

# Son, Sacrifice, and Great Shepherd

Edited by  
DAVID M. MOFFITT  
and ERIC F. MASON

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
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# Son, Sacrifice, and Great Shepherd

Studies on the Epistle to the Hebrews

Edited by

David M. Moffitt and Eric F. Mason

Mohr Siebeck

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## Introduction

In the last few decades, the Epistle to the Hebrews has risen to a place of prominence in the larger field of New Testament studies. A number of questions and approaches, both old and new, are being put to this ancient text in fresh ways. This volume, which developed from presentations at the 2011–2013 sessions of the revived Hebrews program unit of the Society of Biblical Literature's International Meeting, attests the ongoing and still developing fascination with Hebrews evident in these last decades. As will be clear, all of the papers have undergone significant development subsequent to those initial presentations.

The volume examines three major sections of Hebrews – chs. 1–2, 8–10, and 13. Each of these sections of the text contains material that can be interpreted in ways that have important ramifications for understanding the whole of the epistle. Each of these sections also contributes a major, distinctive image of Jesus, as reflected in the title of this volume: Son, Sacrifice, and Great Shepherd.

### Issues in Interpreting Hebrews 1–2

In her chapter titled “The Son Like No Other: Comparing the Son of God to the Angelic ‘Sons of God’ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Amy L. B. Peeler* looks at the language of sonship in Heb 1. By way of examination of some key pieces of evidence in Second Temple Jewish literature in Greek, Peeler highlights the fact that angels were called “sons of God” and that this language fostered some worry in early patristic texts regarding the status of angels. She then moves in the second section of her chapter to explore some of the primary ways in which Jesus, *the* Son of God, is distinct in his relationship to the Father from that of the angels. Hebrews, in order to avoid possible confusion, emphasizes aspects of the Son's relationship with the Father that distinguish him from the angels. Three points are especially worthy of note: (1) *the* one Son is different from the many sons; (2) the Son is begotten (Heb 1:5), not, as is true of the angels, made (Heb 1:7); and (3) God engages in conversation with Jesus, but not with the angels. In these ways Hebrews sets the Son apart from the many angelic sons.



*David M. Moffitt's* contribution "Human Beings and Angels in Hebrews and Philo of Alexandria: Toward an Account of Hebrews' Cosmology" compares the discussion in Heb 1–2 of the Son's elevation above the angels with some of the relevant evidence from Philo. While many have argued that Hebrews likely holds a cosmology and view of the redeemed human soul's passing spiritually into heaven upon the death of the body, the evidence from Philo makes this conclusion unlikely. Philo's cosmology, which is heavily influenced by a Platonic dualism between the material and spiritual realms, correlates with his view that upon death the soul or spirit of a human being can ascend into the heights, leaving the body and the material realm behind. Human beings in this disembodied, spiritual state are not merely like angels, but actually *are* angels. This kind of account of humanity, angels and the Son's exaltation does not work in Hebrews, where the author states plainly that the place to which Jesus has been elevated has never been offered to any angel. Rather, in keeping with the author's eschatological reading of Ps 8, Jesus is exalted in the heavens because he is a human being, not an angelic one. Hebrews does not, therefore, appear to work with a cosmology like that of Philo.

*Félix H. Cortez* argues in his chapter "The Son as the Representative of the Children in the Letter to the Hebrews" that Davidic traditions underlie the representative connection between Jesus as the Son of God and his followers, who are identified as children of God. A close reading of 2 Sam 7 (among other texts) in the light of a biblical theology of the development of God's covenant relationship with his people suggests for Cortez that in the Davidic covenant, God appoints a mediator between himself and his people. This irrevocable covenant means that the faithfulness required by all the people under the Mosaic covenant, as well as the punishment for failure to uphold the covenant, is now focused on the king as their representative. When applied to Hebrews, these insights suggest that Jesus can be seen not only to be the brother of the many children, but their representative – who not only bore their punishment, but even more, serves as royal mediator who faithfully upholds the covenant to which they belong.

Next, in "'Behold! I Am with the Children God Has Given Me': Ekphrasis and Epiphany in Hebrews 1–2," *Scott D. Mackie* considers ways in which Heb 1–2 encourages a mystical vision of the ascended Christ's enthronement in the heavenly realms and sets the scene for the later passages of the homily that exhort the audience to approach God. Identifying rhetorical elements in Hebrews that parallel techniques in the wider Greco-Roman world that make up an ekphrasis (which intends to produce visual and emotional experiences in hearers), Mackie argues that Hebrews aims to make the heavenly tabernacle and divine presence visually accessible to the community. They can approach God, enter the tabernacle that is manifest to them in their gathered worship, and experience a vision of the risen and exalted Jesus. This experience forms a central aspect of the exhortation and encouragement the author uses to help

persuade his audience to remain faithful to Jesus, as they have their identity as his siblings reconfirmed.

## Issues in Interpreting Hebrews 8–10

*Grant Macaskill* (“Hebrews 8–10 and Apocalyptic Theology in the New Testament”) engages afresh the ongoing debates on the extent and nature of Hebrews’ apocalyptic commitments. The ongoing heavenly ministry of Jesus, he argues, implies that Hebrews’ cultic and revelatory aspects are inseparable. After clarifying some common misconceptions about Jewish apocalypticism, Macaskill turns to an examination of the relationship between Jesus as Son and heavenly high priest in Heb 8–10. The “Sonly” Priest’s heavenly ministry transforms Jewish apocalyptic by democratizing access to God. Now, knowledge is revealed to all members of the new covenant, not just those worthy enough to ascend, because Jesus’ cultic service offers purification that surpasses that of the law and makes it possible for the Spirit to dwell within all the people of the covenant. Intriguingly, Macaskill concludes with some reflections on how the cosmology and eschatology of Hebrews might bear on current debates about apocalyptic in Pauline studies.

*Benjamin J. Ribbens* offers a challenge to the ubiquitous conclusion that the author of Hebrews had a negative view of Levitical sacrifice and thought that these had no power to effect atonement. Instead, he argues in “The Positive Functions of Levitical Sacrifice in Hebrews” that the epistle shares with its wider Second Temple context basic positive assumptions about sacrifice. The very comparative logic of Hebrews’ argument requires that sacrifice be assumed to be good in order for Jesus’ sacrificial work to be understood to be better. Moreover, Hebrews’ statements in chs. 9 and 10 that sacrifice is a means of forgiveness (especially in 9:22 and 10:18), together with the author’s emphasis on the redemption that Jesus’ sacrifice accomplishes (which should be seen in distinction from the old covenant sacrifices), suggest that Hebrews affirms the value of sacrifice in the law – even as the author highlights the surpassing effects of Jesus’ work.

In “‘Vaine Repetitions’? Re-evaluating Regular Levitical Sacrifices in Hebrews 9–14,” *Nicholas J. Moore* takes aim at another common misconception concerning Hebrews’ engagement with the old covenant cult – namely, that the author opposes earthly sacrifices and cultic ritual because he opposes repetition as necessarily implying imperfection. Moore demonstrates that in Heb 9:6, in particular, one can see that aspects of the repetition in the old covenant cult actually do have a positive function in the argument of Hebrews. Additionally, Heb 13:15 implies the necessity of repeated offerings of praise as part of new covenant worship. Interpreters, Moore points out, should pay more careful attention to the subtleties of Hebrews’ typological reasoning.

