary.

- {Sin offerings are appropriate only for unforgiven sin.}

Hebrews 10:19-39—exhortation for faithfulness

After the lengthy doctrinal section (7:1-10:18), the third major section of the epistle is primarily parenetic. Even chapter 11, although not directly hortatory, has a parenetic purpose: The author wants the audience to imitate those who have faith.²⁶⁹

He begins by reasoning: “Therefore (οὖν), my friends, since we have confidence to enter...and a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart... Let us hold fast to the confession” (10:19-22). A double reason is given: “Therefore” points back to 10:17, and “since” (reflecting a causative participle) points forward to the claims of 10:19-20.²⁷⁰ Since sacrifices are not needed, and people can enter by Christ, the readers are exhorted to approach God confidently (10:22).

However, much more is involved in the “therefore” than just 10:18, since this exhortation echoes some of the key words of Heb 4:14-16: “Since we have a great high priest...let us hold fast to our confession.... Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with confidence.” Everything since 4:16 has been driving toward this point: People can approach God confidently because Jesus is the high priest. The readers apparently want to approach God, and the author argues that they cannot do it with Levitical rituals, but they can with Christ, because he has opened a new path and has provided a means of cleansing the conscience; the readers should therefore hold fast to their confession—and all that goes with the confession.

- Premise: Jesus has opened a way into the sanctuary (10:20).
- Premise: Jesus is high priest (10:21).
- Conclusion: People should approach God, confident that their sins are forgiven (10:22).

The author gives more exhortations in 10:23-25, with the implication that these also logically follow from faith in Christ. When the readers “hold on to the confession,”

²⁶⁹ “Although the section is expository in form, it is parenetic in function, inviting Christians to emulate the example of those who responded to God with active faith” (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 316). Hagner writes, “The author is less concerned with providing information than with motivating his readers” (*Encountering*, 144).

²⁷⁰ Although 10:19 *seems* to give a reason, it is almost tautological to say, “Since we have confidence to enter...let us approach with assurance.” I therefore take this as rhetorical strategy, stating a desired result as if it were established fact. The author has used synonyms to reduce the appearance of tautology.

they will also continue meeting together and encouraging one another. Verse 23 has a small enthymeme:

- Claim: People should hold fast to the confession of hope without wavering.
- Ground: Because he who promised is faithful (to his promises)—he does not waver.²⁷¹
- Warrant: {People should hold fast as long as the promises are good, and in this case they are always good.}

However, why is the existence of a high priest reason to meet together to encourage one another (10:25)? Is there a connection between sacrifice being unnecessary, and meeting being necessary? The author assumes without argument that *assembling together is an inseparable part of what it means to confess Christ*. He is thinking in terms of a package, a package that the readers are presumably familiar with—one religious approach as opposed to another. The author does not explain the logical connection between having a high priest (10:21), maintaining the confession (10:23), and meeting together (10:24-25). The connection between these ideas is not obvious on the surface, which suggests that it is an unstated belief of the author (and presumably the readers) that these go together. The passage requires the readers to make several assumptions, including a) that the existence of a priest means that they *should* draw near to God, i.e., that this is something they already want to do, and b) that “the hope we profess” includes a belief about Jesus that distinguishes “us” from others.

The author argues for this package by arguing that 1) the alternative is inadequate, 2) Christ is sufficient, and 3) faith is commendable. The author argues that it is necessary for the readers to confess Christ. But the readers cannot logically conclude *necessity* unless all relevant alternatives are addressed. The author is assuming an audience for which the only viable religious options are those addressed in Hebrews—namely, the old covenant cultus.

By its use of γάρ, Heb 10:26 implies a logical connection between the exhortations and the warning:

- Claim: People should hold fast, meet together, and encourage one another.

²⁷¹ “This provides the sole logical basis (*for*) for the Christian’s unfaltering confession of hope” (Hughes, *Hebrews*, 414).

- Ground: Because (γάρ) deliberate sin will be punished.²⁷²
- Implied warrant: {Dropping out is a deliberate sin.}²⁷³

The author clearly assumes this warrant when he argues: Do not drop out, because deliberate sin will be punished. The rhetoric uses a strong emotional appeal (the warning passage) without articulating the premise, which might have been questioned. It is a rhetorical strategy, not an objective soteriological discussion. The readers may have been facing dire threats such as, “If you are not faithful to the covenant of Moses, you will suffer the covenant curses.” The author responds with equally severe threats: “Those covenant curses are now moot because of Christ; what you really want to avoid is being unfaithful to the *new* covenant. If you go back on it, there is no salvation. Don’t abandon the only effective approach to God.”²⁷⁴

An argument from lesser to greater appears in 10:28-29:

- Under the old covenant, transgressors were killed.
- {The new covenant is more important than the old.}
- People who abandon the new covenant deserve worse.²⁷⁵

The author here assumes that the new covenant requires punishments, not just brings forgiveness, but he does not elaborate on the nature of the punishment that is

²⁷² Ellingworth argues that γάρ refers to 10:18: “The connection is less with vv. 19-25 than with the argument culminating in v. 18.... ‘No further sacrifice for sin is needed’ (v. 18) implies ‘no further sacrifice is available’ (v. 26)” (*Hebrews*, 532). The logic is elliptical—presuming that “willful sin” means rejecting the new covenant and its sacrifice. However, since 10:18 has a note of forgiveness, and 10:26 of hopelessness, “nevertheless” would be more appropriate than “for” if these two verses were being connected. Even with the connection that Ellingworth advocates, the implied warrant would be similar: Dropping out is a deliberate rejection of the only true sacrifice for sin.

²⁷³ “Simply leaving the voluntary association called the ‘church’ becomes an active assault on the honor of one’s divine benefactor and mediator” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 238). Marie E. Isaacs describes it: “To abandon the community of faith is to place oneself beyond the efficacy of the new covenant sacrifice” (*Reading Hebrews and James: A Literary and Theological Commentary* [RNT; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002], 124). Montefiore acknowledges the implication when he writes, “Persistent absenteeism... may have been almost tantamount to apostasy,” but then he adds, “but it is not to be equated with it” (*Hebrews*, 177).

²⁷⁴ deSilva writes, “The potential apostate is warned that leaving the group does not mean getting out from being under hostility and danger—it means exposing oneself to the greatest danger and loss.... They are led to consider [apostasy] not as a movement toward what their neighbors would consider just and pious but as a movement toward the utmost injustice and impiety toward one who had gone to the most extreme lengths (death itself) to bring them the benefits that they now so carelessly spurned” (*Perseverance*, 355, 239).

²⁷⁵ Michel comments on the rhetorical strategy: “Es ist geschickt, daß unser Verfasser die Entfaltung des Schlusses vom „Leichten zum Schweren“ dem Leser selbst überläßt” (*Hebräer*, 352).

worse than death—the rhetorical question leaves that to the imagination of the readers.²⁷⁶ The verse also implies that neglecting to meet together is equivalent to despising Christ, counting his sacrifice as unholy, and insulting the Spirit of grace. But the author may avoid saying these things directly as a matter of rhetorical strategy. He assures the readers in 10:39 that such things are not appropriate for them.

Verse 30 uses γάρ to introduce scriptural support for the concept of punishment:

- People who turn away from God’s covenant deserve punishment (10:29).
- We know this because God said he will judge, and take vengeance (10:30).²⁷⁷
- {God doesn’t change, so he still punishes; Scripture is trustworthy.}

Verse 32 also argues by implication rather than statement—after warning the readers that God punishes willful sin, the author commands them: “But recall those earlier days...” The implication is that if they continue in that earlier behavior, they will not be punished—but the author does not directly say that they will be saved by good behavior.

Verses 33-34 include a short enthymeme:

- You were partners with those who were publicly abused.
- For (γάρ) you had compassion on those who were in prison.
- {Their compassion on prisoners led to the abuse.}²⁷⁸

Verse 34 has another enthymeme, using a participle to indicate reason:

- You cheerfully accepted plundering of your possessions.
- Since you knew that you had something better and more lasting.
- {People are willing to lose a small amount when they have much more.}

²⁷⁶ Fenton comments: “The hidden assumption in the argument of Hebrews is that God’s actions are to be understood wholly in terms of retributive justice” (“The Argument,” 180). Montefiore says, “Our author...prefers warning to encouragement, and he emphasises the stimulus of fear rather than the attraction of love.... Jesus is described as merciful and compassionate. But God is conceived primarily as holy and just” (*Hebrews*, 180). If the readers were afraid of being killed for the faith, then it would be rhetorically appropriate in that situation to tell them that apostasy had a punishment *worse* than death.

²⁷⁷ It is not necessary to put this verse into an enthymeme; γάρ simply introduces the quote.

