Sinai and Hebrews:
Rethinking the Place of Sinai in the Epistle to the Hebrews



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Short Abstract

This dissertation argues that the narrative of Israel's encampment at the foot of Mount Sinai plays a more significant role in shaping the theology and structure of the Epistle to the Hebrews than has traditionally been recognised.

Modern scholarship often focuses on the wilderness-wandering motif in Hebrews, portraying the audience as pilgrims journeying from bondage to the promised land. While Hebrews does present the audience as those freed from slavery and destined for their promised rest, this emphasis frequently overlooks the period when Israel was stationary at Sinai, waiting for Moses to return from the mountaintop. My project proposes that the audience of Hebrews, like Israel at Sinai, is depicted as waiting for its intercessor—Jesus—to return after completing his intercessory work in the heavenly tabernacle. But, unlike Israel, who could not approach the mountain due to its terrifying presence of fire, cloud, and loud sounds, the audience of Hebrews is invited to ascend the heavenly mountain and enter the realm Moses accessed atop Sinai and Jesus entered at his exaltation. Consequently, this dissertation reframes Hebrews as not merely a narrative about the wandering people of God but also about the waiting people of God.

The dissertation makes two key contributions. First, it challenges supersessionist interpretations by demonstrating that Sinai is not merely a negative contrast to Zion but rather a foundational and positive element in Hebrews. By exploring Hebrews' engagement with Second Temple traditions, this project situates the epistle in conversation with other Jewish literature, highlighting both points of continuity and distinction. Second, it offers insights into Hebrews' cosmology, noting that the audience is portrayed as existing simultaneously in the earthly and heavenly realms, much like Moses' experience atop Sinai. This dual existence means that, while the audience is waiting for their intercessor's return, their waiting is not passive. Instead, they are actively participating in the heavenly realm through faith, engaging with God's presence even as they anticipate the full realisation of their promised rest.

Long Abstract

For decades, particularly since the publication of Käsemann's *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* (1939), interpretations of Hebrews have often focused on the wilderness journey as a metaphor for the audience's pilgrimage from slavery to rest. However, this approach has largely overlooked the pivotal stop at Sinai, where Israel waited at the foot of the mountain while Moses ascended to receive the law and where God established a covenant with his people.

Traditionally, when the Sinai event (encompassing all of the events that occurred while Israel was encamped at Sinai's base) comes into focus in Hebrews scholarship, it is usually viewed negatively and primarily as a contrast between the old covenant at Sinai and the new covenant established at Zion. Much of this is concluded because of Heb 12:18–24, which presents Sinai as a place of fear and judgment, marked by blazing fire, darkness, and tempest, in sharp juxtaposition with Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, described as a place of angelic festal gathering. Since this comparison appears to frame the Sinai event as a negative experience, it has frequently been understood as symbolic of the negative elements that the author encourages the audience to leave behind in favour of the new covenant, represented by Zion. In other words, the contrast between Sinai and Zion in Hebrews has led many to conclude that Sinai is referenced in Hebrews primarily to underscore what the audience has left behind in favour of a superior mediator and covenant.

This dissertation challenges the prevailing view that the Sinai narrative in Hebrews serves as a negative foil, arguing instead that Sinai is a positive and foundational narrative. This reinterpretation becomes evident when one traces how the author progressively develops the Sinai narrative throughout the epistle. Unlike studies—e.g., Son (2005), Kibbe (2016), and Stolz (2018)—which begin with the climactic contrast between Sinai and Zion in Heb 12:18–29 and use it as a hermeneutical key to interpret the rest of the text, this project adopts a sequential approach. By examining the influence of the Sinai narrative from the epistle's opening chapters through to its conclusion, this method uncovers insights often overlooked by scholars. My project, by starting with the epistle's opening chapters and following the progression of allusions to the Sinai narrative within the epistle, provides a fresh perspective on how the Sinai event informs Hebrews' theology and structure.

The project is organised into seven chapters, each building on the central thesis that the Sinai event serves as a foundational and positive backdrop in Hebrews:

Chapter 1 introduces the dissertation, outlining its aims, methodology, and implications. It critiques the dominant framework that views Sinai as a negative foil in Hebrews and proposes that the event offers a complementary and helpful narrative for understanding Hebrews.

Chapter 2 situates Hebrews within the context of Second Temple Jewish literature, highlighting how the epistle draws on the Sinai tradition as a *Hintergrundgeschichte* (a backdrop narrative). While Hebrews' most explicit allusion to Sinai appears near the end of the epistle (12:18–24), this chapter argues that the author introduces Sinai's influence much earlier, as early as chapter 2 ("a message declared by angels" [2:2]). Additionally, this chapter presents the theme of the "waiting people of God," a motif central to understanding the epistle's exhortations. It examines Jesus' role as the mediator who bridges the earthly and heavenly realms, drawing a parallel with Moses' mediatory role at Sinai. By focusing on Jesus' function as both intercessor and forerunner, the chapter lays the groundwork for the broader argument that the audience, like Moses at Sinai, is portrayed as capable of accessing the heavenly realm, not as a distant eschatological hope but as an active reality achievable through faith.

Chapter 3 examines Heb 3:1–4:13, where the author draws a parallel between Moses' ascent at Sinai to intercede for his people and Jesus' ascension to heaven to intercede for his followers. While the Israelites failed to wait faithfully for Moses' return and hardened their

hearts, the audience of Hebrews is exhorted to remain faithful during their own period of waiting. They are encouraged to place their trust in their intercessor who continues his heavenly mediation on their behalf. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates how the Sinai narrative connects the discussions of angels (Heb 1:5–2:18) and Moses (Heb 3:1–4:13), providing a cohesive framework for the epistle's exhortations.

Furthermore, the chapter argues that Hebrews presents the audience as simultaneously connected to the earthly and heavenly realms, actively participating in both. This dual connection aligns with the expectation in the Book of Exodus that the people gathered at Sinai were intended to ascend the mountain (LXX Exod 19:13). Hebrews reimagines this ascent as not just Moses' singular privilege but as something now extended to the followers of the Son. The chapter explores how Sinai and Zion are not therefore two entirely distinct or unrelated geographical locations. Instead, they function as different bridges granting access to the same heavenly realm. The critical distinction lies in accessibility: at Sinai, only Moses ascended into the divine presence, while at Zion all the Son's followers are invited to ascend alongside him.

Chapter 4 examines the audience's access to the heavenly realm. This chapter examines Hebrews' portrayal of its audience as already possessing the "perfection" required for immediate access to the heavenly holy of holies. Arguing that this perfection is best understood in purification terms rather than solely as moral uprightness or future eschatological transformation, the study contends that it is achieved through Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation, realities that not only qualify him to enter the heavenly tabernacle but also enable believers to do likewise. The analysis situates Hebrews' language of τελειόω within the conceptual framework of the Sinai event, where covenantal transformation, along with the sensory barriers, is the decisive factor for ascent. By exploring key texts that invite believers to "draw near" to God, the chapter demonstrates that the author envisions the community as exercising priestly privileges in the heavenly sanctuary now, inhabiting both earthly and heavenly realms simultaneously.

Building upon the previous chapter's argument, chapter 5 addresses statements that appear to invalidate the Sinai Torah and covenant, such as those in 7:12 ("change of law") and 10:1 ("the law has only a shadow of the good things to come"). This chapter argues that these passages do not dismiss Sinai but introduce a new set of heavenly regulations and priesthood that operate alongside, rather than replacing, the existing earthly ones. The Sinai law retains its earthly relevance while being paralleled by a heavenly priesthood of the Melchizedekian order, which complements rather than annuls the Levitical priesthood. The chapter further develops the idea that the Hebrews community is depicted as living under the influence of both realms, mirroring Moses' experience at Sinai. While physically on earth, Moses, atop Sinai, accessed heavenly realities, serving as a bridge between the two dimensions.

Chapter 6 finally focuses on the contrast between Sinai and Zion in Heb 12:18–24. The chapter asserts that the description of Sinai in Hebrews—characterised by fire, loud sounds, and fear—is not intended to depict Sinai as a negative or inferior place. Rather, the author draws directly from the descriptions found in the Pentateuch, using the same imagery to highlight the awe-inspiring nature of God's presence at Sinai. What distinguishes Zion from Sinai is not that one represents a negative experience and the other a positive one, but rather that Zion offers something Sinai could not: unrestricted access to the heavenly realm. While Sinai was marked by barriers—fire, clouds, and sound—that limited access to God's presence, Zion represents a new reality where these barriers are removed. At Zion, the audience is invited to ascend the heavenly mountain, just as Moses did at Sinai. The chapter ultimately argues that the difference between Sinai and Zion is not geographical but one of accessibility: whereas Sinai was marked by barriers, Zion offers the faithful open access to the divine presence.

Chapter 7 addresses the question of how the audience of Hebrews can ascend into the heavenly realm while still remaining the waiting people of God on earth. Focusing on Heb

13:8–16, the chapter argues that the community participates in the heavenly inner shrine by performing priestly acts—such as partaking of an altar, bearing reproach, and offering sacrifices of praise. These actions, though carried out in the earthly sphere, are simultaneously located within the heavenly realm. In doing so, the chapter reinforces the central claim that the audience inhabits a liminal space between Sinai and Zion, already engaging with the heavenly reality while still awaiting Jesus' return.

Chapter 8 concludes the study by reviewing the argument developed across the dissertation and revisiting the central question concerning the role of Sinai in Hebrews. It highlights how the epistle reconfigures Sinai not as a discarded past but as a vital literary and theological frame through which the audience's present identity and future hope are shaped. Additional sections reflect on early Christian receptions of Sinai, acknowledge the dissertation's focus on Second Temple literature, and propose avenues for further research. The chapter closes by reaffirming that Sinai, rather than being left behind, remains an active coordinate in Hebrews' vision of divine encounter and covenantal faithfulness.

This dissertation contributes to Hebrews scholarship in four significant ways. First, it aligns with a broader trend in New Testament studies that reexamines the significance of Sinai across biblical texts, demonstrating its importance as a fertile ground for scholarly exploration within Hebrews. Second, by highlighting Hebrews' positive portrayal of Sinai, it challenges traditional interpretations that view the Torah as obsolete, proposing instead that the revelation at Sinai retains its enduring validity even under the new covenant. Third, it reinforces the integration of Hebrews within Second Temple Jewish literature, showing how the epistle echoes Jewish rhetorical patterns and literary traditions. Finally, this study joins voices challenging supersessionist readings of Hebrews, depicting Sinai not as a negative contrast to Zion but as a critical framework for understanding the "waiting people of God" and rethinking the epistle's relationship with Judaism and its traditions.

In conclusion, this dissertation argues that the Sinai event plays a more significant and constructive role in shaping the theology and structure of the Epistle to the Hebrews than previously recognised. While much scholarship has stressed the wilderness-wandering motif, portraying Hebrews' audience as pilgrims journeying from slavery to the promised land, this study suggests that the Sinai event, when Israel was stationary, is equally critical for understanding the epistle's theological vision. As a result, rather than portraying Sinai as a place to abandon, Hebrews integrates it as a foundational theological motif, shaping the audience's identity as the waiting people of God: those who, like Israel at Sinai, anticipate their intercessor's return while remaining steadfast in their faith.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. Overview

Over the last century, since the publication of Käsemann's seminal work *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*,[1] numerous critical studies have explored the theme of wilderness wandering in the Epistle to the Hebrews.[2] Generally speaking, these works typically frame the epistle[3] within the context of Israel's liberation from Egypt and subsequent journey to Canaan, depicting its audience as pilgrims in a foreign land, akin to Israel, who, after being freed from slavery, spent 40 years in the wilderness before finally reaching their Promised Land, Canaan.

This interpretative approach has undoubtedly yielded significant insights into Hebrews over the past century. However, when God commissioned Moses to go to Egypt to free the Israelites from slavery, his goal was not just to lead them straightaway to Canaan, but to bring them to "the mountain of God" (Exod 3:1, 12),[4] the same place from which Moses was being commissioned. Moses explicitly requested Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to journey to the desert to worship God at his mountain (Exod 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 8:27).[5] Thus, although the journey from Egypt to Canaan is indeed the heart of the exodus journey narrative, the pivotal stop at Sinai is equally significant. Put differently, Israel's trajectory was not simply a direct move from point A (Egypt) to point B (Canaan), but rather it included a deliberate stop at Sinai.

[1] Käsemann 1939; published in English as Käsemann 1984.

[2] A few notable works include Stuart 1973; D'Angelo 1979; Weir 1984; Thiessen 2007; Groenewald 2008; Thiessen 2009; Miller 2009; Coyne 2016; and Shin 2016.

[3] Because this project is not primarily interested in the genre of Hebrews, I will simply refer to it as an epistle. For a discussion on this topic, see, for example, Swetnam 1969; Eisenbaum 2005.

[4] Unless otherwise stated, all English biblical citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

[5] Sarna 1991, 14.

It was the significance of the events that took place at Sinai in Israel's exodus narrative that first led me to wonder whether the author[6] of Hebrews similarly emphasises the period when people were not wandering in the desert but stationed at the foot of the mountain. At first glance, the answer seems to be no. Historically, as I will develop below, when Sinai is brought into focus in Hebrews, it is typically understood to highlight what the audience has thankfully moved beyond. Indeed, the text alludes to Sinai, though in its clearest reference in chapter 12—an allusion rather than an explicit mention, since the author never uses the name "Sinai" (or "Horeb" for that matter)—it is presented in deliberate contrast to Zion: Sinai is characterised by blazing fire, darkness, gloom, and tempest (12:18), a mountain the audience is told they have not approached, whereas Zion is portrayed as the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, a place of festal assembly and abundant blessing (12:22), to which they have fortunately arrived. Consequently, the prevailing interpretation has been that the author assigns only minimal theological significance to Sinai, mentioning it briefly and indirectly, primarily as a way to remind the audience to be grateful for their deliverance from that fearful setting.

Nevertheless, a remark in one of Moffitt's recent articles prompted me to investigate whether Sinai does hold a central role in Hebrews, much like in the exodus narrative. Moffitt highlights the often-overlooked theme of *waiting* in Hebrews, particularly drawing from 9:28, which speaks of Christ's return from heaven "to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." He argues that, while Hebrews does portray the audience as situated in a wilderness state, the author emphasises not so much their pilgrimage towards a destination but their patient waiting for Jesus to return from his high priestly work in the heavenly tabernacle.[7] As a result, Moffitt

[6] I will refer to the author of Hebrews using a masculine pronoun (he/him) based on the traditional reading of the masculine participle διηγούμενον in 11:32. For a discussion in this topic, see for example Harnack 1900; Hoppin 1969; Allen 2010.

[7] Moffitt 2019a, 170.

suggests that Hebrews is less about the wandering people of God and more about the waiting people of God.[8]

If Moffitt is correct and Hebrews can be reframed as a narrative about the waiting people of God, we suddenly gain a fresh perspective that appears to emphasise the significant role in Hebrews of Israel waiting at the foot of Mount Sinai. According to the exodus narrative, when Moses ascended the mountain to engage with God and the heavenly tabernacle, the Israelites were commanded to wait patiently and remain faithful. Hebrews tells a similar story, but with Jesus as the central figure rather than Moses. Like Moses, Jesus ascends—not to a mountaintop, but into heaven itself—where he enters the heavenly tabernacle and intercedes on behalf of his followers. Hebrews then exhorts his audience to remain faithful during this period of waiting (9:28), contrasting them with the Israelites at Sinai, who failed to uphold their faith while waiting for Moses to return from the mountain (3:16–19).

This theme is reinforced by Moffitt's own observation that the author compares the readers not only to Israel poised to enter the Promised Land but also to Israel as they were encamped at Sinai awaiting Moses' return.[9] Like Israel at Sinai, the audience of Hebrews is called to exercise faith, believing in the unseen—that there is one who faithfully intercedes for them before God. This intercessor, who, in the case of the audience, continues to carry out his ministry, will return to his people, just as Moses did after 40 days and nights.

[8] As Moffitt acknowledges, he is not the first to arrive at this conclusion. In 1970, Hofius concluded, "[D]ie Gemeinde [ist] nicht als das zum Himmel wandernde, wohl aber als das auf die Heilsvollendung *wartende* Gottesvolk gesehen, und der Verfasser will dieses Volk… mit aller Dringlichkeit dazu aufrufen, die Erwartung nicht preiszugeben, der allein die Erfüllung verheißen ist" (1970, 150).

[9] As Moffitt argues, "Not only does the author liken his readers to Israel about to go into the land, they are also compared to the congregation of Israel encamped at Sinai awaiting Moses' return" (2017, 169–70). Although elsewhere Moffitt locates this waiting at Kadesh (2024, 191–92, 202), this does not diminish the essential point: the audience is portrayed as a people in a state of expectant waiting, rather than as wanderers aimlessly drifting through the wilderness.

1.2. Proposal

The primary assertion of this study is that the author of Hebrews places considerable emphasis on Israel's encampment at Sinai, not just their journey from Egypt to Canaan. While the wilderness narrative is important, it has often overshadowed the significant role that the Sinai event plays in the narrative structure of Hebrews. This oversight has limited deeper interpretations of various texts within the epistle. By rethinking the Sinai narrative as an important backdrop—a *Hintergrundgeschichte*—we can unveil new layers of meaning across key passages in Hebrews.

At the outset, it is important to clarify the scope of my proposal. First, this study is not primarily an analysis of a specific use of an Old Testament (OT) text in Hebrews.[10] Instead, I am interested in the narrative of the events that took place at Sinai. Thus, when I use the term "Sinai" in this study, I am referring to the comprehensive events associated with Israel's encampment at the foot of the mountain, rather than focusing solely on its depiction in specific texts, like the Book of Exodus.[11] In this regard, my study extends to how Sinai is portrayed across both biblical and Second Temple Jewish texts, without confining it to a hermeneutical study on the reception and rewriting of the Sinai tradition.[12] In other words, while my analysis will at times delve into exegetical examinations of the OT's use in Hebrews and compare how the author interprets aspects of Sinai tradition relative to other Second Temple Jewish texts, my principal focus is on evaluating how the narrative of Sinai functions as a controlling image throughout the epistle. In doing so, this project aligns with narrative approaches in Hebrews

[10] Among the most important works dedicated to investigating the use of the OT in Hebrews, the following stand out: Thomas 1959; Barth 1962; Schröger 1968; Howard 1968; McCullough 1971; Ellingworth 1977; Moyise 2001.

[11] In other words, my analysis is not confined solely to a certain textual witness, such as the Book of Exodus, which contains the most extensive narrative of Sinai within the Pentateuch (Exod 19–40). For an analysis of the use of the Book of Exodus in Hebrews, see Attridge 1986; Lehne 1990; Löhr 1993; She 2011; Gheorghita 2014; Moore 2017; Mason 2018; and Moffitt 2022.

[12] For an in-depth analysis of this field of study, see Brooke, Najman, and Stuckenbruck 2008.

scholarship, like those of Allen[13] and Schenck,[14] yet it is distinct in that it does not aim to create a new hermeneutical framework. Instead, it brings attention to an aspect of the Sinai narrative previously overlooked, suggesting that this backdrop is critical for a fuller understanding of the epistle.

Second, it is important to clarify that when I use the term "waiting," I am not envisioning a passive or motionless state, precisely because that is not how Hebrews alludes to the concept. When Christ sat down at the right hand of God (10:12), he himself entered a period of waiting (ἐκδέχομαι) until the subjugation of his enemies (10:13). Yet this waiting is by no means depicted in Hebrews as lifeless or inactive. On the contrary, it is marked by ongoing priestly activity and intercession. Similarly, Abraham's waiting (ἐκδέχομαι [11:10]) was active: he set out on pilgrimage toward a new land in obedience, all while waiting for the heavenly city. In this light, when the author speaks of the audience as "eagerly waiting" (ἀπεκδέχομαι [9:28]), he does not envision them as motionless or disengaged. Rather, as we will explore in due course, the audience's waiting entails active participation in practices and responsibilities that the author expects of them during this interim period.

1.3. History of Interpretation

A common strand in Christian interpretation has understood Sinai (12:18–21) in Hebrews as representing Judaism, while Zion (12:22–24) represents Christianity. Consequently, in early Christian thought, Sinai—being associated with the old covenant and thus perceived as standing in contrast to the new—was often viewed negatively. As Childs succinctly summarises, "Sinai was conceived of as primitive, mythological, and crude. Indeed, it stood on

[13] Allen 2008.

[14] Schenck 2003; 2011.

the same level with pagan religion."[15] Early writers such as Chrysostom,[16] Cyril of Jerusalem,[17] and Augustine,[18] appear to uphold this understanding. The same perspective persists among some medieval commentators, including Aquinas,[19] and early modern interpreters such as Calvin[20] and Owen.[21] Even in more recent scholarship, writers like Griffiths,[22] Gäbel,[23] and

[15] Childs 1974, 381.

[16] Chrysostom held that as Zion superseded Sinai, so also Christians had supplanted Jews as God's chosen children; see Chrysostom 1889, 368. Chrysostom went on to suggest that Hebrews describes Judaism in an exceedingly unfavourable light intending to dissuade Christian readers from reverting to their previous Jewish customs. He believed that the exhortation to keep the marriage bed pure in Heb 13:4 was meant to deter the audience from abandoning the Christian faith. He used Torah's teaching that a woman was impure after childbirth (Lev 12:2) to teach that, in like manner, Judaism had become polluted upon giving birth to Christianity; see *Hom*. *Heb*. 13:4.

[17] Cyril thought that Moses' fear, as described in Heb 12:21, argued that God had rejected the Jews because they had stopped the ears of their hearts, whereas those who believe in Jesus Christ are welcomed by God (*Catechetical Lecture* 12.13).

[18] Augustine viewed the old covenant as producing children destined for slavery, suggesting that Sinai held value only insofar as it testified to the new covenant (*Civ*. *Dei*. 17.7).

[19] Aquinas characterised the Sinai event as the place where God gave a covenant "in terror to terrify the hearts of Jews," whereas those who belong to the Christian church have no cause to fear because God grants them "enjoyment of the godhead and companionship with the saints" (2018, no. 703).

[20] Calvin, expanding on this thematic dichotomy, interpreted Sinai as emblematic of "eternal death by the Law," underscoring Torah's harshness and its role in condemning humanity, unable to fulfil its stringent demands. In stark contrast, Zion represented the gospel of Christ, and as such, "contains nothing but love" (1855, 332). Calvin emphasised that unlike the terrifying divine manifestation at Sinai, the gospel presents God in a compassionate and inviting manner, extending a loving invitation to salvation and peace: "God does not present himself to us clothed in terrors as he did formerly to the Jews, but lovingly and kindly invites us to himself" (1855, 330). For him, while the law given to Jews at Sinai delivers condemnation, the message of Jesus offers salvation and comfort.

[21] Owen articulated his interpretation of Sinai in Hebrews as being a place where the "terror and curse of the law" was delivered. For him, Hebrews points to Sinai only "to manifest how low and inferior the giving of the law was, in comparison of the promulgation of the gospel" (1840, 622). He believed that, in light of the gospel's grace, the law was rendered obsolete, offering nothing but desolation and terror to those who remained under its jurisdiction. Padley highlights Owen's perspective, noting that Owen "carefully distinguished the covenant of Sinai from the evangelical covenant… locating [his] federal scheme against the background of civil war supersessionism" (2016, 10–11).

[22] For Griffiths, understanding the reference to Sinai in Heb 12:18–22 requires considering the preceding discussion of Esau and his rejection of his birthright. He argues that the narrative establishes idolatry as a central concern. As such, to remain at Sinai is not only a matter of apostasy but also idolatry (2014, 151). Griffiths draws a parallel between Esau's rejection for choosing a tangible, immediate reward—a meal—despite his inheritance of a covenant blessing, and the audience of Hebrews, whom he urges to value the intangible. He argues that Judaism, characterised by the tangible nature of Sinai, poses a significant risk similar to the moral dangers Esau faced (2014, 136). To be sure, Griffiths was not the first to relate the comparison of Sinai and Zion to Esau's birth right rejection. Weiss, for instance, noted that one cannot disconnect 12:18–24 from its preceding context because of the conjunction γὰρ in 12:18 (Οὐ γὰρ προσεληλύθατε…). As he writes, "Allein so ergibt sich auch der vom Autor des Hebr—wie das einleitende γὰρ (V. 18) zeigt—beabsichtigte Zusammenhang mit der am Beispiel des Esau verdeutlichten Warnung in VV. 16f" (1991, 669). What sets Griffiths apart is that, unlike Weiss, he equates Judaism to Esau's sin and therefore to follow Judaism is to commit unforgivable apostasy.

[23] "Die Siniaoffenbarung wird damit zum Paradigma der Verwehrung des Zugangs zur Gottespräsenz unter der ersten διαθήκη" (Gäbel 2006, 382).

Son,[24] have continued to reflect this view, interpreting Sinai as a symbol of "unbelief, apostasy, and judgment."[25]

However, not all scholars have shared this assessment.[26] Among some contemporary interpreters, a different approach has grown in popularity, one which understands Zion not as replacing Sinai but as reinterpreting it. That is, while the traditional interpretation indicates replacement (i.e., Christianity replaces Judaism) some newer interpretations suggest reinterpretation (Christianity reinterprets Judaism).[27] In this reading, Sinai functions as an anticipatory stage within God's redemptive plan, pointing forward to the fuller revelation at Zion. As Ndzi argues, Sinai was a momentary step in God's redemptive plan along the journey

[24] According to Son, "the terrible phenomenon of Sinai described in Hebrews… underlines the inferior nature of the OT figures and cultic institutions… [and] functions as the intellectual basis of all warning passages of the epistle" (2005, 24). As a result, Sinai is meant to remind readers of Hebrews about "the sins of the community, and thus the judgment of God" (2005, 102, n. 119).

[25] Harris 2019, 383–84. According to her, the author's primary concern in this comparison is to stress "the sense of what the audience risks should they not persevere in their faith" (2019, 383). Therefore, faithfulness to Jesus means staying away from Sinai, the place which represents apostacy and damnation.

[26] Even among early Christian writers, the law was not universally regarded as entirely defective or obsolete. Theodoret of Cyrus, for example, argued that the parts of the law that what had become obsolete were the "prescriptions of the law [which are] ineffective and useless," namely "circumcision, sabbath observance and suchlike things" (2001, 2:167). Later, when he comments on the reference to "the covenant" in 8:9, Theodoret adds a couple more things to the list, such as "regulations about eating and drinking, menstruation, leprosy, childbirth, and periods," (Hill 2001, 2:173). Theodoret does not give these as examples to then argue that the law should therefore be discarded in its entirety. On the contrary, he prefaces his comments by saying, "He [Jesus] clearly taught… that he does not reject the law as a whole" (Hill 2001, 2:173). Elsewhere he argues that "the New Testament also bids us observe to a greater extent the commandments, you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, and suchlike things" (Hill 2001, 2:167). To be sure, elsewhere Theodoret does speak of the law in more negative terms, claiming that Israel did not actually encounter God at Sinai. He noted that the absence of any hint that indicates God's appearance suggests that "what they saw was not the God of all in person but some impression of the divine coming" (2001, 191). According to him, this occurred because Israel, instead of choosing God, preferred Moses. Consequently, God gave them the law at Sinai as a substitute for a direct heavenly revelation. Theodoret's interpretation suggests that the author of Hebrews is urging his audience not to emulate Israel's "crassness" or their choice to abandon God for Moses. As he writes, Hebrews "bids them not imitate their [Israel's] crassness nor abandon the Lord… like them who chose Moses instead of God" (2001, 192). Theodoret summarises his view by stating, "God gave them the law... not from heaven but on Mount Sinai" (2001, 192). In other words, by choosing Moses, Israel settled for a revelation mediated by a man on an earthly mountain, whereas Christians receive a superior revelation directly from God in the heavenly realm. On the other hand, Theodoret

[27] Lane summarises the present, common understanding of 12:18–24 as a juxtaposition, in which the author "juxtaposes Sinai and Zion in order to contrast the old and the new covenants, with their respective mediators (12:18–24; cf. 3:1–6; 8:5–13; 9:15–23; 10:28–31)… the distance that separated worshipers from God under the old covenant (12:20–21; cf. 9:1–10; 10:1–3, 11) in striking contrast to the unrestricted access to God through worship that is the hallmark of life under the new covenant (12:22–24; cf. 4:15–16; 9:11–14; 10:10, 12–14, 19–22)" (1991, 448).

to Zion, and thus was never meant to be the destination.[28] Similarly, Ramantswana concludes that "Mount Sinai is transitory in character and of limited significance whereas Mount Zion as a destination has perpetual significance."[29] In other words, Sinai does not necessarily have to be viewed negatively; rather, it was always intended to point forward to the fuller revelation brought by Jesus' testimony and sacrifice. Sinai was indeed significant, but the advent of the new covenant signifies a shift in focus in Hebrews, rendering Sinai a mountain of the past that is left in the rearview mirror.[30]

A more sympathetic reading of Sinai, however, is found among scholars such as Thiessen, who maintains that the law given at Sinai is neither transformed nor superseded in Hebrews. Rather, it continues to function validly within the earthly realm, while Jesus' priesthood operates in a distinct sphere, namely, the heavenly realm.[31] On this reading, Zion does not reinterpret or replace Sinai; instead, Sinai remains a legitimate revelation, complete with its law and covenant, within its proper earthly domain. The contrast in Hebrews, then, is "not intend to compare and contrast two different religions. Instead, the author intends to compare two different cultic centers"[32]—one earthly and one heavenly. I will return to these perspectives in greater detail later. For the present, it is sufficient to note that although Sinai

[28] As Ndzi concludes, "Sinai was a surety that God was going to bring his delivered people into the promised land. But it also showed that the people had to be willing to follow God in faith throughout the wilderness journey" (2018, 180).

[29] Ramantswana 2013, 118.

[30] This view is summarised quite well by Attridge when he writes, "Sinai and the Law associated with it, high points in the history of God's dealings with Israel, have their primary value for Hebrews as pointers to the 'good things to come'" (2010, 313). Furthermore, according to Lindars, the function of 12:18–21 is to describe the progress of "God's plan of salvation" (1991, 115). This multi-step plan of salvation which includes the revelation of the law at Sinai, "reached the person of Jesus" and now "waits to be completed in us at the Parousia" (1991, 115). The comparison between Sinai and Zion is therefore the contrast between two steps along the journey of salvation, on route to a final eschatological rest. So, Lindar comments, 12:18–29 is about "a matter of living in the present in the light of the future, because the completion of God's plan of salvation has already been reached in the person of Jesus, though it still waits to be completed" (1991, 115).

[31] Thiessen 2019.

[32] Thiessen 2019, 194.

has often been marginalised in interpretation, recent scholarship has begun to reconsider its significance within Hebrews.

Given the historically dismissed and often negative emphasis on Sinai in Hebrews, it is not surprising that only a handful of works have specifically addressed its role within the epistle. To my knowledge, three works exist on this topic: Son (2005), Kibbe (2016), and Stolz (2018). In due course, I will engage with these works in detail. For now, I highlight only that all three authors focus primarily on Heb 12:18–29, the text's most explicit and extended allusion to Sinai.

Son, for example, centres on the juxtaposition of Sinai and Zion in Heb 12:18–24 as a hermeneutical key for understanding the epistle. As a result, Son interprets the negative references throughout the epistle as correlating with Sinai (e.g., 6:4–6; 9:14; 10:1), while the positive aspects are linked with Zion (e.g., 8:6–13; 10:19–24).

Kibbe's analysis also centres on Heb 12:18–21, but his primary interest lies in the author's portrayal of the Sinaitic theophany and the invitation to ascend Mount Zion instead of Sinai. While his work significantly advanced the understanding of Sinai's role in Hebrews, Kibbe mainly focused on how Hebrews presents Jesus as the audience's mediator, in alignment with his analysis of Israel's request for a mediator in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Although Kibbe's analysis of Sinai in the Pentateuch is outstanding, his treatment of Sinai outside of chapter 12 is somewhat limited.

More recently, Stolz has offered what is, in my opinion, the most comprehensive exegetical treatment of Heb 12:18–29 to date. He concludes that this passage, which he describes as "der Höhepunkt des Hebräerbriefs" (the climax of Hebrews), unifies the entire epistle. In his view, Heb 12:18–29 uniquely gathers the letter's central theological themes and issues a decisive call for the audience to follow Jesus and remain faithful to him.

While these works are enormously valuable, they have two central limitations. First, none of them offers a comprehensive study on the use of Sinai throughout the entire epistle. Both Kibbe and Soltz focus primarily on chapter 12 and do not extensively explore the broader implications of Sinai in the earlier sections of Hebrews. Kibbe, for one, acknowledges this limitation, noting that his primary attention is on the role of mediators in both the Pentateuch and Hebrews, rather than on a detailed exploration of Sinai throughout the entire epistle.[33] Similarly, Son's work, as indicated by the title of his book, is more interested in Hebrews' depiction of Zion than of Sinai.

A second limitation of these works is that, by focusing on the portrayal of Sinai in Heb 12:18–24, they construct an image of Sinai in Hebrews based on the comparison between Sinai and Zion presented at the end of the epistle. This approach effectively starts from the end and works backward to interpret earlier references to Sinai throughout. I believe this method does not fully account for the epistle's portrayal and use of Sinai from its inception. In this project, I argue that a more comprehensive understanding of Sinai in Hebrews is achieved by following the epistle's natural progression, moving from its opening chapters, where we find the first allusion to Sinai (2:2), to its end. After all, the author's description of his work as "a word of exhortation" (13:22) may suggest that Hebrews' development should be appreciated sequentially. I propose a more systematic approach to understanding Sinai's role in Hebrews by beginning with the opening chapters and progressing through the epistle.

1.4. Consequences

Five key implications arise from this study. First, this project emerges within a broader trend in New Testament (NT) studies that reassesses the significance of Sinai across various texts,

[33] Kibbe 2016, 138–81.

including the epistles of Paul[34] and the Gospel of John.[35] By exploring new interpretive possibilities, specifically within Hebrews, this project contributes to an expanding dialogue that views Sinai as a fertile ground for scholarly exploration.

Second, by proposing that Hebrews presents the events of Sinai in a positive light, I open the door to suggest that the revelation at Sinai retains its validity beyond the establishment of the new covenant. This perspective calls for the revaluation of the role of Torah in Hebrews. Contrary to traditional interpretations that depict the Torah as obsolete following the advent of the new covenant, recognising the positive depiction of Sinai in Hebrews compels us to reconsider Torah as not only valid but also as a positive and enduring revelation from Sinai, one that the audience of Hebrews was still expected to uphold.

The third outcome of this project is that it reinforces the view that Hebrews can be fruitfully interpreted alongside Second Temple Jewish literature. As I will detail in the upcoming chapters, the initial sections of the epistle invoke the Sinai event in ways that echo other Jewish texts. Building on the work of scholars like Boyarin (2016), Docherty (2009), Flusser (2009), and Gelardini (2007), who have highlighted Hebrews' Jewish exegetical and literary characteristics, my analysis positions Hebrews squarely within Jewish literary traditions. It asserts that Hebrews engages with distinct Jewish rhetorical patterns and devices, making it a text that can be legitimately and insightfully studied as part of Jewish literature.

Relatedly, a fourth consequence of my research is that it aligns with recent voices challenging the traditional view of Hebrews as a supersessionist text. Contrary to the conventional approach, which interprets references to Sinai in Hebrews as efforts to dissuade people from Judaism, my argument is that the author views the Sinai narrative as a positive and valid revelation given to God's people. In fact, the author understands the message of Jesus as

[34] Harris 1996; Wilk 2020.

[35] Käfer 2019.

building upon, rather than departing from, the revelation at Sinai. As a result, the narrative of Sinai is not a negative event from which one should distance oneself. Instead, I propose a different narrative function, where Sinai is depicted not as a place to abandon but as a crucial framework for understanding the theme of the "waiting people of God." This perspective alters how we might view the epistle's approach to the relationship between the believing audience and their neighbouring Jewish communities. As I will elaborate later, Hebrews does not necessarily equate Judaism with apostasy.

Finally, by emphasising the moment when Israel is stationary at the foot of Sinai awaiting Moses' return, this study challenges the widespread assumption that "wandering" serves as the primary paradigm for understanding the experience of Hebrews' audience. While the generation delivered from slavery did eventually wander in the wilderness, that wandering represents divine judgment rather than the intended trajectory of Israel's redemption. By contrast, the audience of Hebrews is admonished to persevere in faith precisely so that they do not share Israel's fate and fail to enter God's promised rest.

Accordingly, the epistle does not primarily portray its recipients as a people traversing through the wilderness of life, but rather as a community called to wait faithfully for the return of their heavenly intercessor. In this respect, theologically, the project nuances common depictions of Hebrews as a text chiefly concerned with pilgrimage toward a final destination. While Hebrews certainly employs journey imagery, its ultimate hope is oriented not toward believers travelling to Jesus, but toward Jesus' return to his people from the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, Hebrews is centrally concerned with waiting well rather than journeying well.

1.5. Outline of This Research

The structure of this study is guided by the premise that Hebrews can be effectively analysed sequentially. This approach draws support from the author's own characterisation of his work

as a "word of exhortation" (13:22), a term also used in Acts 13:15 in the context of delivering a sermon.[36] While the precise genre of Hebrews remains debated and this study does not assert that it is strictly a sermon, the designation ὁ λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως[37] suggests a sequential reading could be beneficial. Accordingly, the analysis proceeds through the epistle from chapter 1 to chapter 13.

Chapter 2: The Sinai Narrative and Angels

This chapter initiates our exploration through Hebrews, focusing on the epistle's first two chapters. My primary goal is to anchor Hebrews within the context of Second Temple Jewish literature which invokes the Sinai narrative right from the start. Drawing on Najman's work on "Seconding Sinai," I aim to demonstrate that Hebrews employs the Sinai story as a foundational backdrop story upon which a narrative takes form. In doing so, I begin highlighting the theme of the waiting people of God, which, as I will explore, is introduced early in the text.

Additionally, this chapter lays the foundation for understanding how the Sinai event informs the epistle's depiction of the interconnection between the heavenly and earthly realms. I will begin to explore how the author presents Jesus as traversing these realms at his exaltation, thus constructing the pathway that enables believers to transition from this world into the presence of God's glory. In this analysis, special focus will be placed on the author's statement in 2:10, where it is noted that Jesus was made perfect through suffering to "bring many children to glory."

[36] Koester 2001, 80–81.

[37] This and all subsequent Greek NT quotations are taken from the NA28, unless otherwise noted.

Chapter 3: The Sinai Narrative, Moses, and the Audience's Ascent of Sinai

This chapter explores how recognising Sinai's role in Hebrews illuminates the connection between Jesus' high priesthood in the heavenly realm and Moses' interactions at the heavenly tabernacle. I argue that the author positions Moses and Jesus within the same heavenly realm that Moses experienced atop Sinai. That is, when Jesus ascended, he, like Moses, entered the heavenly tabernacle to intercede for the people below. The author utilises the comparison between the Israelites at Sinai and the Jesus-believing community to underscore the need for patience and faithfulness. Unlike the Israelite generation, which failed to enter the Promised Land due to unbelief despite standing at the foot of mount Sinai, the audience of Hebrews is reminded that they still have a promised rest awaiting them. The argument unfolds by exploring the fulfilment of the expectation of Exod 19:13 for ascending Sinai—unlike their forebears, Hebrews' audience faces no barriers like clouds or trumpets and thus can ascend directly into God's presence. This ascent is framed as an entry into the heavenly tabernacle, akin to Moses' experience.

This chapter illustrates how the Sinai event, serving as a controlling image in Hebrews, helps clarify the author's thematic transitions. Portraying the audience as stationed at the foot of Sinai, eagerly awaiting the return of their intercessor, enables the author to transition smoothly from the initial discussion of angels (1:5–2:18) to Moses (3:1–4:13). I argue that this shift is not a random segue between comparative figures in a series of "Jesus is better than" propositions, but rather a coherent progression from the earthly location at Sinai's foot to the heavenly role of the intercessor above.

Chapter 4: The Sinai Narrative and the Audience's Purification

By this point in the study, a question may arise in the reader's mind: is Hebrews primarily about the waiting people of God or the ascending people of God? This question emerges

because, in chapters two and three, I argue that the author envisions the audience as able to ascend into heaven, following in the footsteps of Jesus and Moses. As a result, one might question the kind of waiting the author envisions, if waiting is indeed the most accurate description of the audience's experience. To address this, the primary goal of this chapter is to further explore the nature of the audience's invitation and their ability to ascend into the heavenly inner shrine.

This chapter investigates Hebrews' presentation of its audience as already possessing the perfection necessary for immediate entry into the heavenly holy of holies. Building on the Sinai narrative as a theological backdrop, the chapter argues that "perfection" in Hebrews is best understood in terms of ritual purification achieved through Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation. This perfection not only qualified Jesus for his role as heavenly high priest but also grants believers priestly privileges, including access "behind the curtain" into God's heavenly dwelling. By tracing the nine occurrences of τελειόω and examining key exhortations to "draw near," the study contends that Hebrews envisions its audience as active participants in the heavenly tabernacle now, inhabiting both earthly and heavenly realms simultaneously.

Chapter 5: The Sinai Narrative, Torah, and the Levitical Priesthood

The fifth chapter explores how the Sinai event functions as a backdrop for discussing Jesus' priesthood and the new covenant—central themes within this text. Traditionally, these discussions in Hebrews are interpreted as dismissing the Sinai event and Torah. Phrases such as a "change of law" (7:12) and the assertion that "the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities" (10:1) are often viewed as the author's repudiation of Torah.

However, I posit that the author does not signal the dismissal of the Torah and the Sinai covenant by these words, but rather the introduction of new, heavenly realities alongside the

existing earthly ones. The Sinai law retains its earthly relevance, paralleled by a new heavenly priesthood akin to the Melchizedekian order that does not annul the Levitical priesthood. I then turn to develop the notion that the community of Hebrews is depicted as under the influence of both realms, just like Moses at Sinai, who accessed heavenly realities while on earth. This dual aspect of law and priesthood suggests an ongoing, interconnected relationship between the earthly and heavenly, a theme that contrasts with other scholars who also recognise the continuity of the Torah's relevance but do not explore the implications of this dual-realm interaction as extensively.

Chapter 6: The Sinai Narrative and the Audience's Arrival at Zion

In Chapter 6, we delve into Hebrews' most comprehensive discussion of Sinai. Unlike prevailing interpretations that view the contrast between Sinai and Zion as illustrating a transition to an entirely different realm, my analysis suggests that both Israel at Sinai and the audience of Hebrews have encountered God in the heavenly tabernacle. The distinction between Sinai and Zion, then, lies not in their nature but in accessibility. At Zion, the faithful are invited to ascend the mountain as Moses once did at Sinai, where, by contrast, the people were kept at a distance by dark clouds and thunder. Thus, the key difference is in the accessibility to the heavenly tabernacle, not in the nature of the places themselves. Like two different bridges that connect the same two pieces of land, the analogy between Sinai and Zion highlights not disparate destinations but the means of reaching the same divine presence.

Chapter 7: The Sinai Narrative and Going Outside the Camp

Focusing on Heb 13:8–16, this chapter argues that the audience performs priestly actions—such as partaking of an altar, bearing the reproach of Christ, and offering sacrifices of praise—that have both earthly and heavenly dimensions. These actions, though performed in the visible

world, are shown to participate in the realities of the heavenly tabernacle, reinforcing the thesis that the audience lives in a liminal state, positioned between earth and heaven. By returning to the imagery of Sinai and priesthood, this chapter demonstrates that access to the heavenly inner shrine is not only the privilege of Christ but also the calling of the community.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Chapter eight draws the study to a close by reviewing the argument developed across each chapter and revisiting the central research question. It reflects on how Hebrews employs the Sinai narrative as an ongoing literary and theological framework, shaping the identity of the community as those who wait, worship, and draw near. The chapter also engages broader considerations, including early Christian receptions of Sinai and implications for further research, while reaffirming that the Sinai motif remains central—not peripheral—to Hebrews' message.

Chapter 2
The Sinai Narrative and Angels

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to begin tracing the theme of Sinai throughout Hebrews, starting with the opening chapters. Although it is one of the shortest chapters of the project, it is crucial in demonstrating that the author alludes to Sinai not only at the end of the epistle (12:18–22) but as early as the opening chapters. Furthermore, these early allusions to Sinai play a significant role in shaping the epistle's initial arguments. To this end, two primary questions guide my argument at this point: (a) when does the author of Hebrews first employ the narrative of Sinai in his epistle? (b) how much theological significance does he attach to these allusions?

The first question is about quantity: how many references or allusions to Sinai can be identified in the opening two chapters of Hebrews? To that end, this chapter will identify several instances in the opening chapters where Sinai is alluded to, either directly or indirectly. However, my primary focus will be on the epistle's clearest initial allusion to Sinai in 2:2 ("a message declared by angels").

Naturally, not all these allusions carry the same weight, which brings us to the second question concerning their qualitative importance: how significant is the reference of Sinai to the author as he develops his initial arguments? I will contend that the comment about Sinai's message as alluded to in 2:2 is not a mere side remark but plays an important role in the ongoing discussion of the Son's supremacy over angels. Additionally, the allusion to Sinai in the opening chapters sets the stage for the direction the author takes in chapter three, where he compares Moses and Jesus (3:1–5). By tracing this development, I will show that the Sinai narrative helps explain the thematic transition from angels (1:5–2:18) to Moses. The comparison between Moses and Jesus is the logical next step, as the author has already implicitly introduced the two mountains—Sinai and Zion—and now shifts to the individuals who ascend them.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first addresses the two questions regarding the quantity and significance of allusions to Sinai in Hebrews 1 and 2. I will focus specifically on the message of angels (2:2) and argue for its importance within the broader logic of the author. This exegetical approach sets the stage for the eventual conclusion that the author strategically alludes to the Sinai narrative early in the epistle, showing that the Sinai event is not a mere aside but is instead integral to the author's argument from the outset.

The second section suggests a possible connection to a Second Temple literary tendency, often referred to as "Mosaic Discourse," as a way to explain the significant emphasis on the Sinai narrative in the development of the epistle. While my intention is not to reclassify Hebrews as part of the so-called "Mosaic Discourse," I will explore various points of contact that raise the question of whether Hebrews participates in a broader Second Temple Jewish literary pattern—one in which Mosaic figures and themes are reimagined—and how such a pattern might help situate Hebrews in conversation with other Second Temple texts.

2.2. A "Message Declared by Angels" in Heb 2:2

The first obvious reference to Sinai in Hebrews appears in 2:2, where the author reinforces the urgency of the exhortation in 2:1—"pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away"—by recalling the consequences for those who disobeyed "the message declared through angels (ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος)."[1]

[1] For a study on the history of the interpretation of angels at Sinai, see Najman 2000. It is important to note at this point that in the first two chapters of Hebrews, the author references angels eleven times (1:4, 5, 6, 7, 13; 2:2, 5, 7, 9, 16), a stark contrast to only two mentions elsewhere in the epistle (12:22; 13:2). While the last two mentions of angels may initially appear detached from the use of angels at the beginning of the epistle, I will argue that they are, in fact, related to how the author introduces and utilises the theme of angels in the opening chapters.

There is little debate that the reference to "the message declared by angels" in Heb 2:2 alludes to the giving of the law at Sinai.[2] Texts like Deut 33:2 depict God as coming from Sinai (εἶπεν Κύριος ἐκ Σινα) along with his angels (ἄγγελοι μετ' αὐτοῦ).[3] In *Jubilees*, while it is God who calls Moses to ascend Sinai (Jub. 1:3), it is the "angel of the presence" (מלאך הפנים [Jub 1:37]) who interacts with Moses and gives him the law.[4] Josephus notes that Israel "learned from God the most excellent of our teachings, and the most holy part of our law by angels (δι' ἀγγέλων)" (*Ant*. 15.36). Similarly, Philo suggests that when Israel requested an intermediary at Sinai, asking, "Do not let God speak to us, or we will die" (Exod 20:19), God sent angels to serve as intermediaries, delivering the law to them (*Dreams* 1.140–44).[5]

Texts in the NT also reflect this understanding of the law being given by angels. In Gal 3:19, Paul writes that the law was "ordained through angels by a mediator." Whether the prepositional phrase "through angels" (δι' ἀγγέλων) is causal (angels instituted the law) or instrumental (angels were the means through which the law was given), Paul views angels as playing a role in the giving of the law at Sinai.[6] In Acts 7, Stephen echoes this view, stating that Moses spoke with an angel at Sinai: "an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai… the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai" (Acts 7:30, 38). Later, Stephen remarks that the law Israel received at Sinai was also given by angels, saying, "You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels" (τὸν νόμον εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων, Acts 7:53).[7]

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[2] See Lane 1991a, 38; Reed 2020, 252. There are some that think otherwise, like Silberman, who suggest that the "angels" in Heb 2:2 is a reference to the prophets previously mentioned in Heb 1:1 (1981, 98–99). For an interaction with Silberman's view, see Johnson 2006, 87.

[3] The exact meaning of the phrase קֹדֶשׁ מֵרִבְבֹת אֵשְׁדָּת לָמוֹ (Deut 33:2) is unclear and therefore those who come with God could either be people or divine agents, see Tigay 1996, 320; Merrill 1994, 435 However, the LXX does identify them as angels (ἄγγελοι). Other texts which depict angels as present at Sinai include Ps 68:17 (Ps 67:18 LXX) and Exod 3:2.

[4] This and all subsequent translations from *Jubilees* are taken from VanderKam 2018a; 2018b.

[5] Translation taken from Colson and Whitaker 1934, 373.

[6] For a discussion on the use of the prepositional phrase δι' ἀγγέλων, see Martyn 2004, 356–57.

[7] It is unclear whether the author understood the law to be delivered by angels or if the law was constituted by angels; see Fletcher-Louis 1997, 98–107.

If it is accepted that the "message declared by angels" (2:2) refers to the law given to Israel at Sinai, then the *a fortiori*[8] argument of the surrounding exhortation (2:1–4) becomes clear. The author reasons that if the message delivered at Sinai was significant enough to warrant punishment for disobedience—"every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty" (2:2)—then how much more serious would be the consequences of neglecting the greater revelation now announced by the Lord himself,[9] confirmed by those who heard him,[10] and attested by God and the Holy Spirit through signs, wonders, and various gifts (2:3–4).[11]

2.2.1. Sinai before and after Heb 2:2

While the above conclusion that "the message declared by angels" (2:2) refers to the Sinai event is relatively uncontroversial, determining the extent to which the Sinai narrative shapes the author's argument up to this point proves far more complex. Broadly speaking, scholarship is divided between those who view the exhortation in 2:1–4 as a parenthetical aside[12]—treating the Sinai reference as only loosely connected to its literary context—and those who regard 2:1–4 as integral to the epistle's opening logic. I tend to align with the latter. In brief, the exhortation in 2:1–4, introduced by the clause διὰ τοῦτο (2:1), which signals a logical continuation from the preceding discussion—particularly the role of angels as ministering spirits in 1:14[13]—and

[8] *A fortiori* is a Latin phrase used for "all the more" or "even more so;" see Blackburn 2008. For an analysis on the use of *a fortiori* arguments in Jewish logic, including the use of Sinai's revelation, see Sion 2010.

[9] Though the author does not identify the Son as Jesus until 2:9, there is little doubt that κύριος in 2:3 refers to Jesus (cf. 7:14; 8:2; 12:14); see Spicq 1952, 27; Attridge 1989, 66.

[10] Whether "those who heard him" (2:3) should be understood as an indication that the audience belonged to a second generation of Christians (Vanhoye 1969, 49), the author understands the role of "the hearers" (τῶν ἀκουσάντων) to be one of confirmation.

[11] Some, like Spicq (1952, 28), have speculated that the author conveys a trinitarian theology, referencing God, the Lord, and the Holy Spirit (2:3–4; cf. 6:4–6), though Attridge (1989, 67–68) disagrees.

[12] For example, Buchanan argued that 2:1–4 disrupted not only the literary argument but, more importantly, the theological argument the author intended to develop at this point, namely, the exaltation of the Son at his ascension (1972, 81). Synge viewed 2:1–4 as such a literary interruption to the flow of the text that he suggested it may have been a later addition (1959, 45).

[13] The exact antecedent of διὰ τοῦτο (2:1) has been a subject of debate, partly because the author's use of illative particles is, as Attridge notes, "rather loose," with terms like γάρ, οὖν, διό, and ὅθεν being employed without strict consistency (1989, 63). However, the phrase διὰ τοῦτο appears again in Hebrews only in 9:15: "For

centred on the theme of divine speech,[14] suggests that the reference to Sinai in 2:2 is not incidental but contributes meaningfully to the author's unfolding argument.[15]

However, granting that the exhortation of 2:1–4 forms part of the author's developing logic necessitates an assessment of how the allusion to Sinai functions within the broader argumentative structure, encompassing both the context leading up to the mention of "the message declared by angels" in 2:2 and the implications thereafter.

One could approach this question from several angles. For instance, by identifying the Son as the "reflection of God's glory" (ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης [1:3]), it could be argued that the author evokes Moses' own radiance of God's glory as he descended from Sinai (Exod 34:29–35).[16] The images of Zion as the place where the Son is enthroned could be seen as helping set up the eventual comparison between Zion and Sinai (12:18–24), implying that Sinai—though not explicitly mentioned in Hebrews 1—is continuously in the author's mind as

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this reason (διὰ τοῦτο) he is the mediator of a new covenant." There, διὰ τοῦτο links back to Christ's work as high priest (9:11–14), particularly his sacrifice. If διὰ τοῦτο is being used in a similar manner in both cases, we can conclude that διὰ τοῦτο in 2:1 refers both to the preceding verse (1:14) and to the broader argument of 1:1–14; see Ellingworth 1993, 135; Johnson 2006, 86.

[14] For a discussion on this, see Grässer 1992; DeSilva 2000, 104.

[15] Based on these connections, Koester concludes that 2:1–4 is so closely tied to its preceding context that it must belong to the epistle's opening discourse and be part of the first literary unit extending back to Heb 1:1. As a result, Koester argues that Hebrews' exordium extends from 1:1 all the way through to 2:4 (2001, 174–75). Lane argues something similar, though with much less force than Koester. For Lane, the "thematic connection between 1:1–4 and 2:1–4 needs to be appreciated. If God, in the final period of history, has spoken *to us* (ἡμῖν) his ultimate word in the Son (1:2*a*), then *we* (ἡμᾶς) must pay the closest attention to what has been heard (2:1)" (1991a, 37). Furthermore, Koester draws on Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (4.1.5; c.f., *Rhet. ad Her.* 1.4.6) to point out that ancient rhetorical exordiums were not necessarily brief but could be extended as needed to engage the audience. As Quintilian remarks, "We shall therefore use various forms of Composition in the Prooemium, depending on the sense required (*Itaque componemus prohoemium varie atque ut sensus eius postulabit*)" (*Inst.* 9.4.132); translation taken from Russell 2001. Koester also points to Paul's long and multipart introduction in Romans (Rom 1:1–15) as a possible comparison for Hebrews' exordium. Like Hebrews, Paul begins with a complex sentence (Rom 1:1–6; c.f., Heb 1:1–4) and follows the introduction (Rom 1:7–15; c.f., Heb 1:5–2:4) by presenting the epistle's main thesis (Rom 1:16–17; c.f., Heb 2:5–9); see Koester 2001, 174, n. 15. Of course, whether Koester is right in concluding that 2:1–4 belongs structurally to the same section as 1:1–14 is part of a broader discussion on the epistle's outline, which falls outside the scope of this study. For a study on this topic, see, for example, Guthrie 1994; Vanhoye 1976; Westfall 2005.

[16] As Vanhoye concludes, "La théophanie du Sinaï, où, selon Dt 5,22–24, le peuple pense avoir vu Dieu et sa gloire, est présentée en Heb 12,18–24 comme une expérience religieuse d'ordre inférieur, surclassée désormais par l'initiation chrétienne. Il convient donc de comprendre ici la «gloire» au sens fort, comme une désignation de la nature de Dieu" (1969, 73–74). Mitchell also alludes to Sinai, citing from Exod 33:18–19 to explain what the author seeks to describe (2009, 37–38).

he draws attention to Zion.[17] If Moses is considered one of the prophets through whom God spoke to the audience's ancestors (1:1), then the author begins the epistle by comparing Moses' prophetic role at Sinai to the Son's revelation in these last days (1:2).[18] Additionally, the phrase περισσοτέρως προσέχειν ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσιν in 2:1 may be following a pattern commonly found in the Pentateuch, where the verbs προσέχω and ἀκούω are often accompanied by a warning about the consequences of disobedience (e.g., Exod 19:12; 34:12; Deut 4:9, 23; 6:12; 8:11; 11:16; 12:23, 30; 15:9; 32:46).[19]

While these interpretations offer potentially valuable points of contact between Heb 1:1–14 and the Sinai narrative, they are not without their challenges. For instance, the "reflection of God's glory" (1:3) could be understood as referring not to Sinai but to Lady Wisdom, as described in Wis 7:26 ("she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness").[20] Furthermore, there is no clear indication that Moses is the only prophet being referred to in 1:1, and the reference to Zion in 1:5–14 is not immediately obvious either.

[17] Son 2005, 22–32.

[18] The argument goes: the primary group the author has in mind when he refers to the audience's "ancestors" (1:1) is the generation of Israel that left Egypt (3:7–4:11), and who spoke God's word to them? Moses. Therefore, the argument follows that Moses is the chief prophet in view here; see Grässer 1984, 17.

