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God's Faithfulness to Promise

*The Hortatory Use of Commissive
Language in Hebrews*

David Worley

With a Bibliographical Addendum by
Lee Zachary Maxey

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO PROMISE

The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews

Yale University Ph.D. 1981

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO PROMISE

The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews

*A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Yale University in Candidacy for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

By David Ripley Worley, Jr., May 1981

With a Bibliographical Addendum by
Lee Zachary Maxey

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To Melinda Ann Worley

never flagging in zeal
aglow with the Spirit
loving as Christ loved

faithful woman
loving companion
patient mother

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FOREWORD

James W. Thompson

An irony in the history of research in the Epistle to the Hebrews is that the major thread running through this homily has received little scholarly attention. While Hebrews appears to be a series of midrashim on different texts and topics, the unifying thread of the homily is the divine promise. Forms of ἐπαγ- appear throughout the homily, more frequently than in any book of the NT.¹ Synonyms for ἐπαγ-, which are also prominent in the homily, include ἐλπίς (3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23; cf. ἐλπίζομένων in 11:1), God's oath (cf. forms of ὀμνύειν in 3:11, 18; 6:13; 7:20-21), the inheritance (κληρονομία, 9:15; 11:8) of salvation (1:14; 6:12), the abiding possession (10:34), the reward (μισθαποδοσία, 10:35; cf. 11:6), and the city that is to come (cf. 11:8-16; 13:14). According to David Worley's dissertation, these references reflect the accumulation of commissive language in Hebrews.

Prior to David Worley's analysis, Ernst Käsemann's classic *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* demonstrated an awareness of the importance of the promise in Hebrews.² F. J. Schierse's *Verheissung und Heilsvollendung: Zur theologische Grundfrage des Hebräerbriefts* was one of the few thorough studies of the motif of the promise in this homily.³ After Worley completed the dissertation in 1981, others recognized the importance of the promise in Hebrews. Indeed, C. Rose argued that the promise is the central theme of

1 Cf. ἐπαγγελία in 4:1; 6:12, 15, 17; 7:6; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9, 13, 17, 33, 39; ἐπαγγέλλεσθαι in 6:13; 10:23; 12:26. Elsewhere in the NT it appears prominently in Acts (8 times), Romans (7 times), and Galatians (9 times). It appears 18 times in Hebrews as compared to 22 times in the Pauline corpus, and only 17 times in the entire LXX. See A. Sand, *ἐπαγγελία*, *EDNT* 2.14.

2 Ernst Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*. FRLANT 55. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1938).

3 F. J. Schierse, *Verheissung und Heilsvollendung: Zur theologische Grundfrage des Hebräerbriefts*, MTS 9 (Munich: Zink, 1955).

Hebrews.⁴ The major focus of the research on the promise in Hebrews was the author's concept of the content of the promise. Scholars have examined the background of the concept, comparing the concept of the promise with canonical and noncanonical writers with an attempt to discover the world behind the text. They also have examined the promise in analyses of the eschatology of Hebrews.

Worley's dissertation, unlike the other studies, is an examination of the world within the text. With its use of linguistic analysis, it offers a unique analysis of how promises function in human discourse. Background studies offer a critical analysis of the role of commissive language in antiquity, demonstrating the various functions of promises. Worley's study of ancient literature offers valuable insights into the role of the promise in both religion and politics. Much of this literature has not been played a role in subsequent studies of the promise in Hebrews. The focus of this dissertation is not, however, on the background of the concept in Hebrews, but on the function of promissory language within the text. With its focus on what language does, it anticipates the emergence of rhetorical criticism, which has flourished since this dissertation was completed. Indeed, current rhetorical critics will benefit from Worley's careful treatment of the functions of promissory language throughout this homily.

In a linguistic analysis of the functions of commissive language in chapter one, Worley demonstrates that, of the numerous functions of promises, one is to exhort the listener(s). The demonstration from ancient sources, including the speeches of the generals to their troops, offers a helpful parallel to the function of the promise in Hebrews. Such promises embolden the listeners to endure and bear the necessary burdens that lead to the promise.

The function of the promise is inseparable from the situation of the listener, as Worley demonstrates. Against a long tradition of Hebrews scholarship, he rightly determines that Hebrews is not a polemical work, but a "word of exhortation" (13:22) to a community that suffers from social alienation, loss of property, and discouragement. Readers who are abandoning their assemblies (Heb 10:25) because of their "drooping hands and weak knees" (12:12) need to find a reason to endure to the end (3:6, 14). Worley's examination of the speeches of the commissive language of ancient generals provides helpful insights in determining that the function of the promise is to instill the confidence in the readers that will lead to their endurance.

4 C. Rose, "Verheißung und Erfüllung: Zum Verständnis von *ἐπαγγελία* im Hebräerbrief," BZ 33 (1989): 191.

Worley correctly demonstrates the hortatory function of the promise throughout Hebrews in providing the readers' confidence and perseverance. In a careful analysis, he correctly maintains that the central section of Hebrews (4:14-10:18) is not only a soteriological statement, but is a promise intended to embolden the community. In his study of the historical Jesus (Heb 5:1-10) and of the faithful patriarchs (6:12-20; 11:8-16), he recognizes the exemplary role played by the biblical examples as people sustained by the promise.

In his study of commissive language in Hebrews, Worley anticipated subsequent scholarship with a focus on the performative nature of language. In many instances, he provided insights that later scholarship did not develop. Consequently, the dissemination of this dissertation a previous generation will benefit current scholarship.

ABSTRACT

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO PROMISE

The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews

David Ripley Worley Jr.
Yale University, 1981

This study is an attempt to account for the extensive use of “promise” and promising in Hebrews by an approach to the commissive vocabulary in Hebrews which proceeds from a heightened awareness of the phenomenon of promising. To this end, the work of J.L. Austin has been seminal for this study in the formation of certain basic categories for isolating the distinctive features of commissive language and for interpreting their use in Hebrews. The more traditional question of ‘what is the author saying with promises’ has been broadened in our work to ‘what is the author doing with commissive language’ in his letter.

The first chapter introduces the basic categories for talking about commissive language: the words denoting promise, the components of promise, the felicities of promising, the forces of commissive utterances. The latter category is elaborated through a classification of the sorts of things people in the ancient world tried to accomplish by promising and using past “promises”. Since our primary concern is with promises in a literary whole, we also raise in this chapter the question of ‘what our author is doing with his letter.’ Against a background of ancient hortatory literature, we isolate certain

features of Hebrews which lead us to regard the letter as an Exhortation. This generic conception is reinforced by a reconstruction of the readers' situation.

Chapter 2 is an investigation first of the degree to which the stories of Abraham and the heirs in Heb 11:8-22 are depictions of *felicitous promising*. What the author has done with these depictions in his letter is then pursued by considering the functions of Abraham's story within the anaphora of faith and within the listing of the exemplars of faithful endurance of Hebrews 11. Next, the particular impact these depictions may have had on the readers is gauged by comparing the story of the ancient heirs with the situation of the readers in order to see if Abraham has been made into the image of the readers.

The interest in the *forces of promising* leads us in Chapter 3 to interpret God's solemn oath in 6:12-18 in light of the ancient orator's use of the forensic oath. From this framework of what was done with oaths, it becomes clear that our author has tried to encourage his readers not only by an appeal to the integrity of God as oath-taker, but also His faithful guardianship as oath-witness. God's faithfulness to His solemn oath to Jesus is then placed within the hortatory concerns of Heb 4:14-7:28.

Attention to the *linguistic phenomenon of promising*, the way we ordinarily use "promise", makes the use of "promise" by some in their formulations of Jesus' role in Hebrews vis-à-vis God as Promiser sound strange and somewhat awkward. In Chapter 4, we offer alternative formulations of Jesus' relationship to God's promises, as well as a description of what the author has attempted to do to his readers by depicting such a relationship. First, Jesus' possible role as an exemplary promisee in 5:5-10 and 11:39-12:3 is examined. Next, particular concern is focused in Hebrews 8-10 on the connection of Jesus' priesthood to the "better promises" of the new covenant. Finally, we raise the possibility that our author's own perceptions may have been formed, at least in part, by a regard for the 'Jesus' of the LXX who was sent ahead into the promised Rest.

We conclude that our author's use of commissive language was not prompted by criticisms within the church over a delay in God's promise keeping; rather that our author seized upon God's commissive activity and the behavior of promisees of scripture as a way of emboldening a people tempted to withdraw from one another and from God to endure social and financial difficulties and to remain confident in the face of threats to the promise.

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Finally, Iva Lea Worley Barton, without your faithful guardianship as mother and as steward of possessions my academic quests for knowledge would have been impossible.

ABBREVIATIONS

A. Journals

<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Ohio Journal of Religious Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>NRT</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue theologique</i>
<i>NT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RelS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
<i>SEA</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>ThRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>ThStKr</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
<i>TTZ</i>	<i>Trierer theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

B. Commentaries

Bleek Friedrich Bleek. *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. 3 vols. Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1828-40.

- Bruce F.F. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Buchanan George Buchanan. *To the Hebrews*. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972.
- Calvin Jean Calvin. *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*. Translated by William Johnston. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963.
- Delitzsch Franz Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Translated by Thomas Kingsbury. 2 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868-70.
- Grant Frederick Grant. *The Epistle to Hebrews*. Harper's Annotated Bible. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.
- Héring Jean Héring. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Translated by A.W. Heathcote and P.J. Allcock. London: Epworth Press, 1970.
- Hughes Philip Hughes. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
- Käsemann Ernst. *Das Wandernde Gottesvolk*. Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939.
- Kuss Otto Kuss. *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. 2d ed. Regensburger Neues Testament. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1966.
- Lightfoot Lightfoot. Neil. *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.
- Michel Otto Michel. *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. 6th ed. Meyer Kommentar. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966.
- Moffatt James Moffatt. *Epistle to the Hebrews*. The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924.
- Montefiore Hugh Montefiore. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Harper's New Testament Commentaries. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- Riggenbach Eduard Riggenbach. *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. Zahn's Kommentar zum Neuen Testament. Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1913.
- Schlatter Adolf Schlatter. *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. Stuttgart: Calwer, 1950.
- von Soden H. von Soden. *Hebräerbrief*. 2d ed. Hand-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament. Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1892.
- Spicq Ceslaus Spicq. *L'Épître aux Hébreux*. 2 vols. Etudes Bibliques. Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1952.
- Spicq SB Ceslaus Spicq. *L'Épître aux Hébreux*. Sources Bibliques. Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1977.
- Strathmann Hermann Strathmann. *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. Das Neue Testament Deutsch. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970.
- Vanhoye Albert Vanhoye. *La Structure Littéraire de L'Épître aux Hébreux*. 2d ed. Desclée de Brouwer, 1976.
- Westcott B.F. Westcott. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. 3d ed. London: Macmillan & Co., 1914.
- Windisch Hans Windisch. *Der Hebräerbrief*. Handbuch zum Neuen Testament. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1931.

C. Reference Works; Texts and Translations

- BAGD Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 5th ed.
 BDF F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, 9th/10th ed.
 BDR Blass, Debrunner and F. Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, 14th rev. ed.
 DBS *Dictionnaire de la Bible*
 IG *Inscriptiones Graecae*
 Kasher Menahem Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*
 LAW *Lexikon der Alten Welt*
 Lexicographie Ceslaus Spicq, *Notes de Lexicographie Néo-Testamentaire*, 2 vols.
 MM J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek NT Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*
 Preisigke Friedrich Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der Griechischen Papyrusurkunden*
 PG *Patrologia graeca*, ed. J. Migne
 PW Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*
 Sammelb *Sammelbuch Griechischen Urkunden aus Aegypten*, ed. F. Preisigke and E. Kiessling
 SIG *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, ed. W. Dittenberger
 Spengel Leonard Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*
 Str-B Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*
 TDNT/TWNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Theologisches Wörterbuch zum NT*
 TRE *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*

Abbreviations for modern lexica, grammars, encyclopedias and other reference tools follow the ‘style guide’ for the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Similar use of these guidelines is made in the case of Jewish and Christian texts, and Rabbinic material with these additions: for the papyri, Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed.; for certain ‘Jewish’ texts, James Charlesworth’s *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research*; for Philo, abbreviations in Loeb ed.; for Plutarch, Frederick Brenk’s *In Mist Apparelled*.

INTRODUCTION

The word “promise” is used more frequently in Hebrews than in any other New Testament document. This alone might have less significance for the interpretation of Hebrews except that the uses of ἐπαγγελία/ἐπαγγέλλομαι are not confined to one part of the letter, as they are for example in Galatians. In Hebrews, “promise” is distributed throughout the letter.¹

This frequency and even distribution of “promise” has been recognized by interpreters; few though have been concerned to explore its significance in any sustained way. The one notable exception to this is an obscure study by Cletus Groenen, *De Notione ἐπαγγελία in Epistola ad Hebraeos*.² Groenen does not advance a particular thesis, as much as present a description of “promise” in Hebrews, working from a series of questions involving aspects of the denotation and reference of ἐπαγγελία. Groenen cannot, in short space (71 pp.), provide any close exegetical work but he does offer a fair introduction to what is present in Hebrews.³ Still his conclusions are of a general

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- 1 ἐπαγγελία 4:1; 6:12, 15, 17; 7:6; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9, 9, 13, 17, 33, 39; ἐπαγγέλλομαι 6:13; 10:23; 11:11; 12:26; not only “promises” but also commissive utterances, some of which are called promises in Hebrews, others which are not, to Jesus (1:5; 5:5, 6; 7:17, 21), threats to the Israelites (3:11; 4:3, 5) promises to the heirs (6:13; 11:18), to us (8:8-12; 10:16, 17; 12:26; 13:5); add to this, words with related senses in Hebrews (e.g. “oath”, “covenant”, “word” then the importance of commissive vocabulary in the letter increases; moreover, one must not overlook the predications of God that may be related to his role as Promiser (cf. 6:10, 18; 10:23; 11:6, 10, 11, 27; 12:29; 13:6) as well as the stress in Hebrews on God speaking.
 - 2 This little known dissertation from the Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum published in Rome in 1954 was kindly brought to my attention by Gerhard Friedrich in his preparation for the supplementary bibliography for the *TWNT*; reference may also be found in the bibliography of Ceslaus Spicq in “Épître aux Hébreux,” *DBS* 7 (1961) 226-79.
 - 3 After a brief survey of promise in Jewish literature, Groenen proceeds to the heart of his descriptive study which is a fair accounting of the role of Promiser (e.g. the importance of certain attributes, *Fidelis, Veracitas, Omnipotentia*) and promisee (e.g. the need for assurance toward endurance, pp. 39-42), as well as a survey of the referents of “promises” (pp. 49-57) which leads him to the general conclusion that the ultimate goal of the promises is “union with God”.

nature, leaving the reader to wonder why the author of Hebrews chose to use "promises":

Doctrina epistolae ad Hebraeos de *ἐπαγγελία* est quasi primus tractatus brevis de "novissimis" hominis. Nam *ἐπαγγελία* est: revelatio voluntatis divinae salvificae universalis, qua hominem vocavit ad beatitudinem caelestem obtinendam mediante Christo et bonis operibus (p. 71).

While Groenen's is the only full study whose thematic focus is *ἐπαγγελία* in Hebrews, other investigations of Hebrews have dealt with the use of "promise".⁴ Among these studies, including Groenen's, *ἐπαγγελία* has been typically approached from one of three, or some combination of three, perspectives.

1. Most frequently "promise" is part of the discussion of the eschatology of Hebrews.⁵ "Promise" is important as a word, along with others such as "inheritance" and "reward", which refers to the future salvation. Interest is here shifted from promise qua promise to the particular referents of promise. Along these lines, investigations pursue Jewish/ Christian precedents or analogies for the particular images of the future.⁶ Promising becomes an act of revealing (Groenen, p. 71), proclaiming (*Käsemann*, p. 15; Schierse, p. 135), predicting (Barrett, p. 392). Used as an adjective ("promissory", "character of promise"), promise comes to denote the future aspect of "revelation" (*Käsemann*, p. 11) and the "Word of God" (Michel, p. 193; Hughes, *Hermeneutics*, p. 41).

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- 4 These studies will be mentioned in the text below, but we must note here that the work of Franz J. Schierse, which by title appears to be a full blown study of "promise" in Hebrews, *Verheissung und Heilsvollendung: Zur Theologischen Grundfrage des Hebräerbriefes* written before Groenen's work, 1948, but published after, 1955; cf. Groenen, p. ix, n. 1) is actually a study of the 'already/not yet' (heavenly sanctuary/future world) aspect of Hebrews to which he brings some comments on "promise".
 - 5 *Notio eschatologiae*, Groenen, p. 71; die eschatologische Ausrichtung dieses Begriffes, Ernst Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, 3d ed. (FRLANT 55; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959) 19; cf. Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics* (NTSMS 36; Cambridge: At the University Press, 1979) 41; Michel, p. 193; C.K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ftsch. C.H. Dodd, ed. W.D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1956) 363-93; John T. Ramsey, "The Concept of Promise in the New Testament" (Th.D. Diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1970) 149.
 - 6 E.g. Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief* (WUNT 11; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1970) and Barrett's discussions of Philo and Barnabas ("Eschatology," pp. 368-93).

2. If the interpreter proceeds to relate the eschatology to the situation of the readers then the “promises” of Hebrews necessarily become a part of his reconstruction. If the readers have been discouraged because of a delay in the Parousia, then the “promises” function apologetically to proclaim and reaffirm the future salvation.⁷ If the purpose of the letter is otherwise then another explanation for the use of “promise” must be offered.
3. One obvious difficulty faced in pressing the ‘future’ aspect of “promise” has been the “promises” in Hebrews already completed. Abraham, for example, receives the promise of increase (6:15). Attempts to account for this have ranged from a certain leveling of the promises (secondary and primary promises, Groenen p. 66) to a kind of minimizing of the completion (Abraham received the promise in only a limited degree, Barrett p. 378) to a hermeneutic reactivation of promise in completion (jede erfüllte Verheissung... eine Verheissung auf das Endgültige, Schierse p. 137). Somewhat similar problems have been faced in attempts to describe Jesus’ involvement with God’s “promises” in Hebrews. Is his role that of agent to the Promiser, implementing God’s primary promises (Groenen, p. 63)? Is his priesthood a partial realization of a future promise (Schierse, p. 138)? Or does Jesus’ priesthood itself constitute a final promise (Klappert, pp. 28-32)?

Familiar as these characteristic approaches may sound, one must not overlook the limitations and various differences in these uses of “promises” and promising from the way we ordinarily use promise. In promising, information is certainly conveyed, but promising is much more than a declaration of intentions. To speak of God’s promises as “proclamation” or “revelation” is accurate but at best partial and somewhat misleading, for distinctive components of “promise” and conventions characteristic of promising are left unspoken. Moreover, to understand the *Begriff* of promise as threefold—proclamation, object, future reference (cf. Schierse, p. 135; Käsemann, pp. 13-15)—is to neglect other significant features of the logic of promise, in particular the integrity of the Promiser, the clarity of the promising, the benefit of the promised object, the expectation of the promisee. These features have certainly not

7 Worked out by Erich Grässer, *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief* (MTS 2; Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1965); picked up in Bertold Klappert, *Die Eschatologie des Hebräerbriefs* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1969) 54 and in Hofius, *Katapausis*, p. 150. For the unusual position that the “heavenly homeland” promised in Hebrews actually refers to Palestine, see George W. Buchanan, “The Present State of Scholarship in Hebrews,” in *Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults*, ftsch. Morton Smith, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975) 1:327.

been wholly overlooked (especially by Groenen, pp. 28-41, 61-65) but neither have they been central in previous discussions.⁸

What we propose to do in our study is to broaden the perspective toward promise in Hebrews, and this in four ways: 1. to view promising as an activity *in* which and *by* which certain things, in addition to proclamation, can be accomplished; 2. to view the uses of past "promises" as signaling certain typical situations; 3. to be aware of the various components of promising and how the mechanism of promising works; 4. to include the use of certain other words which share with promise an obligatory denotation, i.e. the commissive vocabulary of Hebrews (e.g. "oath," "covenant," "word"), in the investigation of the phenomenon of promise.

What we thus set out to do is to answer this question: What is the author of Hebrews *doing* with commissive language. We shall try to demonstrate that in Hebrews there is a *hortatory* use of commissive language.

In order to make this proposal feasible there must first be some sense of the range of things that can be done by promising and by using past "promises" as well as some sense of what the author of Hebrews is doing with his letter. In *Chapter 1*, we shall address these twin concerns. What shall be provided in the first instance is a brief classification of the characteristic uses of promising and "promises", human and divine, in certain literary sources of the first centuries. The way we shall think and talk about language here will presuppose an understanding of the "forces" of utterances conceived and worked out, in a preliminary way, by J.L. Austin in his *How to Do Things with Words*. Although Austin was concerned with utterances, and not literary sections or wholes, certain of his insights will also be applied to the second issue of our first chapter, the much disputed question of the structure and literary intention of the whole of Hebrews. Bringing in recent discussions of the character of "hortatory" material, we shall see how by the situation of the readers, the style of writing, and the expressed intention, Hebrews may be read as a hortatory letter. Finally, we shall be concerned in this first Chapter, in various ways, with arriving at a general understanding of what constitutes a promising situation and most importantly what makes promising a "felicitous" activity.

Since commissive language is distributed throughout Hebrews, a close investigation of its use would require a lengthy study. We have therefore chosen to concentrate particular exegetical attention on the two passages in

8 The *theology* of God as Promiser has been relatively neglected; cf. Albert Vanhoye, "Le Dieu de la nouvelle alliance dans l'épître aux Hébreux," in *La Notion biblique de Dieu*, ed. J. Coppens (Genbloux: J. Duculot, 1976) 315-30; L.O. Bristol, "God in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Crozer Quarterly* 25 (1948) 319-23; F.J. Taylor, "The Will of God IV. In the Epistle to the Hebrews," *ET* 72 (1961) 167-69.

Hebrews in which commissive language is the most concentrated, Heb 11:8-22 and 6:12-18.

In *Chapter 2*, we shall explore what the author is doing with his depiction of Abraham in chapter eleven. Taking two features of felicitous promising, promises of benefit and the character of the Promiser, we shall discuss how a depiction of the heirs as ‘avidly expecting the promise’ alternates with a depiction of the heirs as ‘trusting God’s faithfulness to promise.’ To discover what the author has intended with this double depiction, we shall next look at the rhetorical logic of chapter eleven, both from the perspective of Abraham’s place *within* chapter eleven and from the reverse perspective of the weight of the Abraham depiction on the interpretation of chapter eleven. Finally, we shall place the double depiction of the heirs alongside the situation of the readers and ask how the similarities and differences between these may be functioning in exhortation. In this chapter we shall be addressing, in part, the problem encountered in the eschatological reading of “promise”, viz. of how to interpret the “promises” to Abraham ‘already completed’.

In *Chapter 3*, the question of what the author is doing with the divine oath within 4:14-7:28 will be pursued. The author’s use of the forensic oath in 6:16 suggests that the author may have been influenced by a rhetorical training in the use of the forensic oath. We shall see how our author’s use of God’s commissive oaths compares with the theory and practice of oath-taking and oath-using among ancient orators. In this, however, we shall not overlook the primary context, the literary-rhetorical context of 4:14-7:28. This Chapter will hopefully illustrate the benefit of having broadened the study of “promise” in Hebrews to its semantic field of commissive vocabulary, in particular here, to an extended rhetorical investigation of oaths.

Jesus’ priesthood is such a fundamental consideration of Hebrews that it would be remarkable indeed if the author did not include Jesus somehow within his use of commissive language. In *Chapter 4*, we shall seek the points at which the depiction of Jesus’ role and activity intersects with God’s commissive activity. We shall try to avoid not so ordinary uses of promise frequently found in attempts to address this issue (e.g. ‘Jesus’ exaltation is the definitive form of the promise’). We shall inquire, on the one hand, whether Jesus is depicted *as a promisee* within those passages of Hebrews in which Jesus’ humanity is of thematic concern. What has been discovered as characteristic in the author’s depiction and use of faithful promisees (Chapter 2) will serve as a guide to the possible depiction of Jesus as a promisee. On the other hand, we shall be interested in Jesus’ priesthood vis-à-vis God’s role as promise keeper. God’s oath to Jesus (Ps 109:4), as well as Jesus’ mediation of covenant (Heb 8:6), will be of particular interest. Although we cannot engage

in detailed exegesis in this final Chapter, we must nevertheless seek some description of our author's conception and use of Jesus' priesthood and God's promising, as well as some explanation, tentative though it be, of our author's reticence to relate Jesus more explicitly to God's faithfulness to promise.

CHAPTER 1

PROMISES AND EXHORTATION

The question of what our author is doing with “promises” in his work is in practice an inquiry into the forces and functions of “promises” in Hebrews. The author’s use of “promises” is constrained by at least two broad factors which we may introduce in this Chapter. The first is the actual human experience of promising. The author is not creating or appealing to some remote experience but to a conventional human activity, with characteristic forces. These forces, as they affect promisees, can be classified. The second broad factor which constrains the use of promise is the author’s intention for his literary work; “Promises” occur within discourse which has certain functions according to the author’s larger purposes. To understand “promises” in Hebrews one must work from some conception of the author’s literary intentions.

The use of commissive utterances or the use of a word, “promise”, is not, however, what we are finally after. We are interested in the phenomenon of promising, not only in utterances but in people, promisers and promisees, and how these people influence and are influenced by promising. We may begin now with this wider perspective.

Features of Promising

“The concept of a promise is obscure.”¹ This remark of the philosopher Georg Hendrik van Wright sounds at first strange because promising is something young and old do alike regardless of their intelligence quotient. In practice, the concept of promise *is* understood. If one, however, slows the machinery of promising to an idle and attempts to describe all that is involved in the

1 Georg Hendrik von Wright, “On Promises,” *Theoria* 28 (1962) 281.

promising situation, the complexity of this ordinary human experience begins to become apparent. One index to this may be seen in the various legal institutions designed to protect partners in promises in the business world from misexecutions and abuses in promising. The challenge of describing what happens in promising has spurred the pen of many a philosopher the last three decades.² "Obscure" may be too strong a word, but the concept of promise is certainly open to manifold elaboration.³

Our effort here in the beginning to introduce features of promising may at best be considered a modest, yet necessary one. In order to discern the 'landscape' of promising in Hebrews, it is necessary that we define some categories for thinking about and describing promise. We shall describe what is entailed in promise by presenting the components of promising; what is implied and presupposed in promising by describing the felicities of promising. From these two general features, we shall obtain a preliminary view of what is of interest to the author of Hebrews in the 'logic of promise.'³

First, however, the most obvious feature of promising in Hebrews should not be overlooked, the word the author uses to denote promise, ἐπαγγελία/ἐπαγγέλλομαι. What sparks our interest here is a type of question often neglected in New Testament lexicography, the question of word choice, why the author used this word for promise and not another.⁴ Such an inquiry falls

2 Among the many studies available in the philosophical journals, two have been most useful for our purposes, the article by van Wright and the essay of A.I. Melden, "On Promising," *Mind* 65 (1956) 49-66. From a legal perspective, see P.S. Atiyah, "Promises and the Law of Contract," *Mind* 88 (1979) 410-18.

3 We use the expressions "logic of promise" and "concept of promise" interchangeably to refer to that web of elements which are entailed and implied in promising and in the promising situation. The former expression has become more visible in theological circles through the publication of Christopher Morse's *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), which is in many ways an attempt to show the illogical nature of promise in the way Moltmann uses "promise".

4 In his work, Anthony Thiselton is now drawing attention to the significance of such questions, questions pertaining to what semanticists call, in debt to the work of de Saussure, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationship of words, i.e. the relationship of words with related senses and the relationship of words in context and collocation; Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1980) 124-29. James Barr's criticisms of the explanations given in *TDNT* for the absence in the NT of certain words are not germane to our discussion; *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1961) 282-87. In practice, Barr sees a genuine place for the pursuit of 'paradigmatic relationships'; see "Some Semantic Notes on the Covenant," *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart and Rudolf Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977) 31-34. The theory of semantic fields lies at the heart of the Greek New Testament Wordbook for translators which is nearing completion. No doubt the forthcoming book of J.P. Louw on the Semantics of N5.T. Greek will reinforce a growing interest in semantic fields in

within the current research in ‘semantic fields’ and in ‘componential analysis’.⁵ The significance for our interpretation of Hebrews is simply the issue of whether our author’s exclusive use of ἐπαγγελία should indicate to us an interest in a certain kind of promise or perhaps the exclusion of some denotation.

Promise, Pledge, Vow. In modern English, there are a number of words which have in common an obligatory sense. In certain contexts, this commissive vocabulary can be used synonymously: “Promising to..., he pledged to... Moreover he vowed to...” An author or speaker who is concerned about stylistic variation in his work makes frequent use of this shared aspect in the associative relationship (“paradigmatic relationship”) of words.⁶ When an author does not vary his word choice, it may indicate some stylistic inaptitude, but it may as well reflect a deliberate choice. A speaker may choose “promise” rather than “pledge” because it sounds better. We speak of “God promising” rather than “God pledging” not because the denotation is different but because our ears are more accustomed to the first expression. Yet, the choice of “promise” over “pledge” may sometimes result from their difference in sense.⁷ “Campaign promises” are quite different from “campaign pledges”. In such expressions, the word that “promise” and “pledge” keeps company with, its collocation (“syntagmatic relationship”), distinguishes the commissive vocabulary.⁸

N.T. studies. Eugene Nida has been a persistent voice in these matters with regard to translation; “Linguistic and Semantic Structure” and “Words and Thought,” *Language Structure and Translation* (Stanford: University Press, 1975) 68, 185 -89.

- 5 See John Lyons, *Semantics* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1977) 1:240-42, 250-69; A. Lehrer, *Semantic Fields and Lexical Structure* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1974); Eugene Nida, *Componential Analysis of Meaning* (Paris: Mouton, 1975) 15-20.
- 6 See E.D. Hirsch, Jr., “Stylistics and Synonymy,” *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 50-73.
- 7 “Very few words are completely synonymous in the sense of being interchangeable in any context without the slightest alteration in objective meaning, feeling tone or evocative value;” Stephen Ullmann, *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 141-55. Cf. also, Miles Hanley, “Synonyms and Antonyms,” in *Harbrace Guide to Dictionaries*, ed. Kenneth Wilson et al. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963) 158; R.C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 11th ed. (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1890) xxi.
- 8 For the notion of collocation, J.R. Firth, *Papers in Linguistics*, 1934-1951 (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) 197; cf. Trench, *Synonyms*, p. xx.

In the first century, two words were predominately used to denote the obligatory sense, *ὑπόσχεσις/ὑπισχνέομαι* and *ἐπαγγελία/ἐπαγγέλλομαι*. The author of Hebrews denotes divine promises with only one of these two word pairs, *ἐπαγγελία/ἐπαγγέλλομαι*.⁹

In this instance, the author has *not* been influenced by what at first glance might seem to have been the obvious source for such language, the LXX. The Greek Old Testament not only lacks *ἐπαγγελία/ἐπαγγέλλομαι* in those stories of the Pentateuch so associated with God's promises, but in fact uses *ἐπαγγελία* only in Esth 4:7; Ps 55:9; and Amos 9:6.¹⁰ No 'Biblical Greek' has determined our author's choice of *ἐπαγγελία* over *ὑπόσχεσις*.

Nor has the linguistic practice of the Hellenistic culture in speaking of divine promises or the vocabulary of Greek speaking Jewish exegetes and leaders in the synagogue determined a preference for our author. Both words were used variously by Gentiles when they spoke of the "promises" of their Gods.¹¹ In Jewish literature as well *ἐπαγγελία* and *ὑπόσχεσις* are both used to denote the promises of God.¹² Most striking is the use by Philo of *ὑπόσχεσις*

9 One could ask why the author has used *ἐπαγγελία* instead of *ἐπαγγελμα* or why *ἐπαγγέλλομαι* instead of *ὁμολογέω*. The uses in Philo, Josephus, Plutarch and Polybius, as well as the glosses in certain ancient lexica, suggest that our question in the text below will be a more useful one to pursue. Hesychius and Pollux, for example, both list *ὑπόσχεσις* as a synonym for *ἐπαγγελία*. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. M. Schmidt (Jenae, 1867); *Pollucis Onomasticon*, ed. Ericus Bethe, 3 vols. (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1900-37). The older Greek-Latin glossaries (under the names of Cyrillus and Philoxenus) list *ἐπαγγελία* and *ὑπόσχεσις* synonymously and as equivalent to *pollicitatio* and *promissio*; *Glossae Latinograecae et Graecolatinae*, ed. G. Goetz and G. Gundermann (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1888) 152,161,305. (Note: for the sake of brevity we include in the text, by implication, *ἐπαγγέλλομαι* with *ἐπαγγελία* and *ὑπισχνέομαι* with *ὑπόσχεσις*.) It must be reiterated that on the one hand the two words could be used to refer to the very same promise (e.g. in Poly V 36:3,4; XXIX 9:2,8; Jos *Ant* VII 63; XI 310; Arist *NE* IX 4:16,17; 1164a; Aelius Arist, *Sacred Tales* IV 81,82). They could, however, be distinguished (below).

10 In the Old Testament of the RSV, the noun occurs some 32 times, the verb 57 times (the KJV, 5 and 36 respectively). The exposure in Christian teaching of the "promises of God" has, no doubt, had its influence on the inclinations of the English translators in their reading of the Old Testament. The classical Hebrew had no separate word for promise as the Greeks did and we do.

11 "For divine promises," *ὑπισχνέομαι* Xen *Cyrop* III 34; Diony Hal VI 6; Dio 11:49; 20:21; 13:4; 59:5; Aelius Arist. *Sacred Tales* IV 97; *SIG* 3:1 (1915) 274, epigr. 7; *IG* II 2, 4514; and *ἐπαγγέλλομαι* Plut *Consol. ad Apoll.* 109A; Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* I 9; *Sammelb* III 7172; *IG* XI 4, 1299.

12 The instances of divine "promises" in the 'Intertestamental' literature are too few to draw any conclusions that Greek speaking Jewish exegetes or leaders in synagogue worship had acquired a single word to denote the promises of God. While one finds the use of *ἐπαγγελία* for divine promise in this literature (3 Mac 2:10; Ps Sol 7:10; 12:6; Pr Man 6; T Jos 20:1), the use of *ὑπόσχεσις* is not unknown (Wis 12:21) and there is its extensive use in Philo.

for the divine promises.¹³ Neither *ἐπαγγελία* nor *ὑπόσχεσις* can be isolated as the single word for divine promise which predominated in the early Jewish school or synagogue.

The two explanations which remain, a choice by sense or a choice by sound, must then be considered. These, in fact, were two options isolated by Quintilian as considerations in choosing between synonyms, euphony or appropriateness (*Inst VIII 3:16*). That our author may have chosen *ἐπαγγελία* over *ὑπόσχεσις* because of sense is a strong possibility considering his regard for stylistic variation of synonyms elsewhere as well as his recognized marks of rhetorical training.¹⁴

Such training would have involved word choice (*ekloge*).¹⁵ But what distinction can be drawn between the two words?

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- 13 Thomas Mangey suggested that it would be better to read in *Mut* 201 *ἔγνω τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν* than *ἔγνω τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν*; *Philonis Judaei Opera* I (Gulielmum Innys, 1742). Paul Wendland accepted this suggestion for the reading in the text, though there were apparently no mss. that attested such a reading; *Philonis Alexandrini Opera Quae Supersunt* (Berlin: Georgii Reimeri, 1898) 3:191. Mangey and Wendland probably accepted this reading because the context in Philo concerns God's promise of a child. I have not, however, seen that particular collocation of *ἐπαγγελία* (cf. Josephus *Ant XIII 43 γνοῦς...τὰς ὑποσχέςεις*). In either reading, Philo would be using a word which does not occur otherwise in his extant works. It may be noted that Philo does use *ἐπαγγέλλομαι* in the three senses of 'promise', 'profess' and 'order'; he does not, however, speak of God *ἐπαγγειλάμενος*. Schniewind/Friedrich ("*ἐπαγγέλλω*," *TDNT* 2:585) remark that Philo prefers *ἐπάγγελμα* to *ἐπαγγελία*. However, *ἐπάγγελμα* has the sense of 'profession' in Philo, not 'promise'.
- 14 E.g. *ὄρκος/ὄρκωμοσία* 6:17; 7:20,21; *παραμένειν/μένειν* 7:23; *εἰς τὸ παντελές/πάντοτε* 7:25; *συντελέσω/ἐποίησα/διαθήσομαι* 8:8-10; *ἀφαιρεῖν/περελεῖν* 10:4,11 *ἐξῆθεν/ἐξέβησαν* 11:8,15; *μνηθήσκεσθε/μνημονεύετε* 13:3, 7. The Latin Vulgate provides its own stylistic variation for the frequency of promise in Hebrews by using two Latin words for "promise": *promissio* 6:12,18; 10:36 and *pollicitatio* 4:1; 6:17. See Allen Wikgren, "Some Greek Idioms in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Teacher's Yoke*, ed. E.J. Vardaman and J.L. Garrett (Waco: Baylor, 19.64) 145-53; and C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1952) 1:351-70.
- 15 Our author, trained no doubt as he was in some form of rhetorical education, would have been exposed to teaching on the choice of words (*ekloge*) and their building into sentences (*synthesis*); cf. A.D. Nock "Word-Coinage in the Hermetic Writings," *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Zeph Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) 2:645. The concern for rhetoric in the ancient world fostered a concern for synonyms and their discrimination. Plato wrote admiringly of the sophist Prodicus (450-400 B.C.) and his ability to sort synonyms. Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 7th ed., ed. Walther Kranz (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1952) 2:308-19; Kathleen Freeman, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) 372; O. Gigon, "Prodikos," *LAW*, pp. 2439-40. Synonyms were also discussed by Aristotle, in Peripatetic discussions (e.g. Aristoxenos), among the Stoics (e.g. Chrysippus) and many others; see Leopold Cohn, "Griechische Lexikographie" in Karl Brugmann's *Griechische Grammatik*, 4th ed. rev., ed. Albert Thumb (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913) 688. Unavailable to me, Wiehe's *De vestigiis et reliquiis synonymicae artis Graecorum* (Hauniae, 1856).