²⁷⁸ This warrant is practically a restatement: You suffered abuse because you showed compassion. However, the warrant cannot support the word “cheerfully.” Westcott suggests that the readers were cheerful because it was through the trial that they became *aware* of possessing something greater (*Hebrews*, 335).

Verse 35 draws a conclusion, using οὖν.

- Claim: You should therefore not abandon your confidence (10:35).
- Ground: Because you knew you had better possessions (10:34).
- Warrant: Confidence brings great reward (10:35b).

The author says, “Keep your confidence, because it will be rewarded.” But οὖν also suggests that there is a connection between past behavior and the current situation. It suggests, “You did it before; you can do it again in the face of similar threats, so do not quit, because the reward is still available for those who are faithful.” Perhaps the implication is also that, if the readers quit now, they will lose whatever reward the previous sacrifices earned. Verse 36 adds another reason:

- Do not abandon your confidence.
- Because (γάρ) you need endurance in order to (ἵνα) receive the promised reward.²⁷⁹

However, this is simply a rephrasing: If you give up hope, you will not get the reward, so do not give up. After warning the readers about punishment, the author is now focusing on the reward. Verse 37 adds support from Scripture:

- Claim: You should not abandon your confidence (10:35).
- Because (γάρ) the coming one will soon come (10:37; cf. Hab. 2:3-4).
- { You will not have to endure much longer. }

The argument seems to imply something more than this warrant, though it is difficult to know what it is. Perhaps the thought is that a short wait means that the readers will not have to make many more sacrifices, and thus the great reward is worth the brief inconvenience. Motivational rhetoric appeals more to emotion than it does to logic, and the author does that by praising the readers’ past performance, promising unspecified rewards, playing down the magnitude of the sacrifices, and expressing confidence for the future. His indicative sentences imply exhortations: Have faith, and do not shrink back.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ Ellingworth says that “ἵνα is here used probably of result rather than purpose” (*Hebrews*, 553). He describes 10:36a as “a positive counterpart to v. 35a” (*ibid.*, 552). Carrot and stick are alternated.

²⁸⁰ Verses 38-39 form a chiasm: faith, shrink back, shrink back, faith. Hebrews abounds in chiasms (and other rhetorical devices), but I have not pointed them out because I do not see how they help advance the purpose of the epistle, except in the general sense that an esthetically pleasing literary style can keep audience attention and increase the credibility of the writer.

Hebrews 11:1-22—faith that pleases God

Hebrews 11 brings a change of style²⁸¹ as the author moves into an encomium on faith, which (as 12:1 shows) is preparatory to a renewed call for perseverance. *Γάρ* is used in 11:2, but in this verse it does not indicate cause.²⁸² Although 11:3 may be making a statement rather than an argument, it is possible to form it into an enthymeme:

- Claim: What is seen was made from things that are not visible.²⁸³
- Ground: The worlds were prepared by the word of God.
- Warrant: {The word of God is invisible.}

Verse 5 (quoting Gen 5:24) gives a reason for its statement:

- Claim: Enoch was not found.
- Ground: Because God had taken him.
- Warrant: {He could not be found because he was not on earth.}

With this information from Genesis, our author draws a further conclusion:

- Claim: Enoch was taken {to heaven} without dying.
- Ground: Because (*γάρ*) he pleased God (allusion to Gen. 5:22).
- Warrant: {When God “takes” a good person, it must be something good.}²⁸⁴

Verse 6 includes *γάρ*, making explicit the link implied in 11:5:

²⁸¹ This change in style could indicate that the author is incorporating a pre-existing homily, but it is also possible that the author simply changed style while composing the epistle, just as a preacher may change pace during a sermon.

²⁸² The verse could be construed as an epistemological enthymeme (as 11:16b is)—we know that faith is conviction of the invisible because the patriarchs were praised for having such convictions. But this would degenerate into circular reasoning: We know that the patriarchs had faith because they acted in accordance with the definition of faith that we created based on their behavior. Ellingworth, citing Bleek, says that “*γάρ* suggests ‘because of this kind of faith...’” (*Hebrews*, 577). But that would say no more than the already existing instrumental *ἐν* with the dative.

²⁸³ Although *εἰς* *τό* usually indicates purpose, here it seems to report a conclusion. “In effect, *εἰς* *τό* introduces, not a second event which is the result of the first, but a logical result or implication” (*ibid.*, 568).

²⁸⁴ “The implication of v. 6c is that his ‘removal’ was a reward for his faithful life, and evidence that it had pleased God” (*ibid.*, 576).

- Scripture testifies that Enoch pleased God (11:5c; Gen 5:22 says “walked with God”).
- Since (γάρ) a person cannot please God without faith (11:6)...
- We conclude that Enoch had faith, and that it was by faith that he was taken (11:5a).²⁸⁵

Verses 7 and 8 imply similar enthymemes:

- Claim: Noah acted in faith.
- Ground: He acted on what he was told, not on what he could see.
- Warrant: Acting on “the conviction of things not seen” is defined as faith (11:1b).

- Claim: Abraham acted in faith.
- Ground: He went to a place he was told about but had not seen.
- Warrant: { With no other explanation for such behavior, Abraham must have been acting on faith in the promise. }²⁸⁶

Verses 9-10 include an enthymeme:

- Claim: Abraham lived in the land of promise as if he were a foreigner.
- Ground: For (γάρ) he looked forward to God’s permanent city.²⁸⁷
- Warrant: { He viewed the heavenly city as his permanent home. }

Verse 11:

- Claim: Someone²⁸⁸ received reproductive power.
- Ground: Since (ἐπεὶ) that person considered God faithful.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Ellingworth notes that v. 6 “is the major premise of a syllogism of which 11:5c formed the minor premise” (ibid.).

²⁸⁶ This ignores Abram’s long stay in Haran, and the fact that many people move to places they have not seen. Gordon suggests a way in which the example would be relevant to the readers: “The example of Abraham’s abandoning of the assured and the familiar for the uncertainties of life in Canaan could help to stiffen the resolve of those who had stepped out in faith without having received any tangible fulfillment of the promises that had inspired them in the first place” (*Hebrews*, 133). Similarly, Thompson writes, “The author describes the faith of Abraham (11:8) and Moses as a ‘going out’ or abandonment of security. His reason for presenting these heroes in such terms is demonstrated at 13:13 where the author wants to encourage his readers to ‘go out’ or abandon their security for the sake of Christ” (*Hebrews*, 157).

²⁸⁷ “Γάρ introduces the comment on vv. 8f., the reason why Abraham ‘went out’ and began a nomadic life” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 584). Royster observes that the patriarchs were not very “concerned about the earthly or material benefits which the land of promise might have brought them” (*Hebrews*, 181).

²⁸⁸ I will not delve into the question of whether that person is Abraham or Sarah. See Isaacs, *Reading*, 132.

- Warrant: {God rewards those who believe his promises (cf. 11:6).}²⁹⁰

On the surface, the verse is tautological: The person received reproductive power by faith, since the person had faith. This enthymeme is more rhetorical than logical, and the author would probably agree that God’s promises will be kept even if people do not believe them. The real purpose of the verse is to encourage readers to consider God faithful to his promises.

Verse 12 presents a conclusion:

- Ground: Someone considered God faithful (11:11b).²⁹¹
- Claim: Therefore (διό) many descendants were born from one man²⁹² (11:12).
- Unstated connection: {God rewards the faithful. }

Verses 13-16 summarize the previous verses²⁹³ and note some logical connections:

- The patriarchs said they were strangers and foreigners on earth (11:13, alluding to Gen 23:4).
- For (γάρ) people who speak in this way are seeking a homeland (11:14—i.e., a homeland that is not on earth).²⁹⁴
- {People who think they are permanent residents do not consider themselves strangers.}²⁹⁵

²⁸⁹ Ellingworth says that ἐπεὶ is causal here: “Abraham’s faith is a response to God’s faithfulness” (*Hebrews*, 589).

²⁹⁰ Heb 11:6 does not directly *say* that God rewards those who have faith, though that is implied. In this case the reward was commensurate with the promise.

²⁹¹ Verse 12 may be connected to 11:11a, but the result is trivial: Someone received the power to have a child, so that person had descendants. The connection to 11:11b, as outlined above, seems more in line with the author’s purpose.

²⁹² The participle and substantive numeral in 11:12 are masculine. Abraham was able to father children even after Sarah died (Gen 25:1-2), so “dead” does not mean that he was sexually impotent.

²⁹³ Michael R. Cosby notes that “this brief commentary reflects upon the content of 11:8-10, not the material in 11:11-12 which immediately precedes it” (*The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* [Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988], 44).