[19] We could point to some scholars who have concluded that the author's words in 2:1 ("we must pay greater attention to what we have heard") are meant to point readers to the Sinai event. Moore, for example, suggest that the author is alluding to Exod 23:20–21 at this point, as both texts are introduced by a reference to angels (2017, 104). In Exodus, after identifying the angel who will guard and guide Israel to the promised land (Exod 23:20), the text commands, "Be attentive (πρόσεχε) to him [the angel] and listen (εἰσάκουε) to his voice; do not rebel against him (μὴ ἀπείθει)" (Exod 23:21), and then warns of the consequences of disobeying the angel (Exod 23:21). Similarly, Heb 2:1–4 follows the same pattern: the author uses προσέχω (2:1), followed by a command to obey (2:2), and then a warning about what will happen if people do not obey (2:2–3). Alternatively, one could also point to Deut 4:23 as another candidate of an OT text in the mind of the author in Heb 2:1. In Deut 4:23, people are told to 'be careful' (προσέχετε) to 'not forget the covenant that the Lord your God made with you' (μὴ ἐπιλάθησθε τὴν διαθήκην κύριου τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν). Not only is the term διαθήκη frequently seen in Hebrews, but a verse later, Deuteronomy 4:24, is quoted in 12:29 to speak of God as 'consuming fire' (ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκον). Even another option, as Allen suggests, is that Deut 32:46 is being referenced in Heb 2:1 (2010, 192).

[20] See Attridge 1989, 42; DeSilva 2000, 88; Mackie 2008, 438.

Therefore, a more fruitful approach for this study is to focus on two demonstrably stronger connections between the Sinai narrative, as referenced in Heb 2:2, and its surrounding context, both of which are sufficient to support the argument: (1) the allusion to angels as servants in 1:14, and (2) the author's comparison between the earthly and heavenly realms throughout chapters one and two, with particular emphasis in 2:5–10. I now turn to the first of these two connections: the depiction of angels as servants at Sinai in 1:4–2:4.

2.2.1.1. Angels as Servants at Sinai

Throughout the second part of Hebrews chapter one (1:5–14) the author compiles a series of OT texts to emphasise that the Son is superior (κρείττων) to angels. He argues that angels are God's servants (λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ [1:7]) and "ministering spirits" (λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα [1:14]), while the Son is exalted (1:3, 6), seated on a throne from which he governs all things (1:8, 13). As the author summarises: "he [the Son] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels (τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων) as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs" (1:3–4).

However, the author does not emphasise the Son's superiority as he arrives at the end of the catena in 1:14. Instead, the focus is on angels' role as servants to humanity: they are "sent to serve for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν [1:14]).[21] This is not the first time the concept of inheritance (κληρονομέω) appears in the epistle. In 1:4, it is the Son who inherits

[21] Attridge 1989, 62, n. 148; see also DeSilva 2000, 102. Because the use of σωτηρία and its cognates in Hebrews always refer to people's salvation in a spiritual, eschatological way (2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 7:25; 9:28 [Only in 5:7 and 11:7 is σωτηρία used to speak of liberation of physical harm]) it seems safe to assume that those whom angels serve are people. This makes sense of the following section, where the author moves to speak of his audience as recipients of salvation (2:3–4) and as God's children and Jesus' brothers and sisters (2:10–11). That those whom angels serve are humans is also seen in the use of μέλλω (1:14). Whenever the author of Hebrews uses μέλλω, it is in the context of speaking about the heavenly realm (2:5; 6:5; 8:5; 10:1, 27; 11:8, 20; 13:14). In those instances, it is people who anticipate the promise of salvation. As Vanhoye comments, it builds the bridge between the "situation du Christ" in chapter one to the "situation des chrétiens" in Chapter 2 (1969, 227).

(κεκληρονόμηκεν) something from God, namely a name greater than angels. Now, at the conclusion of the catena, it is not the Son but humanity that is identified as inheritors, not of a name but of salvation.

That angels are considered servants to humans is also seen it the epistle's final mention of angels, where the author urges, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it" (13:2). The author is probably alluding to the story of Abraham and Sarah, who unknowingly hosted angelic visitors (Gen 18:2–15; c.f., Philo, *Abr*. 107–13; Josephus, *Ant*. 1.196), a story the author had previously referenced in 11:11. Even if the author has in mind another story of angelic visitation, such as visitations to Lot (Gen 19:1–14), Gideon (Judg 6:11–21), Manoah and his wife (Judg 13:2–20), and Tobit (Tob 5:4; 12:1–20), or even Graeco-Roman traditions of divine guests (e.g., Ovid, Metam. 8.620–724), all of them share a common tradition that angelic visitors arrive to provide some sort of benefit to those who entertain them.[22] In the case of Abraham and Sarah, thanks to their hospitality the angels promised them they would have a child (Gen 18:10). The author is then eager for the community to dispose themselves of the possibility of receiving angelic visitors because of the fact that they were sent to serve them as inheritors of salvation.[23] Said differently, just as angels are depicted as ministering spirits sent to serve in 1:14, by welcoming strangers, as instructed in 13:2, people may unknowingly host the very angels who have been sent into the world to serve them.[24]

[22] For a discussion on the possibility of these various accounts, see DeSilva 2000, 488.

[23] Koester 2008, 564.

[24] Some have argued that the author, by changing the verbs between λειτουρέω to describe the angels' servanthood to God (1:7) and διακονία their service to humans (1:14), seeks to further stress angels' inferiority. As Johnson concludes, "The status of the angels is therefore reduced even further: their 'ministry' (*leitourgia*) is not one of worship around the throne, but one of service (*diakonia*) to humans" (2006, 82). However, it is not entirely evident that διακονία indicates even greater inferiority in Hebrews. The audience, for example, is praised because of their service to others (6:10). Jesus is also depicted as one who became human so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest "in the service of God" (2:17). That angels serve humans must not necessarily mean an even lower position. In fact, in 2:7 the author quotes from Psalm 8 to indicate the opposite. Even though the Son aided humans and not angels (2:16), people are still described as being "lower than the angels" (2:7).

A possible question one might raise at this point is: how does the emphasis on angels' servanthood in 1:14 relate to its immediate antecedent, the quotation of Ps 110:1 in 1:13 ("to which of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?'")? Though much could be said of the use of Ps 110 in Hebrews,[25] I only note that Hebrews, like other Second Temple Jewish texts, understands angels' service to humanity as one that includes assisting God in subduing his enemies. In the Book of Daniel, for example, God's angels surround the throne to aid him in bringing judgement to people (Dan 7:10).[26] A similar image appears in Jude 14 and 15, where, quoting from *1 Enoch* 1.9, the author writes, "The Lord is coming with ten thousand of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all" (c.f., *1 En.* 40.1; 71.8; *2 En.* 40.3). And, as already mentioned, both Deut 33:2 and Ps 68:17 (Ps 67:18 LXX) describe God as coming to Sinai surrounded by an innumerable number of angels to protect his people and judge his enemies.[27] Therefore, the difference between angels and the Son in Heb 1:13 is that angels, unlike the Son, are not seated at the right hand of God but were sent to assist God in subduing his enemies. Their service towards those who are meant to inherit salvation (1:14) includes serving God in subduing his enemies.

Returning to the topic at hand, since angels were sent to serve humans meant to inherit salvation (1:14), it comes as no surprise that they were present at Sinai since the generation of Israel there gathered were themselves also destined to inherit from God. In fact, the two other two uses of "inherit" (κληρονομέω) in Hebrews (besides 1:4 and 1:14), refer to the audience's

[25] See, for example, Anderson 2000; Wallace 2003; Compton 2015.

[26] Although Daniel does not use the word ἄγγελος, several scholars have identified the innumerable beings around the heavenly throne room as angels, see Newsom 2014, 226–31.

[27] It comes as no surprise that some Jewish apocalyptic traditions, like the Book of the Watchers, depict Sinai as the place where the Lord would carry out judgment: "The Great Holy One will come forth from his dwelling, and the eternal God will tread from thence upon Mount Sinai. He will appear with his army, he will appear with his mighty host from the heaven of heavens" (*1 En*. 1.4); This and all subsequent translations from 1 Enoch are taken from Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012.

ancestors, who, like them, were meant to inherit promises to salvation (6:12), or, as was the case of Esau, failed to inherit the blessing promised him (12:17).

If my argument thus far is correct, then the mention of Sinai in 2:2 does not look as an incidental remark but rather an integral part of an ongoing argument about angels' servanthood that the author develops as he progresses to that point. The generation of Israel gathered at Sinai, like the audience being addressed, was a group of people meant to inherit something from God: promised rest in the case of Israel (3:19) and salvation in the case of the audience (1:14). God sent angels to assist Israel by declaring his word at Sinai, just as he sent the Son to deliver his word to the audience. Because the audience, like that generation of Israel, was waiting for its inheritance of salvation, the author stresses the need to pay close attention to and obey the message it was now receiving. If the failure of Israel to heed the angels' message at Sinai—despite its validity—resulted in their rebellion (3:16), disobedience (3:18), and ultimately their inability to enter the promised rest (3:19), then the audience would fail to receive their inheritance of salvation if they too would fail to listen and obey (2:4–5). Or to summarise this conclusion in other words: just as angels were present at Sinai to minister to Israel by delivering the message that would guide them toward their promised inheritance, so too are angels present among the audience in Hebrews, serving them as they attain their salvation.[28]

[28] For a similar conclusion, see Peeler 2024, 69. This argument is further supported a few verses later in 2:16, where the author asserts that Jesus did not come to "help angels, but the descendants of Abraham." Like angels, who were sent from heaven to earth to serve those destined for salvation (1:14), Jesus also entered the world to help people (2:16). However, while angels served by declaring the law to people at Sinai, Jesus helped by becoming one of them and becoming a high priest on their behalf (2:17–18). To be clear, this does not mean that angels are no longer present now that Jesus is helping people (c.f., 13:2). What it means is that the audience is now the beneficiary of a much greater service than the service angels provided to people at Sinai. As DeSilva concludes, in 2:5–18 the author "speaks of Jesus' role as rescuer, deliverer, and protector of his clients in the new exodus from the shakeable realm and entrance into the 'rest' of God… It was by this means that God could make Jesus the most effective and sensitive helper and broker of God's favour that he could be" (2000, 120); see also Lane 1991a, 64.

2.2.1.2. Sinai and the Heavenly World

Having argued that the author of Hebrews intentionally connects angels as spirits sent to serve humanity (1:14) with the reference to angels' role at Sinai (2:2), I now turn to the second reason why I conclude that the allusion to Sinai in 2:2 is not a mere aside, but a deliberate component of the author's argument as he contends for the superiority of the Son.

After urging the audience to pay attention to the message they had received (2:1–4), the author writes, "God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels" (οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις ὑπέταξεν τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν, περὶ ἧς λαλοῦμεν [2:5]).[29] Unlike the present, earthly world, which other Second Temple texts portray as divided and subjected to angelic rule (e.g., Deut 32:8; *Jub*. 1:8, 18–19; 15:33; Sir. 17:17; 2 Kings 18:35),[30] the coming world, according to the author, is not under the authority of angels. Instead, their sphere of influence remains on this earth. Angels were sent (ἀποστέλλω [1:14]) from heaven to earth to serve people, and so the earthly realm is set under their influence. This explains why, at his incarnation, Jesus is said to have been made lower than the angels (ἠλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχύ τι παρ' ἀγγέλους [2:9]) because, by entering this world, he was entering a realm under angelic dominion.[31]

[29] Throughout Hebrews, the author frequently uses οὐ γὰρ to link a section to its immediate antecedent (e.g., 2:16; 4:15; 6:10; 9:24; 12:18; 13:14). In this instance, οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις (2:5) connects to the previous discussion of angels, particularly their role at Sinai in 2:2. This connection is further reinforced by the author's remark that the subject he is introducing—"the coming world" (2:5)—is something "about which we are speaking" (περὶ ἧς λαλοῦμεν), signaling continuity with his prior discussion. Worth noting, Ellingworth claims the opposite, suggesting that the phrase οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις builds upon the rhetorical questions of 1:5 (τίνι… τῶν ἀγγέλων) and 1:13 (πρὸς τίνα… τῶν ἀγγέλων) and therefore continues the theme of chapter one. As such, 2:1–4 is a parenthetical passage that interrupts the author's main argument; see Ellingworth 1993, 145.

[30] Lane 1991a, 45.

[31] Johnson 2006, 91. If the coming world is not subject to angels, then to whom is it subjected? The answer is provided in 2:9, where the author asserts that Jesus, having been made lower than angels at his incarnation, now rules from the heavenly realm: "We do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (2:9).

Jesus was made lower than angels but only for a little while (Heb 2:9). After his passion and resurrection, Jesus ascended into the coming heavenly world (οἰκουμένη [2:5])[32] where he was crowned with glory and honour (2:9). More will be said later about Jesus' exaltation and enthronement in the heavenly realm. For now, it is worth noting that at this point in the epistle the author for the first time introduces a theme that will be developed in greater detail as the letter progresses: people are meant to follow Jesus into the heavenly, coming world not subject to angels.

This invitation for people to enter the same heavenly realm into which Jesus was exalted is made explicit a verse later, in 2:10: "it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory (εἰς δόξαν), should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings." While it is true that the noun δόξα is used in a variety of ways throughout Scripture[33]—including within Hebrews itself, where it can refer to personal glory (Jesus' glory in 1:3; 2:7, 9), angelic glory (9:5), human glory (3:3), or glory directed toward Jesus (13:21)—the invitation for believers to enter into glory (εἰς δόξαν [2:10]) can most logically be read in close continuity with the cluster of uses of δόξα surrounding it (2:7–10). These references emphasise, among other things, the glory Jesus received at his exaltation: "you have crowned him with glory (δόξα) and honour" (2:7); "we see Jesus… crowned with

[32] The term οἰκουμένη ("world") first appears in 1:6, introducing a quotation from Ps 96 (LXX 95): "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world (εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην), he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" Several scholars interpret οἰκουμένη in 1:6 as referring to the physical world, suggesting that Jesus' entrance εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην alludes to his incarnation; for example, Spicq 1952, 17; Attridge 1989, 55–56. Another possibility, taken by Bateman, is that it refers to Jesus' baptism (1997, 222). However, this view presents a challenge, as the author later states in 2:5 that οἰκουμένην μέλλουσαν is a world "about which we are speaking," namely, the heavenly realm where Jesus is enthroned. It seems more consistent, then, to assume that οἰκουμένη in 1:6 and 2:5 refer to the same realm where Jesus has been exalted. Proponents of this view include Buchanan (1972, 17), Ellingworth (1993, 117–18), Koester (2001, 192–93), and Moffitt (2011, 70–81). Further supporting this, had the author intended to describe Jesus' entrance into the physical world, he could have used εἰς τὸν κόσμον, as he does in 10:5. For a fuller treatment of οἰκουμένη in both 1:6 and 2:5, see Stolz 2014; Kibbe 2016, 147.

[33] Owens 1932a; 1932b; Perkins 2010; Burton 2017.

glory (δόξα) and honour" (2:9). As a result, the entrance into glory which the author envisions is entrance to the same place where Jesus is receiving glory.[34]

One line of argument supporting this conclusion is the direct link the author draws between the glory Jesus received and the glory now extended to his followers by identifying Jesus as the audience's ἀρχηγός (2:10).[35] This term, which appears rarely in the NT (only in Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb 2:10; 12:2),[36] and always in reference to Jesus' death and exaltation,[37] carries a range of connotations related to the idea of a leader or originator. As a result, it has been translated in various ways, such as "originator" (LEB), "author" (KJV), "prince" (NAS), and even "champion" (Lane).[38]

However, ἀρχηγός also conveys the notion of someone who leads people to a destination. An example of this can be found in Num 14:4 LXX, where the Israelites say to one another, "Let us choose an ἀρχηγός that we may go back to Egypt." Here, both aspects of ἀρχηγός are evident: (a) a leader to (b) guide them toward a specific destination.[39] Several scholars have argued for this interpretation, concluding that ἀρχηγός in Hebrews is best understood as a pioneer or leader who opens the way for others to follow.[40] They conclude that in Hebrews, ἀρχηγός refers to someone who leads others (in this case, "many children" [πολλοὺς υἱοὺς]) to a destination (namely, "into glory" [εἰς δόξαν]). Therefore, ἀρχηγός is best

[34] One might note that the phrase εἰς δόξαν does not necessarily indicate entrance into a spatial location. While some texts support a spatial reading (e.g., Luke 24:26; Rom. 9:23), others employ εἰς δόξαν in a more abstract or non-spatial sense (e.g., Rom. 15:7; 1 Cor. 2:7; 10:31). For a discussion on the construction εἰς δόξαν, see Jacob 2018, 108–10. Jacob's work, however, centres on the use of εἰς δόξαν in the non-disputed Pauline epistles and therefore one must be careful not to impose the same conclusions in Hebrews.

[35] Like ἀρχηγός in 2:10, in 12:2 the author describes a place where Jesus entered as exalted pioneer of salvation after a period of suffering for people's sake; for a brief discussion on ἀρχηγός in both 2:10 and 12:2, see Backhaus 2009. For a study of ἀρχηγός more generally, see Müller 1973.

[36] Harris 2019, 55.

[37] Ellingworth 1993, 160–61.

[38] Or "divine hero," see Lane 1991a, 56.

[39] Milgrom 1990, 108.

[40] These include Ellingworth (1993, 161), DeSilva (2000, 115), Koester (2008, 228–29), and Healy (2016, 62).

translated as “pioneer” (e.g., NET, NRSV) to convey the idea that others are meant to follow Jesus into the glory he has received in the heavenly realm. In this regard, Cockerill argues that the author’s designation of Jesus as ἀρχηγός serves to anticipate the explicit comparison with Moses in 3:1–6, given that Moses, like Jesus, led people toward a promised state of rest.[41]

This point is further underscored when considering that the invitation to “enter glory” (εἰς δόξαν) in 2:10 is situated within a broader context in Hebrews that repeatedly envisions access to the same heavenly realm where Jesus is now located (e.g., 4:16; 10:19). These texts, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5 of this study, support the view that εἰς δόξαν in 2:10 refers to entry into a specific, exalted realm. Additionally, the author uses the title “forerunner” (πρόδρομος, 6:20) to describe Jesus, which, as I will argue later (also in Chapter 5), is best understood as signalling that people are meant to follow Jesus into the heavenly inner shrine.

In summary, the logic of the invitation to enter glory in 2:10 can be outlined as follows: God sent angels to serve those destined for salvation (1:14), exemplified by the giving of the law at Sinai (2:2). Jesus, being made lower than the angels at his incarnation (2:6–8), came to help humans, not angels (2:16), and to invite humans into a realm not governed by angels (2:5), where he was crowned with glory and honour (2:9). To enable people to enter glory (2:10), Jesus proclaimed God’s word to them (2:1), accompanied by signs, wonders, and witnesses (2:3–4),[42] and assumed a priesthood in the heavenly tabernacle (2:17–18).

[41] In this regard, Cockerill’s conclusion is worth citing in its entirety, “A pioneer is one who, by entering a new land, enables others to follow. By his incarnation, death, entrance into God’s presence, and session at God’s right hand the Son has opened the way for God’s ‘sons and daughters’ to enter the ‘glory’ of the heavenly homeland prepared for them. God’s children are to follow their ‘Pioneer’ (12:3), who is their ‘Forerunner’ (6:20). This ‘Pioneer’ is, then, the one through whom God ‘leads’ his sons and daughters to glory. This description of Jesus anticipates the coming comparison with Moses (3:1–6), who led God’s people toward the earthly Promised Land,” (2012, 137–38).

[42] Both σημεῖον and τέρας (2:4) are often paired in the NT, especially in the Gospels (e.g., Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48; Acts 2:19, 43). These terms also appear frequently in Sinai-related events (e.g., Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; Jer 32:20–21).

Seen from this vantage point, the significance of Sinai is not diminished, even in the context of the invitation to follow Jesus into heavenly glory. The mechanism enabling the audience's ascent into Christ's heavenly glory is their arrival at a mountain, namely, Mount Zion, which functions as the nexus connecting the heavenly and earthly realms. This connection is immediately evident in the quotation of Isa 8:18 in Heb 2:13: "Here am I and the children whom God has given me." Continuing the reading of this verse in the LXX of Isaiah, one encounters the declaration: "...I and the children whom God has given me, are for signs and wonders in the house of Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion." Thus, Jesus, accompanied by his children (i.e., the audience), are presented as signs and wonders in the house of Israel, originating from the Lord of Zion. It is by virtue of their position at Zion, the mountain at which the audience had arrived (12:22), that they are formally presented by Jesus as the recipients to whom he proclaims the Father's name (2:12).

Immediately, an objection arises: since the mountain in view is Zion and not Sinai, this distinction might be taken as proof that Sinai has been superseded in favour of Zion. I will return to this potential objection in the next chapter, where I will argue that the difference between the two is not one of geographical location but of accessibility. The audience is described as having arrived at Zion precisely because it is the mountain that facilitates their access into the heavenly realm while they are still alive on earth.

This very emphasis, however, suggests that the author retains the concept of the mountain top as the transition point between the earthly and celestial spheres, a trope frequently attested in Second Temple Jewish literature, where mountaintops are often seen as an *axis mundi*, a connection between heaven and earth (e.g., *1 En*. 17, 25; *Apoc*. *Zeph*. 3; *T. Levi* 2). More specifically, it was at Sinai where heaven and earth met, enabling Moses to transition from earth to heaven. This is seen in texts like *Jubilees*, which speaks of four places—the Garden of Eden, Mount Lubar, Mount Sinai, and Mount Zion—as the locations where God not

only revealed himself to specific individuals but where the heavenly presence of God briefly touched the earthly realm to signify the coming new creation (*Jub*. 4.26).[43] 4 Ezra speaks of Sinai as the place where the heavens bent down to touch the earth (2 Esd. 3.17). In 2 Baruch, Moses is granted a vision of paradise while interacting with the heavenly tabernacle (2 Bar. 4.2–7), but once the connection between heaven and earth at Sinai ended—similar to Eden and God's revelation to Abraham—paradise was returned to heaven for preservation.[44] Another text worth mentioning is Philo, who presents Moses' ascent at Sinai as the ultimate example to be emulated (*Mos*. 1.158–59).[45]

Eventually, with the establishment of the temple at Zion, the Temple Mount came to symbolise the point where the heavenly and earthly realms converge.[46] In Jewish theology, both Sinai and Zion were regarded as pivotal locations, functioning as central points for the universe.[47] These mountains were understood as sites where communication between heaven and earth occurred, allowing not only messages but also messengers to pass between the two

[43] Geist and VanderKam 2012; VanderKam 2018a, 262–63. More could be said about the relationship between Heb 2:1–18 and *Jubilees*; see Moffitt 2023.

[44] "Do you think that this is that city of which I said: 'On the palms of my hands have I graven you'? This building now built in your midst is not that which is revealed with me, that which was prepared beforehand from the time I took counsel to make Paradise and showed Adam before he sinned, but when he transgressed the commandments it was removed from him, as also Paradise. And after these things I showed it to my servant Abraham by night among the portions of the victims. And again, I also showed it to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed to the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels. And now, it is preserved with me, as Paradise" (2 Bar. 4.2–7); Translation taken from Stone and Henze 2013. For a complete investigation of 2 Baruch's use of heaven's interaction with Sinai, see Lied 2008, 243–305. Kim offers the following summary, "2 Baruch envisions the 'sky' to be the celestial paradise, where only resurrected righteous Israelites see it, reside, and shine forever, enjoying the immortal state superior to even angels" (2011, 270).

[45] For Philo, Moses' ascent "set before us, like some well-wrought picture, a piece of work beautiful and godlike, a model for those who are willing to copy it" (*Mos*. 1.158–59). For a discussion in this text, see Segal 1980, 1358. Another example can be seen in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which narrates how, when Abraham ascended Horeb, "the mountain of God," he did not consume bread or water for forty days and nights, "because my food was to see the angel who was with me, and his speech—that was my drink" (*Apoc. Ab*. 12), which was exactly Moses' experience atop Sinai as he was away from the camp for forty days and nights (Exod 24:18). For the parallels between Abraham and Moses at this point, see Himmelfarb 1993, 62; Allison Jr. 2003, 209.

[46] Clifford 1972; Moore 2024, 34–50.

[47] These mountains came to be known as "a kind of fulcrum for the universe," as Levenson has concluded (1985, 122).

realms.[48] Mountains, such as Elijah's Mount Horeb, were seen as conduits between the earthly and divine realms, serving as places of divine self-revelation.[49]

As already mentioned, more will be discussed later about how heaven and earth are connected through Jesus, which I view as evidence that the author is rethinking the cosmology of heaven and earth through a Christological lens.[50] Here, my emphasis is only to highlight that the connection between earth and heaven was not first established at Jesus' incarnation and exaltation; it had already occurred at Sinai and Zion. As a result, by inviting people into glory (2:10), the author has not entirely departed from the narrative of either Sinai nor Zion.

The above conclusion becomes clearer when we note that it is precisely at this point in the epistle that the author shifts to compare Moses and Jesus (3:1–6), a comparison that will be explored in detail in the next chapter. Addressing the audience as "partners in the heavenly calling" (3:1), which, as Cockerill and others have pointed out, is not only a calling from heaven but also an invitation to heaven,[51] the author begins comparing the apostolic and priestly ministries of Moses and Jesus. Both figures ascended a mountain to enter heaven and intercede

[48] "On it, messages can be passed from heaven to earth and vice versa. It is the prime place of communication between transcendent and mundane reality… It is the place where a mere mortal, even a man who had uttered slander (Isa 6:5), can make contact with the realm of overpowering holiness, where he can hear the language of angels and respond to it… As the junction between heaven and earth, Zion, the Temple Mount, is a preeminent locus of communication between God and man" (Levenson 1985, 122–23, 125).

[49] Davies 2020, 141. According to Conway-Jones, the study of how heaven and earth connect via mountains offers yet another valuable tool for understanding how Jewish and Christian groups developed and diverged during the first four centuries C.E. She argues that "heavenly ascent," much like Goodman's concept of "magic" as a point of connection between Jews, Christians, and pagan communities (referencing his seminal work Goodman 2003, 119–29) can serve as a fruitful point of comparison. All three traditions, to varying degrees, explore the theme of individuals ascending from earth to heaven, providing a shared conceptual framework across these different religious communities; see Conway-Jones 2014, 18–19 As Peter Brown concludes, "The antithesis of the heavens and the earth, closer to the stars, closer to the heavy matter of our world, epouranios and epigeios, runs obsessively through the literature of the period" (1978, 16).

[50] The author of Hebrews is not alone in seeing Jesus as the new stairway that, through his incarnation, connects the earthly and heavenly realms. This concept is echoed in texts that describe Jesus as the temple (John 2:19), the place where these two realms meet, or in narratives such as his baptism (Matt 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–22) and transfiguration (Matt 17:1–8; Luke 9:28–36), where, like at Sinai, the two realms come into contact. As Longnecker, Shively, and Lang have recently noted regarding the bridge Jesus forms between earth and heaven, akin to the connection at the temple, "In the New Testament, this vital cosmological and architectural connection between the tabernacle/temple on earth and the realm of heaven is developed christologically and theologically" (2024, 443).

[51] Cockerill 2012, 158.

for their people below: Moses ascended Sinai, and Jesus ascended Zion. However, having been brought to the foot of the mountain, the audience is invited to experience something distinct from Israel's encounter at Sinai. Unlike Israel, whose rest lay in the promised land of Canaan—requiring them to depart from Sinai—the audience's rest is located atop the very mountain they have already reached. (Yet, as I will later emphasise, this rest is not fully realised until Jesus returns to his waiting community.) Therefore, they are invited not to depart but to ascend, entering into their rest by remaining faithful at the mountain. As a result, I will contend that understanding the narrative of Sinai in this comparison reveals that the difference between both mountains is not primarily one of geography, but one of accessibility. While at Sinai only Moses was permitted to ascend into the heavenly realm, at Zion—the mountain to which the audience is brought by the Son—both he and his entire congregation are invited to ascend.

2.2.2. Summary

The primary objective of this section has been both straightforward and crucial: to trace the reference to Sinai in Heb 2:2 and how it is connected to two themes introduced in the opening chapters of Hebrews: (a) the theme of angels as servants and (b) the relationship between the heavenly and earthly realms.

In this last point, I argued that the author envisions the audience as capable of entering the glory (2:10) that Jesus acquired at his exaltation (2:7–9). Those invited do not have to wait until they depart from the earth to experience the benefits of heavenly glory, such as the intercession of their heavenly priest (2:17), but can partake in these benefits while still living on earth (2:18). I also maintained that the author does not depart from the theme of Sinai as he envisions the audience as entering into heavenly glory. Sinai, like Zion, was a mountain of God where heaven and earth met, and one individual, Moses, was able to transition between the two realms. For the author, then, the Son is not a new portal linking these realms; rather, just as

Sinai once served as a meeting point between heaven and earth, the two realms are now connected through Jesus.

2.3. A Sinai-Inclusive Narrative Approach

Before moving on to the next chapter, and thus the following section of Hebrews where the comparison between Moses and Jesus is introduced (3:1–6), I pause briefly to reflect on approaching the epistle through the lens of the Sinai narrative. My central question here, crucial to this project, is to what extent is it warranted to use the narrative of Sinai as a lens for approaching Hebrews. I have already provided some support in the introductory chapter, particularly in tracing Käsemann's influence on Hebrews scholarship and how scholars have wrestled with using a narrative lens to understand Hebrews. However, beyond being a section typically overlooked in narrative approaches which use the narrative of Israel's liberation from Egypt and journey towards Canaan, is there additional justification for underlining Sinai in Hebrews? I believe so, particularly if we consider recent investigations in Second Temple Jewish literary tendencies, primarily Najman's "Mosaic Discourse."

In Najman's seminal 2003 work *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*,[52] she describes how several Second Temple writers allude to the Sinai narrative to, among other things, build an argument with the Sinai event as a backdrop. She defines "Mosaic Discourse" as consisting of four main components, which are worth quoting in full:

> 1) By reworking and expanding older traditions through interpretation, a new text claims for itself the authority that already attaches to those traditions. 2) The new text ascribes to itself the status of Torah. It may portray itself as having either a heavenly or an earthly origin, but in any event as an authentic expression of the Torah of Moses. 3) The new text is said to be a re-presentation of the revelation at Sinai. There is repeated emphasis on gaining access to revelation through a re-creation of the Sinai experience. This strategy emphasizes the presentness of the Sinai event, even in the face of destruction and exile. 4) The new text is said to be

[52] Najman 2003.

> associated with, or produced by, the founding figure of Moses. This claim serves to authorize the new interpretations as divine revelation or dictation and as prophecy or inspired interpretation. The new text can then be seen as an extension of earlier ancestral discourse.[53]

Based on Najman's definition, we can readily see both points of continuity and discontinuity between Hebrews and Mosaic Discourse. One key difference between the two is that, unlike Mosaic Discourse, the author of Hebrews does not seek to rewrite the Torah by attributing his revelation to Moses. Instead, this epistle presents a revelation that proceeds from the Son (1:1–4). Thus, getting ahead of myself, this deliberate departure from the Mosaic Discourse pattern helps explain why the author compares Jesus to Moses in the immediately following section (3:1–2). The author wants to make it clear that, unlike other Second Temple texts, the revelation he presents is authorised by someone greater than Moses.

Yet, even if we set aside the key feature of Mosaic Discourse—attributing authority to Moses—there are still indications that the author aligns with the remaining three of the four characteristics identified by Najman. First, Hebrews claims to be divine revelation, as explicitly stated in 1:2. Second, and most importantly, Hebrews claims to be a revelation founded upon an older tradition, as described in the opening verses: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (1:1–2). This older tradition is further explained as God's revelation at Sinai, which, as I will emphasise throughout this project, the author views as a valid and enduring message—not something that lost its authority with the establishment of the new covenant.

Moreover, while Hebrews does not claim authority solely based on Moses, it asserts greater authority than the Torah by deriving its revelation from the Son while building upon the earlier message delivered by angels at Sinai, described as a "valid" message (ἐγένετο βέβαιος [2:2]). Throughout the NT, βεβαῖος conveys the sense of something fixed, secure, and

[53] Najman 2003, 16–17.

unmovable.[54] For example, Paul assures his audience that the promise of inheritance given to Abraham, because it depends on grace, is βεβαῖος, that is, guaranteed and secure for all his descendants (ἵνα κατὰ χάριν, εἰς τὸ εἶναι βεβαίαν τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι [Rom 4:16]). As the NRSV renders it, "in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed (βεβαῖος) to all his descendants" (Rom 4:16). Similarly, 2 Pet 1:10 exhorts believers to "be all the more eager to confirm (βεβαίαν ποιεῖσθαι) your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble (πταίω)." The contrast here is clear: βεβαῖος denotes that which stands firm, the opposite of what stumbles or falls. Outside the NT, βεβαῖος retains this same sense of steadfastness and stability (e.g., Esth 3:13c; Wis 7:23; 3 Macc 5:31; 7:7; 4 Macc 17:4; *Thuc*. 1.122; Plato, *Phaedo* 90c). Philo likewise uses the term to describe the law given to Moses as "firm (βέβαια), unshaken, immovable, stamped" (*Vit*. *Mos*. 2.14).

Within Hebrews, βέβαιος retains this same meaning. In 3:14, the author assures the audience that they had indeed become Christ's partners (μέτοχοι γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ γεγόναμεν), but only if they were to hold firmly (βεβαίαν κατάσχωμεν) to their first confidence (or "the beginning of their confidence") until the end (τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως μέχρι τέλους). In 6:19, Jesus is described as the "sure and steadfast" (ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν) anchor of the soul. And in 9:17, the author describes a will as unchangeable once the testator dies (διαθήκη γὰρ ἐπὶ νεκροῖς βεβαία).

Given the understanding of βέβαιος as denoting something fixed and unchanging, when the author describes the "message spoken through angels" as βέβαιος (ὁ δι' ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος ἐγένετο βέβαιος [2:2]), it is most reasonable to conclude that he envisions the message delivered at Sinai as firm and enduring.[55] The Son's message, though indeed a greater message of salvation (2:3), does not nullify God's previous revelation communicated through the

[54] In the NT, βεβαῖος appears four times outside of Hebrews (Rom 4:16; 2 Cor 1:7; 2 Pet 1:10, 19) and four times in Hebrews (2:2; 3:14; 6:19; 9:17).

[55] And not just valid during a limited period time, as the BDAG (172), for example, suggests.

prophets; rather, it constitutes God's final and climactic word "in these last days" (1:1). Sinai, therefore, remains βέβαιος—fixed, steadfast, and unmoved—not a revelation rendered obsolete by the advent of the Son.

In addition to the above points of intersection between Najman's concept of "Mosaic Discourse" and Hebrews, I am particularly interested in the third characteristic she identifies: namely, that "the new text is said to be a re-presentation of the revelation at Sinai." In her study, two central examples from Second Temple Judaism that illustrate how later texts appropriate the Sinai narrative to situate their own authority are the *Book of Jubilees* and the *Temple Scroll*.

Jubilees begins with the phrase, "These are the words regarding the divisions of the times for the law and for the testimony … as he [God] related (them) to Moses on Mount Sinai when he received the stone tablets … by the word of the Lord as he had told him that he should come up to the summit of the mountain" (*Jub*. Prol.). From this point onward, everything described in the book is framed as occurring at Sinai.[56] In the concluding chapter of Jubilees, which recapitulates the book's main themes, the author reminds the reader that everything discussed happened at Sinai: "on Mount Sinai I told you about the Sabbaths of the land and the years of jubilees in the Sabbaths of the years" (*Jub*. 50.1–2).

In the *Temple Scroll* (11QTemple), though Sinai is not explicitly referenced, there is little debate that it describes the revelation God gave to Moses at Sinai.[57] This is evident from

[56] van Ruiten 1995; Brooke 1997, 45; García Martínez 1997; Carr 2001; Debel 2014, 477; Halpern-Amaru 2015, 13–23; Markl 2016.

[57] Some, like VanderKam, have pointed out that the community at Qumran held a special place in their theology and liturgy for the Sinaitic event (2005, 48). VanderKam goes on to analyse how the Qumran community would recite Exod 19–24 regularly and re-enact annually the covenant at Sinai (as seen in 1QS 1:8–9, 13–15; 2:19; 5:24), in 2005, 49, 55. It is therefore no surprise that many of the manuscripts that have been discovered so far allude to the story of Israel at Sinai. These include texts such as The Words of Moses (1Q22), Biblical Paraphrase of Genesis (4Q158), Testimonia (4Q175), Exodus Tradition (4Q374), Apocryphal Pentateuch B (4Q377), Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400–07), 1Q158, and 4Q588. For this project, however, not all these texts will be analysed. Not only because of word limitation, but because though they refer to Sinai, we have little information to know where said reference would have been in the complete manuscript. It could be the case that the story of Sinai played an important role in the entire text, particularly texts like 4Q374. But we do not have enough data to determine whether said references to Sinai were limited to specific sections or if they helped shape the entire work. For fuller discussions, see Betz 1967; Newman 2008, 30; Berner 2013; Newsom 2018, 50.

its opening section, where the author quotes Exod 34:1 (11QT 2.1) and proceeds to narrate how God instructed Moses to build and operate an earthly tabernacle, modelled after the heavenly tabernacle Moses saw upon the mountain. As the scroll progresses, the author details how the heavenly tabernacle looked and how it was to shape every aspect of its earthly replica. Furthermore, in 11QT 51.6–7, the author reminds the reader that the information presented is the same that Moses received at Sinai: "and they shall not defile themselves with those things which I tell you on this mountain" (11QT 51.6–7). Like *Jubilees*, the *Temple Scroll* never departs from the story of Sinai, using it as the central framework that unites the entire work.[58]

Having provided a short overview of Mosaic Discourse as defined by Najman, we now take a step back to ask: does the comparison between Mosaic Discourse and Hebrews confirm the author's intent in using the Sinai narrative in the style of this Second Temple literary approach, or is it merely a happy coincidence?

Reading Hebrews through the lens of Jewish literary tendencies is not new. As early as the 1950s, Thyen proposed that Hebrews is an example of a rabbinic Jewish homily.[59] In the decades that followed, others, like Barth,[60] Murray,[61] and Buchanan[62] arrived at a similar conclusion. In the 1990s and 2000s, there was a general shift towards framing Hebrews within Second Temple Judaism and early rabbinic literature. This change focused on three areas:

[58] As Shiffman and Gross recently concluded, "The scroll [11QT] presents itself as a rewritten Torah that begins with the renewal of the Sinaitic covenant of Exod 34 and then turns to the building of the Temple in Exod 35" (2021, 2); see also Najman 2003, 56; Mroczek 2008, 91.

[59] Thyen 1955.

[60] Barth 1962, 53–78.

[61] Murray argued that it borrowed literary devices seen in Hellenistic Judaism, the same that would later give raise to rabbinic midrash (1982).

[62] Buchanan proposed that Hebrews was "a homiletical midrash" (1972, xix).

Hebrews' use of the LXX,[63] its place in the "Parting of the Ways" debate,[64] and its borrowing from Jewish literary practices. On this last point, Docherty argued that Hebrews is an important example of early Jewish exegesis,[65] while Flusser noted its similarity to first-century Jewish homilies, emphasising that its creativity as a homily is best understood in the context of Jewish literature.[66] Gelardini's work further advanced this idea, arguing that Hebrews is a synagogue homily.[67] Since then, scholars have continued to advocate for reading Hebrews in light of its Jewish literary context.[68]

While a number of scholars have advocated for reading Hebrews in light of Second Temple Jewish literature, categorising the epistle within a single literary tradition remains difficult. That is, because Hebrews appears to draw upon and incorporate a range of literary styles and theological motifs, it is nearly impossible to identify a single Second Temple text that fully accounts for its complexity. Nonetheless, the work of these scholars remains

[63] Some suggested that Hebrews reflected a time when several versions of the LXX were in circulation and the author's use of the LXX informs us of the author's use of Jewish literary practices; see Cadwallader 1992 and Gheorghita 2003. More recently, Steyn (2011), Walser (2013), Sigismund and Kreuzer (2022) have produced critical works in this area.

[64] Eisenbaum 2005a; 2005b; Hays 2009; Bockmuehl 2009; Svartvik 2011; Mitchell 2011, 254. For a more recent example, see Mason 2018.

[65] Docherty argued that Hebrews "must be taken seriously as an important exemplar of early post-biblical Jewish exegesis" (2009, 2). To understand what she called the "axioms underlying the biblical interpretation in Hebrews" (2009, 49), Docherty proposed that one should analyse Hebrews' exegetical technique through the lens of the exegetical method used in rabbinic midrash. A similar approach was taken in Tönges 2005.

[66] Flusser concluded that Hebrews depicts characteristics common to first-century CE Jewish homilies and lamented that "insufficient attention has been paid to the Jewish background of this ancient Christian homily" (2009, 57). For him, Hebrews' creativity as a homily cannot be fully grasped unless it is seen through the lens of Jewish literary practices and is not fully understood until it is compared with Jewish literature. As Flusser goes on to conclude, "Jewish sources have shown again, that there are motifs which at first are thought to be genuinely Christian, but in reality they are common both to ancient Judaism and Christianity" (2009, 60).

[67] Gelardini 2007. See also Gelardini 2005; 2021.

[68] For example, Boyarin commented that Hebrews is "Midrash in style, midrash even in structure … I see the epistle as a Jewish text, a homily presumably closely related to other Jewish homilies of the time in style and to a great extent, in content as well—with a twist, of course, a fateful twist" (2016, 15, 29); see also Boyarin 1990, 16. Most recently, in 2022 Lee argued that Hebrews uses Jewish apocalyptic literature to frame its eschatology (Lee 2022).

invaluable in reframing Hebrews as a text that both can and should be read in conversation with contemporary Jewish writings.[69]

What remains open to further inquiry, however, is the extent to which Hebrews actively engages with the ideas and literary traditions of its Jewish contemporaries. Thus, in comparing Hebrews with Najman's work, particularly regarding how the opening chapters of Hebrews make decisions similar to those in texts identified within the group of "Mosaic Discourse," my aim is not to argue that Hebrews must be strictly analysed within the scholarly confines of what it means to belong to a Mosaic Discourse text. My goal is not to limit Hebrews to this specific tradition. Instead, Najman's work provides additional justification for considering the Sinai narrative in Hebrews. Just as reading Hebrews alongside works like Philo, Josephus, 4 Ezra, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, and others can reveal meaningful connections, tracing the Sinai narrative throughout Hebrews aligns with the literary tendencies found in this particular Second Temple Jewish tradition of using the Sinai narrative as a backdrop.

Therefore, my position is that, insofar as Hebrews exhibits patterns similar to those found in works such as *Jubilees* and the *Temple Scroll*, we can profitably explore how the incorporation of the Sinai narrative functioned as a common literary strategy among writers of the period. In relation to the central argument of this study, recognising the place of Sinai within Hebrews aligns well with the broader literary and theological currents of its time. My aim is to highlight that drawing upon the events at Sinai was a recognisable and widespread practice among authors of the Second Temple period. In this sense, the author's emphasis on the Sinai narrative should not be viewed as a novel innovation, but rather as a move consistent with the literary conventions of the era.

[69] In this regard, I find works like the recent Blackwell, Goodrich, and Maston (2022) to be particularly valuable in bridging Hebrews scholarship with the literary tendencies of Second Temple Judaism.

2.4. Conclusion

This short chapter has focused primarily on Heb 2:2, where the author alludes to Sinai by referencing "the message declared by angels," commonly understood as the law given at Sinai. This allusion emphasises the urgency of the exhortation in 2:1, urging the audience to pay attention to the message they have received. The author argues that neglecting this message would result in even greater consequences than those faced by Israel at Sinai, who, despite receiving the law from angels, failed to enter the promised rest due to disobedience. The reference to Sinai is therefore closely connected to the author's broader argument on the Son's superiority over angels. While angels served humanity by delivering God's word at Sinai, the Son delivers a greater revelation, one that invites people into a realm not governed by angels, but by Jesus himself.

The primary takeaway of this chapter is to establish the first of several puzzle pieces that make up the Sinai image in Hebrews. While the conclusion—that the reference to Sinai in 2:2 is not a trivial comment—may seem modest, it serves as an essential building block for the overall argument. If this chapter alone were the extent of my argument, then my thesis would indeed be brief. However, the real benefit of this chapter lies in its contribution to the broader narrative, which will be expanded in the next section, which centres on the comparison between Moses and Jesus in Hebrews 3. There, I will analyse how, while Israel's rest was found in the land of Canaan, which required them to leave Sinai, the audience's rest is found atop the mountain they have already reached (Zion). The author invites the audience to ascend the mountain and enter their rest, signifying that their experience is distinct from that of Israel at Sinai. This shift in focus from Sinai to Zion highlights the accessibility of the heavenly realm through Jesus, who leads the way. The comparison between Moses and Jesus further stresses that, unlike Moses, who ascended Sinai alone, Jesus, through his death and exaltation, invites his followers to ascend with him into the heavenly realm.

Chapter 3
The Sinai Narrative, Moses, and the Audience's Ascent of Sinai

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the case that Sinai plays an essential role in the opening chapters of Hebrews. Here, I focus on the next portion in Hebrews, Heb 3:1–4:13, where the author compares the generation of Israelites who left Egypt with the epistle's audience.

Through the lens of Käsemann's *wandernde Gottesvolk*, this comparison has often been understood as one between two groups of people wandering in the wilderness on their way to the promised land: one that failed due to unbelief and another that is at risk of a similar failure. However, this chapter contends that the comparison is not really between two groups wandering, but rather between two groups waiting for the return of an intercessor who ascended into God's presence on their behalf. This becomes clear when we consider that the author introduces the contrast between that generation of Israel and the audience (3:7–4:13) with a comparison between Moses and Jesus in 3:1–6. Moses, as Israel's intercessor, faithfully mediated on behalf of his people while they waited for his return from Sinai's mountaintop. However, the people at the foot of Mount Sinai were unfaithful, their hearts becoming hardened, and, as a result, they were barred from entering their promised rest (3:19). Similarly, Jesus, like Moses, has ascended a mountaintop and has entered God's heavenly presence to intercede for his followers, who now await his return (9:28). Observing Israel's failure to wait faithfully for Moses, the author of Hebrews urges the audience to remain faithful as they wait for the return of their own intercessor, Jesus.

This leads to the second aim of this chapter: to propose that the comparison between Sinai and Zion in Hebrews—between the mountain the generation of Israel encountered after leaving Egypt and the place where the audience now stands—is not a contrast between two unrelated geographical locations, as if these two mountains are in opposition to each other.

Rather, they represent two different channels leading to the same destination. Since both Moses and Jesus ascend into the same heavenly realm and enter the same heavenly tabernacle, the difference between Sinai and Zion, as later reflected in Heb 12:18–24, is not primarily geographical but concerns the means by which one encounters and ascends into the heavenly realm.

3.2. Moses and Jesus Ascend a Mountain

The author introduces the comparison between Moses and Jesus (3:1–6) by linking it to the prior discussion of Jesus' high priesthood through the conjunction ὅθεν (3:1), directly connecting it to Jesus being the "merciful and faithful high priest before God" (ἐλεήμων καὶ πιστὸς ἀρχιερεὺς τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν [2:17]). Scholars have often recognised the centrality of 2:17 in the epistle, where Jesus is first described as the audience's high priest who makes "atonement for the sins of the people" (εἰς τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ [2:17]) and became like them to offer help to those who are tempted (2:18).[1] Therefore, it would be reasonable to expect the comparison between Moses and Jesus in 3:1–6 to relate somehow to Jesus' role as the faithful high priest. This is precisely what we find. The author urges the audience to "consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession" (τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν [3:1]), noting that Jesus was faithful (πιστός) to "the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house" (πιστὸν ὄντα τῷ ποιήσαντι αὐτὸν ὡς καὶ Μωϋσῆς ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ [3:2; c.f., Num 12:7]).[2] The key distinction is not the degree of faithfulness, but rather their roles: Moses was faithful in (ἐν) God's house, while

[1] Koester 2001, 240–41.

[2] What the author means by οἶκος is not entirely clear. It may refer to the people of God, or the ruling house, or the believing community, or even the tabernacle. For a discussion on this matter, see Grindheim 2023, 178.

Jesus is faithful over (ἐπί) God's house, a point the author clarifies as he continues the comparison,

> Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope (πλείονος γὰρ οὗτος δόξης παρὰ Μωϋσῆν ἠξίωται, καθ' ὅσον πλείονα τιμὴν ἔχει τοῦ οἴκου ὁ κατασκευάσας αὐτόν· πᾶς γὰρ οἶκος κατασκευάζεται ὑπό τινος, ὁ δὲ πάντα κατασκευάσας θεός. καὶ Μωϋσῆς μὲν πιστὸς ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς θεράπων εἰς μαρτύριον τῶν λαληθησομένων, Χριστὸς δὲ ὡς υἱὸς ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ· οὗ οἶκός ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς, ἐάνπερ τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος κατάσχωμεν [Heb 3:3–6]).

Both Moses and Jesus are clearly characterised by their faithfulness: Moses as a servant within God's house and Jesus as the Son of the house's builder.[3] Notably, Hebrews uses the adjective πιστός five times, applying it only to Jesus (2:17; 3:2), God (10:23; 11:11), and Moses (3:5). Therefore, the comparison between Moses and Jesus does not suggest that one was more faithful than the other but emphasises the distinct roles they played in relation to God's house.[4]

But how exactly were Moses and Jesus faithful, according to the author? On one level, it can be argued that both were faithful as prophets, delivering divine revelation to God's people.[5] After all, the epistle begins by emphasising how God delivered his message through the prophets and now, in these last days, speaks through the Son (1:1–2). Furthermore, when Hebrews quotes Num 12:7 concerning Moses' faithfulness as God's servant (3:2),[6] the context of that passage is about Moses' leadership being challenged by Aaron and Miriam, who

[3] Grindheim 2023, 178.

[4] Unlike some NT texts which, in comparing Moses to Jesus, depict Moses as the antithesis to Jesus and therefore less than ideal (e.g., John 1:17; 6:32; 2 Cor 3:6–18), Hebrews does not speak of Moses in seemingly negative terms as one might conclude he does when referring to angels in 2:2–3; see D'Angelo 1979, 67. Though, in all his faithfulness, Moses was never called a Son, like Jesus, but remained a servant (Num 12:9), just as the angels are also identified as servants (Heb 1:7–12), see Docherty 2009, 183–84.

[5] Vanhoye 2015, 85.

[6] While the majority of commentators perceive Num 12:7 to be behind the words "Moses was faithful in all God's house" in 3:2, D'Angelo has notably (though not convincingly, in my estimation) proposed that the text in view is in fact 1 Chron 17:14, see D'Angelo 1979, 69–93.

question Moses' role and claim that God had also spoken through them (Num 12:2). In response, God affirms Moses' special status, declaring that, unlike other prophets, "my servant Moses" (ὁ θεράπων μου Μωυσῆς [Num 12:7]), who is "faithful in all my house" (ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ μου πιστός ἐστιν [Num 12:7]), was the only one able to see the glory of God and speak with him "face to face (στόμα κατὰ στόμα)" (Num 12:8).[7]

However, while the faithfulness of Moses and Jesus in Heb 3:1–6 certainly includes an aspect of their roles as prophets—and indeed, some have shown that Hebrews has a strong emphasis on divine speech and the channels through which it is dispensed[8]—it appears to also include their roles as mediators between God and his people. Both, after freeing people from slavery, bring them into the presence of God and intercede on their behalf. As we will explore in this section, when Moses is referenced in Hebrews he is not limited to his role as a prophet but is portrayed as God's apostle (3:1),[9] as an instrument for constructing a tabernacle patterned after the heavenly one (8:5), and as one who "saw him who is invisible" (11:27).[10] Each of these designations points back to Moses' role at Sinai, reinforcing the idea that the Sinai event remains central to Hebrews' portrayal of Moses.

3.2.1. Moses and Jesus Were Sent from God to Bring People to God

The story of Israel's liberation from Egypt, as narrated in the Book of Exodus, begins on Mount Sinai when Moses encountered God at mount Horeb (ἦλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος Χωρηβ [Exod 3:1]).[11]

[7] In the aftermath, Miriam is punished with lepra (Num 12:10) for her challenge, to which Moses immediately responds by intercedeeding on her behalf, pleading, "God, I beg you, heal her!" (ὁ θεός, δέομαί σου, ἴασαι αὐτήν [Num 12:13]), and God hears his intercession and heals her. Though, to make Miriam bear the shame of her criticism against Moses, she was forced to be shut out of the camp for seven days (Num 12:14–16).

[8] Pierce 2020.

[9] I am persuaded by Lierman's (2016) argument that the titles "apostle" and "high priest" in Hebrews 3:1 function not only as designations for Jesus, but also evoke corresponding roles attributed to Moses.

[10] Moses is referenced twice more in Hebrews, but only indirectly to speak of the "tribe of Moses" (7:14) and the "law of Moses" (10:28).

[11] Much could be said on this point, particularly regarding the varied terminology used to describe the mountain. While Exod 3:1 and 17:6 refer to it as Horeb (a designation also implied in Exod 3:12; 4:28; 18:5),

From this mountain, also called "the mountain of God" (ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ [Exod 4:27]), God commissioned Moses to descend into Egypt to free his brothers (οἱ ἀδελφοί μου [Exod 4:18]) from slavery and to announce to them the name (ὄνομα) of God (Exod 3:13). Once freed, Moses was to lead them back to that very mountain, which would serve as a sign that God did in fact send Moses on this rescue mission: "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent (ἀποστέλλω) you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain (λατρεύσετε τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ)" (Exod 3:12).[12] While indeed Moses' ultimate goal was to lead Israel to the promised land (Exod 3:8), his mission included guiding Israel to ὁ ὄρος τοῦτο, where they were to worship God.[13] Although Moses did not explicitly mention the "mountain of God" when he met with Pharaoh, instead requesting permission to journey three days into the wilderness (Exod 8:27 [Exod 8:23 LXX]) to worship God (ἵνα μοι λατρεύσῃ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ [Exod 7:16]) and celebrate a festival (ἵνα μοι ἑορτάσωσιν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ [Exod 5:1]), the journey into the wilderness was understood as synonymous with a journey to Sinai.[14] Thus, we could succinctly say that Moses' mission

from the moment the name Sinai is introduced in Exod 19:1–2, it becomes the dominant term used in both Exodus and Numbers. By contrast, Deuteronomy overwhelmingly prefers the name Horeb when referring to the same mountain. Throughout this project, I refer to the mountain where God spoke to Israel and Moses ascended as Sinai, while fully acknowledging that Horeb denotes the same location. For a more detailed discussion on the use of Horeb and Sinai to describe the same place, see Koenig (1975) and Dohmen (1989).

[12] A point of clarification is worth adding here. While Exod 3 recounts Moses' encounter with the burning bush, the narrative also sets the expectation that he would bring the people of Israel back to that very mountain (ὁ ὄρος τοῦτο, 3:12). Although the mountain in Exod 3 is referred to as Horeb rather than Sinai, it is nevertheless the same location from which Moses is commissioned and to which he is instructed to lead the people. Thus, the site of Moses' initial encounter with God is also the intended destination of Israel's liberation journey. Accordingly, I take the location of the burning bush—however exactly that scene is to be envisioned—as the same site to which Moses was later instructed to lead the newly liberated Israelites. This view is summarised in Tigchelaar's observation, that "Moses' encounter with God in Exod 3 cannot be read apart from the Sinai and the Tent of Meeting stories" (2006, 22).

[13] I am not alone in noting that the mountain where Moses first met God in Exod 3 is Sinai, the same mountain where Moses would later return with the people of Israel. As Macchi writes, "le signe du culte de Dieu sur cette montagne prend tout son sens quand on se rend compte que le parcours effectué par Moïse en Ex 3/1-12 est le même que celui que vont parcourir les Israélites dans leur fuite d'Egypte. Ils finiront, au chapitre 19, au mont Sinaï, qui, comme nous l'avons vu précédemment, est implicitement identifié au lieu où Moïse vit le buisson ardent (3/2)" (1996, 72); see also Gurtner 2013, 205–06.

[14] Because Moses requests a journey to the wilderness and not explicitly to the mountain of God, one could understand that the wilderness is distinct from the mountain, implying that the three days' journey was meant for a different destination. However, some texts draw a connection between the wilderness with the mountain. Exod 3:1 indicates that Moses arrived at the mountain of the Lord (ἦλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος Χωρηβ), which

began when he was sent by God to save his brothers from slavery and bring them back to place from which he was sent so that they too could encounter the presence of God.

Hebrews describes Jesus' ministry to his brothers in ways that closely mirror Moses' commission, as briefly surveyed above. This is particularly evident in the author's identification of Jesus as ὁ ἀπόστολος of the audience's confession (τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν [3:1]).[15] There is no scholarly consensus on why the author uses this unique title for Jesus. It is one of the few instances where Jesus is referred to as an apostle (Justin, *1 Apol*. 12.9; 63.5), and, notably, it is the only time in the NT.[16] And unlike the parallel designation of Jesus as high priest (2:17; 3:1), which the author goes on to advance throughout the epistle (5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11), the author does not develop the idea of Jesus as apostle or answer whether there is an overlap between Jesus' apostleship and high priesthood.[17]

Why then does Hebrews call Jesus an apostle? While there is no clear consensus, it is reasonable to conclude that the author is drawing from the LXX's designation of Moses as sent by God to liberate Israel from Egypt (καὶ νῦν δεῦρο ἀποστείλω σε [Exod 3:10]).[18] Though the

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is found by the wilderness (ὑπὸ τὴν ἔρημον). In 4:27, God tells Aaron, "Go into the wilderness (εἰς συνάντησιν Μωυσεῖ εἰς τὴν ἔρημον) to meet Moses." Aaron, obediently, "went, and met him [Moses] at the mountain of God (καὶ συνήντησεν αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τοῦ θεοῦ)" (Exod 4:27). Evidently, Aaron's journey into the wilderness led him to the mountain of God, indicating that the wilderness and the mountain are not unrelated places.

[15] The identification of Jesus as ἀρχιερεύς (3:1) will be discussed below.

[16] For a brief analysis on early Christian texts' use of the designations ἀπόστολος and ἀρχιερεύς in reference to Jesus, see Plooij 1932.

[17] Harris 2019, 69. There is no consensus whether "apostle and high priest" refers just to Jesus or to both Moses and Jesus; see Lierman 2016. Some have argued that the phrase derives from an early Christian confession of belief in Jesus and thus pertains only to Jesus; see Rhee 2001, 89–90. In this regard, some have concluded that ἀπόστολος refers to Jesus' divinity and ἀρχιερεύς to his humanity; see Swetnam 1972, 370–71.