One ancient lexicographer, Philo of Byblos (A.D. 64-141), has transmitted in his work, *Similarities and Differences Between Words* (περί ὁμοίων και διαφόρων λέξεων), one possible distinction.¹⁶

182. “A person ὑπισχνεῖται who promises (ὁμολογήσας) to give something to someone who has asked for it. A person ἐπαγγέλλεται who promises a gift of his own initiative.

485. ὑπόσχεσις and ἐπαγγελία are different. A person ὑπισχνεῖται who will give what has been requested. A person ἐπαγγέλλεται who decides to give something without having been asked.

It is at once striking how different this axis of discrimination is from the way we distinguish commissive words of English. We may use the English nouns to refer to different components of the promising situation: “vow” may refer to the actual utterance, “pledge” to the object promised, “promise” to the commitment or assurance of the promisor.¹⁷ As verbs, we may denote various degrees of commitment by the use of these words, “pledging” and “vowing” sometimes denoting stronger commitments than “promising”. Philo of Byblos (under the name of Ammonius) has discriminated ὑπόσχεσις and ἐπαγγελία not by the ardor of commitment nor by its reference to a component of promising but rather by a particular situation, whether the ‘promise’ has been requested or not.¹⁸ This discrimination is not completely foreign to our English usage in that “pledging” is often in response to a request (reciting a pledge, pledging loyalty, pledging money).¹⁹

16 *Amonii qui dicitur liber, De Adfinium Vocabularum Differentia*, ed. Klaus Nickau (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1966). For titles of other works dealing with synonyms, see Chon, “Lexikographie,” p. 688. For a brief history of ancient lexica, see H. Stuart Jones, “The Making of a Lexicon,” *Classical Review* 55 (1941) 1-13.

17 E.g. in a pledge of support, of loyalty, of allegiance, of money; make a pledge, give a pledge, sign a pledge, take a pledge; marriage vows, vows of celibacy, make vows, take vows, keep vows, break vows, pay vows.

18 Schniewind/Friedrich, unaware of Philo of Byblos’ work, are aware of the distinction in Thomas Magister adduced by the lexicographer Pape. Their reaction to it is ambiguous. On the one hand they speak of it as artificial (TDNT, 2:506), but on the next page they say it is very true of ἐπαγγέλλομαι though the relationship to ὑπισχνέομαι is fluid” (p.507, n. 5). J.H.H. Schmidt is open to the distinction in his *Synonymik der griechischen Sprache* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1876-86) 3:22. Liddell, Scott, Jones (9th ed., p. 602) offer the gloss “promise unasked (opp. ὑπισχνέομαι) or offer of one’s free will,” but they make no reference to Philo of Byblos.

19 For the place of ‘request’ in the activity of promising, see von Wright, “Promising,” p. 278 and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1969) 58.

What Philo of Byblos has apparently done is set up the axis of discrimination along the lines of the sense of *ὑπόσχεσις*. What may be read between the lines is that the lexicographer has understood *ὑπόσχεσις* in a way in which it has retained aspects of its etymology from *ὑπέχω*, “receive, yield to a request”.²⁰ From this meaning, he has then contrasted *ἐπαγγελία* as the word denoting unrequested, self-initiated promises. Indeed, in actual usage, the distinction holds more often for *ὑπόσχεσις* than for *ἐπαγγελία*; *ἐπαγγελία* is the more ‘inclusive’ word, much as “promise” includes “pledge” and “vow” in its semantic field.²¹

If *ἐπαγγελία* is more inclusive, then the results for the interpretation of *ἐπαγγελία* in Hebrews are ‘negative’. All that may be said is that the author has not chosen the word that more narrowly denotes requested promises. Though *ἐπαγγελία* can refer to requested promises, the exclusion of *ὑπόσχεσις* which frequently does is certainly in accord with the theological presupposition of God as Promiser, that He promises freely in order to extend His purpose, and not in response to our requests. This, however, is more of an explicit concern of Paul in Galatians, than it is for the author of Hebrews. The discrimination of Philo of Byblos is, in any case, of more interest in a work in which *ὑπόσχεσις* predominates, such as the exclusive use of *ὑπόσχεσις* for God’s promises in the work of Philo of Alexandria. Indeed there is evidence here that Philo was not uncomfortable with viewing God’s promise as sometimes issued in response to man’s activity, as we shall later see in our description of philophroneic uses of promising.

Our author’s use of *ἐπαγγελία* instead of *ὑπόσχεσις* may thus reflect the avoidance of a denotation which could entail a misleading perspective on God as promiser. It may be the case, however, that the word choice was dictated simply by *sound*. This does not mean that one of the words sounded more

20 Hesychius: *ὑποσχέιν*• *ὑποβαλεῖν*, *δοῦναι* (col. 1504); Suidas: *ὑποσχέιν*• *ὑπολαβεῖν*, *ἀπαιτηθῆναι*, *ὑποθεῖναι* (IV 677 #599); Photius: *ὑποσχέιν*• *ὑποβαλεῖν*, *ἀπαιτηθῆναι*, *ὑποθεῖναι* (II 249). *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Ada Adler, 5 vols. (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1928-38); *Photii Patriarchae Lexicon*, ed. S.A. Naber (1864-65; reprint ed., Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1965). While many doubt the usefulness of etymology in synchronic semantics, J.L. Austin is more open: “a word never—well, hardly ever—shakes off its etymology and its formation. In spite of all changes in and extensions of and additions to its meanings, and indeed rather pervading and governing these, there will persist the old idea;” “A Plea for Excuses,” *Philosophical Papers*, 2d ed. (Oxford: At the University Press, 1970) 201.

21 *ἐπαγγελία* can include requested promises (e.g. *Jos Ant* V 159; VIII 399; *Plut De vitios. pud.* 533A, *Consol.* ad Apoll. 109A; Acts 23:21). Eugene Nida has, identified four types of relations between related meanings of different words: inclusion (e.g. move to walk), overlapping (e.g. give and bestow), complementation (e.g. good to bad) and contiguity (e.g. walk, run, hop, skip); *Componential Analysis*, pp. 15-20.

colloquial than the other; there is no indication that in the first century the words were discriminated by such a stratification.²² Rather, when the author began to give expression to God's promises *within Christian discourse*, *ἐπαγγελία* sounded better to him than *ὑπόσχεσις*. What can be gleaned through the New Testament about the speech habits of the first century Christians would indicate that *ἐπαγγελία* was the word the Christians used to refer to God's promises.²³ What may very well have attracted Christians to *ἐπαγγελία* was its similarity in sound and sense to an important word in their language of faith, *εὐαγγέλιον* (cf. Acts 13:32; Gal 3:8; Rom 1:2).²⁴ The author of Hebrews, in fact, uses the two words together in the context of 4:1,2, so closely together that the expression *ἔσμεν εὐηγγελισμένοι* could be translated "we have been promised". The most likely scenario is that our author was heir to a Christian habit of speech in which *ἐπαγγελία* was the word being used predominately for God's promises. The author's own measured sense of words elsewhere in his work keeps us, though, from entirely excluding the possibility that he has avoided *ὑπόσχεσις* because of its distinctive sense of "requested promises".

Components of Promising. For an activity to be called a promise, five basic elements must usually be present: a promiser, a promisee, a commissive utterance, a promised object and a chronology.

Normally there are partners in promise. Someone may, of course, make a promise to himself in order to establish resolve, but ordinarily a promise

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- 22 The absence of *ἐπαγγελία* and *ὑπόσχεσις* in the more strictly Atticistic lexica (e.g. Phrynichus and Moeris) should make one cautious in any attempt to discriminate the two either in terms of tone (elegant, stuffy) or time (one as more archaic than the other). *Phrynichi Eclo ae Nominum et Verborum Atticorum*, ed. C.A. Lobeck (1820; reprint ed., Hildesheim: Georg Olms verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965); *Harpocration et Moeris*, ed. I Bekker (Berlin: G.E. Reimeri, 1833).
- 23 Cf. in collocation with Abraham (cf. Rom 4:13, 20; Gal 3:16; Acts 7:17) with inheritance (cf. Rom 8:17; 9:4, 8; Gal 3:18,29; Eph 3:6) with covenant (cf. Rom 9:4; Eph 2:12). The one literary exception in the early church is in Polycarp, Phil 5:2 *καθὼς ὑπέσχετο ἡμῖν*. In the NT, *ἐπαγγελία* is used almost exclusively in a narrow commissive sense (exception: 1 Tim 4:8 with the sense of "potential" or "indication"; cf. Jos *Ant* II 230). The verb appears only in the middle in the NT and has the sense of "promise" (exception again: 1 Tim 2:10; 6:21 with the sense of "profess" or "confess"). There is no occasion in the NT for the legal (summons) or military sense ("order").
- 24 Both *ἐπαγγελία* and *εὐαγγέλιον* are polysemic, and the senses they have in common are "announcement" and "promise". For examples of *εὐαγγέλιον* as "promise" see Gerhard Friedrich, "εὐαγγελίζομαι," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 711-12. Words with *-αγγελω* may have been common fare among the early Christians: *ἀναγγέλλω*, *ἀπαγγέλλω*, *καταγγέλλω*, *διαγγέλλω* (e.g. in Acts 14:27; 12:14; 13:5; 21:26). Concerning the attraction of like sounding and like meaning words, see J.L. Austin, "Three Ways of Spilling Ink," *Papers*, p. 28.

involves at least two people. In the corporate life of a society, a single promise may in fact involve many people, as in the case of a President making promises to the electorate, or in the ancient world, a benefactor undertaking liturgies.²⁵

In Hebrews, the subject of *ἐπαγγελία* is God. While there are commissive utterances in which Jesus is the promiser (2:12, 13; 10:7,9), their force is as declarations of resolve before God; the author does not call these “promises”. The promisor of the *ἐπαγγελίαι* in Hebrews is God and God alone. Hebrews is in fact the first Greek work of Jewish/Christian heritage to predicate God as “one who has promised”, ὁ ἐπαγγελιάμενος (10:23; 11:11).²⁶ This theological concern for God as Promiser corresponds in Hebrews to a concern for God as One who has spoken.²⁷

The target of the divine promises within Hebrews is the readers. What is being done with “promises” is being done for the readers as promisees. This does not mean that the author has not depicted others as promisees; he indeed has. The Israelites are depicted in 3:7-4:13 as promisees who failed to receive the promise. Abraham is elevated as the promisee *par excellence*, the faithful promisee (11:8-19; 6:12); he is predicated as “the one who has the promises”, τὸν ἔχοντα τὰς ἐπαγγελίας (7:6). The depictions of the Israelites and Abraham, as well as other heirs (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, 11:20-22), as promisees is not insignificant for the readers as promisees because similar promises are made to the reader (4:1; 11:16; 13:14) and the same God is Promiser.

The issue of the partners in promise in Hebrews raises the question of how to understand Jesus’ role. One must notice first of all that Jesus is nowhere explicitly connected with *ἐπαγγελία*. Nowhere does Jesus “promise” (cf. Luke 24:49), nowhere is “promise” made to him (cf. Gal 3:16), nowhere does Jesus mediate “promise” (cf. Rom 15:8), nowhere is he “promise” (cf. Acts 13:23), nowhere does he keep “promise” (cf. 2 Cor 1:20). While God is consistently the Promiser in Hebrews, one may still ask whether Jesus is not in fact depicted as a promisee and as a promise keeper. This insistence arises from the fact that Jesus is called an heir (1:2,4) and is called the mediator of a covenant “enacted on better promises” (8:6). In Chapter 4, we will investigate

25 Schniewind/Friedrich (*TDNT* 2:577-8) mention these sources: *P0xy* VI 904:3; *GDI* 3624a, 8; 5228, col I, 21; *Ditt Syll* 3:577,10; *PGiess* I 59 col IV, 12f. Also see Naphtali Lewis, *Leitourgia Papyri* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1963) 7:16.

26 Philo does use the expression, ὁ ὑποσχόμενος (*Mig* 44). Later, in debt to Hebrews, 2 Clem 11:6 has πιστὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐπαγγελιάμενος.

27 See ‘La parole de Dieu’ in Spicq, I 270-72 and the discussion of promise as the “historical form of the Word of God” in Hughes, *Hermeneutics*, p. 41.

whether Jesus is heir of a promise and whether Jesus' mediation of covenant is a promise keeping activity.

Ordinarily promising involves a *commissive utterance*, a verbal performance of the promiser, whether oral or written.²⁸ Only exceptionally, in certain situations in society, can a promise be issued without such a verbal performance, e.g. at auctions with bidding by raising the hand. Entailed in the commissive utterance is the *promised object*, identifiable to promisor and promisee. The commissive utterance conveys information to the promisee about that which is promised. In English, "promise" can denote either the commissive utterance or the promised object. However, as we have seen, our language has evolved particular uses of "vow" and "pledge" which refer to utterance and object respectively.

Greek, in this respect, lacks a richness in commissive expression; *ἐπαγγελία* and *ὑπόσχεσις* must do service for several denotations. In Hebrews, *ἐπαγγελία* may refer to the promised object: inherit (6:12), heirs of (6:17; 11:9b), obtain (6:15; 11:33), receive (10:36; 11:13, 39) the promise; it may also refer to the commissive utterance (4:1; 7:6). In two instances, the interpretation of the passage is crucial to deciding which of these two references is meant (9:15; 11:9a). In another case, *ἐπαγγελία* holds the two references together (8:6) and in another refers to the keeping of the promise (11:17).²⁹

There are many commissive utterances in Hebrews, utterances in which the Promiser has committed Himself to a particular disposition or activity: to the reader (8:8-12; 10:16,17; 12:26; 13:5) to the heirs (6:13; 11:18), to Jesus (1:5; 5:5,6; 7:17,21), threats to the Israelites (3:11; 4:3,5). These utterances are neither *προφητεία* of the author or *ἀποκάλυψις* from God. The author has in every instance used utterances from the LXX.

This has not, however, been a simple borrowing of a packaged set of LXX promises, dictated either by the Old Testament stories themselves or exegetical practice. Our author has used some commissive utterances that first century Jews and Christians would have readily identified as "promises" (e.g. 11:18; 6:14). Other utterances, however, which the author himself explicitly designates as commissive would doubtless *not* have been among the promises more traditionally isolated from the Old Testament. The author calls the commissive utterances of Jer 38:31-34 and Hag 2:6 "promises" (Heb 8:6-12; 12:26)

28 Written promises are typically legal and commercial. For first century *ὁμολογία* see Raphael Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri*, 2d ed. (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1955) 293, n. 6.

29 Groenen (Notione, p. 26) distinguishes the references of "promises" in terms of *actionem* (4:1; 8:6; 11:9a), *titulum iuridicum* (7:6; 11:17) and *bonum promissum* (6:12, 15; 10:36; 9:15; 11:33).

and draws attention to the utterances of Gen 22:17 and Ps 109:4 as “oaths” (Heb. 6:14; 7:17, 21; 5:6). What the author wants the reader to hear as promises will be important to our interpretation of what the author is doing with promises in his work.

On two occasions, the author mentions promised objects without issuing commissive utterances. In 4:1, the “promise” of entering the Rest is mentioned, but nowhere in his discourse of 3:7-4:13 is there a corresponding commissive utterance from the Old Testament. In 11:13-16, the “promise” of the heavenly city is recounted but again the author does not report any corresponding commissive utterance. The question that arises then is how the author, much less the reader, can rely on such promises. We shall return to this question later.

The fifth component of promising is the temporal aspect, the *chronology* of promising. In promising, the promiser obligates himself to some future activity whether near term and continual, as in marriage promises and pledges of allegiance, or far term. It is in this aspect of promising, the chronology, that the viability of promising is most severely tested. The interim period between commissive utterance and the keeping of the promise tests the integrity of the promiser as well as the patience of the promisee.

As we discussed in our Introduction, the future aspect of “promise” in Hebrews has been emphasized in previous studies on promise. Indeed, promisees in Hebrews are encouraged to wait patiently to receive the promises (6:12; 10:36). Yet, “promises” in Hebrews are not viewed exclusively from the perspective of incompleteness. Abraham, Sarah and certain other Old Testament figures do receive the objects of promise (6:15; 11:11, 19, 33). Certain other “promises” in Hebrews seem, like marriage promises, to be in the process of being completed, in particular the promises of the new covenant (8:6-12) and the commissive oath to Jesus (7:16-25). How this completed (completing) chronology of promise is being used by our author will be of interest to us in subsequent Chapters.

Felicities of Promising. While, fundamental to promising, the presence of these five components of promising hardly insures that all will go well in the promising activity. The whole, at least a healthy whole, is not the sum of the parts. Certain maladies may inflict promising to such a degree that the activity is severely hampered if not aborted.

In his William James lectures at Harvard University (1955), published under the title *How to Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin noticed that it was hardly accurate to sum up what could go wrong with the uttering of words

simply under the description of "false", as if every utterance was subject to a true/false discrimination. Austin thought it better to conceive of utterances as subject rather to felicities and infelicities.³⁰ Austin took this approach because of his fundamental conviction that utterances were not primarily vehicles for propositions or descriptions but rather should be viewed first and foremost as activities, or to put it in other words, people not only say but do things with words.³¹

In rather characteristic fashion Austin set out to notice and discriminate what could go wrong in an utterance in order that he might see what it took for an utterance to function smoothly.³² The result was a perceptive ordered analysis of certain general conditions that should obtain in a felicitous utterance. These categories of felicities provide us rather interesting perspectives on the promises in Hebrews. Four infelicities may be isolated here, two nullifications of promising and two abuses of promising, which may reveal for us the felicities of promising.

Sometimes promising aborts because of a misexecution or misapplication of a *procedure recognized by convention* as constituting the making of promise. Such misexecution/misapplication may be the result of difficulties ranging from mispronunciation to the inappropriateness of the procedure for the particular situation.³³ We may more often think of the commissive procedure as involving an utterance with a first person future indicative active

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- 30 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed., ed. J.O. Urmson and M. Sbisà, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) 15-52. My own understanding of Austin was enriched through a seminar on Austin led by Robert Fogelin at Yale (Fall, 1979).
- 31 Austin is perhaps best known outside of philosophical circles for his designation of utterances as "performative", a designation which he eventually moved away from and one which will not be used in our discussion. The issue that gave rise to this term, the "descriptive fallacy", may be found in his essay, "Other Minds," *Papers*, pp. 76-116; cf. also "Performative Utterances," *Papers*, pp. 233-5. The application of "performative utterance" to liturgical studies, to analyzing Bultmann's theology, to Pauline studies, to biblical hermeneutics may be seen in this sampling: Jean Ladrière, "The Performativity of Liturgical Language," in *Liturgical Experience of Faith*, ed. Herman Schmidt and David Power (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973) 50-62; David H. Kelsey, *The Use of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 78-80; Nils A. Dahl, "Promise and Fulfillment," *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1977) 121-36; R.F. Melugin, "The Church and the Language of the Bible," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 13 (1978) 8-18; Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, *passim*.
- 32 Austin had a habit of approaching a phenomenon by carefully noticing what could go wrong and how this was expressed, as in the case of discerning 'responsibility' by the way people make excuses; "A Plea for Excuses," *Papers*, pp. 175-204; cf. "Three Ways of Spilling Ink," *Papers*, pp. 272-87.
- 33 An historical example: President Nixon's misfire when he attempted to promise Henry Kissinger a governmental position. Kissinger did not hear the promise and Nixon subsequently had to attempt the promise again.

verb but, in fact, promising cannot be delimited by some one set of grammatical criteria. There are numerous ways, grammatically, a person can promise besides “I will do such and such.” The form of promising is not thereby a matter of individual creativity; the procedure must have some conventional recognition.³⁴ Promising must be clear, intelligible and appropriate if it is to be felicitous.

When we ask whether the promising in Hebrews is felicitous in this regard, we face again the curious feature that the awaited “promises” are without commissive utterance in Hebrews and the completing/completed “promises” are with commissive utterances.³⁵ Explanations for this must await interpretations of the passages but we may say for now that one must reckon at points with an implied script of God’s promises, a script to which readers would readily subscribe as promisees. To speak of a promised Rest or a promised city would not then necessarily demand a commissive utterance within the text, because a previous script would have provided a recognizable convention of promising. But this raises the question of what the presence of commissive utterances within Hebrews says about the completing/completed “promises”. Is it a matter of emphasizing? Or is it a means of introducing promises, forgotten or unrecognized before, to the readers? “Promises” in Hebrews are conspicuous, but they are not always simply at the level of the text perspicuous.

The activity of promising may also abort if the promiser is lacking in *characteristics presupposed of a promiser*. A promiser will not be taken seriously by a promisee if the promise involves a completion beyond the ability and capability of the promiser. Three men who promise a barren woman a child usually are not to be believed (cf. Philo *Abr* 111). Nor is someone normally to be trusted who makes promises that are to be completed only after the promisee’s death. If the promiser has failed before in promises, a potential promisee will only with strong guarantees venture to place confidence in such a promiser. An owner is reluctant to rely on the promises of a trustee who has mismanaged property in the past. In general, a promiser must be reliable and both capable and available to complete the promise before a promisee will rely on the promise.

34 See Stanley Cavell’s lead essay in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1976); concerning the absence of grammatical criteria for determining (exclusively) promises, see Austin, *Words*, pp. 55-66.

35 This may be qualified in two ways. First, the commissive utterance in 6:14, in its mention of “blessing,” may be an awaited promise, though some would disagree (e.g. Schierse, *Verheissung*, p. 136). Secondly, the awaited promises may be interpreted as in the process of completion (“are entering” or “will enter” Heb 4:3; 11 you have come to... 11 12:22).

Obviously, aspects of this felicity are quite different when the Promiser is divine rather than human. God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence are significant for His role as Promiser. In Hebrews, these attributes of God are indeed brought into contact with His promising. This does not, however, relieve the promisee of still having to trust and wait on what is unseen (11:6). Sarah and Abraham still trust, contrary to experience, that God is capable of bringing Isaac to life (11:11,12,17-19). Faithful heirs must believe that despite their own death God foresees and will be faithful to the moment of promise keeping (11:13,16,39,40). God's own availability eternally insures his commissive oath to Jesus (7:16-25). The promisee, in short, must be confident that God is faithful to His promises (10:23; 4:1). The author of Hebrews clearly brings these felicities of the Promiser into the service of what he does with promise in his work.

On occasions, commissive utterances are successfully issued but the promising is infelicitous because the promiser has abused the activity. This may happen if the promiser has no intention of keeping the promise. Promising implies the *sincerity of the promiser*, that he intends to do what he has promised.³⁶ Insincerity is an abuse rather than a nullification of promising because the promisee unaware of the intention of the promiser does rely on the promise through the successful commissive utterance.

In Hebrews, God's sincerity in promising is of explicit concern in the author's discourse on the divine oath in 6:12-18. That it is within the framework of God's oath-taking that God's sincerity in commissive utterance is stressed is noteworthy. There were 'critics' in Philo's day who questioned why God would have to take an oath: "were not all of God's words truthful?" Why the author of Hebrews has chosen to speak of God's sincerity in connection with His commissive oath will be investigated in Chapter 3.

Promising may also be abused if the promiser makes a promise of little interest to the promisee. Felicitous promising involves promises of benefit to the promisee. A husband's promise to his wife of a trip to the opera may evoke delight and expectation. If, however, her musical tastes are not operative, the promise is hollow; we may be suspicious of the husband's motives in promising such a thing.

Certainly God's promising in Hebrews is felicitous in this regard. What God promises is of benefit to the readers. Those promises being completed, the promises of the new covenant, can be called better (8:6), in part, because

36 For particular stress on sincere/insincere promises, see Searle, *Speech Acts*, pp. 54-62. The reiteration of "intention" (βούλομαι) in 2 Cor 1:15-17 may reflect criticisms that had been raised over Paul's sincerity in his travel promises.

they indeed are of great benefit to the readers.³⁷ How these and other promises are beneficial must require exploration of the passages themselves as well as some perception of the readers' situation. On the one hand, the promises of the new covenant and the awaited promised Rest can be interpreted as designed to stimulate expectations and embolden the hopes of people who have struggled and face new struggle. It must be asked, however, if some divine promises are not in fact intended to be mirrored in Christian behavior now (cf. 2 Cor 6:16-7:1; 2 Pet. 3:13t 14), in the sense that what is promised, the promised object, is itself to be realized in the Christian community now even though the completion is for the future. In Hebrews, the question is pertinent for the author's use of God's promised City. Is the character of the promise as being one of an occupied realm (1:6; 2:5; 3:6; 12:22-24) meant to encourage the readers to behave themselves now as God's community, not forsaking one another but remaining with one another to encourage brotherly love (10:25) even as God is constant as helper (13:15b,16) and Jesus is constant as friend (13:8)? To ask about the benefit of God's promised objects in Hebrews is to begin to ask what the author of Hebrews is doing with God's promises.

Characteristic Uses of Promising

When people promise they are usually doing more than undertaking an obligation. A father who makes a promise to his child is doing more than declaring his intention. A general who promises his troops the spoils of victory is doing more than predicting the outcome.

A candidate who promises action is doing more than reporting his resolve. People usually intend to accomplish something not only *in* but *by* their promising.

J.L. Austin thought this distinction to be true of all utterances. In his William James lectures, Austin set out to explain and illustrate this. What people accomplish in utterances Austin chose to name the *illocutionary act*; *by* utterances, the *perlocutionary act*.³⁸ Austin was most concerned to elaborate the

37 The use of "better" in 8:6 arises in the first place from the author's use of syncrisis in his letter, but this only reinforces the point that the author could use "promises" in connection with the greatest of benefits, Jesus' priesthood. Hebrews is to begin to ask what the author of Hebrews is doing with God's promises.

38 Austin distinguished three acts performed by a speaker in issuing an utterance. We may illustrate these with the utterance, "The train is leaving at noon." The *locutionary act* is uttering this sentence with a certain sense given by the sequence of the words. The *illocutionary act* is what the speaker himself does in speaking the utterance. For example, the above utterance could be a threat (a sheriff to an outlaw) an answer or assertion (ticket agent to passenger) complaint (passenger to official) or it could have other forces.

illocutionary acts and consequently presented a preliminary classification of these.³⁹ Our interest lies more in what can be accomplished *by* promising, the so-called perlocutionary act. In the present section we offer a brief classification of some perlocutionary acts of promising, human and divine.

Our field of inquiry for *human* promising consists in the main of five literary sources: Polybius, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, Philo and Josephus.⁴⁰ These resources have tended to weight the discussion toward military and diplomatic contexts. A more thorough accounting of papyri and inscriptions might have redressed this wrong but the literary sources have provided the

As is apparent, the force of an utterance is connected with a situation. A *perlocutionary act* is what is performed by a speaker (sometimes intentionally, but not always) when something consequential occurs in his audience. For example, the outlaw is warned (he leaves town), the passenger is persuaded (he catches the train), the official is angered (he walks away). For the background of Austin and his theory of speech-acts, see K.T. Fann, ed., *Symposium on J.L. Austin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Mats Furberg, *Saying and Meaning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971); Keith Graham, *J.L. Austin* (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1977). Austin's distinctions have generated much subsequent discussion among philosophers. Despite criticism, his basic proposal remains a useful way to talk about utterances, even for semanticists. Most noticeable in this regard is John Lyons devoting an entire chapter (16 - "Mood and illocutionary force") to this subject in his recent extensive study of semantics (*Semantics*, II 725-86). His evaluation of Austin's work and his distinctions is quite favorable and he believes Austin's theory has created a bridge "over the chasm that has long existed between philosophical and sociological or anthropological approaches to *semantics*" (p. 735). Two other recent, modest introductions to semantics have also dealt with speech acts, though with less enthusiasm than Lyons; Geoffrey Leech, *Semantics* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974) 343-45, and F.R. Palmer, *Semantics* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1976) 137-43. For examples of the use of these categories among linguists, see C.J. Fillmore, "Verbs of judging; an exercise in semantic description," in *Studies in Linguistic Semantics*, ed. C.J. Fillmore and D.T. Langendoen (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971) 273-89; B. Fraser, "A partial analysis of vernacular performative verbs," in *Toward Tomorrow's Linguistics*, ed. R. Shuy and C.J. Bailey (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1974) 139-58.

- 39 Austin's "forces of utterances" has attracted some attention among those interested in Biblical studies and theology. In addition to Morse's work, see also Donald Evans *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London: SCM Press, 1963); James Smith and James McClelland, "Religious Language after J.L. Austin," *ReIS8* (1972) 55-63; Gerald Downing, "Meanings," in *What About the New Testament?*, ftsch. C. Evans, ed. M. Hooker and C. Hickling (London: SCM Press, 1975) 135; E. Güttgemann, *Einführung in die Linguistik für Textwissenschaftler* 1 (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1978).
- 40 Our search is limited here to the uses of *ἐπαγγέλλομαι/ἐπαγγελία, ὑπόσχομαι/ὑπόσχεσις*. My gratitude must be expressed here to these scholars who generously gave of their time in making available the unpublished indices of the various authors: for Plutarch, Edward O'Neil; for Polybius, H. Geiss; for Dio, Jan Rosenqvist; for Josephus, Karl Rengstorf. In addition, use has been made of these resources: Günter Mayer, *Index Philoneus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974); Karl Rengstorf, ed., *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus* 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975); Arno Mauersberger, ed., *Polybios-Lexikon* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961).

advantage of a narration through which the circumstances of the promising could often more easily be discerned.⁴¹

For the uses of *divine* promising, our resources have not been limited to Jewish and Christian material. In the 1935 edition of *TWNT* (2:575) Schniewind/Friedrich could report that they were aware of but one example of the “promise” of a God in Gentile sources, viz. the use of “promise” in the Sarapis Aretalogy from Delos. Our investigation has found other examples of divine promising in non-Jewish/Christian sources, in particular in Xenophon, Plutarch, Dia Chrysostom, Apuleius (Latin), as well as in various inscriptions.

Our purpose here in sketching a taxonomy of “things that can be done by promising” is to sensitize us to a range of possible things our author may be doing with God’s commissive activity in Hebrews. We shall begin with human promising.

Self Resolution. The effect of some promising is not to offer any particular assurances to a promisee, but rather to declare and solidify the purposes of the promisor. Promising involves the promisor undertaking an obligation. In some promising the primary effect of this self-obligating is the posturing of the promisor. Naive exuberance and pride (*μεγαλαυχία*) may accompany youthful promises of great feats for one’s country (Plut *Lyc.* 53a). In threatening circumstances, promising may firm the inner resolve to meet the crisis courageously: David promises to kill the giant (Jos *Ant* VI 181; cf. *Vita* 102; Plut *Caes.* 713f; *Ap. Lac.* 233F).

Such perlocutionary sequels in the promisor are not the exclusive domain of crises which demand inspiration. They may occur in more quiet moments. Numerous times in our literary sources, an author “promises” the reader that he will take up a particular subject in the course of his work.⁴² The reader does not think of himself as a promisee. Such promising has the effect of structuring the author’s own literary intentions.

Exhortation. More often than not a promisor makes a promise in order to do something to the promisee. It may be no more than an act of good will which preserves and insures an amicable relationship (philophronesis). At other times, the promisor may have in mind a course of action to which promising

41 Our literary sources have also included the following: Aristotle, Aesop, Cebes, Cicero, Diodorus Siculus, Test Sol, Acts, Mark, and the Maccabean literature.

42 “I will attempt now to bring my promise to conclusion” Poly XVIII 28:1; cf. XXXI 23:1; V 105:9; 111:10. “If as I have promised, I must now speak...” Plut *Isis* 383A. “In fulfillment of my promise, I must begin with the following examples” Philo *Mos* II 192; cf. *Spec* I 318; Jos *War* VII 454; Diod Sic I 5:3; II 60:3.

may induce the promisee (persuasion). Or the circumstances of the promisee may be such that the promiser promises in order to lift wavering spirits (encouragement).

'Philophroneis' may be achieved by promising. Hannibal warmly welcomed (φιλαφρόνως ἀποδεξάμενος) the Celts to his army promising gifts to them (Poly III 67:4). On another occasion, Hannibal generously (μεγαλοψύχως) promised good things in order to generate good will and create expectations (Poly III 13:8). Characteristically, such promising is extended out of gratitude (χάριν ἔχειν Jos *Vita* 103), out of joy (ἐχάρησεν Mark 14:11) out of exceeding happiness (ὑπερβολὴν ἡδονῆς Jos Ant XII 91,92; περιχαρῆς γενόμενος Plut *Pomp.* 637b), out of admiration (ἠγάπησεν Jos Ant XII 166).

'Persuasion' is the most frequent purpose for promising in our literary sources.⁴³ This is true because promising was a staple of diplomatic maneuvering and plays for power.⁴⁴ That promises were a typical feature of political life, both domestic and foreign, is indicated in an oration of Dio Chrysostom in which he compliments the Assembly of Prusa for having resisted "inducements, promises, and threats" (παράκλησις, ὑπόσχεσις, ἀπειλήσις 50:8). Examples abound of Kings, ambassadors and leaders promising in order to effect alliances and peace,⁴⁵ to bring about loyalty and support,⁴⁶ to win privileges.⁴⁷ The persuasive uses of promising were not restricted, though, to the powerful and the would-be powerful. Hannah, according to Josephus, beseeched God for a child, promising to consecrate the offspring to God (*Ant* V 344). Promising could be directed to the divine (Plut *Cam.* 151e) as well as the human (Plut *Luc.* 514c) in an effort to secure benefits and deliverance.⁴⁸

43 "Promising" distributed with πείθω in Jos *Ant* V 307; XVII 25,26; XX 143; Plut *De Alex. fort.* 339D; *Demos.* 859d; *Eum.* 592e; with παρακαλέω in Jos *Ant* V 258; Plut *Reg. et imper. ap.* 173F; *Aq.* 617b; Philo *Mos* I 266-68.

44 See Frank Adcock and D.J. Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975) 208-209.

45 E.g. Poly XXII 7:2,4; IV 29:3; II 34:1; III 34:4; XXI 20:8; Plut *Arist.* 324c; Jos *Ant* XII 382.

46 E.g. Poly I 43:3; Plut *Reg. et imper. ap.* 173F; Dion 975b; Jos *Ant* XIV 30,31; V258; XX 77; Philo *Mos* I 266-68.

47 E.g. Poly XII 26b I; Plut *Mar.* 410a; Jos *Ant* XIII 219; 1 Mac 11:28; 2 Mac 4:8,9,27.

48 Libanius, the fourth century Greek rhetorician, advised that great promises be made to Asclepius only in exceptional situations. To the question of how much should be promised, Libanius shrewdly answered, "Has he granted us immortality?" (*Declamations* XXXIV 42). In the fable of Aesop, "The Man Who Promises The Impossible" (#34 Hausrath, p. 48), the sick man, in hope of recovery, promises the gods a large public sacrifice. When his wife asks how he could possibly offer such a sacrifice, he replies "Do you think I will recover so that the gods will claim these things of me?" The moral is clear: "men casually promise what they do not expect to have to keep."

Persuasive promising was also an element of *paideia*.⁴⁹ In his essay on the educating of children (*De lib.* 12c), Plutarch portrays the wise father as rearing (σωφρονίζειν) his adolescent through “teaching, threatening, pleading, advising and promising” (διδάσκοντας, απειλοῦντας, δεομένους, συμβουλευόντας, ὑπισχνουμένους). Such persuasive promising of children may be seen in Eph. 6:1-3. “Children, obey your parents, for it is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ which is the first commandment with a promise, ‘that things may go well for you and that you may live a long time on the earth’.”