²⁹⁴ “Γάρ draws a conclusion from v. 13b; that is, from the fact that Abraham, and by implication all the OT heroes of faith, speak of themselves as resident aliens on earth” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 595).

²⁹⁵ This ignores the fact that Abraham was an immigrant. Immigrants can call themselves aliens and strangers without seeking a *different* land of their own. The author’s purpose here is not to analyze Abraham’s statements objectively, but to exhort the readers to view their own situations as temporary; the

The logic is almost tautological: They said they were not at home, because they believed they were not yet home. The purpose is simply that the *readers* should not view the earth as their permanent home; their eternal home is yet future. Verse 15 offers additional rationale:

- If they were thinking of their original land, they could have returned.
- { They did not return. }
- Therefore they were thinking of a different homeland.

No one would have thought that a return to Mesopotamia was ever considered, but the argument has a rhetorical purpose. The idea of “return” would be significant for Jewish believers who were being urged to return to their former beliefs.²⁹⁶ The author is arguing that the patriarchs did not feel “at home” in Canaan, and did not want to return to their original home, therefore 11:16 says that they must have wanted a heavenly land instead of some other earthly territory.²⁹⁷

Ellingworth identifies the syllogism:

- “they said they were looking for a homeland (v. 14)
- “it could not have been their earthly birthplace (v. 15)
- “so it must have been a home in heaven (v. 16a).”²⁹⁸

Verse 16 contains two logical connectors:

- They desired {i.e., had faith in} a heavenly country.
- { God wants his people to have faith (11:6). }
- Therefore (διό) God is not ashamed (i.e., he is proud) of them.²⁹⁹

circumstances of Abraham are described in such a way as to provide a model relevant to the readers. deSilva says, “The author has fastened onto aspects of the ways in which the patriarchs’ ‘faith’ was enacted that correspond most nearly to the condition of the audience” (*Perseverance*, 401).

²⁹⁶ “The implication can hardly be missed that our author does not want his readers to return to their previous Judaism” (Hagner, *Encountering*, 149).

²⁹⁷ The leaps in logic indicate that the author is not reviewing material the readers already believe; he is not trying to argue a disputed point. Here, the author could have pointed out that Abraham did not feel “at home” *even in the land God had promised him* (i.e., the best possible land for him on earth), so his real home must be yet future.

²⁹⁸ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 596. He does not comment on the fact that the conclusion includes a term (heaven) not found in the premises.

²⁹⁹ Ellingworth considers the possibility that διό “draws an immediate conclusion from v. 16a,” but rejects it because God’s promise normally comes before a person’s faith. He suggests that διό instead “refers

- God is not ashamed of them.
- Because (γάρ) he has prepared a city for them.
- {If God prepares a city for them, that means that he is not ashamed of them.}

The author concludes that God is not ashamed of the patriarchs because he sees in Scripture that God promises rewards to them. They pleased God, and since a person must have faith in order to please God, the patriarchs must have acted in faith. But this analysis is only marginally relevant to the author's purpose. The real purpose is hortatory: 1) Have faith in the future homeland because 2) God is pleased with faith and 3) he rewards faith.

No logical connectors are used in 11:17-19, but the verses do support a claim:

- Claim: Abraham acted in faith.
- Warrant: He obediently offered up the heir he had been promised.³⁰⁰
- Ground: He was willing to do that because he believed that God would fulfill the promise despite Isaac's death—he had confidence in something that God had promised but could not yet be seen.

Verses 20, 21, and 22 are similar:

- Claim: Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph acted in faith.³⁰¹
- Ground: Each of them spoke of the future.
- Warrant: {Belief in future promises is defined as faith.}

Hebrews 11:23-40—faith in the face of death

Verse 23 offers support for the claim that Moses' parents acted in faith:

forward, elliptically, to a further scriptural allusion" (ibid., 598). But the author normally introduces scriptural support with γάρ, and the scriptures alluded to are too far forward to be in view.

³⁰⁰ Some commentators take ὅθεν as a logical connector: Abraham received Isaac back *because* of his belief in God's ability to raise the dead (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 333; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 343). Both "because" and "from which" work well with the verse, and the author may have been aware of both meanings when he wrote it. The enthymeme would be:

- Abraham believed that God could raise the dead.
- {God rewards those who have faith; or, those who have faith get what they believe.}
- Therefore Abraham did get Isaac back, as if from the dead.

³⁰¹ In most of these examples, the *actions* of the person demonstrate faith; in 11:3, 11, faith is simply a belief. In 11:20-22, faith is a belief about the future. Although the author exhorts the readers to have beliefs about the past (e.g., the atonement and enthronement of Christ) and the present (his intercession), this passage focuses on future rewards as the motivation for behavior in the present.

- Claim: By faith, his parents hid Moses for three months.
- Ground: Because (διότι) he was beautiful and they were not afraid of the king's edict {presumably the threat of severe punishment}.³⁰²
- Implied warrant: {Anyone who defies the king's threat of punishment must believe in something beyond immediate convenience.}

However, the author does not say *what* Moses' parents believed. There was no prophecy, and no specific command from God; it was just that Moses was a beautiful baby.³⁰³

Verses 24-26 argue for the faith of Moses:

- Claim: Moses refused royal privileges because he had faith.
- Ground: He chose difficulties over privilege (11:25-26).³⁰⁴
- Because (γάρ) he was looking ahead {with faith} to a far better reward (11:26b) {and presumably he had to give up short-term benefits to get future rewards}.

The result is a tautology—he did this by faith, because he looked to the future (i.e., had faith). The enthymemes in this chapter are (in terms of logic) distinctly inferior to those in earlier chapters (e.g., 7:1-10:18). That is because the author has a different rhetorical purpose and strategy in this chapter. He is not trying to prove a certain definition of faith, or prove that Moses acted in faith—the readers already *knew* that Moses had faith. Instead, the author wants to draw exemplary lessons from the life of Moses. He is saying, “If someone offers you all the treasures of Egypt (not likely), or if you are persecuted with the people of God because of your belief in Christ (much more

³⁰² Ellingworth writes, “It is uncertain whether διότι here relates (a) to the second clause alone, or (b) to the second and third clauses; in other words, whether ‘they did not fear the king’s command’ is intended as the expression of their faith, or as a reason for the parents hiding the child” (*Hebrews*, 609). He supports the former, saying, “Logic suggests option (a): the hiding of the child might be more naturally understood as an expression of fear.” It is not clear then why the author of Hebrews would say that it was by faith.

³⁰³ This suggests that “beautiful” meant not just pleasing to the parents, but pleasing to God as well (see Acts 7:20); the parents defied the edict not through natural love, but through a conviction that God wanted the baby to live. “Something in his appearance kindled hope as to his destiny” (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 371).

³⁰⁴ The author here equates royal status and wealth with the “fleeting pleasures of sin”; he equates “ill-treatment with the people of God” with “abuse suffered for the Christ.” How could Moses suffer for the Christ? Westcott suggests that it refers to “the reproach which belongs to Him who is the appointed envoy of God to a rebellious world.... [It] was endured also by those who in any degree prefigured or represented Him” (*Hebrews*, 372; see also Isaacs, *Reading*, 135). Thompson notes that “abuse of the anointed is found in the LXX Ps 89:51b” (*Hebrews*, 156).

likely³⁰⁵), do not give up. The reward is worth the sacrifice. If you want to follow Moses, follow him in this regard—do not be dissuaded by external pressures.” Verse 27 presents another point of imitation:

- Moses left Egypt in faith, not fearing the king.³⁰⁶
- { We know this } because (γάρ) he persevered.
- { Why? } It was as though he saw the unseen one.³⁰⁷

Verse 28 indicates a purpose, possibly implying an enthymeme:

- Moses kept the Passover in faith.
- He did it so that (ἵνα) the destroyer would spare the Israelites.
- { God had promised to spare those who kept the Passover, so if Moses did it in order to spare destruction, he did it because he believed God. }

Verse 29 includes a contrast between two peoples who acted in identical ways:

- The Israelites passed safely through the Red Sea by faith.
- The Egyptians attempted to pass through but were drowned.
- { The Israelites were acting in obedience to God; the Egyptians were not, even though they may have *hoped* they could pass through. }

Verse 30 requires even more information to be supplied:

- The Israelites acted in faith at Jericho.
- The walls fell down.
- { God had promised that the walls would fall if the Israelites encircled the city seven days, and their obedience demonstrated that they had faith. }

Verse 31 argues that Rahab acted in faith:

³⁰⁵ “Vv. 35b and 36 are linked by the theme, directly relevant to the readers’ situation (10:32-39; 12:4), of endurance under persecution” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 627).