*Georg Gäbel* explores in detail the depiction of the sanctuary given in Heb 9:1–5 in his chapter titled “‘You Don’t Have Permission to Access This Site’: The Tabernacle Description in Hebrews 9:1–5 and Its Function in Context.” This often neglected element of Hebrews should be seen to be an essential part of the author’s argument about the superiority of the new covenant and Jesus’ heavenly service in the heavenly tabernacle. In the light of Jewish texts and traditions about the tabernacle and many of its furnishings, the description in Heb 9 can be seen to participate in the ambivalent sense of continuity and discontinuity of the temple cult and the tabernacle during the Second Temple period. Hebrews, in other words, can appeal to the earthly tabernacle as a way of highlighting the inadequacy of the first covenant’s cult. Specifically, the spatial layout of the tabernacle and the furnishings the author highlights serve to make the symbolic point that under the first covenant, access to God was severely restricted, while in the new, Jesus’ entry into the heavenly tabernacle has opened access to all.

*Eric F. Mason* looks again at the difficult and contested interpretation of the statement in Heb 9:14 that Jesus offered himself to God διὰ πνεύματος αἰωνίου in his chapter “‘Through Eternal Spirit’: Sacrifice, New Covenant, and the Spirit of Hebrews 9:14.” Mason first surveys all the instances of the term “spirit” in Hebrews, laying out the diversity of usages of the word in the homily. Good reasons, however, support the conclusion that in several cases (e.g., 2:4; 6:4; 9:8) the Holy Spirit is the intended referent. In keeping with the ways Hebrews speaks about the Holy Spirit, especially in connection with cleansing the conscience, the “eternal Spirit” of 9:14 should be understood as participating with Jesus in his sacrificial offering. Rather than the Spirit empowering Jesus to offer his blood, the Spirit contributes to the sacrificial work that Jesus performs.

## Issues in Interpreting Hebrews 13

*David M. Allen* opens the section final section of the volume with a useful chapter surveying and assessing key scholarly positions on a perplexing text with his chapter “What Are They Saying about Hebrews 13?” Allen briefly traces the debates concerning whether or not Heb 13 is an original part of the book, highlighting some of the most significant studies of the last several decades that have led to the present consensus that this enigmatic chapter has always been part of Hebrews. Questions of structure and interpretation occupy the rest of Allen’s study. Hebrews 13 contains a large number of phrases that are ambiguous and difficult to understand. Allen helpfully maps and navigates the variety of opinions on many of these issues, while also stressing some of the ways Heb 13 engages themes found elsewhere in the homily.

In “The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews 13 and Its Bearing on the Question of the Integrity of the Epistle,” *Susan Docherty* approaches from a new perspective the question of the originality of Heb 13 relative to the rest of the epistle. Docherty perceptively notes that the use of Scripture in Heb 13 is likely to bear on the issue of the relationship of ch. 13 to chs. 1–12, given the extent to which the rest of the text uses and interprets Jewish Scripture. She therefore works systematically through Heb 13, offering close analyses of the ways in which the author of that chapter interprets Scripture. On the basis of this careful work, she is able to demonstrate that on several levels the use of Scripture in Heb 13 is consistent with what one finds in chs. 1–12. This does not by itself prove that Heb 13 is original to Hebrews, but, as Docherty concludes, her study does suggest the value of paying more careful attention to this aspect of Heb 13 in the midst of the ongoing discussions about its place in the document.

*James W. Thompson* turns his attention in “Hellenistic Ethics in Hebrews 13:1–6” to the most characteristic feature of Heb 13 in comparison with the rest of Hebrews – the concrete, ethical imperatives, especially in the first six verses. After identifying vv. 1–6 as a unit, Thompson gives extensive evidence showing that the virtues encouraged and the vices discouraged in this portion of Hebrews resonate well with Hellenistic moral philosophy. In fact, Thompson concludes, Hebrews has adapted Hellenistic moral philosophy as a means of understanding torah. The ethical reflection of Hebrews – like those of Philo of Alexandria and the authors of Wisdom and 4 Maccabees – fits well within the broader Hellenistic Jewish milieu to which this homily most likely belongs.

Continuing the examination of Hebrews in the light of Greco-Roman moral philosophy, *Joseph R. Dodson*’s chapter “Ethical Exhortations in Hebrews 13 and the Writings of Seneca” concludes the volume with a detailed examination of the first part of Heb 13 in the light of Stoic moral reflection. Dodson draws primarily on the works of Seneca in order to elucidate ways in which Heb 13:1–8 presents ideas similar to and different from Roman Stoic moral thought. Dodson looks to the broad themes of mutual affection, marriage, contentment, and imitation to provide the material for his study. Such comparative work allows him to suggest ways in which one can identify plausible assumptions underlying the terse imperatives of Heb 13.

## Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank all of the contributors for their stimulating chapters as well as everyone who participated in the Hebrews sessions at the SBL International Meetings and offered discussion that helped shape the final forms of the papers. In addition, we express special thanks to R. Jarrett Van Tine for the indispensable work he did in helping to prepare the manuscript for publication.

We are also particularly grateful to the editorial support given by Tobias Stäbler and Jana Trispel at Mohr Siebeck.

Given that many of these essays were originally written prior to the publication of the second edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style*, we have generally chosen to follow the style guidelines in the first edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander, John F. Kutsko, James D. Ernest, Shirley Decker-Lucke, and David L. Petersen; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999). In keeping with this decision, all abbreviations used have also been taken from the first edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style*.

St Andrews, Scotland, and Algonquin, Illinois, September 2019

David M. Moffitt and Eric F. Mason

## Chapter 1

# The Son Like No Other: Comparing the Son of God to the Angelic “Sons of God” in the Epistle to the Hebrews

*Amy L. B. Peeler*

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus is the Son. Even as the author focuses upon Christ’s priestly role, this identity remains a vital part of the Christological presentation throughout. The heaviest concentration of filial language, though, occurs in the first part of the letter, especially the first chapter.<sup>1</sup> Here the author extols the Son with the Scriptures of Israel to declare that he has attributes similar to God’s wisdom, word, king, and even attributes similar to God. The most explicit medium for comparison with the Son in the first section, however, are the angels. He is better than the angels because he has a better name (1:5), receives their worship (1:6), and has been invited to sit at God’s right hand (1:13). The dual concentration of sonship and angelic language is, I will argue, no coincidence. In the Jewish Greek writings in the milieu of our author, angels were also called “sons of God,” so it is plausible that in comparing the two the author of Hebrews would need to differentiate Jesus the Son of God from the angels who could also bear the filial title.

The first half of this chapter gives evidence of the potential confusion that could arise with the use of the word *υἱός*, especially in the context of a discussion about angels, by presenting instances in which writers of the ancient world equate or closely associate “sons of God” and angels. The second half traces Hebrews’ arguments that differentiate this Son from any angelic being. These arguments focus upon the kind of Son that he is by virtue of the unique relationship God has with this Son. The author of Hebrews has ample reason from

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in 7:28 the word of the oath appoints a son as priest. See my argument for the importance of this identity throughout the author’s argument in *You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Library of New Testament Studies 486; London: T&T Clark, 2014). The word *υἱός* occurs in the letter twenty-one times (Heb 1:2, 5 (2x), 8; 2:6, 10; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 5, 28; 10:29; 11:21–22, 24; 12:5–8) and in reference to Christ thirteen times (Heb 1:2, 5 (2x), 8; 2:6 (possibly); 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29). Four of those instances occur in the first chapter.

the tradition before him (Heb 2:3) to affirm that Jesus is Son, and ample reasons to compare him to the angels.<sup>2</sup> I would like to suggest an additional reason for doing both, namely, that in speaking of the Son and angels the author must eliminate any potential confusion between this Son of God and the angelic *vioi* by emphasizing that by virtue of God's relationship with him he is a Son like no other.