[18] Lane helpfully divides the possible explanations into three main options (1991a, 75–76.): first, by calling Jesus ὁ ἀπόστολος, the author may be drawing from a Rabbinic understanding that high priests, when performing their duties on the Day of Atonement, were considered שׁליח ("sent") by God to represent him before his people (*b. Qidd.* 23b; *Ned.* 35b; *Yoma* 19a–b). Second, the author could be drawing from the notion that the figure which God sent to help lead Israel to their rest (Exod 23:20) was not an angel but an apostle. This is most notably evidenced in the *Samaritan Targum*' variant reading of Exod 32:34, where the figure is identified not as מלאך ("angel") but as שׁלחי ("my apostle"). This shift from ἄγγελος to ἀπόστολος may explain Justin's depiction of Jesus as both angel and apostle (*1 Apol*. 63.5, 10, 14); see also Cockerill 2012, 159, n. 9. Third, the position taken above, that Moses, although not explicitly called ἀπόστολος, is described in the LXX as being sent by God (Exod 3:10).

LXX never designates Moses as ἀπόστολος, the cognate ἀποστέλλω is the LXX's preferred verb to describe God's commissioning of Moses to go to Egypt on a saving mission.[19] God told Moses atop Sinai, "I will send (ἀποστείλω) you to Pharaoh to bring my people" (Exod 3:10). When Moses met with Pharaoh, he informed him, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent (ἀπέσταλκέν) me to you to say, 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness'" (Exod 7:16). Like Moses, Jesus as ὁ ἀπόστολος (3:1) became like his brothers (ἀδελφοῖς μου [2:12]), announced to them God's name (ὄνομα [2:12]), and, having freed them from slavery (2:15), ushered them into God's presence (2:10).

I am not alone in arriving at this conclusion. Swetnam, for instance, observed that at the heart of the comparison between Moses and Jesus in Heb 3:1–6 is that "Jesus, like Moses, has been 'sent' by God to announce his name to his brothers."[20] Lierman concluded that while "apostle" is a title given to Jesus in 3:1, it applies to him because it was first applicable to Moses.[21] More recently, Moffitt has argued that a key to interpreting Jesus' liberation of those who were "held in slavery by the fear of death" (2:15) is by viewing this phrase through the lens of Moses' liberation of Israel from Egypt.[22]

By referring to Jesus as ὁ ἀπόστολος, the author draws a parallel to Moses' mission: Moses was sent by God from Sinai to free Israel from slavery and lead them into worship. Similarly, Jesus was sent by God to liberate his people from bondage and bring them into God's presence. Thus, the faithfulness of Moses and Jesus as apostles reflects not only their roles in

[19] Exod 3:10, 13, 14, 15; 4:13, 28; 5:22; 7:16.

[20] Swetnam 2008, 254.

[21] Lierman 2016.

[22] According to Moffitt, "Jesus is a Moses-like figure, whose death is a new Passover that has defeated the Devil and freed God's people from enslavement" (2022, 26). So, for Moffitt, the faithfulness of both Moses and Jesus must therefore extend to include their opposition to the devil, as they both liberated God's people from his dominion, see Moffitt 2022, 25.

conveying divine revelation but also their function as messengers sent from God to guide people back to the very place from which they themselves were sent.

This perspective also brings into focus the destination to which Moses and Jesus lead their respective communities. While Moses leads Israel to Sinai, Jesus leads the audience to Zion (12:18–24). Although the mountains in Hebrews differ, both groups, as members of the same house (3:4–6), are freed to worship the same God in the same divine presence. Having briefly developed the notion of Moses and Jesus as messengers sent by God, I now turn to examine the destination to which each leads his community, both with the purpose of worshiping God.

3.2.2. Moses and Jesus Ascend into Heaven

In the Book of Exodus, Moses alone ascended Sinai to meet with God, while the rest of the people waited below (Exod 24:15). I will explore this passage more thoroughly in Chapter 5, including the LXX's unique addition that Ἰησοῦς (Joshua, in the LXX) also ascended with Moses (ἀνέβη Μωυσῆς καὶ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸ ὄρος, καὶ ἐκάλυψεν ἡ νεφέλη τὸ ὄρος [Exod 24:15]). For now, my focus is on the location Moses reached upon his ascent. According to Exodus, when Moses went up the mountain (εἰς τὸ ὄρος [Exod 24:15]), he entered a cloud-covered peak (ἐκάλυψεν ἡ νεφέλη τὸ ὄρος [Exod 24:15]). Throughout the Pentateuch, clouds (νεφέλη) consistently symbolise God's heavenly presence (Gen 9:13–16; Exod 14:24; 16:10; 34:5; 40:35; Lev 16:2; Num 9:15–22; 11:25; 14:14). They descend upon Sinai to signify God's arrival and communion with Israel (Exod 19:9, 13, 16; 24:15–16), lead the people through the wilderness (Exod 13:21; 14:19; Num 10:12; Deut 1:33), and ultimately come to rest within the tabernacle Moses constructs (Exod 33:9; 40:34; Num 12:5; Deut 31:15).[23]

[23] "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud" (ἐγὼ παραγίνομαι πρὸς σὲ ἐν στύλῳ νεφέλης [Exod 19:9]); "The Lord descended in a cloud" (κατέβη κύριος ἐν νεφέλῃ [Exod 34:5]).

It should come as no surprise, then, that several Second Temple texts interpret Moses' ascent not merely as a climb to a mountain peak but as an entry into heaven itself. Philo, for instance, describes Moses' ascent as "entering into the darkness where God was (εἰς τε τὸν γνόφον, ἔνθα ἦν ὁ θεός)," that is, "into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal, and archetypal essence of existing things" (*Mos*. 1.158).[24] He further suggests that at Sinai Moses beheld the immaterial realities of the heavenly realm (σωμάτων ἀσωμάτους θεωρῶν [*Mos*. 2.74])[25] and it was there that he saw "him that is invisible, as though he were visible" (ἀόρατος ὡς ἂν ὁρατὸς ὤν [*Migr*. 183]).[26] Ezekiel the Tragedian's *Exagoge* similarly depicts Moses as reaching heaven (67–82),[27] and in 4Q377 Frag. 1 col. ii, Moses speaks with the authority of a heavenly angel at Sinai.[28] Frisch, drawing on these and similar examples, concludes that interpreting Moses' ascent as an entry into heaven is a common motif in some Second Temple texts. She

[24] Some have wondered whether this "darkness of God" is a reference to the tabernacle's inner shrine, as depicted in 1 King 8:13 (κύριος εἶπεν τοῦ κατοικεῖν ἐν γνόφῳ [3 Kings 8:53 LXX]). For a full discussion, see Conway-Jones 2014, 188–202.

[25] Colson 1935, 485.

[26] According to Philo, Moses perceived the patterns of the heavenly tabernacle with what he describes as ἰδέας τῇ ψυχῇ, translated by Colson as "the soul's eye" (*Mos*. 2.74, in Colson 1935, 485). God enabled Moses' inner self to discern these heavenly patterns so that he could replicate them on earth: "The shape of the model was stamped upon the mind of the prophet, a secretly painted or moulded prototype, produced by immaterial and invisible forms" (*Mos*. 2.76). This suggests that Philo may not have envisioned Moses physically entering the heavenly tabernacle but rather experiencing it inwardly, almost as if in a vision. After all, Philo elsewhere describes Moses' soul's ascent into heaven at Sinai as an analogy for how people's souls ascend to God's presence ("his… holy soul is divinized by ascending not to the air or to the ether or to heaven [which is] higher than all but to [a region] above the heavens" [*Som*. 1.227–29]). However, Philo is also comfortable speaking of Moses as a priest who possesses the prerogative of entering into the tabernacle's holiest places (*Her*. 182). Moreover, there is no indication in Philo's account that Moses' experience atop Sinai—entering the darkness where God was (εἰς τὸν γνόφον, ἔνθα ἦν ὁ θεός)—was limited to his soul rather than encompassing his whole being.

[27] At Sinai, Moses "reached till the folds of heaven. A noble man was sitting on it [the heavenly throne], with a crown and a large sceptre in his left hand. He beckoned me with his right hand, so I approached and stood before the throne. He gave me the sceptre and instructed me to sit on the great throne. Then he gave me the royal crown and got up from the throne. I beheld the whole earth all around and saw beneath the earth and above the heavens. A multitude of stars fell before my knees and I counted them all. They paraded past me like a battalion of men. Then I awoke from my sleep in fear" (*Exagoge*, 67–82); translation taken from Jacobson 1982.

[28] "Moses, the man of God was with God in the cloud, and there covered him the cloud for […] when he was sanctified and he spoke as an angel from his mouth, for who was a messen[ger] like him, a man of the pious ones?" Translation taken from Gropp et al. 2001, 205–18.

observes, "Unlike an ordinary mountain, Sinai reaches to the heavens, enabling Moses to see the whole earth."[29]

However, according to the Book of Exodus, Moses' experience atop Sinai was not solely an encounter with God's presence; he was specifically shown the heavenly tabernacle's pattern so that he could replicate it on earth.[30] Moses was shown the תבנית ("pattern") of the heavenly tabernacle, translated in the LXX as παράδειγμα (Exod 25:9) and τύπος (Exod 25:40; cf., Acts 7:44; Heb 8:5). God later instructs Moses to build an earthly tabernacle precisely according to the שפט ("plan;" εἶδος) he was shown on the mountain (Exod 26:30), ensuring everything was constructed exactly as he had seen there (Exod 27:8).

One might wonder about the extent to which Moses interacted with the heavenly tabernacle. Notably, several Second Temple texts show a readiness to portray other figures as entering the heavenly tabernacle.[31] In the *Testament of Levi*, for example, Levi is taken to the holy temple in heaven (*T. Levi* 2.9), where God confers upon Levi "the blessing of the priesthood" until the day God himself would dwell with his people (*T. Levi* 2.10).[32] Thus, while Levi's priesthood refers to the priesthood which his descendants would exercise on earth, his priesthood was conferred in the heavenly tabernacle.

[29] Frisch 2019, 194.

[30] For an analysis on the idea of a heavenly temple in Jewish and Christian tradition, see Moore 2024; Newsom 2018a, 60–61.

[31] Himmelfarb believes that the reason these Second Temple texts' focus on people's ability to enter the heavenly tabernacle, including Moses, has to do with the authors' dissatisfaction with the earthly temple, which led to a search for a more perfect, divine counterpart in the heavenly tabernacle, not an uncommon feature among other Second Temple texts. As she writes, "In the period of the Second Temple… those who are unhappy with the behavior of the people and especially its priests come to see the temple not as God's proper dwelling, the place where heaven and earth meet, but rather as a mere copy of the true temple located in heaven. It is this desacralization of the earthly temple in favor of the heavenly that opens the way for Enoch's ascent in the Book of the Watchers. The first ascent in Jewish literature is thus a journey to the true temple" (Himmelfarb 1993, 13). For an in depth study on this topic, see Segal 1980; Dean-Otting 1984; Himmelfarb 1993; Rowland 2002.

[32] Himmelfarb 1993, 36–37.

Similarly, the *Book of Watchers* describes Enoch's ascent to heaven (17–19; 28–33) and into God's heavenly sanctuary by way of two houses.[33] The first is described as a great house surrounded by fire, a house which caused Enoch tremendous fear (*1 En*. 14:8–14). The second house, "a greater house than the former one," which Enoch saw as soon as a door opened before him, is described as a throne room where God himself was found surrounded by tens of thousands of angels (*1 En*. 14:15–23). Several scholars have pointed out that the author is alluding to the idea that Enoch is in fact entering the heavenly tabernacle at this point, moving from the sanctuary, referred to as the first house, to the holy of holies, the second house.[34]

As for Moses, some, like Ruffatto, have argued that Second Temple texts depict his ascent as a "transferral to Moses of Enochic visionary claims."[35] That is, as Ruffatto explains, these texts adopt the "Enochic-style cosmic and heavenly tour, including ascent to the celestial temple," and elevate Moses as a visionary figure surpassing Enoch.[36] One of the clearest indicators of an ascent into the heavenly tabernacle comes from later Samaritan texts, like the *Memar Marqah*, which describe Moses as "the servant of God, the faithful one of his house" (ומהימנה דביתה; c.f., Heb 3:2), who, having ascended Sinai, entered "the Sanctuary of the Unseen," where angels live in the presence of God (4.6.14).[37] Atop Sinai, Moses was made "a holy priest in two sanctuaries" (תרתי כנשאן קדיש [4.6.15]), referring to the heavenly tabernacle, which Moses entered in heaven, and the earthly tabernacle, which he proceeded to build once he descended from Sinai.

[33] For a recent study on the heavenly tabernacle in *1 Enoch*, see Bokhorst 2024.

[34] See, for example, Himmelfarb 1993, 20–22; Newsom 2018b, 60.

[35] Ruffatto 2010, 149.

[36] Ruffatto 2010, 150. In this perspective, "Moses is the exalted patriarch who, through bodily ascent to the heavenly temple from Sinai, bridges the gap between the celestial and earthly realms" (2010, 151). Like Enoch, "Moses transgresses the boundaries between heaven and earth and becomes the mediator between the divine and human realms" (2010, 151).

[37] Translation taken from MacDonald 1963, 155.

This interpretative trajectory was adopted by some early Christian writers, most notably Gregory of Nyssa.[38] In *De Vita Moysis*, Gregory provides an in-depth account of Moses' ascent to Sinai and his entry into the heavenly tabernacle, discussing its architecture, dimensions, and inner sanctuary.[39] According to Gregory, Moses was not alone in this ascent; he suggests that figures like John, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Paul also ascended to the heavenly tabernacle (*Vit. Moys*. 2.163–80). Like Philo, Gregory viewed Moses' ascent as a pattern that others could follow, allowing them to ascend into the heavenly tabernacle as Moses had.[40]

Prior to these later texts, evidence of entrance into the heavenly tabernacle is less explicit.[41] Nevertheless, it remains possible that the author of Hebrews was working within the conceptual framework that Moses, even if he did not enter it, encountered the heavenly tabernacle atop Sinai. So, when quoting from Exod 25:40 ("See that you make everything according to the pattern (τύπος) that was shown you on the mountain" [Heb 8:5]), the author perceives Moses as interacting with the heavenly realm atop Sinai, along with its tabernacle.

Another instance in Hebrews where the idea of Moses encountering the heavenly tabernacle emerges is in 11:27, where the author describes Moses as having "seen him who is invisible" (τὸν γὰρ ἀόρατον ὡς ὁρῶν ἐκαρτέρησεν). There is no doubt that whatever Moses

[38] According to Alexander, the transfer of the heavenly tabernacle from Judaism to Christianity is because the newfound emphasis on the heavenly tabernacle in Second Temple Jewish communities directly influenced early Christian conceptions of the heavenly tabernacle. As he writes, "The key ideas of Qumran mysticism—the celestial temple, the angelic liturgies, communion with the angels through liturgy and the ultimate angelication of the mystic—all had a vigorous afterlife specially within Christian tradition" (Alexander 2006, 138). For a full and recent study on this topic, see Moore 2024.

[39] For an in-depth study, see Conway-Jones 2014.

[40] So, Boersma concludes, for Gregory the heavenly tabernacle was a place where individuals, like Moses, could ascend and participate in heavenly realities while still existing in the earthly realm. See Boersma 2013, 243–44 For further analysis, see also Douglass 2005, 133.

[41] Philo hints at the notion that Moses saw the invisible house of God (οἶκος θεοῦ… ἀόρατος [*Migr*. 5]), without indication that he entered. Various authors depict Moses as a priest, including Josephus (Ant. 3.212, 222), Philo (Mos. 1.158), and later Rabbinic texts (Exod. Rab. 37.1). However, they generally tie Moses' priesthood to the earthly tabernacle he constructed, making it challenging to conclude that they associated his priestly role with the heavenly tabernacle. Some Graeco-Roman writers, like pseudo-Manetho, also held that Moses was a priest, though an Egyptian one; see Josephus, *C. Ap*. 1.250. For a discussion on this topic, see Gager 1972, 116–18.

saw was perceived by faith.[42] What remains less clear, however, is the exact nature of what he was seeing. It seems to me that, for the author of Hebrews, what Moses continually "saw" by faith was not merely an abstract sense of God but a concrete, unseen reality: the heavenly realm he encountered atop Sinai.[43]

My view is grounded primarily on the context surrounding the reference to the "invisible one" (11:27), which suggests that what Moses saw—and what the audience is encouraged to emulate by faith—is connected to the heavenly realm and tabernacle. The text reads,

> [Moses] considered the reproach of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible (μείζονα πλοῦτον ἡγησάμενος τῶν Αἰγύπτου θησαυρῶν τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ· ἀπέβλεπεν γὰρ εἰς τὴν μισθαποδοσίαν. Πίστει κατέλιπεν Αἴγυπτον μὴ φοβηθεὶς τὸν θυμὸν τοῦ βασιλέως· τὸν γὰρ ἀόρατον ὡς ὁρῶν ἐκαρτέρησεν [11:26–27]).

According to the text, in turning away from Egypt, Moses not only renounced the title of Pharaoh's daughter's son and the luxuries of Egyptian wealth, but he also valued the reproach of Christ as of far greater worth than all these things. By leaving behind his royalty and wealth, Moses chose to identify with his enslaved brothers and sisters, with the intent of freeing them

[42] One interpretive challenge of this phrase lies in understanding the word ὡς. If read causally, it suggests Moses persevered *because* he saw the invisible one (e.g., NIV). If read qualitatively, it indicates that Moses persevered *as though* seeing the invisible one, without implying he actually saw God (e.g., NRSV, NET). I find the qualitative reading of ὡς more convincing. When the author of Hebrews uses ὡς, it generally conveys a qualitative aspect, as in "remember those who are in prison, as though [ὡς] you were in prison with them" (13:3). Additionally, the present participle ὁρῶν (11:27) suggests an ongoing perspective: Moses was continuously engaged in "seeing" by faith the invisible one. Furthermore, this interpretation aligns with the chapter's emphasis on faith, which centres on belief in things unseen (11:1). According to this perspective, the author is not referring to an actual moment when Moses saw God, but rather that Moses lived with the conviction of continually seeing God by faith. As Lane translates it, Moses "kept the one who is invisible continually before his eyes" (1991b, 375). For Lane, this interpretation fits well with Hebrews' pastoral emphasis, suggesting that Moses' habit of keeping God in view provides a model for the community in their own struggles with fear and oppression. As Lane writes, "The firmly entrenched habit of Moses in keeping God continually in view establishes a standard for imitation by the community in its experience of fear and governmental oppression" (1991b, 376). Other scholars, like Attridge (1989, 342) and Peeler (2024, 343), similarly interpret this phrase as highlighting an example of faith for the audience to imitate.

[43] In other words, whilst the qualitative reading of ὡς seems right (as discussed in the previous footnote), it is not divorced from Moses' encounter with the heavenly realm which he saw at Sinai. In fact, some have tied this event with Moses' encounter with the burning bush in Exod 3:1–17, see Bruce 1964, 320.

from bondage, declaring God's name to them, and leading them to the mountain of God to worship him.[44] Thus, Moses preferred the reproach (ὀνειδισμός) of Christ (11:26) by abandoning a more comfortable, privileged life and assuming a position of lesser honour than one might have had by not sacrificing temporary wealth.[45]

This understanding aligns with the author's use of ὀνειδισμός in 10:33, where he calls the audience to remember how some of them had endured great struggles and suffering, including being "publicly reproached (ὀνειδισμός) and persecuted" (10:33).[46] Although the exact details of their public reproach are not provided, the author explains that they had "cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting" (10:34). Like Moses, they willingly faced public reproach and the loss of temporal comforts because they believed in the promise of something far greater and more enduring—a great reward (μεγάλη μισθαποδοσία [10:34])—which, being identified as something "lasting," as I will later develop, is linked with the preceding mention of the audience's ability to enter into the heavenly tabernacle's inner shrine (10:19–22).

The third and final time Hebrews uses the noun ὀνειδισμός is in 13:13, where the author invites the audience to partake in the greater wealth of Christ's reproach by stepping outside the camp: "let us then go to him outside the camp and bear his reproach (ὀνειδισμός αὐτοῦ)"

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[44] As noted above, Jesus, according to Hebrews, followed a similar pattern. He left his heavenly throne and became like his brothers and sisters in order to rescue them (2:17) and lead them back to God's glory—the glory from which he was originally sent (2:10). DeSilva writes regarding these points of contact between the stories of Moses and Jesus, "Moses, like Jesus, "despised shame" by renouncing the worldly honors into which he had been born (or, rather, adopted) and, in a manner analogous to the pattern of Christ, by leaving a throne to take the form of a slave. He chose to be dishonored and reproached in the company of God's people, thus joining himself to their destiny, rather than to enjoy the pleasures afforded by a lofty status within the society of unbelievers, thus being joined with them in their destiny. Faith led him to choose temporary disgrace and to evaluate the honors of the world in light of God's reward, and thus to leave his adoptive patrimony behind" (2000, 412–13).

[45] This helps explain why D'Angelo concluded that what Moses saw atop Sinai was Jesus, see D'Angelo 1979a, 13, 155–99.

[46] Ὀνειδισμός means a verbal reprimand. The term often referred to verbal expressions of disapproval, such as reprimand (Josephus, *Ant*. 19.319; Plutarch, *Art*. 22.6), criticism (Dionysius, *Pomp*. 396; Dionysius, *Ant. rom*. 3.71; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl*. 7.10.7), ridicule (Plutarch, *Mor*. 631.E; Dionysius, *Ant. rom*. 9.1) or even a strong insult (John Damascene, *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, 90). In the other two instances where it appears in the NT, it alludes to verbal insults directed by people (Rom 15:3) and by the devil (1 Tim 3:7).

(13:13).[47] Like Moses, who left the riches of Egypt, the audience is encouraged to abandon the comforts found within the camp in order to bear Christ's reproach outside. The irony—and indeed, the wonder—of this invitation is that, though the audience is leaving familiar security, they are not left with a temporary "camp" but promised an enduring "city." This contrast between "camp" and "city" (13:11–14) reinforces the author's reminder: "for here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (13:14). This city is none other than the heavenly Jerusalem, where the Son's family and the angels gather in joyous celebration (12:22–24). Though the audience is called to bear criticism and leave behind fleeting securities, they gain in exchange an eternal, unshakable city.

So, what does this tell us about Moses' embrace of Christ's reproach in 11:26? When we consider Moses' embrace of the reproach of Christ and the far greater reward he received (11:26), along with Hebrews' other references to bearing Christ's reproach (10:23; 13:13), it becomes clear that the reward Moses found was none other than the heavenly Jerusalem, the very destination promised to the audience when they leave the camp to follow Jesus. Therefore, if Moses serves as an example of bearing the reproach of Christ, found in the same place the audience is called to enter, it follows that the author understood Moses' encounter atop Sinai, to whatever degree, as a direct engagement with the heavenly realm.

[47] Leading up to this text, the author recounts a part of Jesus' crucifixion, highlighting that Jesus suffered outside the city gate to sanctify the people by his blood: "Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood" (13:12). At first glance, this statement might seem to challenge my interpretation. In 12:2, the author describes Jesus' crucifixion as a shameful event, noting that he "endured the cross, disregarding its shame (αἰσχύνη)." While ὀνειδισμός primarily refers to verbal reproach, αἰσχύνη appears to encompass physical disgrace and dishonour (cf. 2 Cor 4:2; Rev 3:18). One might then wonder if the invitation to "go to him outside the camp and bear his reproach" (13:13) implies that believers are called to share in Jesus' physical, bodily shame. However, Hebrews does not seem to make that connection. While there is a reminder that the Messiah the audience encounters outside the camp is a crucified one—and thus their reproach might include the possibility of shedding blood (12:4)—the focus is elsewhere. As Ellingworth observes, "the readers are to share, not necessarily the shame of crucifixion itself, but the shame of association with the crucified Jesus" (Ellingworth 1993, 718). Put simply, the author invites the audience to bear ὀνειδισμός, not αἰσχύνη. The call is to endure the verbal reproach and social dishonour that come with abandoning temporal securities to follow a crucified Messiah.

Sinai was the mountain Moses ascended and the destination to which he led his people. But can we similarly say that Jesus, like Moses, ascended to heaven by way of a mountain? To be sure, Hebrews does not phrase it this way, describing Jesus' arrival in heaven as having "passed through the heavens" (διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανούς [4:14]) and, after being "made lower than the angels" for a while, as "now crowned with glory and honour" (2:9). However, several scholars have seen the imagery of Zion underlying the catena of OT quotations in chapter one (1:5–14), which emphasise the Son's heavenly exaltation above angels and all creation.[48] The citations from Psalms (Ps 2:7 in Heb 1:5; Ps 104:4 in Heb 1:7; Ps 45:7–8 in Heb 1:8–9; Ps 102:25–28 in Heb 1:10–12; Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:13) and Deuteronomy (Deut 32:43 in Heb 1:6) have often been interpreted as allusions to Zion, the place of the Son's exaltation as king.[49] Kibbe summarises this view well: "if the author of Hebrews has paid even the slightest attention to the context of those OT texts from which the catena (Heb 1:5–14) comes, then he is certainly aware that most of these texts are concerned with the status of the Davidic king on Zion."[50] Thus, to speak of the Son's exaltation as king is to evoke Zion, where he is enthroned as sovereign.

Determining whether each OT citation in Heb 1:5–14 explicitly alludes to Zion lies beyond the scope of this section. My purpose here is simply to observe that Hebrews portrays Jesus' entry into heaven in a manner evocative of Mount Zion. This depiction aligns closely with the author's vision in 12:22–24, where the audience is said to have come to Mount Zion and there encounters Jesus, along with the assembly of his redeemed followers—those he has freed from slavery and brought to worship God. Comparable language appears elsewhere in the NT, where the risen Christ is associated with Zion (e.g., Rev 14:1) and is described as

[48] Ludwig 1973, 354; Thiessen 2004, 410–19; Son 2005, 119; Johnson 2006, 77; Persaud 2015; Vanhoye 2015, 57; Cheung 2016, 337.

[49] See Son 2005, 105–24.

[50] Kibbe 2016, 141.

descending from Zion at his return (Rom 11:26). This association is made explicit in 12:22, which declares, "You have come to Mount Zion," the very place where the audience encounters the ascended Jesus (12:24). It is evident, then, that the author envisions the audience as having been brought to the foot of Mount Zion to worship God, just as Moses once led Israel to the foot of Sinai.[51] Moreover, in Heb 12:28–29 (to which I will return below), the audience is exhorted to offer "acceptable worship with reverence and awe" to the God they now encounter at the mountain—who, in language echoing the Sinai theophany, is described as a "consuming fire." Thus, even at this stage of the argument—though I will provide further evidence below in relation to the audience's invitation to ascend—the parallel becomes apparent: just as Moses ascended Sinai to enter God's presence and intercede for his people, so too does Jesus ascend Zion to enter heaven and intercede for those he has led there.[52]

Before moving further, it is worth pausing to situate both this section and the next within the broader aim of this chapter, lest the argument become lost in the details. My claim is that the author's comparison between Moses and Jesus in Heb 3:1–6 is not confined to their shared roles as mediators of divine speech or as faithful servants—Moses in God's house, Jesus over it—but is also shaped by the broader Sinai narrative. Far from being excluded, the Sinai event is embedded within the author's comparison. This becomes evident when we recall the contours of the Sinai story: Moses was commissioned by God at Sinai to lead the people to that very mountain. Yet having brought them there, only he ascended, while the people remained below. There, atop the mountain—understood in some Second Temple Jewish texts as a gateway to heaven (as outlined above)—Moses interceded for those he had led. In parallel

[51] As Moffitt notes, the author of Hebrews portrays the audience as a people freed by Jesus and brought to a mountain to worship God, mirroring Israel's journey to Sinai with Moses: "The audience can now identify themselves as… gathered around Zion, where they worship God as they wait for their covenant mediator to return from his ascended position in God's presence and lead them finally into the fullness of their inheritance" (2022, 26).

[52] For a similar argument, see Son 2005, 52–56.

fashion, Jesus is presented as the one commissioned by God to lead his people to a mountain, Zion, where he also ascends into heaven itself. There he intercedes on behalf of those who remain below.

If this reading is correct, then it becomes clear that the author is not disinterested in the Sinai event, nor is his focus restricted to the portion of the exodus narrative that recounts Israel's wilderness journey. Rather, the events at Sinai lie at the heart of his comparison between Jesus and Moses at this point in the epistle. Moreover, if this is the case, then the following exhortation in 3:7–4:7 can also be read through the lens of Sinai. The community addressed in Hebrews is not merely cautioned against repeating the failures of the wilderness generation but is simultaneously invited to enter what that generation never attained: not only to approach the mountain, but to ascend it, and thereby to enter the heavenly realm itself. Before exploring that theme more fully, however, I return to the comparison between Moses and Jesus, both of whom, having entered heaven, now intercede for those below who await their return.

3.2.3. Moses and Jesus Pray for the People Below

The Book of Exodus places significant emphasis on Moses' role as an intercessor for his siblings while atop Sinai.[53] Some of the most telling narratives include the Golden Calf incident in Exod 32:7–14, where Israel, growing desperate over Moses' prolonged absence, acted unfaithfully and hardened their hearts, provoking God's anger (Exod 32:7–9). As their intercessor, Moses prayed on their behalf (Exod 32:11), and God relented from his anger (Exod 32:14). Moses interceded again the following day after the sons of Levi ordained themselves (Exod 32:29) by executing about 3,000 people (Exod 32:28). Once more, God heard Moses'

[53] Other notable instances include his intercessory prayer on behalf of Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exod 8:8–15, 20–30; 9:11–35) and on behalf of Miriam and Aaron (Num 12:10–16).

intercessory prayer offered atop Sinai.[54] Given this emphasis, some scholars have concluded that Moses' faithfulness is closely tied to his willingness to intercede on Israel's behalf.[55] Even Philo, recognising this, elevated Moses not just as Israel's intercessor but as one who offers prayers "for the whole universal race of mankind" (*Mos*. 1.149).

While the author of Hebrews does not explicitly connect Moses' faithfulness to his intercessory role, instead emphasising his service in "testifying to the things that would be spoken later" (3:5), I would maintain that Moses' intercession is an implicit element in the comparison between Moses and Jesus, portraying both as faithful intermediaries. This argument is chiefly supported by the author's reference to Num 12 in Heb 3:2 (already noted above) and his subsequent shift to another pivotal episode of Israel's rebellion in Num 14. The narrative in Numbers provides one of the most extensive accounts of Israel's rebellion, where the people, upon hearing the spies' report of giants in the promised land (Num 13:25–14:12), refused to move forward. In response, God declared his intent to destroy the rebellious nation (Num 14:12). Yet, once again, Moses interceded on their behalf, pleading with God: "forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now" (Num 14:19). Upon hearing Moses' intersession, God relented from his immediate judgment. However, the rebellion did not go unpunished. God swore that none of the generation who had witnessed his glory and signs in Egypt and the wilderness, yet tested him repeatedly, would enter the promised land (Num 14:22–23).

It is widely recognised that Ps 95:7–11, which Hebrews quotes in 3:7–11, alludes to this very incident.[56] The psalm recalls a "day of testing in the wilderness" (3:8) when the people

[54] For an overview of the role of Moses' intercession and its use in Hebrews, see Urga 2022, 168–76. Also, worth noting is Mason 2018 and his views on the Golden Calf in Hebrews.

[55] Dozeman 1984; Aurelius 1988, 1–7; Widmer 2004, 337, 339.

[56] See, for example, Harris 2019, 76–77; Kraus 2023, 165–82.

"put God to the test, though they had seen [his] works for forty years. Therefore, he was angry with that generation, and … swore, 'They will not enter my rest'" (3:8–10). What is striking in this account is that, unlike previous episodes where Moses' intercession successfully averted God's judgment (e.g., the golden calf incident in Exod 32), here Moses' intercession could not overturn the consequences of Israel's rebellion. The nation was condemned to wander the wilderness, and that generation was barred from entering their promised rest.

In referencing Moses' failure as an intercessor, I am not suggesting that the author of Hebrews regards this as the primary reason the wilderness generation failed to enter the promised land. Rather, for Hebrews, it was Joshua who was intended to lead the people into rest but did not (4:8), and the decisive issue lied in the people's own unbelief (3:19) and disobedience (4:11). My point is that, unlike Moses—whose remarkable intercession was ultimately insufficient to secure rest for his generation—Jesus, as the audience's heavenly intercessor, enables his followers to receive the grace necessary (4:16) to remain faithful as they await his return (9:28). The responsibility still lies with the people, as I will argue below, yet their failure is not inevitable; what they require is an inner cleansing that grants access to the heavenly realm. For the author, this is precisely what the new covenant, established through Jesus, provides. Moses, though faithful as he was and effective in his intercession, did not institute such a covenant, and neither he nor Joshua succeeded in leading the people into their promised rest. Jesus, by contrast, can bring "many children to glory" (2:10) by virtue of his heavenly priesthood.[57]

[57] What enables the audience to strive to enter their rest is that their intercessor is a "great high priest." As the author notes, "Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession" (4:14).

3.2.4. Summary

The argument presented so far in this chapter can be summarised as follows: according to Hebrews, both Moses and Jesus are sent by God to liberate their siblings from slavery. In the case of Moses, this happened at Mount Horeb, the site of his commissioning at the burning bush; in the case of Jesus, it was at his incarnation, wherein he was made "lower than the angels." After liberating their respective people from slavery, they lead them back to God. Upon reaching this destination, both Moses and Jesus ascend into the heavenly realm, Moses at Sinai and Jesus at his exaltation. Once in the heavenly realm and, as I have maintained, potentially within the heavenly tabernacle itself, both Moses and Jesus serve as intercessors on behalf of the people below. However, while the people who waited for Moses at the foot of Sinai grew unfaithful in his absence, the author of Hebrews is primarily concerned with encouraging the audience to remain faithful as they await the return of their intercessor, who continues to intercede for them in the heavenly tabernacle.

3.3. The Audience's Invitation to Ascend a Mountain

The above section has aimed to present the notion that when Hebrews calls Moses and Jesus faithful, it highlights not only their roles as prophets but also their roles as apostles sent by God to lead people back to him. Moreover, the destination to which they guide their redeemed followers is the heavenly realm, with its heavenly tabernacle, the very place from which both were sent. This exploration now allows us to address the question of the path through which Moses and Jesus bring people into God's presence for worship. As I will argue in this section, while Moses and Jesus ascend via different mountains, they, along with those they lead, ultimately arrive at the same heavenly realm. Thus, Sinai and Zion are not in opposition but are rather two distinct pathways connecting the same two realms. The diagram below seeks to represent this relationship visually:

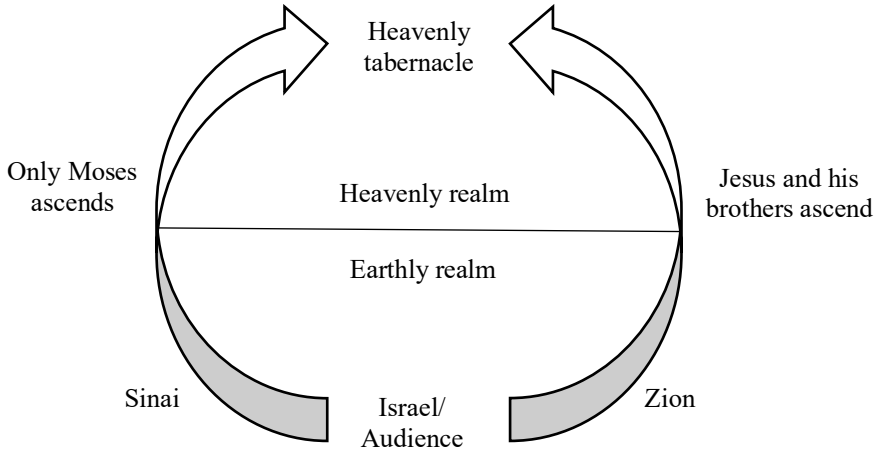


Figure 1: Ascension at Sinai and Zion

The diagram above naturally raises several questions, which I will address in due course. For now, however—and to outline the proposal in broad strokes before turning to its details—this approach to Hebrews' use of Sinai and Zion opens a fresh perspective on their comparison, one that the author will later develop more fully in 12:18–24. As already discussed above, Sinai and Zion share striking similarities: both serve as pathways from the earthly to the heavenly realm, both are sites where an apostle is sent to descend and liberate his brothers from slavery, both bring the newly liberated people to worship God, and at both mountains an advocate ascends on behalf of the people. What distinguishes them is not their geographical location but the nature of the access they offer. At Sinai, access to the heavenly realm was limited to Moses alone, while the rest of the people remained at the foot of the mountain. At Zion, however, all the intercessor's brothers are invited to ascend into the heavenly realm. In other words, the comparison is not between two distinct destinations but between two distinct modes of access to the same heavenly realm, one of which allows only one individual to ascend, while the other allows for an entire congregation.

At first glance, the link between the audience's ascent and the Sinai narrative may not be immediately apparent. In the Sinai event, only Moses ascends to the mountain's top to interact with the heavenly tabernacle, while the rest of Israel remains at the base. Thus, while

the comparison between Moses and Jesus as intercessors is relatively straightforward, drawing a parallel between Moses' ascent and the audience's experience of entering the heavenly tabernacle is less immediately obvious. Nevertheless, my thesis is that Hebrews envisions the audience as capable of ascending into the heavenly tabernacle, much like Moses. To support this argument, we turn to the LXX translation of Exod 19:13 to argue that Hebrews understood the ascent of Sinai as not just possible but expected. While the generation of Israelites at Sinai was barred from ascending due to clouds and loud sounds, the audience in Hebrews has arrived at a mountain free from such obstructions. With these barriers removed, the expectation of ascent in Exod 19:13 can now be fulfilled, and the audience is invited to ascend in faith to where they are now welcomed.

3.3.1. Ascending Sinai in Exod 19:13 LXX

The MT of Exod 19:13 reads, בִּמְשֹׁךְ הַיֹּבֵל הֵמָּה יַעֲלוּ בָהָר ("When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain"). At first glance, the text appears straightforward: the long blast (מָשַׁךְ) of the ram's horn (יוֹבֵל) signals the people of Israel's (mentioned just a few sentences earlier in Exod 19:10) welcome to go up (עָלָה) the mountain (הַר). The phrase בִּמְשֹׁךְ הַיֹּבֵל ("when the trumpet sounds") also appears in the MT in Josh 6:5, where Joshua instructs the Israelites to ascend to Jericho at the sound of the trumpet (בְּקֶרֶן הַיּוֹבֵל בִּמְשֹׁךְ).[58] In that story, this instruction is faithfully executed: "as soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they ascended into the city (וַיַּעַל הָעָם הָעִירָה)" (Josh 6:20).

However, the lack of an account narrating Israel's ascent of Sinai in the Pentateuch has both puzzled interpreters[59] and given rise to alternative interpretations which excuse an

[58] The LXX translates it as σαλπίσητε τῇ σάλπιγγι (Josh 6:5).

[59] Memorably, Rabbi Saadia Gaon acknowledged that "For many years I pondered this verse and could not decipher its meaning!" (כי שנים רבות חשב בפסוק הזה ולא ידע טעמו [Ibn Exra Exod 19:13]).

ascent.[60] Some suggest that the pronoun הֵמָּה ("they") refers only to a select group of people—possibly those mentioned late in Exod 24:9, which includes only Moses, Aron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders—and not the entire congregation.[61] Another alternative is that the preposition ב does not indicate ascent upon the mountain but simply an approach towards the mountain. As Polak argues, just as Moses was invited to approach the burning bush but only up to a point (Exod 3:5), so also "Israel is called upon to stand on the outskirts of the holy precinct… but may not ascend the mountain."[62] If this is the case, the fulfilment of these words could be seen three days later, when people "took their stand at the foot of the mountain" (Exod 19:17) but only "Moses went up" to "the top of the mountain" (Exod 19:20).[63] Furthermore, some have argued that the Qal imperfect עָלָה does not indicate an obligation ("they *will* go up") but describes a permission ("they *may* go up"), as Rashi has argued (רַשָּׁאִין לַעֲלוֹת).[64] Therefore, said ascent is not recorded in Exodus because it was only optional and not compulsory. We could add to these interpretations non-literal readings which understand the invitation to ascend as allegorical, like Aristobulus (Euseb. *Praep. ev.* 13.12), who objected to a literal ascent since God is everywhere.[65]

While the wording of Exod 19:13 in the MT allows for multiple interpretations, some of which do not explicitly mandate Israel's ascent to Sinai, the LXX version of this verse

[60] For a summary of differing views, see Kibbe 2016, 33–44. Interpreting Exod 19:13 as a command to ascend based solely on the Hebrew text is unusual. To my knowledge, one of the first Jewish interpreters to argue for this was the 19th-century commentator Malbim, who speculated that Israel was in fact meant to ascend the mountain but failed to do so due to their fear of the sensory overwhelming elements of the fire and dark clouds; see Malbim 1912, loc. Exod 19:13.

[61] Dozeman 1989, 24; see also Ibn Ezra, *Exod 19:13*; *Mek. R. Ish.*, 24.1, 9. It is worth noting, however, that, in the context of Exod 19:13, the use of the third person plural pronoun always refers to the whole congregation of Israel, not just a few individuals. One could argue that this section of Exod 19 reflects the work of an editorial emendation, and therefore the pronoun הֵמָּה in 19:13 does not necessarily refer to the congregation mentioned in 19:10; see Oswald 1998, 37–39. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely that author of Hebrews would have approached Exodus' account of Sinai through the lens of modern source-criticism.

[62] Polak 1996, 135.

[63] Stuart 2006, 427.

[64] Rashi, *Exod* 19.13.3.

[65] See Riessler 1928, 182.

presents a clearer expectation that the people were indeed to ascend the mountain. This interpretation is supported by a clause in the LXX that is absent in the MT: ὅταν αἱ φωναὶ καὶ αἱ σάλπιγγες καὶ ἡ νεφέλη ἀπέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους, ἐκεῖνοι ἀναβήσονται ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος ("When the sounds and the trumpets and the cloud depart from the mountain, they will ascend the mountain" [Exod 19:13]). Thus we note that, whereas the MT connects people's ascent to the long blast of a ram's horn, the LXX attributes their climb to the moment (ὅταν) when the sounds, trumpets, and clouds depart (ἀπέρχομαι).

It is not difficult to conclude that the LXX's translation expected an ascent of Sinai. Throughout LXX Exodus, the preposition ἐπί followed by τὸ ὄρος consistently refers to something set "upon the mountain," namely Mount Sinai, and not simply besides it (Exod 19:11, 20; 24:16; 34:2). Moreover, ἀναβαίνω persistently refers to going up and not just coming near (Exod 19:12, 13, 18, 20, 24; 24:1, 9, 12, 13; 32:30). This interpretation is supported by other Greek translations: Symmachus' revision clarifies that ascent should occur once the noise ceases—ὅταν ἀφελκύσθη ὁ ἀλαλαγμὸς ἀναβαινέτωσαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος ("When the noise has been drawn away, let them ascend the mountain"). Similarly, Aquila specifies that the ascent to the mountain (ἀναβήσονται ἐν ὄρει) should happen at the moment ἐν ἑλκυσμῷ τοῦ παραφέροντος αὐτοι ("in the drawing of the one leading them").

Setting aside the rationale for the LXX's addition,[66] the point is that it distinctly associates the ascent of Sinai with the cessation of loud sound, trumpets, and dark clouds. In

[66] It is challenging to determine the rationale behind the LXX translators' decision to include a clause about the removal of clouds, trumpets, and sounds in Exod 19:13. Several theories have been proposed to explain the LXX's addition in Exod 19:13. Some, like Wevers, have suggested that the translators aimed to resolve perceived inconsistencies in the MT, speculating that the LXX's inclusion of sound removal could be an attempt to reconcile inconsistencies within the MT regarding the use of the trumpet in Exod 19:13 and 19:16. Whereas the former predicts an ascent at the trumpet blast, the latter holds that the trumpet marked the onset of the theophany and the moment Moses warned people not to come near the mountain. Wevers argues that the LXX "fixes up the account by making the verse refer to the conclusion of the theophany" (1990, 300). Another possibility is that Exod 19:13 LXX presents deliberately contradictory commands as a test of Israel's reverence. According to this view, the test was whether Israel would decline the invitation to ascend the mountain—a test they purportedly passed by entrusting Moses to ascend and communicate with God on their behalf; see, for example, Propp 2006, 162; Kibbe 2016, 41–44.

essence, once these elements surrounding God's divine presence dissipated, the mountain would no longer be enveloped by these elements. For Sarna, this pattern is consistent with the way sacred spaces in nature are depicted in the Pentateuch.[67] Once the manifestation of God's presence—the theophany—concludes, these spaces become approachable. This too was the opinion of Rashi, who commented, וכיון שאסתלק, הן רשאין לעלות ("since I [God] will be leaving, they are allowed to go up").[68] According to Rashi and Sarna, there is no basis to consider Sinai as perpetually sacred or untouchable once the theophany ended, indicating a temporal, rather than an inherent, sanctity of the location.

3.3.2. Ascending Sinai in Hebrews

Having offered a brief analysis of some allusions to heavenly ascent in Second Temple Jewish texts and the LXX rendition of Exod 19:13, I now move to argue that these texts, particularly Exod 19:13 LXX with its added clause suggesting that Israel was meant to ascend Sinai once the sounds, trumpets, and clouds had disappeared, influenced Hebrews' interpretation of the Sinai event. Before going further, however, it is crucial to clarify that I am not arguing the author believed the Israelite generation which left Egypt should have ascended Sinai, nor that their failure to do so was a missed opportunity for direct divine communication or entry into the heavenly tabernacle alongside Moses. Hebrews consistently presents Moses' role as intercessor in a positive light (3:1–6), without attributing fault or failure to his function.[69]

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[67] Sarna 1991, 15, 106.

[68] Rashi *Exod* 19:13. Like him, other Jewish interpreters maintain this view. See, for example, *Mek. Bachdesh* III.14; Rashbam, *Exod* 19.13.2; Cassuto, *Exod* 19.13.

[69] As noted above, Moses' apparent intercessory "failure" in Num 12—where his mediation did not ultimately prevent the judgment and exclusion of his generation from entering the promised rest—is not, in the logic of Hebrews, attributed to any deficiency on Moses' part. Rather, the author locates the cause in the people's own disobedience and unbelief (3:19; 4:11). By contrast, Jesus' intercession accomplishes what Moses' could not: he ushers his people into God's heavenly presence. As I will later argue more fully, this is due because entrance into the heavenly realm is a distinctive benefit of the new covenant—a covenant that, according to Hebrews, only comes into effect through Jesus' priestly work.

What I am arguing is that in Hebrews a critical distinction is drawn between the Israelites' experience at Sinai and the audience's current engagement with God, particularly in terms of the persistent or absent sensory phenomena surrounding the heavenly tabernacle. Having arrived at the foot of Sinai and having waited three-days as a period of preparation (Exod 19:15), Moses led the people "out of the camp to meet God" (Exod 19:17), and God "descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain" (Exod 19:20). However, unlike the expectation of Exod 19:13 LXX that the clouds and trumpet sound would leave, and people would be able to ascend, the exact opposite occurred: the trumpet's blast grew louder and louder (Exod 19:19) and the cloud continued to shroud the mountain (Exod 19:16). Of all the people, only Moses was "summoned… to the top of the mountain" (Exod 19:20), leaving the congregation below (Exod 19:17). Consequently, Hebrews emphasises these sensory barriers—the sounds, trumpet, and cloud, along with fire and darkness—as specific factors that prevented the people from approaching God (12:18–19).

In contrast, the audience of Hebrews encounters a vastly different situation. As I will develop at greater length in Chapter 6, instead of an overwhelming sensory experience, the audience is portrayed not just as standing under the new covenant—a covenant that grants them new hearts upon which the Torah is inscribed, enabling them to respond in faith and obedience—they also find themselves before a soundless, trumpet-less, cloudless mountain (12:22–24). This difference might initially seem straightforward since they did not arrive at Sinai but at Zion (12:18–24). Hence, their experience varies because their destination is not the same. However, as already discussed, the distinction between Sinai and Zion in Hebrews is not primarily geographic but rather a matter of accessibility to the heavenly realm. In both locations, the earthly intersects with the heavenly: the same God who spoke to Israel at Sinai now addresses Hebrews' audience at Zion. Moreover, at both mountains, individuals enter the

heavenly tabernacle—Moses at Sinai and Jesus at Zion—and in both instances, a mediator intercedes for those stationed at the mountain's base.

Therefore, my argument is that the absence of overwhelming sensory elements, like the sounds, trumpets, and clouds, opens the way for the audience's direct encounter with "the living God" in "the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22). Invited to "approach the throne of grace" (4:16) and draw near to God (10:19), the elements that once instilled fear in people have been removed. This newfound access allows the audience to engage directly with God's presence by ascending into the heavenly realm and entering the heavenly inner shrine, amidst angels in festal gathering, Jesus, and the congregation of righteous people (12:22–24). In other words, Hebrews conceptualises the entry into the heavenly tabernacle as akin to ascending Sinai, because it was there that the celestial tabernacle became visible, and for Moses accessible, from earth.

3.3.3. Ascending Sinai and Rest

Before drawing this chapter to a close, two lingering questions remain. First, and more briefly, if the clouds and sounds at Sinai signalled the presence of God, does their absence at Zion signify his departure? That is, is the mountain no longer fearsome because the divine presence has withdrawn? This interpretation is highly unlikely. The author explicitly envisions the mountain the audience has reached as the "city of the living God" and the place of "God, the judge of all" (12:22–23), who remains "a consuming fire" (12:29)—hardly a depiction of a God-less mountain. Rather, Hebrews envisions the fulfilment of the expectation in Exod 19:13 LXX that people would ascend upon the cessation of these restrictive elements. Now that the fearful phenomena have subsided, as I will develop in greater depth in Chapter 6, the audience is welcome to ascend. This freedom of access, therefore, does not signify the absence of God; on the contrary, it represents a state of unhindered access to God's immediate presence.

The second question has also likely occurred to the reader while following the argument thus far: what would have happened if the generation of Israel had ascended Sinai? If the people had not recoiled at the terrifying sights and sounds but had instead mustered the courage and faith to ascend, as the LXX version of Exod 19:13 appears to anticipate, would they, too, have entered heaven? This, of course, is a hypothetical question. Yet it is a valid one, given that my argument has been that the author of Hebrews envisions the possibility of the audience ascending into heaven, just as Moses did at Sinai and Jesus at Zion.

Going back to Heb 3, the author, following the comparison between Moses and Jesus (3:1–6), exhorts the audience to remain faithful so that they might enter their appointed rest (3:7–11). In contrast to the wilderness generation—who, though liberated from Egypt, failed to enter rest due to unbelief (3:12–14)—the audience is warned not to repeat that failure.[70] His exhortation centres on the notion that the audience is still looking forward to entering a promised rest. As he states, "Therefore, we must be fearful, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it" (φοβηθῶμεν οὖν, μήποτε καταλειπομένης ἐπαγγελίας εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ δοκῇ τις ἐξ ὑμῶν ὑστερηκέναι [4:1]). Various scholars have noted that, for the author of Hebrews, this anticipated rest, referred to as "his rest" (κατάπαυσις αὐτοῦ), specifically the rest of Jesus, is located where Jesus himself resides.[71] Since Jesus is in the heavenly realm, the author envisions this rest not in a geographical location, as was true of the promised land, but in the heavenly sphere.[72]

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[70] Much could be said about the citation of Ps 95:7–11 in Heb 3:7–11 and the author's call for the audience to "hold firm to the confidence of their faith firmly until the end" (3:14); see, for example, Cockerill 2012, 153; Grindheim 2023, 175. However, my primary focus here is the location of the rest that the audience awaits.

[71] Such as Mason (2018, 147), Kibbe (2016, 157), Vanhoye (2015, 92), and Calaway (2013, 80). Wunrow offers an alternative, non-spatial view. According to him, "κατάπαυσις should not be taken as a reference to heavenly space. Instead, the author uses κατάπαυσις to refer to a state or action, and he wishes to motivate his readers to persevere so that they reach or remain in this state with God" (2025, 100).

[72] Attridge concludes that, despite the difficulty of pinpointing the author's use of the metaphor of rest, the image of rest is "best understood as a complex symbol for the whole soteriological process that Hebrews never

This explains why the author asserts that Joshua did not give the people rest (4:8). While this might seem contradictory to the Pentateuch's account, which states that Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:30) and the young children (Num 14:31) did indeed enter the promised land, it is unlikely that the author is unaware of or deliberately contradicting these passages. After all, just a few paragraphs earlier, he referenced a passage from Num 12:7. According to Docherty, the key lies in Hebrews' reinterpretation of the promised land. Rather than viewing it as the geographical land of Canaan, the author presents it as a more desirable, accessible, and heavenly realm for the audience.[73]

To suggest then that the author relocates the concept of rest from an earthly geographical place to the heavenly realm is hardly a novel proposition. My argument, however, advances this notion further: if the audience's anticipated rest is indeed in heaven, then we can assert that the audience, having been brought to the foot of a mountain, is invited to experience something distinct from Israel's encounter at Sinai. At Sinai, only Moses was permitted to ascend, while the rest of the people remained below. At Zion, however, the audience—identified as "the people of God" (ὁ λαός τοῦ θεοῦ [4:9])—is invited to ascend the mountain to attain their promised rest at its summit. In contrast to Israel at Sinai, whose rest was to be found elsewhere in the promised land of Canaan (thus requiring them to leave Sinai), the

fully articulates, but which involves both personal and corporate dimensions" (1989, 128). Calaway offers a similar view but more nuanced. She proposes that the author of Hebrews follows the pattern seen in some Second Temple texts, chiefly the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, of combining the Sabbath and the tabernacle into a single, yet complex, entity. As she concludes, "For Hebrews, the Sabbath is a heavenly place to approach and enter just as one… enters the sanctuary, overlaying imagery of space and time in the process, in which the Sabbath has spatial characteristics, and the tabernacle acquires temporal ones" (2013, 29). Calaway goes on to argue that appreciating the "spatiotemporal" aspect of both rest and the temple in Hebrews allows us to see how in Hebrews the promised rest which the Jesus' believing community await is not a physical, earthly land, but heavenly Jerusalem found in the heavenly realm. As Calaway concludes, "The promise of land as rest that was given to Abraham and subsequent figures has been transformed into access to the heavenly realm, into God's own presence," in 2013, 69. As she says elsewhere, "The promised land, even as the land as rest, transforms into a heavenly reality of the Sabbath" (2013, 74). For an analysis of various models of the potential relationship between the concept of rest and the heavenly realm in Hebrews, see Heidel 2020, 240–49.

[73] Docherty 2009, 188–89.

audience's rest is situated atop the mountain they have already reached. Therefore, they are invited to ascend, not depart, to enter their rest.

If my interpretation is correct in suggesting that the audience is being invited to ascend into the heavenly realm via a mountain, then my response to the hypothetical question above (whether Israel would have entered heaven had they ascended Sinai) would mirror the answer I would give if someone asked a similarly curious question: what would have happened if the people of Israel had followed Joshua into Canaan? If my reading is correct—that the rest Joshua did not provide (4:8) refers to entrance into the heavenly realm—then would Israel have entered heaven had they faithfully followed him into the promised land?

In both instances, the answer might be "yes" and "no" simultaneously. Theoretically, yes, it is conceivable that, from the author's perspective, Israel could have entered the heavenly realm had they followed Moses up Sinai or Joshua into Canaan. However, according to the logic of Hebrews, actual entrance into the heavenly realm is inseparable from the benefits of the new covenant. These benefits include inner transformation and purification, which alone make one fit to enter God's presence. From this vantage point, the answer would then be "no." Apart from the new covenant, neither Moses, Joshua, nor the Levitical priesthood could ultimately lead the people into heaven. As effective and divinely commissioned as their ministries were within the earthly realm, they lacked the means to bring about the perfection necessary for heavenly access.

This position naturally raises several questions, one of which is: if my aim is to situate the audience as the people of Israel waiting for Moses to descend from the mountaintop, why emphasise the audience's expectation of ascending the mountain once the elements of sound and fire are lifted? In other words, is the audience depicted as waiting or ascending? I will address this question in the next chapter, where I argue that waiting in Hebrews is not a passive state but an active one, which both acknowledges the anticipation of Jesus' return for his

community and recognises that the audience can already access the very space where Jesus is to be found. And where is Jesus in Hebrews? In the heavenly inner shrine. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will explore in greater depth the specific location the audience reaches atop the mountain, which I contend is the heavenly inner shrine.

Moreover, the above conclusion also raises broader questions about the author's cosmology, specifically, a worldview in which heaven is accessible from earth, and earthly acts such as ascending a mountain (Sinai) or entering a land (Canaan) might function as portals to that realm. In Chapter 7 of this study, I will argue that this is, in fact, how Hebrews envisions earthly participation in the heavenly sphere: by performing actions on earth that carry heavenly significance and thereby constitute a form of engagement with the heavenly realm. For now, however, as intriguing as the above thought experiment may be, it remains hypothetical. Hebrews gives no indication that such access to heaven was ever truly available to the generation of Israel that came out of Egypt. Nevertheless, the invitation to enter God's rest appears to have been genuine. According to the author, the people's inability to enter their promised rest lay not in any inadequacy of the invitation itself but in their own disobedience and unbelief, which ultimately barred them from what had been, apparently, sincerely offered.

3.3.3. Summary

In this section, I explored one line of connection between Sinai and Zion in Hebrews, particularly focusing on the invitation for the audience to ascend into the heavenly realm. I argued that while Moses and Jesus both served as intercessors for God's people, they did so via different mountains—Sinai for Moses and Zion for Jesus—yet both led their followers to the same heavenly destination. The key distinction between the two mountains is not geographical but pertains to the access they offer: at Sinai, only Moses ascended, but at Zion, the entire audience is invited to ascend into the heavenly realm. This access is made possible

because the sensory barriers (clouds, trumpet sounds, and fire) that once prevented Israel from approaching God at Sinai are absent in Hebrews. As a result, the audience is now able to enter the heavenly tabernacle directly, just as Moses did at Sinai, but with the added privilege of a broader, more inclusive access.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has made significant progress in advancing the main argument of the study. It proposed that when the author of Hebrews compares the faithfulness of Moses and Jesus in 3:1–6, he considers not only their roles as prophets but also a broader narrative in which both figures liberate people from slavery and lead them to a mountain to worship God. Therefore, the comparison between Moses and Jesus is not accidental; it reflects the author's underlying framework, where the Sinai narrative is central. The comparison is logical, especially after the author introduces Jesus as high priest (2:17), as both Moses and Jesus can be seen as figures who ascended to the heavenly tabernacle after leading their people to the foot of a mountain that bridges the earthly and heavenly realms.