³⁰⁶ Commentators puzzle over this point, pointing out that Moses initially fled in fear, but in the exodus he left in faith. Either way, the author may have included this point (and the similar point in 11:23c) because the readers were facing a governmental edict. In defense of the exodus theory, I note that Heb 11 includes several items slightly out of chronological order—the incident in 11:17 came before 11:13, 11:21b came before 11:21a, and the names in 11:32 are not in order. deSilva suggests that the author’s “lack of clarity shows his lack of interest on this point.” His main concern, deSilva suggests, is that “Moses left his earthly homeland, status, and heritage behind” (*Perseverance*, 412).

³⁰⁷ Westcott argues here that the words mean “inasmuch as he saw the unseen” (*Hebrews*, 373)—presumably referring to the burning bush. This makes a tautology—he did it by faith, because he did it because he saw the unseen. However, the author wants the readers to act *as though* they see the unseen.

- Rahab did not perish with those who were disobedient.³⁰⁸
- {Because} she received the spies in peace.
- {She received them because she believed God would give the Israelites victory, and God spared her because she believed and took action.}

The details stop here, and if enthymemes were to be constructed, they would become tautological: This was done by faith, because it would be possible only if the person(s) had faith. The author is not trying to prove his points because they were not being disputed. Rather, he is trying to encourage the readers to have faith.³⁰⁹ Verse 35b, which introduces the more negative outcomes of faith, implies an enthymeme:

- Claim (implied by the context): {The martyrs remained loyal by faith.}
- They accepted torture rather than release {release would come only with disobedience—4 Macc 9:13-18³¹⁰} so that (ἵνα) they would have a better resurrection (i.e., better than the resuscitations mentioned in 11:35a).
- {People choose suffering only if they have faith in something better, *and* if they believe they cannot obtain the reward if they accept release.}

Verses 36-39 give a rapid series of unpleasant outcomes, implying that the difficulties were endured by choice, and that the people who suffered had faith in a future reward—something that was “promised” (11:39). The author asserts that the people were commended for their faith, and that they did not receive the reward. Verse 40 gives a reason:

- They did not receive the reward that was promised (11:39).
- Because God provided something better for us³¹¹ so that (ἵνα) they would not be completed without us.

³⁰⁸ “Faith” is here contrasted with “disobedience” rather than lack of belief. For the author, faith is not just belief in the invisible—it is obedience. “For Hebrews, faith is faithfulness” (Thompson, *Hebrews*, 146). “The primary dimension of faith for Hebrews is that of endurance, *faithfulness*” (Schenck, *Understanding*, 65). “Faith for our author...is practically interchangeable with obedience” (Hagner, *Hebrews*, 72).

³⁰⁹ Verses 28-31 may also be assertions rather than enthymemes. Ellingworth notes that starting with 11:27, “there begins a rhetorically effective acceleration of the narrative” (*Hebrews*, 608). Verse 32 has a rhetorical use of γὰρ: “What more should I say? *For* time would fail me...” In other words, “I must stop now, because it would take too much time to describe more examples, and you do not need more.”

³¹⁰ Only the story in 4 Macc gives the martyrs an opportunity for “release” (David A. deSilva, *Introduction to the Apocrypha* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 371 n. 4).

³¹¹ Cause is implied in this verse with a participle. The author does not explain how it is better for anyone to wait than to receive the reward right away. Ellingworth struggles with the question and concludes, “To seek to identify the ‘something’ better referentially is to go further than the author chooses to go at the present

- {We would not share in salvation if God had already given the rewards; there can be only one time of reward.}

The author does not explain his reasoning—it may depend on Jewish assumptions about a millennial age. Rhetorically, he brings the readers into the tension of people who look for a reward even as they are persecuted. He reminds the readers that they also have something better waiting for them—better than this world—but their belief in that promise requires a willingness to endure various difficulties.³¹²

Hebrews 12—perseverance will be rewarded

Hebrews 12 begins with a conclusion, signaled by the word “therefore” (τοιγαροῦν). Although this could refer to 11:40, it more likely refers to all of Heb 11, since 12:1 refers to a “great cloud of witnesses.” The exhortation is couched in athletic imagery; the basic claim implied in it is that people should persevere in their loyalty to Jesus, getting rid of distractions (which might cause a person to fail) and keeping their eyes on Jesus, who set a perfect example of faith.

- Claim: We should continue to be loyal to Jesus.
- Ground: Because we have many witnesses surrounding us.
- Warrant: {Their success shows that we can also have success.}

The people mentioned in Heb 11 are witnesses *to faith*,³¹³ who show that faith is needed—and possible—for spiritual success. This also implies that the situation of the readers is in some way analogous to the situations reviewed in Heb 11. The author does not highlight examples of people who had faith despite boredom, or faith despite a long delay, or faith despite lethargy. Rather, the examples are faith in a time of crisis, suggesting that the reluctance of the readers is due to external pressures.

Verse 2 gives a rationale for Jesus’ willingness to endure crucifixion:

stage.... Speculation on what would have happened if OT believers had not had to wait for fulfillment is irrelevant and futile” (*Hebrews*, 636). In other words, the author’s reason is not clear.

³¹² Attridge observes that, on the surface, “imprisonment seems to be a rather anticlimactic conclusion” (v. 36). However, he suggests that “the prominence of the reference to imprisonment here is not accidental” (*Hebrews*, 350), implying it was a threat the readers faced.

³¹³ Numerous commentators argue against the meaning “spectators”: Bruce, *Hebrews*, 333; Isaacs, *Reading*, 138; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 408; Royster, *Hebrews*, 204; Westcott, *Hebrews*, 391.

- Jesus willingly endured the cross.
- {Because} he counted its shame as unimportant and valued some joy.³¹⁴
- {The eternal reward (joy) was worth far more than the temporary pain and shame of crucifixion.}

Verse 3 has γάρ with an imperative—an unusual construction, apparently supporting the exhortation of 12:1-2.³¹⁵

- Claim: We should be steadfast, focusing on Jesus (12:1-2).
- For (γάρ) we should consider the one who endured hostility from sinners so that (ἵνα) we do not grow weary (12:3).
- {Remembering his example will help us endure.}

The construction suggests that the experience of Jesus is comparable in some way to the situation of the readers—that the readers might also have to endure some difficulties and despise some shame in order to gain the reward set before them.³¹⁶ (Verses 5-11 also indicate that some unpleasant circumstances were affecting the readers—although 12:4 suggests that it is not as unpleasant as what Jesus faced.³¹⁷) They are to consider his example because it has similarities to their own. The fact that he succeeded in more difficult trials should encourage them to persevere in lesser trials.

³¹⁴ Although the grammar of the verse might permit the meaning, “Jesus endured the cross *instead of* keeping the joy he already had,” such would give no reason for *why* Jesus accepted pain instead of pleasure. It is possible that the verse does not intend to give a reason, but the situation suggests that a reason is being given. Further, 12:3 implies that the example of Jesus is relevant to the readers—and pre-existent joy is not. They are to endure their difficulties for the hope “set before them” (6:18, using the same Greek word). Third, it would be odd to say that joy was “set before” Jesus if he already had it.

Even *with* the meaning of “instead,” the placement of the verse shortly after chapter 11 would imply that Jesus did this to obtain some sort of reward—i.e., he would have more happiness by becoming human and enduring the cross than he would have if he stayed in heaven. The joy for Jesus is not just being in heaven, but in helping others be there as well. The joy “is not something for himself alone, but something to be shared with those for whom he died” (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 339).

³¹⁵ “Γάρ marks a strong affirmation, ‘by all means consider’...and indicates the close link with v. 2” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 643).

³¹⁶ “The addressees are asked to see society’s hostility against them as a token of society’s unworthiness [cf. 11:38a], not a mark of the believers’ lack of value or honor.... We, too, are called to look ahead to the ‘joy’ that God ‘set before us’ as an incentive to endure in costly discipleship” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 425, 438). The crucifixion *could* provide motivational support for readers who were merely lethargic, but in such a case we might expect the author to use an argument from lesser to greater: If someone can be faithful even in difficult times, how much more should you find it easy to be faithful in times of peace!

³¹⁷ Heb 12:5 may allude to a boxing match rather than martyrdom—but it would be a particularly inappropriate metaphor to use if anyone in the recipient community had been killed for the faith.

Verse 5 implies that if the readers remember that God disciplines his children, they will be better able to persevere. Verses 5-6 also include an enthymeme quoted from Prov 3:11-12:

- Claim: God’s discipline should be valued and endured (12:5).
- Ground: For (γάρ) the Lord disciplines those whom he loves (12:6).
- Warrant: {When God does it in love, it is for our good, and valuable.}

The verb in 12:7a may be imperative or indicative; either way, it implies that the readers are experiencing difficulties. In a syllogism, the author tells them to view these difficulties as divine discipline:

- Expect discipline in the form of difficulties to be endured (12:7a).
- {You are children of God}, and he treats you as his children (12:7b).
- For (γάρ) all parents discipline their children (12:7c) {so you should expect God to discipline you with some unpleasant experiences}.