## Attestation of Angelic *vioi*

### *In the Greek Texts of Israel's Scripture*

In six occurrences in the Greek translations of the Scriptures of Israel, authors employ the word *vioi* in such a way that it could refer to angelic beings.<sup>3</sup> One of the clearest examples, and one of the most pertinent for Hebrews, appears in Moses' song recorded in Deut 32.<sup>4</sup> Hebrews, like other New Testament authors, appeals to this text when (likely) quoting a line from it in the first

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<sup>2</sup> Paul, the earliest example of Christian reflection in the New Testament, makes Jesus' status as the Son of God a regular part of his confession of faith (Rom 1:3–4; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 2:20; 1 Thess 1:10, as a few examples). Interpreters of Hebrews have argued that the angels serve to highlight the Son's superior ontological position (Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008], 241; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* [NTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 84), his superior covenant (Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993], 104; James Thompson, *Hebrews* [Paideia; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008], 50; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2001], 200) and his possession of flesh (David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* [NovTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011], 49, 118–44).

<sup>3</sup> See the discussion that follows concerning Gen 6:4, 6; Deut 32:43; Ps 28:1 LXX; 81:6 LXX; 88:7 LXX, and Wis 5:5.

<sup>4</sup> NA 28 lists both Deut 32:43 LXX and Ps 96:7 LXX as the possible citation in Heb 1:6b. The verse from Deuteronomy is a very close fit, the only difference being the word of interest for this chapter. Hebrews has ἄγγελοι and most Gk mss of Deuteronomy have *vioi*. Psalm 96:7 includes the ἄγγελοι, but it lacks a καί at the beginning of the phrase, has a second rather than a third person imperative, has an article with ἄγγελοι, and uses the pronoun αὐτοῦ instead of the noun θεοῦ. Although certainty is not possible (See Johnson, *Hebrews*, 78; Thompson, *Hebrews*, 47), the fewer differences favor Deut 32:43, as does the author's citation from the same chapter (Deut 32:35) in Heb 10:30. Several interpreters of Hebrews think Deuteronomy is the most likely source of the citation (Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1989], 57; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990], 56; Koester, *Hebrews*, 193; William L. Lane, *Hebrews* [2 vols.; WBC; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1991], 1:28).

chapter.<sup>5</sup> His interest lies in a statement about the ἄγγελοι, namely that they give worship to him (αὐτῷ). Originally this statement charged these beings to worship God, but here the author reconfigures it to say that the angels worship the Son (Heb 1:6).

Deuteronomy 32 has a complicated transmission history. The MT version of v. 43 is the shortest, an expanded form is preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QDeut<sup>q</sup>), and mss of the Greek text are even more expansive. The following chart of the first portions of Deut 32:43 presents the different versions.<sup>6</sup>

Deut 32:43 MT	4QDeut <sup>q</sup> (4Q44) <sup>7</sup>
הָרְגִינוּ גוֹיִם עִמּוֹ	הָרְגִינוּ שָׁמַיִם עִמּוֹ וְהִשְׁתַּחוּ לוֹ כָּל אֱלֹהִים
Praise his people, O Nations. <sup>8</sup>	Praise O heavens his people; Bow down to him all the gods.
Deut 32:43 LXX <sup>9</sup>	Odes 2:43
a. εὐφράνθητε, οὐρανοί, ἅμα αὐτῷ, b. καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες <u>υἱοὶ</u> θεοῦ· c. εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ, d. καὶ ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες <u>ἄγγελοι</u> θεοῦ·	a. Εὐφράνθητε, οὐρανοί, ἅμα αὐτῷ, b. καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ <u>ἄγγελοι</u> θεοῦ· c. εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ, d. καὶ ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες <u>υἱοὶ</u> θεοῦ·
Rejoice heavens together with him And let all the sons of God bow down to him Rejoice nations with his people And let all the angels of God be strong for him.	Rejoice heavens together with him And let all the angels of God bow down to him Rejoice nations with his people And let all the sons of God be strong for him.

<sup>5</sup> The Synoptics, Paul, and the Johannine writings all cite or refer to this hymn of Moses, which is unsurprising given its popularity as a liturgical text among Jews of the first century (Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:28).

<sup>6</sup> See also a similar chart and discussion in Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 516; and Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), 903–5.

<sup>7</sup> See DJD 14:141; col. II, frag. 5 ii, lines 6–7.

<sup>8</sup> Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> Based on the Göttingen edition. A few Gk mss preserve ἄγγελοι in line b (F V Ephiphanius I 38) and υἱοὶ in line d (V 15 29 82 426 707).



As the chart shows, both the Greek mss of Deut 32 and the text preserved in the *Odes* invite the angels and the sons of God to give worship and strength to God.<sup>10</sup> If the author of Hebrews is familiar with either presentation, it seems likely that he would have noticed the complementary lines in which the singer calls upon the υιοί of God along with the angels of God to join in the act of praise.<sup>11</sup> Whatever his motivation for penning the precise word that he did (ἄγγελοι),<sup>12</sup> the point stands that in the Greek versions of Deut 32 a possible connection exists between angels and υιοί.

Another close association between sons and angels occurs twice in the fantastic passage in Gen 6 (vv. 4 and 6). Here the narrator describes a time when the sons of God (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) noticed the daughters of men, took them as wives, and bore children with them (Gen 6:1–4). The Septuagint translates the phrase woodenly: the υιοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ perform these actions, and for many early interpreters, this was an account of malicious angels. The *Book of the Watchers*, the first thirty-six chapters of *1 Enoch*, survives in Ethiopic, Aramaic, and Greek. Although the Greek text is preserved in later manuscripts,<sup>13</sup> citations of the *Book of the Watchers* in Jude and possible Greek fragments at Qumran (7Q8, 11–14) prompt some to assume that a Greek translation of the *Book of the Watchers* existed in the first century C.E.<sup>14</sup> When reflecting upon the Genesis passage, Codex Panopolitanus of the *Book of the Watchers* uses the word “angels” to describe the “sons of heaven” who mate with and defile the daughters

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<sup>10</sup> The *Odes* are biblical songs collected and attached to the end of the Greek Psalter. The earliest mss of the collection of *Odes* appears in Codex Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> century), but several scholars (James A. Miller, “Let Us Sing to the Lord: The Biblical Odes in Codex Alexandrinus” [Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2006], 27–33; Heinrich Schneider, “Die biblischen Oden im christlichen Altertum,” *Bib* 30 [1949]: 28–65; idem, “Biblische Oden im syrohexaplarischen Psalter,” *Bib* 40 [1959]: 199–209; idem, “Die biblischen Oden seit dem sechsten Jahrhundert,” *Bib* 30 [1949]: 239–72; idem, “Die biblischen Oden in Jerusalem und Konstantinopel,” *Bib* 30 [1949]: 433–52; idem, “Die biblischen Oden im Mittelalter,” *Bib* 30 [1949]: 479–500; Jennifer Wright Knust and Tommy Wasserman, “The Biblical Odes and the Text of the Christian Bible,” *JBL* 133 [2014]: 341–65) argue that collections of the Odes could have been circulating much earlier.

<sup>11</sup> It is possible that “sons of God” could refer to human beings here, especially in the Odes version where the next line proclaims that the blood of his *sons* will be avenged.

<sup>12</sup> The author of Hebrews might have been familiar with a version of Deut 32 preserved in the *Odes* (2:43; see the discussion in Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:28), or it could be the case that the author retained the language of worship but opted for the terminology of angels instead of sons in order to avoid the (further?) confusion between the Son and the many angelic sons (Koester, *Hebrews*, 193).

<sup>13</sup> Codex Panopolis (5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century), *Chronographia* of Georgius Syncellus (c. 800).