Moreover, in this chapter I suggested that the destination Moses and Jesus reach atop their respective mountains is the same heavenly realm with the same heavenly tabernacle. Consequently, I introduced an idea that requires further exploration, namely, that Sinai and Zion are not entirely separate locations leading to distinct destinations. Viewing Zion as the antithesis or replacement of Sinai overlooks the fact that both serve as distinct paths to the same ultimate destination, rather than one superseding or discrediting the other.

My contribution lies in suggesting a consistent reading that integrates the audience's arrival at the mountain Jesus ascended to enter heaven. The author's discussion of rest is grounded in the comparison between Jesus and Moses—two figures who ascend to God's heavenly presence to intercede for their people—and the exhortation to the audience not to

follow the path of the generation that failed to enter their promised rest due to unbelief.[74] Therefore, the thesis presented in this chapter is that, unlike the generation of Israel who sought a promised land distant from Sinai, the audience is encouraged not to depart from the mountain to which their apostle has brought them, but to ascend it, following in the footsteps of Moses and Jesus, reaching the heavenly realm.

The full benefit of this chapter will become evident in Chapter 6 of this study, when I examine the comparison between Sinai and Zion in Heb 12:18–24. There, I will test my thesis that the fundamental difference between Sinai and Zion in Hebrews, when considered alongside the narrative of Sinai throughout the epistle, lies in accessibility rather than geography. These are not two unrelated mountains but rather two distinct channels leading to the same destination. Whoever ascends a mountain ultimately arrives at the same divine presence of God in the heavenly inner shrine. However, while only Moses was able to ascend at Sinai, at Zion, the entire community of the Son is invited to ascend. The reason for this difference is that the barriers that once prevented the people of Israel from ascending have been removed at Zion, allowing people to ascend unhindered. This perspective—namely, that Moses and Jesus entered the same heavenly realm, one via Sinai and the other via Zion—challenges the traditional view, as previously outlined, that Sinai and Zion represent opposing mountains or divergent paths, such as Christianity versus Judaism. The primary distinction, then, is that while only Moses was permitted to ascend at Sinai, at Zion, the entire audience is invited to ascend by virtue of Jesus' intercession. In other words, the difference between the audience's experience at Zion and Israel's experience at Sinai is that at Zion all are welcomed to ascend into God's presence because it is their right as rightful heirs.

[74] In highlighting the figures of Moses and Jesus, I do not intend to suggest that Joshua plays an insignificant role in the logic of rest in Hebrews. Ounsworth (2012), for example, has made important contributions in drawing attention to the role of Joshua. However, while Joshua may at times appear to be left outside the scope of the discussion, this is a deliberate decision, reflecting the broader aim of this project to explore the role of Sinai in Hebrews. And since Moses, rather than Joshua, is the central figure associated with the events at Sinai, I have chosen to prioritise Moses in my analysis.

Chapter 4
The Sinai Narrative and the Audience's Purification

4.1. Introduction

In the introduction to this study, I framed my topic as an attempt to reexamine the portrayal of the people of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews. I argued that Hebrews is not entirely about the wandering people of God motif, as suggested by Käsemann, but is about the waiting people of God. Thus, so far in this study, I have contended that Hebrews draws on parts of Israel's narrative of liberation from Egypt, particularly the moments when the people are not journeying in the wilderness but waiting at the foot of Mount Sinai for Moses to return after completing his high priestly ministry atop the mountain. However, since much of my argument so far has focused on presenting the audience as invited to ascend into the heavenly realm, while less emphasis has been placed on constructing a scene where the audience waits at the foot of the mountain, a question might rightly arise at this stage: is Hebrews then about the waiting people of God, or is it more about the ascending people of God?

In this chapter, I will continue to maintain the notion that the audience should profitably be understood as the waiting people of God, anticipating the return of their heavenly intercessor. Nonetheless, this waiting is by no means static. While still alive on earth, the audience is invited to ascend and enter the heavenly sphere. One must not mistake this present entrance into the heavenly realm as either an indication that the audience has already fully attained their hope or that their ultimate goal is to abandon the earth entirely in favour of heaven; their ultimate focus remains the return of Jesus (9:28). The reality of their present participation and expected ascension therefore does not diminish the fact that their intercessor has not yet fully returned for the consummation of their hope.

Naturally, this gives rise to two main questions, which set the outline for this chapter. First, what is the heavenly tabernacle in Hebrews? In addressing this, I turn to the epistle's use

of the Sinai narrative, focusing on the moment when Moses was shown the heavenly tabernacle (8:5) and when he sprinkled the people at the foot of the mountain (9:19–21). There, I ask what the author perceives is the nature of the heavenly sanctuary.

Second, and equally important, is the question of enablement: if indeed the audience is invited to reach the heavenly tabernacle—a notion which is strongly debated and which I will address in due course—what precisely enables people to enter the heavenly inner shrine? To this end, I will first examine the epistle's invitation to enter the heavenly inner shrine, focusing on three key texts: Heb 4:16, 6:19–20, and 10:19–20. Through this, I will argue that the author not only envisions the audience as capable of ascending into heaven while still alive on earth but also expects them to do so. Building upon this analysis, I will move to analyse the theme of "perfection" in Hebrews, focusing on the use of the verb τελειόω within the framework of purification. I will argue that in Hebrews, perfection denotes the purification required for entry into the heavenly tabernacle's inner shrine, such access being presented as enabling the audience to perform at least one distinctly priestly function, namely, entering the holy place.

4.2. The Heavenly Tabernacle in Hebrews

In the second chapter of this study, I investigated the allusion to Sinai in Heb 2:2, where the phrase "the message declared by angels" refers to God's revelation spoken at the mountain. Though the name "Sinai" is not used, the suggestion is unmistakable. Later, in Chapter 6, I will address the most explicit reference, Heb 12:18–21, where the citation is so strong that some manuscripts include the word ὄρος (12:18) in the text itself (even though, as I will investigate, it is likely not in the original).

This section engages with two additional references that similarly draw from the Sinai event and explicitly cite the Book of Exodus' portrayal of the proceedings: Heb 8:5 and 9:19–21. To be clear, my aim here is not to produce a detailed exegetical analysis of these texts, nor

how they function in their immediate context; that will be addressed in Chapter 5, when I grapple with the question of the validity and endurance of the Sinai covenant and Law following the introduction of the new covenant. Instead, the emphasis here is primarily driven by questions of how the author refers to the Sinai event beyond 2:2 and 12:18–21.

4.2.1. Heb 8:5

> The place where they serve is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary, just as Moses was warned by God as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For he says, "See that you make everything according to the design shown to you on the mountain" (οἵτινες ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ λατρεύουσιν τῶν ἐπουρανίων, καθὼς κεχρημάτισται Μωϋσῆς μέλλων ἐπιτελεῖν τὴν σκηνήν· ὅρα γάρ φησιν, ποιήσεις πάντα κατὰ τὸν τύπον τὸν δειχθέντα σοι ἐν τῷ ὄρει [8:5]).

In a later chapter (Chapter 5), I will analyse the Levitical priesthood, referenced here as those serving in the earthly tabernacle, which is described as a "sketch and shadow" (ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ) of the heavenly one. I will argue that the author's use of σκιά—also applied to the Law in 10:1—does not imply a negative connotation or a lack of validity. Rather, the earthly tabernacle's value is derived precisely from its status as an earthly σκιά of the celestial reality, a concept attested in Second Temple thought (e.g., Philo, *Vit. Mos*. 2.74). In this section, however, the emphasis lies specifically on the quotation from Exod 25:40 LXX in Heb 8:5, when Moses is instructed to build the earthly tabernacle.[1]

According to the narrative of the Book of Exodus, God instructed Moses to ascend the mountain to come to the Lord (ἀνάβηθι πρὸς κύριον) alongside Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and

[1] The quotation of Exod 25:40 LXX itself is rather straightforward. Hebrews adds the adjective πάντα (8:5), probably to emphasize that the entirety of the earthly tabernacle was made according to the patter of the heavenly one, and slightly changes the tense of δείκνυμι, from a perfect participle (δεδειγμένον [Exod 25:40 LXX]) to an aorist participle (δειχθέντα). For a brief discussion of the addition of πάντα and the change of tense of δείκνυμι, see Attridge 1989, 220. It is also worth noting that the quotation is introduced as a χρηματίζω given to Moses as he was about to complete the tabernacle (Μωϋσῆς μέλλων ἐπιτελεῖν τὴν σκηνήν [8:5]). The author employs this verb twice more in Hebrews: in 11:7, Noah, by faith, is χρηματίζω about unseen things (referring to the coming flood), and in 12:25, the audience is urged to heed the message of Jesus, as he is χρηματίζω not from earth but from heaven. This consistent usage suggests that for the author, χρηματίζω carries the semantic weight of a warning. This nuance is well-attested in the NT (e.g., Matt 2:12, 22; Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22) and within Second Temple Jewish texts (e.g., Philo *Vit. Mos*. 2.238; Josephus *Ant*. 5.1.14 § 42).

seventy elders (σὺ καὶ Ααρων καὶ Ναδαβ καὶ Αβιουδ καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα τῶν πρεσβυτέρων Ισραηλ [Exod 24:1]). The text immediately establishes a restriction: only Moses was invited to come near God (ἐγγιεῖ Μωυσῆς μόνος πρὸς τὸν θεόν). Everyone else was explicitly prohibited from approaching (αὐτοὶ δὲ οὐκ ἐγγιοῦσιν)—even the smaller group accompanying Moses was instructed to worship the Lord at a distance (προσκυνήσουσιν μακρόθεν τῷ κυρίῳ [Exod 24:11])—and the people were strictly forbidden from ascending with them (ὁ δὲ λαὸς οὐ συναναβήσεται μετ᾽ αὐτῶν [Exod 24:2]). As the ascent proceeds, the number of participants grows smalle: having left the group behind, only Moses, alongside Joshua, continued ascending the mountain of God (Μωυσῆς καὶ Ἰησοῦς… ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ [Exod 24:13]; ἀνέβη Μωυσῆς καὶ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸ ὄρος [Exod 24:15]). Upon reaching the cloud-covered summit, Moses entered the cloud and continued his ascent alone, without Joshua (εἰσῆλθεν Μωυσῆς εἰς τὸ μέσον τῆς νεφέλης καὶ ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος [Exod 24:18]). He remained there for forty days and nights (Exod 24:18), receiving instructions for the precise elements of the earthly tabernacle (Exod 25:1–39), which was to be made according to the pattern (τύπος) of the heavenly tabernacle (Exod 25:40).

Evidently, the author of Hebrews is fully aware of this episode in the Sinai narrative[2] and envisions Moses being shown (δείκνυμι) a tabernacle atop Sinai to that he might construct an earthly sanctuary according to a heavenly pattern (τύπος). However, the precise nature of how the author understood this heavenly tabernacle remains a matter of scholarly debate.[3] Did he perceive it as an immaterial, Platonic ideal, serving as the model for the earthly tabernacle

[2] The author returns to this specific narrative in 9:19–21 to discuss the covenant sprinkling (see comments below).

[3] For recent studies on how the author of Hebrews might have imagined the heavenly tabernacle, see Isaacs 1991; Church 2017, 369–432; Woo 2024, 3–34. Schenck offers a helpful comment regarding the varied ways in which the author employs instructions regarding the heavenly tabernacle, "In the end, the best explanation for Hebrews' varied tabernacle imagery and rhetoric is that the primary significance of the tabernacle is located in the rhetorical purposes of the author's broader high priestly metaphor" (2007, 180). In other words, since the author "uses the heavenly tabernacle in several different metaphorical ways that do not necessarily cohere with one another" (2007, 115), it is challenging to have one unifying approach to all allusions of the heavenly tabernacle in Hebrews.

and temple?[4] If so, one could ask how the author envisioned people in the material world interacting with such an ideal, immaterial tabernacle. Perhaps the author saw the tabernacle as a reflection of the cosmos, with the audience ascending to the archetype from which the earthly temple was patterned. Alternatively, the author might have viewed the heavenly tabernacle as the eschatological assembly of the redeemed, meaning that entering the heavenly tabernacle was not so much a vertical ascent, but an eschatological participation in a future reality made accessible in the present.[5] Or perhaps the tabernacle is a metaphor of the audience's wilderness journeying state.[6] Another possibility is that the author saw the heavenly tabernacle as symbolising Jesus' body, either his humanity,[7] or in its current, exalted form in heaven,[8] or as represented in the Eucharist.[9]

An alternative position, taken in this study, is that, for the author of Hebrews, the heavenly tabernacle exists as a tangible reality in the heavenly realm, constituting a dimension distinct from the earthly sphere. This view—where the heavenly tabernacle co-exists in a parallel dimension to its earthly counterpart—is supported by descriptions in OT texts (e.g., Isa 6:1–8; Ps 11:4), in Second Temple Jewish literature (e.g., *1 En*. 14:8–23; Wis. 9:8; 4Q400–7; Philo, *Mos*. 2.66–108; Josephus, *Ant*. 3:179–87),[10] in the NT (Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17;

[4] Williamson 1970, 563. For a helpful summary of possible Platonic notions of the heavenly tabernacle in Hebrews, see Koester 2008, 97–100.

[5] According to Church, the heavenly tabernacle "is not a structure, either in heaven or on earth. Rather, it is a metaphor for the eschatological dwelling of God with his people" (2017, 435); see also Hurst 1983. For an argument against Church and Hurst's views, see Moore 2021.

[6] Keene 2010.

[7] Cody 1960.

[8] Vanhoye 1965.

[9] Swetnam 1966.

[10] For example, the *Testament of Levi* describes the heavenly tabernacle as follows: "In the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory in the Holy of Holies superior to all holiness. There with him are the archangels, who serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord in behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous ones. They present to the Lord a pleasing odor, a rational and bloodless oblation. In the heaven below them are the messengers who carry the responses to the angels in the Lord's presence. There with him are the thrones and authorities; their praises to God are offered eternally" (*T. Levi*. 3.4–8); translation taken from Kee 1985, 789.

16:1, 17), as well in Cicero (*Resp*. 3.14) and Seneca (Ben. 7.7.3).[11] I am not alone in this view. While scholars have proposed various nuances regarding the interaction and coexistence of the earthly and heavenly realms, and to what extent the author incorporates Platonic idealism or Jewish apocalypticism, the idea that the heavenly tabernacle is both real and existent is supported by scholars such as Mackie,[12] Westfall,[13] Moffitt,[14] and Jamieson.[15] I do not mean to propose that all of these individuals share the exact same views. Rather, to varying degrees, they have all argued that the author of Hebrews envisions the heavenly tabernacle as existing in a heavenly realm that runs parallel to the earthly realm.

Naturally, this analysis of the heavenly realm invites several other related questions, such as whether the author of Hebrews envisioned the heavenly tabernacle as mirroring the earthly one in its spatial divisions and, consequently, whether he envisions there being multiple heavens.[16] While these are important questions, they fall outside the scope of this particular inquiry. I will, however, discuss the co-existence of the earthly and heavenly tabernacles when I engage with the possibility of two parallel priesthoods—a Levitical one and a Melchizedekian one—operating in two different, but co-existing realms (see Chapter 5). For the present,

[11] Mackie 2011, 83.

[12] Mackie 2007, 158–59. According to Mackie, the "author clearly believes that an actual temple stands at the centre of the heavenly realm" (2011, 82–83).

[13] Hebrews "represents the heavenly tabernacle as a concrete real place" (Westfall 2019, 228).

[14] "The author of Hebrews held to a cosmology along the lines attested in Jewish apocalyptic texts that imagine multiple heavens with a tabernacle structure located in the highest heaven" (Moffitt 2022, 131).

[15] "Hebrews envisions the heavenly tabernacle as an actual structure in heaven... Making all due allowance for transcendent aspects of Hebrews' depiction of heaven, its heavenly tabernacle must be 'real' enough for the resurrected Jesus to be there now" (Jamieson 2018, 53–54).

[16] While passages such as 6:19–20, which describe Jesus' entry "behind the curtain" into the inner shrine, may suggest such a dual structure in the heavenly tabernacle, my focus in this study is more narrowly defined. Specifically, when referring to the heavenly tabernacle, I am referring to the inner sanctuary—the most holy place—as this is the locus of heavenly activity and theological emphasis for the author. Consequently, I will not distinguish between an outer and inner sanctuary in my discussion. Unless otherwise noted, references to the heavenly tabernacle should be understood as references to the inner shrine. I will assume Moore's conclusion that "the outer chamber of the heavenly tabernacle has in fact 'lost its standing' by being combined with the most holy place... The removal of the curtain unites the two chambers into one, a change that is straightforward given that the chambers of the tabernacle are equal in width and there is no other structural distinction between them" (2024, 90–91). For the most detailed analysis of the structure of the heavenly realm in Hebrews, see Wunrow 2025, 109–21.

returning to Heb 8:5, we can safely conclude that when the author speaks of Moses having been warned to build the earthly tabernacle according to the pattern shown atop Sinai, he is fundamentally envisioning the erection of an earthly tent that exists in a distinct realm from the heavenly one. This distinction is crucial, as it is in the celestial sphere that Jesus was established as high priest. Jesus, having ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens (8:1), entered that heavenly tabernacle as high priest to "minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up" (8:2; c.f., 9:24). Consequently, the author affirms that on earth, Jesus "would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law" (8:4). This affirmation, in effect, establishes the Levitical system as functionally valid in its earthly sphere, while simultaneously confirming Christ's ministry in the heavenly realm.

4.2.2. Heb 9:19–21

> For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship (λαληθείσης γὰρ πάσης ἐντολῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον ὑπὸ Μωϋσέως παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, λαβὼν τὸ αἷμα τῶν μόσχων καὶ τῶν τράγων μετὰ ὕδατος καὶ ἐρίου κοκκίνου καὶ ὑσσώπου αὐτό τε τὸ βιβλίον καὶ πάντα τὸν λαὸν ἐρράντισεν λέγων· τοῦτο τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης ἧς ἐνετείλατο πρὸς ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός. καὶ τὴν σκηνὴν δὲ καὶ πάντα τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας τῷ αἵματι ὁμοίως ἐρράντισεν [9:19–21]).

An additional text where the author of Hebrews draws from the Book of Exodus' narrative of the Sinai event is 9:19–21. The author's argument is rooted in the principle that the inauguration of a covenant or a will requires death (9:16), establishing an analogy wherein a testament only takes effect after the testate dies (9:17).[17] Thus, Jesus' death (9:15) signifies the

[17] As Peeler explains, "the author articulates the common idea that people have to die before their inheritance is distributed and their wills are put into effect" (2024, 244). For an in-depth exploration of the author's logic and use of διαθήκη, see Hahn 2005.

inauguration of the new covenant. To validate this conclusion, he turns to the "first covenant"—the covenant made with Moses and Israel at Sinai—to demonstrate that it, too, required blood for its inauguration: "not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood" (ὅθεν οὐδὲ ἡ πρώτη χωρὶς αἵματος ἐγκεκαίνισται [9:18]). The author then resumes his larger proposition regarding what Jesus' blood accomplishes in establishing a new covenant (9:11–10:18).[18]

The specific episode the author recalls is Moses' action following the people's agreement to keep God's commandments (Exod 24:3, 7). Moses took the blood from oxen offered upon "an altar at the foot of the mountain" (Exod 24:4) and proceeded to sprinkle it upon the people (λαβὼν δὲ Μωυσῆς τὸ αἷμα κατεσκέδασεν τοῦ λαοῦ [Exod 24:8]), saying: "see the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (εἶπεν Ἰδοὺ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης, ἧς διέθετο κύριος πρὸς ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων τῶν λόγων τούτων [Exod 24:8]).

We can readily observe two key features in the author's use of the Sinai event. Frist, the author alters the quotation from Exod 24:3–8 LXX: Hebrews introduces the quotation with τοῦτο, whereas Exodus uses ἰδοῦ. More significantly, the covenant is ordained by God (ὁ θεός) in Hebrews, with the Lord (κύριος) in Exodus, and is described as commanded (ἐνετείλατο) rather than decreed (διέθετο). Furthermore, whereas the LXX identifies only the people as being sprinkled, Hebrews explicitly includes the "book itself" (τὸ βιβλίον) as being consecrated by the blood.[19]

[18] For an in-depth analysis of the logic and theology of Jesus' blood in Heb 9:11–10:18, see Jamieson 2016, 2018.

[19] For a brief discussion on these differences between Hebrews and Exodus, see Attridge 1989, 257–58. Likewise, see Koester's summary of how the differences between these two texts have often been interpreted as reflecting a spiritual meaning (2008, 28–29). It is also worth noting that ῥαντίζω in Hebrews does not appear to reflect modest scattering, since it is used to describe the effects of Jesus' blood as it effects salvation for the audience. Thus, Peeler concludes that ῥαντίζω should be understood as completely covering with blood; see Peeler 2024, 246; 2013, 187–205.

Second, the author does not limit his comments to the covenant sprinkling ritual but incorporates details from other Pentateuchal texts (Lev 8–9 and Num 19). The author speaks as though Moses used water, scarlet wool, and hyssop (9:19), elements absent from the Exodus account but appearing in the ritual of the red heifer in Num 19:9, 18, 20. Exodus says nothing of the tent and vessels as being sprinkled by Moses with blood at Sinai, and thus perhaps the author is drawing from the purification of the tabernacle upon its completion in Exod 40:9–10 (though there Moses uses oil and not blood) or perhaps from the ordination of Aaron (Lev 8:15, 19) or the Day of Atonement ritual (Lev 16:15–19).[20]

One may be tempted to conclude that since Jesus' death "redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant" (εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων [9:15])—transgressions about which the author has already spoken (e.g., 2:2)—the audience is no longer bound to fulfil the covenant and thus follow the Torah.[21] Nonetheless, while transgressions against Torah under the first covenant did indeed demand retribution, redemption from these transgressions is experienced by receiving "the promised eternal inheritance" (τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας). As I will develop in Chapter 5, in Hebrews, things that are eternal appear to be tied to the heavenly realm, while earthly things are temporal.[22]

An example supporting this distinction can be seen in 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐχθὲς καὶ σήμερον ὁ αὐτὸς καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [13:8]). This phrase, placed immediately after instructing the audience to remember

[20] For brief comments on the different items sprinkled or not sprinkled in the accounts of Hebrews and Exodus, see Johnson 2012, 242.

[21] Indeed, one might be forgiven for concluding that this indicates that "Christ's death fulfilled the self-maledictory curses associated with the Sinaitic covenant and terminated that covenant" (Harris 2019, 230).

[22] At this point, Stevens' recent work on the theme of promise in Hebrews is remarkably useful, as he centres on the question of how the audience receives and experiences this eternal inheritance (2025). He reminds readers that in Hebrews, the promise that the audience awaits is "described in terms of rest (4:1), blessing and the multiplication of a people (6:13), forgiveness (8:12), homeland and city (11:16), and festival (12:22)" (2025, 78). From this vantage point, Stevens concludes that "this way of access into heaven that is the covenant of which Jesus is a mediator (9:15) is portrayed as the means by which a recipient of the promise receives the eternal inheritance (9:15)" (2025, 78).

their transient leaders (13:7), is best understood as asserting that while earthly conditions and leadership are unstable (given the impending shaking of all created things in 12:27), something that remains unchanged εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας must be tied to the heavenly realm, where, according to Hebrews, things will be left constant (12:27).[23] This is a point the author emphasises repeatedly, highlighting that Jesus will forever be the same high priest in the heavenly inner shrine (6:18–20; 7:3, 28). In other words, Jesus Christ remains the same (ὁ αὐτός) because he is the high priest in the heavenly tabernacle, the realm where stability and permanence exist. In heaven, Jesus will always remain the same. On earth, however, leaders will come and go. Given the proximity of this statement to the earlier comments about leaders in 13:7, it is natural to see Jesus' unchanging nature as a contrast to the transient nature of earthly leadership. The community had existed long enough for leaders to have risen and passed, yet in heaven, Jesus will remain steadfast tomorrow, as he has been today and in the past.

If this view is correct—that earthly things are temporal while heavenly things are eternal—then we can readily see that the audience is redeemed from transgressions of the first covenant (9:15), which operates on earth, by being introduced to the inheritance tied to a new priesthood that operates in another realm—the heavenly sphere. This conclusion (which I will fully address in Chapter 7) highlights that a key to understanding the author's seemingly negative descriptions of Sinai and Torah is by keeping in mind that he is envisioning a community that lives in two realms at once: on earth, the Torah and the Sinai covenant remain

[23] It is worth noting that this phrase has sparked various interpretations regarding its relationship to the surrounding text, and, naturally, not everyone would agree with my conclusion. Ellingworth, for instance, views it as an isolated statement that seems detached from its context. As he concludes, "This apparently isolated statement has no syntactic connection with what precedes or follows; its content also seems general and unrelated to the surrounding exhortations" (Ellingworth 1993, 704). DeSilva, on the other hand, argues that it is meant to reassure the audience that, in contrast to the passing of previous leaders mentioned just a verse earlier, Jesus remains constant: "The hearers may trust Jesus today and tomorrow even as 'yesterday' their leaders trusted Jesus and were not disappointed. Jesus' favor, which is not here today and gone tomorrow but always present toward his faithful ones, becomes thereby the source of stability for the hearts of the addressees" (2000, 495). Attridge suggests that this remark serves to remind the audience of the firm foundation of their doctrine and communal life, which remains steadfast in Jesus, regardless of the changing nature of human leadership. Attridge remarks, "He [Jesus] is now, for the Christian addressees, a sure foundation for their communal life and doctrine" (1989, 393).

valid; in the heavenly realm, the audience experiences a different set of realities under the heavenly priesthood of Jesus. It is to this theme—namely, the topic of the audience's welcome into the heavenly realm—that I now turn.

4.2.4. Summary

In this section, I consider two passages from Hebrews (8:5; 9:19–21) that reference the Sinai event. As stated in the introduction, my objective was not to provide an exhaustive analysis of these verses; rather, I sought to engage with two clear allusions to Sinai that exist beyond the primary texts of 2:2 and 12:18–21. The significance of this discussion will become evident as I now move to expand upon the author's invitation for the audience to enter the heavenly realm.

4.3. People's Invitation to Enter the Heavenly Tabernacle

In a previous chapter, I argued that Hebrews sees the invitation in Exod 19:13 LXX as an anticipation of an ascent to Sinai once the sounds and clouds had dissipated. This section builds upon that theme by suggesting that the author envisions the audience as being able to enter the heavenly tabernacle. To support this, I analyse three key passages—4:16, 6:19–20, and 10:19–20—that appear to invite people to approach the heavenly inner sanctuary.[24]

Before proceeding, it is necessary to acknowledge that the notion of the audience being welcomed to enter the heavenly realm whilst alive on earth is a significantly debated topic. For instance, Moore recently argued that such access was not possible, whereas Mackie asserts that it is.[25] I will engage more fully with this scholarly discussion—specifically addressing the paradox of how the audience can be alive on earth while simultaneously envisioned as entering the heavenly realm—in Chapter 7. There, I will outline the different scholarly positions and

[24] I will comment on Heb 12:18–24, another critical text for this study, elsewhere in this study. For focused studies on entering God's heavenly presence in Hebrews, see, for example, Mackie 2011a; 2011b.

[25] Moore 2019; Mackie 2011.

explain my own view. In the current section, however, I will reserve detailed commentary on competing views for the footnotes, focusing solely on establishing the exegetical case for the audience's possible access.

4.3.1. Heb 4:16

> Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος, ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὕρωμεν εἰς εὔκαιρον βοήθειαν [4:16]).

One of the key interpretive challenges of this passage is understanding the concept of ὁ θρόνος τῆς χάριτος. While it is sometimes interpreted as a royal setting where subjects seek mercy from their king,[26] there are also compelling arguments for interpreting this invitation within a cultic context. On one hand, the author's call to approach (προσέρχομαι) God is grounded in Jesus' role as the high priest. After presenting Jesus as a priest who has ascended to heaven (4:14) and can empathise with human weaknesses (4:15), the author directly links the act of drawing near to God with Jesus' priesthood, stressed by the word "therefore" (οὖν) in 4:16. This invitation to approach the throne of grace is followed by an extended discussion of Jesus as high priest (5:1–10). Moreover, as I will discuss shortly, the use of προσέρχομαι in Hebrews consistently carries a cultic connotation, framing the act of approaching the throne of grace as a form of cultic worship.[27]

The term "throne of grace" (4:16) is not merely a royal term but also carries significant cultic overtones. As Attridge notes, it evokes the imagery of God's heavenly enthronement found in the prophets (Jer 14:21; 17:12). Attridge interprets this throne as the archetype of the

[26] As Kleinig writes, this is the scene of "an unusually generous king who makes himself available daily for an audience with his subjects in the throne room of his palace" (2017, 232). To be sure, some Second Temple texts do draw a connection between the place Moses' saw atop Sinai and a throne room, for example, *Exagoge*, lines 68–76.

[27] Ellingworth 1993, 269.

ark of the covenant, situated in the inner sanctuary—the place where God's presence resided and where the rites of expiation were conducted on the Day of Atonement. He observes that the earthly counterpart of this heavenly throne was referred to as the "mercy seat" (ἱλαστήριον).[28] While this study does not delve into the specifics of Attridge's interpretation regarding the tabernacle's mercy seat,[29] it is significant that Hebrews employs cultic language when discussing access to the heavenly throne. For instance, in 8:1, the epistle refers to Jesus' ascension to "the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens," connecting it to his priestly ministry in the true tabernacle established by God.

It is worth remembering that the focus of the statement in 8:1 is not on Jesus' right to rule, as one might expect if the throne were understood as a royal throne room, but rather on Jesus' priesthood. The author introduces Jesus' ascension to the heavenly throne by first emphasizing his role as high priest (8:1). He then states that Jesus ascended "to serve in the sanctuary and the true tent" (8:1–2). Not surprisingly, this has led some scholars to conclude that Hebrews places God's throne within the corresponding heavenly holy of holies.[30]

In short, though various interpretations of the "throne of grace" exist,[31] my primary focus here is to highlight that the call to approach the throne in 4:16 is fundamentally tied to Jesus' priesthood and his ministry in the inner sanctuary of the heavenly tabernacle. When the audience is invited into God's presence, they are specifically invited to enter the place where

[28] Attridge 1989b, 142.

[29] For differing views, see the discussion in Ellingworth 1993, 269.

[30] See Bruce 1964, 86; Buchanan 1972, 82.

[31] For a summary of views, see Scholer 1991, 103–12. I am inclined to agree with deSilva that the aim of the author in Heb 4:16 is not to provide details of the precise location of the temple/throne to which people are invited. Other texts like 6:19–20 provide better clues. Heb 4:16 is simply describing the place where Jesus dwells in both royal majesty and priestly holiness. As deSilva writes, "The author's choice of words here reveals his ideological strategy at work. Joining the Christian movement has not pushed believers out to the margins but rather has brought them closer to the divine center of the universe. There is a certain centripetal force to the language… This image reinforces the linear model that the author uses to orient the audience to life in this world, which casts leaving the group to rejoin one's neighbors as 'falling short' of, or 'failing to enter,' the goal prepared for them by God" (2000, 185–86).

God dwells within the heavenly tabernacle.[32] In doing so, they would "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16).[33]

4.3.2. Heb 6:19–20

> We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (ἣν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [6:19–20]).

Leaving aside the use of nautical ("an anchor") and athletic/military ("runner") analogies,[34] I am primarily interested in the location of the audience's anchor and the destination of their forerunner, namely the place "behind the curtain" (ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος [6:19]). There is almost a unanimous consensus that this term points to the holy place within the tabernacle tent, which was separated from the rest by a curtain, where the ark of the covenant was placed.[35] This interpretation is supported by the fact that ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος

[32] Not everyone would agree. Moore, for instance, holds that, while Heb 4:16 indeed comes close to inviting people to enter into the heavenly realm, yet stops short from actual entrance into the very presence of God (2019, 206). I will engage with some of Moore's views in Chapter 7. For now, I briefly note my agreement with him insomuch as it seems reasonable to assume that humans, in their physical form, are unable to enter the heavenly inner shrine. Nonetheless, although the community's actions on earth might appear to be activities restricted within the earthly realm, they are not bound to this world but indeed function in the heavenly realm altogether. Therefore, they do enter the heavenly inner shrine—yet not physically, but by virtue of living in two realms simultaneously.

[33] It is worth stopping to note that although the terms ἔλεος and χάρις often appear together in Jewish and Christian literature (e.g., Wis 3:9; 4:15; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; 2 John 3), and are sometimes used almost synonymously (Attridge 1989, 142), both terms are in fact found in the Exodus narrative of Sinai. There, they describe the grace and mercy that Moses received from God while interceding on behalf of Israel. When Moses asks God to see his glory (Exod 33:18), God accedes because he showed Moses χάρις (Exod 33:17) and ἔλεος (Exod 33:19). Later, when God shows Moses his glory by passing by, again both terms are highlighted (Exod 34:7, 9).

[34] Cockerill 2012, 290.

[35] Notable exceptions arise primarily from two fronts. On the one hand, some conclude that the curtain (καταπέτασμα) in mind is not the one leading to the holy place (Rice 1987). A response contra Rice is offered by Young (2001). On the other hand, some argue that "behind the curtain" reflects a Hellenistic understanding of the temple as a symbol of the cosmos. As such, to go "behind the curtain" represents moving from an earthly to a heavenly reality; see Attridge 1989b, 184–85. For a discussion of the use of καταπέτασμα in Hebrews, see Hofius 1972, 49–94.

is mentioned four times in the LXX, consistently referring to this space within the tabernacle, accessible solely to the high priest and only during the Day of Atonement (Exod 26:33; Lev 16:2, 12, 15). Moreover, Hebrews clarifies that Jesus gains access to this sacred space behind the tent solely upon assuming the role of a high priest (ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος [6:20]). By becoming a high priest, he qualifies to enter the holy of holies.

It is at this point that Hebrews departs from other Second Temple Jewish writings by identifying the high priest (in this case, Jesus, having been made high priest under the order of Melchizedek [6:20]) as a forerunner (πρόδρομος). The term πρόδρομος appears three times in the LXX: twice metaphorically for the first fruits of the land (Num 13:21; Isa 28:4) and once to describe wasps sent ahead by enemies as precursors to their army (Wis 12:8). In Graeco-Roman literature, πρόδρομος primarily refers to a scout or advance guard that prepares the way for the main force (e.g., Herodotus 1.60; 4.121, 122; Arrian, *Anabasis* 1.12).[36] The consistent theme across these references is that πρόδρομος signifies a precursor or advance party, heralding the forthcoming arrival of a larger group.[37]

By calling Jesus a πρόδρομος, and since a πρόδρομος is always proceeded by others, Hebrews anticipates that Jesus will be followed by others and more would arrive at the location to which he has gone. Those expected to come after Jesus are none other than the community members themselves, since Heb 6:20 calls Jesus a forerunner "on our behalf" (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν). This theme is echoed in 2:10, where Jesus is termed the "pioneer" (ἀρχηγός), guiding God's children to glory and thus delineating his role in leading believers into the same place he himself has gone (2:13).

The concept that believers are to follow Jesus into the inner sanctuary is reinforced by the association between him and ἐλπίς (6:18). Jesus' entrance (εἰσῆλθεν [6:20]) into the space

[36] Lane 1991a, 154.

[37] When not referring to people, πρόδρομος can mean a home's front porch or vestibule; see CGL "πρόδρομος," 2.1182. In this case, πρόδρομος indicates an area which precedes the rest of the house.

behind the curtain parallels how hope enters (εἰσερχομένην) the inner shrine.[38] While the role of ἐλπίς in 6:18–19 primarily offers consolation to the audience,[39] its connection with Jesus, as Johnson notes, effectively conveys the notion, "hope is Jesus."[40] Furthermore, this hope is described as "set before" (προκειμένης ἐλπίδος [6:18]) the audience. The verb πρόκειμαι is used similarly in Hebrews in two other instances: in 12:1, it refers to "the race set before" us (προκείμενον ἡμῖν ἀγῶνα [12:1]), and in 12:2, to "the joy set before" (προκειμένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς [12:2]) Jesus, implying in both contexts that what is "set before" (πρόκειμαι) is intended for pursuit and attainment. Thus, the hope which enters the inner shrine is meant to be seized by the audience.[41] In other words, as the high priest, Jesus accesses the inner sanctuary, and as a forerunner on the audience's behalf, he sets the expectation for them to follow him into the sacred space behind the curtain.[42]

4.3.3. Heb 10:19–20

> We have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh (παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, ἣν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ [10:19–20]).

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[38] Jesus grants people a hope (ἐλπίς) that is secure and steadfast (ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν [6:19]) because it is one that enters the inner shrine (εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον [6:19]). The καί chain that links "secure," "steadfast," and the verb "to enter" (ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ εἰσερχομένην [6:19]) suggests that all three are components of the "hope," and therefore one can conclude that the hope would not be secure nor steadfast were it not for the fact that it also enters the inner shrine.

[39] See DeSilva 2000, 252; Koester 2001, 334.

[40] Johnson 2006, 172.

[41] Namely by those seeking refuge (οἱ καταφυγόντες [6:18]) and holding fast to it (κρατῆσαι [6:18]). It is worth noting that εἰσερχομένην (6:18) is in the present tense, which further emphasises the fact that to follow after this hope is a present possibility for the audience; see Ellingworth 1993, 347.

[42] Koester 2001, 335; Mitchell 2009, 137; Cockerill 2012, 291–92. There is, of course, the questions of whether the audience follows Jesus into the inner shrine already or at some unspecified point in the future. After all, clearly Jesus has entered, while the audience apparently has not yet followed. As Moore concludes, "These verses [6:18–20] establish a close connection between two cosmological realms, rather than locating believers and Jesus in the same heavenly realm" (2019, 199). I will return to this matter later on (in Chapter 7), when I ask how exactly do audience members enter the inner shrine whilst alive on earth.

While more could be said regarding the pivotal position which Heb 10:19–20 holds within the epistle's structure (several scholars have viewed it as signaling a major transition and introducing a paraenetic section),[43] my focus here is only on the invitation to "enter the sanctuary" (εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων [10:19]). There is almost unanimous consensus that τὰ ἅγια denotes the holy of holies, the sacred space behind the veil (6:19–20; 8:1–2; 9:11–12, 24).[44] This interpretation is strongly reinforced by the requirement to pass "through the curtain" (διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος [10:20]) to gain access to this holy place. As established earlier, καταπέτασμα in Hebrews specifically refers to the veil that demarcates the inner sanctuary from the rest of the tabernacle (9:3). Therefore, regardless of whether Jesus' flesh is interpreted as the path or the veil,[45] the exhortation to "enter the sanctuary" in 10:19 is most plausibly understood as an invitation to the heavenly inner shrine, the holy of holies behind the curtain.[46]

A comparison reveals significant structural and thematic parallels between Heb 6:19–20 and 10:19–21. Both passages emphasise Jesus, as the high priest, entering the heavenly tabernacle and the space behind the veil. The critical distinction lies in the subject: in 6:19, that which enters is the sure and steadfast hope of the audience; in 10:19, the audience themselves, having confidence, are able to enter the space behind the veil. These similarities and differences are synthesized in the table below:

[43] Vanhoye 1976, 173.

[44] Indeed, much more could be said on the matter, especially if one assumes that the heavenly tabernacle is comprised of one or more tents. For a brief discussion on this topic, see Koester 2001, 442.

[45] One of the more challenging elements to interpret in 10:19–20 is the phrase τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (10:20) and what exactly it modifies. If it is understood as modifying "the way" (ὁδός), then it suggests Jesus' blood is the vehicle through which one gains access to the holy of holies. Alternatively, if it modifies "curtain" (καταπέτασμα), it implies that Jesus' flesh itself acts as the barrier to the inner sanctuary, now made passable. For a discussion on these different interpretations, see Lane 1991b, 275. An alternative view, held by Harris, is that this phrase modifies the entire clause (2019, 274). Despite the divergent interpretations of how Jesus' flesh facilitates entry into the inner shrine, both readings converge on the idea that Jesus' flesh.

[46] To borrow deSilva's words, who similarly concludes, "The author tells them, however, that they have already the full confidence to make that journey into the 'real' realm, having been cleansed by the better sacrifice to go where even the levitical high priests could not" (2000, 337). For a fuller analysis of this text as it relates to entrance into the heavenly tabernacle, see Ounsworth 2012, 145–52; Peterson 2020, 238–39.

Heb 6:19–20	Heb 10:19–21
We have (ἔχομεν) this hope… that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain (εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος), where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered (εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς), having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς).	We have (ἔχοντες) confidence to enter the sanctuary (εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων) by the blood of Jesus (ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ), by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος) … we have a great priest (ἱερέα μέγαν) over the house of God.

Table 1: Heb 6:19–20 and Heb 10:19–21.

4.3.4. Summary

In this section, I analyse three key passages from Hebrews (4:16, 6:19-20, and 10:19–20) that highlight the audience's invitation to enter the heavenly tabernacle, drawing a parallel to Moses' experience on Sinai. In Heb 4:16, the call to approach the throne of grace is linked to Jesus' high priesthood, highlighting the cultic nature of drawing near to God. Heb 6:19–20 describes Jesus as a forerunner who has entered the inner sanctuary on behalf of the audience, setting an example for them to follow into the heavenly holy of holies. Finally, Heb 10:19–20 stresses that through Jesus' blood, the audience is given confidence to enter the sanctuary, the holy of holies, further reinforcing the idea of direct access to God through Jesus' priestly role.

4.4. People's Ability to Enter the Heavenly Tabernacle

Thus far in this chapter, the focus has been on the apparent invitation in Hebrews for the audience to enter the inner shrine of the heavenly tabernacle. At this juncture, however, a critical question must be addressed: if one assumes that the author envisions individuals as able to enter the heavenly inner shrine, what precisely enables them to do so? After all, Levitical priests could not enter the earthly tabernacle, much less the inner sanctuary, without undergoing the requisite purificatory rites. Therefore, how does the author account for the necessary purification that legitimises the audience's entry into the holy of holies behind the veil? More specifically, how does he justify envisioning individuals as being able to perform actions reserved exclusively for the Levitical high priest, namely, entering the inner shrine?

This question naturally leads to another: has the author departed from Torah's teaching that only the high priest, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Exod 30:7–10; Lev 16:1–34), could enter the inner shrine? Put differently, has he now extended this invitation to everyone, thereby contradicting Torah's legal provision by granting access to a space previously prohibited?

The second question is easier to answer. The invitation to enter into the heavenly inner shrine is by no means a violation of Torah's instruction that people were not to enter the tabernacle's holiest place (Lev 16:17).[47] While on the surface it might seem like a contradiction, Hebrews' invitation to enter the holy of holies does not violate Torah for a primary reason: the author recognises only Levitical priests are authorised for priestly duties in the earthly sanctuary and does not invite the audience to enter the earthly tabernacle but rather its heavenly counterpart.[48] Thus, in 8:4, the author argues that if Jesus were on earth (εἰ μὲν οὖν ἦν ἐπὶ γῆς), he would not be qualified to serve as a priest (οὐδ' ἂν ἦν ἱερεύς) for a significant reason: according to the law (κατὰ νόμον), there are others who present the offerings (ὄντων τῶν προσφερόντων… τὰ δῶρα)—namely, the Levitical priests who minister in the earthly sanctuary, described as a copy and shadow of the heavenly one (οἵτινες ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ λατρεύουσιν τῶν ἐπουρανίων, 8:5). Consequently, Jesus could not invite anyone into the inner shrine of the earthly tabernacle, since he himself was not permitted to enter it. In the heavenly tabernacle, however, he can invite his audience into the inner shrine without

[47] One could point to the stones on the high priest's breastplate, which, according to Exod 28:15–30 represented the tribes of Israel, as a form of introducing people into the tent's holiest place. However, it is not clear whether the high priest's Day of Atonement clothing, as stipulated in Lev 16:4, would include the breastplate.

[48] More could be said about Second Temple Jewish understanding of the heavenly tabernacle and its relationship with its earthly counterpart. See, for example, Joyce 2021; Moore 2023. To be sure, one could argue that entrance into the heavenly tabernacle is even more difficult. Whenever Second Temple Jewish texts describe the heavenly tabernacle, it describes a place of overwhelming holiness and glory (*1 En* 14.16–18; *T. Levi* 5.1). Regardless, there is no prohibition in Torah against entering the heavenly tabernacle.

transgressing the Torah's stipulation that only Levitical priests may offer gifts in the earthly temple.

The crucial distinction between the earthly and heavenly tabernacles underpins the author's argument.[49] The audience is invited to the heavenly tabernacle, located in a distinct and separate realm. This is particularly evident in 9:1–8, contrasting the earthly tent with the heavenly one. After describing the layout of Moses' tabernacle (9:1–5) and the priests' activities therein (9:6–7), the author concludes, "The way into the sanctuary (τὴν τῶν ἁγίων ὁδὸν) has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent (τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς) is still standing" (9:8). While there is debate over whether the temporary marker "as long as… still standing" (μήπω… ἐχούσης στάσιν) alludes to the temple's destruction in 70 CE or has another temporal significance, my focus is on highlighting the difference between the two tents. The "sanctuary" refers to the heavenly realm (10:19), distinct from the "first tent," which the author goes on to explain is a symbol (παραβολή) "of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered" (9:9).[50] Therefore, the author does not envision an earthly entrance into the space reserved for Levitical priests, but an entrance into the heavenly tabernacle, located in the heavenly realm, where Jesus serves as high priest.

At this point, the reader may wonder how I will account for the fact that the author seems to suggest mortal bodies cannot enter the heavenly inner shrine. After all, it is precisely through the "power of an indestructible life" (7:16) that Jesus is qualified to serve as a high

[49] As deSilva concludes, "The holy place they approach is certainly not the earthly sanctuary but the heavenly sanctum, the same 'heaven itself' that Christ entered on their behalf" (2000, 337).

[50] A key aspect of the comparison between the earthly and heavenly tents in 9:1–22 is the author's claim that the earthly tent "cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper (συνείδησιν τελειῶσαι τὸν λατρεύοντα)" (9:9). Unlike the heavenly tent, described as "the greater and perfect tent (τῆς μείζονος καὶ τελειοτέρας σκηνῆς)" (9:11), the earthly tabernacle is not described as perfect because it cannot bring worshippers to perfection. This distinction between the earthly and heavenly tabernacles is fundamental: the earthly cannot offer perfection, while the heavenly can.

priest in the heavenly realm. I will address this question in more detail later (in Chapter 7), when I explore how the author envisions individuals ascending into the heavenly realm.

For now, I turn my attention to the first question outlined above: How does Hebrews account for the necessary purification required for priests to enter the tabernacle? Addressing this central issue necessitates the simultaneous consideration of two distinct, yet interconnected, topics. On the one hand, we must determine the extent to which the author envisions the audience members as functioning as priests, at the very least in performing the *par excellence* priestly action of entering the tabernacle. On the other hand, and equally important, the audience must somehow possess the requisite purification to access the heavenly inner shrine. I will begin by analysing the question of purification, which will subsequently inform the discussion regarding the audience's priestly role.

4.4.1 Purification/Perfection to Enter the Heavenly Tabernacle

What exactly enables the audience to enter the heavenly tabernacle? The validity of this question rests on the fact that priests, those who were authorised to enter the holy place, never did so without first undertaking a series of prescribed actions and refraining from certain others to ensure their ritual fitness. Without this purification, they were unwelcome. Thus, when Hebrews invites its audience not merely into the holy place but into the holiest place of the heavenly tabernacle—the inner shrine itself—and even urges them to enter "with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:19), it envisions a people who somehow can stand in God's most sacred presence.

In his 2019 work *Weak and Useless? Purity, the Mosaic Law, and Perfection in Hebrews*, Moffitt offers a framework for understanding how this purification is achieved. He argues that, rather than discarding OT ritual purity concerns, the author of Hebrews reconfigures them around the perfection accomplished in Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

Moffitt contends that Hebrews' "perfection" language overlaps with both ritual and moral purity systems: for Jesus—sinless yet mortal—perfection required ritual purification through resurrection into immortal life, a transformation that enabled his permanent entry into God's heavenly presence. His main thesis is worth stating in its entirety,

> To put the point differently, the ultimate problem of mortality and the way in which death hindered humanity from fully entering God's presence applied to Jesus' imperfect/mortal humanity. This logic looks remarkably similar to the logic of ritual purification. Thus when, after his death, Jesus was perfected, the point seems to be that he was made fully, ritually pure… At this moment of perfection, Jesus' humanity was no longer mortal, no longer subject to death. Jesus is, therefore, never again subject to the problem of ritual impurity. Because of this perfection, that is to say, because his humanity has been fully and irrevocably purified, he was able to do what no other high priest has done – ascend into the sacred space of the heavenly sanctuary, draw close to the fullness of God's presence, and importantly, remain there.[51]

I find Moffitt's arguments compelling because they illuminate the logic of ritual purification in Hebrews in light of the Torah's own expectations of purification. Yet this raises an important question: how does his argument apply to the audience of Hebrews? Moffitt's central claim revolves around the resurrection of Jesus, in which his mortal humanity was perfected and made fit to enter the heavenly holy of holies. But what about those who have not yet died and been raised (assuming, as the author likely does, that audience members who die will one day rise like Jesus)? What, in their present state, enables them to enter the heavenly inner shrine?[52]

Building on Moffitt's framework, I will argue that ascension into the heavenly realm should be understood not merely as a future hope or symbolic possibility, but as a present reality, something the audience can do now, even while alive on earth. More than that, Hebrews depicts them as already enabled to enter and remain in the heavenly inner shrine. How is this

[51] Moffitt 2019b, 101.

[52] This is not to say that these questions have escaped Moffitt's attention. He has, in fact, addressed them in multiple works. His most recent study (2024), for example, makes a compelling case for believers' present ability to enter the heavenly realm by virtue of Jesus' immortality, yet gives comparatively little attention to the theme of perfection at that point. My own approach here is simply to place Moffitt's 2019b and 2024 works in dialogue, drawing on his main line of argument and extending it in this specific direction.

possible? Because they have also been purified to enter, a reality the author of Hebrews consistently frames in terms of "perfection."[53]

The topic of perfection in Hebrews is complex, as the epistle employs τελ- related language in various forms, including nouns,[54] verbs,[55] and adjectives.[56] In its basic lexical form, τελειόω describes the action to "complete; bring to an end; finish; accomplish."[57] The precise interpretation of perfection within Hebrews still remains a subject of debate.[58] The main scholarly views on the concept of perfection in Hebrews can be grouped into four broad categories: (1) Moral View, which interprets perfection as a state of moral or ethical virtue—an ideal of blamelessness attained through moral integrity and honourable conduct;[59] (2) Eschatological View, which understands perfection as the final, glorified state believers will

[53] For a similar argument, see Moffitt 2019a.

[54] Τελείωσις (3:14; 7:11); τελειότης (6:1); τέλος (6:8, 11; 7:3); συντέλεια (9:26); τελειωτής (12:2).

[55] Τελειόω (2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23); ἐπιτελέω (8:5; 9:6); συντελέω (8:8); τελευτάω (11:22).

[56] Τέλειος (5:14; 9:11); ἀλυσιτελής (13:17).

[57] Hoffmann, Hieke, and Bauer 1999.

[58] Notable works include Du Plessis 1959, 206–32; Wikgren 1960; Peterson 1982; Attridge 1989b, 83–87; McCruden 2008; McCruden 2011; Simisi 2016; I am extremely grateful to Amanda Higgin for her help with τελ- language and its implications in Hebrews; see her unpublished MPhil thesis (2023).

[59] Lane defines perfection in Hebrews as "the accomplishment of a decisive purging of sin with the consequence that believers are consecrated to the service of God" (1991a, 393). This interpretation finds some support in biblical texts where τελ- language often carries a moral or ethical connotation. The LXX often translates תמים, something "blameless," as τέλειος. When not τέλειος, the LXX regularly translates תָּמִים as ἄμεμπτος (Gen 17:1) and most commonly ἄμωμος (Exod 29:1; Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1; 2 Sam 22:31), both which convey a sense of moral-ethical blamelessness. The paschal lamb in Exodus 12:5, for example, is to be a "blameless goat" (שֶׂה תָּמִים), a πρόβατον τέλειον. In 2 Samuel 22:26, תָּמִים תִּתַּמָּם is translated τελείου τελειωθήση. Sirach 44:17, quoting from Genesis 6:9 (אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים), identifies Noah as a τέλειος and δίκαιος man. Furthermore, in Matthew people are encouraged to "be perfect (τέλειοι) as your heavenly Father is perfect (τέλειός)" (Matt 5:48) and records the occasion Jesus told someone who thought had kept the law, to "go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor" if he wished "to be perfect (εἰ θέλεις τέλειος)" (Matt 19:21). However, this view has its challenges, particularly in the context of Hebrews. In 2:10, Jesus is described as being "made perfect through suffering" (διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι). There are those who suggest that 2:10 indicates that Jesus had to achieve a moral/ethical perfection. Like Brooke Westcott, who argued that Jesus' perfection through suffering in 2:10 spoke of "the full moral perfection of his [Jesus] humanity" (1909, 49). Riggenbach concluded that in his humanity Jesus had to become morally/ethically perfect, since his priesthood, unlike the Levites, was based "auf persönlicher Eigenart beruht" and therefore, "in jeder Beziehung zur Vollkommenheit des Lebenstandes gelangte Sohn ist" (1923, 191). As McCruden summarises Riggenbach's model, "Christ's perfection suggests the notion of an authentic development or transformation within the personality of Jesus himself" (2008, 18). However, given Hebrews' emphasis on Jesus' sinlessness (4:15), the author might not conceive of Jesus' perfection as necessitating moral or ethical improvement via a virtuous lifestyle.

attain, often citing Heb 2:10, where Jesus' perfection through suffering is presented in the context of bringing "many sons to glory" (πολλοὺς υἱοὺς εἰς δόξαν);[60] (3) Vocational View, championed by Peterson (1982), which sees perfection as a vocational or experiential process by which Jesus became a fully qualified high priest, thereby enabling others to reach their own state of perfection;[61] and (4) Cultic Consecration View, which holds that the author's use of τελ- terminology—particularly the verb τελειόω—is strongly influenced by its usage in the LXX Pentateuch, where it most often refers to the ordination or consecration of priests.[62]

[60] So, the argument goes, his triumphant entry into heaven, where he is enthroned (10:12) and crowned with glory (2:9), is done to bring his children into the same glory. In other words, Christ's perfection, followed by his enthronement, enables and ensures people's future entrance to the same place where Christ has gone. Lane summarises this view in concluding, "The concept of τελείωσις is eschatological: the fulfilment of the promises of the new covenant in the priestly ministry of Christ makes possible an access to God and relationship with him that was not possible under the former covenant" (1991a, 181). So, according to Lane, in saying "the law made nothing perfect" in 7:19, the author means that "the law did not bring the eschatological fulfilment intended by God" (1991a, 185). A key proponent of this view was Kögel 1905, though not many have held to this view since. It is worth noting that a challenge one could raise against this view is that, though perfection in Hebrews certainly includes an eschatological dimension, it also contains present components. People, it seems, can already experience perfection even while present in the earthly realm.

[61] What Otto identifies as "berufliche Vollendung" (1934, 139). McCruden summarises this view by concluding, "In two of the three instances where the verb τελειοῦν occurs in Hebrews, there is a clear connection between the phenomenon of Christ's perfection and his *experience of suffering*… To endeavour to dissociate the theme of Christ's perfection from his experiences of suffering would seem to fracture a connection consciously forged by our author" (2008, 11). Pierce offers a strong critique against the view of perfection as vocational qualification. For her, in attempting to provide a broad understanding of perfection as a qualification attained by Jesus and subsequently people, she thinks Peterson has ultimately failed in sustaining his argument. As Pierce concludes, "By using this term as a christological catch-all, Peterson ultimately voids its meaning" (2020, 129).