“Encouragement” may also be a perlocutionary object of hortatory promising. In such promising, the promisor is aware of some distress in the promisee’s circumstances. Cicero encourages a friend: “For such a time as this it is the part of friend either to offer consolation or make promises (*polliceri*)... I pledge you my word (*spondero*) that the bitter injustice you are suffering will not be of long duration” (*Ep ap Fam* VI 10B, 4-5). Not only injustices (cf. Philo *Flac* 103) but other threats from without (Poly V 36:3) and anxieties within (Jos *Ant* VII 193) may be eased by promising.⁵⁰

Encouraging promising finds its cleanest and most identifiable use in speeches of generals to their troops before the battle (παρακλητικοί). In Polybius III 111, Hannibal attempts to rouse the spirits of his troops for battle by exhorting them:

I no longer need to exhort you (παρακαλεῖν ὑμᾶς) now through further words to be courageous and bold (εὐθαρσεῖς και προθύμους) in the face of danger... Already you have defeated the Romans three times; what words could be a stronger commendation of your courage than your deeds. By your actions in danger you possessed (κεκρατήκατε) the country and its wealth just as we promised (κατὰ τὰς ἡμετέρας ἐπαγγελίας; we did not lie (ἀψευστούντων ἡμῶν) in what we said... What you will possess will make you masters of all Italy... The time now is for deeds and not words. The gods willing I am confident that I will keep these promises to you (βεβαιώσεν ὑμῖν...τὰς ἐπαγγελίας).

49 The seminal essay of John Wilkins on linguistics (1668; *An Essay towards a real character, And a philosophical Language*, reprinted, Menston, England: Scalar Press, 1968) lists the “Oeconomical Duties of Education consisting in words” as command/forbid, persuade/dissuade, interest/deprecate, advise/warn, allure/deter, *promise/threaten*, commend/reprehend, praise/dispraise.

50 Cf. these distributions, ἐπιγγέλλετο...παρεμυθεῖτο Plut *Caes* 734f: κατεπράϊνε... ὑπισχνούμενος Plut *Them.* 115b: ὑπέσχετο... ἀνεθάρρησαν Plut *Brut.* 1005a.

Such speeches as Hannibal's and such promising were intended to embolden and hearten the spirit. A leader's promising encouraged (θαρρεῖν προτρέπεται Jos *Ant* VI 25; παρωρμήθησαν Poly X 14:12). Desires, enthusiasm and zeal were kindled by a general's assurances (πρόθυμον Jos *Ant* VI 326; εὐθυμία Philo *Mos* I 333; ὁρμή Poly I 45:3).

Of all the perlocutionary objects of human promising, this encouragement of generals to their troops bears the most interesting similarities to uses of "promises" in Hebrews. Not only is there the connection of promise with enthusiasm and boldness (Heb 6:11-13; 10:35, 36), but there is also the reminder of the promiser's past faithfulness to promise (6:17- 19 cf. Hannibal's "just as we promised... we did not lie"). When we later ask about the hortatory character of Hebrews, these παρακλητικοί of the generals will again occupy our attention.

Deception. One particular perlocutionary act of promising is the result of an abuse of promising, deception. One would suspect that those promises offered in order to persuade would be most susceptible to this abuse. Indeed they were. A promisor's overriding interest to gain support or recognition often produced insincere promises, promises which nevertheless excited the expectations of armies, leaders and citizens alike (Plut *Sul.* 469e; *Ant.* 939d; Dio 45:4; cf. 2 Pet 2:18,19). Such promises, "no different than dreams" (Philo *Gig* 39), were nonetheless promises which promisees acted upon. No wonder that promises and flatteries, and promises and deception could be named in the same breath (Dio 7:80). No wonder that when deceit was personified one of her activities was promising (Dio 4:114). No wonder that the potential for deception was a constant force of erosion in the effectiveness of promising and in the inclination of the promisee to trust the promiser. This did not go unnoticed by moralists who spoke *about* promises.

Our taxonomy of *human* promising yields three basic perlocutionary objectives: self-resolution, exhortation, deception. The concern now for the uses of *divine* promising narrows these three to one, exhortation. alone; deception and, to a certain extent, self-resolution cannot be called typical perlocutionary objectives of divine promising. *Theological* convictions, God's truthfulness and His justice, tend to combat attributions of divine deception in promising; this does not exclude, however, criticisms and complaints by the promisee about delays in divine promise. In the matter of self-resolution there can be regard for God's self-determination *by* promising, as in Titus 1:1, 2—"Paul ... an apostle of Jesus Christ in the hope of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before the ages." Here God "promises" with no promisees

present; the promising is simultaneous with the salvific resolution of God. Yet, even here “promising” is related to “hope”. The promising is not merely for God’s resolution; it is also for the assurance of the promisee. In general, divine promising attempts to achieve two hortatory objectives, philophronesis and encouragement.⁵¹

Philophronesis. By promising, the divine promisor often seeks to maintain a dependable and just relationship with the promisee. By such assuring promising, the divine promiser is not trying to change the mind, spirit or activities of the promisee, as much as trying to honor and maintain the social amenities of a relationship.⁵² Thus, the answers to prayer requests sometimes include the promise of God: Solomon prays for wisdom and God promises to give him wisdom (Jos *Ant* VIII 24). Such promising is an expression of God’s good pleasure (εὐδοκία). The clearest example of the philophronetic use of divine promising occurs in Philo’s *De Abrahamo*.

According to Philo, the promise of a son to Abraham was the performance of reciprocity by guests (the three men) for the hospitality of their hosts: “Being Abraham’s guests they showed kindness (φιλαφρονοῦνται) to their host... promising him his own child” (*Abr* 132). For Philo, the same exercise of divine reciprocity occurs at the sacrifice of Isaac. To the marvelous display of Abraham’s faith, God responds by making a promise by oath (*Abr* 273). In both cases, God’s promising is the returning of favors (cf. *Abr* 110).⁵³ This performance of social etiquette serves to maintain and strengthen God’s relationship with Abraham.

Encouragement. In his retelling of Biblical history, Josephus chooses on numerous occasions to express God’s activity as “promising”. The situations in which “God promises: in the Antiquities are typically those of distress. Divine “promising” in Josephus is thus less an aspect of God’s developing eternal plan than it is an activity of the moment, encouraging those in need. To those with afflictions (*Ant* I 208), to the hungry (*Ant* III 23; IX 71) God promises

51 ‘Persuasion’ will be of more concern when we discuss what can be done using past “promises”. We have though already discussed a use of divine promising for persuasion in Eph 6:1-3.

52 Cf. Paris’ expectation that Aphrodite will promise him the best possible marriage (Dio 11:49; cf. 20:21) apparently based on his relationship with the goddess (θεοφιλής).

53 Cf. Plut *Consol.* ad *Apoll.* 109A: Agamedes and Trophonius build a temple at Delphi and ask Apolo for a reward. Apollo promises to return to them on an appointed day.

care and provision.⁵⁴ To those facing serious obstacles—Moses encountering the Pharaoh (*Ant* II 272), the Israelites meeting the Jordan (*Ant* V 16)—God promises safety⁵⁵ Josephus does not confine divine “promising” to the Abraham stories (as Philo tends to do). He rather understands God doing things by promising at various times much as a human promiser would.

The analogy with human encouraging promising extends even to that use of promising we have isolated in the παρακλητικοί. As a general would embolden his troops by promising, so also God “promises” victory to those who have suffered defeats (*Ant* V 156), strength to those failing in confidence (*Ant* V 214), support to those facing invasions (*Ant* IX 10). This need and reliance on divine promises for victory was not peculiarly Jewish; it was a broader phenomenon of the Gentile world. Cyrus, for example, tells his troops that the gods “promise” to give them victory and salvation (*Xen Cyop* III 34). In Dionysius Halicarnasus VI 6, the general encourages his army: “The gods promise through omens, sacrifices and other signs to provide us with freedom for the city and a pleasing victory” (cf. *Thuc* IV 92:7). The intended effect of such divine promising was to strengthen troops for the battle.

One must acknowledge, however, that the intentions of the divine Promiser of the Old Testament, as retold in Josephus, are hardly exhausted by the detection of ‘encouragement’. By such promising, God not only attempted to encourage; He also acted to keep His past promises, promises which had assured the Israelites of a special relationship to God. God acted at the moment to encourage, but the promising itself was a sequel to previous promises of special favor. Such a ‘script’ of past promises was fundamental to Israel’s existence.

54 To the afflicted Lucius, Isis promises salvation (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* XI 266-76). To Homer, burdened by homesickness, a goddess promises immortality (Dio 13:4).

55 To a priest of Delos, Apollonius II, Sarapis promises a legal victory: “The god promised (ἐπηγγείλατο) me in a dream that we should win. With our trial completed and a victory worthy of god achieved we praise the gods offering in return the highest praise: (Roussel, *Cultes Egyptiens* (1915-16) 71; IG XI 4, 1299; Date: 200 B.C.). P. Roussel translates ἐπηγγείλατο, m’annonca; more recently, Vincenzo Longo has translated it, annuncio (*Aretalogie Di Eta’ Ellenistica* (Genova: Libreria Editrice Mario Bozzi, 1968) 14. However, if the author of the inscription had wanted to say “announce” he probably would have used χρηματίζω which he does in lines 13-14. The word was used frequently in connection with manifestations in dreams; see Helmut Engelmann, *The Delian Aretalogy of Sarapis* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975) 18.

Characteristic Uses of Past “Promises”

What the author of Hebrews does with commissive language, he does not only with commissive utterances but also with “promises”, i.e. by using the words “promise” and “oath.” This means that the author’s concern for divine promise is not only in what God’s promises can do but also what can be done by remembering and being reminded afresh of features of God’s promises.

As it happens, people mention “promises” and talk about features of promising in rather predictable ways. Sometimes promisees talk because things have gone wrong in promising, certain infelicities may have occurred, the completion may have been delayed. Such talk frequently arises because the perlocutionary acts of promising have been performed; people have been persuaded, have been encouraged, perhaps deceived, to expect certain promises.

Because the logic of promise has certain parameters—certain components, certain felicities, certain perlocutionary acts,—the range of situations in which people *talk about* promises, human and divine, has certain limits. As a background to the use of “promises” in Hebrews, we now classify certain typical occasions for mentioning promises. We begin with the way partners in promise and others (moralists, philosophers, orators) frequently talk about *human* promises.

Complaints, Reminders. Past “promises” are most often used in complaints. The perlocutionary object of persuasion has been achieved; in expectation of a promised object, the promisee has followed the promiser’s wishes. Time passes.⁵⁶ The sequel to promising, the completion, is delayed. High expectations quickly lead to bitter disappointment and complaint. In Philo Mos I 193-5, the Israelites speak in the wilderness;

We left the country in the hope of freedom (ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίας ἐλπίδι) and yet we have no security even of life. Our leader promised us happiness (ὕποσχέσεσι...εὐδαίμονες); in actual fact, we are the most miserable of men... He exhorted and puffed us up with his words and filled our ears with empty hopes (κενῶν ἐλπίδων)... With the name of colonization he has deceived (ἠπάτησεν) this great multitude.

Those led by generals and led into dangers remember promises (Poly I 66:12); they are impatient with failures to keep the promises (Poly I 67:1).

⁵⁶ Dio recognized this as a possibility for his own promising: “with delay, even a promise made freely becomes a heavy obligation: (40:3, 4).

Aristotle noted that the 'beloved' often complains (ἐγκαλεῖ) that her lover no longer keeps the promises he once made (*NE IX 1:2*, 1164a).

If the situation has not yet deteriorated, the promisee may use the "promise" in reminder: "Come, Munatius, see that you keep your promise" (ὑπόσχεσιν ἐμπεδώσεις *Plut Cat. min.* 763b).⁵⁷ If the promisor *has* kept past promises and he desires to make further promises, the promiser may remind the promisee of past faithfulness in order to encourage the promisee to rely on fresh promises (*Poly III 111*). In these two reminders "promise" is used in exhortation.

Exemplary Illustrations. The moralist could also use "promise" in exhortation though in a different way. Plutarch uses "promise" within an exemplary illustration (*Quomod. adul.* 29E, F):

There is also in the promises (τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν) of the heroes a special character. For Dolan promises (ἐπαγγέλλεται), "Straight to the midst of their hosts shall I go till I come to the vessel which Agamemnon commands". Diomedes, however, promises (ἐπαγγέλλεται) nothing, but says that he should be less frightened if he were sent in company with another man. Prudence (ἡ πρόνοια) then is characteristic of a Greek and a man of refinement (ἄστεϊον), while presumption (ἡ θρασύτης) is barbaric and cheap (φαῦλον). The one should be emulated (τὸ μὲν ζηλοῦν) and the other detested (τὸ δὲ δυσχεραίνειν).

Here, the "prudent" promisor is used as a model for emulation. The picture of the "cautious" promiser was part of the paradigm of the friend. The thoughtful promiser weighs his ability to perform the promise before he makes the promise. He is not hasty (τῆ εὐχερείᾳ) to promise money when he has none (*Quomod. adulat.* 64B; 62B; *De vitios. pud.* 533A, E; *Sir 20:23*). The flatterer, however, throws caution to the wind (*Quomod. adulat.* 62E). Such a promisor is part of the warning in Aesop #34 (Hausrath ed.): "Men readily promise what they don't expect to keep". The moralists were quite aware of the abuse of persuasive promising, deception.⁵⁸

Occasions for talking about divine promises are not totally unlike the situations in which past human promises are brought up. Promisees of both types may remind the promisor of past promises when the time for completion

57 Cf. *Plut De lib.* 8D; *Them.* 127f; *De Pyth.* 402b; *Jos Ant V 4*.

58 There is the story of the tyrant who made deceptive promises to a musician to promote virtuosity (*Arist NE IX 1:4, 1164a*; *Plut De recta* 41D, E; *De Alex. fort.* 333F, 334A).

seems at hand or past due. Such reminders to a divine promisor take the form of appeals in prayers. Complaints or criticisms of a divine promisor are not even absent, though they are more often spoken to other promisees than directly to the divine promiser.

Two uses of divine “promises” do, however, go beyond the typical uses of human “promise” we have “promise” we have previously identified: ‘exhortation’ and ‘thanksgiving’. Whereas exhortations with human “promises” are frequently designed to provoke the reader himself to be a faithful promiser, exhortations with divine “promises” are often intended to encourage the reader to be an expectant promisee. The second use of “promise” more typical of divine than human promises is thanksgiving. Gratitude to god for completed promises is the most prominent use of divine “promises” in Gentile inscriptions.

Thanksgiving, Appeal, Criticism. Expressions of gratitude, etched in stone, testify to Gentile recognition of divine care. A decree honoring Ptolemy IV (217 B.C.) proclaims that “he was careful to thank the gods (εὐχαριστῶν τοῖς θεοῖς) for keeping what they had promised” (*Sammelb.* III 7172). Various inscriptions praise the gods for healing afflictions, giving abilities, and achieving legal victories, all according to their “promises”.⁵⁹ Most famous is the gratitude of Lucius for the promise of salvation from Isis: “Eagerly hoping for the completion of the promise, I devoured the rose from the priest. I was not disappointed in the heavenly promise. At once my ugly animal form left me. In what words, at what length could I begin to thank so great a goddess!” (Apuleius *Metamorphoses* XI 266-76). Such explicit thankfulness for completed divine promise was present also on Jewish/Christian lips (e.g. in Ps Philo 32:12, 13; *Apost Const* VII 37: 1; 26:2,3; 35:10).

Threats to promises might occasion the promisee’s urgent appeal to God to keep His promises. Joshua, with a distraught army under his command, prays: “to Moses... you promised to provide possession of the land... some things have happened to us according to your promises... but now we are

59 From a dedication of Diophantus of Sphettus to Asclepius for healing his foot: “Diophantus now appears with sound foot just as you promised (ὡςπερ ὑπέσθης)” (*IG* II 2, 4514; Date: A.O. 167/8). From an inscription on the face of along stone pedestal in which nine cavities had been cut to receive the marble statues of the members of one Thessalian house: “Pallas did not lie to you in the dream, Sisyphus son of Daochus, but she indeed made a reliable promise (σαφῆ θῆκεν ὑποσχέσιαν)” (Homolle, *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 21 (1897) 594, #6; *SIG* 3 I (1915) 274, epigr. 7; Date: 337 B.C.). From Aelius Arist. *Sacred Tales* IV 97 (A.O. 170’s): “And again there were promises (ὑποσχέσεις) of the god that Glabrio, consul ordinarius, would settle the matter.”

distressed... assure victory" (Jos *Ant* V 38-41). Not only political threats (cf. Ps Sol 7:10; 12:6; Syr Bar 21:25) but also the sinfulness of a people (3 Mac 2:10) or an individual might lead to an appeal for God's promised mercy: "The wrath of thy threat to sinners is irresistible, yet immeasurable and unsearchable is thy promised mercy: (Pr Man 6).

For others, threats to promise did not lead to appeals, but to disillusionment and despair.⁶⁰ With the report of the scouts, the Israelites began to believe that God's promises were mere words (Jos *Ant* III 306). This orientation to the abilities and chronology of the human promisor permeates the criticism leveled by the "scoffers" of 2 Peter. Whatever their ideology and motivation, they were discouraging others with their criticisms of the "promise": "Where is His promised coming? From the day the fathers died nothing has changed, even since the creation day itself" (2 Pet 3:4). The author's response in part is to remind his readers that the promiser is divine, not human (vv. 5-9).

The despair of the promisee did not, however, inevitably arise over the promiser's supposed negligence or failure. In IV Ezra 7:119,120, the problem lies with the promisee: "What benefit is it for us that an immortal time has been promised (*promissum est*) when, in fact, we have done death dealing work; that perpetual hope has been held out for us when, in fact, we have acted in utter futility."

Exhortation. In all the above uses, the promisees are responding to the promiser. In exhortation, however, the direction is essentially reversed; the divine promiser, or better, his messenger, is reminding the promisee of past promises. Such reminders may function to promote purity of life, *evoke gratitude* and *encourage endurance*.

In 2 Cor 7:1 and 2 Pet 1:4,5, the promise of God's holy presence is used in two slightly different ways to induce holy conduct. In Paul, the present completion of certain promises is incentive to live holy lives, a holiness to be reflected first and foremost, no doubt, in a healthy relationship between Paul and the Corinthians: "Having these promises [6:16- 18], let us cleanse ourselves... completing the holiness by fear of God." In 2 Peter, the chronology of the promise is at issue. The completion of the promise of fellowship with "divine nature" (1:4) and of the promise of new heavens and a new earth (3:13) has been stretched forward by God's salvific patience (3:9). What has

60 A young Assyrian is asked by Apollonius if he wants to get well. He replies, "By all means! But the health Asclepius promises (*ἐπαγγέλλεται*) he doesn't give" (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 19).

been promised, however, is to promote holy lives now: “expecting these things let’s be eager to be found in him without blemish or spot in peace” (3:14).

The characteristic use of “promise” in Ephesians is to evoke gratitude within the Gentiles. Attention is focused, not on the condition for completion, nor on the chronology, but on the object of promise and the privilege of being a promisee of such promise.⁶¹ The promise in Ephesians is the Spirit (1:13), the “spiritual blessing” (1:3) to which the Gentiles have become partakers through the gospel (3:6). By their reception of the promised Spirit, the Gentiles have access to God (2:18). The evocation of gratitude for such a blessing is attempted by Paul both through the congratulatory *eulogia* of 1:3-14 and the contrasts of 2:11-19. Those once afar (cf. Acts 2:39), apart from the promised blessing of Abraham (Eph 2: 12), now through Christ Jesus have gained access to God by the promised Spirit.

A third hortatory use of past “promises” is in encouragements to endurance. To Jews under oppression, there is the call to remember God’s faithfulness to promise in the past (2 Mac 2:17, 18), to look forward to the promise of His merciful deliverance of His people in the future (Syr Bar 83:4, 5; 78:7). To the Israelites trapped at the Sea, Moses delivers an exhortation in which he reminds the people of the promises God has already kept and of God’s assurance of aid in the future (Jos *Ant* II 326- 35). In the New Testament, in James and 1 John, the promise of “life” is recalled as an incentive to the endurance of trial (James 1:12) and for constancy of faith (1 John 2: 24, 25).

What the various authors have done here with “promises”, in using them in exhortations, is not unlike what we have identified as hortatory uses of human promising. There is persuasion by “promises” to a course of action (e.g. 2 Cor 6:16-7: 1; 2 Pet 3:13, 14, cf. Acts 2:33, 39) and there is the encouragement with “promises” of those in need of endurance (e.g. James 1: 12; 1 John 2:24, 25). It is this hortatory use of promising and “promises” which we will be arguing best describes what the author of Hebrews is doing with divine “promises”.

Abraham as Promisee. The use of “promise” in Hebrews cannot though be adequately understood without some appreciation of the role played by the story of Abraham in Jewish and Christian thinking about God’s promises. We have so far been stressing the possible uses of “promise” available to our

61 “Promise” is sometimes recalled together with “covenant” as a way of acknowledging Israel’s privileged position: Wis 12:21—“whose fathers you gave oaths and covenants of good promises”; Rom 9:4—“to the Israelites belong... the covenants...the promises...”; Eph 2:12—“the Gentiles were “strangers to -the covenants of promise.”

author simply from his own human experience with promising and past promises. This influence is certainly fundamental to an intelligent use of promises but to appreciate our author's use of "promise" one must consider in addition a second influence, the influence of the story of God's promising activity with Abraham. As a way of introducing this particular influence, we may consider briefly certain uses of Abraham as promisee in Philo and Paul. These uses are certainly not uniform nor necessarily like the uses in Hebrews, but they do demonstrate the impact made upon talk about divine promises by the story of Abraham as promisee. We also include here Luke's use of promise, not because he is so concerned with Abraham as promisee (he is not), but rather because the attempt to describe his use of promise makes us acutely aware of the need to consider the author's literary intention and even his audience's situation if one is to speak about the use of "promise" in a unified literary whole.

Philo's use of divine "promise" arises exclusively in connection with his interpretation of the story of Abraham and the first heirs in Genesis.⁶² We have already noted that Philo depicts the promising activity in the story of the three visitors to Abraham as philophroneitic. We now turn to a slightly different perspective, the question of how Philo is using divine promising within his literary purposes. The initial answer is that he uses promising in an "exemplary illustration"; Abraham is an exemplary promisee. This appears to correspond at once to a previously isolated use of past promises; here though the exemplum is not the promisor but the promisee. But even this explanation must be qualified.

In the first place, Philo's depiction of Abraham as promisee in *De Abrahamo* is not as central to his purpose as is a concern for what led Abraham to be a promisee. What Abraham illustrates in this section (110-113) is not faithfulness but hospitality, a form of piety. What Philo elevates is Abraham's hospitable reception of the three guests. In his allegorical exposition, Philo draws from this story the principle that God first rewards the person who honors Him for Himself alone. Because Abraham was "pious" to God in his encounter with the three guests, God kindly reciprocated by rewarding Abraham with a promise (126-130). Abraham is thus an example for the reader of the type of person who receives the prizes of God, represented in the story of Abraham by the "promise".

The particular role of Abraham as promisee is more explicit in *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres*. Philo interprets the promise of land (Gen 15:7) as

62 *Her* 91,96; *Mig* 43; *Mut* 154; in connection with God's oath *LA* III 203; *Abr* V3; with Isaac *LA* III 218; *Mut* 166; with Abraham's faith *Her* 90; with Abraham's falling on his face *Mut* 54; with Gen 28:14, *Som* I 17 with the 'One who promises' *Abr* 132. story of Abraham by the "promise".

instruction to Abraham that he will inherit wisdom. Abraham is an exemplary promisee but Philo has considerably altered the logic of promise. Promising is viewed primarily as informing. Through the promising, Abraham grasped (κατείληφεν) that he would inherit wisdom (101). There is expectation involved but the chronology of promising tends toward collapse through Philo's interpretation of Abraham as representing the acquisition of wisdom *through teaching*. Through the promising, according to Philo, Abraham not so much begins to expect wisdom as actually experience wisdom, i.e. contemplate the perfect good. He migrates from insecure conjecture (ἀβεβαίου εἰκασίας) to firm apprehension (πάγιον κατάληψιν-98).

The way Philo makes the story of Abraham *as promisee* meaningful to his reader is thus to interpret the land as "wisdom" and make Abraham an example of one who acquired wisdom through promising. For those "progressing", the promise of wisdom might then be heard as an assurance of a beatific goal; but trust in the promiser could also be participation in the very promise itself.⁶³

In at least one respect Paul's use of Abraham as promisee is quite different from Philo's. Whereas Philo can depict Abraham as having merited the status of promisee, for Paul such a role was one granted by God's grace, to be received by faith. In Rom 4:16, Paul uses the story of Abraham as promisee to affirm that God's promise is valid for all those who share Abraham's faith. Not only the circumcised (9:4 15:8) but the uncircumcised as well can be promisees through faith, since Abraham himself was promisee before his circumcision (4:10-12). In one sense what Paul is doing is clarifying the procedure of promising, in this case clarity about the promisees, in order that he might remind the Roman Christians again that the gospel is for all who believe (1:16, 3:22).

Abraham's actual experience as promisee, not simply his being promisee, is elaborated by Paul subsequently in Rom 4:18-22. What Paul isolates in Abraham's experience as exemplary for the reader is Abraham's trust in God's *character as promiser*: ὁ ἐπιγγέλται δυνατός ἐστιν καὶ ποιῆσαι (4:21). The promise to Abraham, to become the father of many nations (v. 18), is not the reader's promise. Nor is the explicit concern that the Christian reader, like Abraham, must wait for the promise to be completed. What is interesting is that Paul takes Abraham's trusting expectation for the completed promise

63 Cf. *Mig* 43, 44—"He says not 'which I am showing' but 'which I will show you.' Such is the trust the soul has in God, thankful not for what has been accomplished, but in expectation of what is to come. Clinging in utter dependence on good expectations and believing that the things not present are present because of the steadfastness of Him who promised, such a soul has found trust, the perfect good, as its reward."

as exemplary for Christians who must trust that God has already completed the promise. The point of intersection is that in both, God's omnipotence as Promisor is crucial, for Abraham that *He will*, for the Christian that *He has* kept his promise bringing life to the dead. In Roman 5:1-5, Paul does mention the Christian's hope, but he does not bring explicit attention to it as "promise".

If Paul's use of promise in Romans touches on two felicities of promising, clarity in promising and capability in the promiser, in Galatians Paul has interest in a third felicity, the *benefits of promises*. In Galatians Paul is pressed to persuade his readers that they should not submit to the Law and be circumcised. To do this Paul stresses that what the Galatians experience as Christians is the direct benefit of promises made to Abraham, promises independent of the law. Working from their experience of the Spirit (3:1-5), Paul reminds them that this experience of sonship is not something acquired through law but through the promises to Abraham. In particular, the "blessing on the nations" (3: 8, 14) is interpreted by Paul as a blessing of the Gentiles in their reception of the promised Spirit. Such a promise is received by faith in Jesus and baptism into Christ, the "seed" of Abraham (3:16, 26-29). Paul is in the position of having to tell people who have enjoyed the benefits of promise that that is in fact what they have enjoyed. It is not the result of obeying the law or being circumcised; it is the result of receiving promises through faith in Jesus Christ.

Unlike Philo and Paul, Luke's use of "promise" only minimally involves Abraham as promisee and where it does Abraham's role as the exemplary promisee is not the primary concern. Luke places "promises" on the lips of four agents in his story. Stephen in his defense recalls the promise made to Abraham (Acts 7:5-7, 17). The referent of the "promise" here appears at first to be the possession of the land yet as the speech progresses and the thematic concerns become more evident, the possession seems more to be the possession of the Spirit and the place (τόπος v.7) the worshipping Christians in Jerusalem.⁶⁴ This possibility is reinforced by the use of "promise" elsewhere to refer to the Spirit. In his hortatory speech on Pentecost, Peter uses the promise of the Spirit to persuade his audience to repent and be baptized (2:33, 39). Such a promise goes back in Luke's work to Jesus' own promise that he would send the Spirit at his ascension to God's right hand (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33).

The Spirit is not the only promised object in Acts. Paul uses the completion of another promise, the promised seed of David, to persuade the children

64 The latter is the suggestion of Nils Dahl, "The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts," *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1976) 74-76.

of Abraham to believe in Jesus (13:22, 23, 32, 33). Before Agrippa, Paul uses the completion of this same promise as a way of describing for Agrippa the issue of basic conflict in his relationship with his Jewish brethren (26:6-8). In these speeches of Paul, as well as the others, one must of course be careful to distinguish the use of “promise” within the speech and the use Luke intends within his whole work. Within the speeches, the benefit of promise is used to incite action (2: 3, 31, 39) and the proclamation of completed promise is used to change beliefs and dispositions (13: 32, 33). How then Luke intended such uses to be understood by his audience requires educated guesses about his larger literary intentions and the situation of his audience. The promise of the Spirit, of course, could be readily applied generally to the readers since within the speech the “promise” is extended to Jews and Gentiles of the future. The completed promises are part of Luke’s larger literary concern for prediction/fulfillment.⁶⁵ Various reconstructions of the situation of Luke’s audience are now being offered in an attempt to explain Luke’s “theology of fulfillment of promises.”⁶⁶ Such educated guesses are important, though necessarily tentative, if one is to address the question of how Luke is using “promise”. We cannot pursue this question further, at least for Luke. We can, however, and we must ask similar questions if we are to understand how the author of Hebrews is using promises in his own work.

Hebrews as Exhortation

To ask about the use of commissive language in Hebrews it is not enough to ask about the use of promising and past “promises” in individual utterances or even in immediate literary contexts. The interpreter must also have in mind what the author has intended to do with his whole work. If Luke, to take an example, is writing to Christians involved in missionary activity, then his use of completed promises may be functioning to encourage trust in God’s fidelity to promise. Paul’s use of promise in Romans 4 to persuade the Roman Christians that the gospel is for all should perhaps be viewed in light of a concern of Paul to mold Gentile support for the contribution for the saints in Jerusalem. Whatever the case, the question must be raised for Hebrews

65 See Paul Schubert, “The structure and significance of Luke 24,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolph Bultmann*, ed. W. Eltester (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1954) 176-77 and Nils Dahl, “The Purpose of Luke-Acts,” *Memory*, pp. 89-91.

66 See Gerhard Schneider, “Der Zweck des lukanischen Doppelwerks, 11 *BZ* 21 (197) 56-58; Robert Karris, “Missionary Communities: A New Paradigm for the Study of Luke-Acts,” *CBQ* 41 (1979) 94.

concerning the function of the commissive language within the larger generic concerns of the letter.

To talk about the intention, occasion and structure of Hebrews is to talk about disputed matters. We cannot possibly give detailed attention here to these matters.⁶⁷ What we do intend now is to set forth our approach to the generic reading of Hebrews, how we understand the parts functioning in the whole.⁶⁸ The way we structure our reading, the language we use, cannot be adequately defended, yet the process of being self-conscious about conception and expression we hope will be a salutary one.

Intention and Occasion. Our author describes what he has done as “a word of exhortation” (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως 13:22). His description occurs as part of an epistolary concluding utterance:⁶⁹ “May I encourage you to bear with this word of exhortation for the letter I have sent you has been brief.” His use of παρακαλῶ as well as his remark about the letter’s brevity indicate that the author is attempting to encourage his readers to be favorably disposed to his work.⁷⁰ The remark about brevity, not infrequent in letters (cf. 1 Pet 5:12), functions to reduce the pressure on the readers, implicit in his demands upon them, by indicating a confidence he has in them (cf. 6:9).⁷¹

67 Whole dissertations have been devoted to such topics; e.g. C.P. Anderson, “The Setting of the Epistle to the Hebrews” (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1969) and Wayne G. McCown, “ὁ λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως The Nature and Function of the Hortatory Sections in the Epistle to the Hebrews” (Th.D. Diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1970).

68 For a useful discussion of the relationship of the generic conception of a text with the details of the text, see E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 72-76. We shall designate the generic conception of the literary whole by Exhortation (capital letter) while using exhortation to designate the force of individual utterances of sections.

69 Harry Y. Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans* (SD 42; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1977) 65. Examples of such remarks (n. 52): μὴ οὖν ἄλλως (in *POxy* 745; *PLond* 356); μὴ ἀμελήσης (in *POxy* 742; 1665).

70 Carl Bjerkelund calls attention to the epistolary function of this formula which occurs in connection with closing exhortations; *Parakalō: Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalō-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967) 32. The epistolary nature of the work has frequently been disputed because of the absence of epistolary addresses and salutations. Letters, however, could begin without such openings; see Fred O. Francis, “The Form and Function of the Opening and Closing Paragraphs of James and I John, 11 *ZNW* 61 (1970) 123.

71 Frequently authors noted the brevity (or lack thereof) of their letters. Some remarks sound like apologies for having transgressed the boundaries of a letter (e.g. Isoc *Ep* 2:13; 4:13; cf. Demetrius *Style* 228). Others are issued as encouragements to the addressees that they do not need long letters (e.g. Cicero *Ep ad Fam* II 4:2; Ign *Pol* 7:3). In Heb 13:22, the remark about brevity tends to reduce the pressure of the immediate demand being

While then our author has not issued his remark as a “library classification”, we should not too quickly disregard his own expressed generic conception of his work, for our author reflects a measured sense of where he is and what he is up to throughout his letter (cf. 2:5; 4:13; 5:11; 6:9; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32). What he has intended to do with his exhortation has involved, to some degree, uncomfortable words, at least this may be inferred by his use of ἀνέχομαι: “Bear with this Exhortation.”⁷² Indeed, exhortation may involve warning (cf. Heb 3:13), but it has other sides such as arousing (10:25), pleading (12:5,6) as well as other forces we have already noted. His description of his literary whole as Exhortation is thus not the prescription of a narrow literary effort but rather is an inclusion of a number of complementary activities which involve *active persuasion to a course of action*.⁷³

We avoid translating λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως “sermon” because this expression and variations of it were inclusive terms, appropriate to a number of situations. It could indeed be used of the edifying discourse in the synagogue (Acts 13:15) and in the Christian assembly (cf. 1 Cor 14:3; Acts 20:3). But it could also describe a diplomatic speech designed to foster alliances (1 Mac 10:3,24,47) as well as a military leader’s address to arouse his troops (2 Mac 15:11). The problem in too readily associating λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως with “sermon” is that it tends to narrow the field for understanding how exhortation works. The scope becomes too often the synagogue sermon. Not only is there the difficulty of working from something not clearly known anyway, but Exhortations that are available are neglected.⁷⁴ This is particularly unfortunate in view of the acknowledged rhetorical ability of our author. Certainly the

placed on the reader (cf. Ign *Rom* 7:2; 1 Pet 5:12).

72 ἀνέχομαι is often used concerning the experiencing of something unpleasant: “the time will come when they will not bear healthy teaching” (2 Tim 4:3); children enduring their parents’ injunctions (Philo *Prob* 30); Herod not able to endure the words of his enemies (Jos *War* I “since you have endured other words which though true were offensive, I beg you to bear these” (Isoc *Peace* 65).

73 Paul Trudinger understands the expression as referring to the injunctions of chapter 13 rather than to the whole work. He would translate ἐπέστειλα as “enjoin” rather than “write”; καὶ γὰρ διὰ βραγέων ἐπέστειλα ὑμῖν: A Note on Hebrews XIII. 22 *JTS* 23 (1972) 128-30. Trudinger has fallen into the trap of identifying παράκλησις too narrowly with injunction.

74 Michel (pp. 27,542) has contributed to the popularization of understanding λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως, “sermon” (cf. “homily” in Turner, *Style*, p. 108). For a critical assessment of the description of Hebrews in Hartwig Thyen’s *Der Stil der Jüdisch-Hellenistischen Homilie* (1955), see James Swetnam, “On the Literary Genre of the ‘Epistle’ to the Hebrews,” *NT* 11 (1969) 261-69. The Chapter on “Paraclesis and Homily” in James I. H. McDonald’s *Kerygma and Didache* (NTSMS 37; Cambridge: At the University Press, 1980) is a cursory review of the texts often cited as examples of “homily”.

possibility looms large that through a rhetorical training he came in contact with Exhortations.

Because of the inclusive denotation of λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως, the occasion or situation that called forth the Exhortation must be determined if one is to properly understand the generic conception of the work. In other words, it is necessary to form some ideas about what the author was exhorting his readers to do and why. Ever since the work of Martin Dibelius, however, there has been some question whether one could gain a picture of the situation, especially if "exhortations" are issued with little regard for the audience's situation. For Hebrews, Dibelius suggested that one, in fact, could not get a portrait of the audience because the "exhortations" (e.g. poor church attendance, persecution...) were of a general nature, appropriate for many situations.⁷⁵ Dibelius viewed Hebrews as "a treatise on a single theme" with its epistolary features added later.