<sup>14</sup> James C. VanderKam, “The Book of Enoch and the Qumran Scrolls,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 254–76, here 258; Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 105.

of men, placing both terms next to each other: “the angels, the sons of heaven” (6:2). In *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, when he discusses the giants of Gen 6, Philo states that Moses, in describing the angels, refers to them as the “sons of God” (1.92 [Marcus, LCL]). Josephus states that “many angels of God now consorted with women and begat sons” (*Ant.* 1.73 [Thackeray, LCL]). While other interpretive options for Gen 6 appeared later, John Walton concludes with respect to this passage that “the ‘angels’ view [was] the only contender into the second century.”<sup>15</sup>

A possible angelic “son of God” association appears in Wisdom of Solomon as well. Wisdom 5 compares the way of the righteous with that of the impious. The righteous receive much from God, and the impious marvel that these righteous have been afforded a place among the divine sons, the holy ones of God (5:5). Based on similar texts that describe the divine sons and the holy ones as members of the heavenly court (Deut 32:43; Ps 88:6, 7 LXX; Exod 15:11; Ps 109:3 LXX; Job 5:1; Sir 45:24; Isa 57:15), this too could be a filial reference to angels.<sup>16</sup> The comparative element of the impious’ astonishment would not make sense if the impious were simply saying that those they derided are like other humans; it is much more powerful that they are astonished at their elevation to an angelic realm.

Three other instances of the association between “angels” and “sons” appear in the Psalms. In Ps 88 LXX, the psalmist exalts God by naming the heavenly realms that praise the Lord. The heavens (v. 6a) and the assembly of holy ones (v. 6b) acknowledge God, as the clouds and the sons of God cannot compare to him (v. 7). In *The Mysticism of Hebrews*, Jody Barnard argues that “the chiasmic arrangement (‘who *in the skies* shall be compared to the Lord and who shall be likened to the Lord *among the sons of God*’) suggests a reference to the *celestial* sons of God, that is, the council of angels.”<sup>17</sup> This text holds interest for Hebrews since it is a royal psalm proclaiming God’s faithfulness to David and their paternal/filial relationship to which the author alludes in Heb 1:6 with the language of “firstborn” (Ps 88:28 LXX). Athanasius quotes this verse of the psalm in his discussion of Heb 1. The Arians who want to show that the angels and the Son are of the same kind (1.55) might be emboldened by this psalm to show that these angels too are gods like the Son (*C. Ar.* 1.57). Athanasius goes on to argue that the author of Hebrews differentiates the Son by his nature: he is Son and they are servants (possibly he has in mind Heb

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<sup>15</sup> J. H. Walton, “Sons of God, Daughters of Man,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), 793–98, esp. 794.

<sup>16</sup> David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 147.

<sup>17</sup> Jody A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 2/331; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 161.

1:14). This potential confusion arising from the filial language as it appears in such scriptural texts as Ps 88:6 LXX is precisely the kind of confusion the author of Hebrews is working against with his insistence that this one bears the title of Son in ways the angels do not.

Psalm 81 LXX depicts God in the midst of other gods, thereby depicting the scene of a heavenly court similar to that seen in Job 1–2. A charge – possibly spoken by God – comes to these gods to take up justice.<sup>18</sup> In v. 6, another speech calls them gods and sons of the Most High but also proclaims that they will die like human beings. The psalm closes with a call for God to arise and judge the earth. Some read these “sons of the most high” as angelic beings. Athanasius quotes this psalm as evidence that the angels and archangels can undergo change, and therefore they are not by nature gods but derive their title “god” and “son” from their “participation in the Son” (*Ep. Serap.* 2.4).<sup>19</sup> Some have seen a possible allusion to this Psalm text with an angelic association in the Latin version of the *Life of Adam and Eve*. Here the devil proclaims to Adam his angelic glory and his being cast down from it (12:1). Psalm 81 LXX and its description of divine glory and then death could be in the background.<sup>20</sup> Tertullian in his treatise against Marcion quotes this psalm as a possible text that Marcion might use to show that there are other gods. In reply, Tertullian counters that “Yet not one of them is divine because he is called a god” (*Marc.* 1.7 [ANF 3:277–78]). His point is that greatness cannot come from this designation alone, but when he seeks to make that point he draws a comparison between those called “gods” in Ps 81 and the Creator’s angels.

Finally, in Ps 28 LXX, David calls upon the sons of God to bring rams, glory, and honor to the Lord. Again, because of the language of angelic divine sons in other places, this psalm becomes a candidate as well, and later evidence exists that some interpreters wondered about the meaning of the phrase “sons of God.” Didymus the Blind queries if God is commanding angels or the spirits of adoption in humans to bring offerings to God,<sup>21</sup> and Venerable Bede concluded the psalm indicated angels.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Goldingay begins his commentary on this psalm with the double question: “Who speaks and who is addressed?” (*Psalms* [3 vols; Baker Commentary on the Old Testament and Psalms; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006–2008], 2:559).

<sup>19</sup> *The Letters of Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (trans. C. R. B. Shapland; London: Epworth Press, 1951), 157. Athanasius makes a related comment in *C. Ar.* 1.11.39: “And if all that are called sons and gods, whether in earth or in heaven ...” (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup> 4:329).

<sup>20</sup> As suggested by the biblical references in the “Life of Adam and Eve,” *OTP* 2:262.

<sup>21</sup> Ekkehard Mühlenberg, *Psalmekommentare aus der Katenenüberlieferung*, Vol. 1 (PTS 15; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975), 259.

<sup>22</sup> “Hence the psalmist says in a pleasing manner: ‘Bring to the Lord, O children of God, bring to the Lord the offspring of rams,’ which is clearly to say, ‘Bring to the Lord, O angels of God to whom the responsibility for this task has been delegated...’” (*On the Tabernacle*

With all of the psalm texts, however, interpreters also read the language of υἱοὶ θεοῦ as a phrase that describes humans. Athanasius appeals to Ps 88 LXX to talk about the elevated status of humanity (*C. Ar.* 3.25.10). Many can claim to be “sons of God” (he cites Ps 88:6 here), but only one is the Image “true and natural of the Father” (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup> 4:399). Because the Gospel according to John records Jesus citing Ps 81 and referring it to human beings (John 10:34–35), the majority of Christian interpreters follow suit.<sup>23</sup> Finally, many Christian interpreters also see in Ps 21 a reference to the people of God.<sup>24</sup> A quote from Philo adequately summarizes the evidence about the texts of Israel’s Scriptures: “But sometimes he [Moses] calls the angels ‘sons of God’ because they are made incorporeal through no mortal man but are spirits without body. But rather does that exhorter, Moses, give to good and excellent men the name of ‘sons of God,’ while wicked and evil men (he calls) ‘bodies’” (*QG* 1.92 [Marcus, LCL]).

“Sons of God” can refer to humans or angels, but the point stands, that an angelic association existed for the term υἱός. For those conversant with the Scriptures of Israel, υἱός could indicate an angel and therefore, the author of Hebrews will need to distinguish this Son from the angels by more than just his filial title alone.

### *In Other Hellenistic Jewish Literature*

The same association exists in other Hellenistic literature as well. In Philo’s *On the Confusion of Tongues*, in the midst of a comparison between those who know the one true God and those who do not, Philo makes a close association between a “son of god” and the angels. “But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to take his place under God’s First-born, the Word, who holds the eldership among the angels, their ruler as it were” (*Conf.* 146 [Colson, LCL]). The πρωτόγονος from whom one can learn to be a Son of God is the eldest of the angels – in other words, this angel is a son.

In *Agri.* 51 Philo praises God for his shepherding of the universe and affirms that he employs a manager to care for everything, “his true Word and Firstborn Son Who shall take upon Him its government like some viceroy of a great king; for it is said in a certain place: ‘Behold I AM, I send My Angel before thy face to guard thee in the way’” (Colson and Whitaker, LCL). Again, the son is the

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2.4, cited in Craig A. Blaising and Carmen S. Hardin, eds., *Psalms 1–50* [ACCS 7; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2008], 215).