Verse 8 then reasons from a contrary: All parents discipline their (legitimate) children (12:7c, 8b), so if you lack discipline from God, you are not his children (12:8a, c). This statement can be put into irrefutable logic: If children, then discipline. The contrapositive is: If no discipline, then not children. It would seem that the point has been proven, but the author emphasizes the point by adding an argument from lesser to greater:

- We respected our parents who disciplined us (12:9a).³¹⁸
- We should respect God’s discipline even more (12:9b).
- For (γάρ) God disciplines for our eternal good, {so it is more valuable}, whereas human parents discipline only as best they know how (12:10).

He reminds the readers that discipline can be painful, but that it has good results—“the peaceful fruit of righteousness,” which is apparently equivalent to salvation (12:11). The author draws the conclusion in 12:12:

- Discipline has extremely valuable results (12:11).
- {You want the results more than you want to avoid the pain.}

³¹⁸ Verse 10 says that earthly parents discipline “for a short time.” Presumably divine discipline is also “for a short time”; the difference is in length of the results. Human discipline has only temporary benefits.

- Therefore (διό) be strong and continue on the right path (12:12-13).³¹⁹

Verse 14 gives commands without supporting rationale; 12:15 implies an enthymeme:

- Do not miss out on God’s grace.
- Avoid any “root of bitterness” that defiles many (i.e., is contagious; cf. Deut 29:18).
- {A defiled person misses out on God’s grace.}

Verse 16 continues the thought, implying that Esau was defiled and missed out; 12:17 gives an analogy to explain how his example is relevant:

- You should not be like Esau, who sold his birthright for one meal (12:16).
- For (γάρ) he was unable to get the blessing later (12:17).
- {Abandoning Christ in a time of trial is like trading your birthright for a temporary desire, and you will be unable to get it back.}³²⁰

Verse 17 contains an enthymeme of its own:

- When Esau wanted the blessing, he was rejected.
- For (γάρ) he found no opportunity for repentance.³²¹
- {Repentance was necessary for the blessing.}

Verse 18 includes γάρ, but it does not provide support for 12:17. Rather, it supports the exhortations in a span of verses (12:1-14). The supporting reason also involves a span of verses—12:17-24:

- Remain loyal to Jesus, and be strong in your difficulties.

³¹⁹ Ellingworth says that “the conclusion does not follow directly from what precedes” (*Hebrews*, 657), but I think it does. However, the imagery is puzzling—it is not clear whether the athlete is trying to prevent a dislocation or to heal one. The author ignores the details to include a variety of emotionally stirring words. Ellingworth says that vv. 12-13 exhort “strong members to encourage the weak” (*ibid.*, 657; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 428 is similar). Some members might need to be healed, whereas others need prevention.

³²⁰ “Esau is the antithesis of the paragons of faith in chapter 11. He trades off what is unseen and what lies in the future for immediate gratification in the present” (Hagner, *Hebrews*, 222). Gordon observes an irony for the readers: “If any of the addressees were converts from Judaism, to go back to their ancestral faith would not mean a return to ‘Jacob-Israel’ but an identifying with Esau” (*Hebrews*, 155).

³²¹ Was Esau seeking the blessing or repentance? It seems likely that he knew that blessings went with the birthright. He sold the birthright, but he later wanted its benefits, so it seems that he had already changed his own mind, and the “repentance” he wanted was a change in his father, but that was not possible. Esau’s angst might then correspond to the root of “bitterness” (v. 15), which otherwise has no parallel in the story.

- For (γάρ) you have come to a place of blessings, not to a place of fearful punishments.
- {The reward for following Jesus is worth the effort.}

The passage is “the rhetorical climax of the epistle”; “vielleicht der theologisch bedeutsamste Abschnitt im ganzen Mahnschreiben.”³²² However, the passage does not argue a case in the way that previous expository sections do. Rather, it builds on what previous passages have developed. The logic is allusive—the first location is not even named, nor is the speaker of the “voice” named.³²³ The passage is more rhetorical than logical—a contrast is quickly presented between fear and joy, with the *implication* that the readers will enjoy the good only if they follow the author’s previous exhortations. In other words, the description has a parenetic purpose. The place of fear is the location of the old covenant; the place of joy and community is found with Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. This is the choice the readers faced: between old and new covenants. There was no other option worth discussing.³²⁴

Verses 19-20 include a small enthymeme:

- They begged that nothing more be spoken to them (12:19b).
- For (γάρ) they could not endure the order that required stoning (12:20).
- {They were afraid of hearing something worse?—12:21 refers to fear.}

What role does covenant play in this passage? It has become a rubric for the way of Jesus. Ellingworth observes, “The new covenant, Jesus as its mediator, and the blood by which the covenant is sealed, are inseparable.”³²⁵ He also observes that διαθήκη is used “near the climaxes of paraenetic passages” after the central section.³²⁶ “The new

³²² Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 669, and Gräßer, *Hebräer*, 3:302; cf. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 448.

³²³ Vanhoye observes that the author does not include God in this picture, although Deut 4-5 identifies the speaker as the Lord. In several ways, the author distances God from the old covenant. See Albert Vanhoye, “Le Dieu de la nouvelle alliance dans l’épître aux Hébreux,” in *La notion biblique de Dieu* (ed. J. Coppens; BETL 41; Gembloux, Belgium: Duculot, 1974), 321. Koester writes, “God remains hidden. The physical phenomena...do more to conceal God than reveal him” (*Hebrews*, 549).

³²⁴ The logic says, “Be faithful to Christ, because you have not come to something bad, but to something good.” But to address the options of Gentiles, the author would need to contrast Mt. Olympus with Zion.

³²⁵ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 681-2. Gräßer observes, “Das *Besprengeungsblut* steht als »letztes Charakteristikum« des Neuen Bundes »fast selbständig neben Jesus«” (*Hebräer*, 3:322).

³²⁶ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 385.

covenant is rarely if ever mentioned without a reference, usually explicit...to the work of Christ.... From [8:8] on, the new covenant is never mentioned without an explicit reference to the blood of Christ's sacrifice."³²⁷ The new covenant thereby becomes a term connoting *forgiveness*. Guthrie says, "The new covenant, in essence, has to do with a relationship with God established by the forgiveness of sins...and conceptually set against the backdrop of God's working through the people of Israel."³²⁸

Verses 22-24 make assertions about Mount Zion; 12:25-29 concludes with a warning:

- Make sure that you do not refuse the one who is speaking.³²⁹
- For (γάρ) if the Israelites did not escape when they refused Moses,³³⁰ we will not escape if we refuse the one who warns from heaven.³³¹
- {The principle of punishment for rejection remains the same—there is a new offer, but there is still a penalty for refusal.}

Verse 26 continues the contrast: His (the one from heaven) voice shook the earth at Sinai, but by warning of only one other shaking, he has promised an unshakeable reward. Yet this promise comes with a threat³³²—yet another reason that the readers should not abandon the new covenant, as 12:28 makes explicit:

- We should therefore (διό) show gratitude (equivalent to not refusing).
- Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.
- {It is appropriate to be grateful for gifts, and not abandon them.}³³³

³²⁷ Ibid., 409, 413.

³²⁸ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 286.

³²⁹ *Who* is speaking? The most immediate antecedent is "the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word"—i.e., the blood of Jesus, which inaugurated the new covenant. But 12:26 implies that the speaker is God.

³³⁰ Some commentators assume that the "one who warned them on earth" was God, but that would not provide any contrast with the situation in the new covenant. I conclude that the first warning came from Moses. Montefiore says, "The context...and the plain meaning of the Greek, require a contrast between Moses and Jesus.... It was Moses who was their divine instructor on earth" (*Hebrews*, 234).

³³¹ "Warns" is implied in the parallelism. The author gives warnings, but he has not described any warnings spoken from heaven regarding the new covenant. He leaves punishment up to the imagination of the readers.

³³² "The use of ἐπαγγέλλομαι in a warning context is at first puzzling" (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 686). "This final catastrophe of the world, however awful in itself, is a 'promise'" (Westcott, *Hebrews*, 419).