It is true that certain Exhortations may contain a section which gathers together general advice for possible future situations (cf. Isac *Dem* 44). In Hebrews, the single warning about diverse and strange teachings (13:9) is a good example of such general advice. From this warning one can hardly extrapolate heresy rampant in the congregation. Still, Dibelius' contention may be viewed as misleading for Dibelius did not distinguish clearly enough the general nature of some exhortations from the discretion of the individual author to select pieces of general advice appropriate to his audience. Seneca, for example, could select and adapt

hortatory utterances in view of his reader's situation (*Ep* 84; 64:7ff). We should not therefore lack confidence in reconstructing situations from exhortations (and of course from more explicit comments) and yet we must be modest for the clues in the exhortations are themselves sometimes ambiguous.⁷⁶

75 Martin Dibelius, *A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1936) 194-96. Albert Vanhoye, however, has shown a close connection between the thematic concerns of the hortatory utterances in Heb 13:1-6 and the rest of Hebrews which would certainly not favor a theory of randomness for the hortatory utterances; "La Question Littéraire de Hébreux xiii 1-6," *NTS* 23 (1977) 121-39.

76 Ambiguous not only in the sense that more than one situation of the reader could be inferred, but also in the sense that what is reflected may be little more than the author's own recent experiences or his instincts or his training. For example, does Paul's use of promise in Roman 4 reflect a concern for the situation of his immediate audience or does it more mirror his experience with the Galatian Christians? Cf. the contrary interpretations for Hebrews of L.K.K. Dey, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* (SBLDS 25; Missoula: scholars Press, 1975) and George MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 (1978) 179-99.

What is perhaps most noticeable about the readers' situation is their withdrawal. The author says explicitly that some have withdrawn from the Christian assembly (10:25). This state of affairs is disturbing because, as our author stresses, Christians have the responsibility of encouraging one another (10:25; 3:13). This mutual responsibility extends even to a shared suffering (10:34; 11:25; 13:3) in order that there might be a shared inheritance (11: 9, 20, 21; 12:14-17). This denial of community responsibility may be one reason why the author includes in his letter a series of hortatory utterances concerned with "love of the brethren" (13:1-8) and near the end of his letter a final plea to not neglect "fellowship" (13:16). Concern for one another is not completely absent (6:10), but bad habits have been forming.

What is even more disturbing is that this withdrawal from one another is nothing less than a withdrawal from God. So it is that the coming judgment day of God is used by the author as an inducement for brethren to come together for encouragement (10:25). A withdrawal would eventually lead them to destruction but the author displays confidence that they will be shown to be a people of faith (10:39). The author insists in various ways that the readers "approach" God (προσέρχομαι 4:16; 7:25; 10:1,22;11:6; 12:22). This approach to God is simultaneous with a fellowship with one another (10:22,25; 13:15,16).

This withdrawal is attributed in part to certain *suffering* the Christians have experienced in the past and perhaps more recently, suffering related to *financial* and *social* matters. At some time in their past, property of some of the Christians was confiscated (10:34). They initially responded to this with joy, but one may suspect that as the permanence of this loss set in bitterness and some distrust replaced the first glow. A fear of further financial loss and accompanying this a withdrawal of possessions from service to others may be behind the author's hortatory utterances in 13:5, 6 and finally the declaration, "What can man do to me!" (v. 6).⁷⁷ As we shall see in Chapter 2, certain passages with commissive language utilize a commercial vocabulary; this may reflect a concern for the reader's experience.

Not only have the Christians had to deal with financial loss; they have also had to cope with social reproach (10:33). That the author anticipates more of this ahead and is in fact preparing his brethren for this seems likely from the way he makes such experiences constitutive of the life of the believer who

77 John A.T. Robinson (*Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976) 111-12) notices the use of economic terminology in Hebrews, but he sees this as indicating a temptation facing the Christians to permit their business commitments to take precedence over their faith (cf. Hs VIII 8:1; IX 19:3; 20:1}. We rather understand the author's use of this language in light of fears of financial loss and dispossession.

follows Jesus “outside the gate” (13:12-14). In this matter, Moses himself is exemplary for “he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (11:26).

That a combination of social alienation and financial hardship could lead to withdrawal can be well illustrated in the bitter response of Dia Chrysostom to his experience of exile. In his oration “Distrust” (*περὶ ἀπιστίας*, *Or* 74), Dio counsels his audience to withdraw, to avoid being vulnerable, to beware of relationships, especially friends who promise permanent bonds, for such friendships will turn fickle (74:6-12,21-23). By contrast, the author of Hebrews elevates Jesus’ suffering through his becoming vulnerable (2:5-18; 5:5-10; 12: 2-4). Such suffering finally does have purpose for through it God is rearing his child to share the father’s holiness (12:4-11).

While suffering has taken its toll, the author indicates that the passage of time has also been a factor in the withdrawal.⁷⁸ The author shames some of the Christians because they should be more mature by now (5:11-14). Others he tries to arouse from their sluggishness (12:12,13). What is above all needed is endurance (2:1; 3:14; 10:36). In fact, if Hebrews is an Exhortation it is an Exhortation to endurance, warning those who would retreat, emboldening those who face the struggle.⁷⁹

Structure. Though the author has called his work an Exhortation and though the situation of his readers is in line with his description, many exegetes have been reluctant to accept this designation because of what they have found in the structure of the letter. What they have found is an alternating sequence of theology and paraenesis, or better, teaching and warning:⁸⁰ 1:1-14/2:1-4; 2:5-

78 Paul Andriessen (“La communauté des <<Hébreux>>: Etait-elle Tombee dans le Relachement?” *NRT* 96 (1974) 1054-66) stresses the role of suffering to the virtual exclusion of any apathetic withdrawal on the part of the readers. T.S. Lewis (“...And if he shrinks back (Heb. X 38b),” *NTS* 22 (1976) 88-94) posits that the readers consciously withdrew themselves in response to the call they heard in Isa 26:20.

79 cf. the comment of Theophylaktos (*PG* 125:401) on Heb 13:22—“It is not a word of *παραινέσεως* but a word of *παρακλήσεως*, that is a word of encouragement (*παραμυθίας*) to promote endurance since the author’s words were directed to those under affliction.”

80 Rafael Gyllenberg is credited with the crystalization of this position; “Die Komposition des Hebräerbriefs,” *SEA* 22-23 (1957-58) 137-47. For antecedents and development, see the surveys in Albert Vanhoye, *La Structure Littéraire de L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 2d ed. (Desclée de Brouwer, 1976) 11-32 and in Jukka Thurén, *Das Lobopfer der Hebräer* (Abo: Abo Akademi 1973) 25-49. The alternation has found its way into NT Introductions—Kummel (p. 390), Perrin (p. 138), Conzelmann (*Arbeitsbuch*, p. 299)—as well as into other works (e.g. Turner, *Style*, p. 113; Bjerkelund, *Parakalô*, p. 31; Barnabas Lindars, “The Place of the OT in the Formation of NT Theology: Prolegomena,” *NTS* 23 (1976) 63). Even Vanhoye acknowledges the presence of an alternating structure although his main contribution is the presentation of a concentric view of Hebrews.

18/(3:1-6) 3:7-4:13; (4:12-16) 5:1-10/5:11-6:12; (6:13-20) 7:1-10:18/10:19-39 (11:1-40) 12:1-13:17.

Working from these categories, rather than the generic conception in 13:22, some exegetes have characterized Hebrews as a theological exposition served by paraenesis. Others, however, have chosen to see the theological sections in the service of the paraenesis: auf der Paränese liegt das Hauptgewicht, nicht auf einem theologischen Vorbau; hier erreicht der theologische Gedanke seine letzte Zuspitzung und seinem inneren Abschluss (Michel, p. 27).

Questions about the usefulness of these divisions, as well as the designations of them, arise when it is observed that for certain sections (those in parentheses above) there is no consensus on their proper designation.⁸¹ This is particularly important for us for in two of these sections (6:13-20; 11:1-40) commissive language is concentrated.

Even for the divisions usually undisputed problems have been raised. Dibelius, for example, has noted the presence of “theoretical” sections within the “great paraenesis” of 10:19-13:17 (viz. 11; 12:18-29; 13:10-18)⁸² More recently, Graham Hughes in commenting on 2:5-18 has fostered more doubts: “Some hesitation may be felt in ascribing the quality of paraenesis to 2:5-18 which must seem to include a good deal of the writer’s theology of incarnation. Certainly it is not so obviously exhortatory as some of the other paraenetic passages; but nor is it so clearly Christological as the ‘comparisons’ and functions rather more ‘encouragingly’ than ‘dogmatically.’”⁸³ Hughes’ legitimate attempt to make sense of these distinctions indicates that in fact there is something wrong with them.

As a way to overcome this impasse we may consider here certain work that has been done on exhortation in Paul. In general, thinking about exhortation in Hebrews has lagged behind thinking about exhortation in Paul. The work of Victor Paul Furnish and Abraham Malherbe on exhortation in Paul may stimulate our rethinking exhortation in Hebrews.⁸⁴ Both men acknowledge a debt to Paul Schubert’s *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgiving*

81 For example, 3:1-6, admonitory-Gyllenberg, Vanhoye; didactic Kummel, Perrin; 4:12-6, admonitory-Gyllenberg; didactic-Perrin (vv. 14-16); 6:13-20, admonitory-Vanhoye; didactic-Conzelmann; 11:1-40, admonitory-Gyllenberg; didactic-Perrin.

82 Martin Dibelius, “Der himmlische Kultus nach dem Hebräerbrief,” *Botschaft und Geschichte* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956) 2:176.

83 Graham Hughes, *Hermeneutics*, p. 176, n. 49. Cf. also W.G. Johnsson, “Issues in the Interpretation of Hebrews,” *AUSS* 15 (1977) 185.

84 Victor Paul Furnish, “Paul’s Exhortations in the Context of His Letters and Thought” (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1960); *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968); Abraham Malherbe, “1 Thessalonians as a Paraenetic Letter” (unpublished paper, 1972 SBL Pauline Seminar).

(1939) and more particularly to Schubert's observation of the "paraenetic function" of Pauline Thanksgivings.

Furnish isolates two basic approaches to identifying exhortation in a work. The first is to identify exhortation with a particular grammatical construction, e.g. the use of imperatives and hortatory subjunctives in a section. This is the more traditional approach. The second is to begin with a sense of what exhortation does and to identify those literary units which correspond to one's understanding of exhortation. Furnish goes to Paul and isolates those utterances and literary units which have an "imperative object". Furnish finds that not only thanksgiving but a host of other things can be hortatory: benedictions, commendations, examples, satire, narrative, autobiography (*Theology*, pp. 92-97).

Viewed from these two approaches it is clear that exhortation has been identified in the alternating structure of Hebrews according to the grammatical criteria. The admonitory sections have a high degree of imperatives and hortatory subjunctives; the didactic sections

do not.⁸⁵ The question that arises is whether the use of the second approach would reveal exhortation at work even in the so-called didactic sections. If it did, divisions in Hebrews might still be evident but the designations of these would need careful thought and revision. The use of the second approach requires, in any event, some definition of exhortation. This brings us to the work of Malherbe.

Hortatory Traits. The real intent and indeed contribution of Malherbe's work has been the interpretation of certain features of I Thessalonians in light of the paraenetic letter, in particular the use of the style of antithesis in exhortation.⁸⁶ What interests us here, however, is Malherbe's preliminary concern to distinguish certain characteristics of exhortation by examining the descriptions

85 In the undisputed admonitory sections: 3:7-4:13, see lest 3:12, we see 3:19, only if 3:14, who...who...who 3:16-18, let us fear lest 4:1, let us strive to 4:11; 5:11-6:12, you are 5:11, you ought 5:12, let us go on 6:1, impossible to 6:4, do not be 6:12, we are persuaded 6:9, we desire 6:11; 10:19-39 let us come 10:22, let us possess 10:23, let us consider 10:24, not neglecting 10:25, you see the day 10:25, remember 10:32, do not throw away 10:36; 12:1-13:17 let us run 12:1, let us go out 13:13, let us offer 13:15, consider that 12:3, permit 13:1, remember 12:4, 13:3, do not forget 13:2,16, straighten up 12:12, obey 13:17, pray 13:18, bear with 13:22, do... lest 12:13, look out lest... lest... lest 12:15,16, see lest 12:25, seek peace 12:14, you know 12:17, do not put up with 13:9. By contrast, in the undisputed teaching sections: 1:1-14, none; 2:5-18, none; 5:1-10, none; 7:1-10:18, notice that 7:4 (we have 8:1), if... how much more 9:13 (we are sanctified 10:10).

86 Furnish mentions the paraenetic letter in his dissertation (p. 35), but it is Malherbe who brings it to exegetical significance. Using a quite different approach, McDonald (Kerygma, pp. 50-68) views antitheses as characteristic of 'Paraclesis'.

and uses of exhortation in certain ancient Exhortations, specifically certain discourses of Isocrates and certain letters of Seneca, Pliny and Cicero. What Malherbe's review yields for us, though he does not express it this way,⁸⁷ are three traits of hortatory literature: reminders to evoke remembrance; precepts, instructions, considerations to be learned; exemplary illustrations to be emulated.⁸⁸

Though individually or even in combination these traits do not unerringly indicate an Exhortation or exhortation at work, together with an author's own description of his work they do provide some preliminary guidelines for pinning down hortatory forces at work in an Exhortation. Applying these to Hebrews, what one finds is that these hortatory traits do not accumulate solely in the admonitory sections but they in fact cross the divisions, appearing also in what have been called the didactic sections. In addition to the "directive" *instructions* in Hebrews already mentioned (i.e. the uses of the imperative and hortatory subjunctive), there are uses of principles of exclusion and limitation (ἀδύνατον 6:4; 10:4; 11:6; ἀνάγκη 7:12; 9:16, 23; 8:3) as well as maxims (e.g. 6:7,8) which function to order the reader's expectations. This structuring is clearest and most emphatic in the consideration of Jesus as high priest (4:14,15; 8:1; 10:1 9; 13:10,14). Besides the explicit calls to remembrance (e.g. 10:32-35), there are reminders of who the people are that function to reinforce an identity (ἔσμεν 3:6; 4:2; 10:10,39; μέτοχος; 3:1,14; 6:4; 12:8). In addition to the exemplary illustrations of 11; 6:12-15; 13:7, there is a patterning intent in the discourse concerning Jesus' paideia and suffering (12:2-4; 2:10-18; 5:6-9; 10:5-10; 13:12,13). Approaching Hebrews then from

87 Malherbe calls his results, "characteristics of paraenesis", and includes concerns for theme and occasion. Our traits of Exhortation are more concerned with the forces at work in Exhortation. We avoid here and elsewhere the use of the word "paraenesis" (preferring "exhortation") because of a confusion over its reference. For some it is a hortatory utterance. For others it designates a form in which there is a collection of hortatory utterances (cf. Furnish "Exhortations," pp. 8, 9). And for others, like Malherbe, it can also be the generic conception of a whole work, as in paraenetic letter. It would seem that the value of a transliterated word (*paraenesis*) is its power to give a more precise definition, yet in the case of "paraenesis" and "paraenetic" they often mean little more than "exhortation" and "hortatory". Cf. Thuren, *Lobopfer*, p. 26, n. 90.

88 The activities of instructing, reminding, and illustrating are by no means distinct forces. The remembrance may be of well known instruction, principles, rules, maxims (cf. Seneca 94:11) or of recognized virtuous men (Marcus Aurelius 11:26; Seneca *Ep* 11:9). There is instruction which is more directive, e.g. precepts to be carried out or to be continued (cf. Isoc *Nicoles* 40; Seneca *Ep* 6:5; 25:4; Pliny *Ep* VIII 24:1) and there is instruction which has more of the character of giving structure to one's desires and expectations (e.g. principles, rules, maxims). For an account of the uses of exemplary illustrations in the Latin sources, see Karl Alewell, Ueber das rhetorische Παραδειγμα: (Leipzig: August Hoffmann, 1913) 87-89.

a consideration of hortatory traits, one can hardly limit exhortation to the previously prescribed admonitory sections.

The convergence of these traits for exhortation could no doubt be illustrated in other Exhortations besides those used by Malherbe, e.g. those of philosophers to students (προτρεπτικὸς λόγος) to athletes (προτρεπτικὸς ἀθληταῖς), moralists to kings (περὶ βασιλείας λόγος), ambassadors to courts (πρεσβευτικὸς λόγος).⁸⁹ One other kind of Exhortation should be considered, however, not only because it adds testimony to the usefulness of these traits, but also because unlike the other ancient Exhortations we have mentioned the purpose of this Exhortation has similarities to the purpose we have suggested for Hebrews. It is also Exhortation that, to my knowledge, has not yet been considered in previous discussions of hortatory literature.⁹⁰ The Exhortation is the speech of a general to his troops.

From Thucydides onward, historians included these speeches in their narratives. At least by the time of Aelius Aristides, these speeches had acquired the technical term, παρακλητικὸς.⁹¹ In some rhetorical curricula, these speeches were used in the development of expression and style in writing. In his *progymnasmata*, Theon has the impersonation of a general speaking to his troops in danger as an exercise of προσωποποιία. (II 115, Spengel).

Already we have noted the hortatory use of promising, human and divine, in these speeches. These speeches share with Hebrews the goal of arousing and emboldening faltering spirits to endure the impending struggle. These παρακλητικοί also share the three

hortatory traits we have been concerned with.⁹² Of particular interest, though, is the way instruction functions in these speeches in ways similar to

89 Concerning these four Exhortations, see respectively, Paul Hartlich, *De Exhortationum a Graecis Romanisque*, *Leipziger Studien zu classischen Philologie* 11 (1889) 236-304; Dionysius Halicarnasus, "VII Προτρεπτικὸς ἀθληταῖς, in *Artis Generis Demonstrativi*, ed. H. Usener and L. Radermacher (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1965) 6:283-92; T.C. Burgess, *Epidictic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1902) 136, 228f.; Dietimar Kienast, "Presbeia", *PW Suppl.* 13 (1973) 593-96.

90 Spicq (I 8-12) has mentioned the προτρεπτικὸς λόγος in connection with Hebrews, although he favors calling the letter apologetic.

91 Our study is in debt to the monograph of Joseph Albertus, *Die παρακλητικοί in der Griechischen und Römischen Literatur*, *Dissertationes Philologicae Argentoratenses Selectae* 13:2 (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1908). The word παρακλητικὸς arose, no doubt, because of the frequent use of παρακαλέω and παράκλησις in the introductions of the speeches in the historians (Albertus, pp. 9-15; and for a list of these speeches, pp. 28-36).

92 The "directive" instruction is a call to the virtues and instincts of a soldier: do not fear, be courageous, strive eagerly, expect victory (e.g. 2 Mac 15:8; 4 Mac 16:16,17). It is a time for remembering through reminders (ὑπομνήσαι) who they are (*Jos War III 472*)

Hebrews. In both, there is a magnification of the benefits of the struggle and at the same time a strong declaration of the outcome of faltering in endurance.⁹³ The general may tell his troops how great their situation is, how great their equipment is or even how great their general is (cf. Jos *War* II 482-84). The way some generals accomplished this particular instruction on greatness in their Exhortations leads us in fact to one final, striking feature of Hebrews.

Syncrisis and Exhortation. Though certain hortatory traits in the “didactic” sections should lead one to reconsider the force of these sections, there remains justification for some of the division breaks because of a certain continuity maintained within the “didactic” sections through the use of the comparative style, syncrisis. Just as the characteristic grammatical feature of the admonitory sections may be said to be imperatives and hortatory subjunctives, so the characteristic element of style in the “didactic” sections is syncrisis.⁹⁴ As part of the instruction about Jesus, his status, his priesthood, his liturgy, syncrisis has been viewed as alternating with, rather than as part of, exhortation.⁹⁵ For some, syncrisis is used for polemical reasons, much as antitheses in Paul have frequently been viewed as aimed at opponents.⁹⁶

What we find in the παρακλητικοί, however, and something we must remember, is that syncrisis *can* be used for exhortation. For example, in Dio

and for whom they fight (Poly III 109:1,7-9). The deeds of the fathers are exemplary *illustrations* for the sons: “Your fathers of old among the Greeks had the highest reputation of virtue...I give you testimony of this...remember all these men because you are the children of these men” (Lesb III 3f. K; cf. Thuc IV 92:6,7; Dio Cassius 50:24; 4 Mac 16:19-21).

- 93 “We struggle not for small or insignificant ends but, through fervency of spirit, to obtain the greatest goals, through neglect (ἀμελήσαντες), however, to suffer the most grievous things. Do you suppose that those who did not spare allies would spare us? Let us strive (σπουδάσωμεν)...” (Dio Cassius 50:20-22; cf. Heb 2:1-3; 4:11; 10:28,29). Those who hear are faced with an ‘either... or...’ (cf. Thuc II 89:10; IV 95; VI 68:3; Poly III 63:3 and Heb 3:13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:15-17).
- 94 Within 1:1-14, the son better than the angels, 1:4,7,8; within 2:5- 3:6, Jesus lower than the angels, 2:9; the faithful son worthy of more glory than Moses, 3:3; within 5:1-10, the elect high priest with his weakness and the Christ; within 7:1-10:18, numerous comparisons; better hope 7:19, better covenant 7:22, better promises 8:6, greater, more perfect tent 9:11, better sacrifices 9:23; every priest stood, this one has sat 10:11,12.
- 95 E.g. Dey, *Intermediary*, p. 2: “how do these comparisons relate to the exhortations which are interposed?” So also, C.F. Evans, “Theology and Rhetoric: The Epistle to the Hebrews” (unpublished paper, 1975 University Seminar for the Studies in the New Testament, New York) 6-8.
- 96 Cf. Dey, *Intermediary*, pp. 121-26; for a reconsideration of antitheses in Paul, in addition to Malherbe, see Luke Johnson, “II Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers: A Re-examination,” *JRS* 6-7 (1978-79) 1-26.

Cassius 50:17-19, Antony attempts to rally his troops by persuading them that they have a better general to lead them and better equipment to sustain them. Using syncrisis, comparing himself in age, ability, training, and experience to the enemy general, Antony hoped to promote the confidence of his troops. It is not as though there was some danger of defection to enemy lines that prompted Antony to use syncrisis. He rather utilized the basic function of syncrisis, amplification, to elevate himself in their minds that their spirits might be heartened.⁹⁷ In the actual syncrisis there is evidence of the encomiastic form because syncrisis had its most familiar home in the encomium (cf. Cicero *Or* II 85:348; Aphthonius II 36 ff., Spengel).⁹⁸

In encomium, syncrisis functioned first of all to highlight the character and good deeds of the person portrayed. As part of encomium, syncrisis could also be used to elevate a person for imitation (cf. Isac *Evagoras* 77). As varied the uses of encomium, so varied the uses of syncrisis.

When Jesus and his priesthood are elevated in Hebrews by syncrisis with the angels, with Moses, and with the Levitical priesthood, it does not, therefore, automatically mean that the author was intending to correct some misunderstanding of his audience concerning the angels, Moses, or the Levitical priesthood. The syncrisis functions first and foremost to magnify Jesus. How this magnification is then being used by the author requires attention not only to the immediate context but also to the author's larger literary intentions. The comparison of Jesus with the angels, for example, functions to highlight how seriously and soberly the words about salvation through Jesus should be taken (1 :4-2-:4). In Chapter 3, we shall examine how the function of syncrisis in Heb 5:1-10 may be usefully understood by analogy with a syncrisis in Isocrates' *Nicocles*, an Exhortation of a "king" to his subjects. Our only point here, for we cannot do a full study of syncrisis in Hebrews, is that syncrisis can be used for hortatory reasons; its use does not simply signal teaching, much less polemics and debate.

97 Cf. Arist *Rhet* I 9:38,1368a: "If he does not furnish you with enough material in himself, you must compare (ἀντιπαραβάλλειν) him with others... And you must compare (συγκρίνειν) him with illustrious persons, for it affords ground for amplification (αὐξητικόν), and it is noble if he can be proved better than men of worth."

98 See, in general, Friedrich Focke, "Synkrisis," *Hermes* 58 (1923) 327- 68; on the significance of αὐξησις and σύγκρισις for ἐγκώμιον, Vinzenz Buchheit, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des Genos Epideiktikon von Gorgias bis Aristoteles* (Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1960); also, for its varied uses, Marsh H. MacCall, Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Simile and Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) 135-36. Günther Zuntz has mentioned this background in connection with syncrisis in Hebrews; *The Text of the Epistles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) 286.

The alternating structure of Hebrews does not, therefore, preclude our expecting exhortation throughout the letter. We shall avoid the designations “didactic” and “admonitory” not only because they may each be less than accurate at times but also because certain divisions may be more usefully described by two or more functions. Just as individual utterances have forces (illocutionary, perlocutionary), so also individual literary units have functions. More often than not, “form and functions” is more accurate than “form and function.” Schubert’s recognition that thanksgiving has a hortatory function does not mean that it does not have a thanksgiving function as well.

Though there are reasons for the divisions marked out within Hebrews, we shall not treat these as sacred. There are breaks in the flow of the work, especially those effected by the self-conscious remarks of the author, yet the interweaving of thematic concerns throughout the piece forces one to mark and define divisions with care. The approach of James Moffatt on this matter in his commentary is not without wisdom: “It is artificial to divide up a writing of this kind, which is not a treatise on theology, and I have therefore deliberately abstained from introducing any formal divisions and subdivisions in the commentary” (pp. xxiii-xxiv).

Summary

Hebrews has the appearance of an Exhortation. Certain traits characteristic of hortatory literature appear with strong features in Hebrews. Even the syncrisis and the instruction concerning Jesus as high priest, often understood as on a different track from exhortation, cannot be excluded *per se* from hortatory purposes, for other Exhortations, such as the παρακλητικοί do use syncrisis and instruction to achieve hortatory intentions. What may be pieced together about the audience of Hebrews indicates that they needed exhortation. Facing uncertain financial times and the uncomfortable prospect of social abuse, Christians were forsaking one another and neglecting their privileged access to God. It is not surprising that the author can call his work “a word of exhortation” for he speaks to people who need encouragement to endure; that they must “bear” his Exhortation indicates that some in fact needed stern warning.

If the larger literary intention of Hebrews is exhortation then in choosing to talk about God’s promises the author could hardly have chosen another activity, human or divine, better suited typically for exhortation. A taxonomy of characteristic uses of promising and “promises” reveals how frequently

promises were issued (and were reported) for the purpose of persuading people to change dispositions and actions or encouraging people to endure struggle.

Formative in the Jewish and Christian use of divine promise, in particular, were the stories of God's commissive activity with Abraham. Promises remained promises, but particular features of the Abraham story could in the hands of interpreters such as Philo and Paul excite images and appeals to belief and behavior which sometimes overshadowed the activity of promising. In our next Chapter, we shall take a close look at our author's depiction of Abraham, to see whether Abraham's experience *as a promisee* emerges from or recedes into the background, and see whether the resulting picture of Abraham functions in exhortation.

CHAPTER 2

FAITHFUL PROMISEES

The first index of what our author is doing with commissive language is the use he makes of the story of Abraham. In 6:12-15 and 7:6, Abraham is identified as promisee, but it is not until 11:8-22 that our author develops aspects of his story.¹ It is in this same section that commissive language is the most concentrated in his letter.² Our investigation now of Abraham in chapter eleven will follow two tracks. First we shall be concerned with what is said about Abraham and the first heirs. Exegetical traditions will be of somewhat less interest than the author's actual depiction of the first heirs.³ Secondly we shall be concerned with *what is done* with the depiction of Abraham and how it is accomplished.

- 1 The question of whether the "seed of Abraham" in 2:16 connotes Abraham's experience as promisee will be addressed in Chapter 4. The only other reference to the Abraham story in Hebrews is in 13:2, "some have entertained angels unaware" (Genesis 18).
- 2 ἐπαγγελία (11:9,9,13,17), a faithful, capable Promisor (11:11,19), promised object (τόπον 11: 8, πόλιν 10, σπέρματος 11, πατρίδα 14, κρείττονος...ἐπουρανίου 16, πόλιν 16 Ισαάκ 17, περί μελλόντων 20, τὸ ἄκρον τῆς ῥαβδου αὐτοῦ 21), commissive utterance (11:18), keeping promise (δύναμιν...ἔλαβεν 11:11, αὐτὸν...ἐκομίσατο 19), promisees' expectation (ἐξεδέχεται 11:10 ἰδόντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι 13, ἐπιζητοῦσιν 14, ὀρέγονται 16, προσεκύνησεν 21).
- 3 For general accounts of Abraham in early Jewish and Christian texts, see Bruce E. Schein, "Our Father Abraham" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1972); Klaus Berger, "Abraham II," *TRE* I (1977) 372-82; Robert Martin Achard, *Actualité D'Abraham* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1969); Samuel Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937-56) I 185-308; V 207-69; Günter Mayer, "Aspekte des Abrahambildes in der hellenistisch-jüdischen Literatur," *EvT* 32 (1972) 123-25; and, unavailable to me, Halvor Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict* (NovTSup 53; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980).

Determining the impact upon the readers that the author has intended by his depiction is certainly a matter of interpretation but positive directions may be taken from the rhetorical logic of chapter eleven, the literary context of 10:32-12:13 and the situation of the readers.

Expecting the Promised City

The depiction of the first heirs in Heb 11:8-22 involves roughly five episodes from the Genesis story: the call and migration of Abraham vv. 8-10, the birth of Isaac vv. 11, 12, the search for a homeland vv. 13- 16, the sacrifice of Isaac vv. 17-19, and the 'death-bed' utterances of the triad of heirs, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph vv. 20-22. The author's selection and sequence of incidents follows a chronological order except for the middle segment which is in part concerned with the death of the heirs. This seeming break in continuity is evidence to some exegetes that our author has taken over a catalogue of Old Testament heroes and adapted it for his own purposes by means of insertions such as vv. 13-16. This seeming break, however, is more apparent than real for vv. 13-16 may be viewed from a more significant perspective to be a crucial part of the structure of segments in vv. 8-22.

When viewed from the perspective of promising, what is revealed is that our author has created an *alternating sequence of segments* involving two felicities of promising and two aspects of the chronology of promising. The first is the depiction of the heirs longing for, with firm conviction, a welcomed *promise of benefit*, the promised City of God (vv. 8-10, 13-16, 20-22). They *do not receive* the promised object but they remain expectant even until death. The second depiction is of Sarah and Abraham remaining confident that God is a *faithful and capable Promiser* even though the promise is severely threatened (vv. 11, 12, 17-19). In this case the heirs *do receive* the promise. We shall discuss in this Chapter features of these two depictions and shall begin now with the first, 'heirs expecting a promised city'.

Destination without Guide

:8 By faith when called Abraham obeyed to go out to a place which he would receive as inheritance and he went out not knowing where he was going. :9 By faith he came to sojourn in the land of the promise as in a foreign country living in tents with Isaac and Jacob fellow heirs of the same promise. :10 For he expected a city with foundations whose builder and maker was God.

The opening depiction of Abraham in verses 8 and 9 echoes familiar expressions of the LXX account of the story: ἐξελεθῆν... ἐξῆλθεν (cf. Gen 12:1,4), παρῳκήσεν (e.g. 17:8; 20:1; 21:23,34; 28:4), ἐν σκιναῖς (cf. 18:1,2,6,9,10; 26:25; 31:25; 33:19; 35:16) κατοικήσας (e.g. 13:12,18; 24:62). The story line of the Genesis narrative has, however, been significantly altered by the report in verse 10 of Abraham's expectations for a permanent city. This forces the reader to reorient his understanding of the story line because what lies behind Abraham's movement *in Genesis* is the expectation for the promised land: Abraham leaves home for the promised land, Abraham migrates in expectation of the promised land, Abraham sojourns in tents, a foreigner in the promised land. What lies behind Abraham's behavior *in Hebrews*, however, is expectation for a permanent city. The changes this brings in the depiction of Abraham may already be seen in the author's choice of expressions in verse 8.

In Heb 11:8 what Abraham goes out to inherit is not the land, but a "place". The author's use of τόπος here might seem at first to be but a stylistic variation for γῆ,⁴ The identification of Abraham's expectations in verse 10, however, makes it more likely that the author's choice was in view of the inheritance of the city of God. Such a use of τόπος would not be unusual in Christian tradition. In John 14:2,3 and Rev 12:6, τόπος refers to a heavenly place prepared by God (c f. Isa 33:10-21).⁵

What is 'indefinite' in the depiction of Abraham is not the destination but the direction: "he went out not knowing where he was going." The author leaves Abraham without a guide. This contrasts noticeably with some pictures of Abraham, especially in Jewish historians, in which Abraham knows his way around through his astrological knowledge.⁶ He is guided by the stars. In Hebrews, he moves by faith, in expectation of a city, still not knowing where or when the city might be inherited.

The author has no interest in portraying Abraham's courage in leaving the familiar surroundings of home and family for a city of unknown locale. The author omits the threefold 'separations' of Gen 12:1: "out of your land, away from your kindred, apart from your father's house." In Hebrews, the stress lies

4 In the Genesis narrative τόπος does not refer to the promised land; rather, to towns (12:6; 13:3; 18:24,26; 19:12-14; 20:11,13) to cultic places (13:4; 19:27) and to other locales (13:14; 18:33; 21:17,31; 22:2,3, 9,19).

5 In the commissive utterance to Abraham in Stephen's speech, Luke has τόπος instead of, as one might have expected, γῆ: "they will serve me in this *place*" (Acts 7:7b). If Nils Dahl is correct, what Luke is doing here is broadening the promise and τόπος refers to the worshipping believers in Christ in Jerusalem; "Abraham," pp. 74-76.

6 E.g. Ps Eupolemus in Eus *Praep Ev* IX 17:3-8; 18:2; Artapanus in Eus *Praep Ev* IX 18:1; c f. Jos *Ant* I 166-68; Philo *Abr* 70. See also Mayer, "Aspekte des Abrahambildes," pp. 123-25.

on what is ahead for Abraham. There is no maximizing (e.g. Philo Abr 63-67; Gen. Rab. 39:7) nor is there a minimizing (e.g. 1 Clem 10:2) of what Abraham had to leave. The author passes over any such concerns for his interest lies in Abraham's motivating expectations.

The depiction in verse 9 of Abraham living in tents, behaving like a person in a foreign land is not the picture of a man victimized by circumstances, living the life of an alien unable to possess the promised land. Rather, his life style is one of his choosing because of his expectations for a city of God. He lives in tents on the land because he believes his inheritance to be elsewhere, in a city with permanent foundations designed and built by God. He is not a wandering nomad waiting to possess the land (cf. Philo Abr 245). He lives in tents expecting a permanent home.

It is doubtful, therefore, that $\gamma\eta\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\alpha\varsigma$ in verse 9 should be translated "the promised land". The promises of land in the Genesis narrative have no place in Hebrews.⁷ Abraham's expectations are expectations for the city of God, not for land. What $\gamma\eta\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\alpha\varsigma$ probably refers to is either the land in which the promise was made or the land in which the promise was to be kept.⁸ The latter is the most likely possibility for in verse 22 the author chooses, from all the stories about Joseph, to speak about Joseph's concern to get his bones back into the land, perhaps because it was in the land that the promise was to be kept. In any case, it is fair to say that the expectation of the city has diminished if not extinguished the promise of land. It is not yet clear, however, how the author can attribute such expectations to Abraham and the first heirs.

7 Curiously, W.D. Davies has no reference to Heb 11:9 in the index to his book, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). By contrast, see Buchanan's attempt (pp. 188-94) to read the aspirations of the first heirs (Hebrews 11) as set on the very land of Palestine. Unavailable to me, Richard Vair, "The OT Promise of the Land as Reinterpreted in First- and Second-Century Christian Literature" (Ph.D. Diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1979).

8 Cf. the remarks of Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis*, p. 147: Kanaan ist gerade nicht Zwischenstation einer Reise zum Himmel, sondern die $\gamma\eta\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\alpha\varsigma$, d.h. das land, in dem Abraham das verheissene "Erbteil" erhalten soll. Deshalb wartet er dort auf die von Gott bereitete Stadt, deren Bürger er kraft göttlicher Berufung und Verheissung bereits ist. Whereas we associate "the land of promise" immediately with the promise to give the land to the heirs, it is not clear that Greek readers would have made this same immediate association. For example, in *Mig.* 43, Philo draws special attention not to the promise of giving the land, but rather showing the land ($\acute{\epsilon}\iota\varsigma\ \tau\eta\eta\nu\ \gamma\eta\nu$, $\eta\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\ \sigma\omicron\iota\ \delta\epsilon\iota\acute{\xi}\omega$ Gen 12:1).

Desiring a Homeland

:13 In faith all these died not receiving the promises. But seeing them from afar and greeting them, they acknowledged that they were strangers and foreigners in the land. :14 In making this claim they made it clear that they desired a homeland. :15 If they had meant the country from which they had departed, they had ample time to go back. :16 What is rather the case is that they were longing for a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one. Consequently, God was not ashamed to be called their God. He had already prepared a city for them.