<sup>23</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 13; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 4; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.6; idem, *Exhortation to the Hebrews* 12.

<sup>24</sup> These include Ambobius the Younger (*Commentary on the Psalms* 29), Basil the Great (*Homilies on the Psalms* 13.2), Theodoret of Cyr (*Commentary on the Psalms* 29.4) (all cited in Blaising and Hardin, *Psalms 1–50*, 215), and Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Psalms* 29.

ἄγγελος. Concerning the writings of Philo, Larry Hurtado states, “We conclude that he pictured the divine Logos as God’s vizier or chief steward over the heavenly assembly.”<sup>25</sup> Philo’s numerous reflections on the Logos, whom he calls the firstborn Son and an angel, show that for him these are associated terms.<sup>26</sup>

Very similar to Philo’s accumulation of titles for the Logos in *On the Confusion of Tongues*, the prayer of Joseph, an apocryphal text preserved in the text of Origen, contains similar titles for an angel. Jacob introduces himself as Israel the angel who is the “firstborn” (πρωτόγονος) (frag. A. 3). Uriel, another angel (usually one of the archangels, *I En.* 9:10; 10:1, 4, 9, 11; 20:2; *Grk. Apoc. Ezra* 6:2; *T. Sol.* 2:4; *Apoc. Mos.* 40) challenges him over rank, including over who has the superior name. Uriel’s disagreement with him is that he has dwelt among humans. Israel in reply says that he is above Uriel. He (Israel) is the archangel and the chief captain of the sons of God (frag. A. 8). The fragmentary nature of this text makes it impossible to firmly establish a date and provenance, but Jonathan Smith argues that its parallels to Hellenistic and Aramaic materials would suggest a first century date.<sup>27</sup> Because it is mentioned by early Christians through citations and on lists of apocrypha, it demonstrates a similar collocation of ideas: angels who bear the name “son/firstborn” who are arguing over a superior name.

The foregoing examples give evidence that in the texts available in the first-century world, angels were called “sons of God.” Jody A. Barnard argues similarly: “It is reasonable to maintain that the author of Hebrews was familiar with the tradition of designating angels as sons.”<sup>28</sup> If this association between angels and sons would have been known to his readers, then the author’s use of the term υἱός in the opening section of his letter would demand a clear articulation of the ways in which this Son differs from the angelic “sons of God.”

## A Different Son; A Different Relationship

One might counter that, while the author of Hebrews could know that some texts refer to angels as “sons of God,” he denies this title to them with his question in v. 5: “For to which of the angels has [God] ever said, ‘You are my son’?” The expected reply being, “None of them!” As I have endeavored to

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<sup>25</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1988), 46.

<sup>26</sup> Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (WUNT 2/70; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 137.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, introduction to “Prayer of Joseph,” *OTP* 2:700, 703.

<sup>28</sup> Barnard, *Mysticism*, 161.

show, however, his denial of the title “son” would be hard to maintain in light of the biblical and extrabiblical writings of his time. As the church fathers mention, others are readily able to access these texts in which angels are called the “sons of God” and use them in conversations about Christ’s sonship.<sup>29</sup> In light of this reality, I argue that, while his question of v. 5 clearly expects a negative answer, what he denies to the angels is not simply the title *viós* but the manner in which it is spoken, by whom, and what that divine speech implies about the relationship between God and his Son. In other words, if both the angels and Jesus could be “sons,” the author then needs to distinguish what *kind* of Son Jesus is. This is precisely what he does by portraying the unique type of relationship this Son has with God and that God has with him.

The distinct nature of his sonship begins with the grammatical difference of number. In every case except that of Philo when he is discussing the Logos in *Conf.* 146, the angelic beings referred to with a filial title occur in the plural; they are the *sons* of god. Conversely, when the author of Hebrews refers to the one who has the better name, he is always *the* Son. Hence, commentators like Craig Koester argue that the number of the noun supplies enough difference between the Son and the angels: “‘sons of God’ is only used for angels collectively; in the Scripture no one angel is called God’s ‘son’ in a singular sense.”<sup>30</sup> Against this argument, Jody Barnard counters, “This explanation relies on the rather awkward premise that angels were thought to be sons collectively and not individually ... and overlooks those passages which use the singular *son* to refer to an angelic being.”<sup>31</sup> Koester goes on to acknowledge that Philo refers to the Logos as both an angel and a son (so, a singular occurrence exists), but counters that “the question posed in Heb 1:5 assumes that the listeners are not familiar with it.”<sup>32</sup> It is not clear that the author’s question can reveal if the audience was familiar with Philo’s association or not because the author’s question concerns the speech of God whereas Philo’s comments about the angelic filial Logos are his own. Moreover, the distinction between the one whom God has appointed as his heir and the angels has to do with a more excellent *name* (Heb. 1:4). A singular and a plural noun are different in number, but “Son” and “sons” are not two different names. The singular/plural difference does contribute to the contrast, but is not sufficient to account for the different sonship of Christ on its own.

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas provides another example of this argument for Christ’s sonship. In *Summa contra Gentiles*, in a chapter refuting Arius, he states, “the name of divine sonship is suitable to many – for it belongs to all the angels and saints,” but goes on to argue for Christ’s distinction “by reason of creation” (*SCG* 4.7.4, cited in R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2011], 76).

<sup>30</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 191.

<sup>31</sup> Barnard mentions as examples Dan 3:25 and passages in Job (*Mysticism*, 161).

<sup>32</sup> Koester, *Hebrews*, 191.

A second distinction between the Son and the many sons arises from the citation of Ps 2. The voice of God states, “I have begotten [γεγέννηκα] you.” In no other instance in which angels are called “sons of God” does the text indicate *how* that status came to be. Instead, the texts simply affirm that these beings are υἱοὶ θεοῦ. In Hebrews, however, this assertion about *the* Son stands in contrast to the angels who are made (ὁ ποιῶν, Heb 1:7).<sup>33</sup> In the psalm’s setting in Israel’s Scriptures the claim that God has begotten the king was the medium of expressing his intimate relationship to God at the time of his inauguration (*today* I have begotten you).<sup>34</sup> While interpreters ancient and modern have had to exercise theological acumen to explain this reference as it applies to Christ,<sup>35</sup> the distinction between the begetting of a Son and the making of servants who can be known as sons contributes another notable variance between the two.

Finally, and most importantly, the author describes the relationship this Son has with God that goes beyond a simple title of proximity to assert God’s direct and unique involvement with this Son. As a first example of this relationship, God engages the Son in dialogue; God speaks *to* the Son. In comparison, throughout this catena of texts, God does not speak *to* the angels. God calls for their worship with a third person imperative (προσκυνήσάτωσαν) and speaks indirectly about them with the citation of Ps 103:4 LXX. The author does not explicitly deny that God ever speaks to the angels (it is possible to read Ps 81:1–4 LXX in this way), but the author’s introductions to these citations shows that God has conversation with the Son, which gives evidence of the relationship between them.

In addition to the form of the citations, the content of God’s speeches to the Son differ from what God says about the angels. The first two citations in

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<sup>33</sup> David Moffitt raises a valuable point that the “nub of the contrast” between the Son and the angels resides in their spiritual status and his incarnation as flesh and blood (*Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 50, n. 7). I raise no disagreement with that argument, but I draw attention to another aspect of the contrast, namely the way in which the angels and the Son came to be related to God.

<sup>34</sup> John Goldingay states, “The occasion was hardly the day of his physical birth, but his designation or coronation. Yhwh did not bring him into being then but did enter into a fatherly commitment to him in adopting him as son. The words uttered on that occasion made him heir to his father’s wealth and authority and are the undergirding of his position now” (*Psalms* [3 vols.; Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006–2008], 1:100).