³³³ deSilva notes the cultural expectation of showing gratitude: "Those who receive benefits from a patron should not be reticent about publicizing that benefit.... The client who insults rather than honors his or her

Verse 29 then adds a warning:

- We should be thankful.
- For (γάρ) our God is a consuming fire.³³⁴
- {He will consume us if we are not thankful for his wonderful gift.}

This warning is ironic, for the author has just associated fire and dire threats with the *old* covenant. Moreover, a threat seems to be an odd way to motivate gratitude—but it is more understandable if the readers were tempted to adopt rival approaches to worship. Others may have been threatening them with divine punishment for abandoning the old covenant; the author responds by offering threats for abandoning the new (as well as explaining that the old is obsolete, and that violations have already been paid for).³³⁵ The author may have included these strong warnings to ensure that the readers also feel the *need* for mediation, and for a sacrifice that effectively averts the wrath of God.³³⁶

Hebrews 13—miscellaneous exhortations

Chapter 13 presents another dramatic change in writing style. The author continues to support his exhortations with reasons, but at first the enthymemes are independent rather than being linked together by shared components. Verse 2:

- You should show hospitality to strangers.
- Because (γάρ) some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

benefactor and who responds with disloyalty rather than reliable service will be excluded from future benefits.... The horror and baseness of offending the divine patron should outweigh the temporary disadvantages of offending society through continued Christian commitment” (*Perseverance*, 340, 350, 354).

³³⁴ Gräber notes, “Καὶ γάρ denn (Vg.: etenim wie 5,12) zeigt an, daß jetzt das Verhalten der Dankbarkeit V 28 begründet wird, und zwar durch Hinweis auf den strengen Richtergott” (*Hebräer*, 3:338).

³³⁵ Gordon points out that 3:12 may involve another reversal—opponents were accusing the readers of turning from the living God; the author responds that if they regress they will be doing exactly that (*Hebrews*, 59).

³³⁶ Gräber says that each major section in Hebrews ends with a warning about God’s judgment (*Hebräer*, 3:338). On 3:340, he quotes Barth, who says: “Grace would not be *grace*, the serious and effective address of God to man, the effective establishment of fellowship with him, if God did not oppose man’s opposition to Himself, if He left man to go his own way unaccused and uncondemned and unpunished, if He ignored the miserable pride of man, if the man of sin had nothing to fear from Him, if it were not a fearful thing to fall into His hands (Heb. 12²⁹)” (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* [ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. G. W. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956], part 1, p. 490).

- {You might help angels, too, and presumably be rewarded for it.}

This is not a very good reason to be hospitable—in the extraordinarily slim chance of helping angels. However, the author is probably telling them to do something that they already know they should do, and the “reason” is given tongue-in-cheek.

In some translations, 13:3 presents an argument: Remember those who are being tortured, since you are also in the body. However, the parallels between the first half of the verse and the second half suggest that the participle does not supply a reason, but describes the circumstances: Remember prisoners *as if* you were imprisoned with them, and remember those who are being tortured *as if* you were also ἐν σώματι.³³⁷

Both 13:4 and 13:5 use γάρ to indicate a rationale:

- Marriage is honorable, and should not be defiled.
- For God will judge (punish) fornicators and adulterers.
- {Sexual sins defile marriage.} (No support is given for “honorable.”)
- You should be content with what you have, not greedy for money.
- For God says he will never leave you.
- {When God is with us, he will ensure that we have enough.}³³⁸

Verse 6 gives a result, introduced by ὅστε:

- God says that he will never forsake us.
- We can therefore say that God helps us, and we do not fear anyone.
- {Being with us means that he gives us sufficient help.}³³⁹

Verse 7 uses a participle to imply a reason:

- Considering the outcome of their way of life...

³³⁷ Being “in a body” could mean remembering that you are also made of flesh and therefore ought to empathize, or it could mean being in the same *group* with the person—using a metaphor common to the culture, found also in Paul. Either way, it means “as though you yourselves were being tortured” (NRSV).

³³⁸ Another possible rationale is that God himself is all that we need, but that is more abstract than our author usually is. Verse 6 implies the notion of help, and suggests that persecution might be the reason some would not be content. Ellingworth observes that the epistle does not suggest that financial pressures were the main danger to faith, “but they may have been a factor contributing to their loss of zeal” (*Hebrews*, 698). Desire for riches “is incompatible with trust in God” (ibid.).

³³⁹ However, the author has already described what enemies can do to God’s people: steal, torture, and kill. In the end, all that believers have for sure is God himself, and the promise of future reward.

- You should imitate the faith of those who led you.
- {They had a good outcome, and if you have the same kind of faith you will have a similar outcome.}

Verse 8 is not verbally tied to any other verse. However, it may provide a rationale for 13:7,³⁴⁰ just as God’s constancy underlies some previous enthymemes, such as those in 3:19-4:1.

- Imitate their faith.
- {Because} Christ is always the same.
- {Christ will reward you, too, if you have similar faith.}

Verse 9 gives a rationale, but it is difficult to ascertain the situation³⁴¹ and premise:

- You should not accept strange teachings.
- Because (γάρ) it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not helped the participants (spiritually, that is).
- {The strange teachings concern foods,³⁴² and will not help you.}

“Strengthening the heart” has no previous parallel in Hebrews, and may be a slogan of the opponents—that certain foods would strengthen the heart (perhaps meaning a person’s loyalty for or standing with God).³⁴³ The strange teachings probably had something to do with eating from the altar (13:10), perhaps in a vicarious way through synagogue meals.³⁴⁴ So the author responds that a person’s heart will be strengthened more by grace than by special foods.

³⁴⁰ “This apparently isolated statement has no syntactical connection with what precedes or follows” (ibid., 704). Heb 13:8 could theoretically provide a rationale for 13:9: Christ is always the same, so do not be carried away by strange teachings. {Since Christ does not change his teachings, strange teachings are false.} However, the epistle claims that divine teachings *have* changed. But the author views reward and punishment as a constant, so the connection with 13:7 is more likely.

³⁴¹ “The writer refers allusively to a situation which was well known to the first readers, but of which modern readers are largely ignorant” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 705).

³⁴² “The verse strongly suggests that the false teachings have something to do with foodstuffs” (ibid., 707).

³⁴³ “It was alleged that the competing teachings concerning food will strengthen the heart and keep it from defection” (Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 531).

³⁴⁴ “The allusion is to the consumption of foods in some way connected with Jewish sacrificial meals” (ibid., 532). “The sphere of grace is contrasted with a cultus in which salvation, or at least ‘strengthening,’ is offered through ritual meals” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 707). Isaacs concludes that grace is “contrasted... over against Judaism’s sacrificial offerings (see 9:9-10), which were ineffectual” (*Reading*, 157). Josephus

Heb 13:10 has no direct link with 13:9.³⁴⁵ Those serving the tabernacle³⁴⁶ (another negative reference to Levitical worship) do not have a right to partake of the altar that believers have.³⁴⁷ The author has shifted in mid-sentence from what “we” have to what “they” have—perhaps meaning, “We have an altar, a source of forgiveness, but the Levitical priests cannot even eat from their own altar.” Verse 11 uses γάρ to introduce support from Scripture, which specifies that the bodies of sin offerings had to be burned outside the camp.³⁴⁸

Verse 12 reports a conclusion:

- The bodies of sin offerings were burned outside the camp (13:11).
- Therefore (διὸ) Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to (ἵνα) sanctify the people by his own blood (13:12).
- Missing premise: {Jesus fulfilled the typology of the sin offerings.}

The author has already argued that Jesus fulfilled the typology involved in the blood—just as the Levitical high priest brought animal blood into the earthly sanctuary, Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood (9:12). But as Gräßer points out,

speaks of “common suppers” in *Antiquities* 14.10.8. These could have continued after the temple was destroyed. Lane reports that Jukka Thurén has collected material showing “that eating, joy, and the praise of God at cultic meals, especially the fellowship meal, were associated with the thought of being supported by the grace of God” (*Hebrews 9-13*, 533, referring to *Das Lobopfer der Hebräer: Studien zum Aufbau und Anliegen von Hebräerbrief 13* [Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1973], 188-96).

³⁴⁵ Ellingworth notes that the lack of connection here “is in contrast with the tightly knit series of logical connectives in the following verses” (*Hebrews*, 707, 709). If vv. 9 and 10 are linked, the altar that “we” have is the source of grace (cf. the throne of grace, 4:16).

³⁴⁶ Montefiore observes the irony that the people are said to serve the tabernacle rather than God (*Hebrews*, 244). Gordon observes the irony that “it is the adherents of temple and sacrifice who are now cultically debarred” (*Hebrews*, 167). deSilva notes that the author is “inverting the normal Jewish discourse about priests’ rights to eat at certain tables in the temple, from which nonpriests cannot eat” (*Perseverance*, 498).

³⁴⁷ This would mean that priests were not *allowed* to believe in Jesus and participate in the new covenant, but that is probably more than the author intended to say. The book of Acts views belief in Christ and participation in temple rituals as compatible.