In Heb 11:13-16, the author offers testimony to the heirs' expectation for a city of God. The testimony consists of an inference drawn from a certain acknowledgement of the heirs about themselves. This acknowledgement of self-identity comes in part from statements of Abraham

and the first heirs in Genesis: *πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος ἐγὼ εἰμι μεθ' ὑμῶν* (23:4; 26:2,3; 47:9; cf. 1 Chr.29:15). The author has inserted *ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* into these utterances (cf. Ps 38:12 *ἐν τῇ τῆ*) in order to provide a starting point of contrast for his inference: the heirs are foreigners in the land, this land in which they dwell in tents, but they are not foreigners in another place.⁹

The author admits that the inference that might be drawn is that they were speaking of Abraham's original homeland; there he would not be a foreigner. Other inferences could be drawn. Philo takes the acknowledgement as an indication, allegorically, of the soul's desire to return to the heavenly home from which it came (*Q Gen #74*). The author of Hebrews excludes his own first suggestion ('if they had meant Chaldea, they had opportunity and certainly would have returned there') and rather draws the conclusion that what they longed for was a heavenly homeland, in fact the city of God.

While the author has depicted Abraham as expecting the city of God he has not depicted *how* Abraham *is to expect it*. He takes for granted that Abraham had been promised the city of God. He does not reiterate the commissive utterance for such a promise and in point of fact there is no such utterance in the Genesis narrative. What has apparently happened, in part, is that he has

9 The expression *ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* is usually translated "On earth" (cf. 12: 25). Our translation, "in the land", attempts to pick up the similar thematic concern in verse 9, "in the land of the promise". In both cases, a use of the preposition *ἐν* would have made the expressions less ambiguous, but our author has an interest, throughout his work, in word variation (e.g. *ξένοι* instead of *πάροικοι* in v. 13). The translation "On earth" is preferred by those interpreters who hear in the language of sojourning a Middle Platonic cast of the material; see Luis Fidel Mercado, "The Language of Sojourning in the Abraham Midrash in Hebrews 11:8-19" (Th.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1966) (unavailable to me).

interpreted as commissive certain interchanges between God and Abraham which had been reconstructed in traditions of exegesis of Genesis 15.

Genesis 15 involved the mysterious ceremony of the portions. Certain explanations of this ceremony included God revealing to Abraham 'the beyond' (cf. 4 Ezra 3:13,14; Apoc Abr; *Gen. Rab.* 44:22) and even the very city graven on the hands of God (2 Apoc Bar 4:1-7; cf. Isa 49:16).¹⁰ Although our author does not express any explicit concerns otherwise for Genesis 15—even remarkably enough in Hebrews 11, there is no concern for Gen 15:6 "Abraham believed God"—still these exegetical traditions are a likely resource for our author's unspoken connections.¹¹ The script of divine promises for our author must, it would seem then, include not only scripture but at times interpretations of scripture.

Our author concludes the segment by offering a final testimony to the heirs' expectations, their bearing the name of God ('The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'). The author interprets God's bestowal of His name upon the heirs as testimony to the heirs' faithful expectations for the city God has prepared for them. This connection itself may reflect exegetical traditions for in *b. Sanh.* 111a, the three heirs bear God's name and are praised because they do not question God's faithfulness to His promises (Gen 13:17; 26:3; 28:13) even though they face serious threats to the promises (Gen 23:4; 26:20; 33:19).¹²

In his account, our author actually goes a step beyond depicting the heirs as expecting. They not only expect, they long for the city of God (ὀρέγονται, v. 16). The author expresses this desire in verse 13 by means of a phrase describing the cordial greeting of a welcomed guest: πόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ἰδόντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι.¹³ The first phrase, "seeing from afar", is reminiscent of Moses' seeing the promised land from afar (Deut 32:52; 34: 4). Unlike Moses, however, the heirs in Hebrews greet the promise, eager to receive this 'guest',

10 To be shown the city was to be shown the Temple. In *Mek.* II 268 (based on Exod 20:18), Abraham is shown the Temple with the order of sacrifices (cf. Gen 15:4 "Take a heifer three years old..."). In *Gen. Rab.* 44:21, one of the four things that is revealed to Abraham (cf. Gen 15:17) is the Temple "with the promise"(?). Another rabbinic tradition based on Gen 22:14 ("The Lord was seen") has God revealing to Abraham the Temple "rebuilt and firmly established in the Messianic era" (Gen. Rab. 56:10). In *TanchB* שר"ה §6 (60*), based on Gen 24:1 (מֵיבִים בָּא), one rabbi has Abraham coming to the Curtain of this world; another rabbi has Abraham viewing this world and the future world (in Str-B II 525).

11 A particular adaptation of Gen 15:7 in Heb 11:Ba or of Gen 15:5 in Heb 11:12 is not at all clear. Neither the covenant nor the promises of Gen 15:13,14 (cf. Acts 7:6,7) are mentioned explicitly in Hebrews. See also, Ferdinand Hahn, "Genesis 15:6 im Neuen Testament," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie*, ftsch. Gerhard von Rad, ed. Hans Walter Wolff (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971) 105, n. 61.

12 In Philo (*Abr* 50,51), God shares His name because of their love for Him and because of their exceeding virtues.

13 Cf. Plato *Charm* 153b; Jos *Ant* XI 331; Mark 9:15; from Hans Windisch "ἀσπάζομαι" *TDNT* 1 (1964) 496-502.

confident that God will keep His “promise of benefit”. What is remarkable is that their confidence and hopes remain alive even at their deaths.

Dying without the Promise

:20 By faith, with a view to what was coming, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau.

:21 By faith, Jacob dying blessed each of Joseph’s sons and he greeted the goal of His ruling scepter. :22 By faith Joseph at the end mentioned the Exodus of the sons of Israel and he gave instructions concerning his bones.

As if to emphasize their faith as promisees even at death, the author selects those episodes in the lives of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph which occur near their deaths. The author makes this occasion explicit in the case of Jacob and Joseph (ἀποθνήσκων v.21; τελευτῶν v. 22); it is, however, also true for Isaac, for he blesses his sons near his death (Gen 27:1,2).

The author, as he had summarily described them in verse 13, depicts each heir as in his own way “looking for and greeting” the promise. Joseph insists that his bones be taken to the place in which God would keep His promise. Isaac acts with a view to what is coming (περὶ μελλόντων). The author’s consistent use of μέλλων in his work in connection with the coming world in which Jesus exercises his priesthood (2:5; 13:14; 10:1) raises the possibility that the author intends his reader to understand Isaac as looking to a similar promised ‘coming realm’. This possibility is not diminished when Jacob’s expectations are considered.

In 11:21 the author chooses to recount the rather unusual incident, at least for this context, of Jacob “worshipping at the head of his staff” (προσεκύνησεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον τῆς ῥάβδου αὐτοῦ Gen 47:31). The episode in Genesis comes as Jacob extracts from Joseph an oath that Joseph will bury him with his fathers. The request is similar to the instructions given by Joseph in Heb 11:22b. However, if our author has intended a reference to such an occasion in 11:21, he could have made the reference more straight forward as he does in 11:22. Most recent exegetes have been content to explain verse 21b simply as the author’s way of ‘rounding-out’ his depiction of Jacob.¹⁴

14 ‘Modern’ exegetes leave the clause as an extra feature of the occasion on which Jacob blessed his grandsons (Bruce, p. 314; Delitzsch II 256). The staff is either a support for Jacob who is an old man (c f. Riggenbach, p. 366) or it is a symbol of Jacob’s pilgrimage (Michel, p.405; Hughes, p. 488; c f. Hering, p. 104; Montefiore, p. 201). In Jewish interpretation, Gen 47:31 could be the occasion for a revelation; e.g. in *Tg. Ps.-J.* 47:31; “And immediately the Glory of the Shekina of the Lord was revealed to him and Israel worshipped upon the pillow of the bed” (c f. MHG 1. 712: *Sifre D.*, 31; from the appendix to *Tgs. Neofiti I*, vol. 2, p. 573). Not surprisingly, Jacob’s experience with the “house of God” in Gen 28:16-19 was interpreted by some rabbis as a revelation to Jacob of “the Temple built, destroyed and rebuilt again” (*Gen. Rub.* 69:7).

Another approach to this puzzling phrase is suggested by our author's thematic concern in 11:13 that the heirs "saw and greeted" the promise. What is suggested is that the author may have been thinking of προσεκύνησεν more within the semantic field of "greetings", than within the semantic field of "worship". In other words, the author may have intended προσεκύνησεν as an instance of an heir "greeting" the promise. Such is possible, for προσκυνέω can be distributed with ἀσπάζομαι in contexts of welcoming. In Jos *Ant* XI 331, for example, Alexander sees certain priests from afar, reverently greets the name and welcomes the high priest (πύρρωθεν ἰδὼν...προσεκύνησε... ἠσπάσατο).¹⁵

The problem with this translation is the object of προσκύνησεν.¹⁶ "Greeting the head of his staff" (v. 21) is hardly a parallel to "greeting the promise" (v. 13). One must ask, however, to whom the author intended αὐτοῦ to refer. Some exegetes have suggested Joseph and have concluded that, in the author's mind, Jacob worshipped the Kingship of Christ who was descended from Joseph. In this case, (ῥάβδος is changed from "staff" to "scepter").¹⁷ Jacob worships the ruling scepter of Joseph. This alternative understanding of τῆς ῥάβδου αὐτοῦ does raise a third possible translation which appears to us the most likely solution.

In Heb 1:8, the author uses ῥάβδος to refer to the scepter of Jesus' Kingdom. The Kingship symbolized by the scepter is within Hebrews a priestly Kingship, a priestly service which gives access to God (12:28). The outcome

15 For the distribution of προσκυνέω with ἀσπάζομαι see Jos *Ant* VI 334; VII 268; as respectful greetings, Jos *War* V 401,402; *Ant* X 211; cf. Gen 18:2; 19:1; Exod 18:7; Mark 15:18,19; see further, Heinrich Greeven, "προσκυνέω" *TDNT* 6 (1968) 761.

16 Jos *War* II 366: "Do they not respectfully greet (προσκυνοῦσιν) a single governor and the consular fasces (τὰς ὑπατικὰς ῥάβδους)." Our author's use of ἐπί with προσκύνησεν is, of course, in conformity with the LXX translation. If it had been his own composition, it is doubtful that he would have used ἐπί since the collocation of this preposition with προσκυνέω to signal a direct object is unusual (however, cf. Jos *Ant* V II 115). The author is not without, though, seemingly peculiar collocations of his own composition (e.g. παρώκησεν εἰς 11:9; πίστεως ἐπὶ 6:1; ἐμαρτυρήθησαν 11:2).

17 The LXX translators of Gen 47:31 understood פָּנָה as τῆς ῥάβδου; Aquila and Symmachus, as τῆς κλίνης. A Czech Bible translator, Jan Heller, has recently argued that the LXX translators deliberately used ῥάβδος in view of contemporaneous expectations of a Davidic Messiah (cf. Num 24:17). The author of Hebrews assumed this reading and so... betete... Jacob den künftigen Messias an, wie er ihn in dem Szepter versinnbildlicht und dargestellt sah; "Stabesanbetung?" *Communio Viatorum* 16 (1973) 263. Many 'pre-critical' exegetes (e.g. Primasius, Aquinas, Erasmus; see Hughes, p. 490), by identifying the "staff" as Joseph's, interpreted our author as worshipping the Kingship of Christ (cf. also the commentary of the Greek Orthodox exegete Apostolos Makrakis, p. 268). Our interpretation differs in that our translation of προσεκύνησεν is constrained by the author's concern for greetings (ἀσπασόμενοι 11:13).

of this priestly Kingship, what the author characteristically calls “perfection” (cf. 9:9), was something unavailable to the first heirs (11:40).

That the author is saying in 11:21 that Jacob “reverently welcomed the outcome of Jesus’ scepter” is quite possible within the thematic constraints of his depiction, especially if we are correct that in verses 20-22 our author is illustrating what he said in verse 13 that the heirs died without the promises while faithfully expecting and even greeting them. Jacob dies not receiving the promise but dies still expecting its completion. If these are our author’s intentions, then he has intertwined the promise of God’s city with the benefits of Jesus’ priestly Kingship. Why he would depict Jacob welcoming but not participating in what the reader now enjoys is a question at the heart of understanding what the author is doing with his depiction of the first heirs.

The heirs’ expectation for the promise is manifested finally in their own ‘death-bed’ utterances, utterances which renew and extend the promised inheritance to their children. Isaac blesses Jacob and Esau. Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph.¹⁸ Joseph is not depicted as blessing his sons (Jacob does) but he reassures his brothers concerning a return to the land. Even at their deaths, the three heirs expect the promised blessing to be kept.

Confidence in the Promiser

Alternating with this depiction of heirs who live and die expecting God’s promised blessing is the depiction of Sarah and Abraham receiving a promise, the promised increase, the son Isaac (11:11-12,17-19). The felicity of promising that the author draws special attention to in this depiction is the heirs’ confidence that God is capable and reliable. This confidence is made all the more striking by the visibility given to certain threats to the promise, threats centering on death: the barrenness of Sarah’s womb and the sacrifice of Isaac. The author makes such threats to the promise especially prominent in this depiction by a particular stylistic move, the ascensive use of καί.¹⁹ The author uses καί to pose or introduce a circumstance which threatens the completion

18 No explicit distinction is made by our author in the blessings of Jacob and Esau, and the sons of Joseph, even though such a distinction is a feature of Genesis (27:27-28:4; 48:8-22). However, the author’s choice of Jacob’s blessing of his grandsons rather than his sons (Genesis 49), along with Jacob coming before Esau in Isaac’s blessing, may very well signal a conviction of the author that God’s promises often contravene (threaten) normal human conventions, in this case the rights of the firstborn. The author makes it clear though that the promisee has responsibilities (12:16, 17).

19 See Denniston, *Particles*², p. 293; BDF § 442:12; 290:5; BDR § 442: 6; and also BAGD, p. 393.

of the promise: “even Sarah herself... even beyond the age” v. 11; “even from one... and to be sure as dead” v. 12; “even the only son... even from the dead” vv. 17,18. Such threats heighten the confident response of the promisee while reflecting at the same time characteristic features of God’s promising.

Even Sarah Herself

:11 By faith even Sarah herself obtained the ability to begin a posterity, even when beyond the normal age, because she considered the One who had promised faithful. :12 Therefore, even from one, there came to be, even one as good as dead, in number as the stars of the heaven and innumerable as the sand of the seashore.

The interpretation of Sarah as a faithful promisee in these verses has been complicated by the difficulty faced in translating *καταβολὴν σπέρματος*. Normally the phrase refers to the male’s role in procreation, “begetting”.²⁰ In Hebrews, however, Sarah appears as the subject, not Abraham. Variant readings within verse 11 indicate the attempts of some early scribes and interpreters to bolster Sarah’s position as subject.²¹ Some more recent exegetes, however, have attempted to make Abraham the subject, construing “Sarah herself” as an associative dative (αὐτῇ Σάρρα): “He [Abraham] along with Sarah herself.”²²

20 E.g. Philo *Cher* 49 “a man of wisdom σπέρμα...καταβαλλόμενος”; *Op.* 132 αἱ καταβολαὶ τῶν σπερμάτων; Marcus Aurelius IV 36 σπέρματα...εἰς γῆν ἢ μήτραν καταβαλλόμενα; Gk Ap Ezra 6:12 “As the farmer sows the seed of grain into the ground, so the man καταβάλλει τὸ σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῆς γυναικός.

21 The various readings of “barren” after Sarah (στεῖρα; στεῖρα οὐσα; ἡ στεῖρα) are probably the result of the intrusion of a canonical echo (Luke 1:36; Gal 4:27; Isa 54:1). The curious choice of στεῖρα for the text in the Nestle/Aland 26th ed. is the result neither of mss. weight nor of the reading which best explains the others. The choice is rather the result of the influence of one of the editors, Matthew Black, who has argued that this is the ‘original reading’ and that καὶ αὐτῇ Σάρρα στεῖρα is an example of a Biblical Greek circumstantial clause.

Exegetical Notes on Three New Testament texts Hebrews xii 11, Jude 5, James i 27”, in *Apophoreta*, ed. W. Eltester and F.H. Kettler (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1964) 41. The additions of εἰς το τεκνοῦσαι and ετεκεν after ἔλαβεν in certain mss. indicate further attempts to interpret the whole verse. The reading εἰς το τεκνοῦσαι may very well attest to an attempt to understand Abraham as the subject (active, “to beget”; middle, τεκνοῦσθαι “to bear).

22 E.g. Riggenbach, p. 358; Bruce, p. 302; see also BDF § 194:1. Windisch (p. 101) and Zuntz (*Text*, p. 16, n. 4) regard it as an interpolation. For an account of the various suggestions, see Spicq II 349 and Black, “Hebrews xi 11,” pp. 39-41.

A way out of this difficulty may be taken by translating, καταβολὴν σπέρματος “foundation of a posterity” (cf. καταβολή in Heb 4:3; 9:26), thus retaining Sarah as the subject: “Sarah received the ability for the foundation of a posterity.” What makes this particularly attractive is a thematic sequence which this manifests with the preceding utterance. In 11:10, the author has mentioned a city with foundations (τοὺς Θεμελίους) built by God. In 11:11, the author is apparently indicating how God is, in part, building His city, by keeping His promise to Sarah, laying a foundation for a posterity in her barren womb. One is reminded of Paul’s allegory in which Sarah is the city above, the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4: 26). In Hebrews, God’s city is a populated realm (12:22-24; 1:6; 2:5; 3:6; 10:21). His city is not pearly gates or streets of gold or buildings made of supra sensible material; it is in large measure people perfected through Jesus’ priestly Kingship. That our author has depicted the promise to Sarah in connection with the promise of a city appears likely in the context. Preparing a city involves preparing a people.

Taking Sarah as the subject in verse 11, Sarah herself is depicted as trusting God’s faithfulness to promise despite the contradiction and threat to the promise posed by her barrenness. Such an attribution of faith to Sarah may sound strange in view of the Genesis account of her incredulity and laughter at the promise. Sarah’s laughter was not, however, universally taken as indicative of faithlessness. Philo speaks of her laughter as an expression of joy (*Abr* 201-206; cf. *LA* III 217-18; *Mut* 166). Josephus changes the laughter to a smile (*Ant* I 198). Our author’s silence about her laughter may reflect some similar interpretation of Sarah’s behavior.²³

The extent of Sarah’s confidence in the Promiser, as well as the magnitude of the promise kept, is reiterated in verse 12. This is accomplished not only through the ascensive use of καί but also by the contrast the author sets up between “the one” (ἄφ’ ἐνός νενεκρωμένου) and “the many”, the innumerable posterity of Sarah (ἡ ἀναρίθμητος). It may be that “the one” in this case refers to Abraham rather than Sarah. Abraham was sometimes identified as “the one” (cf. Isa 51:2; Ezek 33:24). The use of the masculine gender in Heb 11:12 is certainly not conclusive evidence that Abraham is meant.²⁴ It is partly a matter of the author’s own sensibilities about attributing impotency to Abraham. Genesis placed the problem with Sarah (Gen 16:2; 18:11; 21:1) although

23 It is possible that Gen 18:14 “No word is impossible with God, is it?” was attributed by some interpreters to Sarah, thus reinforcing a picture of Sarah’s response as one of faith (cf. *Jos Ant* I 198 and *Philo Abr* 112).

24 Neither can the issue be decided by a choice of either ἐγεννήθησαν or ἐγενήθησαν. The former can mean either “begotten” or “born”. The latter could have either Sarah or Abraham as the referent of ἀφ’ ἐνός (cf. Gen 17:17; 18:12).

Abraham's old age is a feature of the narrative (Gen 17:17; 18:12). Paul in Rom 4:19 and Philo in one passage, *Abr* 111, can speak of Abraham's old age and nearness to death; yet Philo can turn around and in another passage seem to avoid the issue of Abraham's age (*Mut* 166). Whether or not our author is referring to Abraham in verse 12, the only person mentioned in this segment is Sarah. That she was intended as the central figure is suggested by verses 17-19 in which Abraham's prominence and confidence in the Promiser may be read as a deliberate complement to the depiction of Sarah in verses 11-12.

Testing the Promisee

:17 By faith Abraham offered Isaac when tested, even his only son he was offering, he who had assumed responsibility for the promises, :18 to whom it had been said, "In Isaac your seed will be named." :19 He reckoned that God was able to raise even from the dead whence, figuratively, he received him back.

As in the case of Sarah, the depiction of Abraham in 11:17-19 concerns a promise that God kept while Abraham was alive. As with Sarah as well, the promise involves the promise of increase. Here, however, the promise does not entail the birth of Isaac; it rather entails the preservation of Isaac.

The distinctive features of our author's presentation may be brought into clearer focus by contrasting them with one typical depiction of this episode in Jewish interpretation.²⁵ What is characteristic in this depiction is the presence of a conflict, a conflict between a father's love for his son and the father's obedience to God. The "test" is an ultimate test, whether a man will obey God even when such obedience means an irreconcilable conflict with the highest of human passions, a father's affection for his son (4 Mac 14:20; 15:28; Philo *Abr* 170).

The depiction of the sacrifice of Isaac in Hebrews, by contrast, has no heightening of the paternal affections. Isaac is not identified as τὸν ἀγαπητόν (Gen 22:2) but as τὸν μονογενῆ.

The significance of this particular identification becomes clear in the author's quotation of the commissive utterance from Gen 21:12, "In Isaac your seed will be named." In referring to Isaac as "only son" the author indicates that Abraham is being called upon to place the promise in jeopardy.

25 The sacrifice of Isaac had become identified in Jewish tradition as *the* test in Abraham's life; cf. 1 Mac 2:52; Sir 44:19-21. It was counted among the ten tests Abraham faced; cf. Jub 17:17; *Pirqe R. El.* 26-31; *Abot R. Nat.* 33.

The “test” that Abraham faces in Hebrews is the test of his trust in God’s faithfulness to promise. Abraham’s dilemma is whether to continue to assume responsibility for the preservation of the promised object or to trust that God will keep His promise even though God’s own command threatens to abort the completed promise.²⁶ Abraham reacts by trusting the capability of the Promiser to perform His promise: “He reckoned that God was able to raise even from the dead.”²⁷ Abraham’s confidence in the Promiser is rewarded as was Sarah’s; Abraham receives Isaac back, as from the dead.²⁸

In result, our author has depicted heirs familiar yet different from their narration in Genesis and subsequent interpretations. Their difference may be measured, in part, by a concern for two felicities of promising: heirs longing for what God has promised and heirs willing to trust His power to perform. From this perspective, it can be seen that the author has arranged these twin felicities in alternation. These correspond further to promises not kept (the “blessing”, the heavenly city) and promises kept (the “increase”, the posterity through Isaac). This alternation, however, is not a radical one. God’s promised posterity are the heirs to a promised city. The two dominant promises have a relationship to one another. Not only this, the promisees face a common threat to the promises in ‘death’. Death’s claim on Sarah’s womb and the sacrifice of Isaac reveal the promisees’ confidence. Death is also a threat for those who expected the city of God. That the heirs were faithful until death reveals the strength of their expectation. The question that remains is why the author has selected these stories and adapted them in these particular ways.

Illustrating Faithful Promisees

The most immediate indication of what our author is doing with the depiction of the first heirs is to be found in that rhetorical element of chapter eleven which is its most striking stylistic feature: the anaphora of πίστις. The repetition of

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- 26 We translate ἀναδέξάμενος “assume responsibility” in view of its use in the papyri for someone becoming surety for someone or something (cf. *POxy* III 513:57ff; *PTeb* I 98:27; from *MM*, p. 32). It is possible, however, that the word means “welcome” and is a continuation of the author’s concern for the heirs “greeting” the promise.
- 27 The second blessing of the 18 Benedictions, “Blessed is He who quickens the dead”, was illustrated in haggada by reference to the sacrifice of Isaac; see Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, trans. Judah Goldin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967) 28 and Nils Dahl, “The Atonement—An Adequate Reward for the Akedah?” *Crucified Messiah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1974) 146-60. Paul in Rom 4:17-25 applies this *theological* consideration not to the sacrifice but to the birth of Isaac.
- 28 Whether ἐν παραβολῇ is translated “figuratively” or “as a type”, the author is depicting Abraham’s reliance on God’s commissive utterance as rewarded with an act not unlike resurrection itself: “whence [i.e. from the dead] he received him back.”

“faith” within 11:8-22 serves at least two functions. First, it relates the depictions of the first heirs to the definition of faith in 11:1; the heirs illustrate “faith”. Secondly, it connects the first heirs with the other people of faith in chapter eleven such that the presentation of these other people is affected by the depiction of Abraham.

Guarantee of a Better Possession. In 11:1 the author defines πίστις as ἐλπίζομένων υπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων. The definition comes as a rather surprising clarification of the πίστις in a preceding passage (Heb 10:38) which the author quotes from Hab 2:4 ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. It is surprising because we would have expected the author in 11:1 to have described πίστις explicitly as ‘endurance’, for within 10:36-39 πίστις is ‘faithfulness’, in contrast to ‘withdrawal’. Instead, the author defines πίστις in rather secular terms.

In the second predicate, for example, πίστις is defined as “proof of things unseen”. Here the author is utilizing the forensic sense of πίστις, a meaning familiar in rhetoric and in the courtroom, its use as “proof” in argumentation (cf. *Rhet Alex* VII, 1428a; Acts 17:31; Jos *Ant* II 218; XV 260).²⁹ The author illustrates πίστις as πίστις, “faith” as “proof”, straightaway in 11:3 reminding his reader that they accept God’s creation of the world by the “proof” of “faith.” Noah, he relates (v. 7), likewise acted in preparation of the ark by the “persuasion” to things unseen by “faith”.

The definition of πίστις in the first predicate, ἐλπίζομένων υπόστασις, is no less surprising. In this case, however, more recent interpreters have been content to translate υπόστασις with a sense which πίστις never had. Helmut Koester, for example, translates υπόστασις in its philosophical sense, “Wirklichkeit”, “reality” (*TDNT* 8:587; cf. “realization,” BAGD p. 847).³⁰ In

29 For πίστις as a part of a speech, Arist *Rhet* III 13:2, 1414a; further, Josef Martin, *Antike Rhetorik* (Munich: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1974) 95-137. One might have expected ἀπόδειξις instead of ἔλεγχος as the predicate for πίστις in Heb 11:1; ἔλεγχος often had the sense of negative proof (“refutation”) while ἀπόδειξις, the positive proof (cf. Arist *Rhet* III 9:8, 1410a; 13:1, 1414a; Epictetus, passim; Jos *Ant* XVI 258). However, ἔλεγχος could be interchangeable with ἀπόδειξις (cf. Jos *War* I 626; *Ant* XVI 333, 363; XVIII 110; and the later comment of the unknown Oecumenius (*PG* 119:401d) ἔστι δὲ ἡ πίστις ἔλεγχος καὶ ἀπόδειξις τῶν οὐ βλεπομένων)

30 This sense from its philosophical semantic field is gaining more attention and acceptance through the influence of Koester’s work, as well as its congruence with a middle-Platonic reading of the letter. Cf. Krister Stendahl and Emilie Sander, “Biblical Literature: VIII New Testament Literature,” *New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macroaedia*, 15th ed. (1974) 2: 968; PHEME PERKINS, *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 283; George MacRae, “Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *Semeia* 12:1 (1978) 194. In the last instance MacRae does qualify

this definition, faith is the transcendent reality. However, this definition necessitates such a sharp break from the understanding of faith in Heb 10:36-39 (faith as endurance), that one must wonder if thematically such a definition is conceivable for the context. The thrust of our author's whole Exhortation seems to be in part that his readers need faith because in point of fact they have not entered the 'transcendent reality'; faith is waiting for, not actual integration with this 'reality'. Koester himself calls his assessment of the author's definition "a formulation of incomparable boldness", but such an assessment is not the only, and we think finally, not the best way to translate ὑπόστασις.

It is not necessary in the first place to translate ὑπόστασις with the meaning it has elsewhere in Hebrews (1:3; 3:14); ὑπόστασις is polysemic and the sense appropriate in 11:1 is constrained by the immediate context ('syntagmatic relationship').³¹ A leading question for us is whether πίστις and ὑπόστασις share a related sense ('paradigmatic relationship') as do πίστις and ἔλεγχος, and if so, whether such a related sense is appropriate in the immediate context. To answer our question we must turn to the use of ὑπόστασις in the papyri.³²

In the papyri, ὑπόστασις is used in three different senses. In later papyri (II A.D. onward), it is frequently synonymous with ὑπαρξις "property". A woman appointing a person to attend to inheritance matters says, "Out of this estate (ὑποστάσεως) I declare that my husband owes me..." (POxy X 1274:15; III A.D.).³³ We may exclude this as a possibility for Heb 11:1, however, for reasons similar to our exclusion of the philosophical sense. "Faith" is not the promised object.

The other two senses ὑπόστασις are more intriguing for they have the denotation of "guarantee". In a decree of A.D. 89 of Marcus Mettius Rufus, praefect of Egypt, (POxy II 237 p. 176) wives are instructed, if they have

it somewhat by saying that "homiletically this reality functions as the assurance upon which hope can rest."

- 31 By method, Koester commits himself to translating ὑπόστασις with the same sense in all three occurrences in Hebrews (TWNT, p. 585). Since ὑπόστασις in 1:3 has clearly its more generally philosophical sense, Koester takes this as its sense as well in 3:14 and 11:1. However, context must always determine the appropriate sense for a polysemic word.
- 32 While giving a brief survey of the papyri, Koester does not consider this semantic field for ὑπόστασις in 11:1 (or 3:14). The English translation is misleading in the section on papyri in that Pachtangebot (p. 578) has been translated "lease" (p. 579). However, ὑπόστασις in the papyri does not mean "lease" but rather "bid" or "offer" to rent, to lease, to buy.
- 33 Other examples of this sense: PPhil 1:22-3 (II A.D.), POxy III 488: 17 (11, III A.D.), PPan 1:269 (III A.D.); PGrEJiz 1 50:9,44,86 III A.O.), PHenn 31:11,12 (VIA.D.), ExcNes III (VIA.D. Frequent is the expression in oaths from the fourth century onward, "at the risk of myself and my property" (κινδύω ἑμῶ καὶ τῆς ἑμῆς ὑποστάσεως): PAberd 59; PRoss-Georg V 37; POxy I 138:25,30-1; XXVII 2478:27-8; BGV IV 1020:16; PApoll 9:11.

a claim on their husband's property (κρατεῖται τὰ ὑπάρχοντα), to insert their marriage contracts in the property statements of their husbands (ταῖς ὑποστάσεσι τῶν ἀνδρῶν). The "property statements" were evidently the documents in the place of records which signified and guaranteed a person's ownership of property.³⁴ The temporal proximity of the decree to the probable dates for Hebrews makes this use of ὑπόστασις important for Heb 11:1. Moulton/Milligan, in fact, offer this translation: "faith is the *title-deed* of the things hoped for" (p. 660).³⁵

What makes this use of ὑπόστασις attractive for Heb 11:1 is the author's concern for possessions and his use of language of business in the preceding context of 10:32-36. It is here that we learn that the readers experienced confiscation of property in the past and here that our author reminds them of their "better, permanent possession" (10:34). In this same context, the author twice uses situations and images from the field of business and commerce to reinforce the perception of God's faithful obligation to perform His promises. In 10:35, for example, the author speaks of the promise as μισθαποδοσία. This word, perhaps coined by the author (μισθός & ἀποδίδωμι), has the strong denotation of "that which is owed".³⁶ God here is like an employer who has obligated himself to pay wages to those who have labored.³⁷ Again in 10:36, 'the receiving of the promise' is couched in language frequently used

34 See, further, Hans J. Wolff, *Das Recht der Griechischen Papyri Aegyptens* (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1978) II *passim*; N. Hohlwein, "L'Egypte romaine," *Académie Royale de Belgique Memoires* II 8 (1912); P.M. Meyer, ed., *Juristische Papyri* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Handlung, 1920) 199-203.

35 Accepted by Spicq, *Lexicographie*, 2:912. Matthew Black mentions the recommendation of Moulton/Milligan, but himself prefers its semantic field in the LXX as the equivalent of *tohelet* ("hope"); "The Biblical Languages," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970) 1:9.

36 From the present state of our lexical knowledge it appears that the author has coined the words μισθαποδοσία (2:2; 10:35), μισθαποδότης (11:6 cf. Philo *LA* I 80). The word comprehends the phrase ἀποδίδωμι τὸν μισθόν (cf. Matt 20:8 and other examples in BAGD, p. 90) and thus has a strong obligatory denotation, "that which is owed". The reasons for an author's use of a coinage were various; see A.D. Nock, "WordCoinage in Greek," *Essays in Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Zeph Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 97:642-52. In the context of Heb 10:32-36, the coinage seems to be the author's way of drawing special attention to the certainty of God's repaying their "boldness".

37 God as one who pays μισθός: for LXX passages see M. Preisker, "μισθός," *TDNT* 4 (1967) 697; in the NT among others, see Matt 5:12; 20:8; 1 Cor 3:8, 14; in the Rabbinic sources, see Ephraim Urbach *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: At theagnes Press, 1975) 1:437; 2:881. Corresponding to this are the OT laws for employers (Lev 19:13; Deut 24:17) that they should return the wages (μισθός) to the employees the same day. Philo comments on these texts (Virt 88): they should "return (ἀποδιδόναι) the wage of a poor man the same day... for on his wage (μισθῶ) he places his hope. If he recovers (κομίσσαστο) it immediately, he is glad."

for ‘recovering a debt’ (κομίζομαι).³⁸ God here is like a trustee who is responsible for returning that which belongs to another, or as Augustine said (via Calvin, p. 79), “He has made Himself our debtor not by receiving anything from us, but by fully promising us all things.”³⁹

That the author may have been continuing this concern for property and possessions in his use of ὑπόστασις in Heb 11:1 is quite possible. One scenario might be that the readers, in having their property confiscated, had their “property statements” (ὑπόστασεις) abused and dishonored. The author then could be reminding them that the “permanent possession” is theirs as long as they have πίστις, the guarantee (ὑπόστασις) of the things hoped for. The problem with this reference of ὑπόστασις is that the only clear evidence for such a use is the one papyrus we have discussed above.⁴⁰ This brings us then to the third use of ὑπόστασις in the papyri, one which is certainly more widely attested.

A regular feature of auctions in the ancient world (as today) was the submission of bids to the person selling or leasing property. The bids were guarantees to the bidder of claim to possession of property if the owner accepted the offer. On the other hand, they were obligations of the bidder to honor the promised offer. In papyri ranging from II B.C. to IV A.D. this bid is called ὑπόστασις.⁴¹ Such a referent of ὑπόστασις in Heb 11:1 might appear extremely remote except that the background to auctions in the ancient world has some possible connections with the reader’s past experience of confiscation of property. Frequently property that was auctioned for lease was ‘King’s land’ which itself had been confiscated from others.⁴² The question that arises

38 For κομίζομαι with payment, 2 Clem 11:5; Ign Pol 6:2; with inheritance, Dem 44 *Leochares* 15; with the recovery of a deposit; Matt 25:27; Isac 17:10, 18; 21:4; Cebes 31:5 and of a debt (from MM, p. 354) *PHib* I 54:9 (III B.C.), *PTeb* I 45:33 (II B.C.), *PHamb* I 27:5 (III B.C.) *PEleph* 13:5 (III B.C.). As a function of God’s final judgment, see κομίζομαι in 2 Car 5:10; Eph 6:8 and ἀποδίδωμι in Matt 16:27; Rom 2:5; 2 Tim 4:14; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 18:5.

39 God as faithful trustee: 1 Pet 1:3; 4:19; Col 1:5; 2 Tim 1:12; *Deut. Rab.* 3:3; cf. C. Spicq, “Saint Paul et la loi des dépôts,” *RB* 40 (1931) 481-502 and Christian Maurer, “παράτιθημι,” *TDNT* 8 (1972) 162-64.

40 So, H. Dörrie, “Zu Hbr 11:1,” *ZNW* 46 (1955) 197, n. 2 M.A. Mathis dismisses the use as too late, dating its use with the papyrus (A.O. 186); he does not realize that the decrees date from 182 and 89 respectively; *The Pauline πίστις-ὑπόστασις according to Heb XI, I* (Washington: Catholic University, 1920) 126.

41 E.g. in *PCornell* 50 (I A.D.), *PTeb* 61:194 (II B.C.), *PPan* 2:144 (IV A.D.), *UPZ* II 222; 224 ii 8; iii 7-17; *PEleph* 15:3.

42 See Erwin Seidl, *Ptolemäische Rechtsgeschichte* (Hamburg: J.J. Augustin Glückstadt, 1962) 127 and Raphael Taubenschlag, *The law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri*, 2d ed. (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1955) 266.

is what happened to the property of the Christians after it was confiscated.⁴³ If the Christians had endured the added injury of watching their property leased to the highest bidder, then our author's use of ὑπόστασις has an especially poignant ring: "Your property was confiscated. It went for the highest bid (ὑπόστασις). But remember that you have claim to a far better possession. Faith is your bid which guarantees your claim to the things you hope for."