<sup>35</sup> Athanasius’ *Against the Arians* provides a classic example where Athanasius discusses the begottenness of the Son (*C. Ar.* 1.3.9; 1.5.14). See Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God in Origen and Athanasius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), especially ch. 10, “Father and Son,” 188–222. As a modern interpreter, Attridge has stated the problem starkly: “The first quotation . . . stands in obvious tension with the exordium’s sapiential Christology, implying the existence of the Son from all eternity. This tension raises in acute form the question of the coherence of the text’s Christology” (*Hebrews*, 54).

Hebrews announces that Jesus is God's Son and that God is Jesus' Father. By selecting citations that emphasize both parties in this relationship, by structuring them so that they create a balanced pattern alternating between the Father and the Son, the author says as much about God as he does about the Son. The angels may be known as sons of God, but in none of the texts that include this title for them is the title of God affected. Here, however, the author shows that in addressing this one as Son, God is Father.<sup>36</sup>

The implications of this relationship echo throughout this chapter. God was Father to this Son before the ages were made in partnership with him (1:2, 10) when God appointed him as heir of all things (1:2). This Son reflects God's glory and being (1:3), and this Son reigns with him at God's right hand (1:3, 13). God invites worship of him (1:6), proclaims the Son's eternal throne (1:8) and unchangeableness (1:11–12), and promises to subdue his enemies (1:13).

The author compares this Son to the angels by appealing to texts associated with the king of Israel. This comparison with the angels sets these royal texts the author of Hebrews utilizes into a different context and thereby modifies them. Similar to the angels, he is a divine Son in the heavenly presence of God, and like the king he is a royal Son blessed with an enduring throne. The amalgamation of both kinds of sonship creates a new category. In response to the potential confusion between a Son and angelic sons of God, Johnson states, "no angelic figure is formally declared 'son' in connection with the sort of royal enthronement envisaged by these two texts."<sup>37</sup> His position as the royal Son in a close and blessed relationship with God vitally contributes to his superiority over the other divine "sons." This one has been, is, and will be a greater Son, by virtue of his very different relationship with God.

## Conclusion

Hebrews 1 could be an example of the kind of Christological reflection suggested by Hurtado: "we need to ask ... whether Jewish angelology may have assisted early Jewish Christians in coming to terms theologically with the exalted Christ. ... Reflection on the exalted Christ was influenced by and developed in opposition to Jewish speculations concerning angels, perhaps especially certain chief angels and their status."<sup>38</sup> The opening section of Hebrews provides a window into one possible example of these kind of conversations. If the author's listeners knew that angels were "sons of God," the author argues emphatically that because of his relationship with God, Jesus is a son who is superior to them, the Son *par excellence*.

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<sup>36</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 39–41.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *Hebrews*, 77.

<sup>38</sup> Hurtado, *One Lord*, 74.





## Chapter 2

# Human Beings and Angels in Hebrews and Philo of Alexandria: Toward an Account of Hebrews' Cosmology

*David M. Moffitt\**

The question of the underlying cosmology held by the author of Hebrews is hardly a new one. Debates around this question are substantial.<sup>1</sup> The issue is a matter of essential importance for interpreting this text. One's understanding of so many elements of this homily, particularly when examining Hebrews' language of and about heavenly realities, depends on an account of the author's implicit understanding of the structure and makeup of reality. These concerns can hardly be avoided when trying to understand this ancient sermon, even though they often remain implicit in the text.

This chapter does not offer a robust, constructive account of Hebrews' cosmology. Rather, it explores the contrast between the Son and the angels in Heb 1–2 with a view to showing how the argument in these chapters effectively disallows a Platonic account of the human being and so also of cosmology. The argumentation of the opening chapters of Hebrews refuses Platonic categories just to the extent that it envisions the Son's return to the heavens after his death as a human being. The point can be seen with clarity when viewed from the perspective of some potentially important comparative reflection in Philo of Alexandria on the ontology of angels and of human beings. Whereas Philo sees death as a moment when the essential distinction between human beings and angels can be erased as the properly trained spirit (πνεῦμα) or soul (ψυχή) trapped in an individual human body has the opportunity to ascend through the

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<sup>1</sup> For only a few of the more recent essays on the topic see, Edward Adams, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (ed. Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 122–39; Jon C. Laansma, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough; Library of New Testament Studies 355; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 125–43; and Philip Church, "Hebrews 1:10–12 and the Renewal of the Cosmos," *TynBul* 67 (2016): 269–86.

air becoming one of the angelic hosts, Hebrews insists that even in the heavens a difference between human being and angelic being must persist in the case of the exalted Jesus. This implies, however, that Hebrews holds a very different cosmology from that of a thinker like Philo.

My arguments about the nature and role of Jesus' resurrection in Hebrews mark my own point of entry into these issues.<sup>2</sup> As is well known, Hebrews says little explicitly about Jesus' resurrection. This fact, some conclude, further implies the author's relative lack of interest in this part of the confession of the earliest Christ-followers.<sup>3</sup> A number of scholars of the last one hundred years or so have argued further that Hebrews has no place for Jesus' bodily resurrection.<sup>4</sup> For many, this conclusion correlates with the assumption that the cosmology and understanding of the human being that the author holds consists of a permutation of a Platonic dualism (a radical dualism between the material and immaterial realms), which makes it difficult to imagine that Jesus could rise from the dead with his physical, human body and ascend in that body through the heavens into the realm of God.<sup>5</sup> Some argue further that Jesus' death and offering of himself to the Father as a sacrifice are essentially the same event. Hebrews' language of Jesus entering the heavenly holy of holies to appear before God and offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice (9:24–26) must, therefore, be a metaphorical reference to the crucifixion.<sup>6</sup> On these kinds of readings, the Son's incarnation – his participation in flesh-and-blood humanity – is often viewed as a temporary affair.<sup>7</sup> Jesus passed into the heavenly realm as a *πνεῦμα* when he expired on the cross. As I demonstrate below, this sort of concept of life after death is well represented in a thinker such as Philo, but it

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<sup>2</sup> See David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NovTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> The recent article by William Loader ("Revisiting High Priesthood Christology in Hebrews," *ZNW* 109 [2018]: 235–83) offers a good example. Loader allows that the resurrection of Jesus stands, even if awkwardly (275), among the early Christian traditions affirmed by the author. This tradition plays little role in the argument of Hebrews, however, because the author's primary concern is with more important matters of faith and salvation – the event and significance of Jesus' death.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of some of the most significant positions see, Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 1–43.

<sup>5</sup> So, e.g., Wilfried Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich: Die mittelplatonische Umformung des Parusiegedankens im Hebräerbrief* (BZNW 116; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), esp. 421–25.

<sup>6</sup> Many interpreters endorse a variation of this view. For a recent defense of such an interpretation, see Kenneth Schenck, "An Archaeology of Hebrews' Tabernacle Imagery," in *Hebrews in Contexts* (ed. Gabriella Gelardini and Harold W. Attridge; *AJEC* 91; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 238–58.

<sup>7</sup> For only one example, see James W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (CBQMS 13; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983), 107–8.

does not fit coherently with Hebrews' eschatological vision of human rule in the world to come.

### Jesus' Bodily Resurrection and Ascension in Hebrews

I begin by briefly reprising one point relative to the bigger question of Jesus' resurrection in Hebrews – the argument of Heb 1–2 for why the Son is elevated above the angels only works if the author assumed Jesus' bodily resurrection and bodily ascension/return to the heavenly realms. The argument for the elevation of the eternal Son above the angels in the heavens requires Jesus to be the exalted human being *par excellence* in the heavens. As such the divine Son had not only to become a human being, but also to return to the heavenly realms as a human being. The incarnation must, that is, continue even after Jesus' death in order for the Son to become greater than the angels. Such an argument requires the resurrection as one of its foundational premises.