[62] Du Pessis 1959, 214. This final view—cultic consecration—is grounded in the fact that τελειόω in the LXX consistently refers to the consecration of priests, as seen in the following nine instances: "You shall consecrate (τελειώσεις τὰς χεῖρας) Aaron and his sons (Exod 29:9);" "The holy vestments of Aaron shall be passed on to his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them (χρισθῆναι αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς) and consecrated in them (τελειῶσαι τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν [Exod 29:29]);" "They themselves shall eat the food by which atonement is made, to consecrate and sanctify them (ἐν αὐτοῖς τελειῶσαι τὰς χεῖρας), but no one else shall eat of them, because they are holy (Exod 29:33);" "You shall do to Aaron and to his sons, just as I have commanded you; through seven days you shall consecrate them (τελειώσεις αὐτῶν τὰς χεῖρας [Exod 29:35]);" "The anointed, consecrated priest (ὁ τετελειωμένος τὰς χεῖρας) shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting (Lev 4:5);" "You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day when your period of consecration (ἡμέρα τελειώσεως ὑμῶν) is completed. For it will take seven days to consecrate you (τελειώσει τὰς χεῖρας ὑμῶν [Lev 8:33]);" "The priest who is anointed and consecrated (ὃν ἂν χρίσωσιν αὐτὸν καὶ ὃν ἂν τελειώσουσιν τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ) as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the linen vestments, the holy vestments (Lev 16:32);" "The priest who is exalted above his fellows, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated (τετελειωμένου) to wear the vestments, shall not dishevel his hair, nor tear his vestments (Lev 21:10);" "These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the consecrated priests, whom he ordained (ἐτελείωσαν τὰς χεῖρας) to minister as priests (Num 3:3)." This perspective gained prominence in the early 20th century, notably through Häring's publications, (1920). This view was cemented in Delling's 1936 entry on τελειόω in the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (TDNT 8:82–84). A few years later, Dibelius concluded, "Man wird also τελείωσις als die vollendende Weihe erklären dürfen und τελειοῦν auf die Erteilung dieser Weihe beziehen" (1942). Dibelius' work was later republished in the 1950s, which helped preserve this view into at least the mid-century; see Dibelius 1956. By the 1950s, Du Plessis noted that, although

Given this brief survey of the current scholarly debate surrounding the use of τελειόω in Hebrews, it is not possible to offer a definitive conclusion in this chapter, as such a task lies beyond the primary aim of this study. My concern here is to note that the nine occurrences of τελειόω in Hebrews (2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23) consistently convey the idea of gaining access to the heavenly tabernacle. Consequently, it seems reasonable to conclude that "perfection" in Hebrews cannot be understood apart from the sort of purification which enables one to enter into the heavenly inner shrine. Moreover, since Hebrews maintains that the audience can possess this perfection even while alive on earth, it follows that they are somehow already enabled to share in the purification/perfection necessary to enter and remain in God's heavenly presence. To support this claim, I move to provide a concise review of the nine occurrences of τελειόω in Hebrews, presenting three key reasons why its use is connected to people's entry into the heavenly tabernacle.[63]

First, the three instances where Jesus is described as having achieved perfection (2:10; 5:9; 7:28) are consistently tied to his heavenly exaltation, which is intrinsically linked to his

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the view "is still holding sway," it was not readily assumed given "the crucial doubt that τελειοῦν was technically applied, or that it functioned as stereotyped expression for initiation and sacred consecration" (1959, 212). Nevertheless, Du Plessis still held that τελειόω contained cultic-sacral characteristics because of its use in Leviticus 21:10 in without τὰς χεῖρας and because of its frequent appearance in Exodus 29, a passage which, like Hebrews, is filled with allusions to the sacrifice of atonement. As he writes, "Its [τελειόω] use in the Pentateuch, if peculiar, is nevertheless clear. It translates the ordination offering or sacrifices accompanying the ordination of priests… The motif of *atonement* is so conspicuous in Exod 29 that the intended analogy cannot be mistaken… Perfection was the totality of being in a divine relationship" (1959, 229). More recently, in the 1980s, Gamiza concluded, "The τελ-word group is used in a cultic sense and does not refer to sinlessness in a moral or ethical sense" (1981, 55).

[63] Before I do so, it is important to specify what I mean by this proposition. I am not suggesting that every instance of τελ- related language in Hebrews should be understood as referring to this sort of purification. I maintain that perfection does not carry a uniform meaning across the text; its interpretation may shift depending on the context. As Bloor recently concluded, "It is unlikely that 'perfection' holds one meaning; 'perfection' might have multiple meanings depending on the context" (Bloor 2023, 110). Much earlier than Bloor, Du Plessis had concluded that one must be open to holding the topic of perfection in Hebrews in tension, particularly because it is not always a straightforward subject. As he writes, "Without any idea of disintegration we may discern in the characteristic traits of τελειοῦν a certain bipolarity. There is, on the one hand, the divine initiative in Christ's calling to the eternal priesthood… On the other hand… a clear subjective realization of his mediatorial qualities in close relation with his full personality, within the confines of human nature" (1959, 217).

ability, as high priest, to enter the holy of holies.[64] In 2:10, the author speaks of Jesus achieving perfection through suffering, yet this perfection is not merely connected to his earthly experiences; it is intricately tied to his exaltation and crowning with glory and honour (2:9). This post-suffering glory and honour that Jesus received in heaven is his enthronement as the heavenly high priest. As the author concludes in this section (2:17–18), Jesus became human, suffered, was tested, and died, all to be exalted in the heavens and serve as the heavenly high priest (2:17). Similarly, in 5:9, Jesus is said to have attained perfection through suffering to become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. This perfection, while rooted in his earthly obedience and suffering, is tied to his current exaltation in heaven as the high priest (5:10), from which he welcomes people into God's presence. Finally, in 7:28, Jesus is described as being made perfect forever because he has been exalted as high priest above the heavens (7:26). This connection becomes evident when the author states immediately after, "Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent" (8:1–2). Again, Jesus' exaltation and his high priesthood at the heavenly inner shrine are inseparable, emphasising that his perfection is directly tied to his exalted role in the heavenly tabernacle.

Second, whenever the author speaks of the Levitical priesthood's inability to perfect people (7:19; 9:9; 10:1), it is always within the context of comparing it to Jesus' heavenly priesthood. In 7:19, the law's failure to bring about perfection is contrasted with the "better hope" by which people approach God in the heavenly realm, this "better hope" being Jesus' heavenly priesthood (7:18, 20–21). Similarly, in 9:9, the author contrasts "the first tent," described as "a symbol of the present time," with the "good things to come" and the "greater

[64] As noted earlier, Moffitt's (2019b) work makes a significant contribution to our understanding of Jesus' entrance into heaven, framing it in terms of purification and perfection.

and more perfect tent" in heaven (9:11). While the Levitical earthly priesthood could not "perfect the conscience of the worshipers" (9:9), Jesus' heavenly priesthood can "purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God" (9:14). In other words, perfection is unattainable on earth through a human, mortal priesthood, but it is available to the community through Jesus' heavenly, immortal priesthood. Likewise, when the author states that the law cannot perfect those who approach in 10:1, this critique occurs within a comparison between "the good things to come" in the heavenly realm and the present earthly realities associated with the Levitical priesthood.[65]

The six instances of τελειόω we have examined so far—three positive references to Jesus and three negative references to the Levitical priesthood—link perfection to the heavenly tabernacle, but have not yet addressed the audience's own perfection. The final three occurrences of τελειόω, 10:14, 11:40, and 12:23, describe the kind of perfection the audience has received through Jesus' death, resurrection, and entrance into the heavenly tabernacle. These passages clarify precisely how purification/perfection function to enable the audience to enter the heavenly inner shrine.

In 10:14, the author writes, "For by a single offering he has perfected (τελειόω) for all time those who are being sanctified (ἁγιάζω)." In Hebrews, it is often observed that ἁγιάζω carries the connotation of priestly sanctification, the kind of dedication that enables entry into the temple's holy place.[66] The main point of my argument here, however, rests on the verbal

[65] Much more could be said here about the precise difference between the Levitical priesthood and the Son's priesthood: the former composed of mortal priests, the latter characterised by an immortal high priest. As Moffitt observes, "the ritual purity codes in Leviticus are designed to enable people to approach God by rendering their mortality fit to draw near to his presence" (2019b, 100). I will return to this text and examine it more fully in Chapter 5.

[66] Koester, for instance, notes that ἁγιάζω in Hebrews refers to the Levitical practice of setting individuals apart to serve in the sanctuary. He explains that being "sanctified" in this epistle extends beyond mere ceremonial cleanliness; it signifies being designated for service in the holy place within the tabernacle. As he writes, "In Levitical practice, a priest was set apart from the common people in order to minister in the sanctuary, which was holy. God is holy, and his holiness is a numinous power. Nothing common was to be brought into the presence of God because of the threat of his wrath breaking out (Num 3:4; 26:61). Since a sanctuary or holy place (*ta hagia*) was set apart for God, one needed to be sanctified (*hagiazein*) or set apart before entering it. Everything holy had to be clean, but just because something was clean did not mean that it was holy. Laypeople, for example, were

tenses: he has perfected (τετελείωκεν)—perfect indicative—those who are being sanctified (ἁγιαζομένους)—present passive participle. This is no minor detail. It means that those who are still in the process of *being* sanctified, namely the audience members who are alive on earth and have not yet died, have nonetheless already *been* perfected.[67] Hebrews gives no hint at this point that perfection is reserved only for a postmortem future; rather, it concludes that the audience members are perfected now.

A similar case appears in 11:40, which reads, "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect (τελειόω)."[68] While much could be said about how this text integrates various themes running throughout the epistle,[69] my focus here is to stress that the perfection referred to in 11:40 can rightly be understood as entrance into the heavenly inner shrine.

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normally considered clean unless they became unclean through skin disease, a discharge, or contact with something unclean. Purification would cleanse them, but would not make them holy" (Koester 2008, 120–21). This interpretation is shared by others, such as Mitchell (2007, 73) and Harris (2019, 55), who also see the term as alluding to priests' sanctification. Additionally, people like Haley and Lane advocate for translating τοὺς ἁγιαζομένους (10:14) as something like "the consecrated ones" (Healy 2016, 205; Lane 1991b, 267–68). I too am of the opinion that it is not unreasonable to conclude that the perfection Hebrews speaks of in 10:14 refers to the setting apart of individuals for cultic service, like how priests were set apart under the Levitical priesthood. This fits perfectly when τελειόω and ἁγιάζω go hand in hand in the LXX. In Exod 29:33 LXX, for example, God orders Aaron and his sons eat the flesh of the ram at the entrance of the tent of meeting (Exod 29:32), because it is the food "to consecrate (τελειόω) and sanctify (ἁγιάζω) them." In Leviticus, Moses sanctified (ἁγιάζω) Aaron and his sons (Lev 8:30) to be set apart for the duration of their consecration (τελειόω [Lev 8:33]). The priest who was consecrated (τελειόω [Lev 21:10]) was not to go outside the sanctuary to touch a dead body because he has been sanctified (ἁγιάζω) by God's anointing oil (Lev 21:12). Furthermore, seeing the use of ἁγιάζω in 10:14 as pertaining to sanctification of priests aligns well with the direction the author takes in the proceeding verses. After declaring that Jesus' single offering enables people to be made perfect (10:13–18), the author invites the audience to enter the heavenly inner shrine freely (10:19–20). As such, it is difficult to miss the point that the audience's access to the heavenly holy of holies is directly linked to their perfection.

[67] To be sure, ἁγιάζω appears earlier in 10:10 not as a present but a perfect participle: ἡγιασμένοι. Thus, my argument is not that the author exclusively employs ἁγιάζω in the present tense; individuals can certainly be described as having been sanctified. However, within the specific context of 10:14, the juxtaposition between the perfect and present tenses is highly significant. This specific grammatical tension indicates that the audience, while still alive on earth, can be definitively stated to have been perfected.

[68] Here the verb appears not in the perfect tense but in the aorist passive (τελειωθῶσιν). This verse, which concludes the extensive list of "heroes of faith" (11:4–38), emphasises that those who lived by faith under the covenant would not be made perfect apart from the community being addressed; see Lane 1991b, 393.

[69] Peeler 2024, 357.

The prevailing consensus, particularly since Käsemann's work, has generally interpreted "perfection" in 11:40 as referring to an eschatological reality. This view suggests that, just as the heroes of faith awaited future promises, the audience too, alongside them, is awaiting the future fulfilment of rest, which will come after their earthly pilgrimage is complete.[70] Departing from this now common interpretation, Cockerill argues that "perfection" in 11:40 should actually be understood in light of its use in 10:14. Since 10:14 emphasises the access the audience already enjoys to the heavenly tabernacle, Cockerill proposes that "perfection" in 11:40 likewise refers to this present entrance. As he explains, "The meaning of 'perfected' in 10:14 is the simplest explanation of both 11:40 and 12:23. When Christ 'has perfected' believers by cleansing them from sin, he has made them fit to enter God's presence."[71] He goes on to explain, "The difference between the faithful before Christ and those who live after is that the former did not enjoy this privilege of access to God during their lifetimes. Since Christ has come, however, both the faithful who lived before his coming and those who live after enjoy access to the heavenly City."[72] If Cockerill is correct, the perfection described in 11:40—shared by both the audience and their ancestors—is not merely an eschatological hope, though it certainly includes that dimension,[73] but the present ability to enter God's very presence while alive. In other words, it is not simply a general movement

[70] For a summary of this view, see Koester 2008, 520–21.

[71] Cockerill 2012, 599.

[72] Cockerill 2012, 599.

[73] I mention this because there is indeed a future hope, namely, the waiting for the ultimate gathering between Jesus and his waiting community. As Moffitt has points out regarding this very text, "Abraham, again, is styled as "waiting" (ἐξέδεχετο) for a "coming" city designed and built by God (11,10). Indeed, the summarizing statement in 11,39-40 that all those held up as examples in Hebrews 11 are only to be made perfect together with the present community seems to imply that even now the faithful of Hebrews 11 continue in some sense to wait for the inheritance promised to them" (2019b, 202).

toward God with the expectation of future entrance into heaven, but immediate access to the space behind the curtain in the heavenly tabernacle now.[74]

A final occurrence of the verb τελειόω appears in Heb 12:23, where the author writes that the audience has come to Zion "to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect (τελειόω)." This verse will be examined more fully in Chapter 6. For the present discussion, my focus is on its use of "perfection," expressed here once again a perfect passive participle (τετελειωμένων). Many interpreters understand these "spirits made perfect" as the souls of the righteous who, having lived by faith on earth, are now in God's heavenly presence, enjoying the full benefits of their reward.[75] Far from challenging my argument, this common interpretation actually reinforces it: the author calls them "perfect" precisely because they dwell in God's heavenly tabernacle. They have fully realised the invitation to enter God's glory (2:10) and already embody the perfection/purification that grants access to the divine presence. In other words, Hebrews depicts the audience's perfection as the necessary qualification and invitation which actually enables them to enter the heavenly tabernacle.

If my argument so far holds, it becomes clear that the Sinai event serves as an important backdrop for this discussion. At Sinai, only Moses was permitted to enter the heavenly tabernacle, while the rest of the people remained at the foot of the mountain. Their lack of an ascent was not, at least according to the LXX's rendering of Exod 19:13 (as discussed earlier), due to a lack of invitation. Rather, they were restrained both by the overwhelming sensory phenomena—the dark clouds and the blaring trumpet—and by the absence of the new covenant, which, among its benefits, grants the capacity to enter the heavenly inner shrine.

[74] Johnson also supports this view, concluding that "perfection" in 11:40 signifies precisely this access to God's presence in the heavenly sanctuary, a reality that is attainable only through Christ's priestly intercession (2012, 309–10).

[75] Healy 2016, 277; Peeler 2024, 392–93.

According to Hebrews, with the Son's exaltation the barriers that once prevented access to the heavenly realm have been removed, and the new covenant has been established. The community now stands before the heavenly tabernacle with unhindered access and hearts upon which the Torah is inscribed. Although the mountain they have reached is Zion rather than Sinai, the ultimate destination is the same: both mountains are points where the heavenly and earthly spheres intersect. These two features—the absence of the terrifying sensory phenomena and the audience's position under the new covenant—will be discussed further below (in Chapter 6). For now, it is enough to stress that what differs is the bridge, as it were, that connects both realms. Now, undeterred by the sensory barriers that once instilled fear and armed with the purification/perfection required for ascent, the audience is not only free to approach but to enter the heavenly holy of holies itself.

Therefore, the concept of perfection, I conclude, must refer to this framework of purification that enables the audience to ascend. By this, I do not simply mean that perfection involves the ability to approach God as he exists in the heavenly realm, a concept already widely accepted, as most interpretations of perfection in Hebrews involve steps by which one meets God.[76] Hebrews, however, speaks of a more specific kind of approach: entering the heavenly inner shrine. To approach God in Hebrews means being granted unrestricted access

[76] For example, deSilva suggests that perfection in Hebrews signifies "the 'cleansing of the conscience' from the defilement of sin so that the human being may approach God face-to-face rather than remaining at a same distance from God's holiness" (2000, 268). Koester defines it as "the establishment of right relationship with God through the cleansing of the conscience and the consummation of this relationship in everlasting glory, rest, and celebration in God's heavenly city" (2001, 353). Along the same lines, Attridge comments that the perfection which the Levitical priesthood did not provide was the "relationship with God that the covenant inaugurated by Christ's sacrifice provides;" that is, a relationship based on "the effects of Christ's action" (1989, 200). Likewise, Richardson proposed, "As a perfector of faith, Jesus has arrived at the τέλος of faith, God's immediate presence, by way of his resurrection and exaltation and is leading God's people to this same goal of glory that will culminate in eschatological resurrection" (2012, 100). Johnson's conclusion is worth quoting at length, "For Hebrews, perfection is a matter of human transformation rather than cultic transaction. It combines elements of maturity and moral growth. Negatively, perfection means abandoning or overcoming sin and cleansing the conscience. Positively, it means a process of sanctification—entering a state of holiness… This is not merely, as in Platonism, an issue of the superiority of the interior (moral) to the physical (ritual). It is an issue of whether perfection means entering into actual contact with God. In the case of Christ, Hebrews avers, God has made contact with humans at the most intimate level possible and thus enables humans to enter into contact with God at the most intimate level" (2006, 185–86).

to God's presence, an access that parallels the high priest's entry into the space behind the temple's curtain in the earthly realm.[77] For the author, perfection denotes the necessary designation that grants one full and unimpeded access to God's presence in the heavenly inner shrine. Consequently, perfection in Hebrews is not confined to a future postmortem reality; it is a present, lived reality that enables the audience members—even while still on earth—to draw near, to enter, and to stand in the holiest place of the heavenly tabernacle.

4.4.2 Προσέρχομαι and Purification in Hebrews

Returning to the question of whether Hebrews intends to convey the idea that individuals are endowed with the capacity to function as priests, at the very least to carry out the priestly activity of entering the inner shrine, one might begin by wondering whether, if the epistle did intend to convey this idea explicitly—that is, that the audience can execute at least the specific priestly priviledge of entering the tabernacle—it could have employed more direct terminology, like 1 Peter 2:9, where the readers are directly termed "a royal priesthood," echoing the words of Exod 19:6 ("you shall be for me a priestly kingdom").

However, some, like Moe,[78] Lane,[79] Scholer,[80] Leithart,[81] and D'Angelo,[82] have identified within Hebrews the idea that followers of Jesus are in fact empowered to assume

[77] As Cockerhill concludes, "the Hebrews' context would make it virtually impossible for the hearers to miss the priestly associations of this term [perfection]" (2012, 139 n. 67).

[78] "Wenn wir aber beobachten, daß die ganze Orientierung des Gedankenganges im Hebraerbrief eine kultische ist und als das Ziel des sacerdotium Christi das Nahen der Gemeinde zu Gott, der Gottesdienst des Gläubigen, die Darbringung ihrer Opfer bestimmt wird, dann ist es von vorherein wahrscheinlich, daß die Gemeinde eben als ein priesterliches Volk und die einzelnen Christen als Priester betrachtet warden… Daß τελειοῦν auf die Befähigung zum vollkommenen Nahen Gottes, wie es die Idee des geistlichen Priestertums ist, hinweist" (Moe 1949, 161, 166).

[79] Lane 1991a, 155.

[80] Scholer 1991, 130.

[81] Leithart 2000.

[82] "Both the Zadokite sectaries and the recipients of Hebrews understand themselves as a priestly house" (D'Angelo 1979, 88).

roles traditionally exclusive to priests.[83] This interpretation is usually supported by two main lines of argumentation. First, Hebrews appears to blur the lines between priestly service and the worshipful actions of the congregation. This combination suggests that in Hebrews to worship is to engage in a priestly act. As Scholer concludes, "Prayer and worship are characterised as cultic and priestly functions."[84] An example of this can be seen in chapter 13, where the audience is encouraged to "continually offer a sacrifice (ἀναφέρωμεν θυσίαν) of praise to God" (13:15), framing worship as a priestly offering.[85] Later, the author equates acts of sharing to sacrifices pleasing to God (τοιαύταις γὰρ θυσίαις εὐαρεστεῖται ὁ θεός [13:16]), further indicating that such acts of generosity are akin to priestly sacrifices.[86] As Moore concludes, behind the thrust of these words is the notion that the author "urges his audience to offer regular praise in keeping with the times of the daily sacrifices."[87]

A second argument supporting the view that Hebrews sustains the audience's ability to carry out the distinctly priestly function of entering the tabernacle derives from the epistle's strategic use of the verb προσέρχομαι.[88] Here, I offer three examples. First, in Heb 7:25, the author assures the audience that Jesus is able to save "those who approach God through him"

[83] An example of a scholar who arrives at this conclusion can be seen in Floor's observation, "In connection with the general priesthood of believers the Epistle to the Hebrews points out two things: (a) a sanctuary in which the priest of the new covenant is supposed to perform his duty; (b) a specific priestly service which has to be performed. If we are to formulate this in more homiletical terms, the Epistle to the Hebrews concerns the place and the pattern, the 'locus' and the 'modus' of the priesthood of believers" (1971, 73). For a recent analysis of the audience as priests in Hebrews, see Woo 2024, 173–210.

[84] Scholer 1991, 108.

[85] See Leithart 2000, 63.

[86] Almost every time θυσία ("sacrifice") appears in Hebrews it refers to Levitical sacrifices (5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:9, 23, 26; 10:1, 5, 8, 11, 12, 26). As such, the θυσία which the audience offers is framed as a priestly service. The only exception to the rule could be 11:4, where θυσία refers to Abel's sacrifice.

[87] Moore goes on to write, "Just as the *tamid* [the twice-daily Levitical sacrifice] has typological relevance for Christ's perpetual intercession, so it also forms the model for Christian sacrifices of praise" (2024, 99).

[88] Some also draw attention to the verb εἰσέρχομαι, which almost always refers to entering God's rest (3:11, 18, 19; 4:1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11) and Jesus' entrance into the inner shrine (6:19, 20; 9:12, 24, 25). For an analysis of this, see Heidel 2020, 223–26; Woo 2024, 182–86.

(προσερχομένους δι' αὐτοῦ τῷ θεῷ).[89] The text's immediate context (7:23–28) establishes a fundamental contrast between Jesus' eternal, sinless priesthood and the mortal Levitical priesthood (7:23, 27). This contrast in turn is extended to the community: unlike the Levitical priests, whose access to God was limited by death and the need for continual sin offerings, the audience is invited to a superior, unhindered form of access (κρείττονος ἐλπίδος) that results in eternal salvation (7:25). Consequently, the call for the audience to "approach God" (10:19) in a manner analogous to the Levitical priestly function of drawing near the earthly tabernacle has led some scholars to conclude that this passage implicitly assumes the priesthood of the believers.[90]

Another example is Heb 10:22, which call the audience to "approach (προσερχώμεθα)… with our hearts sprinkled clean (ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας)… and our bodies washed (λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα) with pure water." This is the first of three imperatives directing the audience to the heavenly sanctuary (10:19–21).[91] The central focus here is the purification language, specifically the verbs verbs "sprinkle" (ῥαντίζω) and "wash" (λούω).

The verb λούω (wash), while associated with baptism in the NT (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11), is consistently used in the LXX Pentateuch to describe the washing of priests enabling their entry into the sacred space (e.g., Exod 29:4; Lev 8:6).[92] Likewise, ῥαντίζω (sprinkle),

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[89] The function of σῴζω in 7:25 has been a matter of debate. Some have understood it in inner soteriological terms (Healy 2016, 144), while others as encompassing both the salvation of the soul and body (Peeler 2024, 202). Another approach, exemplified by Dahl, is that σῴζω pertains to accessibility into God's presence (1951, 401). If Dahl is right, then a parallel might be drawn between the access and permanence the Levitical priests had and the realities for οἱ προσερχόμενοι.

[90] The contrast has led some, like Scholer, to conclude that, "those who draw near to God through Jesus contrasts with the former priests in 7.23, a parallelism that in itself argues for a priestly designation" (1991, 124). Moe, arguing along similar lines, goes a step further to argue that the juxtaposition between Jesus' priesthood and the Levitical priesthood indicates that the audience themselves are deemed priests. As he concludes, "Nur bleibt der einzigartige Vorzug des neutestamentlichen Hohenpriesters, Jesu Christi, insofern bestehen, als er der Mittler bleibt durch den die Gläubigen ihr priesterliches Recht und ihre priesterliche Funktion allein erhalten und behalten" (1949, 163).

[91] The other two being, "let us hold fast (κατέχωμεν) to the confession (10:23) and "let us consider (κατανοῶμεν) how to provoke one another" (10:24).

[92] For instance, Lev 16:4 requires Aaron to λούσεται ὕδατι πᾶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ("bathe his body in water") before putting on his priestly garments to perform the Day of Atonement sacrifice within the tent. Similarly, Num 19:7 commands Eleazar to bathe in water (λούσεται τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ὕδατι) so he may re-enter the tabernacle after

often associated with the priests' ritual cleansing to serve in the tabernacle (Num 19:9, 21), is employed in Hebrews itself (9:13, 19, 21) to denote cleansing, particularly through blood, and is associated with the Sinai covenant's inauguration: "Moses… took the blood of calves and goats… and sprinkled (ἐρράντισεν) both the scroll itself and all the people… he sprinkled (ἐρράντισεν) with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship" (9:19–21).[93]

While these two terms are often seen as holding associations with early Christian baptism,[94] their simultaneous appearance has led some scholars to conclude that the author is alluding to the purification and ordination rituals of the Levitical priests before they entered the tabernacle.[95] Some, like Harris[96] and Leithart,[97] confirm this priestly reading, arguing that the author draws a direct analogy between the physical sacrifices required to purify an earthly

conducting the blood-sprinkling ritual outside the tent of meeting. When not referring to priestly washing, λούω mostly refers to the purification which makes one ceremonially clean (Lev 11:40; 14:8; 15:5–27; 17:15; Deut 23:12).

[93] In 9:13, the author refers to people sprinkled by "the blood of goats and bulls and ashes of a young cow" (τὸ αἷμα τράγων καὶ ταύρων καὶ σποδὸς δαμάλεως ῥαντίζουσα). Those who are sprinkled by the blood and ashes find purification but only for their flesh (τοὺς κεκοινωμένους ἁγιάζει πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότητα [9:13]). In comparison, those who are cleansed with Jesus' blood are purified of "conscience from dead works to worship the living God" (9:14). The NRSV ties ῥαντίζω only to the ashes of a heifer ("the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer"). This is done to show the connection between nominative, feminine participle ῥαντίζουσα with the nominative, feminine σποδὸς δαμάλεως. The other two elements, τὸ αἷμα τράγων and ταύρων are genitive, masculine. However, as Ellingworth has noted, the grammar allows for ῥαντίζω to modify both the blood and the ashes. "The main stress is on the blood" (1993, 455). Unlike the NRSV, other translations do tie ῥαντίζω to the entire clause, indicating that both the blood and the ashes are sprinkled (VUL; NIV; NET; EUE; LU17). The combination of the blood of bulls and goats, and heifer's ashes appears to conflate two different Torah purification rituals: the Day of Atonement when goat's blood was used (Lev 16:1–34) and the Levitical purification ritual where heifer's ashes were utilised (Num 19:9–21). For a longer discussion, see Harris 2019, 225.

[94] DeSilva 2000, 340; Healy 2016, 211; notably, Barth disagrees (1951, 473–79).

[95] Rissi 1987, 99–100; Cockerill 2012, 473–74.

[96] Harris, for example, suggests that Hebrews draws an analogy between the physical sacrifices required to purify an earthly priest for entry into the earthly tabernacle and Jesus' heavenly sacrifice, which purifies people's consciences, enabling their entry into the heavenly sanctuary. According to her, the author "develops an analogy between the earthly means (sacrifices) to cleanse the earthly high priest so that he could enter the earthly sanctuary… and the spiritual/heavenly means (Jesus's sacrifice) to cleanse the conscience of believers to enable them to enter the heavenly sanctuary" (2019, 242).

[97] Leithart arrives at a similar conclusion as Harris but from a different angle. He argues that the author's apparent "confusion" about what exactly is sprinkled at the foot of Sinai in Heb 9:19–21 is clarified when read alongside the invitation in Heb 10:22 to enter the heavenly inner shrine. The combination of "sprinkle" (ῥαντίζω) and "wash" (λούω) in Heb 10:22, incorporating elements of water and blood, points to the ordination of Levitical priests, where both water and blood were sprinkled as part of the rite (Exod 29:4, 21; Lev 8:6, 30). As Leithart concludes, "I argue that Heb. 10.19-22 states precisely that baptism confers priestly privileges… Hebrews 10.22 describes baptism with imagery borrowed from ordination" (2000, 51, 54).

priest and Christ's unique sacrifice, which purifies the believers' conscience and body. Seen form this angle, the invitation to approach "with our hearts sprinkled clean... and our bodies washed" is essentially an invitation for non-Levitical people to access the heavenly holy of holies, undergoing similar purification steps as priests would undertake to enter the tabernacle.[98]

The third and final example demonstrating the strategic use προσέρχομαι is Heb 10:1, which stresses that the Law cannot "make perfect those who approach" (τοὺς προσερχομένους τελειῶσαι).[99] The central challenge here is establishing the meaning of τελειόω. If my overarching argument is correct—that perfection in Hebrews entails the purification necessary to enter the heavenly holy of holies—then 10:1 treats purification as having this very purpose. On the one hand, it involves securing a clean conscience from sin, a reading supported by the text's rhetorical question concerning the cessation of sacrifices if conscience were truly cleansed (10:2). On the other hand, the attainment of a clean conscience is preparatory, not an end in itself; it is the necessary condition for entry into the sacred space behind the heavenly veil. Thus, the Levitical sacrifices failed because their effect, being temporary and limited to

[98] The connection between receiving a clean conscience to be able to ascend heaven is made by Philo when explaining why Moses, and no one else, was allowed to approach God. For Philo, "when the prophetic mind becomes divinely inspired and filled with God, it becomes like the monad, not being at all mixed with any of those things associated with duality. But he who is resolved into the nature of unity, is said to come near God in a kind of family relation, for having given up and left behind all mortal kinds, he is changed into the divine, so that such men become kin to God and truly divine" (*QE* 1.29). Moses, being "the most pure and God-loving mind" (*QE* 1.27), committed himself to become divinely inspired and not get mixed with earthly things which would keep him away from God (*QE* 1.28). As a result, he was conferred the "most excellent and God-worthy ordinance" (*QE* 1.29), which was unimpaired access to the presence of God. As Philo sustains, "He [Moses] had to be clean, as in soul so also in body, to have no dealings with any passion, purifying himself from all the calls of mortal nature, food and drink and intercourse with women. This last he had disdained for many a day, almost from the time when, possessed by the spirit, he entered on his work as prophet, since he held it fitting to hold himself always in readiness to receive the oracular messages. As for eating and drinking, he had no thought of them for forty successive days, doubtless because he had the better food of contemplation, through whose inspiration, sent from heaven above, he grew in grace, first of mind, then of body also through the soul, and in both so advanced in strength and well-being that those who saw him afterwards could not believe their eyes. For we read that by God's command he ascended an inaccessible and pathless mountain, the highest and most sacred in the region" (*Mos*. 2.XIV.68–70).

[99] Unlike 7:25, where οἱ προσερχόμενοι refers to the audience's entry into the heavenly tabernacle through Jesus' priesthood, in 10:1 οἱ προσερχόμενοι refers to the Levitical priests who perform sacrifices within the earthly tabernacle.

the earthly sphere, was insufficient to grant the transformation necessary for the recipients to enter and remain in the heavenly inner shrine. This analysis clarifies why the new covenant, through Christ, is perceived as superior: it grants the audience a perfection that secures the purification needed for unhindered access and permanence in the heavenly tabernacle.

This last point begins to set the stage for one of the main arguments in the subsequent chapter: that at the heart of the author's logic lies the necessity of purification for entry into the heavenly inner shrine, a purification that the Levitical priesthood is inherently unable to grant. The covenant received by Israel at Sinai, though possessing its own validity, ultimately failed to provide perfection because it could not grant the necessary internal transformation, that is, it could not give the people a new heart, which is the prerequisite for receiving the purification needed to access the celestial realm.

4.4.3 Sinai and Purification in Hebrews

At this point, before bringing the chapter to a close, it is necessary to consider how the Sinai narrative intersects with the theme of purification and perfection in Hebrews. As argued above, at Sinai the people were called to ascend, yet, overwhelmed by the terrifying sensory phenomena, they remained below. However, this is not the only reason—or perhaps even the primary reason—why, in the author's view, the generation that left Egypt failed to ascend. The deeper issue was that the people lacked the purification required to enter the heavenly tabernacle. Moses, apparently, did experience such purification and was therefore invited to enter the divine presence, but the rest of the congregation did not. And although Moses sprinkled them with blood, according to the retelling of the Sinai event in Hebrews (9:19), that did not effect the degree of purification necessary for entrance into the heavenly realm.

The people, like the "heavenly things" themselves, stood in need of "better sacrifices" (κρείττοσιν θυσίαις, 9:23): a sacrifice capable of removing sin by bearing it on their behalf

(9:26, 28). In other words, to reach the heavenly tabernacle, humanity required a purification that transcended the limits of the Sinai covenant and its earthly law, since both, as effective as they were, were limited to the earthly realm. What was needed was a realmic-crossing sacrifice, one that could enable access to an entirely different sphere of existence. To follow Moses' trajectory at Sinai—that is, to ascend from earth to heaven via the mountain—people needed the kind of purification made possible only through Christ's offering.

Hebrews thus reinterprets the Sinai event—similar to the way some Second Temple Jewish texts use "Mosaic Discourse," as discussed above—in light of the new covenant. Not only have the terrifying barriers of sound, fire, and darkness been removed at the community's arrival at Zion, but something even more significant has occurred: the Torah has been inscribed upon their hearts and the perfection once reserved for the high priest alone has now been extended to the entire covenant community. As Mitchell observes, the audience's invitation to approach God in Hebrews creates a "contrast between Sinai and the new Jerusalem, the wilderness generation and the readers, who now have access to God in a way that the ancestors did not."[100] The destination—God's own dwelling—remains unchanged, but the means of approach differs. At Sinai, only Moses ascended; at Zion, the entire community ascends, enabled by the purification that grants them access to the heavenly tabernacle itself.

4.4.4. Summary

This section focuses first on three key passages in Hebrews that feature the author's use of προσέρχομαι. I argue that its deliberate and strategic deployment points to the conclusion that the destination envisioned for the audience is none other than the heavenly inner shrine. Second, it argues that the concept of perfection refers to this framework of purification that

[100] Mitchell 2009, 107.

enables the audience to ascend heaven and enter the heavenly inner shrine. Perfection in Hebrews is a present, lived reality that permits people to draw near to God in heaven.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Hebrews envisions its audience as a purified and perfected people, standing at the threshold of the heavenly tabernacle. By analysing Heb 4:16, 6:19–20, and 10:19–20, I have shown that the author extends to the community an invitation not merely to approach God in a general sense, but specifically to enter the heavenly holy of holies, the inner shrine where God's presence dwells. This invitation situates the audience in a state analogous to Israel's waiting at Sinai: they are poised at the foot of the mountain, anticipating the return of their heavenly intercessor, yet simultaneously drawn upward into participation in his priestly ministry.

The key to this heavenly access lies in the notion of perfection (τελειόω), which, I have argued, Hebrews frames in terms of purification. As Moffitt and others have demonstrated, the author does not discard the logic of ritual purity found in the Torah but transposes it into the sphere of heavenly worship. Jesus' own perfection, achieved through suffering, death, and exaltation, constitutes his ritual consecration as the eternal high priest. On this basis, he enables the audience to share in this perfection and purification. Thus, those who are still "being sanctified" (10:14) are nonetheless already perfected, and by this perfection they are qualified to enter the heavenly sanctuary even now.

Within this framework, the Sinai narrative provides a typological backdrop for understanding the audience's position. Whereas Israel once stood fearing at the mountain's base, unable to enter God's presence because the covenant had not yet effected full purification, the hearers of Hebrews stand under the new covenant, their hearts cleansed and their access secured. The waiting people of God, purified through the perfection of their heavenly high

priest, now stand at the foot of Zion, poised to enter the heavenly inner shrine. Their waiting, therefore, is not passive; it is a state of active, heavenly participation, sustained by hope and oriented toward the return of their intercessor who has already entered ahead of them and will one day return to them. Thus, Hebrews reimagines the people of God not as wanderers in the wilderness but as a purified community, dwelling at the intersection of heaven and earth.

Chapter 5
The Sinai Narrative, Torah, and the Levitical Priesthood

5.1. Introduction

Thus far, I have argued that the author draws on the Sinai narrative—particularly the events preceding Israel's wilderness wanderings, when the people waited for Moses' return—as a positive paradigm for encouraging the audience to wait patiently and faithfully for Jesus' return from his heavenly high-priestly intercession. One possible objection to my argument is the claim that I am committing the same error as Lot's wife. According to Gen 19:17, after being rescued from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, she was instructed: "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed." However, she disobeyed, "looked back," and, as a result, was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen 19:26).[1]

If God has freed the audience of Hebrews from the fire, smoke, gloom, and darkness of Sinai (12:18–21), would it not be more appropriate to assume that the author intends for them to flee from Sinai entirely and never look back? Why, then, would I dedicate this study to analysing the role of Sinai in Hebrews when the author seemingly urges the audience not to remain at Sinai but to escape to Zion? Am I, by exploring Sinai's significance, committing the mistake of Lot's wife by focusing on a place the audience was supposed to leave behind and never revisit?

The present chapter addresses this very issue. Here, my primary focus is to wrestle with the question of whether the author is in fact trying to create distance between Sinai and the epistle's audience. There are various texts in Hebrews which seem to suggest that both the Levitical priesthood and Torah are readily disregarded and indeed rejected by the author of Hebrews. As previously noted, many commentators do assert that Hebrews devalues the

[1] For a discussion on the fate of Lot's wife, see Leyerle 2014.

covenant and Torah established at Sinai, presenting them as superseded by the Melchizedekian priesthood and new Christian regulations. Under this view, the Sinai event serves as a negative foil against which the author highlights the superiority of Jesus' story and sacrifice.

Instead, the position taken in what follows is that when the author appears to suggest a replacement of Torah (e.g., a "change of law" [7:12]) or the annulment of the covenant (e.g., "he made the first one obsolete" [8:13]), he envisions the introduction of a new set of realities which, like the Melchizedekian priesthood, operate in the heavenly realm. Just as the introduction of a heavenly priesthood does not cancel the Levitical priesthood, which continues to operate within the earthly realm (7:13–14), so also the new heavenly realities do not supplant the Sinai law, which maintains its relevance on earth. In this regard, the community finds itself under these new heavenly realities not because they have superseded the Torah, but because they exist under the dual influence of both the earthly and heavenly realms. In other words, the Sinai revelation, given on earth (12:25), remains active, while another priesthood and realities have been introduced and operate in the heavenly realm.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first examines the statements in Heb 7:12 regarding the Torah and the Levitical priesthood, arguing that the "change" envisioned by the author does not entail a transformation or annulment of the entire Torah, nor of any specific part of it. Rather, the change reflects the recognition that the audience is not restricted to the Levitical priesthood but also comes under the jurisdiction of the heavenly, Melchizedekian priesthood. Operating in an entirely different realm, this heavenly priesthood complements—rather than replaces or invalidates—the Levitical order, which continues to function within its proper, earthly sphere.

The second section explores the limitations the author attributes to Torah and the Levitical priesthood, even as he affirms their positive aspects. While the Torah and Levitical priesthood are upheld as valuable, the author contends that Jesus' priesthood achieves superior

outcomes. Crucially, these better outcomes do not stem from the substitution of the Mosaic covenant or Torah but from the audience's participation in the dual realities of the earthly and heavenly realms.

5.2. A Change of Priesthood and Law in Heb 7:12

A passage that has often fuelled an interpretation which suggests that the establishment of the Son's priesthood annuls the entire Jewish law, and by extension seeks to move the audience away from Sinai, is 7:12. Du Toit has called it the *crux interpretum* of the law in Hebrews.[2] It reads, "For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well" (μετατιθεμένης γὰρ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ νόμου μετάθεσις γίνεται [7:12]).

While a common interpretation of this text is that the law, along with the Levitical priesthood, has lost its validity now that a "change" has occurred and a new covenant has come into effect,[3] a different conclusion can be reached by following the author's logic that a change in the law is inherently linked to a change in priesthood. Since the entire premise for a change in the law hinges on a change in priesthood—that is, that a change in priesthood necessarily entails a change in law—whatever a "change of law" means must be parallel to the "change of priesthood."[4] Thus, before wrestling with the meaning of "change of law," I move to take a quick detour to analyse the author's meaning of a "change of priesthood," in order to better understand what he means by a "change of law."

[2] Du Toit 2021, 1.

[3] Manson 1951, 114; Harris 2019a, 171. Wedderburn comments the following regarding 7:12, "Hebrews seems to persist resolutely with cultic terminology even after it has, to all intents and purposes, dealt the cultic way of thought a *coup de grâce*" (2005, 409).

[4] To express this in a mathematical formula, if *a* must equal *b*, then any change to *a* necessitates a corresponding change to *b*. As deSilva comments, "On the basis of… mutual interdependence, the author claims that it is 'necessary' that a change of law accompany any change of priesthood" (2000, 270). In other words, a change of priesthood necessitates a change of law.

5.2.1. A "Change of Priesthood" in Heb 7:12

The context surrounding the "change of priesthood" in 7:12 delves into the qualifications for the priesthood, particularly focusing on Jesus' eligibility. It clarifies that Jesus, originating from the tribe of Judah, was not eligible for the Levitical priesthood, which was reserved for the tribe of Levi. As the author writes, "Now the one of whom these things are spoken," speaking of Jesus, "belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests" (7:13–14).

This raises a question in the author's mind: how could a member of the tribe of Judah qualify as a priest? For him, the answer lays in the proposal that Jesus qualifies for the priesthood not through "a legal requirement concerning bodily descent," which restricts the priesthood to descendants of Levi, but "by the power of an indestructible life" (7:16), thus qualifying for the non-Levitical priesthood under the order of Melchizedek.[5] While some have advocated that this "indestructible life" refers to Jesus' life prior to his passion, suggesting that the author hints that Jesus possessed an imperishable divine aspect,[6] it makes sense to conclude that it refers to the life that was conferred upon him by his resurrection and ascension.[7] After all, Hebrews assumes that Jesus did in fact die (2:9), and therefore it is difficult to conclude that his pre-crucifixion life could be labelled "indestructible." Therefore, we may conclude, Jesus, by virtue of his "indestructible life," carries out his priestly office in heaven, the sphere where he is presently located.

[5] For studies on the figure of Melchizedek in Hebrews, see Willi 1986; Fitzmyer 2000; Horton 2008; Mason 2011; Stuckenbruck 2018. If it were the author's intention to suggest that the Sinai revelation had lost its validity, he could have presumably argued that Jesus was in fact entitled to the priesthood because the Torah's rules which prohibited him from being a priest had been entirely abrogated. Instead, the author goes to great length to reason a way to both assume Jesus' high priesthood whilst also maintaining Torah's rule that only Levites are allowed to be priests; see Moffitt 2022, 115.

[6] Westcott 1909, 185.

[7] For a discussion on this topic, see Moffitt 2011, 200–8.

On earth, however, another priesthood is in session, namely the Levitical priesthood. Not surprisingly, the author concludes that if Jesus "were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests," namely, the Levitical priests, "who offer gifts according to the law" (8:4). Essentially, Jesus does not qualify as a priest in the earthly realm, where the Levitical priesthood holds jurisdiction, but does qualify in the heavenly realm because of his post-resurrection, "indestructible life." In other words, the "different priesthood" (ἱερεὺς ἕτερος [7:15]), into which Jesus receives his priestly office, does not operate in the earthly sphere, where the Levitical priesthood is in effect, but in a different realm, namely the heavenly realm.

Obviously, this does not mean that the author would have understood the Son's priesthood as having no jurisdictional effect on earth. As priest, Jesus intercedes for the community living on earth (7:25) and awaits his own return (1:13) to those who are waiting for him in the earthly realm (9:28). Though absent from earth, Jesus continues to be mindful of those living on earth, exercising a priesthood that affects both the heavenly and earthly realms.[8]

However, while at the heart of the author's argument is the question of Jesus' priestly ordination (what gives Jesus the right to be identified as a priest?), it is interwoven with a question of location: *where* does he function as priest? A way of answering this question is by being mindful of the author's use of Ps 110, which serves as his basis to speak of a Melchizedekian priesthood operates in the heavenly realm. There, the location from which God swears and ordains the object being addressed as priest (Ps 110:4) and invites him to sit at his righthand (Ps 110:1) is Zion (Ps 110:2), which, in Hebrews, is synonymous to the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22) and the assembly of the Son in heaven (12:23). In other words, there is little debate that the author would have understood the Melchizedekian priesthood as being tied to Zion, and, as a result, since Zion is tied to heaven, therefore the location into which the Son is being ordained to serve as priest is the heavenly realm.

[8] Bockmuehl 2019, 148–52.

Viewing the Melchizedekian priesthood as operating in a different realm raises an important question: does the inauguration of a heavenly, Melchizedekian priesthood signify the end of the earthly, Levitical priesthood? The relationship between the earthly Levitical priesthood and the heavenly Melchizedekian priesthood remains a topic of scholarly debate. Some view the introduction of the Melchizedekian priesthood as necessarily invalidating the Levitical priesthood.[9] Because Jesus assumes the priesthood of a different order, the argument goes that with it he removes any need for the former. Others, like Isaacs, argue that instead of entirely invalidating the Levitical priesthood, Jesus simply relocated the cultic place of worship, from being under earth's Levitical priesthood now to be administered under heaven's Melchizedekian priesthood. Therefore, Jesus' priesthood does succeed the Levitical priesthood, not by replacing it but simply by transferring the location of worship from earth to heaven.[10]

Whilst I agree with Isaacs that Hebrews indeed depicts worship as being carried out primarily in heaven, it seems to me that the establishment of the Son's priesthood in heaven does not mean that the Levitical priesthood on earth is invalidated. Hebrews appears to envision the coexistence of two separate priesthoods: one earthly and one heavenly. Thiessen arrives at this same conclusion by noting how several Second Temple texts make room for the existence of dual priesthoods.[11] Specifically, he points to the *Testament of Levi*, which describes a "holy of holies superior to all holiness" in the heavens, where archangels "serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous" (*T. Levi* 3.4–6). Thiessen argues that in Hebrews, the earthly priesthood is seen as a reflection of and derived

[9] E.g., Stedman 1992, 80.

[10] "For the author of Hebrews… the cult place has not been replaced by the church, but superseded altogether, and re-located in heaven" (1992, 146).

[11] Besides *T. Levi*, Thissen investigates 4Q400 1.1–4, Philo's *Special Laws* 1.67, *1 Enoch* 9.1, Wis 9:8, and 2 Baruch 4:2–6.

from this heavenly priesthood.[12] He suggests that this dual priesthood model is fundamental to the author's development of the Melchizedekian priesthood while simultaneously upholding the relevance of the Torah's instructions regarding the Levitical priesthood.[13]

Further clarification could be given concerning the interplay between the Levitical and Melchizedekian priesthoods and the potential coexistence of dual priesthoods in Hebrews.[14] However, my objective is simply to note that the "change of priesthood" mentioned in 7:12 does not imply the abolition of the Levitical priesthood. Instead, "change," as I will later develop, does not necessarily indicate replacement but signals the introduction of another priesthood that operates within a different realm—the heavenly—while the Levitical priesthood continues within the earthly realm. In other words, the "change of priesthood" refers to the initiation of a new, heavenly priesthood that complements, rather than replaces, the existing earthly priesthood.

[12] Thissen goes on to conclude, "These texts stemming from diverse periods, locations, and forms of Judaism, show that belief in a celestial priesthood and temple was widespread around the time that the author of Hebrews wrote… Most significantly, it is clear that none of these authors intend to undermine or abolish the earthly priesthood in general" (2019, 189).

[13] Thissen's argument is worth citing in its entirety, "Jesus is not qualified to be a priest on earth precisely because the law has already established an earthly priesthood and, in stipulating a genealogically determined priesthood, precluded Jesus of the tribe of Judah from ever becoming a priest in the temple in Jerusalem. For the author, the law regarding priestly descent from Levi remains valid and permanently disqualifies Jesus from being a priest on earth … Christ cannot be priest on earth because there is already an earthly priesthood… The law is not abrogated, cancelled, made obsolete, or annulled. It remains valid, despite the coming of Jesus and the inception of his own high priesthood in the heavenly realm" (2019, 187–88).

[14] See, for example, DeSilva 2000, 263; Moffitt 2022, 81, 115. Regev asserts that the change of priesthood (7:12) "does not abrogate the existence of the institution of priesthood altogether" and that, for the author, "the office of the high priest still exists" (2017, 594). Earlier Regev concludes, "This change does not abrogate the existence of the institution of priesthood altogether… The author believes the office of the high priest still exists" (2017, 586). For Regev, having used the law to frame Christ's salvific role, the author of Hebrews continues to use Torah's regulations of sacrifices as the guide to develop his arguments elsewhere. Torah, Regev writes, "continues to guide the author in viewing Christ as a high priest," since "his basic worldview is structured by the Law, and the new Christian doctrine is built along the lines of the cultic Pentateuchal Law and serves as its continuation" (2017, 594).

5.2.1.1. A Commandment's Abrogation in Heb 7:18

If my interpretation of the "change of priesthood" in 7:12 so far is correct, then the subsequent mention of a commandment's abrogation in 7:18–19 could be understood similarly. The text reads, "There is, on the one hand, the abrogation (ἀθέτησις) of an earlier commandment (προαγούσης ἐντολῆς) because it was weak and ineffectual… there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God."

Throughout Hebrews, the term ἐντολή is consistently used to refer to specific statutes within the law,[15] rather than the entirety of the law, which is typically designated by νόμος.[16] Chapter 7 particularly employs ἐντολή to refer to regulations relating to the Levitical priesthood. For example, in 7:5, ἐντολή denotes a particular command within the law that mandates "descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law (ἐντολὴν κατὰ τὸν νόμον) to collect tithes from the people." Similarly, in 7:16, the author contrasts Jesus' priesthood, established by "an indestructible life," with the "legal requirement" (οὐ κατὰ νόμον ἐντολῆς) that restricts the priesthood to Levites. Thus, when 7:18 speaks of abolishing a commandment, it seems logical to conclude that it refers to a specific stipulation within the law pertaining to the priesthood, namely, that only Levites may serve as priests, rather than the nullification of the entire law.

The author further elaborates that this "earlier commandment" (προαγούσης ἐντολῆς [7:18]) is deemed necessary to be removed (ἀθέτησις)[17] because it is weak (ἀσθενής) and ineffective (ἀνωφελής). This assessment is then juxtaposed with the introduction of "a better hope (κρείττονος ἐλπίδος), through which we approach God (δι' ἧς ἐγγίζομεν τῷ θεῷ)"

[15] 7:5, 16, 18; 9:19, 20; 11:22.

[16] Lane 1991a, 168.

[17] The only other time the author uses ἀθέτησις is in 9:26, where the author states that Jesus, "appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin (εἰς ἀθέτησιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας) by the sacrifice of himself." There is little doubt that ἀθέτησις in 9:26 means something other than complete removal of sin. After all, the entire argument surrounding 9:26 is that Jesus can truly eliminate people's bondage to sin. Therefore, ἀθέτησις in 7:18 likely refers to the removal and not simply transformation.

(7:19).[18] Evidently, the author's critique of the commandment's limitations is directly linked to the provision of a better hope, implying that the new hope provides a more effective means of approaching God.

It is the association of these two ideas—the removal of an earlier commandment and the introduction of a better way to approach God—that, I contend, helps explain what the author means by the commandment's weakness and ineffectiveness. When contrasting the regulations governing the Levitical priesthood (which mediated access to God within an earthly tabernacle) with the "better hope" that facilitates approach to God in a heavenly sanctuary (6:18; 10:23), the former is deemed "weak and ineffective." This is because, unlike the heavenly model, the earthly priesthood is inherently limited by its members' mortality and the transient nature of their service (10:1–3). On the other hand, the Son's priesthood, founded on the power of an indestructible life, transcends these limitations. Since it is not subject to death or decay, it allows for a continuous, unimpeded access to God in the heavenly realm, far surpassing the capabilities of the earthly tabernacle.[19]

The author's argument could then be summarised as follows: as valid as the Levitical priesthood is, it cannot introduce people into God's heavenly tabernacle because it is a priesthood which remains dependant on human agency, and since humans are mortal, only one with the power of an indestructible life could secure people's entrance into God's heavenly glory.[20] Jesus—although also human—was appointed high priest in heaven thanks to his indestructible life (7:16), and therefore provides people a "better hope," one which actually allows the audience to approach the glory of God in the heavenly realm.[21]

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[18] It is common knowledge that the author uses the correlation μὲν … δέ to join two parallel thoughts. See Harris 2019b, 175. This is the reason why some translations, like the NRSV, add the markers, "on the one hand… on the other hand."

[19] Peeler 2024, 197.

[20] Cockerill 2012, 326.

[21] In this sense, Schmitt's analysis appears right when she writes, "In vv. 18-19, the author calls for the setting aside of the weak and ineffective ἐντολή concerning the lineage of priests in order to bring in a better

What, then, is the commandment annulled in 7:18? If my analysis is correct that the central hope of the author's argument is for the audience to reach the heavenly tabernacle—and that the Levitical priesthood, though entirely valid within its earthly sphere, could not offer this access—then the annulment of the earlier commandment addresses this problem directly. The audience needs the ministry of another priesthood, one that can actually grant entrance into the heavenly realm. This is precisely what the Melchizedekian priesthood provides. Far from being a novel institution, it predates the Levitical order and, crucially, does not depend on physical descent (7:16). Its high priest, Jesus, possesses "the power of an indestructible life" and was appointed "with an oath" (7:20), unlike the earthly priests who took office without such an oath (7:21).

This contrast clarifies the distinction between "the earlier commandment" and "the better hope" (7:18–19): the earlier commandment required access to God's presence through the Levitical priesthood, which ultimately could not provide entrance into the heavenly realm; the better hope, grounded in Jesus' heavenly priesthood, truly enables entry into the heavenly inner shrine. The audience, situated in a liminal state between earth and heaven, now benefits from Jesus' heavenly priesthood, without negating the Levitical order's validity within its proper, earthly domain.

5.2.2. A "Change of Law" in Heb 7:12

In the section above, I provided a brief excursus on the author's reference to the "change of priesthood" (7:12). I argued that the author does not present the Son's priesthood as invalidating or replacing the Levitical priesthood. Instead, the Son's priesthood operates in an

hope…The failure of the Levitical priesthood to attain perfection is the reason the author can 'set aside' the previous commandment concerning that priesthood and instead look toward a different priest—a better hope, Jesus" (2009, 197–98).

entirely different realm, namely the heavenly realm. Thus, while Jesus' priesthood is activated in heaven, the Levitical priesthood continues to function on earth.

I now return to the topic of the "change of law" mentioned in 7:12 to argue that, just as the change of priesthood does not nullify the Levitical priesthood, which remains valid within the earthly realm, the change of law likewise does not abolish the Torah. Instead, it introduces a new set of regulations that pertain specifically to the heavenly realm, aligning with the Melchizedekian priesthood and its heavenly context. To support this view, I move to first examine the use of νόμος in Heb 7:12. I will then explore the implications of the verb μετατίθημι and the noun μετάθεσις in this context.

If one translates νόμου μετάθεσις γίνεται as "a change *in* the law" (NRSV), then it appears that the transformation occurs within the law itself. This is the view which some, like Schmitt, take. She notes that all uses of νόμος in Heb 7 are found in the context of the priestly office and refer specifically to the laws regarding the Levitical priesthood (7:11, 16, 19, 28).[22] Schmitt therefore concludes, "A change of priesthood does not presume a rejection of the 'Law.' Rather, a change of priesthood most naturally results in a change of only those laws pertaining to priesthood."[23] In other words, the author treats ἐντολή (7:18) and νόμος (7:12) as synonymous.[24]

An alternative interpretation suggests that νόμος encompasses the entirety of Torah, implying a transformation of the whole law rather than just a subset of commands related to

[22] As Schmitt concludes, "The νόμος of ch. 7 refers only to the laws pertaining to Levitical priesthood, or, even more specifically, to laws concerning who could become a Levitical priest" (2009, 198).

[23] Schmitt 2009, 199. Based on this conclusion, Schmitt proposes that a logical reading of 7:12 would be, "When the priesthood changes, the laws concerning priesthood also must change," in Schmitt 2009, 199. Years earlier, Hans Windisch had arrived at a similar conclusion. "Daher bedeutet die Aufhebung des Gesetzes nicht Befreiung der einzelnen von dem Zwang und Verhängnis der Gebote, sondern nur Abschaffung des levitischen Kultus," in Windisch 1931, 66. According to Windisch, this change occurs not because the law is inherently evil but because the new preisthood necessarily sets aside all other priesthoods. As he continues, "Nicht wegen der schlimmen Wirkung, sondern nur wegen seiner inneren Unvollkommenheit und kraft der Offenbarung eines neuen Priestertums" (1931, 66).

[24] "If the genitive εντολής is understood as a genitive of apposition," Schmitt concludes, "then νόμος and ἐντολή must refer to the same entity" (Schmitt 2009, 194).

the Levitical priesthood. In this regard, a better translation would be "a change *of* the law" (KJV).[25] Interpreting this as "change of law," however, is not straightforward.

Koester is among those who argue that God, being the author of the law, withheld the right to change Torah.[26] The strength of Koester's argument is seen in the flow of the passage: after stating that God changed the law (7:12) and nullified specific regulations concerning the Levitical priesthood (7:18), the author notes that the Son's priesthood, confirmed by an oath (7:20–28), remains immutable, unlike the Levitical priesthood which was always vulnerable to alteration due to its lack of divine oath.[27] As the author of Hebrews writes, Jesus' priesthood was "confirmed with an oath; for others who became priests (referring to the Levitical priesthood) took their office without an oath, but this one (Jesus) became a priest with an oath" (7:20–21). From this perspective, Koester concludes, "the same God who made the first covenant is the God who replaces it with a new covenant… Obliteration is done by God, who 'abrogates' a command… and makes the first covenant obsolete."[28]

A similar view is argued by Joslin; he, however, takes it in a very different direction than Koester. For Joslin, the whole law "has been transformed in Christ… The law has been 'Christologized.'"[29] According to Joslin, when Hebrews cites Jeremiah's promise (Jer 38:33 LXX) that the law would be written in people's hearts (8:10; 10:16) it means the "Christologized," transformed version of the law and not what a normal Jewish interpreter

[25] For a genitive of reference view of νόμου (7:12), see Wallace 1996, 127–28; Harris 2019a, 170–71.