Our initial quest was for a meaning shared by πίστις and ὑπόστασις. These final two uses of ὑπόστασις provide a denotation shared also by πίστις: "guarantee". In legal and commercial contexts, πίστις frequently referred to the guarantee which secured a transaction.⁴⁴ What the author has then done in 11:1 is to 'define' πίστις in ways quite intelligible outside Christian circles.⁴⁵ Indeed one scholar writing on the use of πίστις in guarantees in the ancient world offers a definition remarkably like Heb 11:1, without any explicit debt to Heb 11:1: πίστις ist einerseits der Beweis für eine Tatsache, andererseits die Garantie für eine Gestaltung der Zukunft.⁴⁶ In defining πίστις as ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος, our author has given definitions of πίστις at home in the marketplace and in the courtroom. More importantly he is telling his readers that within their own Christian "faith" (πίστις) they have the power to endure, for πίστις is guarantee and proof for those things they long for but cannot see.

In 11:2, the author introduces the testimony of the figures of the past by saying that the presbyters have been attested in scripture (found a place in scripture; have been approved) through such faith as defined in 11:1.⁴⁷ In point of fact, the author's first two examples, Abel and Enoch, do not exactly

43 The only clue to a possible governmental confiscation of their property is in the depiction of Moses. Why did he twice speak of those who did not fear the royal power (11:23, 27)? Was his selection and formulation of the incidents with a particular view to governmental pressures on the Christians' property in the past and foreseeable action against it in the near future?

44 As "security" for a transaction see *PTebt* I 14:9 (II B.C.); *PRein* 18:10 (II B.C.); *POxy* III 486:7 (II A.O.) (from MM p. 515) and further examples in Preisigke, *Wörterbuch*, 3:309 and Spicq, *Lexicographie*, 2: 912, n. 5. A frequent collocation, especially in diplomatic exchanges, is "oaths and guarantees".

45 The reluctance of exegetes to call 11:1 a definition stems, according to Grässer (*Glaube*, p. 46, n. 197), from a concern to guard 11:1 from becoming a complete, final definition of faith (cf. Spicq II 336; Grant, p. 50). It may also result from the translations often given for ὑπόστασις.

46 Joseph Partsch, *Griechisches Bürgschaftsrecht* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1909) 1:361.

47 If chapter eleven were more strictly an encomium of faith, one might have expected the author to have said rather explicitly that the presbyters "testified" to faith; as it is, however, the presbyters ἐμαρτυρήθησαν "have been attested" (cf. 1 Tim 5:10), more particularly, "have been attested in scripture" (cf. μαρτυροῦμαι in Heb 7:8,17; 11:4a,5,39; 1 Clem 17:2,3).

correspond to the definition πίστις, but with Noah and especially with Abraham the author is on track.⁴⁸

Abraham's faith, as it is depicted in 11:8-19 as well as the faith of the first heirs, illustrates what it means to say that faith "guarantees" the things hoped for. Abraham and the first heirs die still expecting the promise. What gives them claim to such a promise, at least within 11:8-22, is the faith they have in God as a faithful Promiser. Faith is the guarantee of the promised possession (πίστις is πίστις), not because faith is the promised object, but because faith is the felicitous response of the promisee to the divine Promiser. In Chapter 3 we will examine how the author magnifies God's oath as a source of assurance. In Hebrews 11, however, there is no mention of God's oath. The elevation is of the promisee and the way in which faithful behavior is rewarded, as well as sometimes threatened.

Presbyters as Promisees. The story of Abraham keeps company with other stories in chapter eleven. The author has intended to do something with the depiction of Abraham not only through its connection with the thematic definition of 11:1 but also by its relationship to these other stories of the chapter. One example of the effect the depiction of Abraham has had on the interpretation of the "presbyters" in this chapter may be seen in comments of John Knox on II faith II in Hebrews 11. Knox says that faith here is "confidence that God's promise will be fulfilled." And, he continues, "in almost every case the emphasis falls upon the hero's confidence in God's reliability in fulfilling what he promised."⁴⁹ Evaluated narrowly, Knox's interpretation that 'the presbyters are promisees' might be faulted for only within the stories of the first heirs are "promises" mentioned prominently. Yet there are two stylistic/formal matters in chapter eleven which lend validity to such an interpretation and may very well have influenced Knox's reading.

48 The author apparently includes Abel and Enoch in his account because they represent the faith of 10:38, Abel in being "just" (δίκαιος) and Enoch in being "well pleasing to God" (εὐαρεστηκέναι τῷ θεῷ). The author's decision to begin in 11:3 with the reader rather than with the presbyters is probably nothing more than the author's attempt to engage the reader's interest and attention; such appeals to the reader's experience were recommended for the exordium (Arist Rhet III 14:7, 1415b). However, illustrations were not to be taken only from the past: "Life should be provided with conspicuous illustrations. Let us not always be harking back to the dim past" (Seneca *EP* 83:13; cf. Alewell, *Παραδειγμα*, p. 109). Aristotle recommended that witnesses be not only from the past (οἱ παλαιοί) but also from the present (οἱ πρόσφατοι; *Rhet* I 15:13-19, 175b-76a).

49 John Knox, *The Fourth Gospel and the Later Epistles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1945) 103-104.

The first is our author's use of interpretive recapitulations, i.e. brief summary statements, situated deliberately but unobtrusively, which suggest a particular interpretive perspective. Interpretive recapitulations are essentially 'positioning' utterances; they aim to position the reader a certain way toward the interpretation of a piece of material. They also reveal something about the author's intentions.

Such recapitulations were quite serviceable within listings of heroes. Sirach begins his list in 44:7 with such a summarizing utterance which, in effect, is designed to color the reader's own evaluation of the fathers: πάντες οὔτοι ἐν γενεαῖς ἐδοξάσθησαν. In 1 Mac 2:61 a similar device comes at the end of a listing of the fathers: πάντες οἱ ἐλπίζοντες ἐπ' αὐτὸν οὐκ ἀσθενήσουσιν. This particular use is a good illustration of how a recapitulation could function to provide an explicit interpretation, here the fathers "hoping", without there being any explicit indication of such an interpretation within the list itself (no mention of "hope" in vv. 51-60).

The first interpretive recapitulation in Hebrews comes within the depiction of the first heirs: κατὰ πίστιν ἀπέθανον οὔτοι πάντες μὴ κομισάμενοι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας; (11:13). The concern for the heirs dying without the promise fits within the depiction of verses 8-22 and could be limited to this context except that the author concludes his list of the faithful presbyters in scripture with an utterance similar to 11:13: καὶ οὔτοι πάντες μαρτυρηθέντες διὰ τῆς πίστεως οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν (11:39). What the author does with this utterance is to generalize the specific experience of the first heirs in not receiving the promise to include all the presbyters in chapter eleven. What this does, for example, is to make more visible an alternation of "promises received" (vv. 33, 34) and "promises threatened" (v. 37) within the conclusion itself (vv. 32-38). The reader is led by this interpretive recapitulation to think of, as Knox suggests, all the presbyters as living and dying by the promises, even though "promises" are mentioned prominently only in 11:8-22.

A second feature of chapter eleven which has contributed to the impact of Abraham upon the reader's perception of the rest of the presbyters, and a feature which should not be overlooked or underestimated, is the very length of the depiction of Abraham in Hebrews 11. His story comprises almost one-third of the chapter. The segment on Moses is the only other lengthy depiction but his story is half as long as Abraham's. By sheer length then one could attribute considerable force to the depiction of Abraham, but the greater length may also be indicative of the author's own intentions.

Quintilian gave the common sense advice that the length of illustrations should be varied according to how well known the figures are or according to the particular literary intentions of the author (Inst V 11:16). For our author

it is doubtful that his elaboration of Abraham was a correction of his readers' ignorance about Abraham *per say* nor can the length of his depiction be attributed to his position as such an outstanding figure in exegetical tradition. Other lists of the fathers in which Abraham occurs do not give extra space for his story (e.g. 1 Mac 2:52; 4 Mac 16:20; 1 Clem 10:7; 17:2; 31:2). And in the list in Sirach, the space devoted to Abraham is quite minimal in relation to other figures; Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon and Elijah have two times more coverage (46:1.;48:11), Aaron and Simon four times more coverage (45:6-22; 50:1-21} than Abraham (44:19-21).

What has no doubt accounted for the extra length of depiction given to certain fathers among these authors are special thematic concerns and interests. The extra space devoted to Aaron in Sirach, for example, probably reflects a special concern of the author for the law. We may guess, as well, that the greater length of depiction given to Abraham indicates that our author is interested in faith as faith in God's promises. The author, in fact, has said as much in his summary in 11:39. It would appear therefore that Knox's interpretation of the presbyters as promisees is not a figment of his imagination but rather that certain features of chapter eleven have led the interpreter to such a reading.

Exemplary Promisees Who Endure

One of the functions of chapter eleven is to present and reinforce a particular definition of "faith".⁵⁰ To this end, the depiction of Abraham illustrates faith as the guarantee of what has been promised and at the same time colors the understanding of faith throughout the chapter, as faith in God's promises.

There is, however, a second function of Hebrews 11 which suggests another, though not unrelated, use of Abraham. This second function arises when the larger literary context, 10:32-12:13, is taken into perspective. What brackets chapter eleven is a notable concern for endurance. In 10:32, the readers are reminded of their endurance in the past; in 10:36, of their need to endure in the present. In 12:1-3, Jesus is depicted as one who endured. Hebrews 11 comes, quite clearly, within exhortations to endurance. In this context, chapter eleven may be read as a collection of examples of endurance.

Collections of examples of perseverance were passed along and used in rhetorical training. In the midst of a listing, Seneca has someone say, "Oh,

50 From the attention given to "faith", chapter eleven might be compared with encomiums of virtues which were effected through descriptions of heroes who practice the particular virtue (cf. Hermogenes II 11-13, Spengel).

those stories have been droned to death in all the schools; pretty soon, when you reach the topic 'On Despising Death', you will be telling me about Cato" (*EP* 24:6).⁵¹ Such examples of pagans 'despising death' were in fact used by Tertullian for Christians in prison awaiting trial (*Ad Martyras* 4:4ff). But examples of endurance from Jewish scripture had also developed. In such lists, Abraham could be used as an example of endurance (4 Mac 16:19,20; cf. 4 Mac 16:16-23; 1 Mac 2:51-61).

Such examples, of course, were not mere illustrations of a virtue. They were praise and magnification of notable figures for the purpose of eliciting their imitation by those who listened. As Seneca observed in the midst of a collection of examples of endurance, "I am not now heaping up these illustrations for the purpose of exercising my wit, but for the purpose of encouraging you to face that which is thought to be most terrible" (*EP* 24:9). Within Heb 10:32-12:13 there is no explicit call to imitate the presbyters, and yet there are reasons for understanding them, especially the first heirs, as exemplary illustrations of endurance. This requires some brief reflection on why people imitate people.

The mechanism of imitation appeals to at least two motivations of human behavior: the quest for recognition and the quest for fulfillment. In the former, the person seeks to imitate another in order to enjoy the honor, praise or status that has been accorded to the elevated figure. This type of imitation may be seen in certain comments of Isocrates: "We exhort young men to the study of philosophy by praising others in order that they, emulating those who are eulogized, may desire to adopt the same pursuits" (*Evagoras* 77). There is no indication in his formulation of chapter eleven that the author of Hebrews is working on this motivation.

The second appeal may be to that aspect of the human personality which responds to the heroic. In such cases, an individual seeks to imitate another because the person sees in the other something rewarding and worthwhile which is absent or lacking in his/her life. What is characteristic about these imitations is that there is something similar yet something quite different between the imitator and the imitated. The relevance to the imitator's life may be quite immediate and direct with the difference only consisting in an inspirational quality of the exemplar's life which the imitator can attain. Seneca,

51 A certain Valerius Maximus collected illustrations under various topics and dedicated his work *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* to Tiberius (A.D. 35). See J. Bennett Price, "Paradeigma and Exemplum in Ancient Rhetorical Theory" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California Berkely, 1975) 87 and Rudolph Helm, "Valerius Maximus, Seneca und die 'Exemplasammlung,'" *Hermes* 74 (1939) 149. Seneca used lists more frequently than any other extant Roman writer of the Empire; e.g. *EP* 24:4ff; 104:21f; 120:19; *de tranq an* 11:10ff; *de provid* 3:4 (from Alewell, Παράδειγμα, pp. 106-12).

for example, chooses the stories of two women who grieved, in a consolation to a woman who was experiencing grief (*cons. ad Marc.* 2, 3). In other cases there may be areas of similarities but greater areas of difference which make the exemplar bigger than life, truly heroic. In either case the author who uses this type of exemplary illustration must have a constant eye to his reader's situation and needs.

Although the author of Hebrews does not explicitly call for imitation of the first heirs, a comparison and contrast of the first heirs with the author's audience would indicate that this second type of imitation may well be at work in Hebrews 11. The probability is increased when it is noticed that Moses in 11:23-28 mirrors some of the circumstances and situations which we noticed in Chapter 1 had been or were being faced by the readers. The financial loss of the readers (10:34b; 13:5, 6) is mirrored in Moses' loss of great wealth, which however he chooses to forfeit (11:26). The social alienation experienced by the readers is matched by Moses' welcoming of the reproach of Christ (11:26, 27). The readers' need to serve one another (10:33b, 34a; 6:10; 13:3) is similar to Moses' choice to suffer with God's people (11:25). And finally, the expectation of the promised reward which is to sustain the readers' endurance (10:35) may be compared to Moses' gaze on the reward (11:26).

In the selection of story, adaptation and the very use of language, Moses has been depicted, at least in part, in the image of the readers.⁵² Where differences exist, Moses takes on heroic proportions. He leaves, voluntarily, incalculable possessions. He faces the fury of a powerful Kingdom. Moses is familiar enough that the reader can relate to him. And where he is different, bigger than life, the readers' own potential and desires may be called forth to higher and nobler expression.

We may conclude our Chapter now by examining how the first heirs may have been conformed, at least in part, to the image of the readers; and how their differences may have been intended as motivations to the readers' faithfulness. We shall take the two depictions we have isolated and see what specifically the author has done with these twin felicities of promising in 11:8-22.

Favored Promisees. The one striking similarity between the first heirs and the readers is that they share the same promise, the promise of a permanent city (11:10,16; 13:14). The author's adaptation of the Genesis story here may, as we have suggested, been influenced by exegetical traditions which linked Abraham and Jacob with revelations of God's city; it is as likely, however,

52 Cf. Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 42; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979) 33-35.

that Abraham's expectations have been conformed into the image of the readers' expectations.⁵³ Abraham is depicted as expecting these promises which the readers need to recall, remember and long for.

That the promise to the first heirs is a city rather than "paradise" (cf. Luke 23:43; 12:4; Rev 2:7) or the "cosmos" (Rom 4:13) or even some transcendent promised land further testifies to the interest the author has in the readers' particular circumstances and needs. A city can be the epitome of social contact, of congregating, of adaptation to others. Whereas modern eyes may be accustomed to viewing cities as places of anonymity where human contact is frequently lost, the author of Hebrews seems to presuppose something quite different about God's city.

The forces that are impinging upon the readers are forces that tend to separate people from people. The readers face the temptation to give up vulnerability and to withdraw from one another. In this situation, the promise of a city comes as a reminder that God's inheritance is a shared one. Even as Abraham strove together with Isaac and Jacob for the promise (11:9), so also the readers have a mutual responsibility for one another and they must exercise that responsibility if they are to share in that future occupied realm of God.

It must not be overlooked, however, that the depiction of the first heirs in 11:8-10, 13-16, 20-22 is not a mirror image of the readers. In particular the readers are not without guide and leader as was Abraham. Abraham went out not knowing where he was going (11:8b). The reader, by contrast, has Jesus who has been sent ahead into the promised city as ἀπόστολος (3:1; 1:6) and πρόδρομος (6:20). He leads into the promised realm (2:10; 13:13). Not only the first heirs, but all the presbyters died without receiving this better perspective (11:39, 40). The author does say that Jacob greeted "the outcome of his scepter" but this again is a conformity to the readers' expectations and for the readers' benefit.

What the author is in effect trying to do is show the readers that they are the favored promisees: they have a clarity about the promises unavailable to the first heirs and, related to this, they have one who guides them to the promise. This at once magnifies the faithfulness of Abraham, for he without these benefits still earnestly expected and longed for the promise. The impact of this upon the reader is clear: If Abraham could venture forth, in expectation of a promise, at a disadvantage, and remain expectant even at death, how much

53 The expectation for "a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God" (11:10) was something developed and passed along, in part, through Jewish tradition; cf. Isa 54:11; 60:10; 4 Ezra 10:27; IQH 6:24-26; 1 Enoch 90:29; Rev 21:10-19; Sib Or V 250f. and also Ulrich Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung im hellenistischen Diaspora-judentum* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 978 117).

more should we remain faithful, having welcomed the priestly realm of Jesus and having Jesus himself as leader and guide into the promise. The reader can relate to Abraham, he is familiar enough; yet his circumstances make his faith heroic, demanding of promisees in more favorable conditions the best of effort and enduring confidence.

Confidence in Threatened Promises. In comparing the readers with the depiction of Sarah and Abraham in 11:11-12,17-19, one is struck not by similarities but by differences, the most obvious being the promised object; the readers are not promisees of the promised increase through Isaac. Nor do the situations explicitly pertain. The women of the congregation are not facing barrenness; the men are not being asked to sacrifice their sons.⁵⁴

The author does, however, create a point of contact between the readers and Sarah by formulating Sarah's conviction that "all things are possible with God" into a felicity of promising which is of immediate importance to the readers: "she considered that the Promisor was reliable" (11:11). Such language is in clear deference to the readers' need to maintain confidence in the Promisor, as is clear from 10:23. What the story of Sarah indicates is that experiences and conditions utterly contradictory to the promise are the very occasions when confidence in the Promiser must be maintained. Moreover, it is the experience of faithful promisees, such as Sarah, that God does perform his promise.

The attribution of such confidence to Sarah may, as we have suggested, have been facilitated by exegetical traditions which had minimized the seeming faithless laughter of Sarah. The possibility cannot be excluded, however, that the author intended the readers to pause in puzzlement when hearing Sarah's confidence highlighted. One rhetorical technique for making exemplary illustrations more striking and memorable was to use unequal examples (*exempla inparia*). For example, "courage is more remarkable in a woman than in a man" (Quintilian *Inst* V 11:10). In the case of Hebrews 11:11-12, the author's use of Sarah may have been his attempt to reassure those who were in the process of withdrawing, and who would understand their dilemma as such, that confidence in a faithful Promiser was not too late. As the author stresses in 3:6-4:13, while it is "today" the promise of Rest is available to the reader, if the confidence in the promised hope can be maintained (3:6, 14).

54 By contrast, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac is selected for use in the Maccabean literature because of certain corresponding situations of the characters within the narration: Mattathias' readiness to sacrifice his own offspring (1 Mac 1:50; 2:17-21) and the mother's self-control in the face of the fate of her children (4 Mac 14:20; 15:28; 17:6).

An effort to make Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac relevant to the readers may be seen first of all in the author's recentering the thematic focus away from a 'crisis with paternal affections' to a crisis over God's faithfulness to promise.' The resulting depiction not only reaffirms for the readers God's keeping of promise, but also that such performed faithfulness may be preceded by severe tests of the promisee's own confident trust. How the author may have intended such tests, as Abraham experienced, to be understood requires some brief attention to the context subsequent to chapter eleven.

In 12:1 the author returns to images from the *agon* he had mentioned in 10:32, 34 now describing his readers as endurance runners in a great contest, runners racing toward a goal. As encouragement to such runners, the author in 12:2, 3, recommends the example of another contestant in the *agon*, Jesus, who endured, expecting a promised joy. Further concern for the *agon* motif in 12:4 and 12:11b, 12 brackets a section in which the author explains why endurance in the *agon* is necessary for the Christian.⁵⁵ Utilizing the familiar ancient motif ἔμαθον-ἔπαθον (cf. 5:8) and combining this with Prov 3:11-12, the author reminds the readers that through endurance education takes place and that such education consists in "sharing in God's holiness" (1 2:10).⁵⁶

55 The extent of the images from the *agon* is quite remarkable:

10:32 πολλὴν ἄθλησιν... παθημάτων	the contest
:34 θεατριζόμενοι	the spectacle
12:1 περικείμενον... νέφος μαρτύρων	spectators (Seneca de provid 2:8; Epict IV 4:31)
ὄγκον ἀποθέμενοι πάντα	laying aside weight
εὐπερίσπαστον ἁμαρτίαν	distractions (Epict III 22:69)
τρέχωμεν	the runner
τὸν προκείμενον... ἀγῶνα	the assigned contest (Jos Ant V III 208,302)
:2 ἀφορῶντες εἰς	concentration (4 Mac 17:10)
αἰσχύνης καταφρονήσας	despising training
:3 τοιαύτην... εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀντιλογίαν	hostility
ἵνα μὴ κάμητε	fatigue (Philo Cong 164)
ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ἐκλυόμενοι	weariness
:4 οὐπω μέχρις αἵματος ἀντικατέστητε	to the limits (2 Mac 13:14)
πρὸς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι	struggling (4 Mac 17:14)
:11 τοῖς γυμνασμένοις	training
:12 τὰς παρεμένας χεῖρας... ἀνορθώσατε	drooping hands (Philo Cong 164)

56 Cf. J. Coste, "Notion Grecque et Notion Biblique de la <<Souffrance Éducatrice>> (Apropos d' Hébreux, v. 8)" *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 43 (1955) 481-523.

This description of the readers as endurance runners and this explanation of the *agon* are not unrelated to Abraham in that, as the author says in 12:1, the presbyters of chapter eleven are a great cloud of witnesses, i.e. spectators who are encouraging the runners in the contest.⁵⁷ The question is, of course, how is the story of Abraham in 11:17-19 a spur to the readers' endurance.⁵⁸

At one level this forces a rereading of the depiction of Abraham. If endurance means a sharing in God's holiness (12:10) and finally receiving the promise (10:36), then in enduring the test Abraham was himself learning to share in God's holiness. Thereby, in testing Abraham by threatening the promise God was actually preparing Abraham for reception of the promised City, the realm of God's holy presence, occupied by spirits made perfect (12:22-24). At another level, the experience of Abraham reveals to the readers that God himself may threaten His own promises but the test which transpires may be met by confident trust in God's ability to perform the promise and may be endured in the knowledge that threatened promises may be God's way of preparing the promisee for the promised Rest. As it happens, endurance motivated by the promise may itself be preparation for receiving the promised object.

Summary

In commenting on 11:13, John Calvin (p. 170) posed a question which is really at the heart of discerning our author's use of this depiction of the first heirs. Does the story of Abraham function primarily as an exemplary pattern of how God works as a Promiser and of the faithfulness needed by promisee? "They never obtained the promised good things, just as today also our salvation is hidden from us in hope." Or does the story rather function to embolden the readers' faltering spirits by making them realize the price and cost of their more favored position as promisees? "Though God gave... only a foretaste of His favor... only a vague image of Christ at a distance... yet they were satisfied and never fell from their faith. How much more cause is given to us today to persevere." Calvin chose the latter explanation, stressing

57 Cf. Isoc *Evagoras* 79: "I am and will act as spectators (*θεαταί*) at the athletic games. They do not encourage the runners who are being left behind but those who strive for victory."

58 In Jewish interpretation, aspects of Abraham's life had been likened to the athlete's struggle in the contest (e.g. in 4 Mac 16:16; Philo *Abr* 48, 255f). In Heb 11:17-19, however, none of the explicit language of the *agon* is used.

The possibility may also be mentioned here that the author intended the reader to think about Jesus' resurrection in 11:19 (cf. Rom 4:24). However, 'faith in the resurrection' is hardly a thematic concern in Hebrews.

the difference between Abraham as promisee and the reader as promisee. Our study has found that both functions obtain, corresponding in large measure to the two alternating depictions of the first heirs.

In 11:8-10,13-16,20-22 the first heirs are portrayed as expecting by faith the promised city of God. Abraham's expectations have been formulated in the very language of the readers' own expectations. By this conformation, the readers may identify with Abraham. At the same time Abraham's circumstances are different making what he did, in comparison with the readers, heroic. Without guide and clarity of promise, he went out to receive the inheritance. In this manner, exhortation is effected: "If promisees, at disadvantages, could by faith expect the promise even till death, how much more you who participate in 'the completion of His scepter' and who look to the leadership of Jesus."

The depiction of Sarah and Abraham in 11:11-12,17-19 is hortatory as well but in a different way. Here the readers relate not to the actual promise but to the *theological* considerations of the couple: God is a faithful, capable Promiser. In their depiction is also revealed a pattern of God's promising which the readers may assume as the structure for their own experiences with God as promisor: threats to God's promise must be met with the confidence of the promisee, for God can and will do what He has promised. When therefore the readers face the *agon* in which God's promises are threatened, they must remember that even in trial God's *paideia* may be at work, eliciting through the promises the endurance which is participation in God's holiness. The Rest is bequeathed to the readers who trust God's aid and obey His directive to go out.

Within the narration of the first heirs the author has retained the strong social character of promising, highlighting two aspects of felicitous promising: expectation of the promise and confidence in the promiser. Outside the narration, in the lives of the readers, the twin felicities are also recommended. In our next Chapter we shall discuss how our author has already made an attempt in his letter to promote their continued confidence in God as promiser. In our final Chapter we shall explore in more detail that "something better" (11:40) which favored the readers over Abraham, and which, at the same time, made the first heirs' lives so exemplary.

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S PROMISSORY OATHS

The second section of Hebrews in which commissive language is most prevalent is 6:12-18. In many ways, this passage is the counterpoint to the faithful promisees of chapter eleven. Whereas in 11:8-22 the confident expectations of the promisees are highlighted, entailing but not focusing upon the Promiser's role, in 6:11-20 the reliability and sincerity of the Promiser are elaborated while Abraham's exemplary patient faith receives only passing mention (6:12,15). The way the author proceeds to elaborate the Promiser's faithfulness appears, at first glance, strange if not contradictory, for the concern is with God's promise by oath. It is strange because oath-taking by its very nature is a concession to the abuse and misuse of promising. People swear because their assertions and promises cannot always be trusted. What business then does God have swearing, the One whose words are oaths? This puzzlement, by no means new, raises rather sharply the question of what our author is doing with God's oath. In this Chapter we shall address this question examining rather closely Heb 6:11-20 as well as the oath to Jesus in 7:20-22. The prohibitive oath, part of the author's warning in 3:7-4:13, will be considered to the degree that it illuminates the logic of God's oath in chapter six. First, however, we must orient our discussion by considering three contexts from which 6:11-20 may be better understood.

Using Human and Divine Oaths

The primary context is as always the immediate literary rhetorical context in which the passage is located. In the case of Hebrews, however, any determined contextual parameters must be treated as somewhat flexible since the author is forever anticipating themes, sometimes returning to them at once,

other times much later. The net effect is an interlocking structure which has been identified in most detail by Albert Vanhoye, regardless of one's evaluation of his final overall structural outline.

A second context from which to read 6:12-18 is given within the passage itself: "Men swear by a greater and in every dispute the oath brings a final settlement" (6:16). What is appealed to here is the human experience of oath-taking in the courtroom for the purpose of resolving legal conflicts. In order to see how and to what degree the author's use of God's oath has been constrained by his understanding of the forensic oath, account must be taken of the role of the oath in legal disputes. To do this we must examine briefly the rhetor's use of oath.

A final context is the possible constraint placed on the author's interpretations and use of God's oath through the influence of traditional exegesis of "oath passages" from the Old Testament, particularly Gen 22: 16, 17. What is of concern here are similarities between Philo and Hebrews in their discourse about God's oath. A brief assessment of Philo's use of oath must precede a closer reading of 6:12-18.

Exhortation in Hebrews

4:14-7:28. Unanimity on the literary context for 6:12-18 does not exist: 5:11-6:20 (Westcott, p. 1), 6:9-20 (Michel, p. 230), 6:13-20 (Vanhoye, p. 115), 6:16-20 (Koester, "Abraham," p. 107), 6:13-10:18 (Schierse, p. 199). Such divergences on the scope of the discourse stem from interpreters giving differing weight to features of the text: style (e.g. uses of $\nu\omicron\theta\rho\omicron\iota$ in 5:11 and 6:12 framing the boundaries of the section 5:11-6:12, Vanhoye), thematic concerns (e.g. "progress through patience", Westcott; Verheissungsrede, Michel), logical placement in argument (e.g. as introduction to chapter seven, Koester) and accumulate force of the utterances (e.g. didactic exposition, Schierse). Such a welter of approaches reminds one again of Moffatt's observation: "It is artificial to divide up a writing of this kind..." (p. xxiii).

Our decision, nevertheless, to read 6:12-18 within the division 4:14-7:28, while somewhat artificial, is not without reason. On the one hand, the choice to include chapter seven arises legitimately from the thematic connections of the oath in 6:13-18. with the oath in 7:20- 8. The author intends that the two discourses complement one another (to be indicated later). On the other hand, it has been felt necessary to go back far enough in the letter from 6:13 to include sufficient material to throw a broad enough perspective on 6:12-18. The break has been made between 4:13 and 4:14 because of similarity of expression in

4:14-5:1 and 8:1-3, and because of the natural transition-break with the elliptical phrase in 4:13 πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος.¹ By thus drawing the boundaries with 4:14 and 7:28 we have a section of the letter, though interconnected with what comes before and after, in which it may be shown, through analogies with other exhortation (e.g. in Isocrates, in παρακλητικοί, in Paul), how it is possible to see exhortation at work in Hebrews, and how 6:12-18 fits within this movement.

4:14-5:10. Rational consideration was no less a part of exhortation than it was an element of polemic and apology. In the collections of precepts (paranesis proper) in which enjoining to action was so prominent, “consideration” was a regular feature: “Guard (τήρει) more faithfully secrets entrusted to you than money... Consider (ηγοῦ) that you owe it to yourself no less to mistrust the bad than to place your trust in the good” (Isoc *Demonicus* 22; cf. 11,12,15,39,42). Right reason was at the heart of such exhortation.² No less important for the encouragement of troops for a battle were the considerations a general might forward to his troops about the military situation at hand.³

Certain ‘considerations’ are also part of the exhortation of Hebrews. In chapter eleven, for example, Sarah and Abraham are exemplary in their theological considerations of God’s faithfulness and capability as Promisor (11:11,19). It is, however, in 4:14-16 that the author begins in earnest to fix his readers’ attention on that consideration which he hopes will most embolden those who are withdrawing: “Having therefore a great high priest... let us keep possession of the *homologia*... Let us come there fore with boldness to the throne of grace...”

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- 1 The author’s regard for transitional phrases (e.g. 5:11; 8:1; 11:32) leads the translator to ask whether 4:13b is another example of his rhetorical instincts: “which is the concern of our message.” Many post-Reformation interpreters understood the phrase in this sense, as equivalent to 5:11 περι οὗ...ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος (cf. Bleek II 590). With few exceptions, however, more recent exegetes have rejected this translation (e.g. Moffatt p. 58 “impossibly flat”; Spicq II 91 “une banalité”). What is rather favored is to understand λόγος in its commercial sense, as in 13:17: “with whom we have to reckon” (*NEB*). A difficulty in viewing it as a rhetorical transition is the use of πρὸς instead of περί; πρὸς would more readily suggest “to” or “with” rather than “about” (so cf. Plut *Reg. et imper. ap.* 176F). Nevertheless, it is possible (cf. Heb 1:7) and it may be the author’s own way of varying the expression (cf. Windisch p. 37).
 - 2 See Furnish, “Paul’s Exhortations,” pp. 47-56. The consideration which is to engage the reader’s mind in Hebrews is, of course, not that dictated by the reason of experience but the *homologia* concerned with Jesus’ priesthood.
 - 3 For examples, see Albertus, παρακλητικοί, pp. 51-52. From the speech of Antony in Dio Cassius 50:18, “I speak... not that I may boast about myself but that you might *consider well* how much better prepared we are than they.”

In language borrowed from Paul Schubert one might say that the Christology of high priesthood in Hebrews has a paraenetic function.⁴ We stressed the point in Chapter 1 that exhortation is more than the sum of certain grammatical features. In Hebrews, this may be seen in the way the author uses the consideration of Jesus' priesthood to exhort readers who are retreating.

What marks the hortatory intentions of this Christology in 4:14 is the author's use of the adjective μέγας. While the expression may have been inspired by the description of Ἰησοῦς in Zechariah as a "great priest" (Heb 10:21; Zech 3:1,9; 6:11), our author has clearly employed it in this context, as well as in 10:21, with hortatory purpose.⁵ It not so much summarizes as begins a magnification of Jesus' high priestly character.⁶ His elevation, while a spatial one through and beyond the heavens (διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοῦς 4:14; ἐν ὑψηλοῖς 1:3; ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν 7:26), is more particularly in 4:14-5:10 a "greatness" of sympathetic capacity for human weakness forged and revealed in his own testing as a human. This perspective on Jesus in 4:15 is developed and magnified through the syncrisis of 5:1-10.

The comparison here is different from the two previous syncrises in the letter. In 1:4-13 and 3:2-6, the comparisons proceeded by alternation of Jesus with the one compared: A.) angels 1:5, heir 1:6, angels 1:7, son 1:8-13; B.) Moses 3:2, "this one" 3:3, Moses 3:5, Christ 3:6. One objective in these syncrises was the elevation of the son *over* the one compared yet without defamation of the place and role of the latter.

In 5:1-10, however, the comparison proceeds not by alternation but by a sequence involving chiasmus:

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- 4 Of interest is the title of this study, as yet unavailable to me: Franz Laub, *Bekennntnis und Auslegung: Die paraenetische Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief* BU 14; Regensburg: Pustet, 1980
 - 5 If our author's choice was influenced at all by the LXX phrase for high priest (ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ μέγας Lev 21:10; Num 25:35) it most likely arose out of its application to Ἰησοῦς in Zechariah. In the present context, however, the adjective μέγας is not part of a title but rather functions to elevate Jesus' priestly office, just as in 13:20 "great shepherd" is not a title but a deliberately chosen elevation of the shepherd. A similar special use of μέγας with 'high priest' may be seen in its use in 1 Mac 13:42 on an occasion of exuberance and in Philo *Som* I 214,219 in elevating the Logos.
 - 6 The veiled references to Jesus' priesthood in 1:3; 2:11 and the more explicit passage in 2:17-3:6 have made this identification of Jesus already familiar to the reader's ear by the time 4:14 occurs. In the syncrisis of Moses and Christ in 3:2-6 an elevation of Jesus as faithful high priest may be heard and yet the thematic concern for his priesthood is not in the surface of the text as it is in 4:14-5:10. It therefore seems better to speak of 4:14 as beginning the magnification proper rather 4:14 being a surrmary (e.g. Spicq *SB* 91) or a transition (e.g. Michel, p. 204).

5:1-3 sympathetic high priest beset by weakness	5:5,6 Christ did not glorify him- but He who spoke to him
5:4 called by God for honor	5:7-10 <i>paideia</i> through suffering

Absent in this syncrisis are the comparative adjectives κρείττων (cf. 1:4) and πλείων (cf. 3:3). The comparison rather appears in format as one of equals. Hennogenes, the second century A.D. rhetorician, in his *Progymnasmata* (p. 19,1. 14-16, Rabe) observed that comparisons often proceeded this way: "Sometimes we make our comparisons according to an equality showing the things equal which we compare either in all or in many respects."

While 5:1-10 is framed as a chiasmus-comparison of equal things, it is obvious already in the context and certainly in subsequent syncrisis (e.g. 7:1-28) that for the author Jesus' priesthood far exceeded the "idealized" priesthood of Aaron.⁷ The surface similarities between the two do provide a recognition point and a force of legitimacy to the Christ. His priesthood is not totally unique; it can be compared in its character and origin to πᾶς ἀρχιερέως ἐξ ἀνθρώπων λαμβανόμενος (5:1).

There are, however, clear differences. The μετριοπαθεῖν of the high priest stems from his own weakness (5:2); Jesus is sympathetic through testing and suffering education (5:7,8), not through his own sin (4:15). A man becomes high priest through God's call (5:4); God's utterance to Jesus, while a call, is a unique promissory acknowledgement (5:6) accompanied, as the author will later develop, with an oath (7:20-22). Understandably, our author is not narrowly bound to comparison κατὰ τὸ ἴσον. His purposes are to highlight a great high priest. Implicit even in 5:1-10 is that Jesus' priesthood is better.