I cannot lay out the full case for the argument that follows, but instead summarize my account of how the argument in Heb 1–2 unfolds.<sup>8</sup> This summary is necessary for the following comparison and contrast with Philo because the logic of the argument for the Son's elevation above the angels in Heb 1–2 is a key piece of evidence that indicates both that Jesus' resurrection is essential for the author's thinking, and that this resurrection involved Jesus' blood-and-flesh humanity. Put differently, the argument that the author lays out for the Son's elevation above the angels *requires* Jesus to be an embodied human being when he passes through the heavens and is exalted to God's right hand.

It should be noted here that some interpreters think Jesus' divinity stands as the key point that distinguishes him from the angels and enables him to take his place at the Father's right hand.<sup>9</sup> The divine Son holds a place higher than the angels because unlike them, he is uncreated and unchangeable.<sup>10</sup> This view faces two problems. First, it does not take seriously enough the fact that the Son is described in Heb 1 as *becoming* greater than the angels (1:4). How can it be that the divine Son who created and sustains all things could *become* higher than the angels whom he created? Second, such an argument amounts to a tautology. On this account, the divine Son is greater than the angels

<sup>8</sup> See Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection* for argumentation.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich*, 411.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 104:4 is sometimes taken to make this distinction (e.g., Erich Grässer, *An Die Hebräer* [3 vols.; EKKNT; Zurich: Benziger, 1990–1997], 1:81–82). Undoubtedly the Son differs from the angels on this point. Angels are “made” (1:7), while the Son is God's agent of creation (1:2), but as Eric F. Mason has recently argued (“Hebrews and Second Temple Jewish Traditions on the Origins of Angels,” in *Hebrews in Contexts* [ed. Gabriella Gelardini and Harold W. Attridge; AJEC 91; Leiden: Brill, 2016], 63–93), the chief point of contrast in Heb 1:7 concerns the Son's status above the angels, not their origins.

because he is the divine Son. Certainly, the author of Hebrews could have intended to pose this tautology or even failed to see it as a tautology (as many of his interpreters seem to do). I am not suggesting some reason in principle why this is impossible. The language of *becoming* in the argument is, however, the clue that suggests a different solution. The divine Son's status relative to the angels has undergone some kind of actual change. The divine Son is the one who, the author plainly states in Heb 2:8–9, was for a little while *lower than the angels*. The status of the Son, it appears, has undergone a change relative to the angels. With Ps 8 in view, however, one can see that this change occurs in the context of the incarnation. As the human being Jesus, the Son was, like all humanity, made for a time lower than the angels. Three points support this conclusion.

First, it is clear from the author's eschatological interpretation of Ps 8 in Heb 2 that the place of rule over all things – and here one must surely think of Jesus' present, royal position at God's right hand (1:3, 8–9, 13; 10:12–13) – is reserved for humanity, not the angels (see Heb 2:5–8). Psalm 8 is interpreted by the author as a promise that humanity, though lower than the angels for a little while, will one day be exalted above them. Thus when the homilist says in 2:5 that the place of rule in the world to come is not reserved for angels, it becomes clear from Ps 8 that this is because that place is reserved for human beings.<sup>11</sup> When, therefore, Heb 1:4 claims that the Son *became* greater than the angels, the author must be referring to the eschatological dynamic he sees in Ps 8, just as he explains this as he interprets Ps 8 in Heb 2. That is to say, it is as the human being named Jesus – a human being who was in a position lower than the angels, but who is now crowned with glory and honor – that the divine Son was for a time lower than the angels but has now been elevated above them. Jesus has, in Hebrews, advanced to the goal of the eschatological promise of Ps 8.

Second, in terms of the author's argumentation as this develops from Heb 1 through Heb 2, the logic of the preceding argument identifies exactly how it can be the case that the divine Son has *become* both lower than and greater than the angels. Hebrews 1–2 must work with an incarnational logic in which the divine Son took up flesh and blood, occupying a status temporarily lower than the angels, only then to be elevated above the angels to the rule in the world to come. Precisely as the incarnate Jesus, in other words, the divine Son was for a time made lower than the angels. When, however, he returned to the heavenly realms, he was elevated above the angels as the exalted, eschatologically perfected human being Jesus. According to Ps 8 this elevation was not simply a matter of the divine Son being the divine Son, but a matter of his being a human being. The Son's elevation follows from the fact that Jesus is the first human

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<sup>11</sup> For my detailed argumentation substantiating this point see Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 119–32.

being to be crowned with the kind of glory and honor that makes him what God intended humanity to be. Jesus' humanity, in other words, is a central reason why Jesus is invited to sit at God's right hand, i.e., why he is given rule and dominion over the world to come. The divine Son has come to occupy a status and location that no angel could ever occupy because he is a human being (Heb 1:13; 2:5).

Third, if this reading of the argument of Heb 1–2 is correct, then the author must assume that the Son returned to the heavenly realm as a human being. Jesus must, that is, be a human being when he enters the heavens in order to be the one who, according to the promise of Ps 8, is qualified to be elevated above the angels and invited to rule at God's right hand. The Son must have returned to the heavenly realms with his humanity in order for one to say that the Son's status has changed relative to the angels.

To put all of this differently, the claim in Heb 1 that the Son has *become* greater than the angels is surely ambiguous in Heb 1, particularly since the clarification of how this change in the Son's status came to be is not developed until the author's interpretation of Ps 8 in Heb 2. Hebrews teases us with categories that appear to be incommensurable. How can it be that the divine, creator Son could *become* greater than the very things he created? Yet, the explanation just given in the three points above shows how the author moves to respond to this implicit question. The claim that the Son has inherited a status and location that makes him superior to any of the angels depends upon real development in the Son's relationship to the angels just to the extent that Hebrews draws upon the early Christian descent-ascent narrative of the incarnation and exaltation of the divine Son – Jesus.

From the preceding arguments it is clear, then, that something more than just the Son's divinity must be in play in the argumentation of Heb 1–2. In fact, the Son's humanity stands at the heart of the argument precisely because this is what qualifies him, in terms of the eschatological hope Hebrews sees in play in Ps 8, to attain a place higher than the angels. In order for such an argument to work, Angels must also in some way be ontologically different from human beings.

If this is correct so far, it follows that the development of Hebrews' argument in these opening chapters assumes Jesus' death and bodily resurrection precisely because his death and the resurrection of his humanity best explain how the creator Son could become both lower than and then greater than the angels. The Son, that is, had not only to have become a mortal human being, but must also have taken his humanity with him when he returned to the heavens. Stated differently, the Son would not have been able to be invited to sit on the throne at God's right hand had he not taken the elements constitutive of his humanity with him when we returned to the Father.

## Human and Angelic Ontologies in Hebrews

The proceeding discussion demonstrates the logical necessity of Jesus' humanity for the claim in Heb 1 that the Son has become greater than the angels. After his death, Jesus must have risen and ascended in order for the Son to be elevated above the angels whom he created. Two additional arguments can, however, be brought forward to further strengthen the case just presented, arguments that look closely at the distinction between human and angelic ontologies.