³⁴⁸ The fact that Levitical sacrifices were burned outside the camp has no bearing on whether people can eat from an entirely different altar (13:10a). A search for logic in the wider context might produce this enthymeme: We have an altar because Jesus suffered outside the gate, {and he therefore fulfilled the symbolism of the sin offering}. But this seems to presuppose more than it proves.

The logic suggests that the “altar” may be the cross. However, it could be argued that people “eat” from that altar by means of the Eucharist. But to be precise, the author does not say that believers eat at all. An altar is a place of sacrifice, and believers are to offer praise and good works (13:15-16). Just as the author uses “offer” as a metaphor, he also uses “eat” as a metaphor meaning “receive benefits.”

the analogy has problems.³⁴⁹ The animals were killed *inside* the camp, and were disposed of outside the camp. The author is saying that the symbolism of disposal was fulfilled by the location of Jesus' *death*—and his death outside the gate sanctified the people, just as the blood brought *inside* the Levitical sanctuary pictured the atonement of sin.

The author draws a parenetic conclusion in 13:13:

- Jesus sanctified people by dying outside the gate (13:12).
- Therefore (τοίνυν) we should go to him outside the camp and accept the abuse that this might entail (13:13).
- Missing premise: { We receive that sanctification (which has a value that far exceeds the “cost” involved in the abuse) only if we follow him. }

The author has concluded that a person cannot be saved by Levitical rituals, and a person relying on involvement in those rituals is *ipso facto* not relying on the only effective atonement, the death of Jesus. He therefore exhorts the readers to put those rituals behind them³⁵⁰ and accept the consequences of allegiance to Jesus Christ. As he draws to a close, he includes one more analogy based on the coincidence that Jesus suffered outside the city of Jerusalem, and he is exhorting people to leave the religious system that is centered in Jerusalem. The logic of the analogy may not work well,³⁵¹ but

³⁴⁹ “Es unseren Verf. allerdings nicht stört, daß die Entsprechung nur sehr unvollkommen ist: Die Tiere wurden ja *in* dem Lager geopfert und danach erst vor dem Lager verbrannt, Christus aber leidet und stirbt außerhalb des Tores (V 12)... Das Sterben ἔξω τῆς πύλης dient unserem Verf. als Beleg dafür, daß Jesus toragemäß außerhalb des Lagers »verbrannt« wurde” (Gräber, *Hebräer*, 3:383-84). Montefiore says that the argument here has “become slightly confused” (*Hebrews*, 245). Thompson suggests a different typology: “In the Old Testament the guilty [people] were brought outside the camp to be killed (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35). Only through accepting the stigma of guilt could Jesus remove the guilt of others” (*Hebrews*, 180).

³⁵⁰ Westcott says, “Hitherto he has shewn that the Christian can dispense with the consolations of the Jewish ritual: he now prepares to draw the conclusion that if he is a Christian he ought to give them up” (*Hebrews*, 437). Thompson says that the author encourages the readers “to take the risk of a total break with the synagogue. Jesus, in dying outside the camp, is the great example of one who renounced old loyalties and old securities for the sake of faith” (*Hebrews*, 181).

³⁵¹ Koester writes that this section is an “allusive passage that engages listeners more by images that stimulate the imagination than by a logical argument” (*Hebrews*, 575). Ellingworth observes, “Problems arise when attempts are made...to specify in greater detail the logical steps in the argument” (*Hebrews*, 716).

Many exegetes have even greater struggles with the implications about Judaism. However, the Levitical rituals that the author rejected as useless are not a part of Judaism as it is known today. Isaacs rightly notes that “the ‘camp’ here that our author exhorts his readers to abandon...is not therefore Judaism per se but the Mosaic cult and its shrine” (*Reading*, 159). As Ellingworth notes, the author views the *people* of the old covenant in continuity with those of the new covenant (*Hebrews*, 716)—but he views the

rhetorically it serves as a transition to the exhortation to leave. The logical connectors tie 13:9-15 together, showing that the strange teachings are associated with the Levitical altar,³⁵² and the author tells the readers that they cannot be involved in that system of worship.

Verse 14 adds more support to the exhortation:

- We should go to Jesus outside the camp, bearing the abuse (13:13).
- Because (γάρ) we do not have a permanent city here (on earth), but we are looking for a future (heavenly) city (as Abraham did—11:10, 16).
- {The eternal value of the reward is worth whatever temporary difficulties it may entail.}

Verse 15 draws a more general conclusion:

- We have an eternal reward awaiting us (13:14).
- Therefore (οὖν) we should offer through Jesus a sacrifice of praise to God, which we do by confessing the name of Jesus³⁵³ (13:15).
- Unstated premise: {We receive the reward only if we are faithful to Jesus.}

Verse 16 has an imperative with a supporting reason:

- People should continue to do good and share what they have.
- Because (γάρ) such sacrifices are pleasing to God.
- {God rewards people who please him (11:6).}

Verse 17 returns to the subject of leaders, forming an *inclusio* with 13:7,³⁵⁴ and it has two enthymemes:

approaches to worship as dramatically different. He emphasizes that the old is obsolete and urges the readers to embrace the new. In short, he advocates the same people, but different worship.

³⁵² If the “strange teachings” involved Levitical rituals, in what way were they strange? If the readers were in the Diaspora, they could participate in Levitical sacrifices only vicariously, through synagogue meals, and that is alien to the Scriptures. This idea may have been a recent innovation, at least for the readers. Or it may simply be “strange” to the readers’ previous participation in the Christ community.

³⁵³ The “confession” throughout Hebrews involves Jesus; God is not in question. In other words, we praise God by accepting the Savior he sent, doing good, and sharing. These actions please God (13:16), and God rewards those who please him (11:6). Doing good without confessing Christ would not be sufficient. Praise was not done in private, but in the communal meetings that should not be neglected. The primary reason given for the assemblies is mutual exhortation, rather than worship (10:25), but the worship functions of those meetings would have been taken for granted.

- You should obey and submit to your leaders.
- For (γάρ) they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.
- {Since they will be judged on their leadership, and they want to be found faithful, their orders are good, and it is to your advantage to obey them.}
- You should let them watch over you with joy, not sighing.
- For (γάρ) that would be harmful to you.
- {They sigh only over things that would harm you.}

Verse 18 has another imperative followed by a reason:

- You should pray for us.
- For (γάρ) we are sure that we have a good conscience and are honorable.
- {You should pray for all (leaders?) who have good behavior.}³⁵⁵

Verse 19 offers an additional reason:

- You should pray for us.
- So that (ἵνα) I may be restored to you very soon.
- {If you pray, I will be restored sooner—and you *want* me to come.}

Verse 22 contains the last enthymeme:

- You should bear with my word of exhortation.
- For (γάρ) I have written to you briefly.
- {This is not a long and boring treatise, so read it attentively.}³⁵⁶

Conclusion

The survey of argumentation in Hebrews produced a large mass of observations. Now I want to highlight a few of them. The readers implied by the text

³⁵⁴ Verse 7 is about former leaders, v. 17 about current leaders. The author believes that they will agree with his epistle. The *inclusio* suggests that the intervening verses are conceptually connected.

³⁵⁵ Ellingworth notes that “the force of γάρ is difficult to determine” (*Hebrews*, 725); he suggests that the author’s clear conscience gave him “the necessary confidence to claim the readers’ support in prayer” (*ibid.*). However, the verse is really a request—please pray for us. The last part of the verse might be part of a conventional part of the request—at least the author makes no attempt to support his statement.

³⁵⁶ It is odd to request tolerance at the *end* of the letter. The request is conventional, serving more as an apology than an exhortation.

- 1) view the Hebrew scriptures (which they know only in Greek translation) as authoritative for life and practice
- 2) view those scriptures from the perspective that Jesus fulfilled various messianic prophecies and allusions, and ascended to heaven at the right hand of God³⁵⁷
- 3) view those scriptures as authoritative revelation on how people should worship and be found acceptable by God
- 4) face threats of persecution that are weakening their zeal for Christ
- 5) have the old covenant cultus as the only relevant alternative that the author needs to address.

The readers most likely to fit this profile are Jewish. They considered themselves in continuity with the synagogue, and may have attended the synagogue even while believing that Jesus is the Messiah. Although the readers were at first persecuted for this belief, they were eventually tolerated. But more recently, renewed pressure, even the threat of death, was being used to pry the readers away from the Christ community so that they would be loyal to the synagogue.