Syncrisis is so characteristic an element of style throughout Hebrews, involving in some passages commissive language, that it is important here to reaffirm our conviction that syncrisis should not be conceived of as in

7 Idealized in the sense that the very depiction of the Aaronic priesthood has been in part tailored to suit the author's particular elevation of Jesus. There was in the Law, for example, no special moral qualifications for the priests (Westcott, p. 121). Yet in Heb 5:2, the high priest is one who has empathetic feelings (μετριοπαθεῖν) for those he serves. While instances of such feelings may be assembled from the OT (e.g. Num 14:5; 16:22), it is not an explicit prerequisite for the office. The author uses this description, however, because he is interested in portraying Jesus as a sympathetic, merciful high priest (4:15; 2:17). His choice of μετριοπαθεῖν may have been in connection with his concern for *paideia* in 5:1-10 and progress in 5:11-6:8, for in Philo μετριοπαθεῖν emerges through *paideia* (*Jos* 26 παιδευθεὶς μετριοπαθεῖν) and, from the perspective of Stoic ethics the one who practices μετριοπάθειαν is the one who is progressing (LA III 131 ὁ προκόπτων). That Philo happens to identify the latter with Aaron, placing it in a secondary position, and that μετριοπαθεῖν is used in Hebrews for the Aaronic priesthood, probably should be taken no further than 'coincidence'.

alternation with exhortation but rather part of exhortation. It is not that 4:14-16 is hortatory then 5:1-10 is didactic. Rather, the whole accumulative force of the utterances is hortatory, reminding and persuading the readers of the *great* benefit the priesthood of Jesus has for them. To have this consideration in mind, with its ramifications, is to keep the *homologia* in possession.

Before proceeding to 5:11, it will be instructive at this point (and it will keep a promise we made in Chapter 1) to place along side Heb 5:1-10 a syncrisis from Isocrates' Exhortation *Nicocles* for the purpose of illustrating the way in which thematic concerns such as legitimacy and character may be highlighted and elevated through syncrisis for the purpose of exhortation.

Nicocles has the appearance of an exhortation of a King to his subjects. The major syncrisis in the piece involves a comparison of the monarchy with other forms of governing. Here, the phrases οἱ μὲν... οἱ δὲ alternate no less than eleven times in section § 17-21. The first comparison, for example, analogous to the temporal comparisons of the priesthood in Hebrews 7, is of the *annual* (κατ' ἐνιαυτόν) time of office in other forms of government with the *permanent* (ἀεί) position of the monarch. The avowed purpose of the whole syncrisis is to elevate the monarchy as the best (βελτίστη § 12) form of government. Within the Exhortation, this is designed to draw the subjects to an admiration and respect for their monarch in order that they might heed his words (§13,47).

Along with the elevation of the government, "Nicocles" reminds his subjects that his rule is not exercised illegally; he is no usurper but holds his office "with divine approval, according to justice, by ancestry, by parents, by myself" (§ 13). His method of promoting the legitimacy and character of his monarchical rule is that of the encomium (§ 27-46). This involves a brief comparison with other rulers (§ 31-35). The implied syncrisis, however, is with the subjects themselves: "it is the duty of kings to be as much better (Βελτίους) than private citizens as they are to be superior (μείζους) to them in office (τὰς τιμάς § 38)." The elevation of "Nicocles" through comparison thus functions not only to give power and credibility to his precepts but also to place his life (e.g. his σωφροσύνη § 36) as a paradigm for his subjects.

The syncrisis in Hebrews of Jesus' priesthood with the Aaronic priesthood has been understood frequently in the history of exegesis as polemical. The scenario is familiar: the author, concerned that his readers are being attracted to the Jewish cult, sets out to display its inadequacies by comparing it to Jesus' priesthood. What *Nicocles* provides, however, is an example of a syncrisis similar to Hebrews, used for the purpose of exhortation, not polemic. Other forms of government are compared to the monarchy not because these other governments are attracting *Nicocles*' subjects, but because they bring into focus the advantages and benefits of subjection to *Nicocles*' reign.

Likewise, we presume, though we cannot argue here in detail, that the author of Hebrews begins in 5:1 to deal with a construct of the Aaronic priesthood, not because his readers are attracted to such, but rather because the Aaronic priesthood can be used to highlight the benefits and advantages of Jesus' priesthood. The topics chosen for initial comparison in Heb 5:1-10, legitimacy and character, can be understood in view of Nicocles as contributing to an elevation of Jesus as the great high priest. Moreover, the resulting double effect of 5:7-10—Jesus, the “benefactor” to be admired; Jesus, the example to be emulated—is analogous to hortatory purposes in the elevation of Nicocles. Obviously differences exist in content (cf. the discussion of 5:5-10 in our next Chapter), but the syncrisis in *Nicocles* points out the way in which Heb 4:14-5:10 can be read as the development of a hortatory syncrisis.⁸

5:11-6:8. The syncrisis of 5:1-10 is followed by stern, arresting utterances. This is a characteristic pattern in Hebrews: 1:4-14 and 2:1-4; 3:1-6 and 3:7-4:13; 4:14-5:10 and 5:11-6:8; 10:19-25 (culmination of previous liturgy syncrisis) and 10:26-31; 12:18-24 and 12:25-29. Looking again at *Nicocles*, it is remarkable that similar stern utterances occur in relationship to the hortatory syncrisis, coming before and after the elevation of Nicocles' reign: “Once these claims have been established, who will not condemn himself to the most severe punishment (τὴν μεγίστην ζημίαν) if he fails to heed my counsels and commands?” (§ 13) “The reason I have spoken at such length... is that I might leave you no excuse for not doing willingly and eagerly whatever I counsel and command” (§ 47). The logic involved in both Hebrews and *Nicocles* on this matter is obvious: the higher the privilege, the more the responsibility, the greater the loss. So *Nicocles* ends: “You could, therefore, well afford for the sake of such great blessings (τηλικούτων ἀγαθῶν) to spare no effort and even to undergo labor and face danger” (§ 64). So Hebrews begins: “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation” (τηλικαύτης σωτηρίας 2:3).

While part of this “logic”, 5:11-6:8 is different from the other paralleled sections in Hebrews in that the force is not only warning (6:6,8) but even more one of shame. The author turns the rhetorical transition of “difficult subject” (5:11) into an occasion for shaming his readers.⁹ To this effect, the νήπιος topos (cf. Epict II 16:39) is employed in 5:12-14 (γευσασμένους 6:4,5; cf. 1

8 Cf. again the hortatory syncrisis in the παρακλητικός of Antony in Dio Cassius 50:17-19 (discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 64-65). Through syncrisis is revealed the excellence of the general for the purpose of emboldening the troops for the battle.

9 For examples of transitions in which the orator declines to pursue certain topics because of some difficulty, see Robert D. Elliott, *Transition in the Attic Orators* (Menasha, Wisconsin: The Collegiate Press, 1919) 126-27.

Pet 2:2). Whereas Paul uses the same metaphors in I Cor 3:1-3 to shame his children in their *over* confidence (οὐκ ἐντρέπων! 4:14), the author of Hebrews shames his reader for their *lack* of confidence. Their need for progress and growth is reiterated in the author's use of building and agricultural images in 6:1-3 ("not laying foundations again") and 6:7-8.

The combination of these three images concerned with development (human, architectural, agricultural) at this juncture in his letter is not accidental.¹⁰ The author's concern for the paradigmatic παιδεία of Jesus through suffering in 5:8 has led him in 5:11-6:8 to raise the issue of the readers' own progress toward maturity (τελειότητα 6:1).

The verbal connection of 5:11-6:8 with 5:7-10 through the four variations in the expression of 'completion'—τελειωθεῖς 5:9; τελείων 5:14; τελειότητα 6:1; τέλος 6:8—is indicative of a fundamental internal connection the author perceives between the sanctifier and the sanctified (cf. 2:11), between the son who through suffering was perfected (2:10; 5:8,9) and the reader who seeks maturity by fixing his attention upon him. As a son who was tested and as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is the source of great εὐλογία, eternal salvation (5:9). That the readers would, in spite of this, be withdrawing from each other and from God is a singular indication to the author of their failure to fix their understanding on Jesus' high priesthood. He shames them therefore to arouse them to the word of righteousness (5:13), the word about Melchizedek, king of righteousness (7:2), whose order of priesthood God promised by oath to Jesus, a priesthood enabling the sanctified through παιδεία and testing to enjoy the promise. He shames them before he offers a clarification and magnification of Jesus' priesthood.

6:9-7:28. With hortatory purpose, the author alters the force of his utterances with 6:9 from shame/warning to praise: "Though we speak this way, we are confident, beloved, that the better things of salvation are yours." The shift in tone reflects the author's primary interest which is to embolden and not merely dishearten their spirits. Such an alternation of rebuke and praise (υπόγος/ἔπαινος) was a recognized feature of exhortation (cf. Quintilian *Inst* II 3:49) whether in the education of a child (cf. Plut *De lib.* 9A; Dio 4:73) or, as with Paul, in the edification of a congregation (cf. Gal 5:7-10; 1 Cor 11:2,17).

10 This triad of images, like "faith, hope and love", was quite serviceable in Christian exhortation. Not only do these three occur conspicuously together in Hebrews 5:11-6:8, but they also are distributed together in two other exhortations, I Cor 3:1-13 and I Pet 1:23-2:8. These passages also indicate the latitude in use and application.

The praise is expressed through the use of confidence language (*πεπίσμεθα*), a language familiar from Paul's letters (e.g. 2 Thes 3:4; 2 Cor 7:4,14,16; Gal 5:10; Phm 21; Rom 15:14), but a language also found in the exhortations of Isocrates and in the *παρακλητικοί*.¹¹ The basis for our author's confidence lies in God's faithfulness to reward the readers for their zeal in serving their brethren: "God is not so unjust as to overlook (*ἐπιλαθέσθαι*) your work and love..." (6:10). Similar expressions of confidence designed to embolden the spirit occur in Isocrates' hortatory words to Nicocles: "Do not think that I am reproaching you for indifference... for it has not escaped the notice of (*λέληθας*) either me or anyone else that you, Nicocles, are the first and the only one of those who possess... who has undertaken to pursue the study of philosophy..." (*Evagoras* 78).

An author's expression of confidence in his readers might be simultaneous with his expression of certain expectations and demands. This is especially true of Paul. The best example is the way his confidence language in 2 Corinthians 7 places his children under greater pressure to meet his diplomatic requests and reminders in chapters eight and nine (cf. Rom 15:14-29; 2 Thes 3:4-6; Phm 21).¹² In Heb 6:9-11, as well, the author's confidence in his readers gives way to a request of them. He desires that the same eagerness displayed in their service in the church be maintained in the matter of, what he calls, *τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος*.

As in the case of other collocations with *ἐλπίς* (3:6; 6:18; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1), the meaning of *τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος* is ambiguous. Modern English versions hardly agree on a translation: "in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end" RSV; "until your hope is finally realized" NEB; "to the perfect fulfillment of our hopes" Jer. The reasons for our own translation, "completion of hope", must await our more studied interpretation of verses 11-20. As we shall see, what the author's discourse about God's oath in part provides are inducements to the reader (*ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν* 6:18), warranted by God's faithfulness to reward (6: 10), to maintain enthusiasm about God's bringing the "hope to completion".

11 E.g. "And I shall be most grateful to the gods if I am not disappointed in the opinion which I have of you. (While others do such and such...) you, I think, are minded otherwise as I judge from the industry you display in your general education" (Isac *Demonicus* 45). "Now I should be ashamed indeed to suggest to you how you ought to conduct yourselves at such a time; for I know that you understand what you have to do, that you have practised it, and have been continually hearing of it just as I have, so that you might properly even teach others" (Cyrus speaking in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* III 3:35).

12 Cf. Stanley Olson, "Confidence Expressions in Paul: Epistolary Conventions and the Purpose of 2 Corinthians" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1976).

We have so far described 5:11-6:11, the immediate pre-text to 6:12-18, largely from a rhetorical perspective, i.e. the effect of the author's utterances on the listeners' attitudes about themselves and on the listeners' passion for the topic at hand. This does not mean, however, that the author's concern in 4:14-5:10 to concentrate the readers' attention on the benefits of Jesus' priesthood and on the paradigm of Jesus' *paideia* as son has dropped out of 5:11-6:11. This is important to stress in assaying the literary/rhetorical context of 6:12-18.

In the first place, as we have noted, the author's chiding identification of the readers' progress is, in retrospect, a logical sequel to the *paideia* of Jesus in 5:8-9. He is concerned about their maturity because he is concerned about their looking to the son who through testing and suffering was perfected. In shaming their own failure in *paideia*, he is at once reminding them of their personal need for a high priest who is sympathetic with the ignorant and erring (τοῖς ἀγνοοῦσιν καὶ πλανωμένοις 5:2).

But the most direct indication of the author's continued concern is in 6:9, τὰ κρείσσονα καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας. The comparative ("the better things") picks up the elevation of Jesus' priesthood begun with 4:14-5:10. At the same time it anticipates the extended syncrisis in the subsequent chapters, punctuated by explicit indications of certain benefits related to Jesus' priesthood (better hope 7:19; better covenant 7:22; 8:6; better promises 8:6; better sacrifices 9:23; cf. 11:40; 10:34).

It may be said therefore that the author's chiding in 5:11-6:8 is intended to aid the reader in concentrating attention on a particular 'consideration' designed to reverse their withdrawal. The consideration is that there is a *great* high priest. In 5:11-6:8, the author tries to make them alert to this. Lest, however, they become disheartened at the prospect of judgment (6:6,8), the author quickly adds his own confidence about them. This section, 5:11-6:11, is thus neither a digression nor an interlude. It is in a sense a preparation (Windisch, p. 59) but it is more for it carries forward the elevation of Jesus' priesthood accomplished in 4:14-5:10 by indicating the dire consequences of neglecting its benefits (cf. Dia Cassius 50:20-22).

The syncrisis proper resumes in chapter seven with the comparisons of Melchizedek with Abraham (vv. 5-10) and the "priest who arises" with the Levitical priest (vv. 11-28).¹³ The function of the syncrisis is made explicit in 7:4 θεωρεῖτε δὲ πηλίκος οὗτος. The comparisons serve to elevate Melchizedek

13 The comparisons are executed near the beginning of the chapter and near the end by two series of μέν ... δέ (vv. 5-8 and 20-24). Unlike the syncrisis in 4:14-5:10, the logic of 'lesser/greater' is made explicit (vv. 7,19). The inner syncrisis of the chapter concerned with legitimation (vv. 11-19) turns on the contrast between permanence and change.

and his priesthood. Again the significance for the reader lies in the fact that they are beneficiaries of such a priesthood. The author is attempting, as with 4:14-5:10, to magnify the greatness of Jesus' priesthood in order that the reader might keep the *homologia* in possession.

In *summary*, the rhetorical context for 6:12-18 may be heard as thoroughly hortatory. As in exhortation, there is a 'consideration' which is set before the reader's eyes, a consideration that originates not in folk wisdom but in connection with the *homologia*, the consideration of Jesus' high priesthood.¹⁴ Through syncrisis (5:1-10; 7:1-28) the benefits of his priesthood are highlighted and made attractive (in 5:7-10, paradigmatic) for the readers' situation. Through the sequence of shame/warning/praise (5:11-6:10) an attempt is made to engage the listener, to arouse, and concentrate the memory.¹⁵ What the author is *doing* with God's promissory oath in

6:13-18 must be eventually understood in light of what the author is doing (and saying) with this larger context of 4:14-7:28 with its hortatory intentions. These constraint, as well as the immediate occasion for the discourse in 6:11, 12 must be considered in the closer exegesis of 6:13-18. What must not be overlooked though is the more general phenomenological context: "What can be done with oaths?"

Forensic Use of Oath

Oaths have been classified, according to their temporal reference, into two types: assertive and promissory.¹⁶ The former has its domain in the courtroom in which litigants swear that what they say about *the past* is true. The promissory oath, on the other hand, commits the one who swears to some activity *in the future*.

The three oaths mentioned in Hebrews are commissive, i.e. they obligate the one who swears to perform some future activity. In 3:7-4:13, the oath is God's sure commitment to prohibit entry into the Rest. The oath in 6:14 is God's firm promise to Abraham. In 7:21, the oath is God's promissory

14 Cf. other exhortations in oracular and mental language to consider Jesus: Βλέπομεν Ἰησοῦν 2:9; κατανοήσατε... Ἰησοῦν 3:1; Θεωρεῖτε... οὗτος 7:4; ἀφορῶντες... Ἰησοῦν 12:2.

15 "Admonitio is not teaching; it rather engages the attention, arouses us concentrates the memory, keeping it from losing its hold. We miss much that is placed before our eyes (*ante oculos*). *Admonere genus adhortandi est*. The mind often tries not to notice what lies before it. We must therefore force upon it the knowledge of those things it well knows." (Seneca *EP* 94:25).

16 Rudolf Hirzel, *Der Eid* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1902) 1-7; cf. Johannes Schneider, "ὄρκος" *TDNT* 5 (1967) 458.

acknowledgement of Jesus as high priest. What all three oaths have in common is their firm obligation of God to some future action.

It, therefore, appears at first puzzling to hear Adolf Deissmann remark that the context of 6:16 "is permeated by juristic expressions, as is the Epistle to the Hebrews as a whole," puzzling for us because the oaths in Hebrews are promissory and not assertive. Deissmann does not elaborate on his remark but a closer look at 6:12-18 does reveal the wisdom of his contention.¹⁷

Forensic features. The primary indication of our author's interest in the forensic oath is his description of oath in verse 16b: πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς Βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος. What the author gives here in brief is a classic description of the role of oath in legal disputes. Plato described, in a similar way, the weight of oath with the famous judge Rhadamanthys: "In giving the oath to the litigants concerning each of the matters at dispute (ἐκάστων τῶν ἀμφισβητουμένων) he brought the case to a speedy and sure conclusion" (*Laws* XII 948B).

Another, though less clear, indication of the author's interest in forensic oath is his use of οἱ καταφυγόντες (6:18) within his discourse about God's oath. Why he should use this appellation for his readers at this point in his letter is not immediately clear. Some have connected the image of "fleeing" with an interpretation of the readers as "foreigners and strangers".¹⁸ Others take the author as anticipating the "anchor" metaphor in 6:19; the readers are escaping from a sinking ship and a furious storm.¹⁹ One might even argue that the author has let slip the Gentile character of his audience.²⁰

Considering the thematic concern for oath in the context another explanation is at hand and is appealing. In the Attic orators and rhetoricians one occasionally finds the expression εἰς ὄρκον καταφεύγω (e.g. Dem 47 *Evergus* 31; Isac *Callimachus* 29; *Rhet Alex* XVII 1432a38). Since the oath could bring

17 Gustav Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, trans. Alexander Grieve (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901) 107, 228-29.

18 Hering, p. 51; Grasser, *Glaube*, p. 116; Spicq, *SB*, p. 114. (An important omission in the *TDNT* is the absence of an article on φεύγω and its cognates.)

19 Lightfoot, p. 131; Bruce, p. 131.

20 The most striking use of καταφεύγω in the LXX is for the "proselytes" or nations taking refuge in the Lord or in Israel (Zech 2:11; Isa 54:15; 55:5). This use may lie behind Asenath's being called πόλις καταφυγῆς, ἐν σοὶ καταφεύζονται ἔθνη πολλὰ (*Jos* Asen 15:6; cf. 2Bar 41:4). For discussions of Asenath as the model proselyte, see Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth* (WUNT 8; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965) 117-21; V. Aptowitz, "Asenath, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study," *HUCA* 1 (1924) 290-99; Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968) 31, 50-52.

vindication in the courtroom, the expression was an apt one. In Heb 6:18, οἱ καταφυγόντες also describes people who are to rely on oath. Here, however, the oath is not one the readers have taken but one taken by God himself. It is thus possible that the author has described his readers within the vocabulary of the forensic oath. If he has done this, he has nevertheless done it in a creative fashion for the readers flee not to the protection of their own oaths, but to the assurance of God's.

The question arises whether the author has made here a logical mistake in his discourse in, on the one hand, being concerned about God's *commissive* oath (6:14) and yet using as an analogy a forensic *assertive* oath (6:16). One proposed solution has been to translate ἀντιλογία "contradiction" rather than "dispute".²¹ However, this not only fails to take seriously what otherwise appears to be a clear description of a forensic oath in Heb 6:16b, but it also overlooks the apparent source of this expression (αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας) in certain contexts of the LXX in which disputes are adjudicated before some tribunal (Exod 18:16; Deut 19:17; cf. 25:1; 2 Kgs 15:4; Jos *Ant* XIV 235).

A better solution may be sought in the point of the author's comparison, for the comparison lies not in the *types* of oath but in the *forces* of oath, not in what an oath says but in what an oath does. This at once brings us back to the central question of our study for like promises, oaths are more than an individual's public announcement of intentions or the affirmation of assertions. Oaths like promises may convince, persuade, admonish, encourage, even dissuade and warn. Oaths like promises may be hortatory.

In comparing God's commissive oaths to the forensic oath, the author unveils another context from which we may read 6:12-18. This context is the realm of the rhetor's use of the forensic oath. No one in the ancient world was more conscious of "how to do things with words" than the Attic orators and rhetoricians. They were no less conscious of what could be done with oaths. By briefly surveying their approaches, our author's own tactics with the divine oath may perhaps be more clearly discerned. It is even possible that our author learned to think about and use the forensic oath through a rhetorical training which included a reading of the orators (e.g. the canon of the ten Attic orators) and actual practice in the use of oaths (e.g. in the declamations of *controversia*).

21 Appeals to its sense in 7:7 and 12:3 ("contradiction"; cf. Westcott, p. 162; Riggensbach, p. 171) are unpersuasive since the semantic rule of thumb is that the meaning of a polysemic word is determined by its particular context; cf. Delitzsch I 311-12; Bleek III 255-56.

Oath and the Rhetor. Occasions for oath-taking in the ancient world were many and varied, ranging from the affairs of individuals to the affairs of states.²² Our interest here is in the use of oath in the courtroom. To this forensic occasion for oath we bring two questions: 1. What was the oath intended to do? 2. What could the rhetor do with his client's or his opponent's oaths?

1. The oath had a somewhat different place in the ancient "courtroom" than in the American counterpart. In the ancient world, the oath was not automatically, as a matter of forensic procedure, given to the litigants as witnesses. The oath was rather taken by the litigants either in response to a challenge by one of them (ὄρκον δίδόναι, e.g. Dem 33 Apaturius 13) or voluntarily (self initiated) without a challenge.²³ Such procedure with the oath obtained not only under Attic law but under Roman law as well.²⁴

The perlocutionary force of the oath-taking was *to give assurance* to magistrate and jury of the verity of the litigant's testimony. Since the litigant did not have to take an oath, if he chose to swear it was with the intention of giving the more credibility to his assertions: "One who is acting justly ought not to be embarrassed but ought to be able to answer immediately, and not only so but also swear an oath... so that he might the more (μᾶλλον) be believed by you" (Isaeus 11 *Hagnias* 6). If the litigant chose not to swear upon a challenge, his case was placed in greater jeopardy.

The acceptance of the challenge and the taking of the oath could, however, bring an end to the trial with the judgment in favor of the litigant who took the oath (cf. Dem 49 *Timotheus* 65). Herein may be seen the potency of the oath and its importance in the forensic context. Neither magistrate nor jury, however, were so gullible as to accept without question a litigant's sworn testimony. The rhetors in the service of the litigants made sure of that.²⁵

22 E.g. at various public and private agreements (Dem 48 *Olympiodorus* 9-11; Andocides *Mysteries* 107), in reporting finances (Dem 42 *Paenippus* 18), the Ephebate oath (Lycurgus *Leocrates* 77). For the occasions of use in the papyri (e.g. Steuerverwaltung, Finanzinteressen, Verfahren) see Erwin Seidl, *Der Eid im römisch-ägyptischen Provinzialrecht* 1 (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933). Oaths were also a regular feature of diplomacy (cf. 2 Mac 7:24 and the use of oath throughout Josephus' *Antiquities*).

23 Justus H. Lipsius, *Das Attische Recht und Rechtsverfahren* (Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1915) 895-900; A.R.W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1971) 2:150-53; Douglas M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 247.

24 Cf. J. Paul Sampley, "'Before God, I do not lie' (Gal I. 20) Paul's Self-Defence in the Light of Roman Legal Praxis," *NTS* 23 (1977) 477-82.

25 Dem 40 *Boeotus* II 10; 49 *Timotheus* 65-68 Antiphon 6 *Choreutes* 51; cf. Dia 74:14; Plut *De Alex. fort.* 330F: Lys. 437c.

2. The rhetors were trained and hired to color the litigant's oath. Already Aristotle had systematized the different tactics a rhetor could take to use the oath to his client's benefit (*Rhet* I 15, 1377a27-1377b33). In *Rhet Alex* (XVII, 1432a34-1432b4) the rhetor is instructed to either maximize (αὐξῆν) or minimize (ταπεινοῦν) the oath. If, for example, it is the opponent who has taken the oath then the rhetor attempts to minimize it. He may do this by attacking the integrity of the oath-taker, indicating past perjuries (cf. Dem 49 *Timotheus* 65-8). What is of greater interest to us, however, were the rhetors' tactics in maximizing the oath. Quintilian recommended two topics to elaborate in maximizing a voluntary oath (*Inst* V 6:2).

In the first place, the rhetor should highlight the character of the oath-taker. Stobaeus transmits a saying of Aeschyles that "it is not the oaths of man that are trustworthy but rather the man of oaths" (περὶ ὄρκου 2; Wachsmuth/Hense III p. 611). In like fashion, it is the blameless life of the oath-taker that the rhetor is to stress. He is incapable of committing perjury. Demosthenes voices similar concerns: "Did the plaintiff... give an oath to my father as to one who was honorable (χρηστῷ) and would not lie (οὐδὲν ψευσομένῳ) and yet now speaks of him as base (πονηροῦ), one who removes the records of deposits" (52 *Callippus* 27).

The rhetor is also advised by Quintilian to elevate the *solemn nature of the oath*. The taking of the oath is serious business. It is taken under the auspices of something greater. Under divine witnesses the oath-taker places himself at the risk of punishment for falsehood.²⁶ As translated into Jewish "paraenesis": "The immortal God hates a perjurer, whoever it is who has sworn" (*Ps Phoc* 17; cf. Homer *Iliad* XIX 260). The rhetor is to highlight the pious character of the oath-taker; his client would not lie before the gods. The binding nature of such an oath upon the oath-taker gave rise to the description of oaths as being ισχυρός and μέγιστος.²⁷

Summary. The description of the forensic oath in Heb 6:16b has led us to a brief inquiry about the force and uses of oath in the Attic courtroom. When we later study Heb 6:12-18 in more detail we must ask to what degree the author of Hebrews is concerned with a similar force for God's commissive oath and

26 If there is no fear of the wrath of the gods, then the obligation in the oath must lie solely in the integrity of the oath-taker (cf. Cicero *Officiis* III 108) or, as in Plato (*Laws* XII), oaths in the courtroom should be eliminated.

27 Dem 55 *Callicles* 35; cf. 48 *Olympiodorus* 9-11; Antiphon 5 *Herodes* 11; 6 *Choreutes* 25; Andocides *Mysteries* 31.

to what degree he is concerned with God's character as oath-taker and the solemn nature of the oath God took.

The influence of the forensic use of oath upon our author has been neglected by interpreters, even though the rhetorical flair of his work has been fully acknowledged.²⁸ What has occupied more attention are certain parallels between Philo's discourse about God's oath and Heb 6:12-18.

Philo and the Forensic Oath

In four extended passages in his extant corpus, Philo deals with human (*Spec* II 2-10; *Dec* 84-93; cf. *Spec* I 235; IV 32,40) and divine oaths (*LA* III 203-207; *Sac* 89-96; cf. *Abr* 273). The two discourses on human oaths are occasioned by discussions of the third commandment of the Decalogue (μη λαμβάνειν ὄνομα Θεοῦ ἐπὶ ματαίῳ) and are, in many ways, parallel. The discourses on God's oath are also similar to one another though occurring in connection with two different passages of scripture, Exod 13:11-13 ("...as he swore to your fathers...") and Gen 22:16,17 ("By myself I have sworn...").

Philo and Hebrews. What is striking in these passages when compared with Hebrews 6:12-18 is Philo's consistent use of a definition of oath similar in content to Heb 6:16 and his use of the forensic oath (as with Hebrews 6) in connection with God's oath. In each of the four discourses, Philo repeats the same definition of oath: "a testimony of God concerning a disputed matter" (μαρτυρία θεοῦ περὶ πράγματος ἀμφισβητουμένου, *Spec* II 10; *Dec* 86; *LA* III 205; *Sac* 91; cf. *Plant* 82; *Som* I 12). While somewhat different, it is comparable to the description of the human oath in Hebrews 6:16: "men swear by a greater [cf. Philo's "testimony of God"] and the oath brings a final end to every dispute among men" (πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας; cf. Philo's περὶ πράγματος ἀμφισβητουμένου). Moreover, Philo and Hebrews are ostensibly alike in using the human assertive oath to talk about God's oath.

Such similarities have not gone unnoticed. Johannes Schneider and Helmut Koester explain the similarities as originating in the use of a common exegetical tradition on Gen 22:16.²⁹ Presupposed here is that a scholastic tradition nurtured through the Alexandrian synagogue, which Philo sometimes

28 Spicq (II 161) mentions the references to oath in the Aristotelian tradition but does not integrate them into his interpretation.

29 Johannes Schneider, "ὄμνῶ" *TDNT* 5 (1967) 184, n. 73; Helmut Koester, "Die Auslegung der Abraham-Verheissung in Hebräer 6," in *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Ueberlieferungen*, ed. R. Rendtorff and K. Koch (Neukirchener Verlag, 1961) 99-102. Few today would go as far as Spicq in reconstructing a direct contact of the author of Hebrews with the Philonic corpus.

explicitly reflects (e.g. *Mos* I 4; *Spec* I 8; III 178), was also available to the author of Hebrews.³⁰ In characteristic contrast, Ronald Williamson denies any sort of direct or mediated contact between Philo and Hebrews. Similarities in comments on Gen 22:16 are but logical conclusions reached independently from similar conceptions of oath. Fundamentally, the two outlooks are different: Philo at heart embarrassed by God's oath, Hebrews willingly embracing the divine oath.³¹

There seems to us to be a third explanation for the similarities between Philo and Hebrews. If it is true that Hebrews has been influenced by the forensic use of oath and if there is evidence that Philo has as well, then their mutual conceptions of oath may at some level be the result of a similar rhetorical training in the use of forensic oath. This third explanation may, in fact, be accommodated to either of the previous two explanations. The weak point in Williamson's discussion is his leaving in the air how it is that Hebrews and Philo come to have such similar views. Our explanation would at least provide Williamson with one possible 'independent' yet shared source for the similar understandings of oath. Regarding the suggestions of Schneider and Koester, this third explanation would raise the possibility that a rhetorical training in oath had made an impact on the exegetical tradition itself through exegetes prior to Philo who had been exposed to such a training. A variation of this would be that questions had been raised about God's swearing "by Himself" previous to Philo and Hebrews (as indeed they were), but that Philo and the author of Hebrews picked up on the issue and in certain similar ways because of a shared 'schooling' in rhetoric. This possibility is strengthened when it is considered that Tertullian, one trained and proficient in forensic rhetoric, happens to take note and respond to Marcion's criticisms of God's oath-taking. Tertullian's decision to respond to Marcion on this issue may very well have arisen through a personal familiarity with the conception and actual use of oaths.³² The potential usefulness of this third explanation thus makes an inquiry into Philo's rhetorical training necessary.

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- 30 For a recent report on the research done on the question of the influence of such exegetical traditions on Philo, see Richard A. Culpepper, *The Johannine School* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975) 197-214.
- 31 Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ALGHJ 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) 205-10. Williamson goes beyond the evidence in his contention that "Philo, at heart, did not believe that God swore any oaths at all" (p. 206).
- 32 Tertullian's response to the implicit charge of Marcion that the oath was inappropriate for God (*deo indignum*) was the counter that nothing was unworthy of God which elicited belief *Adv Marc* II 26). See Robert D. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: University Press, 1971) 6. Marcion's own criticisms may go back to traditional questions raised about God's oath-taking "by Himself" in Genesis 22; for a discussion on the existence and tradition of sceptical questions on scripture, see A.B. Hulén, *Porphyry's Work Against the Christians: An Interpretation* (Mennonite Press, 1933 41, n. 91.

Philo, Rhetoric and Oath. Appeal to aspects of the Hellenistic culture to explain certain features of Philo's use of oath is not new. Isaak Heinemann, for example, has shown that Philo's discourse about human oaths (*Spec* II 1-10; *Dec* 84-93) has many parallels in Greek sources.³³ In particular, the decrial of excessive oath-taking (πολυορκία *Spec* II 8; *Dec* 93) was also a concern of Hellenistic moralists (cf. Plut *Qu. Rom.* 271 C; *De Recta* 46A). This concern was voiced as well in Jewish sources both under Hellenistic influence (*Sir* 23:9-11) and under sectarian sway (e.g. Essenes in *Jos War* II 135).

What leads us to suspect that Philo's own sensitivities about oath may have been in part shaped through rhetorical interests in the forensic oath is first all the definition he gives for oath throughout. Heinemann supposes that certain Stoic writers 'inspired' Philo's formulation (e.g. Cicero *Officiis* III 104) but it seems more likely that definitions more generally of the forensic oath influenced Philo. His own definition may well go back to the formulation of Rhadamanthys in Plato's *Laws* XII 948C which we have already quoted (περὶ ἐκάστων τῶν ἀμφισβητούμενων).³⁴ If so, the initial context for the "matters in dispute" was the forensic one (cf. Philo *Spec* I 235; *Dec* 92), however the definition was used and adapted in its literary context.

In addition, particular expressions in his oath discourses parallel expressions and categories used by rhetoricians and orators. In *Spec* IV 40, Philo speaks of the proof available through oaths as ἄτεχνον πίστιν. This forensic categorical description of oath goes back, at least, to Aristotle who discussed oath as one of the five natural proofs (τῶν ἀτέχνων πίστεων) that could be used in the courtroom (*Rhet* I 15, 1375a-1377b). Quintilian could say that by his day the division of proofs into natural and artificial (ἄτεχνοι, ἐντεχνοι) had met with almost universal approval (*Inst* V 1:1).³⁵ Philo is clearly aware of this rhetorical distinction (cf. *Plant* 173).

Moreover, Philo uses that very collocation of the forensic oath which we have argued may well be in the mind of the author of Hebrews in his use of oi

33 Isaak Heinemann, "Philos Lehre vom Eid," in *Judaica* (Berlin: Verlag von Bruno Cassire, 1912) 112-113; and *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus Verlag, 1932) 83-85.

34 In the same passage, Plato argues that since opinions about the gods have changed since Rhadamanthys then so also must the practices concerning the oath. Philo also draws attention to the fact that the oath is undercut if the person who swears is an atheist (*Dec* 91). Whether there is direct contact in this instance, it is in other passages probable that Philo has in fact read Plato's *Laws*; see John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London: Duckworth, 1977) 1940.

35 For an account of the evidence for the use of oath as "proof" see Josef Martin, *Antike Rhetorik: Technik und Methode* (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1974) 100; Friedrich Solmsen, "The Aristotelian Tradition in Ancient Rhetoric," *American Journal of Philology* 62 (1941) 186-87.

καταφυγόντες in 6:18. In *Sac* 93 and *Spec* IV 40, Philo speaks of those who “flee to the oath”. Finally, mention may be made of F.H. Colson’s suggestion (in the Loeb edition) that the form of oath used in *Spec* IV 34 is taken from Demosthenes 21 *Meidias* 119.

Philo’s education included rhetorical training. He mentions this explicitly in some of the listings of the subject matter of the ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία.³⁶ He reflects knowledge of various orators (e.g. Demosthenes in *Flac* 131) and practice in rhetorical composition (cf. *Agr* 18; *Som* I 205 *Cher* 105). Not only might his appreciation of the forensic oath have been shaped by practice with the model orators (whose use in the ‘classroom’ in Egypt is attested by numerous papyri),³⁷ but his instincts could also have been honed through the actual composition and delivering of speeches. E.J. Barnes, in fact, has conjectured that certain themes in *Plant* 157-59 reflect certain topics of school-boy declamations.³⁸ The particular declamations of *controversia* were in fact fertile ground for training in legal issues and the use of the forensic oath.³⁹ Philo’s familiarity with judicial concerns and his ability to express himself, manifested

36 See Thomas Conley, “General Education in Philo of Alexandria,” *Center for Hermeneutical Studies* (Protocol of 15th Colloquy, March 1975). Unavailable to me were the two papers of the Lyon Philo Colloquy (1967) by Monique Alexandre, “La Culture profane chez Philon,” and by Alain Michel, “Quelques aspects de la Rhétorique chez Philon”

37 37Cf. Robert Smith, *The Art of Rhetoric in Alexandria* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974) 122-24.