[26] "Hebrews agrees that no human being can rightly abrogate a command of God (10:28) but argues that in this case it was God who abrogated a command… God presumably possesses the right to alter the covenant that he himself put in place" (Koester 2001, 361).

[27] "The Law included no oath of God concerning the Levitical priesthood, and the author assumes that this silence is no oversight" (Koester 2001, 370).

[28] Koester 2001, 388.

[29] Joslin 2008, 220, 222.

would have understood by Torah.[30] He goes on to argue that it is illogical to sustain that Hebrews assumes the continual validity of the law. Instead, the author has the transformed, "Christologized" version of the law in mind, a type which does not include many of the regulations concerning sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood.[31]

Given that ἐντολή refers to a specific command within the law instead of the law as a whole (as outlined above), it is reasonable to agree with Koester that νόμος represents something broader than a single command. Thus, νόμος is not synonymous with ἐντολή, contrary to Schmitt's view.[32] However, I do not follow Koester in asserting that Hebrews implies God obliterated the law to replace it with a new. Similarly, I find Joslin's argument unpersuasive, as Hebrews does not clearly support the distinctions he proposes, namely, that Hebrews has in mind a "Christologized" version of the law.[33]

What, then, does the author mean by νόμου μετάθεσις (7:12)? Since the premise of a change in law in 7:12 is directly tied to the change in priesthood, as outlined above, I contend

[30] As Joslin concludes, "Something has changed regarding the Old Covenant commands in that some have ended and are no longer to be kept… If there is no change in content, then are the New Covenant people still to obey the cultus?" (2008, 217).

[31] Along the same lines, du Toit does not think that the quotation from Jeremiah point to the internalisation of Torah as a whole. "There is no appeal to a renewed commitment to the precepts of the Mosaic Law, which arguably suggests that the precepts of the Mosaic Law belong to the previous era" (2021, 4).

[32] A more moderate position is taken by Ellingworth, who perceives a level of flexibility in Hebrews' use of ἐντολή, particularly in 7:16, that distinguish it from the use of νόμος. However, even he argues that ἐντολή "must mean a specific commandment" instead of "the Mosaic law as a whole" (1993, 363).

[33] In Hebrews, νόμος always refers to Moses' law and not a transformed, "Christologized" version of Torah (7:5, 12, 16, 19, 28; 8:4, 10; 9:19, 22; 10:1, 8, 16, 28). Even if one agrees with Schmitt that νόμος only refers to the commands relating to the Levitical priesthood, the fact still remains that it refers Moses' Torah, albeit just a fraction. An example of this can be found in 10:28 ("Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy… How much worse punishment… will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son"), where the author draws an *a fortiori* comparison between νόμον Μωϋσέως and the "the knowledge of truth" (τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας [10:27]) which the audience had received through the Son. If the Mosaic law has been stripped of its validity now that the new covenant has been instituted, this a fortiori comparison would make no sense. Why would the audience fear a "worse punishment" (10:28) if, they are presumably no longer culpable of death for violating the law of Moses? I therefore agree with Thissen that a central problem with Joslin's view is that, "What Joslin fails to consider is that if it is a priori unthinkable that Hebrews' use of Jer. 38:33 LXX could include the entirety of the Jewish law, then it must be just as unthinkable that the prophet Jeremiah could have intended his prophecy to refer to the entirety of the Jewish law, rituals included… But we have no evidence either that Jeremiah thought that such a New Covenant entailed the obsolescence of ritual and cultic laws or that other early Jews understood this passage to hint at such an obsolescence of the law" (2019, 184–85).

that a change of law also refers to the heavenly realities where another priesthood operates, one which coexists alongside the earthly Levitical priesthood. This "change of law" then refers to a set of "realities" relevant to the heavenly sphere, which does not nullify the Torah's authority on earth. By this, I do not mean that an alternative law has been inaugurated in heaven. Rather, these "realities" pertain to what the author calls elsewhere the "good things to come" (9:11), which he describes as heavenly certainties of which the law is a shadow on earth (10:1). In other words, just as the heavenly Melchizedekian priesthood complements, rather than invalidates, the earthly Levitical priesthood, these heavenly realities—such as Jesus' priesthood—exist without invalidating Torah's legitimacy in the earthly sphere. As such, while the community remains subject to the Torah's earthly authority as they continue to live on earth, they are also introduced to another set of truths tied to the heavenly realm.

The above premise raises at least two important questions. First, if these changes occur in heaven, how do they impact the audience, who remain physically on earth? The answer, as already alluded to, lies in the concept of dual participation: the audience is envisioned as existing simultaneously in both the earthly and heavenly realms. On the one hand, the audience is described as waiting for their intercessor, Jesus, to return from the heavenly mountain he ascended to intercede on their behalf (as discussed in the previous chapter). Yet, on the other hand, while they wait, they are already granted access to partake in the heavenly realities made effective by Jesus' sacrifice. Thus, unlike the generation of Israel at Sinai, who stood at a distance, afraid to approach God's presence and relied on Moses to ascend in their place, the audience is portrayed as having arrived to the top of a mountain.

Allow me to illustrate this concept with an analogy. Imagine playing an immersive electronic video game. Within this game, one enters a virtual world with its own unique set of experiences and rules, entirely distinct from those governing the physical world. As one engages with this virtual reality, it might feel all-encompassing, but the reality is that one's

physical existence remains rooted in the tangible, earthly realm outside the game. The rules of the physical world—like gravity, laws of cause and effect, etc.—still apply to the player, even if they do not seem immediately relevant while one is immersed in the virtual environment.

The change of law accompanying the change of priesthood can be understood in a similar way. Just as entering the game introduces one to a new reality, the establishment of the Son's priesthood in the heavenly realm introduces the community to a new set of heavenly realities. However, just like the physical laws of the real-world location remain operative regardless of the game's virtual activity, the Levitical priesthood and the Torah continue to govern the earthly realm even as the Melchizedekian priesthood and its corresponding laws come into effect in the heavenly realm. In this heavenly sphere—analogous to the virtual game's unique dimension—a change of priesthood and a consequent change of law occurs, yet this shift does not abolish or invalidate the earthly systems.

5.2.2.1. Μετατίθημι and Μετάθεσις in Heb 7:12

The second question raised by the above conclusion (that the "change of law" does not indicate the end of the law on earth) is this: if the author is not aiming to discredit Torah and the covenant, why then does he conclude that the law has undergone a change (μετατίθημι; μετάθεσις [7:12])? Does "change" not straightforwardly imply the culmination or complete transformation of Torah, now that God speaks through his Son in these last days?

To begin answering this question, we note that both the verb μετατίθημι and the noun μετάθεσις, both which appear in 7:12, sometimes denote the transfer of something or someone from one place to another. A clear example appears in Heb 11:5, which narrates how Enoch was "changed" (μετατίθημι) from earth and "changed" (μετατίθημι) to heaven, because God had "changed" (μετάθεσις) him. Similarly, Acts 7:16 describes how the corpses of Jacob and Israel's ancestors "were changed" (μετατίθημι) from Egypt to Shechem and laid in the tomb

that Abraham had acquired. In these instances, μετατίθημι obviously does not imply the elimination of the transferred object. That is, neither Enoch nor Jacob's remains ceased to exist the moment they underwent a "change."

In other cases, μετατίθημι suggests a transition between distinct cultic regulations or religious practices. For example, in Gal 1:6, Paul expresses surprise at how quickly the Galatian believers were "changing" (μετατίθημι) from the one who called them to live in the grace of Christ and turning to a "different gospel" (ἕτερος εὐαγγέλιον).[34] Here, the fact that they were abandoning the gospel of Christ in favour of another does not mean that the gospel of Christ ceased to exist. Similarly, in Jude 4, the author warns of "certain intruders" who "change (μετατίθημι) the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Again, μετατίθημι conveys the idea of forsaking a religious principle, in this case, "the grace of our God," which was earlier identified as "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). However, just as in Gal 1:6, abandoning one framework for another does not necessarily render the previous one obsolete.

Outside the NT, Josephus employs μετατίθημι to describe the transition from one priestly house to another. In *Antiquities*, Josephus recounts how King Antiochus, following the advice of Lysias, executed Menelaus, who had served as high priest for ten years, and transferred the priesthood to Alcimus, who was not even from the high priestly family. Thus, he "changed the office from one house to another" (μεταθεῖναι τὴν τιμὴν ἀπὸ ταύτης τῆς οἰκίας εἰς ἕτερον οἶκον [*Ant*. 12.387]).[35] Similarly, in 2 Macc 11:24, the only other occurrence of the noun μετάθεσις outside Hebrews, King Antiochus complains that "the Jews do not consent to our father's change (μετάθεσις) to Greek customs but prefer their own way of living and ask that their own customs be allowed them." Here, the fact that some embraced new customs does

[34] Martyn 2004, 107–9.

[35] Marcus 1943, 200.

not mean that the old ones were abolished. Those Jews who refused to adopt their father's change (μετάθεσις) remained committed to their traditional way of life, which existed before the introduced change. A final example appears in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, where Polycarp tells the proconsul, "It is a noble thing to change (μετατίθημι) from what is evil to righteousness" (*Mart. Pol.* 11.1). In context, Polycarp is demonstrating his unwillingness to renounce his faith, even at the cost of death. He argues that it is more logical to change from evil to righteousness rather than to avoid execution and subsequently face eternal judgment and punishment. Here, μετατίθημι again denotes a shift in allegiance or practice without implying that what is abandoned ceases to exist. The eternal punishment Polycarp warns against remains a reality; he simply chooses the path of righteousness by remaining steadfast in his faith.

Returning to Hebrews, the noun μετάθεσις appears once more in 12:27 (besides 7:12), where the author asserts that when God said "once more," quoting from Hag 2:6 ("Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven" [12:26]), he speaks of "the change (μετάθεσιν) of what is shaken—that is, created things (πεποιημένων)—so that what cannot be shaken may remain (ἵνα μείνῃ)." Much discussion has surrounded the meaning of μετάθεσις in 12:27 and the extent to which it might indicate the removal of the material universe.[36] My intent is not to argue for a specific interpretation but rather to highlight that if, as I have argued, μετάθεσις does not require the elimination of what is being changed, then the transformation of the created realm does not necessarily entail its destruction. The text certainly anticipates a future time when the earthly realm will be transformed so that whatever does not align with the unshakable kingdom is altered.[37] However, this "change" does not inherently mean that the earth will be disregarded or cease to exist.[38]

[36] Thompson 1982, 45–51; Weiss 1991, 690–93; Allen 2010, 596.

[37] For a fuller analysis of this text, see Cockerill 2012, 666–67.

[38] Peeler arrives at a similar conclusion but from a different approach. Since Christ's body is eternal, though it is something created, the text cannot mean that *all* created things will disappear. As Peeler concludes, "As Christ's body changed through resurrection, so will all creation be changed. There will be some kind of

Based on the above examination of μετατίθημι and μετάθεσις, we can conclude that when the author of Hebrews employs these terms in 7:12 to speak of a change of priesthood and law, he is not indicating the abolishment of the Levitical priesthood or Torah. Since many occurrences of these words refer to a transition from one cultic framework to another, their use aligns with the idea that this "change" entails the adoption of a different set of realities operating within another realm. Notably, none of the examples given suggest that adopting new regulations necessitates the elimination of the existing ones. It is entirely feasible to embrace a new cultic regulation while the previous ones remain active and available. In other words, the "change" in 7:12 does not imply the invalidation of the older regulations but rather the introduction of new realities within a distinct sphere. Thus, the "change of priesthood" and "change of law" do not signify the abolition of the Torah or the nullification of the priesthood but rather the inauguration of new realities in a different realm.

Naturally, one could object to this interpretation by pointing to other texts, like Heb 10:9 (a text addressed later) which does not speak of the covenant's μετατίθημι but rather uses ἀναιρέω, a much stronger term that can hardly mean anything other than complete removal. Likewise, one may recognise that these assertions raise questions, such as whether the author envisions a future time when the Torah will no longer apply[39] and whether, like the Levitical priesthood's evident heavenly counterpart in the Melchizedekian priesthood, there exists a comparable heavenly counterpart for the Torah.[40] For now, I return to the central focus of this

change, even of God's heavenly realm, possibly to prepare it to receive all God's embodied people forever" (2024, 397).

[39] I will comment on this matter below and in greater detail in Chapter 6 of this study, when I deal with heaven and earth's shaking in 12:27.

[40] It would be a mistake to conclude that the author has in mind something akin to Paul's use of a "law of Christ" (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21), that is, a parallel set of regulations which can be catalogued as Christ's new commandments. (For a comparative approach which takes into account the various approaches of "law of Christ" in early Christian texts, see Brown 2023.) Rather, I hold the view that Torah's heavenly counterpart may be represented by what the author refers to as the "good things" that have come (9:11) and will come (10:1). This view is supported by the text itself, when the author states that "the law (ὁ νόμος) has only a shadow of the good things to come (τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν) and not the true form of these realities" (10:1). In other words, these

chapter, namely, the question of whether the author of Hebrews presents the Sinai narrative as a fundamentally negative event to be rejected.

5.2.3. Summary

The above section has argued that in Heb 7:12, the author states that a change in the priesthood necessitates a change in the law, a passage that has often been interpreted as signalling the invalidation of the Levitical priesthood and the Jewish law. However, a closer reading suggests that the "change of law" does not imply the complete abolition of the Torah but introduces new regulations tied to the heavenly realm, where the Melchizedekian priesthood operates. Jesus, as a priest under this new order, functions in the heavenly realm due to his indestructible life, while the Levitical priesthood continues to function on earth. The author argues that the Melchizedekian priesthood complements, rather than replaces, the Levitical priesthood, which remains valid in the earthly realm. Therefore, this section concluded that the "change of law" refers to the heavenly realities, not the nullification of earthly regulations. The author envisions a dual priesthood system—one earthly and one heavenly—without invalidating the Torah or the Levitical priesthood.

5.3. Should Sinai and Torah be Abandoned?

In the previous section, I focused on Heb 7:12, arguing that the "change of law" does not necessarily imply the complete rejection of the Sinai revelation. However, this is not the only passage that has been interpreted as suggesting the cessation of the Torah. Other texts, such as Heb 8:13—"the first is obsolete and growing old… and will soon disappear"—and Heb 10:9—"he abolishes the first in order to establish the second"—are often cited to support the view that

"good things" are the heavenly counterpart to the earthly Torah, similar to the way the Melchizedekian priesthood is the heavenly counterpart to the earthly Levitical priesthood.

the law and Levitical priesthood come to an end with the establishment of the new covenant. Do these passages indicate that, with the coming of the Son, the sacrificial and priestly systems are so radically altered that they should be abandoned entirely? Historically, these passages have been interpreted as evidence for the abolition of the law. However, this conclusion is not inescapable.

In this section, I will address these seemingly problematic texts, at least within the context of this study. Through an exegetical examination of each passage, I will argue that none of them require the conclusion that Sinai and the Torah must be disregarded. While these passages may seem difficult, they do not provide substantial grounds for interpreting Sinai in Hebrews as a place to be abandoned. Instead, the Sinai narrative serves as a helpful backdrop from which the author constructs a narrative of liberation and the promise of rest. Furthermore, I will reiterate that the Torah's scope is confined to the earthly realm in which Sinai operates. Consequently, the Levitical priesthood, bound to that same sphere, cannot grant entrance into the heavenly realm. Hebrews presents the ultimate goal as the audience's ascent into the heavenly inner shrine, where Jesus now ministers. In this respect, the Levitical priesthood simply cannot facilitate such an ascent.

5.3.1. A Non-Faultless Covenant in Heb 8:7

A text one could use as an argument against the thesis of this chapter is Heb 8:7, which reads, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, no one would have looked for a second one" (εἰ γὰρ ἡ πρώτη ἐκείνη ἦν ἄμεμπτος, οὐκ ἂν δευτέρας ἐζητεῖτο τόπος). A common interpretation of this text is to hold that 8:7 seeks to dismiss the Mosaic covenant for being faulty.[41] After all, the text does present the hypothetical situation that had the covenant been without fault, there would have been no need for the new covenant. However, the text, along with its double

[41] Allen 2010, 445.

negative ἄμεμπτος, οὐκ ἂν… ἐζητεῖτο is, as Johnson notes, not so straightforward.[42] That the author hints at something being less than ideal with the first covenant is not in question. However, what is less than clear is what exactly does he mean by ἄμεμπτος. To answer this, I turn to the passage's context.

Leading up to the statement of the covenant as ἄμεμπτος in 8:7, the author describes the differences between Jesus' priesthood and the Levitical priesthood (8:1–6).[43] On the one hand, the Levites perform their offering on the earthly sanctuary, which is a sketch and shadow of its heavenly counterpart (8:5). Jesus, on the other hand, carries out his offering in the heavenly tent (8:7), at the "true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up" (8:2). The reason why he must perform his offering in this heavenly tent is because, being a descendent of Judah and not Levi, the law bars him from holding priesthood on earth (8:4). It is then that the author summarises this comparison by stating, "Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry (διαφορωτέρας λειτουργίας), and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant (κρείττονός διαθήκης), which has been enacted through better promises (κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις)" (8:6).

If the comparison between the Levitical priesthood and Jesus' priesthood in 8:6 is still in the mind of the author as he moves to identify the covenant as ἄμεμπτος a verse later (both sentences are connected by a γάρ conjunction and so prove a degree of connection),[44] it is not unreasonable to argue that the "better covenant" through "better promises" which Jesus delivers by his "more excellent ministry" in heaven are the comparators which make the covenant ἄμεμπτος (8:7). In other words, the covenant, mediated by the Levitical priesthood, is found faulty when set side by side to Jesus' heavenly priesthood. Therefore, whatever the

[42] As Johnson concludes, "The attachment of blame to the covenant as such is somewhat puzzling" (2006, 205).

[43] For an analysis of 8:1–6 in Hebrews, see Lang 2019, 195.

[44] Westfall concludes that "the cohesive relationship between vv. 6 and 7 indicate close continuity between the paragraphs" (2005, 191).

author means by ἄμεμπτος must somehow relate to the previous discussion of an earthly priesthood which serve at a temporal tent, and a heavenly one which produces better results.

Having briefly looked at the antecedent of 8:7, I now turn to its proceeding context. The assertion that the first covenant was not without fault in 8:7 is linked with its following phrase, where a closely related word to ἄμεμπτος is used, "God finds fault (μεμφόμενος) with them (αὐτούς)" (8:8). There is a crucial textual variant in 8:8 that could tip the scales in favour or against a view which holds the covenant as inherently faulty. While some manuscripts contain the accusative plural αὐτούς, others have the dative plural αὐτοῖς. The manuscripts are evenly split: א*, A, D, I, K, P, and Ψ contain αὐτούς,[45] while P46, א^2, B, D^2, L, 69, and 1424 depict αὐτοῖς.[46] Modern Greek New Testaments are also divided. The NA/UBS and SBLGNT follow an αὐτοὺς reading while the Byz and THNTG, following early modern readings (Erasmus; Stephanus; Beza; Griesbach), contain αὐτοῖς.

Whichever case one prefers, the difference in translation is not small. Whereas, as mentioned above, αὐτούς would indicate that people are at fault ("God finds fault with them"), αὐτοῖς followed by λέγει would suggest a translation that makes αὐτούς the object of God's speech. As the NET renders it, "Showing its fault," that is, a fault in the covenant, "God says to them (αὐτοῖς λέγει)" (8:8). In his 1984 essay, Wolmarans, arguing for αὐτοῖς, helpfully summarised the two positions. If one favours αὐτοῖς, then "the 'fault' of the first covenant consists in its being an imperfect copy, a type, of the coming perfect one."[47] On the other hand,

[45] Complete list: א* A D* I K P Ψ 0150 33 81 88 256 263 326 365 436 1319 1573 1912 2127 2464 2495 it^{ar} it^{b} it^{c} it^{comp} it^{d} it^{dem} it^{div} it^{e} it^{f} it^{x} it^{z} vg cop^{sa} cop^{bo} cop^{fay} arm eth geo slav Cyril Euthalius Theodoret^{lem} WH NR CEI ND Riv Dio TILC Nv NM.

[46] Complete list: p^{46} א^2 B D^2 L 075 6 104 181 330 424 451 459 614 629 630 1241 1739 1852 1877 1881 1962 1984 1985 2200 2492 Byz Lect Origen Chrysostom John-Damascus ς.

[47] Wolmarans 1984, 143.

if one prefers αὐτούς, it creates a "dualistic approach" which depicts the first covenant as "equally perfect" to the new covenant.[48]

Despite the THNTG and Byz readings, αὐτούς makes most sense for the following reasons. First, the author never uses λέγω with a dative object. Of the nine times he uses the third-person, singular λέγει (1:6, 7; 3:7; 5:6; 8:8, 9, 10; 10:5, 16), besides the phrase in question, four occurrences are quotations from Jeremiah 31 (λέγει κύριος, 8:8, 9, 10; 10:16), once it is preceded by a dative adjective (5:6) but not to indicate the object being addressed, and four are used to introduce an OT quotation, all of which pair λέγει with an accusative noun (1:6, 7; 3:7; 10:5).[49] For Harris, this is enough to conclude that αὐτοῖς λέγει would go against the author's style of quoting OT texts, since we would expect the accusative αὐτούς and not a dative αὐτοῖς to precede λέγει in 8:8.[50]

Second, αὐτοῖς might reflect an editorial emendation. In Codex Claromontanus D^2, an I (iota) was drawn over the Y (upsilon). We know this was a correction because a diagonal line has been drawn over the Y to indicate a correction. (The same occurs in 9:15, when the last letter of ΘΑΝΑΤΟΥ is corrected to ΘΑΝΑΤΟΝ, and a diagonal line is placed over the stem of Y.)[51] On the opposite page, in Latin, the text reads, *vitvperans enim eos dicit*, which matches an αὐτούς reading.[52] The same appears to be the case in Codex Sinaiticus $\aleph^2$, where an I was also drawn over the Y. This is what the NA/UBS committee was referring to when Metzger writes in the UBS Textual Commentary, "Observing the direction in which scribal corrections

[48] Wolmarans favoured αὐτοῖς because, according to him, not only is it the most difficult reading, but the only reason people prefer αὐτούς is because "modern commentators have a difficulty with the imperfection of the first covenant… αὐτούς has been generally acclaimed in standard commentaries, for it allows a seemingly doctrinal conservative interpretation" (1984, 144).

[49] οἰκουμένην λέγει (1:6); ἀγγέλους λέγει (1:7); λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα (3:7); κόσμον λέγει (10:5).

[50] Harris 2019b, 201.

[51] Other examples of a diagonal line that indicates editorial modification, though not over Y, include 10:3, 15.

[52] When Tischendorf's published his edition of the codex, he transcribed it as ΑΥΤΟΥΣ and not ΑΥΤΟΙΣ; see Tischendorf 1852, 498.

moved, a majority of the Committee preferred the reading αὐτούς."[53] Nonetheless, even if αὐτοῖς in these manuscripts represents an editorial emendation, this would not account for the fact that P^{46} unambiguously reads αὐτοῖς. Thus, while this point is worth noting, it cannot, on its own, prove the case.

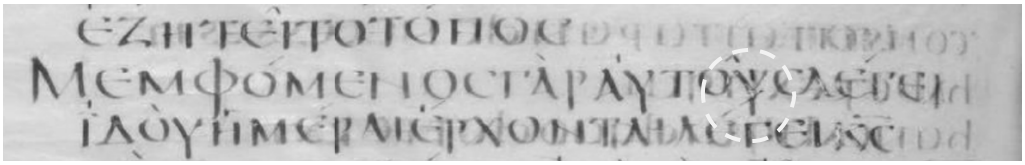


Figure 2: Codex Claromontanus, Heb 8:8.



Figure 3: Codex Sinaiticus, Heb 8:8.

Third, αὐτούς makes much more sense of the author's use of Jer 38 LXX in Heb 8:8–12. Jeremiah speaks of a time when God would establish a new covenant with his people, one which would enable people to have his laws in their hearts and minds.[54] As 8:10 summarises, quoting from Jer 38:33 LXX, "I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people."

Contrary to some interpretations, Jeremiah's prophecy does not suggest a replacement of the laws given at Sinai, nor does it imply that the first covenant was inherently flawed. Instead, it envisions a time when an internal transformation would enable people to embody the Torah in their hearts and minds. As Hayes observes, the prophecy speaks not of a change in the law, but of a change in human nature. In this messianic future, Israel would be naturally inclined to obey God's will without effort or struggle.[55] This understanding is maintained in

[53] This has changed since the first edition, published in 1971. The second edition gave it a B-rating due to scribal corrections tendencies; see Metzger 1994, 597.

[54] For an analysis of Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy in the NT, see Schenker 2006, 71–84.

[55] Hayes goes on to write, "The elimination of human moral freedom is nothing less than a utopian redesign of human nature, in which the difficulties associated with the exercise of moral freedom are obviated.

Hebrews, where the issue lies not with the covenant, but with the people. As Ragev notes, the author of Hebrews adheres to the plain meaning of νόμος as the laws of the Torah.[56] The key difference is that the new covenant is interior, written not on stone but on the human heart, and it also provides effective forgiveness for sins.[57]

This same use of Jer 38 LXX is seen in chapter 10, where the author writes, "The Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying… 'I will put my laws (νόμους μου) in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds…I will remember their sins and their lawless (ἀνομιῶν αὐτῶν) deeds no more'" (10:15–17). The last phrase, τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτῶν, which is not found in Jeremiah but is added by the author, is in apposition νόμους μου. The solution for people's ἀνομία is God's νόμος. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that for the author of Hebrews the fault laid in anything other than humans.

At this point, Seleznev's recent work on the use of νόμος in the LXX is remarkably helpful. His work traces the places where the LXX switches from the single νόμος to the plural νόμοι for what he concludes are theological reasons.[58] In Jer 38:33 LXX, the LXX translates "my law" (תּוֹרָתִי) in the singular as νόμους μου in the plural. Seleznev argues that this "changes the perspective by creating the interpretive possibility that these 'laws' are somehow different from the Torah of Moses."[59] While his thesis could challenge what Hebrews may have

With perfect knowledge of Yahweh's teaching, obedience to the divine law is automatic, a state we may refer to as 'robo-righteousness'… Insofar as Jeremiah… assume[s] that perfect Torah observance will require a future redesign of human nature and elimination of moral freedom that only God can effect, they reinforce the general biblical narrative—perfect Torah obedience is neither expected nor required of human beings as they are" (2015, 48–49).

[56] Ragev goes on to write, "He [the author of Hebrews] could have modified it or provided a more extensive Christological interpretation of it… he could have cut the verse referring to *nomous*, or he could have mentioned again that the Law has been changed. The fact that he refrained from such alternatives shows that the concept of the Law is significant for the author and the readers" (2017, 589–90).

[57] Attridge 1989, 226.

[58] "The change from the Hebrew singular to the Greek plural in Jer 38:33 lxx was theologically motivated and served to distinguish the laws of the future eschatological covenant from the Torah of Moses" (Seleznev 2023, 516).

[59] Seleznev 2023, 499.

understood to be the laws being written on people's hearts, his argument is focused on the idea that the LXX distinguishes the laws of the new covenant from Torah to demonstrate that Jeremiah did not "think that the Law of Moses would be abolished in the new dispensation. Rather, he might have conceived these new 'laws' as standing in continuity with the Torah."[60]

Seleznev then turns to Hebrews and identifies its use of Jeremiah as the perfect example of how the new covenant laws are implemented without discarding Torah. Dealing with the "elements of continuity between the language Hebrews," he concludes that Hebrews "draws a trajectory of exegetical development within the Greek-speaking Judaism of the Second Temple period." As a result, "Hebrews turns out to be not a rupture with the earlier Judaic tradition, but rather its continuation."[61] In other words, if Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant does not necessitate the dismissal of Torah, as Seleznev's investigation suggests, so too can we conclude that Hebrews does not dismiss Torah but maintains its validity whilst also welcoming the implementation of the new covenant.

Based on this analysis, the phrase μεμφόμενος γὰρ αὐτοὺς (8:8) is best translated as "God finds fault with *them*" (emphasis added), as the NRSV renders it.[62] The author implies that human beings are themselves at fault, not the Mosaic covenant. In other words, the problem did not lay on the law but the people.[63]

Having seen the context surrounding 8:7, I now turn to the matter at hand, what does the author mean by calling the covenant ἄμεμπτος? I suggest that Hebrews calls it ἄμεμπτος because of an inherent fault found in humanity, one which keeps them from entering the

[60] Seleznev 2023, 510.

[61] Seleznev 2023, 516.

[62] In favour of this reading, see Ellingworth 1993, 412; Johnson 2006, 205.

[63] As Koester writes, the fundamental reason why Israel failed to enter the promised land "was not that God failed them," that is, in giving them a faulty law, "but that they refused to trust God's promise. The form that divine judgment took was that God allowed them to bear the consequences of unbelief" (2005, 368). Mitchell argues along the same lines, that the phrase means that "the inadequacy of the first covenant was a 'people-problem'… the Law did not change in Jeremiah's view, but the people had to. Therein lay the newness of the covenant" (2009, 170).

heavenly tent. While the Levitical priesthood under the Sinai covenant did grant people access to God's presence, it was limited to an earthly tent. As legitimate as this form of worship was, for the author said limitation was not ideal in comparison to Jesus' "more excellent ministry" (8:6) of priesthood in the heavens, a priesthood which did permit entrance to the heavenly realm. Therefore, he calls the covenant ἄμεμπτος because it did not deliver what only the second covenant gave, namely a way to fix people's μεμπτος (8:8).

"It is not difficult to put these ideas together," writes Hays, referring to the idea that Hebrews places the fault in people whilst still identifying the covenant as ἄμεμπτος, "the people's failure to continue in the covenant is itself a symptom of the covenant's shortcoming, and God's solution to this problem is the creation of a new covenant."[64] In other words, the covenant did not grant humans the ability to be inhabited by Torah and thus gain access to the heavenly tent. As Vanhoye also concludes, the author's line of thought in calling the covenant ἄμεμπτος due to people's μεμπτος can be justified because "to be able to be recognised as irreproachable, the covenant ought to have made those irreproachable who had entered it; it had not had that ability, so it left something to be desired."[65]

This view of ἄμεμπτος in 8:7 makes sense of the comment regarding the covenant in 8:13. More could be said about the literary structure of Hebrews at this point.[66] Suffice it to say, both 8:7 and 8:13 serve as brackets to Jeremiah's quotation (8:8–12), one serves to introduce the citation and the other as a conclusionary remark. In 8:13, the author speaks of the first covenant as "obsolete and growing old," and about to "disappear." As argued below, these descriptions of the Sinai covenant should not be construed to imply its inherent lack of value. To put it succinctly, the author's critique of the covenant is not a condemnation of its nature as

[64] Hays 2009, 160.

[65] Vanhoye 2015, 133.

[66] Vanhoye 1976, 143–44.

perpetually incoherent or broken. Instead, it emphasises that the Sinai covenant, while not inherently flawed, does not offer people the benefits of the second covenant, namely, access to and benefits from the heavenly tabernacle.

At this juncture, it is worth clarifying my argument more explicitly. I am not suggesting that the old covenant was originally intended to grant people access to the heavenly realm, only to have the Levitical priesthood fail because it could not accomplish what it was designed to do—as though it were a broken engine meant to carry people all the way to heaven but stalling partway, thus requiring God to replace it with a new engine capable of completing the journey. That is not my contention. Rather, as real and valid as the invitation to ascend Sinai was, the people themselves were unable to ascend because doing so required a degree of inner purification that only the new covenant could provide. To return to the engine analogy, the issue was not that the engine failed, but that those operating the vehicle lacked the necessary internal capacity to reach the destination.[67] This explains why the author of Hebrews consistently places the blame on the people: they did not enter their promised rest because they were disobedient (3:18) and did not respond in faith (4:2). The new covenant, however, inscribes the law upon their hearts, effecting an inner purification that enables them to ascend.

5.3.2. The Law as Shadow in Heb 10:1

Another text in Hebrews which at first glance cuts against the thesis of this chapter—that the author of Hebrews does not seek to dismiss Sinai and Torah—is Heb 10:1, where the author writes, "The law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities" (σκιὰν γὰρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων). Setting aside whether this is a hint to Plato or middle-Platonic ideas of shadows

[67] As Thiessen aptly points out, this does not imply that the Levitical priesthood is abolished or obsolete (2019, 189). Rather, the fact that Jesus, and not the law, provides permanent access to God's glory underscores an outcome that the law was never intended to achieve.

that depict realities,[68] a frequent interpretation of this text is that the law served only as a signpost which was to point people to the Christ (Gal 3:24). Once Christ came, the shadow in the law lost its primary value.[69]

However, in saying that "the law has only a shadow" (10:1), one does not have to conclude that the author is dismissing Torah for an important reason: what gave Moses' tabernacle its value was the very fact it was a shadow of the heavenly tent (Exod 25:40). An example of this can be seen with in Hebrews, namely in 8:5, the only other place where σκιά is used in the epistle (see comments above). There, the author writes that the Levites "offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow (ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ) of the heavenly one" (8:5). In saying that the tent which Moses built was a σκιά of the heavenly tabernacle does not indicate that it did not possess any validity, at least not in the mind of the author. On the contrary, it was precisely because the tabernacle was an earthly σκιά of the heavenly tent that it possessed great value.[70]

This view makes good sense of the context leading up to Hebrews chapter 10. In 9:24, the author develops the idea of Christ as the high priest who "did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a copy of the true one (ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν), but he entered into heaven itself" (9:24). Though some translations render this phrase in a somewhat negative sense, like the NRSV which translates it "a *mere* copy of the true one" (emphasis added), ἀντίτυπα simply means something that prefigures (1 Pet 3:21) or is an antitype or representation of an object.

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[68] See Attridge 1989, 270–71.

[69] Colossians, for example, identifies "matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" as "only a shadow of what is to come (ἐστιν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων), but the substance belongs to Christ (το δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ)" (Col 2:16–17). Joslin uses this same framework when he observes that the law was but as a temporary "signpost for the will of God and as a shadow that pointed to the reality to come in Christ," in Joslin 2008, 222. Therefore, "to follow the same priesthood and to sacrifice animals for sin is now to go against the work of God and not to hear his speaking in the Son" (2008, 133). Similarly, Attridge concludes that "Sinai and the Law associated with it… have their primary value for Hebrews as pointers to the 'good things to come'" (2010, 313).

[70] This is not unique to Hebrews. For example, when Philo speaks of the Mosaic tabernacle as a shadow, he does so precisely to emphasise its validity as the earthly counterpart to a heavenly reality (*Vit. Mos*. 2.74); see Attridge 1989, 222–24.

The earthly sanctuary was indeed made by human hands and as such was a representation of the truer, heavenly tent into which Jesus entered, yet ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν does not necessarily carry an inherently negative connotation.[71]

One could object to this point by concluding, as Peeler does, that "the shadow is no longer necessary once the reality arrives."[72] In other words, since the heavenly realities of which the law and covenant are shadows have become accessible, the author is ready to dismiss the law, as it has become unnecessary. (If the object casting a shadow moves into the shadow's space, the shadow ceases to be visible since the object itself has taken up that space.) Seen from this angle, the arrival of the heavenly realities so dismiss the law because the shadow, by necessity, does not exist once the object which it reflects has taken up the shadow's space.[73] To stress this point, one can readily note that the "good things" of which the author speaks in 10:1, and earlier in 9:11,[74] are things which the audience can claim as theirs, and therefore the realities do not await arrival: they have already arrived.

[71] One could argue against this point by suggesting that the phrase "made by human hands" (χειροποίητος) does convey a sense of negative inferiority. After all, the author uses this same word earlier in 9:11 as he describes "the greater and perfect tent" into which Jesus entered in the heavens as one "not made with hands (οὐ χειροποιήτου), that is, not of this creation (τοῦτ' ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως)." One could therefore conclude that a "perfect tent" is in apposition to "not made with hands," thus to be perfect is to be built by nonhuman hands. This reading would make sense of Abraham's faithful ambition in seeking a city "whose architect and builder is God" (11:10), that is, a perfect place built by divine and not human hands. However, the author does explain what he means by οὐ χειροποιήτου in 9:24, namely "not of this creation" (τοῦτ' ἔστιν οὐ ταύτης τῆς κτίσεως). What made the heavenly tent great and perfect was that it was not of this realm, where things are liable to decay and death, just as the Levitical priesthood was as seen throughout the context. See Thiessen's idea of "An earthly cult system for mortals" (2019, 192–93).

[72] Peeler 2024, 266.

[73] Peeler helpfully notes that the "good things" not only foreshadow an eschatological heavenly reality but also encompass tangible benefits that the community can currently experience. As she writes, "The good things include pure consciences, freedom from death, ministry to God (9:14), a new covenant, redemption of sins, an eternal inheritance (9:15), Jesus's living advocacy before God (9:24), removal of sins (9:26), and the promise of salvation (9:28)," in Peeler 2024, 258. Similarly, for deSilva, these "good things" encompass various outcomes already partially accessible to the community but whose full realisation lies in the future. He identifies these as including heavenly promises (6:12, 17; 11:39–40), inheritance (9:15), possessions (10:34), and even a heavenly kingdom (12:28) and city (13:14). See DeSilva 2000, 308.

[74] There exists a textual variant in 9:11 which may alter the interpretation: some manuscripts present it as the "good things that have come (γενομένων)" (τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν [$\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ B D* 1739 sy$^{(p).h}$]) while others, akin to 10:1, refer to the "good things to come (μελλόντων)" (τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν [ℵ A D^2 I^{vid} K L P 0278. 33. 81. 104. 365. 630. 1241. 1505. 1881. 2464 𝔪 lat sy^{hmg}. For a full discussion, see Metzger 1994, 598]).

Nonetheless, while the audience can already experience the benefits of these heavenly realities on earth, the "shadow" remains, just as the earth remains in contact with heaven. This continuity does not negate the covenant and priesthood that operate within the earthly realm. The heavenly realities have indeed arrived, but earth, along with the priesthood and laws therein established, continues. This requires greater support, to which I will turn below when dealing with the "old" and "disappearing" covenant in Heb 8:13 and 10:9. For now, I briefly stress that when the author refers to the law as a shadow, he is not denigrating or invalidating it. Rather, he is acknowledging that, while the law is valuable, it is an earthly replica of a different set of regulations that operate in the heavenly realm, where a priest serves eternally and ordinary people are invited to enter the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle.

Before moving further, it is worth noting the direction the author takes at this juncture. After stating that the law is a shadow (10:1), the author concludes that the law, as shadow, "can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach" (10:1). This assertion—that the law cannot perfect those who approach—lies at the heart of the problem the author addresses in 10:1. The issue, in the logic of Hebrews, is not that the Torah represents a flawed or distorted form of the new covenant's benefits. Rather, as a shadow of the heavenly realities, the law cannot bring about perfection—which, as I have already argued, denotes entrance into the heavenly realm—for those who seek to draw near, because it was never intended to do so. There is nothing inherently deficient in the sacrifices offered on earth according to the law under the Levitical priesthood; their validity within the earthly sphere remains intact. The problem is that, as valid as the Levitical priesthood and its sacrificial system were, they did not usher people into the heavenly realm. The offer to ascend heaven at Sinai was genuine, yet the people lacked a covenant that would cause the Torah to dwell in their hearts, thereby granting them the inward disposition necessary to ascend. Only the Melchizedekian priesthood—a heavenly priesthood operating in a different realm and

therefore not in competition with the earthly Levitical order—can grant access to the heavenly inner shrine because it not only extends the invitation but also establishes a new covenant that transforms individuals inwardly.

5.3.3. The Abolishment of an Old and Disappearing Covenant in Heb 8:13 and 10:9

If my interpretation of the author's seemingly negative portrayals of the Mosaic law and covenant is correct, it can be tested against two passages that present a most significant challenge to this chapter's thesis. Due to their notable similarities, I will address them together.

The first is Heb 8:13, where the author writes, "In speaking of 'a new covenant,' he has made the first one obsolete (παλαιόω), and what is obsolete (παλαιόω) and growing old (γηράσκω) will soon disappear (ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμός)." The terms παλαιόω and γηράσκω suggest something wearing away due to age,[75] but the real interpretive challenge lies in the word ἀφανισμός (a hapax legomena). As a derivative of α-φαίνω, it most naturally conveys the idea of "destruction" or "disappearance."[76] This leads many to conclude that the author views the covenant as an antiquated, crumbling structure soon to vanish entirely.

The second is Heb 10:9, which describes God as abolishing "the first in order to establish the second." This verse might be considered the epistle's strongest statement against

[75] Παλαιόω, which the author uses twice in 8:13, appears earlier in 1:11, where, quoting from Psalm 101:27, the author writes that earth and heaven "will all wear out (παλαιωθήσονται) like clothing." This same sense of "wearing out" is found elsewhere in the NT, where people are encouraged to "make purses that do not wear out (μὴ παλαιούμενα)" in Luke 12:33, and to "clean out the old yeast (παλαιὰν ζύμην)" in 1 Cor 5:7. Likewise, γηράσκω appears once more in the NT in John 21:18, where Jesus tells Peter that he will "grow old (γηράσῃς)." This sense of aging is also seen in places like Philo's works (*Aet*. *M*. 61; *Jos*., *Ant*. 19, 170 al.; *Ar*. 7, 1; *Tat*. 21, 2) and 1 Clement, which speaks of people who "have grown old (γεγηράκαμεν)" (1 Clem 23:3).

[76] Its related nouns ἀφάνεια, ἀφαιρέω, and verb ἀφανίζω all consistently refer to something that is destroyed or disappears (Deut 7:2; Jer 9:11; Matt 6:19; Jas 4:14; 2 Pet 3:10). This is the sense used by Josephus, when he writes about Adam's prediction that, "the world would at some stage be destroyed (ἀφανισμὸν) by the fire and again by a flood of water" (*Ant*. 1.71). Early translations of ἀφανισμός in Latin (*interitum*), Coptic (ⲉⲡⲧⲁⲕⲟ), Syriac (ܠܫܘܠܡܐ), and Aramaic (לחבלא) tend to render it as something akin to destruction. For a close analysis, see Allen's unpublished thesis, J. E. Allen 2020, 174–98. Alternatively, ἀφανισμός could also be translated as something invisible or unseen. A closely related word appears in 4:13 where the author speaks of creatures which are "hidden" (ἀφανής). If one takes this approach, it makes sense of BDAG's remark that it refers to "the condition of being no longer visible." However, it seems that "destruction" is the more natural translation.

the Mosaic law and covenant.[77] The verb ἀναιρέω, often used to mean "abolish" or "do away with," and ἵστημι, which connotes the establishment of something new, appear to suggest a deliberate replacement of the old system by the new. In fact, both terms are sometimes seen in the context of dissolution and declaration of new laws.[78]

5.3.3.1. A First and Second Covenant/Tent

Before proposing an interpretation consistent with my thesis, I note a unifying element between 8:13 and 10:9: both describe the impact of the "second" or "new covenant" on the "first."

Throughout Hebrews, the author frequently uses "first" (πρῶτος) to refer to the covenant established at Sinai (8:7, 12; 9:1, 15, 18; 10:9). It calls it "first" not in a pejorative sense but because as its temporal priority relative to the "second" makes it the predecessor. Thus, the introduction of a second covenant naturally positions the first as "old" and the second as "new," just as the birth of a younger sibling redefines the older as "first."[79]

In the epistle, the term "first" is also used to describe the "first tent" (πρῶτος σκηνή [9:8]), referring to the outer section of the tabernacle, which housed the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence (9:2). This was the space where priests carried out their regular cultic duties (9:6). Beyond the "second curtain" (9:3) lay the "second tent" (9:7), which, according to Hebrews, contained the ark of the covenant and (surprisingly) the altar of incense (9:4). Only the high priest could enter this inner section, and then only once a year (9:7).[80]

[77] Ellingworth 1993, 504; Harris 2019b, 259.

[78] Cockerill 2012, 440.

[79] As Attridge helpfully points out, in using the term "old," the author is simply making an exegetical inference which stipulates that, since there is a new, there has to also be an old (1989, 221).

[80] For a recent study on the tabernacle in Heb 9:6–10, see Greene 2025.

The author uses this tabernacle layout as a symbol (παραβολή) of "the present time" (καιρός ἐνίστημι [9:9]).[81] He connects the "first covenant" to the "first tent," explaining that this space accommodated "gifts and sacrifices [that] cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body" (9:9–10). In contrast, Christ, in establishing the "second covenant," entered the "second tent," described by the author as the "more perfect tent" (9:11). This entry was not through the blood of Levitical sacrifices but by his own blood, securing eternal redemption (9:12).

Although the author's use of the tabernacle's imagery warrants further discussion, the discussion here focuses only on his remarks regarding entrance into the second tent. The author asserts that as long as the first tent is still standing (ἔτι τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς ἐχούσης στάσιν), "the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed (μήπω πεφανερῶσθαι τὴν τῶν ἁγίων ὁδὸν)" (9:8). This raises a critical question: if Jesus entered the second tent, does this not imply that the first tent is no longer standing, and therefore that the first covenant and Torah's regulations have also ceased?[82] Some interpreters have indeed read the descriptions of the covenant's obsolescence in 8:13[83] and its abolishment in 10:9 through this lens. However, the author clarifies that the first tent would remain "until the time comes to set things right (μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως ἐπικείμενα)" (9:10). Therefore, the "present time" (9:9), of which the first tent and covenant are symbols, will last until (μέχρι) things are made right.

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[81] Though the antecedent of ἥτις in 9:9 is sometimes debated—thus, whether "this" refers to the tent or to the covenant or the entire preceding context (9:1–8)—at the very least it includes the first tent and therefore I do not find it necessary to engage with this debate at this point. For a discussion on this issue see, for example Johnson 2012, 225.

[82] So, Lane concludes, "So long as the cultic ordinances of the Sinaitic covenant were a valid expression of God's redemptive purpose and the front compartment ἐχούσης στάσιν, 'had cultic status,' entrance into the Most Holy Place was not yet (μήπω) accessible. There can be access only after the front compartment has been set aside. The 'front compartment' represents the sanctuary as the sphere of cultic activity, which constituted a barrier to the presence of God" (1991b, 223).

[83] One way of reading 8:13, as Lane does, is to conclude that ἀφανισμός does in fact make "the covenant concluded at Sinai to be unserviceable and outmoded," Lane 1991a, 210. That is, the author believes that at the coming of Christ the first covenant is annulled and comes to an end. This seems to be the approach that led the NA editors to add a cross-reference to Rom 10:4 (τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστὸς).

The crucial question then becomes: *when* does the author envision this "present time" coming to an end? Various interpretations have been proposed, which can be broadly divided into two categories: those who view the "present time" as referring to a period before Christ's coming, and those who extend it to a period beyond his arrival.[84] The first group argues that Christ's coming marked the moment when "things were set right," and thus, from the perspective of the audience, the μέχρι in Hebrews points not to a future event but to a period that concluded with Christ's redemptive work. According to this view, the present time described by the author has already passed.

An alternative approach, which I advocate, posits that the "present time" has not yet concluded because the comparison the author draws is not merely temporal but also spatial. As long as the earthly realm persists, so does the "present time." Allow me to elaborate: while the "first tent" represents the first covenant, it also symbolises the earthly realm, where the Levitical priesthood carries out its cultic duties. Conversely, the "second tent" refers to the heavenly realm, as the author explicitly states: "Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24).[85]

Thus, the first and second tents signify not only two distinct periods of time but also two distinct realms: the earthly and the heavenly.[86] In this way, the "present time" described

[84] So, as Cockerill concludes, "Christ 'corrected' [διόρθωσις] the Old Covenant by establishing the New" (2012, 386).

[85] One might reasonably ask how this understanding of the "two tents" fits with Hebrews' depiction of Jesus entering heaven and going "behind the curtain" (10:20), a phrase which could suggest that there are indeed two distinct chambers in the heavenly tabernacle, potentially creating a tension in my analogy. In this project, however, I have taken the position that the author does not place significant emphasis on the heavenly tabernacle's divisions. His focus lies instead on what occurs in the inner shrine, where Jesus is located and into which he invites his audience to follow. Hebrews envisions believers entering directly into the very heart of the heavenly tabernacle, just as Jesus himself did. Thus, while further discussion could certainly be given to the author's conception of the heavenly tabernacle's structure, I concur with Moore's conclusion that "the two chambers in heaven have been combined into one" and, as a result, "there is no… structural distinction between them" (2024, 90–91).

[86] As Johnson concludes, "Here we see the author employing both the spatial and temporal axes of his analogical imagination. Not only does the first tent (horizontally considered) operate as though it were all that

by the author incorporates both a horizontal (temporal) and a vertical (spatial) dimension. Consequently, when the author says that the present time will persist until "things are set right" (9:10), it implies a transformation not only in time but also in space. The end of the present time, therefore, would involve a fundamental change in the earthly realm, bringing with it the cessation of the Mosaic covenant and Torah.

As I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 6 of this study, where I address Heb 12:26–27 ("Once more I will shake the earth… indicating the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain"), I argue that the shaking of "created things," i.e., the earthly realm, signifies the conclusion of the covenant and Torah. To be clear, this culmination does not occur because the law itself becomes obsolete or irrelevant but because the realm in which it operates ceases to exist in its present conditions.[87] In other words, the Mosaic law and covenant will indeed come to an end, but their termination will coincide with the shaking of the earthly realm, the space where they hold authority. It is not the law that expires on its own but rather the context in which it functions that undergoes complete transformation.

5.3.3.2. The End of Covenant and Torah

Based on my analysis above, I now return to the two texts introduced earlier (Heb 8:3; 10:9), which, as noted, appear to challenge the thesis of this chapter.

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was necessary—except for that one day a year—but the entire first sanctuary (in the horizontal temporal sense) served as a "veil" that could hide the reality of the "true sanctuary" (in the vertical sense)" (2012, 224).

[87] DeSilva makes a similar move, connecting the comment of "present time" in 9:9 to the shaking of the heavens and earth in 12:26–28: "This parenthesis interjects a cosmological dimension to the layout of the first tabernacle, one that will eventually be clarified by 12:26–28. The outer tent is a symbol of the present age when the visible creation itself still hides the entry into the heavenly, permanent, unseen realm. There is the implicit assurance (noted as early as Calvin) that the heavenly holy place exists even though we do not now see it, just as the holy of holies existed even though only one person a year ever saw it. The way will be made clear when the first chamber, that is, this visible creation, will be shaken and removed, "so that what is unshakable may abide" (12:27)" (2000, 302).

Regarding Heb 8:3, where the covenant is described as "old," "decaying," and "about to disappear," one plausible interpretation is to associate this statement with the impending destruction of the temple in 70 CE, assuming the epistle was written prior to this event.[88] If the author anticipated the temple's destruction, the assertion that the covenant would "soon disappear" could reflect the belief that the removal of the physical temple would signal the cessation of the "first tent" and the conclusion of the "present time."

However, another perspective, one which does not depend on a specific dating of Hebrews, is that by recognising that the removing of something old to make way for something new is not alien to Jewish thought, as Mitchell and others have argued.[89] Instead, it aligns with the Jewish concept of covenant renewal. For example, Lev 26, like Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34), connects the renewal of the covenant with promises of restoration and God's enduring presence. In Leviticus, the idea of removing the old to make way for the new is tied to the declaration that "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Lev 26:12).[90] Similarly, Heb 8:10 reaffirms this promise, showing continuity rather than rejection. Thus, Hebrews is by no means invalidating the Sinai covenant or Torah but presents the establishment of the new covenant within the framework of covenant renewal.[91] The descriptors of the old covenant as "aging" and "nearing disappearance" do not negate its

[88] See, for example, Healy 2016, 160. While this view would make sense of the author's use of ἐγγύς as pointing to an event in the near future, and to be sure it would produce a much less dismissive view of Torah, it necessitates a precise dating of Hebrews which in itself creates another set of difficulties, as outlined in this study's introduction.

[89] Mitchell 2009, 172.

[90] "I will look with favour upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you (στήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου μεθ' ὑμῶν). You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new (παλαιὰ ἐκ προσώπου νέων ἐξοίσετε). I will place my dwelling in your midst (τὴν διαθήκην μου ἐν ὑμῖν), and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev 26:19–12).

[91] "Renewal requires replacing old things with new things… Discontinuity and continuity are elements inherent in renewal" (Mitchell 2009, 172).

validity but emphasise the introduction of a new covenant that offers something different: access to the heavenly inner shrine.[92]

The second text, Heb 10:9, seems even more direct in its language: "he abolishes the first to establish the second." This verse could be read as a clear indication of the Sinai covenant's termination, as already noted. However, the verb ἀναιρέω ("abolishes") is in the present tense (ἀναιρεῖ), which can also be rendered as: "he is abolishing the first so that the second may be established." If we understand this present-tense action as suggests an ongoing process rather than a completed event, then the author does not necessarily describe a moment when the covenant and Torah have already ceased but acknowledges a transitional period. This transition is marked by the coexistence of the "first" and "second" covenants. The former is described as "growing old and decaying," signalling an eventual end, but it has not yet fully disappeared. The audience finds themselves in a liminal state, positioned between the earthly and heavenly realms, where the Levitical priesthood and the Son's priesthood continue to operate concurrently.[93] In this view, the first covenant is not immediately abolished but is in the process of *being* abolished and giving way to the second. This ongoing transition reflects

[92] Johnson takes a similar view, though one not based on Lev 26 but on the way the Qumran community viewed the first covenant. First, he notes five principles in the way the community related to the Sinai covenant and Torah. The community: (1) followed Torah according to the "Teacher of Righteousness" (CD 20:1; 1QpHab 2:2; 9:9–10); (2) viewed itself as a holy house led by a rightful priest (1QS 2:19–20; 5:1–3); (3) was hostile towards the "wicked priests" of the temple cult (1QpHab 8:9; 9:9); (4) understood itself to be living in the threshold of the anticipated Messianic rule (1QSa 1:19–26; 2:16); (5) did not seek to replace Israel but "saw itself as the authentic and purified remnant of Israel, the realization of what God wanted Israel to be," see Johnson 2006, 213. Based on this overview, Johnson argues that although the community departed from the Temple cult by following the teachings of the Righteous Teacher, it saw itself as the rightful heir of the Sinai covenant, the true remnant of Israel, not as a community which departed from the Mosaic Law altogether. Johnson goes on to write, "While these writings do not characterize the Sinai covenant as inadequate or weak, the necessity of establishing a covenant of conversion on the basis of a distinctive interpretation of that covenant at the very least shows us that a Jewish community could claim absolute loyalty to the God of the Abrahamic covenant while negotiating changes in the Sinai covenant" (2006, 214).

[93] Johnson arrives at a similar point but through a different point: "It does not declare that God's covenant with Israel is nullified and replaced by another with Christians… Hebrews nowhere suggests a shift of God's attention and care from the Jewish people. The covenant with Abraham and its promise remains. Nor does the statement represent a rejection of law as such, for the point is precisely that God's will can be expressed by the scroll of the book as well as in the heart. What the author is saying is that the claim of the Levitical cult (established by the law of Moses) to provide access to God is shown—on the evidence of Scripture itself—to be false. What God desires is faithful obedience. Hebrews therefore here stands within the tradition of the prophets who deny the efficacy of ritual when the deeper covenantal obligations are being neglected (see Isa 1:11–31)" (2012, 252–53).

the audience's dual existence: still bound by earthly realities yet invited into the heavenly realm through Jesus' priesthood. Thus, while the audience has already experienced the "powers of the age to come" (6:5), they still remain subject to the earthly realm.[94]

We could press this point further by examining the direction the author takes immediately after speaking of the covenant's abolishment. He narrows the scope of his focus, stating that the Son, who came to do the will of God—"See, I have come to do your will" (10:9)—has sanctified (ἁγιάζω) his people through the offering of his body (10:10). As I have already addressed, in Hebrews, the term ἁγιάζω (2:11; 9:13; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12) is frequently employed in the context of purification. Specifically, it signifies the purification that sets people apart, enabling them to serve in and enter the heavenly inner shrine. If this interpretation holds, the author links the Son's fulfilment of God's will—"by which we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10)—to the audience's ability to enter the heavenly holy of holies. This connection becomes explicit as the author invites the audience to "enter the sanctuary" (10:19) just a few verses later.

The implication of this last point is that the author holds in tension the audience's current earthly existence and their active participation in the heavenly realm. If this interpretation is correct, the description of the covenant as "old" and "being abolished" does not imply that it became invalid with Jesus' coming.[95] Instead, it indicates that the covenant is in a process of obsolescence that will culminate only when the earth, as we know it, comes to an end. In this framework, the Mosaic covenant remains operative within the earthly realm until such time as the earthly sphere itself is transformed. This conclusion requires further

[94] A similar tension between a present, imperfect age and heavenly realities already enjoyed to a degree by the community is found in Galatians, where Paul speaks of them as living in "the present evil age" (1:4) although the "fullness of time" (4:4) had already come; see Koester 2008, 398.

[95] "Hebrews," Johnson writes, "does not suggest that the first covenant was wrong or a mistake… The covenant simply was unable to accomplish what, by Hebrews' definition a 'better covenant' should be able to accomplish. The first is seen as old and weak and disappearing only because of the new and powerful work of God in Christ, who has provided access to the presence of God" (2006, 212).

clarification, which I will provide later when I address the author's use of the earth's shaking in Heb 12:26–27. There, I will argue that this passage points to a future moment when the covenant and Torah will cease, not because they lose their validity, but because the realm in which they operate will undergo a transformation.

What is important to recognise here is that the covenant's movement toward uselessness is not framed in terms of rejection. The law is not nullified because of any inherent flaw within it, nor does it disappear simply because something "better" has come along in an abstract sense. Rather, it is because the entire realm in which the law operates—namely, the earthly—is itself passing away. The law is tied to a spatial order that is, in the author's view, destined for eventual upheaval. So long as the earthly realm continues, the covenant and Torah retain their relevance within it.