First, in Heb 1:7 the author affirms that angels are a particular kind of being – beings of fiery πνεῦμα.<sup>12</sup> Humanity, as becomes clear in Heb 2, is another kind of being, a being of “blood and flesh” (2:14). Additional evidence in Hebrews suggests that the author thinks that humanity also has πνεῦμα and ψυχή (see 4:12; 6:19; 10:38–39; 12:9, 23; 13:17). The idea in 4:12 that the word of God can penetrate to the division of soul (ψυχή) and spirit (πνεῦμα) seems to imply that the word can penetrate between elements of a person that are tightly bound together so as to be virtually indivisible. Hebrews does not explain how ψυχή and πνεῦμα relate to one another, but as I discuss below, some Greco-Roman thinkers assumed that the ψυχή consists of πνεῦμα. In any case, Hebrews appears to identify the righteous dead in 12:23 as perfected πνεύματα – surely a reference to the faithful examples of Heb 11 – gathered at the heavenly Mt Zion. There they presently join with the angels in worship and celebration while they, together with those on earth, wait to receive the eschatological inheritance of the unshakable kingdom (so 12:23, 27–28). Given the author's belief in the eschatological resurrection and eternal judgment (e.g. 6:2; 11:35), it hardly seems a stretch to conclude that he thinks of the heavenly state of the righteous spirits as an intermediate state.<sup>13</sup> Be that as it may, Hebrews appears to think that human beings consist of both flesh-and-blood body and spirit/soul, the latter of which can exist after the death of the mortal body.

It is worth noting here that the view that the human being consists of *both* the material body and πνεῦμα/ψυχή fits well with common assumptions about human ontology in Hellenistic philosophy and apocalyptically oriented forms of Judaism.<sup>14</sup> I discuss below the common, though not universal, view in the

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<sup>12</sup> Some argue that Heb 1:7 intends to identify angels with wind and fire (e.g., Joshua W. Jipp, “The Son's Entrance into the Heavenly World: The Soteriological Necessity of the Scriptural Catena in Hebrews 1.5–14,” *NTS* 56 [2010]: 557–75). Given the contrast Hebrews develops between angels and humanity in Heb 2, however, it seems best to interpret Heb 1:7 and 1:14 as a text identifying angels as fiery spirits, a notion common in Second Temple Jewish texts.

<sup>13</sup> The idea that God protects the spirits of the righteous while they wait for the final resurrection is clearly attested in apocalyptic Jewish texts (see n. 14 for some evidence).

<sup>14</sup> Several schools of Hellenistic philosophy held that humans were compound beings consisting of (at least) body (σῶμα) and soul (ψυχή). For some, such as Stoics and

Greco-Roman world that death separates the human body and the individual soul, giving the soul the opportunity to ascend close to the divine realm. For the time being, however, I note that in Heb 1–2 the author’s focus rests on what distinguishes humans and angels. Having flesh and blood, the very elements the Son inhabits when he participates in the human condition in order to help the seed of Abraham, is identified as the key difference between humans and angels (2:16–17).

Second, when one allows that Hebrews recognizes this ontological distinction between angels and humanity, the significance of the author’s invocation of Ps 8 in support of his argument becomes even more clear. Psalm 8 is read by the author as indicating that God always intended for a being other than an angel, that is, a being other than a ministering πνεῦμα (1:7, 14), to be elevated to the position at his right hand at some point. Thus, as Heb 1:5–6 and 1:13 indicate, God never invited any angel to occupy this special status or place.

The author of Hebrews therefore interprets Ps 8 as an explanation for why it is the case that no angel could be invited to sit on the heavenly throne. That special place of rule is reserved for a human being. In the context of the larger argument of Heb 1–2, it is clear that such a being is more than just a πνεῦμα. Psalm 8, in other words, implies for the author that no angel has *ever* been invited to sit at God’s right hand because no angelic πνεῦμα is a blood-and-flesh human being.

Since this place is reserved for a human being, it follows that if Jesus is qualified to take occupy this position, there must be an enduring ontological distinction between angelic beings and human beings even in the heavenly

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Epicureans, the compounds were all thought to be material. Stoics and Epicureans tended to differ, however, on whether or not the soul could be separated from the body at death such that an individual person continued to exist after death. Epicureans tended to deny this, believing that the soul and the body, and thus the individual, disintegrated after death. Stoics, who viewed the soul as consisting of πνεῦμα, tended to affirm the possibility of an individual existing as πνεῦμα after death. For still others, such as Middle Platonists, the compounds that constituted human being were the material σῶμα and the immaterial ψυχή, with the latter generally thought to consist of πνεῦμα (see R.W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* [London: Routledge, 1996], esp. 59–68). Those more influenced by a Platonic account of cosmology and human ontology tended to think of death as the separation of the body and pneumatic soul such that the spiritual essence of the person (the soul) continued to exist without the body. Death, that is, marked the time when the essence of the person (ψυχή) was released from its temporary entanglement in the material σῶμα. The idea that the human being is a compound of body and spirit was also evident in apocalyptic permutations of Second Temple Judaism. This can be seen in the fact that some apocalyptic Jews and early Christians believed that the spirit could be separated from the body in order to travel into the heavens (e.g., Rev 4:1–2; *Ascen. Isa.* 6:10–12; cf. 2 Cor 12:2–3), as well as in the fact that many believed that upon death, the spirits of the righteous were kept safe by God while they waited for renewed bodies at the resurrection (e.g., *L.A.B.* 23:13; Rev 6:9–11; 4 *Ezra* 7:32; 2 *Bar.* 30:2).



realms, at least for the human being who has received the eschatological or “better resurrection” (11:35).<sup>15</sup> This further explains why the author can claim that the angels will not rule over the world to come (2:5). As the argument of Heb 2 makes clear, that royal prerogative belongs to humanity. Even in the world to come, then, there remains an enduring distinction between angelic beings and human beings.

From these two points it follows that when the divine Son was invited to sit at God’s right hand, he was invited to take this position precisely because he is an eschatologically perfected, i.e., resurrected, human being. He is, in other words, something other than a heavenly being of fiery *πνεῦμα*. To put the point differently, were Jesus only a *πνεῦμα* when he passed through the heavens and returned to God’s presence, he would not be qualified to sit on the throne reserved for humanity in accordance with Hebrews’ reading of Ps 8. Hebrews must envision Jesus entering God’s presence as a human being, for only as a human being can he be invited to sit at God’s right hand. Jesus’ elevation above the angels in God’s heavenly presence is, therefore, a function of his humanity.<sup>16</sup> Jesus, that is, must continue even after his death to be something no angelic *πνεῦμα* is – human.

There is, however, another way to probe and pursue this argument. If one wants to hold that Jesus did not take his flesh and blood with him when he passed through the heavens, one has to show how what he did take is, on Hebrews’ own terms, *essentially* and eschatologically human. That is to say, one has to show that Jesus is now, after his death, something that is essentially different with respect to his humanness in comparison with the angels such that he could become greater than the angels. A category other than Jesus’ divine identity seems to be required if the language of becoming is to be taken seriously.

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<sup>15</sup> In Heb 11:35 the author contrasts women who received their dead back with the “better resurrection.” He appears to contrast the resuscitation of people after they died with the hope for the permanent, eschatological resurrection of the dead. In the former case, the people raised up presumably died again at some point. In the latter case, the resurrection is “better” because it is the final resurrection to immortal life. See Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection*, 186–88 for detailed arguments.

<sup>16</sup> To suggest that this kind of conclusion somehow ignores, downplays, or even stands against the Son’s eternal, divine identity (e.g., Jean-René Moret, “Le rôle du concept de purification dans l’Épître aux Hébreux: une réaction à quelques propositions de David M. Moffitt,” *NTS* 62 [2016]: 289–307) poses a false dichotomy and seems to me not to take the incarnational logic of Hebrews seriously enough. For Hebrews, the human being Jesus is always also the eternal, divine Son of God. I fail to see how a focus on ways in which Jesus’ humanity contributes to the logic and argumentation of this text stands in any way at odds with the author’s incarnational assumptions. For some detailed argumentation on this point see, David M. Moffitt, “The Role of Jesus’ Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Once Again: A Brief Response to Jean-René Moret,” *NTS* 62 (2016): 308–14.