The demand for conformity was not done by threat alone—it was also done through arguments based on the Jewish scriptures. The arguments centered not on whether Jesus is the Messiah, but on whether he is a means of atonement. The opponents were not attacking beliefs about a messiah, but about him being the means of salvation. The readers were being pressured to keep the laws of Moses for assurance of salvation rather than see salvation in Jesus.

So the author responds to these recent arguments and threats by 1) addressing the doctrinal questions and 2) exhorting the readers to be steadfast in time of persecution. He begins with an uncontested point—that Jesus is exalted into the heavens. His exaltation already implies that he is greater than the angels and that his message is more important than the law of Moses. Since Jesus has arrived at the situation the readers desire for their eternal future, he is the pioneer of salvation, and his death as a human is to be seen as an appropriate and necessary part of his trailblazing role in the salvation of humans. The author urges the readers to be faithful and to see Jesus as the means by which they are

³⁵⁷ The argument in 7:1-10:18 is built on the assumption that the readers will accept Ps 110 as messianic, and that Jesus is the messiah; the question dominating this section of the epistle is *whether he is sufficient for salvation*.

accepted by God. So far he has built a positive case for Christ—that what he did was appropriate—without addressing competing views. He then prepares the readers for more difficult argumentation and warns them about the penalties of apostasy.

The “difficult” topic is the priesthood of Christ, which is shown to be superior to the Levitical priesthood (judging by length of argument, this may be the part that is the most difficult for the readers to accept). The holy place of Christ, in heaven, is superior to the Levitical sanctuary, and the ministry that he performed is superior to the Levitical ministry. The author also argues that the covenant of Christ is superior to the Sinai covenant, which was the basis of the Levitical functions. Although Greek rhetoric normally gave praise through a comparison with other respected entities, without denigrating the point of comparison (it is poor praise to say that a person is better than a scoundrel, or an arrangement is better than one that never even worked), the author of Hebrews goes out of his way to denigrate the old covenant and its associated ministries, thus showing that *this* was the primary point of contention.³⁵⁸ He uses the word covenant because he is dealing with a worship *system*, not just priesthood, sacrifices, and sanctuary. In several places, the author uses strong words to say that the old covenant is obsolete. This seems to be the basis for his argument in 9:10b that the Levitical rituals were temporary, and therefore assumed to be ineffective.

The author works harder to prove the ineffectiveness of the old, than he does to prove the effectiveness of the new. He acts as if the readers have only two alternatives: to approach God through the Levitical rituals, or to approach through Christ. If the old way is discredited, it is assumed that the new way will be accepted with little resistance. The readers faced only two choices: the old or the new—and since there is little rhetorical value in showing that Christ is superior to something already known to be ineffective and superseded, the argument implies that the readers were attracted to the old covenant as a means of atonement. Further, the readers’ primary questions had to do with the validity of the old covenant, not the content of the new.

There are two ways of approaching God—two covenants—the old and the new. Although the author says several times that Christ has brought a better covenant, he does

³⁵⁸ In 7:11-19, the author moves from priesthood to law even though his conclusions about law do not become the basis of further arguments, suggesting that this subject is included because it is a need of the readers. He is using “the law” as a synonym for the old covenant (cf. 7:18, 22).

not describe the new covenant, at least not under the term “covenant.” He takes more space to argue that the old covenant is obsolete, than he does to describe what the new covenant actually is. This suggests that the readers valued the term *covenant* because of their attraction to the law of Moses, the author used the term they liked, and in Jer 31 he found a way to use it as a bridge toward Christ. In effect, he argues: Do you want to be in a covenant with God? Christ has a better covenant, one that is effective. Do you not know, from the old covenant itself, that transgressions necessitate death? Christ has provided a death that is so effective it does not need to be continually repeated. Do you not know that God promised to bring a better covenant, which is based on forgiveness? Christ has brought it, so choose Christ.

The old approach is Levitical priests, sacrifices and laws; the new approach is Christ as *the* sacrifice and *the* priest (the author does not argue for “better laws”). Both ways can be called a covenant, but the author associates the old covenant with negative terms (law, transgression, and penalties); he associates the new covenant with positive terms (promises and blessings). But the word *covenant* is not an end in itself—it is a steppingstone toward the author’s real goal—exhorting allegiance to Christ and his community. He is calling for fidelity not just to beliefs about Christ, but to continued association with the community of believers. This is part of the package that he advocates, vis-à-vis the package offered by the synagogue.

A crucial difference in these packages is the means of atonement, or cleansing, or the way in which a person can be made acceptable to God. The author argues that atonement is effected by Christ, not by old covenant rituals. He does not argue piecemeal, law by law, but comprehensively, using the word *covenant*. He argues that the old rituals were legally valid, but not effective, and Christ has achieved what they could only illustrate. Now that the reality has been done, the author argues, the ritual anticipations are obsolete. Due to the readers’ allegiance to the Scriptures, the author bases the argument on passages of Scripture, and Jer 31 provides a conclusive argument that the Scriptures themselves indicate the need for a new covenant, and thus that the old covenant was temporary.

Once this doctrinal difference has been addressed, the author again calls the readers to see Jesus as the crucial link they need in their relationship with God, and he

again warns them of the dire results of apostasy. The *inclusio* structure, bracketing the center section with similar exhortations and warnings, draws attention to the importance of the center doctrinal section to the needs of the readers. The author reminds the readers of the value of being faithful in times of trial, and sketches the readers' situation as a choice between an old covenant mountain and a new covenant heaven. After some miscellaneous exhortations, the author encourages the readers to leave elements associated with the old covenant (foods, animals, city, and camp) and embrace by faith the elements of the Christ community (mutual assistance and confessional loyalty) despite the persecutions that will likely come.

The epistle carries a tone of urgency—some have already turned away from the community, and the author is afraid that others will follow them into irreversible apostasy. In this life-and-death situation, the author deals with subjects that are directly relevant to their waning allegiance, and he spends a large portion of his letter on the old and new covenants because that is a crucial component of the readers' crisis.

Throughout the epistle, the author takes various slogans or arguments that might have been used in favor of the synagogue, and turns them around and uses them to argue for the Christ covenant. The synagogue urges you to be faithful to the living God? So do we. They talk about how important the voice of God is? We have an even *more* important message in Christ. They urge you to look to God's appointed representative, the high priest? So do we, but we have a better high priest. They urge you to enter a weekly rest? We urge you to enter an eternal rest. They urge obedience? So do we. They say that God will reject you if you go to the Christ community? We say that God will reject you if you leave. They offer rituals of cleansing and atonement? We offer the reality. They offer an impressive line of priests? We offer an impressive priest, one who has actually reached the salvation that we want. They offer a covenant relationship with God? We have one, too, only it is better and eternal. Whether the opponents actually argued these things cannot be proved, but such arguments are plausible for the situation, and the author addresses them. The Jews traditionally placed a high value on the covenant relationship with God; the author takes this traditional value and uses it for his own exhortation.

By exhorting the readers to leave behind the old covenant system of worship and to embrace a worship pattern centered on Jesus, he is implying that the Christ-confession

is a religion distinct from and separate from second-temple Judaism.³⁵⁹ He is calling for a “parting of the ways.” In calling for separation, it is remarkable that he does not have to explain what the new covenant is, or argue that it has fulfilled the Jer 31 prophecy. It is sufficient for him to prove that the old covenant was temporary—and from that he assumes (and expects the readers to assume) that Jesus brought the new covenant. These are the only two religious systems under consideration, and a disproof of one is assumed to be a proof of the other.

The author takes a considerable amount of space to argue that the death of Jesus was a self-sacrifice that atoned for the sins of all humanity. Throughout the epistle, he assumes the divine origin and validity of the old covenant rituals even as he argues that they were ineffective and superseded by Christ. But his argument also implies that the readers think the old covenant to be still valid (e.g., 8:4), and he assumes the new covenant to be like the old in penalties for transgression.

Apparently the readers who trusted the Jewish Scriptures implicitly also valued the worship requirements found therein—and this became a key argument as the synagogue sought to regain their full allegiance. In response to this pressure, the author tries to strengthen the plausibility of the new religious system by showing that it fulfills key parts of the old.

The main purpose of Hebrews is parenesis, and the doctrinal passages support the parenetic purpose. In what way does the central doctrinal section help support the parenesis that immediately follows it? To put it most baldly, why is the end of sin offerings (10:18) a reason for believers to meet together (v. 25)? It is because the author is discussing rival systems, not just sacrifices and meetings as separate topics. He can argue for meetings simply because they are part of a package that is the only possible rival to (and successor to) the package that includes animal offerings as a means of pleasing God.

³⁵⁹ The only form of Judaism ever addressed in the epistle is a religion in which sacrifices were central—which implies that a post-Temple Judaism was not yet an option for the readers, which implies that the epistle was written before A.D. 70.