This reframes the issue: the concern is not about the validity of the Torah, but about the reach of its effectiveness. It can function, and has functioned, within a certain sphere. But Hebrews envisions a time when that sphere itself will be shaken, not because it is evil or broken, but because something greater is coming into full view. In that light, the process of the "first" giving way to the "second" should not be understood as a clean rupture, but as a movement from anticipation to access. In this way, the audience is not positioned as those who are abandoning Sinai or Torah, but as those standing at a threshold, that it, inhabiting a moment where both realms overlap, and learning to live faithfully between the already and the not yet. That kind of dual participation is exactly what the author is trying to cultivate.

5.3.4. Summary

In this section, I dealt with several passages from Hebrews that seem to suggest the cessation of the Torah and the Sinai covenant. While these texts have traditionally been interpreted as evidence for the abolition of the law, I argued that while the law is described as a shadow of

heavenly realities (Heb 10:1), this does not invalidate it; rather, it highlights the limitation of the earthly realm in comparison to the heavenly realm that the new covenant enables access to. The Sinai covenant, though not inherently flawed, could not grant entry into the heavenly sanctuary because it was not designed to impart the new heart necessary for access to the heavenly inner shrine—something Jesus' priesthood uniquely provides. The invitation to ascend was genuine, but the people lacked the capacity to ascend. In this regard, I explored Heb 8:7 and 8:13, noting that the "fault" with the first covenant lies not in the covenant itself but in human imperfection, which the new covenant seeks to remedy. The "old" covenant is described as "growing old and near to disappearing," indicating that its role is transitioning rather than ceasing altogether. The establishment of the new covenant does not completely invalidate the old one but fulfils its limitations by providing access to heavenly realities. As a result, while the Sinai covenant remains relevant within the earthly realm, its purpose and effectiveness are surpassed by the new covenant, which offers the necessary purification to access the heavenly realm.

5.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Hebrews does not treat the Sinai event as a negative foil against which the new covenant is introduced. This discussion is critical to the development of my overall thesis, as it challenges the commonly held notion that the Sinai event is primarily portrayed in Hebrews as a negative backdrop. Instead, I have contended throughout this chapter that when Hebrews introduces the heavenly priesthood and the new covenant, the author is not invalidating the earthly realities established at Sinai. Rather, these heavenly realities coexist with their earthly counterparts in a complementary framework. Even when the author appears to speak negatively about the law, this should be understood as distinguishing between the earthly realm—where Torah and the Levitical priesthood function—and the heavenly realm,

where Jesus carries out his high priesthood. Thus, Hebrews does not dismiss Sinai but incorporates it into a broader narrative, recognizing the earthly covenant and Torah as integral components of a dual-realm framework that points toward their ultimate fulfilment in the heavenly realities.

If my above conclusion is correct, then the exhortations to "not turn back" in Hebrews (e.g., 6:4–6) are not meant to dissuade the audience from returning to Judaism, as though they already identified with a non-Jewish religion (an idea that, as alluded to in the introductory chapter of this study, has been widely questioned in modern scholarship). Instead, the exhortations urge the community to remain faithful as they await their intercessor, unlike the generation of Israel, who failed to wait faithfully for Moses' descent from Sinai. The issue at the heart of the problem is therefore not Judaism, the law, or the covenant itself, but the disobedience and unbelief that prevented the people from entering their promised rest. The audience, however, possesses what Israel in the wilderness did not: a new covenant. This covenant not only provides them with a faithful intercessor but also imparts to each individual a new heart—one capable of obedience and, therefore, of waiting faithfully. Any perceived limitation of the Torah or the Levitical priesthood does not stem from a failure to accomplish what they were designed to do—the author says nothing to suggest that the law failed in its earthly purpose—but from their inability to give people a new heart. By contrast, the Son's priesthood and the new covenant do precisely this, and as a result enables the audience to share in the heavenly promises and privileges.

Finally, throughout this chapter, I further developed the idea that the audience is invited to ascend a mountain to reach heaven, drawing a parallel between Moses at Sinai and Jesus at Zion. Building on the previous chapter, I explored the concept that the audience exists simultaneously in two realms, reflecting Moses' experience at Sinai. This analysis clarifies how the author uses the Sinai narrative as a backdrop, illustrating that the audience does not

behave as the Israelites did, passively waiting at the base of the mountain. Instead, they mirror Moses' ascent, actively engaging with the journey. At the same time, they remain the waiting people of God, anticipating Jesus' return from the mountain he ascended to intercede on their behalf. Therefore, while they ascend the mountain in faith, their waiting is not passive but active, requiring both faith to wait and the courage to ascend while waiting continues.

Before ending this chapter, it is worth revisiting the literary role that Sinai plays within the broader structure of Hebrews at this point. As I have argued throughout this study, Sinai is not simply referenced to be contrasted with Zion, nor is it reduced to a discarded stage in salvation history. Instead, the author draws on the Sinai narrative to frame the audience's present situation. Sinai serves as a literary template that helps the author make sense of what it means to wait faithfully in the absence of visible fulfilment. Just as Israel had to wait at Sinai while Moses ascended the mountain to meet with God, so the audience of Hebrews is asked to wait while Jesus, their intercessor, remains in the heavenly sanctuary. In this way, the contrast between Sinai (12:18–21) and Mount Zion (12:22–24) is not about rejecting the former but about helping the audience see the significance of their own position. They, like Israel, are in a moment of waiting. But unlike that earlier generation, they have access to something greater: they, thanks to their high priest who has entered the heavenly tabernacle, can ascend into the heavenly inner realm following in the footsteps of Jesus. By seeing the narrative of Sinai in Hebrews, we see that Sinai is not erased, nor is it simply surpassed; it is re-employed to encourage faithfulness and helps clarify what it means to wait well.

Chapter 6
The Sinai Narrative and the Audience's Arrival at Zion

6.1. Introduction

We have finally arrived at Heb 12:18–24, where the author draws a comparison between the mountains of Sinai and Zion. In short, the audience had not come (οὐ γὰρ προσεληλύθατε [12:18]) to Sinai, a place described as dark, gloomy, and burning with fire, where any animal that touched the mountain is stoned and where even Moses trembled with fear (12:18–21), but had come (ἀλλὰ προσεληλύθατε [12:22]) to Zion, an inviting heavenly place full of life, where people and angels are joyfully gathered in God's presence (12:22–24).

While scholars often recognise the prominence this comparison holds within the epistle,[1] its precise interpretation remains a subject of debate: Is the author comparing physical and metaphysical realities?[2] Does Sinai represent the present age and Zion the future eschatological era?[3] Is the comparison highlighting the progressive nature of God's covenantal

[1] For example, Stolz asserts that Heb 12:18–24 represents the "struktureller und theologischer Höhepunkt des Gesamtschreibens" (2018, 7). G. Lee considers it the "rhetorical apex of the letter" (2016, 131), while Thompson suggests that in 12:18–29 "the author reaches the rhetorical climax of the peroration and the entire homily, summarizing the content of the message with the same rhetorical intensity with which it began" (2008, 266). Along these same lines, Lindars identifies a central theme running from 10:19, calling people to approach the holy of holies, to 12:18–29, which reveals God's unshakable kingdom on Zion, presenting everything prior to it as "building up to the grand finale" (1989, 402). Holmes, examining the stylistic aspect, suggests that 12:18–29 stands out uniquely in the epistle, exhibiting poetic qualities rather than strictly oratorical ones (2018, 26). He describes the "radical rhetoric" of the text as being capable of ascribing "language a capacity to move discourse beyond reason and logic, to produce powerful emotions, and to convey vivid portraits of reality that produces something like the effects of religious experience" (2018, 28). Finally, from a theological perspective, Son proposes that the comparison between Sinai and Zion functions as a "little epistle within the epistle" (2005, 84.), and should serve as a hermeneutical framework for understanding the entire epistle. As Son asserts, "The contrasting description of Sinai and Zion in Hebrews 12:18–24 reveals the author's theological perspective, and sheds a light to illuminate the author's treatment of the OT quotations throughout the epistle" (2005, 23). So, since Hebrews 12 appears to depict Sinai as negative and Zion as positive, that which is negative in the epistle must therefore describe Sinai (e.g., 6:4–6; 9:14; 10:1) and that all that is positive must relate to Zion (e.g., 8:6–13; 10:19–24)" (2005, 23).

[2] E.g., Thompson 1982, 41–52.

[3] As Cody summarises the debate, "The Epistle to the Hebrews has taken the Jewish concept of the correspondence between the earthly sanctuary and heaven and mingled it with the Alexandrian concept of transient earthly shadows and eternal heavenly reality to reach its theology of salvation perfected in the work of Christ. Heaven is the place of God's real dwelling in majesty (8.1) and of man's perfect and eternal union with God" (1960, 189).

plan, marking a transition from the old to the new covenant in Christ?[4] Relatedly, could the author be drawing a comparison between Christianity (Zion) and Judaism (Sinai) to discourage apostasy?[5]

My goal here is not to fully support or refute these views—though I will offer comments on why I believe the comparison should not be understood as a dismissal of Judaism in favour of Christianity, nor as a representation of the development of God's salvation plan that necessitates the abandonment of the Sinai Law and covenant.

In this chapter, I aim to present the argument that the primary purpose of the comparison in Heb 12:18–24 is to serve as an *argumentum a fortiori*, similar to the earlier comparison in 2:2 (a text discussed in Chapter 2). In 2:2, the author compares the message declared through angels with the message of salvation received from the Lord, concluding that the punishment for rejecting the latter would be much more severe. Following the same pattern, the contrast between Sinai and Zion functions as follows: since Sinai was valid and God's glory was fearfully revealed on the mountain, the audience must give even greater attention to the superior message of God's Son at Zion. The author concludes the comparison in 12:25, urging the audience to listen to the one who speaks from heaven, as rejecting such a message carries an even greater penalty than the rejection of the message at Sinai. Therefore, I will contend, to suggest that the author holds a negative view of Sinai would thus undermine the very foundation of this a fortiori argument. In other words, the comparison is not meant to diminish Sinai but to underscore the greater significance and urgency of the message delivered at Zion.

This, of course, leads to a central question that has underpinned this study: When will the revelation of Sinai, including the Torah and the covenant, remain valid? Does the author envision the Sinai revelation as perpetually valid, or does he envision it coming to an end? This

[4] E.g., Ndzi 2018, 180; Ramantswana 2013, 118.

[5] E.g., Griffiths 2014, 136.

question arises because, while I have argued extensively that the Sinai covenant and Law are not being dismissed but maintained, I also noted the author's language of the covenant as being abolished and about to disappear, though this has not happened yet (as discussed in Chapter 5). These questions will be addressed in detail throughout this chapter.

But before dealing with the possible ultimate fate of the covenant, I must first address another crucial question: does the author of Hebrews set out to portray Sinai in the most negative light possible? After all, the descriptions of darkness, gloom, and tempest are remarkably negative (12:18-21). In the first section, I will maintain that the author strictly borrows descriptions of Sinai from the Pentateuch, arguing that these descriptions, while appearing negative, are in fact positive because they demonstrate the validity and great glory of God's revelation at Sinai. Given this project's purpose, I will focus on 12:18–21 where Sinai is discussed, giving less attention to Zion's description in 12:22–24.

In the second section of this chapter, I propose that in comparing Sinai to Zion, the author is neither comparing two different religions (Judaism versus Christianity) nor arguing that Sinai's value terminates at the coming of Zion. Rather, what makes Zion desirable is that it stands upon the enduring promises and expectations God gave people at Sinai. I will survey various Second Temple Jewish texts that speak of a transition from Sinai to Zion not to invalidate the former revelation, but to describe Zion as maintaining said instructions.

Finally, I will return to the question of the ultimate end of the Torah and the Sinai revelation. I will advance the notion that there is indeed an end point, but that end point has not yet arrived; it will come in the future shaking when the earth as well as heaven will be shaken (12:26–29). The Law and covenant will cease, not by virtue of losing their intrinsic validity, but because the realm in which they function—the earthly realm—undergoes such a fundamental change that it is rendered no longer suitable to maintain the earthly structures which presently uphold the Torah and the covenant.

6.2. Portrayal of Sinai in Heb 12:18–21

What should we make of the apparently negative descriptions of Sinai in Heb 12:18–19? In these verses, the author provides seven parallel descriptions of Sinai, all connected by the conjunction καί: "You have not come (οὐ γὰρ προσεληλύθατε) [1] to something that cannot be touched (ψηλαφωμένῳ), [2] a blazing fire (καὶ κεκαυμένῳ πυρὶ), [3] and darkness (καὶ γνόφῳ), [4] and gloom (καὶ ζόφῳ), [5] and a tempest (καὶ θυέλλῃ), [6] and the sound of a trumpet (καὶ σάλπιγγος ἤκῳ), [7] and a voice (καὶ φωνῇ ῥημάτων)."[6] Based on these descriptions, it becomes evident why numerous scholars (as mentioned above) interpret Hebrews as primarily concerned with portraying the Sinaitic covenant and Torah as inherently undesirable and worthy of rejection.

At first glance, these images may indeed seem unwelcoming. In the description of Zion (12:22–24), God is mentioned repeatedly, yet there is a conspicuous absence of any reference of God in the description of Sinai (12:18–21). Even the term "Sinai" is omitted, not even alluded to as an ὄρει ("mountain"),[7] in contrast to the author's explicit reference to Zion (Σιὼν ὄρει [12:22]). Furthermore, Hebrews appears to have altered the description of Horeb as found in Deuteronomy. In Deut 5:22, it is conveyed that people hear the words (τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα) that the Lord spoke (ἐλάλησεν κύριος). However, in Hebrews, the words spoken at Sinai are not attributed to the Lord's speech (λαλέω) but are described as a "sound of words" (φωνῇ ῥημάτων [12:19]).[8] Casey suggests that the absence of a reference to God indicates that, for the author of Hebrews, "Sinai was not a true encounter with God."[9] Similarly, Cockerill remarks

[6] For a recent exegetical analysis of Heb 12:18–21, see Stolz 2018, 51–91.

[7] This absence has led the following manuscript traditions to insert ὄρει, seemingly to fill this gap: D K L P Ψ 104. 365. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739. 1881 𝔪 vgcl syh.

[8] For Koester, this represents a depiction where "the numinous power behind the phenomena is not named… a place cloaked in darkness by a God who remains unseen" (2001, 549).

[9] Casey 1977, 320.

that, "God's speaking is made all more terrible by the impersonal way in which it is described."[10]

6.2.1. Sources of Sinai's Description

A problem with sustaining that Heb 12:18–21 sets out to cast Sinai as negatively as possible is that, except for the addition of the ζόφος, the author's description of Sinai follows Exodus and Deuteronomy's own description. As shown in the table below, all three texts—Hebrews, Exodus, and Deuteronomy—describe Sinai as an untouchable mountain, a fire, a darkness, a tempest, where a voice and loud sounds of trumpets were heard:

Heb 12:18–19, 20	Exod 19:12, 13
You have not come to something that can be touched (ψηλαφωμένῳ), a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet (σάλπιγγος) and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them… If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death (λιθοβοληθήσεται).	Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch (θιγεῖν) the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch them (ἅψεται), but they shall be stoned (λιθοβοληθήσεται) or shot with arrows; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds (σάλπιγγες) a long blast, they may go up on the mountain.
Heb 12:18–19	Deut 4:11–12
You have not come (προσεληλύθατε) to something that can be touched, a blazing fire (κεκαυμένῳ πυρὶ), and darkness (γνόφῳ), and gloom, and a tempest (θυέλλῃ), and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice (φωνῇ ῥημάτων) whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them.	You approached (προσήλθετε) and stood at the foot of the mountain while the mountain was blazing up (ἐκαίετο πυρὶ) to the very heavens, shrouded in dark clouds (γνόφος θύελλα). Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words (φωνὴν ῥημάτων) but saw no form.
Heb 12:18–19	Deut 5:22–23, 25
You have not come (προσεληλύθατε) to something that can be touched, a blazing fire (κεκαυμένῳ πυρὶ), and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest (θυέλλῃ), and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice (φωνῇ ῥημάτων) whose words made the hearers (ἀκούσαντες) beg that not another word be spoken to them.	These words (ῥήματα) the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud (θύελλα), and the thick darkness… while the mountain was burning with fire (ἐκαίετο πυρί), you approached (προσήλθετε)… if we hear (ἀκοῦσαι) the voice (φωνὴν) of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die.

Table 2: Sources of Sinai's Description in Hebrews.

Although the phenomena of fire and sounds might be perceived as terrifying, the Pentateuch's own evidence suggests that these elements were in fact positive because they demonstrated

[10] Cockerill 2018, 230–31.

God's own glorious presence: "Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently" (Exod 19:18); "The appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain" (Exod 24:17); and "The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire" (Deut 5:4). Other descriptions outside the Pentateuch also link overwhelming sensory phenomena to God's appearance at Sinai (e.g., Judg 5:4–5; Ps 68:8; 2 Esd 3:17–18). Thus, just as it would be illogical to conclude that the Pentateuch held Sinai as a negative event based on these descriptions, so too it would be untenable to conclude that Hebrews views Sinai as a negative place based solely on these borrowed descriptions.

6.2.2. Negative Descriptions

Now, it could be argued that Hebrews deliberately portrays Sinai in the most negative light possible, not necessarily by using the Pentateuch's own descriptions of Sinai, but by blending reports from at least three different texts—Exod 19:12–13; Deut 4:11–12; 5:22–25—and swiftly transitioning between them. As such, although the individual portrayals of Sinai in Exodus and Deuteronomy themselves may not inherently carry negative connotations, Hebrews interconnects various unfavourable attributes, one after another, to construct an overall bleak image of Sinai.[11]

A problem with this objection is that the practice of synthesising descriptions of Sinai from Deuteronomy and Exodus is well-documented in Second Temple Judaism. Philo, for instance, oscillates between these books in his discussions of the divine commands concerning the Levitical priesthood given at Sinai (Mos. 2.66-176). Similarly, the narrative in *1 Enoch*

[11] As Holmes suggests, the depiction of Sinai is not merely a recounting of historical events but is presented through a series of striking, swiftly changing images that convert the narrative into scene that is more a living reality than a simple historical narration: "The manner in which the author presents the first location [Sinai] through stirring, rapid images transforms it into what Longinus calls a 'vivid actuality' (*Subl*. 25.1) … The author crafts a scene of 'vivid actuality' rather than simply narrating a past event" (2018, 129).

about sheep ascending a high rock merges elements from both Exodus and Deuteronomy (*1 En*. 89.28–35). A notable example is found in the Samaritan Pentateuch, which blends elements from Deut 5 into its rendition of Exod 19–20. Like Hebrews, this text integrates portrayals of Sinai from both Deuteronomy and Exodus to form a unified narrative.[12] Here is how the Samaritan Pentateuch presents Exod 20:15–18:

> And all the people heard the voices, and the ram's horn voice, and saw the lighting flashes, and the mountain smoking. And when all the people saw, they trembled and stood at a distance (Exod 20:18). And they said to Moses… "You go near… And tell us all that Shehmaa our God says to you, and we will hear and do it (Deut 5:24–27). And let not [God] speak with us, or we will die (Exod 20:19b). And [Moses] said to the people, "do not be afraid, for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of him may be before you, that you sin not (Exod 20:20). And the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the fog where God was (Exod 20:21). And Shehmaa spoke to [Moses], saying, "I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken (Deut 5:28).[13]

Although the intertextual strategies employed in the Samaritan Pentateuch merit a more detailed exploration,[14] my point here is to emphasise that the author of Hebrews adheres closely to how other Second Temple texts depict the events at Sinai. In other words, Hebrews is part of a broader textual tradition that utilises intertextual strategies, combining imagery and themes from multiple sources within the Pentateuch to construct a cohesive depiction of the Sinai events.

Even the inclusion of ζόφος in Heb 12:18 aligns with the descriptions found in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Ζόφος not only echoes the word σκότει found in Deut 4:11,[15] but it also represents a linguistic technique commonly employed in Hebrews, which is to pair phonetically

[12] According to Kibbe, the parallels between the Samaritan Pentateuch and Heb 12:18-21 are striking, indicating that "Hebrews stands alongside the Samaritan Pentateuch in its use of both Exodus and Deuteronomy" (2023, 166). Kibbe argues that the portrayal of Sinai in Hebrews is not a result of selective emphasis or invention to depict the mountain as solely terrifying. Instead, the author of Hebrews is recounting the events at Sinai as they are presented in the Pentateuch and reflected in the Samaritan Pentateuch.

[13] Tsedaka and Sullivan 2013, Exod 20:15–18.

[14] For a study on these details, see Zahn 2015.

[15] As discussed by Stolz (2018, 68).

similar words (e.g., 1:1; 13:1–2).[16] In this case, all words which share the φω sound: ψηλαφωμένῳ, γνόφῳ, ζόφῳ, and φωνῇ (12:18). Consequently, the selection of Exod 19:12–13, Deut 4:11–12, and Deut 5:22–25 for characterising Sinai, in conjunction with the author's stitching together of these passages, fails to provide definitive proof of an entirely negative perception by the author. Rather, it suggests the use of a Second Temple Jewish method of composition which, consistent with the Pentateuch and these passages, portrays Sinai as a place of positive significance.

6.2.3. Fear at Sinai

Another argument supporting the negative portrayal of Sinai in Heb 12:18–21 is the emphasis placed on the fear experienced by Israel and Moses at the base of the mountain. Faced with the sight of the fire and sounds, Israel responded in fear: "when all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance" (Exod 20:19). Indeed, according to Hebrews, "so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear'" (12:21).[17]

In line with the traditional Christian interpretation previously discussed, some scholars have interpreted the prominence of fear in 12:18–21 as evidence that the author viewed Sinai's Torah as inherently terrifying. Calvin, for instance, suggests that the "terrible spectacle" was meant to "express the nature of the Law, which in itself produces nothing but mere terror."[18] This viewpoint finds support in the description of the sounds heard by Israel, specifically the

[16] For a brief discussion on this topic, see Attridge 1989, 373.

[17] A key exegetical problem with this last assertion is that the citation is decontextualized. Moses spoke these words not during the covenant-making event at Sinai, but during the Golden Calf incident. As he interceded on behalf of Israel due to their sin of worshiping the calf (Deut 9:17 LXX), Moses expressed that he was "afraid that the anger that the Lord bore against you was so fierce that he would destroy you" (Deut 9:18 LXX). One could therefore argue that, in displacing Moses' quotation, the author of Hebrews deliberately seeks to heighten and underscore the terror experienced by people at Sinai, using the fear associated with God's wrath against sin to colour the entire mountain experience.

[18] Calvin 1852, 326–27.

phrase "a voice of words" (φωνῇ ῥημάτων), which, within the context, implies this to be the voice of God.[19] One could argue that God's words at Sinai, including the giving of the law, were intrinsically designed to evoke fear among the people. Thus, when Heb 12:20 mentions an "order that was given" (τὸ διαστελλόμενον) that the Israelites "could not endure" (οὐκ ἔφερον γάρ), it potentially refers to the whole of Torah and therefore its unbearableness. Moreover, some have taken the use of ψηλαφάω (something that "can be touched") in 12:18 as an allusion to the ninth plague in Egypt, when "darkness [came] over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt (ψηλαφητὸν σκότος)" (Exod 10:21).[20] This echo to an Egyptian plague, Svendsen suggests, "invite[s] the reader to view the old covenant as anything but a blessing."[21] As a result, Hebrews appears to portray Sinai as a terrifying event, on par with the ninth deadly Egyptian plague.

Nevertheless, as I have already developed in this study, there is no reason to assume that the author of Hebrews understood Mosaic covenant and Torah to be a cause of fear. Even the use of ψηλαφάω is not necessarily an allusion to an Egyptian plague but to Exod 19:12–13, a text from which the author quotes just a few verses later in 12:20.[22] Israel was indeed afraid, but not because they perceived an unfavourable nature in Sinai. In Exod 19:16, it was the "thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet" that made "all the people who were in the camp tremble." Exod 20:19 describes the moment when "all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking." As a result, "they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen'" (Exod 20:19). It was the combination of sounds

[19] Harris 2019, 384.

[20] Selwyn 1910; Bruce 1964, 352; Attridge 1989, 372.

[21] Svendsen 2009, 232.

[22] Schmidt 1876, 225–28; Ellingworth 1993, 671.

and sights overwhelmed people's sensory receptors, and as a result they responded with fear.[23] Furthermore, in 12:21, Moses' fear stems from the terrifying nature of "the sight" (τὸ φανταζόμενον). The other two places where φαντάζω appears in the LXX (in only occurs here in the NT) is in Sirach 34:5 and Wisdom 6:16. On both occasions it describes of something that is seen.[24]

While a comprehensive discussion on the portrayal of Sinai within Exodus, Deuteronomy, and other Second Temple Jewish writings would be enlightening, it falls outside the purview of this analysis.[25] Likewise, more could be said about the exact cause of people's fear at Sinai and whether their dread was a mistake or an expected reaction.[26] My contention is that for the author of Hebrews, the fear exhibited by the people in Exodus was a reaction to the intense sensory experience at Sinai.[27]

This is not to say that the people at the foot of Sinai were afraid only of the sensory phenomena. When they asked Moses to act as their intermediary, they added, "but do not let God speak to us, or we will die" (Exod 20:19). In this sense, the people appear to have also feared God himself. After all, it was precisely the presence of the sounds and fire that signified the presence of God, making the sensory phenomena inseparable from the divine presence. Nevertheless, even granting that God was the ultimate, or an added, object of fear at Sinai, the comparison between Sinai and Zion in Hebrews still locates the elements that made the Sinai experience fearful primarily in these sensory phenomena.[28]

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[23] As Stuart comments, "That combination of sensory data… along with the voice of God itself, was too much for them, so 'they trembled with fear' and 'stayed at a distance'" (2006, 468).

[24] Lane 1991, 464.

[25] For this research, see Brettler 2008; Walsh 2013.

[26] Kibbe 2016, 24–33.

[27] Wenkel 2016.

[28] Ellingworth (1993, 692) interprets the depiction of God as a consuming fire in 12:29 as a metaphor for divine judgment, arguing that the fear stemmed from standing in a metaphorical courtroom, with God presiding as judge instilling dread in those who see themselves as liable to judgment. However, Heb 12:29 does not appear to convey this. Rather, by referencing God as a consuming fire (γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκον), citing Deut 4:24, it instructs the audience to "offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe (μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ

6.3. From Sinai to Zion in Heb 12:22–24

So far in this chapter, I have contended that the descriptions of Sinai in Heb 12:18–20 should not be interpreted as inherently negative. Nevertheless, while there exists a notable sense of continuity between Sinai and Zion, underscored by the simple fact that God speaks at both locations,[29] there also exists an element of discontinuity between the two places. The perfect tense of προσέρχομαι ("to approach") in 12:18 and 12:22 ("mit seinem resulativen Charakter," as Stolz notes),[30] in contrast to the present tense employed in other passages (4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6), implies that the author believed the audience had already arrived at a place distinct from Sinai. As Johnson argues, the audience had already, "in principle and in their imagination… reached the goal of their pilgrimage."[31]

As noted in the scholarly overview provided earlier, some scholars interpret the transition from Sinai to Zion as a shift from Judaism to Christianity. According to this perspective, Sinai symbolises the Mosaic Torah and covenant, which are characterised as "a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities" (10:1). As such, adhering to Judaism is seen as residing in the shadows. In contrast, Zion represents the new covenant established through Jesus' sacrifice, providing access to the true form of these realities. Therefore, following Jesus involves transitioning from the shadows of Sinai and Judaism to the realities of Zion and Christianity.

One problem with the conclusion above is that the depiction of this transition from Sinai to Zion in Hebrews is not unique within the context of Second Temple Jewish literature. These texts also portray the arrival at Zion as complementary to the Mosaic Torah and covenant given

δέους)" (12:28). This directive is not about approaching with anxiety or terror, but with heartfelt emotion (δέος) and profound respect (εὐλάβεια)—a term that elsewhere in Hebrews (5:7) is translated as "devotion" (NET) or "reverent submission" (NRSV).

[29] Westfall 2005, 273–74.

[30] Stolz 2018, 54.

[31] Johnson 2006, 328.

at Sinai. In these texts, the movement from Sinai to Zion is not interpreted as a rejection of the former. Sinai's role extends beyond laying the groundwork for Zion, and the advent of Zion does not undermine the continued relevance of Sinai. While Zion builds upon the revelation and experience of Sinai, introducing new dimensions to Israel's relationship with God, it does not reinterpret the Sinaitic event to such an extent that it diminishes its significance.[32]

An example of this can be seen in the *Book of Jubilees*. *Jubilees* opens with a revelation given to Moses at Sinai, where God, speaking through an angel, foretells a future day when his kingship will be acknowledged by all, and everyone would know that Zion is his holy city (*Jub*. 1:27).[33] The text goes on to describe how that same angel that spoke to Moses would remain with Israel until they completed their journey from Sinai to Zion (*Jub*. 1.28).

However, the transition from Sinai to Zion in *Jubilees* does not imply the replacement or redefinition of one religion by another. Instead, both Sinai and Zion are portrayed as locations where the heavenly and earthly realms intersect (*Jub*. 8.19). Furthermore, from the narrator's perspective at Sinai, Zion has not yet been sanctified but is destined to be sanctified in the new creation for the sanctification of the earth. Zion, therefore, is said to be a mountain "which will be sanctified in the new creation for the sanctification of the earth" (*Jub*. 4.26).

Moreover, the journey from Sinai to Zion is depicted as a transition of time, from one epoch to another within the division of days (*Jub*. 50.2–4). It signifies the movement within the world's epochs and times, with Zion representing the final form. Once Israel arrives at Zion, the earthly time and places conform to the heavenly times and places.[34] As Venter comments, in the journey from Sinai to Zion, "everything is gradually restored to its original, pristine condition in accordance with the original intended divine will, inscribed on the heavenly

[32] Levenson 1985, 187–217.

[33] How is one to interpret *Jubilees*' obvious orientation towards Jerusalem's temple and how this brings into question whether it was written in an isolated community which possibly opposed the temple cult, such as an Essene or Qumran, is well outside the scope of this study.

[34] For a detailed discussion, see Scott 2005, 162.

tablets."[35] Thus, in *Jubilees*, Zion is the goal for those who stand at Sinai, but the transition from one mountain to the other by no means describes the replacement of one religion by another. Those who arrive at Zion are part of the same religious group as those that received God's revelation at Sinai. Likewise, Zion does not indicate a radical reinterpretation of the Sinai event, one which diminished Sinai's value. On the contrary, arrival at Zion vindicates God's revelation at Sinai.

Like *Jubilees*, several texts associated with the Qumran community also allude to Israel's transition from Sinai to Zion. As stated above, my purpose is to argue that movement away from Sinai in favour of Zion does not equate to a movement away from Judaism in favour of Christianity. Instead, when Hebrews, alongside these texts, speak of a transition from Sinai to Zion, it is to be understood within a Jewish framework which upholds the continual validity of Torah and the covenant.

Though much could be said about Qumran's relationship with Jerusalem,[36] there exists a broad consensus that the community deliberately distanced itself from Jerusalem and the temple cult because they perceived that Jerusalem had, to whatever extent, become a broken and defiled place.[37] Pesher Habakkuk, for example, describes the priests of Jerusalem as those who "amass money and wealth by plundering the peoples" (1QpHab 9.5), where "the Wicked Priest[38] committed abominable deeds and defiled the Temple of God" (1QpHab 12.8–9). Pesher Isaiah's commentary of Isa 5:11–14 holds that "the Scoffers who are in Jerusalem," are those "who 'despised the Torah of the Lord'" (4Q162 2.10). According to 4QTestimonia, it is a city overrun by foreigners who "shed blood like water upon the ramparts of the daughter of

[35] Venter 2008, 642.

[36] Schiffman 1996.

[37] Davies 2003, 166.

[38] Regarding the mention of a Wicked Priest in 1QpHab, see Frisch 2021.

Zion and in the precincts of Jerusalem" (4Q175 29–30).[39] "No wonder," García Martínez writes, "that the community finally decided to separate itself from Jerusalem and from the temple in order to build in the desert!"[40]

Instead of participating in the temple cult at Jerusalem, the community went to the desert to set up a new place of worship.[41] This wilderness setting provided the community with an opportunity to re-enact aspects of their forefathers' experiences at Sinai. Though much could be said about the way the Qumran community sought to relive the Sinai experience,[42] a consistent theme is that, in contrast to Jerusalem's perceived departure from strict Torah adherence, the community aimed to do the opposite and follow God's instructions just as Israel received them at Sinai.[43] When describing the admissions process for new members of the community, the Damascus Document instructs the congregation to "enrol him," that is, the one being initiated, "with the oath of the covenant (שבועת הברית) which Moses made with Israel, the covenant to return (לשוב) to the Torah of Moses… to return (לשוב) to the Torah of Moses with a whole heart and a whole soul… a man shall take upon himself (an oath) to return (לשוב) to the Torah of Moses, for in it everything is specified" (15.9, 12; 16.2).[44] What distinguished the Qumran community from Jerusalem was their determination to return to Sinai and the

[39] Berrin 2018, 49, n. 47.

[40] García Martínez 2009, 285.

[41] Davies 2003, 169; García Martínez 2009, 286. For example, the Community Rule describes a place of worship outside Jerusalem, one described as a "House of Holiness for Israel… in order that it may be united to the most holy things… for those who walk in perfection" (1QS 8.5; 1QS 9.6).

[42] As Betz concludes, primarily based on his survey of the Damascus Document, "Like Israel at Mount Sinai, the members of the Qumran community were living in a camp and waiting the manifestation of God's glory" (1967, 96). Similarly, Newman suggests that the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice were meant to "summon the immanent presence of the divine glory first revealed at Sinai anew… The locale for revelation has thus shifted from a desert mountaintop to a wilderness sanctuary" (2008, 30–31).

[43] Davies 2001, 28.

[44] Text taken from Fraade 2021, 75–76 For a discussion of the relationship between the Community Rule and the Damascus Document, and whether we can use both to perceive the Community's practices, see Kapfer 2007.

foundational law of Israel,[45] thus committing themselves to strictly adhere the very instructions that originally set them apart as a nation. [46] In other words, their unwavering dedication to Torah represented a means of rewinding the clock to establish their identity as the genuine Israel, recipients of God's covenant at Sinai.

Nonetheless, the community did not regard their time in the wilderness as a permanent state. Like their forebears during the time of Moses, their existence in a Sinai-like condition was not meant to be a lasting condition but rather a transitional phase with the ultimate goal of returning to Zion.[47] For instance, 4QFlorilegium references God raising up "the booth of David that is fallen," drawing from Amos 9:11, and anticipates its establishment "in Zi[on in the] last days (אחרית הימים ב[בצי]ון)" (4Q174 1.12).[48] Quoting from Exod 15:17–18, 4QFlor declares "The sanctuary,] Adonai, which your hands have made. Adonai is king reign for ever and ever" (4Q174 1.3). In this house, one meant only for the "holy ones (קדושי)" (4Q174 1.3) who kept Torah, God's glory would "continually appear on it, and strangers will no longer destroy it" (4Q174 1.5).

The War Scroll offers specific instructions regarding what the army should inscribe on their trumpets. For example, on trumpets signalling retreat from battle, they would write, "God has gathered (אסף אל)" (1Q33 3.10); those signalling pursuit "God has struck all Sons of Darkness" (1Q33 3.9). There was a specific type of trumpet to be blown when the army was "to enter the congregation in Jerusalem (העדה ירושלים)" (1Q33 3.11). On these trumpets the army was to write, "Rejoicings of God in a peaceful return (גילות אל במשוב שלום)" (1Q33 3.11). Leaving aside the debates surrounding the function and placement of the trumpets,[49] the War

[45] Tso 2008.

[46] Vermes 1975, 39.

[47] Schiffman 2001, 205; Brooke 2008, 84.

[48] Text taken from Steudel 1994, 25, 31. For the use of Zion/Jerusalem in 4QFlor, see Wise 1991.

[49] Piamenta 2022.

Scrolls envisions the day when the community would be settled at Jerusalem, and their army would no longer fight but would thank God for their peaceful return.[50]

Much can be explored about the eschatological concept of Zion in the Qumran community: a place characterised by a restored priesthood (CD 3.21–4.2) and sometimes depicted as a block-shaped city (2Q4 1.1–4; 4Q554 1.i) replete with roads, columns, doors (4Q554 1.ii, iii; 4Q555; 5Q15 i, ii), and precious stones adorning its landscape (2Q4 iii; 4Q554 2.ii.13–21; 11Q18 23, 24); descriptions which bear striking resemblance to the city described in Ezek 40–48 and Rev 21.[51] Additionally, there is discussion about whether Zion's restoration was anticipated to take place before or after the arrival of the Messiah.[52] What I aim to emphasise here is that the community's expectation of transitioning from conditions reminiscent of Sinai to Zion did not entail Sinai's insignificance. Nor did it necessitate a reinterpretation of Sinai to the point of complete invalidation.[53] Throughout their period at a place like Sinai, the community's unwavering commitment to Torah was designed to prepare them for the eventual establishment of the community in Zion, much like the preparations made by their ancestors. The arrival at Zion signified the fulfilment of their long-awaited hope and a continuation of their commitment to the same foundational principles that guided them in the desert.[54]

Returning to the comparison between Hebrews and the Qumran community, it becomes evident that there are several notable differences between the two.[55] Hebrews presents the audience as having already attained Zion, whereas the Qumran community anticipates the

[50] García Martínez 2010, 305.

[51] García Martínez 2009.

[52] Wise 1990.

[53] García Martínez 2009.

[54] Henderson 2014, 1–18.

[55] For an in-depth comparison between Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scroll texts, see Schiffman 2009.

unfolding of eschatological events. Hebrews asserts that the "last days" (1:2) have commenced with the revelation of Jesus, whereas the Qumran community still awaited the upcoming eschatological age. Additionally, the author of Hebrews posits that the new covenant has already been initiated, and the audience was already experiencing the benefits of participating in the heavenly temple worship.

There are, however, similarities between the two. On one hand, both Hebrews and the Qumran community place their respective audiences in a state of pilgrimage, awaiting the full realisation of their eschatological expectations. On the other hand, the audience addressed in Hebrews had, to some extent, also distanced itself from the temple cult, whether because there was no longer a temple to attend—if indeed the epistle was written after the temple's destruction in 70 CE—or because the author deliberately encouraged the community to distance itself from the temple, despite the fact that going to the temple and participating in its cultic practices remained a real possibility for them. As previously mentioned, the relationship between Hebrews' composition and the temple's destruction remains a debated issue. However, regardless of the exact circumstances, the author unequivocally advocates for the audience to worship God at the heavenly tabernacle, facilitated by Jesus' priesthood and sacrifice.

Returning to the movement from Sinai to Zion in other Second Temple texts,[56] my point in this section is only to highlight that, just as the Qumran community did not intend to forsake

[56] Another example of this movement can be seen in Deuteronomy. While the author of Hebrews might have regarded Deuteronomy as part of the Pentateuch and attributed to Moses, contemporary scholarship on Deuteronomy often suggests that it might be a product of Second Temple Judaism; see Najman 2003, 41–69. In Deut 12:5–6, God directs Israel to seek out ὁ τόπος—a place chosen by God to establish his name. This location, different to Sinai, was the intended destination for Israel. This alternative site, Brooke argues, does not diminish or alter the significance of Israel's encounter at Sinai (2008, 79). Comparable to *Jubilees*, Deuteronomy's rearticulation of Sinai is not intended to supplant the original revelation received there. Instead, it presents itself as an additional revelation, one that augments the earlier directives provided by God. To cite Brooke's conclusion, "If Deuteronomy itself could be understood as pointing away from Sinai, then the other Sinaitic compositions in the Qumran library can also be seen as qualifying the status of both Moses and the specific revelation entrusted to him" (2008, 78, 84).

Mosaic Torah and covenant upon reaching Zion, Hebrews does not envision the arrival at Zion as synonymous with a rejection of the law. As I have contended in Chapter 4 of this study, this is precisely the author's argument in Heb 7. The author carefully explains that Jesus cannot serve as a high priest on earth because that contradicts the requirements of the law. The law dictates that priests must be descended from the line of Levi, and since Jesus originates from the line of Judah, he is, by default, ineligible (7:1–28). Because of Jesus' sacrifice, the audience was now under a Melchizedekian priesthood who served at the heavenly tabernacle and provided the community with benefits not found in the Levitical priesthood.[57] Yet this last statement itself must not be understood as a rejection of Torah but in line with the revelation that came "long ago… to our ancestors…by the prophets" (1:1). To follow Jesus meant belief that he is the one whom God appointed heir of all things (1:2) and now God's revelation to everyone "in these last days" (1:2). Hebrews does not intend to break away from Judaism in favour of Christianity, as though these two groups were distinct forms of religion. Just as the community's eventual arrival at Zion was to be marked by observance of Mosaic Torah and covenant, Hebrews does not argue for the loss of Torah's validity among Jesus' followers. As I have argued, Hebrews neither repudiates nor asserts that the law became unnecessary at the coming of the Son's revelation.[58]

6.4. Still at Sinai in Heb 12:25–29

So far in this chapter I have argued that the comparison between Sinai and Zion in Heb 12:18–24 is not the comparison between Judaism and Christianity. I maintained this view by arguing

[57] Moffitt 2022, 81.

[58] To quote Johnson's helpful conclusion, "Hebrews contains no trace of the rejection of the people of Israel or their replacement by another people. There is here no contrast between Gentiles and Jews. There is certainly as yet no "Christianity" facing off against an equally defined "Judaism." Hebrews does not therefore speak as representative of a Gentile Christianity that claims to have superseded Judaism. Hebrews' voice, rather, is like that of the covenanters at Qumran (see below) who claimed a better covenant mediated by their teacher without in the least rejecting the earlier covenant, much less their claim to authentic Jewish identity" (2012, 212).

that both the description of Sinai (12:18–22) and the trajectory away from Sinai towards Zion is not unique to Hebrews but rather reflects the way some Second Temple Jewish texts, like *Jubilees* and the Qumran community, described Sinai and the movement from Sinai towards Zion.

In this section, I move to investigate the author's immediate argument after his comparison between Sinai and Zion, in 12:25–29, the section commonly identified as the epistle's final warning passage. Were the author's intentions to draw people away from Judaism (represented by Sinai) in favour of Christianity (represented by Zion), one would expect the author to describe his audience as finding itself in a scene completely distinct to Sinai. In other words, having described the benefits of Zion (12:22–24), one would expect the author to look forward and not backwards to Sinai. However, the immediate section which follows the comparison between Sinai and Zion returns to Sinai-like settings, demonstrating that, though the audience is now at Zion, Zion itself is patterned on Sinai. Therefore, I contend that, although the 12:25–29 might appear to introduce a "sharp change in tone,"[59] or an "abrupt admonition,"[60] the author has not departed from the scene at Sinai.[61]

The section begins with another *a fortiori* argument, in which the author concludes the comparison between Sinai and Zion by offering a stern warning: "see that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!" (12:25).

[59] Lane 1991b, 474.

[60] Attridge 1989, 379.

[61] From a literary structural point of view, Stolz is among those who argues that the structure of 12:18–29 is somewhat of a chiasmus, with the description of Zion in the middle (12:22–24), surrounded by allusions to Sinai (12:18–21, 25–29). He supports this claim by noting the repetition of certain words and phrases both before and after the depiction of Zion, such as πῦρ (12:18, 29), φωνή (12:19, 26), παραιτέομαι (12:19, 25), and the linguistic connections between ῥῆμα (12:19) and χρηματίζω (12:25), and σάλπιγγος ἤχῳ (12:19) and τὴν γῆν ἐσάλευσεν (12:26); see Stolz 2018, 46–50.

Like the argument from lesser to greater seen in 2:2, the argument from lesser to greater in 12:25 follows a similar pattern. Not only do they use similar language (ἡμεῖς ἐκφευξόμεθα… ἀμελήσαντες [2:2–3]; ἐξέφυγον… ἡμεῖς… ἀποστρεφόμενοι [12:25]),[62] they both use the Sinai narrative as the basis upon which to call the audience to faithfulness to Jesus. Both texts point to the experience of the generation of Israelites which stood at the foot of Sinai. To demonstrate the seriousness of the consequences for those who would not remain faithful, the author draws attention the generation of Israelites that stood at the foot of Sinai during the revelation ("they" [12:25]) to argue: if they received condemnation for rejecting their revelation, how much more would the audience be condemned if they refused to follow Jesus, who is the Son and reflection of God (1:1–2).[63]

One of the most evident allusions to Sinai after the comparison between Sinai and Zion (12:18–24) appears in two key aspects. First, the author urges the audience to "offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe" (12:29), citing the reason: "for our God is a consuming fire" (γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκον [12:29]). This phrase is a reference to Deut 4:24 LXX (ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεός σου πῦρ καταναλίσκον ἐστίν, θεὸς ζηλωτής [c.f., Deut 9:3]), which has been linked to the earlier mentions of fire in the description of Sinai (12:18).[64] The author calls for reverence and awe because, although the audience has arrived at Zion, not Sinai, and the physical elements like fire are not present, God's character—specifically his

[62] Some manuscripts read εφυγον in 12:25, such as 𝔓[46] א[2] D K L Ψ 0243. 0285. 104. 365. 630[vid]. 1505. 1739. 1881 𝔪 z[c]. On the contrary, those that read ἐκφεύγω include א* A C I P 048. 33. 81. 326. 1175. 1241 lat.

[63] For Stolz, the biggest difference between 12:25 and 2:2 pertains to the speaker. While in 12:25 God himself speaks, in 2:2 God speaks through the Son. As he writes, "Der große Unterschied zwischen den beiden *argumenta a minore ad maius* liegt darin, dass der Verfasser in 2,3 nur die Missachtung der göttlichen Botschaft thematisiert, in 2,25bc hingegen (auch) die Missachtung der redenden Gottes selbst" (2018, 284). Regardless of the speaker to the present audience, whether the Father or Jesus, my point is that in both 2:2 and 12:25 there is a comparison between the revelation that Israel received at Sinai and the revelation that they were now receiving by God.

[64] Lane sees an additional relationship between 12:24 and 12:25 by the "literary device of a 'hook word,'" linking the participle λαλοῦντι ("speaking") in 12:24 to τὸν λαλοῦντα ("the one speaking") in 12:25 (1991, 474).

jealousy—can still be described as a consuming fire. This should compel the audience to act with the appropriate reverence.[65]

At this point, the traditional Christian interpretation presents the comparison between Sinai and Zion as one between a negative and a positive element. The argument typically goes that, since the revelation at Sinai, being less than ideal, demanded obedience and those who refused to listen were condemned, the judgment for rejecting the better, more perfect revelation brought by Jesus would be even greater.

However, this line of reasoning overlooks the ongoing validity that the author ascribes to the Torah and the Mosaic covenant. In Chapter 2 of this study, I highlighted that by describing the message of Sinai as βέβαιος ("valid" [2:2]), the author regards the Sinaitic revelation as enduring and reliable, both when it was originally delivered to Israel and now as the audience encounters it and strives to maintain it. Therefore, when the author refers to the legitimacy of punishing those who violate the revelation of Sinai, he is not referring to an outdated or irrelevant set of regulations. Rather, he sees the Sinai revelation as one that has never actually expired. In other words, the comparison is not between a negative, outdated element and a positive, better one, but between two legitimate and valid revelations.

It is crucial to recognise that a positive portrayal of Sinai in the author's view is necessary for the effectiveness of the argument from lesser to greater in Hebrews. Any suggestion that Sinai holds an insignificant or unfavourable role would undermine the entire framework of the argument, which asserts that the audience must heed the voice from Zion because it is valid, just as the revelation at Sinai was. For the argument to hold, the author must regard the voice from Sinai as inherently good. To imply otherwise would create an

[65] It is important to note that just because God is described as a fire does not mean the same barriers to access that were present at Sinai are still in place. The reference to fire in Deut 4:24 LXX, the text being referenced at this point, is connected to God's jealousy, a jealousy that remains even when the literal fire of his presence is not a physical obstacle for the audience's approach. Nonetheless, his nature as a consuming fire serves as a reminder to approach with the proper reverence, regardless of the absence of the sensory barriers that once restricted the people at Sinai.

inconsistency in the reasoning, as it would be illogical for the author to dismiss Sinai while simultaneously claiming that rejecting the voice from Zion would result in a more severe punishment. In short, the author's argument relies on the assumption that rejecting the voice from Sinai already warranted severe consequences. Therefore, a positive view of Sinai is essential to the author's argument, reinforcing the importance of responding appropriately to the voice that now speaks from the heavenly Zion.

As I argue elsewhere, while passages in Hebrews such as, "he has made the first one obsolete, and what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear" (8:13) and "he abolishes the first in order to establish the second" (10:9), might initially seem to suggest the Mosaic Torah and covenant have an unfavourable status, a reasonable interpretation could affirm the continued validity of Torah, even within the community of Jesus' followers. Additionally, as I argued earlier, a positive portrayal of Sinai is crucial for the effectiveness of the argument from lesser to greater in Hebrews. Any view that Sinai holds an insignificant or unfavourable role in the author's conception would undermine the entire argumentative structure, which asserts that the audience should heed the voice emanating from Zion with the same attentiveness that Israel was intended to give to the voice from Sinai. For the argument to be coherent, the author must regard the voice of Sinai as inherently good and beneficial. To suggest otherwise would create a contradiction, as it would be illogical for the author to consider Sinai inconsequential while also claiming that rejecting God at Zion incurs a more severe punishment (e.g., 10:28). In other words, the author's argument assumes that the rejection of the voice at Sinai already warranted a grave penalty. Thus, a positive view of Sinai is integral to the author's overall argument, reinforcing the significance of responding appropriately to the voice that now speaks from the

heavenly Zion. The audience of Hebrews is meant to empathize with the audience at Sinai, as both find themselves in similar situations at Sinai/Zion.[66]

The second point that highlights the lingering influence of Sinai in the aftermath of the Sinai-Zion comparison (12:18–24) is the description of the shaking of heaven and earth in 12:26–27.[67] The text states,

> At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain (οὗ ἡ φωνὴ τὴν γῆν ἐσάλευσεν τότε, νῦν δὲ ἐπήγγελται λέγων· ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν. τὸ δὲ ἔτι ἅπαξ δηλοῖ τὴν τῶν σαλευομένων μετάθεσιν ὡς πεποιημένων, ἵνα μείνῃ τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα [12:26–27]).

Much has been speculated on the exact nature of this shaking, and what exactly does it mean that certain things will remain while others will not.[68] As we have already discussed, arguing that μετάθεσις does not imply the removal of all material or created things, the envisioned change (μετάθεσις) does not mean that the regulations being replaced will cease to exist entirely (see discussion in Chapter 5). If this argument holds, it follows that the "created things" on earth will undergo a change, which will transform, but not eliminate, the earthly realm entirely.

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[66] As Gordon concludes, "The 'Hebrews' would have been encouraged by such texts as Deut 4.9–14; 5.3–4 to consider themselves as part of the original Sinai congregation, in solidarity with that generation that had received the revelation of the law" (2008, 178).

[67] For a recent analysis of Hebrews' shacking of earth and heaven, see Lee 2020.

[68] One might argue, as Ellingworth does, that the use of γῆ in 12:25 marks a shift in the author's argument: while he begins by referencing Sinai (12:18–21), by the time he reaches 12:25, the author seems to be thinking about the entire world (1993, 685). However, this interpretation overlooks the way the author specifically employs the story of Sinai and the wilderness wandering as an antitype for the audience's faithfulness in achieving the promised rest. The author anticipates the audience will reach a particular destination, not a generalised global one. Moreover, in Hebrews, γῆ does not refer to the entire earth. For example, in 11:9, Abraham is said to have dwelled "for a time in the land (γῆ) he had been promised," which refers to a specific portion of the earth, not the whole globe. The most telling instance of this usage is in 12:26, where the γῆ that shook "at that time" (τότε) likely refers to a specific place and time—Sinai. Similarly, "they" (ἐκεῖνοι) in 12:25 refers to the specific people who heard God's voice at Sinai; see Lane 1991, 475–76. As Attridge concludes, 12:25 "picks up imagery of the Sinai theophany" (1989, 379). Who exactly does the speaking "on earth" (12:25) is a matter of debate. The three most popular opinions are: (1) Moses, as he relays to Israel the law; (2) God, in connection to previous references to his divine voice in 12:18–21; (3) Jesus, in relation to the "blood that speaks" mentioned in 12:24. For a full discussion, see Lane 1991, 476–77; Stolz 2018, 269–82.

But when exactly will this shaking occur? I argued earlier that this has not yet occurred but will come when the "present time" (9:9)—that is, this present state—ends, specifically in the eschaton. The change will occur when Jesus returns to his waiting people (9:28) and the heavenly and earthly realms are brought into contact in the establishment of God's eternal dwelling place. Whatever the outcome of this cosmic shaking, one certainty is that the realm in which the Torah and the covenant function will be transformed. Since the heavenly realm is eternal and unchanging, while the earthly realm is temporal and subject to shaking, it is the earthly sphere that will be so transformed as to give way to the covenant and priesthood which operate in the enduring and permanent reality.

This interpretation preserves the integrity of the Sinai revelation on earth while also accounting for those texts that suggest a time when Torah and the Levitical priesthood will no longer function. Their end will not occur because they lose intrinsic validity; rather, they will be transformed by the coming shaking, which will fundamentally alter the very realm in which they were operationally binding.[69]

Now, the above conclusion raises the question of whether the author envisions Jesus remaining a high priest even after he returns to earth (9:28). Does the author believe Jesus' priestly office will eventually end once he exits the realm where he exercises his priesthood? Certainly, no such explicit statement appears in Hebrews. The author speaks of Jesus as one who "has become a high priest forever" (6:20) and thus "remains a priest forever" (7:3), suggesting that while the author acknowledges that Jesus will return to the earthly realm one day, there is no indication that his priesthood ceases at that point.

[69] Moffitt arrives at a similar conclusion: "In the heavenly sphere and in the coming age, the Law's limitations, particularly in the realm of ritual purity, do not apply. In a way not unlike Paul in Gal 3, this argument relies on Jewish apocalyptic periodization to bracket the Law by locating it within a particular period/age, a circumscribed place and time that precedes the eternal age. At least some of the Law's regulations will, therefore, go the way of the rest of the corruptible realm with which it is so closely bound (cf. Heb 1:13–14; 8:13; 12:27). When the earthly realm is finally shaken for the last time, such that only the unshakable realities remain, the Law will be "metathesized" or changed (cf. Heb 7:11–12, 18–19; 8:13)" (2019, 102).

However, a potential problem arises. If Jesus were to retain his priesthood and return to the earthly realm, there would, in effect, be two priesthoods operating simultaneously on earth: Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood and the Levitical priesthood, which, as I have argued earlier, remained in operation on earth even while the Melchizedekian priesthood is active in heaven. To address this concern, I return to my earlier discussion on the shaking of created things (12:27), where I argued that the author envisions a future time when, due to the shaking of the earth, the Levitical priesthood and Torah will cease. The author anticipates a transformation in the earthly realm when the shaking occurs, in part because, at that moment, Jesus will return to earth, along with the heavenly city that the faithful have awaited.[70] This change, I contended, does not imply that the Levitical priesthood or Torah lose their intrinsic validity; rather, it suggests that the realm in which they function will be so drastically altered that the author speaks of them as disappearing.

If the Levitical priesthood is indeed set to cease, it follows that at the eschatological point when Jesus returns, there could very well be a singular priesthood, that of Jesus himself. This interpretation makes sense if we consider that, while Jesus returns to earth, he never actually departs from heaven; instead, he brings heaven with him. In this way, the author would not be in contradiction by asserting that Jesus does not qualify to be a priest on earth while simultaneously advocating for his priesthood on earth upon his return. However, it is important to exercise caution here, as the author does not explicitly go that far. We must refrain from extending this idea beyond what the text itself supports.

[70] "If the promised inheritance includes receiving the heavenly city, and if receiving this inheritance is at least part of what the writer considers to be constitutive of salvation, then it seems plausible to interpret the idea of Jesus appearing a second time for the salvation of those who wait for him in terms of his brining the heavenly city to his waiting people" (Moffitt 2022, 152).

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the comparison between Sinai and Zion (12:18–24) does not signify a rejection or reinterpretation of Judaism. To this end, I first provided an overview of the way 12:18–21 has commonly been interpreted in both history and modern scholarship. Second, I argued that the author draws from familiar imagery of Sinai in the Pentateuch to describe the Sinai event without attributing intrinsic wickedness to it. To say that the author of Hebrews thought of Sinai as a place one should avoid would be as unlikely as to say that Exodus and Deuteronomy have a negative view of Sinai. I then argued, based on Second Temple Jewish texts, that a move from Sinai to Zion does not signal a move from one religion to another.

I then addressed the *a fortiori* argument in Heb 12:25–29, suggesting that it lacks coherence if one assumes a complete rejection of Sinai within Hebrews. It is precisely because Sinai retains its significance within the community of Jesus' followers that the author uses the Mosaic Torah as a foundation for advocating faithfulness to God. In brief, the movement from Sinai to Zion in Heb 12:18–24 does not represent a parting from Judaism to embrace Christianity, as though these were entirely separate entities. Instead, it represents a transition that maintains the validity of Sinai throughout. In summary, the warning in 12:25 does not mark a departure from the comparison between Sinai and Zion in 12:18–24. While it introduces a new section focused on the shaking of earth and heaven (12:26–27), it concludes the comparison by presenting an argument from lesser to greater. This, I move to argue, should shape our understanding of the author's use of Sinai in 12:18–21.

A few conclusions can be drawn from the above chapter. First, a transition from Sinai to Zion does not nullify the law. As mentioned above relating to Second Temple Judaic texts, the shift from Sinai to Zion does not require the abandonment of the Mosaic law. Just as the Qumran community did not anticipate renouncing the Sinai law upon their arrival at Zion, Hebrews similarly does not envision the arrival at Zion as synonymous with a rejection of the

law. As I argue elsewhere, this is exactly the author's premise in Chapter 7. The author carefully explains that Jesus cannot serve as a high priest on earth because that is what the law dictates. The law stipulates that priests must descend from the line of Levi, and since Jesus originates from the line of Judah, he is consequently disqualified (7:1–28). The author neither repudiates nor argues that the law became unnecessary at the coming of the Son's revelation. On the contrary, the author upholds the law at every point, including in the comparison drawn between Sinai and Zion in 12:18–24.

Second, Sinai is a fitting place to end because it is where the author started. As noted elsewhere, the author employs a strategic use of literary brackets to structure and convey certain portions of his message. These brackets serve as thematic markers that connect and unify various sections of the epistle. While the author may initially introduce a subject and seemingly deviate into related topics, he eventually returns to the original theme, creating an arch-like structure that spans across different sections. The author initiates the thematic arch by alluding to Sinai in the opening portion of the epistle, specifically referencing "the message spoken by angels" (2:2). This establishes Sinai as the initial setting where God imparted a valid and enduring revelation to the people of Israel. By returning to Sinai in the penultimate chapter (12:18–21), the author completes the arch, enclosing the entire epistle within these Sinai-related passages. By employing this arch-like structure the author underscores the significance of Sinai as the foundational starting point of divine revelation and reinforces its centrality in the epistle.

Third, the heavenly tabernacle that Moses saw is the same one Jesus entered at his ascension. The fiery presence of God that the people saw at Sinai is the same one that the audience experienced (12:29). Both mountains represent two places where the same heavenly realm encounters the earthly realm and at both mountains a human figure—Moses and Jesus—ascended into the heavenly tabernacle and from there interceded for people on earth. What sets

these two places apart? The difference between these two mountains is not rooted in representing entirely distinct realms, but in providing a different means of approaching the unseen, heavenly realm. Sinai, as the vehicle to connect this world with the heavenly world, did not seem to work. Why not? As I argue elsewhere in greater detail, it is not because it represented a faulty religious system but because people failed to use it properly, namely believing in faith. According to the author, what gives people access to the heavenly realm is Jesus' sacrifice, not because it does away with Jewish Scriptures but because it is the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy that someday the Lord would give people new hearts (Jer 31:31–34). This then becomes the key to understand why some people are enabled to enter God's heavenly realm. What sets them apart is that their hearts have been transformed, and as possessors of a new heart they are free to enter God's glory. So, rather than viewing Sinai's covenant as flawed and in need of replacement by an alternative means of salvation, my argument posits that human fault is responsible for any perceived shortcomings with regards to Sinai's efficacy.

Chapter 7
The Sinai Narrative and Going Outside the Camp

7.1. Introduction

One question that remains unresolved in my exploration of Hebrews' use of the Sinai narrative as a theological backdrop concerns how precisely a person experiences life in the liminal space between the earthly and heavenly realms. As I have argued, Hebrews sustains a tension—one the reader may have felt throughout this study, though I briefly addressed it at the beginning of Chapter 4—between the audience's existence as embodied individuals living on earth, awaiting the return of their intercessor, and their simultaneous participation in the heavenly realm.

Earlier, I employed the analogy of a video game to illustrate this dual participation. I suggested that just as a player, while physically bound to the laws of gravity and causality, becomes immersed in a virtual world governed by its own distinct set of rules and experiences, so too the audience of Hebrews participates in two overlapping realities. The Son's heavenly priesthood affects those on earth not because they have been physically transported into heaven, but because they are now implicated in a different sphere of reality that intersects with their earthly existence. In this way, the Melchizedekian priesthood operates in the heavenly realm while the Levitical system continues to function on earth; the audience, positioned in a liminal state between both, is shaped by the dynamics of each simultaneously.

This, naturally, raises two interrelated questions central to the argument of this project. First, how exactly does the author envision the audience as operating within both the earthly and heavenly realms simultaneously? And second, how do these very activities—this dual participation—generate a self-awareness that, even as the audience has already been welcomed into the heavenly sphere, they nonetheless remain the waiting people of God? In other words, how can they be both like the generation of Israel who left Egypt and is now at the foot of the mountain, awaiting the return of their intercessor, and at the same time those who ascend, following in the footsteps of Moses and Jesus?

In this chapter, I address these two questions by looking at Heb 13, the last chapter of the epistle.[1] Here, the author provides a series of instructions that, among other things, are designed to encourage the audience to recognise that their actions on earth are connected to their participation in the heavenly realm. My examination will centre on Heb 13:8–16—a section framed by two instructions to submit to the community's leaders (3:7, 17),[2] making it a cohesive literary unit, as noted by various scholars[3]—where the author highlights several ways the audience participates in the heavenly realm, providing us with an ideal opportunity to test one of the conclusions of this study: that the audience is envisioned as having one foot on earth and the other in heaven. I will argue that the instructions in Heb 13:8–16 are intended not only to help the audience recognise their status in the heavenly realm but also to encourage

[1] Some scholars view chapter 13 as a later addition (Schenk 1985; Wedderburn 2004), possibly intended to suggest Pauline authorship (Thurén 1973, 49–55; Rothschild 2009), while others see it as an original section that is unrelated to the rest of the epistle. Among those who regard Heb 13 as the natural conclusion of the epistle, a common interpretation is that it serves as a collection of ethical imperatives rooted in pastoral care. The author provides final instructions and admonitions meant to guide the audience toward a particular ethical and moral way of life. So, for Backhaus, chapter 13 could be summarised as a list of imperatives, "Do good works (Heb 10:24)! Attend Sunday service (Heb 10:25)! Let the marital bed be undefiled (Heb 13:4)! Respect the church authorities (Heb 13:7, 17)! Keep to orthodox doctrine (Heb 13:9)!" (2005, 150); see also Allen 2008, 404. Lang summarises this perspective, stating, "Whereas chapters 1–12 deal with the special question of holding fast to the confession… the last main part (13:1–21) contains general exhortations about interpersonal behaviour and closes the composition before its epistolary appendix" (2019, 182).

[2] The term ἡγέομαι (13:7, 17) appears frequently in the Pentateuch to refer to Israel's leaders. In Deut 1:13, it is used to describe those selected by Moses to help lead the people of Israel: "Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders (ἡγουμένους ὑμῶν)." Moses then appointed these wise, knowledgeable, and intelligent individuals (ἄνδρας σοφοὺς καὶ επιστήμονας καὶ συνετοὺς [Deut 1:15]) to lead the congregation of Israel (καὶ κατέστησα αὐτοὺς ἡγεῖσθαι ἐφ' ὑμῶν [Deut 1:15]). Additionally, ἡγέομαι is used in the context of Israel's liberation from Egypt to describe how they were led by a cloud (Exod 13:21) and an angel (Exod 23:23) to their promised rest. One might wonder how much weight the author places on the use of ἡγέομαι in the Pentateuch. After all, given the epistle's emphasis on both the wandering and waiting aspects of the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt, to encourage the audience to submit to their leaders is exactly what Israel was instructed to do in order to remain faithful whilst they waited to arrive at their promised land.

[3] In this regard, I will provide limited engagement with the other sections in chapter 13 (13:1–6, 18–25) because my aim is not to produce a complete analysis of the entire chapter, but only a section which help us see how, for the author, the audience's actions done on the earthly realm have heavenly realities. Given the emphasis of this chapter, I will not develop on Heb 13:1–7 where the author provides instructions on love for brothers and strangers (13:1–2), caring for those in prison (13:3), the sanctity of marriage (13:4), contentment (13:5–6), and submission to leaders (13:7). It is worth noting, however, that various points of contact between Sinai and Heb 13:1–7 could be drawn. For example, the commands to love brothers and strangers (13:1–2) may serve as a summary of Torah, as seen in other NT texts (e.g., Rom 13:9–10). The mention of entertaining angels (13:2) could also allude to the generation of Israel at Sinai, who received the law through angels (2:2), though the Pentateuch does not explicitly state their awareness of the angelic presence during the giving of the covenant.

them actively to engage in that realm's existence. This is accomplished by meeting Jesus in the heavenly realm and living on earth as a faithful community, while awaiting Jesus' return from heaven to earth.[4]

But before proceeding, I must address a question that arises from the proposed setting: exactly how distant is Jesus from the audience? There seems to be a tension between his presence and absence. Bockmuehl highlights this tension, noting that, for NT authors, including the author of Hebrews, Jesus is alive and, in his identity, continuous with Jesus of Nazareth, "but not now visible and tangible."[5] He is present to his followers in a significant way but also absent in heaven until his future return.[6] Although spatially distant, Jesus exercises a "powerful pastoral empathy" with believers in their weaknesses. As Bockmuehl further observes, Jesus, though absent, remains visible in some sense, speaking with the audience and referring to them as his children and brothers.[7]

For Bockmuehl, the author of Hebrews navigates a tension: Jesus is both visible and accessible to the audience, yet he is not physically present with them, and they must await his return. As Bockmuehl concludes, "To say that Jesus is both visible and accessible to Christian faith evidently constitutes an important qualification of the seemingly dominant presupposition of his distance and absence. He is not here—but believers are at least in some sense enabled and indeed encouraged to 'see' him and to 'come to' him."[8] In other words, as I have developed elsewhere already, the audience is invited to ascend to Jesus, yet this approach does not diminish the fact that he remains separate from them.

[4] While outside the scope of my research, this view is in line with some theological views which envision believers as participating in heavenly realities while alive on earth, for example Boersma 2011.

[5] Bockmuehl 2019, 144.

[6] Bockmuehl 2019, 146.

[7] Bockmuehl 2019, 148.

[8] Bockmuehl 2019, 152

Moore, however, takes a slightly different approach. While noting the same verses as Bockmuehl, he concludes that rather than entering heaven through a "revolving door," people remain outside while already seeing Jesus by faith.[9] In this reading, Jesus, their forerunner, has already made it into the heavenly inner shrine whilst remaining visible to the community; the audience, however, has not, at least not yet.

Recognising this tension sets us well to begin the analysis of this chapter with the question of how exactly does the author understands the audience as living within both the earthly and heavenly realms. To answer this, we must first step back and consider whether he actually envisions mortal humans as being welcomed into the heavenly inner shrine, especially given that it is precisely because Jesus, through his resurrection, received an indestructible life (7:16)—one that is not mortal—that he is able to serve as the high priest and enter the heavenly inner shrine. In this sense, Moffitt's comment about Enoch seems relevant, as he notes, "mortal human bodies do not belong in heaven… when Enoch's body goes up to heaven, something has to happen to it for him to be fit to remain in those realms."[10]

7.2. Living Between Realms

There is a lack of consensus regarding how the author envisions the way in which people are meant to "draw near" (10:19) to the heavenly inner shrine. One common approach speculates

[9] Moore's argument is worth quoting at length, "Believers see Jesus and hear his voice. Drawing near to God enables this hearing and seeing. But it is also precisely this that means actual heavenly entrance now is unnecessary as well as uncountenanced by Hebrews' author. Seeing Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, through the open way he has inaugurated for them, and hearing his voice speak to them from heaven, believers are assured that even though they are not presently in heaven, their forerunner has already arrived there, and therefore they will surely arrive there too if they will wait patiently and faithfully… Rather than repeatedly entering heaven (and, presumably, leaving again) through a revolving door, in its worship the community sees ever more clearly that Jesus is holding the door, as it were, and has confidence (παρρησία, 4:16; 10:19) that what he opens no one can shut" (2019, 207).

[10] Moffitt 2011, 177. Likewise, Moore reminds readers that in Second Temple Jewish text, "most ascent narratives are the preserve of a privileged or unique individual, often narrated in the first person; there is a guiding angel; they often take place during dreams rather than when awake; and even to the individual concerned it can be unclear as to whether an ascent is bodily or not" (2019, 203). As a result, there is little room to sustain that Hebrews envisions bodily ascension into heaven.

that the author does not think the audience actually ascends into heaven but rather engages with the heavenly realm by offering prayers and worship. In this view, it is not the people themselves who enter heaven, but their prayers and worship that ascend to God's throne, while the people remain physically on earth. This perspective is held by scholars such as Rissi,[11] deSilva,[12] and, as already noted, Moore.[13]

Another interpretation suggests that the audience does not in fact ascend but instead experiences heaven coming down to them, particularly through the Eucharist.[14] Heaven is made present to the audience not by something that ascends, like prayer, but by something that descends, namely the presence of Christ in the Eucharist elements of bread and wine during their consecration.

Alternatively, some argue that the audience does engage with the heavenly realm, but not in a physical sense. For example, Woo argues that the audience does not ascend physically but instead enters the heavenly realm spiritually.[15] From this perspective, people physically remain on earth, but spiritually, which for Woo means through their participation in Christ through the Spirit,[16] they enter the inner shrine. A distinctive feature of Woo's approach is his attempt to explain how exactly does "entering spiritually" occur. He proposes that people enter what he calls a "thirdspace," a space that blends certain spatiotemporal and eschatological

[11] Rissi 1987, 97.

[12] DeSilva 2000, 329.

[13] Moore 2024, 100.

[14] Swetnam 1989; see comments below.

[15] As Woo concludes, "Believers genuinely occupy the heavenly sanctuary along with Jesus. This is not referring to their entry in a strictly metaphorical or idealized sense. It is the physical, glorified, and resurrected Jesus who materially resides in the heavenly sanctuary. In turn, believers dwell with him spiritually in that actualized sanctuary… Jesus and the sanctuary are both physical. And yet, believers dwell spiritually with Jesus in this physical, heavenly realm… If such is the case, the knowledge of believers' entrance into the heavenly tabernacle is comprehended through their spiritual entrance by way of their union with Christ" (2024, 152–53).

[16] "The cultic condition to stand in the presence of God… is all made possible due to believers' union with Christ through Spirit-wrought faith" (Woo 2024, 156).

aspects of the heavenly tabernacle. This "thirdspace" allows people to remain physically on earth while simultaneously engaging spiritually with the heavenly realm.[17]

An additional approach is proposed by Mackie, who holds that the audience ascends through a mystical experience.[18] According to him, given Hebrews' emphasis on seeing Jesus (e.g., 2:9; 12:2), the author does envision a "real and substantial access to the heavenly realm and God's enthroned presence,"[19] but only insofar as one beholds Jesus, much like Moses "persevered as though he saw him who is invisible" (11:27). For Mackie, this mystical sight unveils the heavenly tabernacle to the community, and as they fill their minds with images of Jesus, they are mystically able to draw into the heavenly realm.[20] This interpretation echoes the experiences of Enoch (*1 En*. 14:8–23) and Levi (*T*. *Levi* 2.5–5.7), who entered heaven, but only in the sense that they saw it through a supernatural vision.[21]

How then does the audience live between realms? Like most scholars, I agree that while Hebrews does not expect people to ascend physically, and they remain on earth in the flesh, they are nevertheless truly engaged with the heavenly realm. That is, I do not think that it is only their prayers and worship which enters heaven, but rather somehow people themselves, not physically, carryout heavenly activities even while alive on earth. My view aligns most closely with Woo and Mackie, who envision a kind of "thirdspace" (Woo) or mystical experience (Mackie) through which the audience engages the heavenly realm while still alive on earth. For the purposes of this project, however, I will neither attempt to explain the precise

[17] See Woo's discussion on "thirdspace" (2024, 35–53).

[18] The audience ascends through "a substantial mystical experience, one that truly brought the whole community into the heavenly most holy place, where their identity was to be formed. Working in concert with the cultic soteriology and entry exhortations is the visual programme that impels, verifies, and solidifies the community's mystical encounter with God and his Son" (Mackie 2011, 117).

[19] Mackie 2011, 94.

[20] Mackie 2011, 115–16.

[21] An additional model can be seen in the work of Heidel, who looks at both the temporal (horizontal) and special (vertical) dynamics of entrance into the heavenly realm (2020, 148–65).

mechanisms by which this engagement occurs nor adjudicate the probability of competing scholarly descriptions. Instead, my focus is on the specific actions that the audience is expected to perform—such as eating from the altar, bearing Jesus' abuse, and offering sacrifices of praise—and how these actions demonstrate their interaction with the heavenly realm. In other words, these actions are meant to be performed in the place where Jesus resides, which in Hebrews is clearly the heavenly inner shrine. Therefore, that a way in which the audience's engagement with heaven is enacted is through earthly actions, which, though performed on earth, equally operate in the heavenly realm.

To support this view, I now move to analyse Heb 13:8–16. If the audience is envisioned as situated between two spheres—the earthly realm in which they live and the heavenly realm in which Christ ministers—then the question is not merely whether they engage the heavenly sphere, but how they do so. What we find in Heb 13:8–16 is not a metaphysical explanation of the mechanics by which mortals access heaven, but a set of practices that perform and enact their dual participation.[22]

7.2.1. Eating of the Altar in Heb 13:9–11

> Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp (διδαχαῖς ποικίλαις καὶ ξέναις μὴ παραφέρεσθε· καλὸν γὰρ χάριτι βεβαιοῦσθαι τὴν καρδίαν, οὐ βρώμασιν ἐν οἷς οὐκ ὠφελήθησαν οἱ

[22] A brief word on Heb 13:8 is in order. By referencing Jesus' unchanging nature in, the author directs the audience's attention to the reality of the heavenly realm, where Jesus serves as high priest and where they are invited to enter. Accordingly, the instructions in 13:9–16 seem to be grounded in Jesus' eternal high priesthood in the heavenly realm. In other words, if the statement "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8) relates to the instructions in 13:9–16, then the commands concerning food (13:9–11), going out to meet Jesus outside the camp (13:12–14), and offering sacrifices (13:15–16) all stem from an understanding of Jesus' unchanging high priesthood in the heavenly realm. This is further supported by the clear connection between Jesus' eternality and the permanence of the heavenly city, as mentioned just a few verses later in 13:14 (Johnson 2012, 346). The author's instructions to go outside the camp and offer sacrifices are intrinsically connected to the heavenly realm, where Jesus, as the unchanging high priest, makes that realm just as real and present in these instructions as the earthly one.

> περιπατοῦντες. ἔχομεν θυσιαστήριον ἐξ οὗ φαγεῖν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἐξουσίαν οἱ τῇ σκηνῇ λατρεύοντες. ὧν γὰρ εἰσφέρεται ζῴων τὸ αἷμα περὶ ἁμαρτίας εἰς τὰ ἅγια διὰ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως, τούτων τὰ σώματα κατακαίεται ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς [13:9–11])

A key challenge in interpreting this passage is understanding what the "strange teachings" were that were leading the audience astray. Given that the author immediately follows with a reference to Levitical priests who have no right to eat from the altar (discussed below), some scholars have concluded that these "foods which cannot strengthen the heart" must refer to Jewish sacrificial meals.[23] In this interpretation, the author's point would be that the Levitical sacrifices, which do not effectively strengthen the audience's hearts, should be viewed as "strange teachings" and therefore rejected. If this interpretation is correct, it would suggest a direct instruction to reject the Levitical regulations regarding meals, as the strength of the heart is now found "by grace." As a result, Sinai's revelation regarding the law and the Levitical priesthood is to be considered "strange" and, by implication, irrelevant for the audience under the new covenant.

However, while much has been written on these issues,[24] no such connection is made by the author. Indeed, the author does link the audience to the Levitical priests by comparing their access to the altar. Unlike the Levitical priests, who, though within the tent, were not allowed to eat from the altar, the audience is invited to partake.[25] But why is this the case? The author explains that the Levitical priests could not eat from the altar because "the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp" (13:11). Normally, Levitical priests could eat of the sacrifices which they offered in the tabernacle (Lev 7:5–6), save the sacrifices offered on a particular

[23] For example, Lane 1991b, 532.

[24] For an analysis of this verse, see Attridge 1989, 394–96; Lane 1991b, 530–37; Ellingworth 1993, 705–708; Cockerill 2012, 692–96.

[25] Mitchell 2007, 299.

day, namely, the Day of Atonement. On that day, both the designated bull and goat were taken outside the camp and burned entirely (Lev 16:27),[26] and priests had no authority to eat of that sacrifice.[27] It seems then that the point the author makes is that the Levitical priests could not eat from the altar because the entire sacrifice was consumed outside the camp. In contrast, the audience is invited to eat from the altar precisely because they are called to go outside the camp, where the sin offering was taken (13:12–14).[28]

There, the audience has (ἔχομεν) an altar from which they can eat. Notably, most instances where the author uses the first-person plural form of ἔχω (ἔχομεν) refer to something the audience already possesses in the heavenly realm: they have a high priest (ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα [4:15; 8:1]), an anchor (ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν [6:19]), a city they await (οὐ ἔχομεν ὧδε μένουσαν πόλιν ἀλλὰ τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐπιζητοῦμεν [13:14]), and now an altar.[29] And since the reference to eating from the altar in 13:10 is connected to the earlier warning against being carried away by strange teachings in 13:9,[30] then the altar, in contrast to erroneous food regulations, is the means by which the community's hearts are strengthened by grace. In other words, having access to the altar and partaking of it are precisely how the audience finds strength.

This idea recalls passages in Hebrews where the author describes how the audience receives grace and strength by approaching Jesus in the inner shrine (4:16). Thus, whether the

[26] "The bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp; their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be consumed in fire" (Lev 16:27).

[27] For a helpful discussion of this subject, see Mitchell 2007, 299. He draws careful attention to the question of whether the sacrifice in the author's mind is in fact the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement.

[28] As Lane helpfully outlines the author's logic, "Briefly, the emphatic assertion in v 10*a*, 'We have an altar,' is the determining thesis, which is elaborated and established in vv 11–12. The declaration is sharpened by the antithesis, 'We have … they have not.' The second term of the antithesis is substantiated through a reference to the Day of Atonement in v 11. The provision for the disposal of the carcasses of the sacrificed animals outside the camp on that solemn day (v 11*b*) is then applied in v 12 to Jesus who experienced death outside the city gate. This allusion to the event of the cross serves as the substantiation for the thesis, 'we have an altar,' in v 10*a*" (1991b, 537).

[29] The only other occurrence of ἔχομεν, besides the ones mentioned above, is found in 13:18, where the author requests the audience to pray for them (presumably referring back to the mention of leaders in 13:17), so that they "may all have a clear conscience" (ὅτι καλὴν συνείδησιν ἔχομεν).

[30] See, for example, discussion in deSilva 2000, 498.

altar is interpreted as a heavenly altar, the cross, or the Eucharist, the key point is that in all three options, the altar is intimately connected to Jesus, as Jesus himself is intrinsically linked to the altar.[31] Therefore, we can affirm that possessing an altar is synonymous with having access to the means by which one's heart is strengthened. Following the trajectory of Hebrews, the means of strength are found by approaching Jesus, who, evidently, is present in the inner shrine.

7.2.2. Bearing Jesus' Abuse in Heb 13:12–14

> Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come (διὸ καὶ Ἰησοῦς, ἵνα ἁγιάσῃ διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος τὸν λαόν, ἔξω τῆς πύλης ἔπαθεν. τοίνυν ἐξερχώμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν αὐτοῦ φέροντες· οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ὧδε μένουσαν πόλιν ἀλλὰ τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐπιζητοῦμεν [13:12–14]).

A central question raised by this text is: from where exactly are the audience coming out, and what is the place outside the camp and city? Some have interpreted this as shorthand for the author encouraging the audience to abandon their old Jewish practices. In this view, leaving Judaism, symbolised by the camp, in favour of Christianity, symbolised as the place outside the camp, signifies the shift from the old covenant to the new.[32] Another interpretation suggests that the camp and city refer to a social order that rejects Christ, implying that the audience is to leave behind the societal structures that oppose their Christian beliefs.[33]

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[31] In brief, some interpret the altar as a heavenly one, suggesting that the audience can partake of it to the extent that they are engaged in the heavenly realm (e.g., Williamson 1975, 308). Others view the altar as symbolic of the cross, where Jesus suffered and died (e.g., Lane 1991b, 540). After all, the author does invite the audience to step outside the gates to the place where Jesus endured suffering (13:12). Another interpretation is that the altar refers to the Christian practice of the Eucharist, where, through the bread and wine, the audience partakes of the altar (e.g., Andriessen 1972; Swetnam 1989). For a helpful discussion on the main views of this "altar" in Heb 13:10, see Peeler 2024, 413–14.

[32] Hanson 1982; Young 2002.

[33] Cockerill 2012, 702–703.

However, it is important to keep in mind that this is not the first time the author speaks of a city. In Heb 11, Abraham is said to have acted in faith because he looked forward to "the city (πόλις) that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (11:10).[34] Furthermore, those who, like Abraham, died in faith without receiving the promises but desired "a better country" (11:16), are promised that "God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city (πόλις) for them" (11:16). The author mentions πόλις again in 12:22, where the audience is said to have arrived "to the city (πόλις) of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering." These references to "city" in Hebrews make it clear that, for the author, there is a city built by God—the heavenly Jerusalem—which the audience's forefathers longed for in faith. This heavenly city is not like any earthly city, which is temporary (13:14), but is eternal and unchanging. Therefore, as already discussed in detail, while the author now invites the audience to go outside the camp to the place where Jesus suffered (13:12) and bore abuse (13:13), outside the camp also represents the location of the lasting, heavenly city, where Jesus serves as the audience's high priest.[35]

One key question that arises is how the author invites the audience to both bear the abuse of Christ (13:13) and receive the lasting city (13:14) in the same place outside the camp. Can "outside the gate" refer to the heavenly realm, given that it is also the place where Jesus suffered? This could suggest that suffering and reproach occur in the heavenly realm, which

[34] For a study on the portrayal of Abraham's faith in Hebrews, see Bockmuehl 2009.

[35] While I have already explored Hebrews' invitation to the audience to approach Jesus, who is found within the inner shrine of the heavenly tabernacle, the word used here is not προσέρχομαι but ἐξέρχομαι. The author employs this term five times: here, in reference to going outside the city (13:12); in 3:16, to describe Israel leaving Egypt; in 7:5, to refer to the Levites coming from Abraham's loins; and twice in 11:8, to describe Abraham's departure from his homeland to a place he would inherit by faith. While the imagery here suggests going outside, it ultimately describes an encounter with Jesus. In other words, to go outside the city is to go to Jesus (πρὸς αὐτόν [13:12]). As I will argue, the act of going outside the camp to meet Jesus is not distinct from approaching him in the heavenly realm. Thus, the use of ἐξέρχομαι instead of προσέρχομαι does not indicate two separate locations for encountering Jesus but instead conveys the same destination. As Ellingworth concludes, "The author speaks positively of its goal as Jesus; Jesus, who is undoubtedly now located in heaven (12:24), but accessible to the readers in worship (v. 15), not distant from them, even metaphorically, in time or space" (1993, 717).

might seem contradictory. As a result, some scholars argue that the camp/city must refer to something other than the heavenly realm.[36]

However, the author does not differentiate between finding Jesus in the inner shrine and finding him outside the gates. The invitation is to encounter Jesus as the sacrificial offering for sins—an offering that, while physically burned outside the camp, had its blood brought into the temple's inner shrine, where it was sprinkled on the mercy seat (Lev 16:14–16). For the author, the entire process of the sin offering forms a unified act. As Johnson explains, "If Jesus had acted out a ritual imitation of the ancient cult, his blood would have been spilled in the temple and his body burned outside the gate. But here it is all one act: his despised rejection and death outside the gate is itself an entering into the heavenly sanctuary (through the veil of his flesh), and an eternal offering for the sanctification of the people."[37] In other words, for the author, there is no scenario in which Jesus, having died, would not have entered the inner shrine to complete the sacrifice for sins. Therefore, the invitation to bear the abuse Jesus endured is not separate from the promise of the lasting city (13:14)—the entrance into the heavenly realm—because both are presented together as part of the benefits of leaving the camp/city to partake of the altar found outside the gates.[38]

In encouraging the audience to bear the reproach of Christ, the author undoubtedly has in mind a willingness to endure hardship for Christ's sake. This call entails being prepared to suffer and endure abuse, much as Jesus did outside Jerusalem at his crucifixion.[39] However, this does not diminish the fact that to meet Jesus in Hebrews is to encounter him in his exalted

[36] Cockerill 2012, 701–02.

[37] Johnson 2012, 348–49.

[38] As Woo concludes, "How can the actual event of Jesus' death on the cross correspond to the heavenly altar that exists in the outer tabernacle? … In strict earthly geographical terms, the self-sacrifice of Christ took place on the altar of the cross. However, its ritual reference took place in the heavenly outer tabernacle where the ritual effects of that sacrifice went into effect. There is a corresponding analogy with the Levitical priests and the Yom Kippur typology of the Old Testament. The priestly act of the high priest took place locally in the Holy of Holies" (2024, 141–42).

[39] Attridge 1989, 399.

place within the heavenly tabernacle. Meeting Jesus as he suffered outside the camp is, in itself, a step toward approaching God in the heavenly inner shrine. This aligns with the author's statement in 13:12, that Jesus suffered outside the city "to sanctify the people by his own blood." As previously noted, throughout Hebrews, the language of sanctification (ἁγιάζω) is closely connected with being made worthy to approach God in worship (2:10–11; 9:13–14; 10:10, 14, 29; c.f., Exod 19:10).[40] Jesus' death, therefore, is intrinsically linked to the process of making people worthy to approach God and worship him. Consequently, the author then elaborates on the audience's ability to worship and offer sacrifices through Jesus (13:15–16).

If the above analysis is correct, then Heb 13:12–14 reveals another way the audience interacts with the heavenly realm: by going outside the camp to encounter Jesus and bearing the abuse he endured (13:13).[41] While, as already mentioned, some scholars raise concerns about whether going outside the camp can be equated with entering the heavenly realm, especially since this is the place where suffering and abuse occur, I contend that the author does not draw such a distinction. To encounter Jesus in Hebrews is to meet him as he is found in the heavenly inner shrine. The conflation of the place of Jesus' death with the place where the audience receives the heavenly city does not imply that suffering and abuse exist in heaven. Instead, encountering Jesus means finding him both as the high priest who offers the sacrifice for sins within the heavenly inner shrine and as the sacrifice whose blood sanctifies his people.

[40] As Lane concludes, "The writer alludes to the cross in terms of the sacrificial offerings on the Day of Atonement, on his assumption that Lev 16 gives a reliable preview of its antitype. The parallelism is particularly instructive: Jesus' death on Golgotha corresponds to the removal of the bodies outside the camp. The work of redemption, however, expressed as the sanctifying of the people by Jesus' blood, corresponds to the bringing of the blood of the sacrifices into the Most Holy Place. Jesus in his death on the cross opened up for others access to God, which they themselves and the old Levitical arrangement could not provide. He suffered death as their representative ἵνα ἁγιάσῃ διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος τὸν λαόν" (1991b, 541).

[41] At this point, a potential point of contact emerges between Hebrews and the narrative of Sinai. Ellingworth (1993, 714) sees the reference of going "outside the camp" (13:11) as a typological reference to the time when Joshua (Ἰησοῦς) remained in the tabernacle, which was found outside the camp, while Moses met with the rest of the congregation inside the camp: "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun (Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Ναυη), would not leave the tent (οὐκ ἐξεπορεύετο ἐκ τῆς σκηνῆς)" (Exod 33:11).

As the audience bears the burden of Jesus' death—a concept that can be compared with other NT instructions on bearing one's cross—they are, in fact, meeting with Jesus. Though this might initially appear to be an action tied to the earthly realm, it involves participation in a heavenly dimension, since bearing the burden is equated with going out to encounter Jesus. In other words, the audience ascends into the heavenly realm by bearing the burden of confessing a crucified Messiah.[42]

7.2.3. Offering a Sacrifice of Praise in Heb 13:15–16

> Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (δι' αὐτοῦ οὖν ἀναφέρωμεν θυσίαν αἰνέσεως διὰ παντὸς τῷ θεῷ, τοῦτ' ἔστιν καρπὸν χειλέων ὁμολογούντων τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ. τῆς δὲ εὐποιΐας καὶ κοινωνίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε· τοιαύταις γὰρ θυσίαις εὐαρεστεῖται ὁ θεός [13:15–16]).

While the instructions to (1) confess his name,[43] (2) do good, and (3) share what you have may seem like practical, earthly actions disconnected from the heavenly realm, it is precisely through them that the audience offers sacrifices pleasing to God. This raises the question: where are these sacrifices presented? Are the audience's sacrifices of praise offered in heaven or on earth? On one level, they take place on earth, where the individuals performing them are located. From this perspective, the offerings might appear to have no specific destination, potentially suggesting no need for a tabernacle.[44] Yet this seems unlikely, particularly in light

[42] At this point, it could be argued that, by leaving the city, the audience is preparing to escape the impending shaking and destruction of the earth, much like Rahab, who was spared from death in the city (11:31) by going "outside the camp" (Josh 6:23) and was saved. For an analogy between the audience going "outside the camp" and Rahab going "outside the camp," see Mosser 2009.

[43] It is worth pointing out that the author equates this offering of praise with "lips that confess his name," a phrase that elsewhere in the NT denotes faith in Christ (e.g., Rom 10:9–10); see Mitchell 2007, 301.

[44] Much has been discussed regarding whether this reflects the author's reinterpretation of the temple cult, encouraging the audience to find alternative ways to carry out what were once priestly duties within the temple; see, for example, Gelardini 2005. This could be due to the temple's destruction or the author's desire for the community to refrain from engaging in the temple cult. Rather than physically offering sacrifices in the temple, the audience now offers sacrifices through praise and acts of kindness. Whether or not this view is correct, my contribution lays on noting the way the author speaks of the audience in terms of priestly activities.

of the author's emphasis on the heavenly tabernacle where the high priest serves and into which the audience is invited. It is far more reasonable to conclude that the audience's sacrifices of praise are directed toward this heavenly sanctuary.

If this assessment is correct, then the audience's actions are simultaneously oriented toward and integrated into the worship of the heavenly sanctuary, while also carrying immediate earthly implications. Whenever they do good, share, and confess God's name, they are not merely offering sacrifices of praise on earth; they are offering them in the heavenly inner shrine, precisely the place they are invited to enter. In other words, if the audience is called to enter the inner shrine and offer sacrifices, the most coherent reading is that these two actions occur together. It is not that they first offer sacrifices outside the heavenly tabernacle and only afterward are invited to enter, but that their acts of praise and goodness are themselves part of their participation in its worship.

7.2.4. Summary

The primary aim of this section has been to provide an overview of how the author of Hebrews envisions the audience as engaging in both earthly and heavenly activities. My focus has been to demonstrate that the instructions in Heb 13:9–16, though seemingly directed toward earthly actions, also have heavenly implications. Specifically, I argued that by partaking of the altar (13:10), bearing the abuse of Jesus outside the camp (13:13–15), and offering sacrifices of praise (13:15–16), the audience participates in these activities within the heavenly realm, since each action points to encountering Jesus in the heavenly inner shrine. In this way, these practices allow the audience to function in the heavenly sphere, even while living on earth.

7.3. Sinai and the Liminal Community

Before bringing this chapter to a close, it is necessary to revisit the narrative of Sinai and its relation to the audience's experience of liminality. Throughout this study, I have argued that the audience of Hebrews is portrayed as standing at the foot of a mountain to which their mediator has brought them, much like the generation of Israel who left Egypt did at Sinai. And just as Moses ascended Sinai to intercede for Israel, Jesus has ascended into heaven to intercede on the audience's behalf. Yet one crucial element has changed between these two moments. Although both communities are called to faithfulness—Israel tragically failing to remain faithful and therefore not entering the promised rest—the audience of Hebrews, unlike that wilderness generation, is invited to ascend all the way into the heavenly realm, even into the heavenly inner shrine, the very place that only Moses could enter in the Sinai narrative.

What has changed? Two developments, central to my argument, explain this transformation. First, the sensory and terrifying barriers that prevented Israel from ascending—the clouds, fire, and sounds that marked Sinai as unapproachable—are now removed. And second, the audience has received a purification capable of granting access to the heavenly sanctuary, a purification unavailable at Sinai. In Hebrews' imagination, the community is therefore permitted to follow in the footsteps of both Moses and Jesus into the heavenly realm.

At the same time, however, they remain the waiting people of God. Just as Israel waited for Moses to return from the mountain, so the audience awaits the return of their intercessor (9:28).[45] Here the earlier illustration of an immersive video game may again prove helpful. As

[45] By using the Sinai narrative as a backdrop, the author creates an image where the audience is both waiting at the foot of the mountain and being invited to ascend it. The audience is like Israel, waiting for their intercessor—just as Israel waited for Moses to descend and return from Sinai—but they are also invited to follow Moses and Jesus in ascending the mountain. This duality addresses the tension at the heart of the question: how can people live in two realms at once? One way of addressing this tension is to recognise that the author envisions the audience living in a state of liminality, similar to Moses' experience atop Sinai. Moses was simultaneously on earth and in heaven. Likewise, the people of Israel were in a liminal state, neither in Egypt nor in Canaan, nor atop Sinai. As Imes aptly concludes, "Sinai is part of their liminal experience… In the wilderness of Sinai they are free from the mind-numbing distractions of Egypt and Canaan. In their isolation, they can hear the voice of God. Having lost their old identity, they are ready to become what they are meant to be" (2019, 18–19). Thus, it

described above, a player, fully absorbed in the virtual world, nevertheless continues to exist physically in the ordinary world, affected by both simultaneously. Likewise, Hebrews envisions its audience as living on earth while being genuinely shaped by and engaged with the heavenly realm. Yet this analogy also opens a further dimension: in Hebrews, the goal is not simply to navigate two overlapping realms indefinitely. The hope is that Jesus, the central figure of the heavenly world, will one day return and appear visibly within the earthly one. It is as though the main character of the game had promised to step out of the screen and stand before the player. The audience perceives Jesus now (c.f., 2:9; 12:2), but the experience is mediated by the distinction of the earthly and heavenly realms. When Jesus returns, that separation—if indeed it can be called mere distance—will collapse. In other words, the audience can approach Jesus now, but they are still bound to the realm which Jesus left at his ascension and will re-enter at his return. The ongoing separation, therefore, is not primarily about spatial distance but about realmic distinction.[46]

This framework helps explain how the audience can be portrayed as already entering the heavenly realm while also remaining a community waiting below for their mediator to come back. Their present experience is not the fulfilment of their hope. One day—as the author has insisted and we have discussed above—heaven and earth will undergo a cosmic shaking (12:25–29), and Jesus will return to them. Only then will the community experience the full realisation of what has been promised.

Speculating on the shape of this final reality, one might imagine it (continuing the analogy) as the moment when the game-world and the player's physical world merge into one,

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would appear, that just as Moses lived in two places at once, so too did the people of Israel as they waited at the foot of Sinai.

[46] Consequently, I slightly push back against Moore's view, which understands the audience as able to see Jesus already but only at a distance (2019, 207). The author seems to conceive of the separation between Jesus and the audience—a separation previously established—not in terms of a simple spatial gap but in terms of a realmic distinction between the heavenly and earthly spheres. These two realms are fundamentally distinct, yet they are not entirely spatially separate.

when heaven and earth are united at the return of Christ. Yet from the perspective of Hebrews, such a vision remains future. For now, the audience continues to inhabit the liminal space between realms: the purified—already endowed with the capacity to enter the heavenly realm—but still waiting people of God.

7.4. Conclusion

How, then, does the audience ascend into heaven? This chapter has only begun to address this question. As noted at the beginning, various views exist regarding how one ascends to heaven: is it through prayer? Worship? Partaking of the Eucharist? Is through a mystical experience or in a spiritual way? I have not taken a stance on which of these views best explains the ascent, as my interest lies in what they all have in common, namely, that people can ascend to heaven even while alive on earth. Building upon this shared conclusion, I surveyed Heb 13:8–16, a concise unit of thought, to examine the premise of how the community can exist in two realms at once. In doing so, I concluded that the author envisions the audience as living both on earth and in heaven simultaneously. Through having an altar, going outside the camp, and offering sacrifices of praise, the audience engages in activities that have both earthly and, crucially, heavenly implications. Returning to the central focus of this study, the purpose of this chapter has been to explore how the audience, while waiting for Jesus to return, is also participating in the realities of the heavenly realm. The audience is encouraged to go outside the camp, but from the author's perspective, they are still living in the camp. The sacrifices of praise they offer, as acts of worship, do not require them to die to perform them; rather, they can be offered within the heavenly tabernacle by mortals living on earth. Similarly, the altar that strengthens their hearts is accessible to them while they are still living on earth. In other words, the author envisions the audience as engaging with heavenly realities, while still awaiting the moment when Jesus will return to them (9:28). They ascend, yet wait simultaneously.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

What is the big idea of this study? In short, I have proposed a reappraisal of the role of Sinai in the Epistle to the Hebrews, arguing that the narrative of Israel's encampment at the mountain functions not as a discarded relic of the old covenant but as a constructive theological framework within the epistle's structure and exhortation. Traditionally overshadowed by the dominant paradigm of wilderness journeying—from Egypt to Canaan—the Sinai episode has often been interpreted negatively, especially in contrast with the imagery of Zion in Heb 12:18–24. However, by drawing attention to the pivotal encounter at Sinai within the broader narrative of Israel's liberation from Egypt, this study has argued that Hebrews, rather than portraying its audience as a wandering people, depicts them as a waiting people: positioned, as it were, at the foot of a mountain, called to remain faithful while their mediator, Jesus, ascends to minister in the heavenly tabernacle. This reframing opens fresh interpretive possibilities: it invites a more nuanced reading of the Torah's enduring relevance, affirms the epistle's dialogical relationship with Second Temple Jewish literature, and challenges supersessionist readings by demonstrating that Hebrews does not repudiate the revelation at Sinai, but rather builds upon it to articulate its high priestly and eschatological vision.

8.1. Review

Having now reached the conclusion of this study, it is helpful to step back and trace the argument as it unfolded chapter by chapter. This not only serves to clarify the progression of thought but also reaffirms how each stage of the analysis contributed to the broader thesis: that the author of Hebrews uses the Sinai narrative as a theological and literary framework to portray the audience as a community awaiting the return of their heavenly intercessor. By revisiting each chapter in sequence, I aim to draw out the key insights and show how they build

towards the final claim that the audience, like Israel at Sinai, stands in a liminal space: already addressed by divine revelation, not yet fully entered into rest, yet now invited to ascend.

Chapter 1

This introductory chapter reassesses a long-standing interpretive tradition in Hebrews scholarship by arguing that the epistle's engagement with the Sinai narrative has been significantly underappreciated. Traditionally, scholars have interpreted Hebrews through the lens of wilderness wandering, following Käsemann's influential reading that aligns the audience of Hebrews with Israel's pilgrimage from Egypt to Canaan. Within this framework, Sinai has typically been cast in a negative or transitional light, an event that is to be surpassed or left behind in favour of Zion. Challenging this consensus, the chapter begins by pointing to the theological significance of Sinai in the Exodus narrative itself, stressing that the Israelites were not just en route to the Promised Land but were first brought to the mountain of God for covenantal encounter and instruction. This serves as a conceptual springboard for re-examining the potential significance of Sinai within Hebrews.

In the history of interpretation section, the chapter surveys dominant Christian readings throughout patristic, medieval, and modern eras, noting how writers have often contrasted Sinai (as emblematic of fear, judgment, and obsolescence) with Zion (as symbolic of the new covenant's blessings). However, a growing body of scholarship has begun to nuance this binary, suggesting that Sinai is not discarded but recontextualised in Hebrews. In this regard, the chapter identifies a significant gap in this conversation: while several scholars have examined Heb 12:18–29 as the epistle's climactic Sinai reference, few have traced the presence and function of Sinai throughout the whole epistle.

Finally, drawing on the work of Moffitt and others, I suggest that Hebrews should be read not as a narrative about the wandering people of God but as a narrative about a waiting

people. Just as Israel waited at Sinai while Moses ascended the mountain, so the audience of Hebrews is exhorted to remain faithful while Jesus ministers in the heavenly sanctuary.

Chapter 2

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that the narrative of Sinai is in fact alluded to much earlier in the epistle than only in Heb 12:18–22. The chapter argues that the first explicit reference to Sinai—"the message declared by angels" (2:2)—is not an incidental remark but a foundational component of the author's early rhetorical and theological strategy.

The chapter unfolds in two main sections: first, I analyse the theological weight of Heb 2:2 in Hebrews' opening chapters. This section argues that the allusion to Sinai is intricately tied to the author's opening discussion of the Son's superiority over angels. By portraying angels as "ministering spirits" who served Israel at Sinai (1:14; 2:2), the author sets up an *a fortiori* argument: if the message declared by angels carried weight and disobedience led to judgment, how much more weight does the Son's message carry, given his superior status? The contrast between the angelic service at Sinai and the Son's priestly work in the heavenly tabernacle anticipates the broader thematic movement of the epistle, including the later comparison between Moses and Jesus in Heb 3.

The second section explores the theological geography implicit in Hebrews' argument, noting that both Sinai and Zion function in Second Temple Jewish literature as *axis mundi*, that is, points where heaven and earth meet. The author draws on this conceptual world, depicting Jesus not simply as a superior figure to Moses, but also as one who enables his followers to access the same heavenly realm he has entered. This connection is particularly evident in Heb 2:10, where the author speaks of Jesus as the ἀρχηγός ("pioneer") who leads "many children to glory," not merely after death, but in a realised eschatological sense that anticipates future fullness while affirming present participation.

The chapter also introduces a comparative literary frame, engaging Najman's work on "Mosaic Discourse." While Hebrews does not conform neatly to this genre—particularly because it attributes revelation not to Moses but to the Son—it does exhibit several key characteristics: (1) continuity with earlier revelation, (2) emphasis on divine speech, and (3) a re-presentation of Sinai as a framework for ongoing revelation. This suggests that Hebrews' use of the Sinai narrative resonates with Second Temple Jewish literary practices, even if it departs from them in crucial Christological ways.

Chapter 3

Chapter three develops the argument that Heb 3:1–4:13 must be read not merely as a wilderness typology in which the audience is likened to the generation of Israel traveling toward Canaan, but as a recasting of the Sinai narrative. Drawing attention to the author's comparison between Moses and Jesus in 3:1–6, the chapter contends that the primary point of analogy lies in their shared roles as divinely commissioned intercessors who ascend into the presence of God on behalf of those they have liberated. Moses is portrayed as the faithful servant who, after leading Israel out of Egypt, ascended Sinai to enter the divine presence and intercede for his people. In parallel, Jesus, described as both apostle and high priest, is presented as the one who has delivered his "brothers" from slavery and has now entered the heavenly tabernacle to intercede for them (c.f., 2:10–18; 7:25; 9:24–28). This reconfiguration reframes the epistle's spatial and theological logic: both Sinai and Zion function as cosmic mountains—places where heaven and earth intersect—and both intercessors ascend not simply a geographical elevation, but into the heavenly realm itself.

The chapter further argues that, for the author of Hebrews, Sinai and Zion are not antithetical poles representing Judaism and Christianity, but rather two distinct modes of access to the same divine destination. Drawing on Exod 19:13 LXX and Second Temple Jewish

traditions, the chapter shows how Moses' ascent was accompanied by barriers—fire, darkness, trumpet blasts—that restricted the people's access. In contrast, Hebrews envisions these barriers as lifted at Zion (12:22–24), thereby inviting the entire community—not just their mediator—to ascend into the heavenly sanctuary.

This chapter, then, contributes to the study's overarching claim by proposing that Hebrews does not depict its audience as merely wandering or passively waiting, but as a people brought to the foot of a mountain and summoned to ascend. Their situation parallels, yet exceeds, that of Israel at Sinai. Whereas the Israelites remained below, forbidden to draw near, the audience now has the privilege to follow their intercessor into the heavenly holy of holies. In this light, Hebrews' theology of ascent—framed through the figure of Moses, recast through Jesus, and actualised in the experience of the community—repositions the Sinai narrative as an enduring and constructive framework. The audience is not called to depart from the mountain as Israel once did, but to ascend it, and to enter the rest that remains open to the people of God (4:9). In doing so, Chapter 3 reinforces the broader claim that Sinai is not superseded but fulfilled in the ascent of Zion, where Moses once stood alone and where, now, the entire community of faith is welcomed.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 develops the argument that the audience of Hebrews should not only be understood as the wandering, but as the waiting people of God, invited, even now, to enter the heavenly tabernacle. Engaging with Second Temple traditions, the chapter contends that the author envisions Jesus' ascension into the heavenly holy of holies not as an isolated action, but as an act performed "on behalf of" a people now summoned to follow. Yet, this ascension does not invalidate the audience's status as waiting for the return of their intercessor.

This chapter examines three key texts (4:16; 6:19–20; 10:19–20), all of which present direct access into the heavenly sanctuary, not as an eschatological hope reserved for the afterlife, but as a present reality grounded in Jesus' high priesthood. Far from being passive recipients of future promises, the audience is depicted as priestly participants, namely, those who, through Christ, are already entering the inner sanctuary that Moses once glimpsed atop Sinai. Building upon the Sinai narrative, in which Moses alone was consecrated to ascend into the divine presence, Hebrews reimagines this ascent as something now extended to the entire covenant community. Through lexical and contextual analysis of τελειόω and προσέρχομαι, the chapter demonstrates that Hebrews recasts "perfection" not merely as moral sanctity or eschatological glorification, but as the ability to enter the heavenly tabernacle. Like Moses, but through Jesus, the community is made perfect, that is, sanctified and purified to approach God within the heavenly inner shrine.

Chapter 5

The arguments developed in Chapter 5 hold considerable significance for the overarching thesis of this study. By demonstrating that Hebrews does not invalidate the Sinai event or dismiss the Torah, but rather recontextualises them within a dual-realm cosmology, this chapter challenges a dominant interpretive tradition that views Sinai as merely a negative foil. Instead, Hebrews presents a complex yet coherent vision in which the Levitical priesthood and Torah retain their validity within the earthly realm, while the Son's priesthood and the new covenant provide access to heavenly realities. This dual framework, far from undermining the former, invites the audience to live faithfully within a tension: residing on earth under Torah, yet drawn upward toward the heavenly sanctuary where Christ now ministers.

This reading also recasts the exhortations found throughout the epistle. Rather than urging the audience to abandon Sinai or Judaism, the warnings in Hebrews address a deeper

existential risk: the failure to persevere in faith while awaiting the return of the heavenly intercessor. The parallel drawn between the wilderness generation and the current community does not rest on their religious system but on their response to divine revelation. Thus, the problem is not Torah, but unbelief; not covenantal law, but disobedience. Sinai is not a shadowy past to be rejected but a narrative frame through which the audience is encouraged to envision their own posture of faithful waiting, only this time not at the base of the mountain, but while ascending in faith. As a result, rather than reading Hebrews as advocating a replacement or abrogation of Torah and the first covenant, the epistle invites its audience to understand themselves as inhabiting both the earthly and heavenly realms simultaneously.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 argues that the comparison between Sinai and Zion in Heb 12:18–24 should not be read as a sharp disjunction between Judaism and Christianity, or as a rejection of Sinai and its covenant. Instead, I propose that the passage is best understood as an *a fortiori* argument. The author does not dismiss Sinai but recalls it as a site of legitimate and weighty divine revelation, one that remains theologically significant even for a community now oriented toward Zion.

While the author's description of Sinai (12:18–21) may initially seem harsh or negative, closer attention reveals that it closely mirrors the language and imagery of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Far from constructing a caricature of Sinai, the author draws from the Pentateuch itself, employing established motifs of divine encounter—fire, darkness, and trembling—to frame the audience's situation. As such, rather than inventing a contrast between a failed Judaism and a triumphant Christianity, Hebrews is aligning with Second Temple Jewish traditions that viewed Sinai and Zion as part of the same eschatological journey. Zion fulfils what Sinai set in motion. Drawing from Second Temple texts like *Jubilees* and the Qumran scrolls, I show that the transition from Sinai to Zion was often imagined not as a

rejection of Torah, but as its culmination. In these traditions, Zion is the promised future made possible by a continued commitment to the law received at Sinai. Hebrews, I argue, participates in this same framework. The audience's arrival at Zion does not negate the revelation at Sinai but builds upon it, now fulfilled in the heavenly realm where Jesus ministers as high priest.

The central contribution of this chapter, then, is to reframe the Sinai–Zion comparison in Hebrews not as a theological rupture but as a progression within a unified covenantal narrative. This reading strengthens the coherence of the epistle's rhetorical strategy, especially the warning in 12:25–29. The urgency of listening to the voice from heaven depends on the enduring seriousness of the voice that once spoke from earth. That argument loses its force if Sinai is rendered irrelevant. Instead, Hebrews portrays both mountains as authentic moments of divine encounter, each demanding a response of faith and obedience.

Chapter 7

This final chapter takes up an elusive question left unanswered in the earlier chapters: how, according to Hebrews, does one live in both the heavenly and earthly realm simultaneously? Drawing on the imagery and logic developed throughout the epistle—and particularly on the Sinai motif that undergirds the author's presentation—I argue that the final chapter of Hebrews, particularly 13:8–16, offers a concrete window into how this ascent is envisioned. What emerges is a vision in which the audience is invited to participate in heavenly realities through practices that, while located on earth, are framed as connected to the heavenly tabernacle.

By analysing the references to possessing an altar (13:10), going outside the camp to meet Jesus (13:12–14), and offering sacrifices of praise (13:15–16), I argue that these instructions are more than ethical exhortations or symbolic gestures: they are actions that have real heavenly consequences. Each is rooted in the author's insistence that Jesus continues to serve as high priest in the heavenly realm, and that the community, by remaining faithful to

him and confessing his name, can participate in that same realm even now. These practices—confession, endurance, mutual care—allow the audience to function simultaneously within both earthly and heavenly domains.

The broader contribution of this chapter to the thesis is to show that Hebrews does not imagine its audience as passive recipients of heavenly benefits, nor as future participants in a realm that is only accessible after death. Rather, they are already participating—actively and meaningfully—in the worship of the heavenly tabernacle. They live, in other words, in a state of overlap between the realms, awaiting the return of Jesus (9:28) even as they engage the world in ways that are grounded in their heavenly citizenship (12:22–24; 13:14).

Chapter 7, then, confirms and extends one of the central arguments of the study: that Hebrews invites the community to inhabit the present moment as a form of liminality, patterned after the generation of Israel set free from Egypt, who were stationed at the foot of mount Sinai, waiting for Moses to return. The author constructs a world in which the audience, like Israel before them, waits at the base of the mountain and yet is also beckoned upward. Just as Moses ascended Sinai and entered into God's presence on behalf of the people, so Jesus, the greater intercessor, has gone before them into the heavenly sanctuary. And just as Moses returned, so too will Jesus come again. But while they wait, the people are not idle. They worship, they confess, they share, and in so doing, they participate in the very realm where Jesus ministers on their behalf.

8.2. Initial Question Revisited

At the outset of this study, I posed a central question: what is the role and function of Sinai in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and how might it shape our understanding of the audience's identity and experience? This question was grounded in the observation that, while the Sinai narrative plays a relatively minor role in much of the scholarship on Hebrews, its appearance in 12:18–

21 stands out with dramatic force. I asked whether this late reference was merely rhetorical flair, or whether it revealed a deeper theological and literary logic that permeates the epistle. Over the course of this study, I have argued that the allusion to Sinai is not incidental. Rather, it offers a vital framework through which the audience's relationship to God, to their past, and to their future is to be understood. Far from representing a superseded covenant or a failed system, Sinai serves in Hebrews as a symbol of legitimate and enduring revelation. That revelation now undergirds the urgency of the Son's message, and so the audience's situation mirrors Israel's at the foot of the mountain: waiting, expectant, and called to remain faithful while their intercessor is in the heavenly realm. In short, by tracing the presence and echoes of Sinai across the epistle—not only in 12:18–21 but also in Hebrews' legal reasoning, spatial metaphors, priestly logic, and eschatological imagery—I have shown that Sinai is not a passing detail but a significant narrative framework.

8.3. Implications for Further Study

Several avenues for further exploration remain, both within Hebrews and beyond it. First, the reception of Sinai in Jewish apocalyptic literature presents a rich area for comparative analysis. While I have engaged with some texts, such as *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *2 Baruch*, and various Qumran writings, a more comprehensive exploration of these themes in relation to Hebrews could help position the epistle more firmly within a particular stream of Second Temple Jewish thought. This approach could also shed light on how Hebrews employs the imagery of Sinai both to affirm continuity with the past and to advocate for a new mode of covenantal participation, focused on the heavenly tabernacle. A deeper analysis of Sinai in both Hebrews and these Jewish texts would offer alternate, yet overlapping, portrayals of Sinai, often intertwining the mountain motif with eschatological hopes, heavenly ascent, and divine revelation.

Second, this study has largely focused on Hebrews' internal coherence and its intertextual dialogue with the Hebrew Bible and select Second Temple Jewish texts. Future work could pursue a more extensive comparison of Hebrews with other early Christian writings, especially those that engage Sinai either directly or indirectly. For example, how does Hebrews' view of Sinai compare with the strong contrast drawn in texts like Paul's allegory in Gal 4:24–26?[1] Or how might it dialogue with the allusions to Sinai in early Christian liturgical or homiletic material, including the Apostolic Fathers or early Christian catechetical instructions? These kinds of comparative studies could help further clarify the diversity of Sinai's function in early Christian theology and shed light on the theological trajectories that followed.

Third, further attention might be given to the liturgical, ecclesial, and ethical implications of the claim—developed especially in chapters six and seven of this study—that the community addressed in Hebrews is portrayed as having priestly status and participating in heavenly worship while still on earth. If, as argued, the audience is positioned in a liminal state—still encamped at Sinai and yet already ascending the mountain—what are the implications of this vision for understanding early Christian identity, ritual practice, and communal self-understanding? Related studies might consider how such a priestly model in Hebrews intersects with or departs from emerging Christian understandings of eucharist, suffering, intercession, and ecclesial leadership.

Finally, as noted in the previous section on early Christian reception, further study is needed to examine the long-term influence of Hebrews' portrayal of Sinai. What role did Hebrews play in shaping patristic or later Christian interpretations of Sinai? To what extent did

[1] "Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother" (Gal 4:24–26).

its language and imagery contribute to or resist emerging trends toward supersessionism? These questions have not been addressed in this study, but the analysis offered here may provide a useful starting point for future scholars interested in tracing the downstream effects of Hebrews' theology of Sinai.

In sum, while this study has focused on one text's appropriation of Sinai, it opens broader conversations about continuity, priesthood, worship, revelation, and identity in early Christian thought. Sinai, far from being left behind in the wilderness, remains a site of ongoing theological negotiation, one that continues to shape how early Christians imagined their past, lived their present, and anticipated their future.

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