38 E.J. Barnes, “Petronius, Philo and Stoic Rhetoric,” *Latomus* 32 (1973) 796-97.

39 The use of oaths in declamations is seen in the story of Albucius whose own experience in an actual legal battle, however, was something quite different (from Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 7:7,8; quoted in George Kennedy’s *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* (Princeton: University Press 1972) 3:

“Swear, but I shall dictate the oath: swear by the ashes of your father which are unburied; swear by the memory of your father; swear... and all the rest of the commonplace.” When he had finished Lucius Arruntius [patron for the opponent] arose and said, “We accept the condition; my client will swear.” “I wasn’t offering a condition,” protested Albucius, “I was employing a figure.” Arruntius persevered. The board of judges was eager to put the finishing touches on a case all but concluded. Albucius shrieked, “If you get away with this it is the end of figures of speech!” Arruntius replied, “Let it be the end; we can live without them.” Arruntius won and Albucius never accepted another brief. He told his friends, “Why should I speak in the forum when more people hear me at home than hear anyone in the forum? I speak when I want to; I speak as long as I like; I speak for which-ever side I wish.”

The implicit criticism raised here against declamations was directed primarily against those who continued such practices as adults. Its proper place was in a school boy’s curriculum as a way of teaching an approach to practical problems, though it was also valuable training for those who would be advocates in the court; see further, Patrick E. Parks, *The Roman Rhetorical Schools as a Preparation for the Courts under the Early Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1945) 61-67.

above all in his role as ambassador to Gaius, were no doubt nurtured through some form of rhetorical training.⁴⁰

The way "oath" is understood and handled in Philo may, therefore, reflect not merely contemporary exegetical tradition nor merely certain practices within a Jewish court system in Egypt, but even more Philo's personal debt to a rhetorical training which had taught him how to think about and use oath. It may be even such a shared rhetorical training that best accounts for the willingness of Philo and the author of Hebrews to use the forensic assertive oath to talk about God's commissive oath.

It must be said however, that this suggestion does not preclude the influence of the forensic oath on exegetical traditions themselves, to which Philo was heir. Philo, in fact, formulates the conception of oath on the part of other interpreters of God's oath (*LA* III 205; *Sac* 91) in the very terms he uses elsewhere for the forensic oath (*Spec* II 9,10; *Dec* 86). The particular exegetical problem reflected here though is completely absent in Hebrews, for the occasion of Philo's comments about the divine oath in *LA* III 203-207 and *Sac* 89-96 is certain criticisms: Why does God swear? His words are as reliable and assuring as his oaths (*Sac* 93; *LA* III 204). Why does He swear by Himself? He needs no witness; and besides how can He testify to Himself (*Sac* 91,92; *LA* III 205).

Why Philo talks about God's oath is thus quite different from Hebrews, for Philo is providing a defense of God's oath-taking. To the charge that such an activity is inappropriate (ἀνοίκειον), Philo responds that God is here accommodating himself to the weakness of created man and is with the oath exhorting him (παρηγορήσει *Sac* 94,96). To the charge that it is absurd for God to swear by Himself, Philo answers by asking in return 'who else could bear witness to God', except God himself who alone knows Himself (*LA* III 205-207). The discourse on God's oath in Heb 6:12-18 is, by contrast, free of such apologetic purposes. Nevertheless, the 'context' of oath in Philo may be a useful one to consider in the interpretation of Heb 6:12-18 for herein are presented forces and mechanisms in oath-taking, presupposed and used in Hebrews.

40 Cf. Smith, *Rhetoric*, pp. 50-56; and H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956) 534, ns. 20, 21. The influence of particular Jewish jurisprudence with regard to oaths upon Philo is unclear; cf. Erwin Goodenough, *The Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929) 10-22, 41-44.

Exhortation and God's Oath by Himself

Whereas in Philo and in Tertullian the extended discourses on God's oath are in response to criticisms raised against the idea of God swearing, the discourses on oath in Hebrews give no indication of such an occasion. The tone is not apologetic; the disposition is not defensive. This 'uncritical' feature of the text has itself caused one recent interpreter to issue remarks, not unlike those made by the critics in Philo: Hebr 6,16f setzt er ganz unbefangen und unkritisch die menschliche Eidespraxis als gegeben voraus... Hebr 7,20-22 geht noch weiter und unterscheidet zwischen einfachem und eidlichem Gotteswort. Das Problematische dieser Gedanken liegt... in jene Unterscheidung zwischen einfachem und eidlichem, weniger und mehr verlässlichem Gotteswort...⁴¹

Clearly the author of Hebrews sees God's oath-taking not as a problem but as an advantage to his readers. This attitude should not be judged as some 'lack of sophistication' but rather, as we have argued, should be evaluated, at least in part, in light of ancient rhetorical recommendations concerning the magnification of oath. Thus, not only should the forces of oath be considered in reading Hebrews 6 but so also certain approaches to maximize the oath: highlighting its solemnity (cf. Heb 6:11-16) and spotlighting the character of the oath-taker (cf. Heb 6:16-20). The rhetorical tradition points the way to an alternative to the apologetic fixation on oath.

What our author is doing with his commissive oaths may also be traced by determining which components of the promising situation are prominent and which felicities of promising the author may be trying to insure. Abraham's patient trust is initially mentioned (6:12) but the call to imitate the faithful heir shifts perceptibly to a concern for the Promisor. Wherein the emphasis lies and how this relates to the magnification of the oath are questions that may be addressed simultaneously.

Finally there is the question of how all this is hortatory. As we have seen, an important element in the exhortation of 4:14-7:28 is the concern to fix the reader's attention on Jesus' priesthood and its great benefits. The discourse on God's oath in 6:13-18 might seem like an interlude or even a departure from this hortatory 'consideration'. In fact, however, the author's subsequent use of oath in synchrisis in 7:20-22 indicates how 6:13-18 is related to Jesus' priesthood and why this discourse on oath precedes the elevation of Jesus in chapter seven.

41 Hans-Georg Link, "Schwören," *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament* (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, 1971) 2:1109.

“He could swear by no one greater”: God's Oath and Patient Abraham (6:11-16)

In the first half of his discourse on God's oath (Heb 6:11-16), our author retells the effect of God's oath on Abraham (vv. 13-15), an effect he further illustrates in the perlocutionary force of the forensic oath (v. 16). At the same time (and in an abbreviated fashion) the author remarks on the solemnity of the oath taken by God.

:11 We desire that each of you maintain until the end the same enthusiasms regarding the completion of the hope. :12 Don't be lazy, but imitate those who through patient faith inherit the promises. :13 For God in making a promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself: :14 “I will indeed bless you and increase you” :15 And so through patience he obtained the promise. :16 For men swear by a greater and the oath brings a final settlement to every human dispute.

God's Assuring Oath. The immediate concern of the author that motivates his discourse on God's oath is stated in verse 11. The interpretation of verse 11, however, has been less than uniform because of difficulties faced in translating πληροφορία. The issue turns on whether to understand the collocation, πληροφορία τῆς ἐλπίδος, as referring to the “assurance” the readers should have in their hope or to the “completion” of the hope which the readers should be convicted about. If it is the former then the phrase is no more than a tautology

of σπουδῆν... ἄρχι τέλους and synonymous with “patient faith” in the next verse.⁴² If it is the latter then the phrase is the object of σπουδῆν and is another way of asking the reader to trust God to keep His promises.

Features of the context in 6:9-20 suggest the second translation. In the first place, the theological expressions in this section entail a strong concern for God's dependability. Not only is this true in the discourse on oath (vv. 13-18) but it is also at work in verse 10. Here the readers are to depend on God's final justice in rewarding their love for one another.⁴³ The same pattern

42 Favored by Grässer, *Glaube*, p. 115, whose work characteristically fails to discriminate between words with closely related senses. The lexicography of πληροφορία in the NT is not decisive for its sense in Heb 6:11 “assurance” I Thes 1:5; “fullness” Col 2:2; Heb 10:22.

43 Appeals to God's justice frequently signaled a concern for God's dependability in the future, whether in final reward/recompense (2 Thes 1: 6; 2 Tim 4:8; Rom 3:5) or in His offer of forgiveness (1 John 1:9; cf. 2:29; 3:7); in the latter, the concern is made explicit, πιστός καὶ δίκαιος.

of dependability also lies in the preceding section of warning in which the agricultural metaphor illustrates the dependable telic response of God within his creation (vv. 7,8).

Of more importance is the parallelism of verses 11 and 12. The “steadfast enthusiasm” (σπουδὴν... ἄρχι τέλους) parallels the “patient faith” (διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας); the “completion of hope” (πληροφορία τῆς ἐλπίδος) parallels the “inheritance of the promises” (τῶν... κληρονομούτων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας). This parallelism is not surprising.⁴⁴ It would be expected that those who are to be imitated (μιμηταί) reflect the very characteristics the author seeks in his readers. In this case, the heirs who received the promises (v. 12) are examples of those who maintained confidence in God's dependability to complete their hopes (v. 11). To imitate the heirs is thus to be confident that God will complete the hope.⁴⁵

The use of *πληροφορία* in 6:11 is the closest our author comes to using the ‘fulfillment’ language more familiar in modern discussions of God's promises.⁴⁶ While parallel in sense, the collocation is, however, with “hope” and not with “promise”.⁴⁷ The use of inheritance language with “promises” is more characteristic of our author (9:15-17; 11:9; cf. 1:6; 4:1; 12:16,17).

The hortatory aim set forth in 6:11 is the encouragement of the reader to an unflinching conviction that the hope will be realized. The inducements to this end are more than the author's own expectations of his readers (*πεπεΐσμεθα... ἐπιθυμοῦμεν* vv. 9,11) and the confidence they should have from their own prior community service (v. 10). The immediate inducement is the experience of other heirs to the promise (v. 12; cf. 13:7) and the patient faith required of them.

This call to imitate is not completely lost in the subsequent verses, for in verse 15 the obtaining of promise by patient Abraham is noted, picking up the thread of the admonition of verse 12. Yet, there is with verse 13 a perceptible change of focus in the author's thematic concern, from the exemplary pattern of the heirs to the deliberate, purposeful action of God. What is condensed and needs some elaboration is the relationship of the heirs' patience to God's activity of oath-taking, and how, in turn, the latter is connected to the hortatory aim in verse 11. The first clue to the author's mixture in verses 12-15 is his description of the forensic oath in verse 16b. As we have already suggested,

44 Cf. the similar parallel admonitory utterances in 10:35,36.

45 Interpreted in this way, Heb 6:11, 12 may be read as the positive counterpart to the negative warning voiced in 3:6-4:13; this will be illustrated later in our present chapter.

46 cf. C.F.D. Moule, “Fulfillment-Words in the New Testament: Use and Abuse,” *NTS* 14 (1967-68) 293-320, who does not, however, consider *πληροφορία* from Heb 6:11 within his discussion.

47 Cf. the somewhat similar expression in Philo *Abr* 268: *πλήρωμα χρηστῶν ἐλπίδων*.

the use of the assertive oath here is not a logical mistake but is rather intended as a statement about the force of oath, in particular the power of the oath to bring firm assurance (εἰς βεβαίωσιν vv. 16b). Even those in Philo perturbed by God's swearing realized the assuring force of God's oath as well as the forensic oath, though their point was to stress the like assuring force of God's very words without oath (Sac 91-93).

When therefore the author speaks of God's oath in verse 13, his interest, in part, is in the perlocutionary force of God's swearing, i.e. God's intention to assure Abraham by means of oath-taking. The question remains though why the author returns to Abraham's patience in verse 15 when the direction of the discourse has seemingly shifted to the perspective of God's intentions in oath-taking, especially as this is developed in verses 16-18.

One solution in view of the perlocutionary intent of oath is to understand the author as implying that Abraham was able to wait with faithful patience for the promise because God had assured him of His firm intention by taking an oath. The sequence of the events so constructed by verses 13-14 would be compatible with this assessment, for first God takes the commissive oath (vv 13,14) and thus through patience Abraham finally obtains the promise (v. 15).

The "promise" (singular) which the author most likely has in mind is the return of Isaac to Abraham after he was given up as dead. As observed in our previous Chapter, it is the promise of "increase", the promise of Isaac, that according to Hebrews 11 Sarah and Abraham did finally receive, though not until they had both experienced threats to the promise. The like attention to patience in 6:15, as well as the author's change within the commissive utterance itself (v. 14), making the promised "increase" more directly applicable to Abraham (πληθυνῶ σε instead of πληθυνῶ τὸ σπέρμα σου) make it likely that Isaac is the referent of the "promise".

The problem this raises, however, is that the sequence is just the reverse of the order in the Genesis text.⁴⁸ The commissive utterance in Gen 22:16,17 comes after the sacrifice of Isaac, not before, i.e. the oath in the Genesis story does not function to aid Abraham in endurance. As it stands, it may even be read as a reward: "I have sworn by myself, since you have kept this word and did not spare your beloved son because of me, I will indeed bless you and increase your seed" (Gen 22:16, 17). Hebrews conspicuously omits the middle clause. Philo, however, does read the oath as occasioned by God's

48 Delitzsch (I 309) is one of the few commentators who sees the difficulty. It leads him to reject the identification of the "promise" with the 'return of Isaac' and to rather see the referent as the final blessing realized after death (cf. also Strathmann, p. 106).

reciprocity for Abraham's admirable trust in God's promising, which we observed in Chapter 1.

A switch in the sequence of events from their Old Testament order would not be out of character for our author. In at least two other places, he has reversed the order of events from their canonical sequence. We have already spoken at length about the two incidents from Jacob's life (Heb 11:21), in reverse order from Genesis; but one may also see in 7:6 a switch in the order of "tithing" and "blessing" from the sequence in Genesis.

In a way, the resulting paradigm of Abraham as the patient heir, brief though it be offers a more human portrait of Abraham than the heroic proportions captured in his depiction in chapter eleven. In chapter eleven, there is no oath; Abraham and Sarah trust God's capability as a faithful Promiser. In chapter six, God is not so hidden. He makes Himself available to confirm His commissive utterance, to give cause for patience. How the readers of Hebrews might draw from this pattern an inducement to remain convicted about "the completion of their hope" is not yet clear. There is also the matter of God's oath by Himself (6:13b, 16a).

By a Greater. In verse 13, the author draws attention to the form of God's oath: "since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself". The initial clause has usually been read as an explanatory, parenthetical remark in which the author anticipates and responds to a possible difficulty in the readers' comprehension of an oath God takes "by Himself". Such an interpretation frequently takes into account the possible influence of traditional exegesis of Gen 22:16-17 in the synagogue.⁴⁹ We have seen in Philo that God's oath *by himself* had raised not a few eyebrows (*LA* III 205; *Sac* 91, 92). Philo felt the need to reaffirm the fittingness of such an oath (ὄρκῳ θεοπροπειῇ *LA* III 203): "you see that God does not swear by another, for there is no one better than He, but 'by Himself' who is best of all".

A decision about why our author has made this initial comment cannot be made apart from an assessment of what he is doing with the same idea in his description of oath in verse 16: "For men swear by a greater and the oath brings a definitive settlement to every human dispute." While the second half of the description states what an oath can do, the first half (the standard of oath-taking) tells why. What the comment about the form of the oath thus adds

49 The alteration in the Targums of Gen 22:16 and Exod 32:13 from "by myself" (בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי) cf. (דְּקִימְתָא בְּמִימְרֵךְ) to "by my Word I have sworn" (Tg. Onqelos בְּמִימְרֵי קִיּוּמִית cf. בְּמִימְרֵךְ) and "in the name of his Word I have sworn" (Tg. Neof. בְּשֵׁם מְמַרְיָה קִיּוּמִית) may reflect some attempts among Aramaic speaking exegetes in the synagogue to deal with difficulties in God swearing "by Himself".

is the solemn quality of oath. Oath-taking is not to be taken lightly. Taken as a whole the utterance of verse 16 highlights the solemn, obligating nature of oath-taking.

Interestingly, the definition of oath functions in the very same way in Philo's discourse on human oaths. It is at the very points where he is stressing the obligatory character of oaths, that Philo gives his definition: "the oath is the testimony of God to disputed matters" (*Spec* II 9, 10; *Dec* 85, 86). Knowing that the oath is taken under the auspices of God, one should feel the seriousness of the undertaking.

What Philo and the author of Hebrews are doing is similar to what the advocate was trained to do in the courtroom to maximize his client's voluntary oath. To magistrate and jury the rhetor would stress his client's sober knowledge of the solemnity of the oath which would 'certainly' dissuade him from abusing such a verbal activity. This careful approach to oath, dictated by oath's appeal to a greater, was not of course confined to the courtroom. Parties to any sort of oath agreement might take time to reflect on the seriousness of swearing 'by the gods' (cf. Xen *Anabasis* II 5:7).

Read in this way, what Heb 6:16 suggests about verse 13 is that the author is not merely offering a parenthetical explanatory comment, but is rather maximizing the obligatory nature of God's oath-taking in order to highlight the degree of God's assurance to Abraham. God undertook the greatest oath possible, the oath "by Himself". This is to imply, however, that other oaths were possible. And indeed in the Greek world a variety of oaths were available suitable for differing occasions and, to a degree, the prevailing morality. The greater the oath, the greater the obligation and the potential threatening prospects.⁵⁰ It is a question, however, whether the author of Hebrews considered this a possibility for God.

Rabbinic tradition had no such qualms. God could swear by a variety of things, by the life of men, by the life of the Messiah (cf. Hennes *Vis* II 2:8 ὄμοσεν κύριος κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ), by the life of angels, even by the Temple door (from Str-B III 691). In midrashim on Exod 32:13, God's oath by Himself had become a sign of the eternity of what had been sworn. If He had sworn by heaven and earth, then with their removal so also would His oath have come to an end; but, since He has sworn by Himself, so His oath will endure forever (*b. Ber.* 32a; *Exod. Rab.* 44:8; cf. Kasher III (1957) 160).

The logic of our author's utterance in 6:13 presupposes such a variety of oath-takings, if only as a foil for his hortatory purposes. It is not that God

50 See Homer, *Iliad* XV 35-40; Antiphon 5 *Herodes* 11; Plut *Dion* 982e; *QU. Graec.* 296A; *De Is.* 382A; also Hirzel, *Eid.*, pp. 7-9, 16-18.

could not have sworn *by anything else* but rather that he could not have sworn *by anything greater*. He took the greatest oath. Our appeal to Rabbinic interpretation does though raise one final question: does God's oath by Himself imply for the author the eternity of what is sworn, in addition to the solemnity and obligation of the undertaking?

What had led to the association of God's oath "by Himself" with the perdurable nature of the oath was the particular form of God's oath-taking. In the Old Testament, God takes an oath with the words "as I live" (אֲנִי חַי; ζῶ ἐγώ).⁵¹ This implied that the duration of the oath was a function of the eternity of One who had sworn. In *Exod. Rab.* 44:8, this form of oath-taking is applied to the oath made to Abraham, even though the actual words ("as I live") are not part of the Genesis text: "The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Abraham, 'Even as I live and endure forever and to all eternity, so will my oath endure forever and to all eternity'".

What is striking is that the two sections in the Pentateuch, the only two, in which God swears "as I live" (viz. Num 14:28; Deut 32:40) appear also in Hebrews and these within contexts of Hebrews in which God is described as a "living God":

- | | |
|--|---|
| a) Num 14:28 As I live, says the Lord... | Heb 3:11 they shall not enter... |
| :29 Your bodies will fall... | :12.. to fall from the living God |
| :30 You shall not enter | :17 whose bodies fell... |
| | :18 they shall not enter |
| b) Deut 32:35 In the day of vengeance,
I will repay | Heb 10:30a Vengeance is mine,
I will repay |
| :36 the Lord judges His people | :30b the Lord judges His people |
| :40 I will swear with my right
hand and I will say,
as I live forever. | :31 It is a fearful thing to
fall into the hands of the
living God. |

It is altogether likely that our author described God as the "living God" in these two sections because the Old Testament texts which he had in immediate

51 Only in two passages in the Pentateuch does God swear "as I live" and both of these are apparently alluded to in Hebrews-Num 14 and Deut 32. The phrase is used of God's oath in some passages in the Prophets: Ezek 17:19; 18:3; 20:3,31,33; 33:11; Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24; 26:18. As a rule the oaths in which God has sworn by His life are threatening. For human oaths the phrase "the Lord lives" (ζῆ κύριος) is common: Judg 8:19; Ruth 3:13; 1 Sam 14:39; 2 Sam 2:27; 1 Kgs 1:29; 2 Kgs 2:2; 2 Chr 18:13. Further see Hans Joachim Kraus, "Der lebendige Gott," *EvT* 27 (1967) 172-79, and J. Schneider, "ἄρκος," *TDNT* 5 (1967) 459.

view spoke of God's oath "as I live".⁵² Not only then would the description, "living God", be an allusion to God's oath "as I live", but it would also be a cipher for the firm, perduring commitment of God to His word of judgment.⁵³ The author's use of "living God" within the textual horizons of Num 14:28-30 and Deut 32:35-40 thus increases the probability that he also considered such a standard of oath-taking at work in the case of Abraham and consequently considered God's eternity to be an element in the firm assurance offered to Abraham through the oath.

In summary, in 6:13-16 our author depicts God as promoting Abraham's patience, as he awaited the completion of his hope, by the taking of an oath. The author draws special attention to the form of God's oath, "by Himself", because it magnifies the firm assurance which was made available to Abraham. If our author has in mind as well the eternity of the One who has sworn, then one might expect him to eventually speak of God's immutable intentions in oath-taking.

"He cannot lie": God as Oath-Taker and Witness (6:16-20)

In the second half of his discourse on God's oath (Heb 6:16-20), our author returns to his concern for the solemnity of the oath giving more attention to God's role as the witness/guarantor to the oath (v. 17). Then speaking of God's dual role in the oath-taking process, the author maximizes the character of the oath-taker/witness (v. 18a) expressing the theology in a combination of ideas rooted in the Old Testament and discussed in Jewish exegesis. Finally, he connects God's oath-taking with the readers' claim to the inheritance, the hope (vv. 18b-20).

:16 For men swear by a greater and the oath brings a final settlement to every human dispute. :17 So, when God decided to demonstrate all the more the immutability of His intentions to the heirs of the promise He became a witness to the oath, :18 in order that through two immutable things in which it

52 The use of "living God" in Heb 9:14 ("from dead works to serve a living God") arises from an adaptation of early Christian missionary preaching to Gentiles (e.g. 1 Thes 1:9; Acts 14:15) which has roots in OT and Jewish polemic against idols. See W. Stenger, "Die Gottesbezeichnung 'lebendiger Gott' im Neuen Testament," *TTZ* 87 (1978) 64 and Bertil Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (ASNU 21; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1955) 202-28.

53 *Tg. Ps. -J.* Deut 32:40 makes this understanding explicit: "As I exist, I will not abolish my oath forever."

is impossible that God can lie we who have fled to God's oath might have the strongest encouragement to keep claim on the hope in store for us, :19 which hope we have, like an anchor for the soul, safe and secure and which has entered into 'behind the curtain' :20 where Jesus has entered in as a scout on our behalf having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

God as Surety. By taking a commissive oath, the human promiser is normally attempting to assure the promisee (perlocutionary force). In taking the oath, the human promiser is making public his intentions, obligating himself to a course of action and enjoining a greater as witness to his intentions (illocutionary force).

In Heb 6:12-16, our author has been concerned with what God has attempted *by* taking the oath. In the case of Abraham, His perlocutionary intent was to assure Abraham in order that he might wait with patience for the completion of his promise. In 6:17, the author expresses in part what God does *in* taking a commissive oath, viz. making known His immutable intentions. It is at this point that a clear distinction exists between the human and divine commissive oath. No felicitous human oath can claim immutability in intentions, only the resolve to perform some future activity and the intent to remain firm to the convictions. God's oath, however, announces immutable intentions.⁵⁴

Though he mentions it in his utterance the author of Hebrews is not primarily concerned in verse 17 with God's taking of the oath. He rather focuses on another feature of the oath-taking process in which, he says, God gave *the more* indication of His unchanging intentions:

54 This distinction between the divine and human commissive oath may be further illustrated in two quotations, one concerning the limitation in human promising, the other concerning the durability of divine promising:

How can I justify the dictatorship which I claim to exercise over my future action, in the name of my present state? At the moment of my commitment, I either (1) arbitrarily assume a constancy in my feelings, which it is not really in my power to establish, or (2) I accept in advance that I shall have to carry out, at a given moment, an action which will in no way reflect my state of mind when I do carry it out.

Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (London: A. & C. Black, 1949) 50

God has remembered His promises both new and old and has shown deliverance. The Mighty One has not forgotten the promises which He made to us... And now from this day forth it shall be known that whatsoever God has said to man that He will do, He will do it even though man dies.

Ps-Philo *Bib. Ant.* 32:12, 13

ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ. Translations of this expression have not made clear what aspect of the oath-taking process is being referred to: "He interposed" RSV, "He conveyed" Jer, "He guaranteed" NEB. Part of the difficulty lies in the available lexical evidence. No other texts have yet been brought to the passage which have this same collocation.⁵⁵

The best parallel is found in a section from Philo in which, though "oath" is not collocated with μεσιτεύω it is distributed in the context and presupposed in the immediate utterance. The discussion is concerning deposits (Spec IV 30-40). At such a private transaction, Philo says, "the unseen God μεσιτεύει, who is naturally called upon as witness by both parties" (31). In the relative clause, ὃν εἰκὸς ὑπ' ἀμφοῖν μάρτυρα καλεῖσθαι, Philo indicates that oaths were being taken by both parties ("calling God as witness"). Subsequently he says, in the same discussion, that the repudiation of a deposit is a nullification of "oaths" (32).

When μεσιτεύω is understood as "to act as a μεσίτης", two more texts become available for comparison with Heb 6:17.⁵⁶ In Josephus *Ant* IV 133, a group of Hebrew young men, in order to assure some Midianite women of their intentions, "took oaths concerning these things, making God μεσίτην of the things they promised". Finally, a sixth century writer Simplicius says in his commentary on Epictetus I Enchiridion: "The oath calls God to be a witness; it offers Him as both μεσίτην and guarantor (ἐγγυητήν) to what one says."⁵⁷

These three texts indicate rather clearly that the aspect of oath-taking in focus in μεσιτεύω/μεσίτης is God's role as witness to the oath. When therefore the author of Hebrews says that God ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ he is referring to God's decision to become the witness (μεσίτης) to the oath. Our author is thus returning to the idea of God swearing by a greater (v. 13) except now from the perspective of the witness to the oath rather than the oath-taker. God's witness to the oath involves His truthfulness (cf. v. 18) but within the field of oath-taking, a μεσίτης is more than a μάρτυς.⁵⁸ In this role, God not only observes but in a sense is thought to guard and guarantee the oath. His guardianship in human oaths did not mean an overriding of the faithlessness of oath-takers;

55 Cf. Albrecht Oepke, "μεσίτης" *TDNT* 4 (1967) 600 and Spicq, *Lexicographie*, 2:549-52.

56 Spicq (p. 550) brings attention to another text in addition, Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 23:8 Ὁ μὲν οὖν πρῶτος αἰθὴρ καλεῖται μεσίτης τῶν ὀρκίων (from Bude edition, edited by Felix Buffière).

57 Comments on *Ench* 33:5 Ὁρκον παραίτησαι, εἰ μὲν οἶον τε, εἰς ἅπαν εἰ δε μή, ἐκ τῶν ἐνόητων, "Refuse, if you can, to take an oath at all, but if that is impossible, refuse as far as circumstances allow." (translation, Oldfather, Loeb, 2:517).

58 Hirzel (*Eid*, pp. 27, 39) emphasizes the thin line between God being witness and God being guarantor.

but the potential threat on oath-takers for failures was a protection of the trust, and might be termed divine guardianship.

With God, the standard of oath-taking as witness to God, oath-taker, the conclusion is not that God was a threat to God. Obviously, the concept of human oath-taking has to be adjusted when God is both oath-taker and standard of oath-taking. In the case of Heb 6:17, the denotation of *μείστης* must shift slightly in the direction of "witness": God as witness to oath knows God's (the oath-taker's) immutable intentions in His commissive utterance. Such testimony, however, does function as guarantee and assurance to the promise.⁵⁹ What one thus winds up with is two assurances.

Lying and Repenting. In verse 18, the author mentions explicitly that there are *two* things which should give encouragement to the readers. With little variation, the prevailing explanation has been that these two things are God's promise and God's oath.⁶⁰ We have argued, however, based upon an understanding of *ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκω*, that the author has drawn^[SEP] attention to God's double role in oath-taking, as oath-taker and witness to oath, and that now, in verse 18, the author has this same double aspect^[SEP] in mind. Accordingly, as the reader depends upon God's oath (*οἱ καταφρονότες*) he may depend upon God's truthfulness and constancy to His commissive oath^[SEP] and in His testimony as witness/guardian to the oath.

The author's choice of this particular combination of characteristics of God (His unchangeability and His truthfulness, v. 18) for the purpose of maximizing the oath-taking may very well have been influenced by Jewish midrashic attention to Num 23:19 and perhaps also 1 Sam 15:29. In both passages, the same combination of theological attributes ("not repenting" and "not lying") is found as in Heb 6:18 except in reverse order: "God is not man that He should lie (*ויכזב*) nor the son of man that He should change His mind (*ויתנחם*). Has He spoken and will He not do it (*ולא יעשה*)? Has He spoken and will He not fulfill it (*ולא יקמנה*)?" (Num 23:19). "The Glory of Israel will not deceive (*לא ישקר*) or change His mind (*ינחם*) for He is not a man that He should change His mind (*להנחם*)" (1 Sam 15:29).

What suggests their possible influence on our author's formulation is the fact that Num 23:19 and 1 Sam 15:29 were applied in Jewish midrash to

59 Close to our interpretation is Oepke, "*μείστης*," p. 620: "In giving the promise, God is as it were one of the parties. But with His oath and as its Guarantor, He puts Himself on neutral ground and pledges the fulfillment of the promise."

60 For testimony to this, as well as the few exceptions, see Bleek III 264-65 and Otfried Hofius, "Die Unabänderlichkeit des göttlichen Heilsratschlusses," *ZNW* 64 (1973) 135-36.

God's oath to the patriarchs. In Num. Rab. 22:20 and Tanch. Num. blq 13, both midrash on Num 23:19, it is pointed out that God does not give up on his friend Abraham, for "He cannot turn back on the oath to the first patriarchs," and "It is impossible for Him to lie in the oath which He made with the for forefathers".⁶¹ Similar is the comment in connection with 1 Sam 15:29 in *Midr. Ps.* 13: 1: "Surely in the covenant made between you and the Patriarchs, you who are the strength of Israel, did not lie" (cf. Rom 15:8; 3:4; Tit 1:2).

God might not lie, but could He be trusted not to change His mind? The second half of Num 23:19 affirmed that He did not repent, yet Jewish exegetes were aware of many passages in the Hebrew scripture in which God did repent. One solution that emerged was to read part of Num 23:19 as affirming God could repent. To do this *השעי אליו רמא אוהיה* was read as a statement rather than a question: "He has spoken and He will not do it." The passage was then taken as an explanation for God's repentance of the destruction with which he sometimes threatened Israel (Num. Rab. 20:20; 23:8; Gen. Rab. 53:4).⁶²

Another possible solution was to interpret God's oath by Himself to the patriarchs as overriding any momentary 'promise' of God in His wrath. So in *b. Ber* 32a, in commenting on the

passage in Exod 32:10-14 in which Moses persuades God to repent of His threat of destruction, what causes God to relent is the eternity of His oath by Himself. Because He is the living eternal God He will not go back on His oath to the Fathers (*Ts. Ps. J.* Num 23:19; cf. Rom 11:29).⁶³

61 I am in debt to Hofius ("Unabänderlichkeit," pp. 142-43) for bringing to my attention the citations from *Tanhuma Numbers*.

62 In a similar way, Karl Barth reads the first repentance in Jer 18: 1-10 (God going back on His threats) as His true and proper repentance (*Church Dogmatics* II 1 § 31:2 "The Constancy and Omnipotence of God" pp. 497-98). For the way other interpreters have handled the problem, see Lester Kuyper, "The Suffering and the Repentance of God," *SJT* 22 (1969) 257-77.

63 In addition, unlike the human promiser, He is around to keep His promises:

I. "Speak (Emor) unto the Priests the sons of Aaron" (21:1): R. Tanhum son of R. Hannilai opened his discourse with the text, "The words of (imroth) the Lord are pure words—amaroth" (Ps. 12:7). Does this mean that only 'The words of the Lord are pure words' and the words of mortals are not pure words? It is the way of the world that if a mortal king enters a province and all the citizens of that province praise him, then if their praise is pleasant to him he tells them: "Tomorrow I shall build for you public baths and bath-houses, to-morrow I shall construct a canal for you." Then he falls asleep and does not rise. Where then is he and where are his words? The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is not so, but "The Lord God is the true God" (Jer. 10:10). Why is He true? Because, said R. Abin, "He is the living God, and the everlasting King" (ib.).

—*Lev. Rab.* 26:1

The author of Hebrews may have heard discussions of 'God's oath to the patriarchs' in which God's commitment to perform His oath was affirmed by appeal to the twin statements of Num 23:19—"He does not lie", "He does not repent"—for in Heb 6:18 the concern is with the same two characteristics of God. At the same time, his discourse in 6:17-18 is not incompatible with the recognition the God does repent of some commissive utterances. The author's point again (as we have interpreted it) is not that it is the promise and oath which are immutable but that it is His commissive oath and His testimony which are unchanging.

Whatever the source for his theological expression, the author is, on the one hand, like a rhetor maximizing God's oath by highlighting His truthfulness in taking the oath. His intentions were sincere in His commissive oath.⁶⁴ As a divine oath-taker, He will not change His mind. He remains committed to His oath. On the other hand, as a witness to oath, He is a truthful witness who, as described by Philo in his discussion of God as μεσίτης to deposits (Spec IV 32) "sees all and hears all, intentions and pretensions."⁶⁵ Because He is the living God His witness and guardianship is constant and eternal.

Safe Inheritance. Those who flee to this most solemn oath of God have the strongest encouragement (v. 18b). Our author's identification of their παράκλησις as ισχυρά may have in view the frequent gradations of oaths in which those with the most binding obligations were μέγιστος and ισχυρότατος (e.g. Antiphon 5 *Herodes* 11). God's decision to obligate Himself under the greatest oath is, thus, meant to offer great assurance and encouragement.

This assurance is concerning the "immutability of God's intention" (v. 17). The author's choice of τὸ ἀμετάθετον here is not awkward; the word is easily collocated with "resolve" (e.g. γνώμης ἀμετάθετο *Jos Apion* II 189).

64 We may speak of a promiser as undependable, incapable or unavailable but what sense does it make to say that he is lying? One may lie about the past or present, but does one lie about the future? Can one lie in promising or in a commissive oath? Such terminology was in fact used in the Greek world (e.g. truthful divine promiser 3 Mac 2:10; Tit 1:2; Apost Const 26:3; human promiser Polybius III 3:8; *Jos Ant* I 321) but what is its meaning? The answer must be that in saying that someone is untruthful in promising what is meant is that the person has been *insincere*, that he has given the impression to the promisee that he plans to keep the promise whereas in fact he had no such intentions at all. The same thing could be said of the commissive oath. It is interesting, however, that Chrysippus retained the true/false distinction only for the assertive oath (ἀληθορκεῖν ψευδορκεῖν) whereas he applied εὐορκεῖν/ἐπιτορκεῖν to the promissory oath (in Stobaeus 28:18; III, 621).

65 In Heb 4:12,13, this theology (God who sees and hears all) along with the theology of God as judge, is applied and adapted to the 'word' of God; see G.W. Trompf, "The Conception of God in Hebrews 4:12-13," *ST* 25 (1971) 128.

Our author uses its cognate antonyms elsewhere (μετατιθεμένης... μετάθεσις 7:12; μετάθεσιν 12:27). Yet, the question must be raised why he chose ἀμετάθετον instead of ἀμεταμέλητος especially if we are correct in hearing echoes of Num 23:19 ("not repenting, not lying") in Heb 6:18 (cf. Rom 11:29).

One solution is to follow through the context the author's identification of the recipients of oath as "heirs of the promise". In 6: 17, those to whom God makes the assurance of His immutable intention are the κληρονόμοι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. This identification may be the immediate clue for the author's choice of ἀμετάθετον for the standard term in inheritance discussions for indicating that a will had been "unchanged" at the testator's death was ἀμετάθετον.⁶⁶ In 6: 17, the heirs of promise may be assured that God's 'will' will remain unchanged. Such a concern with the notion and language of inheritance would not, of course, be foreign to our author (cf. 9:16, 17; 4:1).

The inheritance which has been promised (cf. 9:15) is identified in 6:18 as the reader's hope. Since God has made the promised inheritance firm by the taking of a solemn oath, the reader has strong encouragement to keep his claim as heir on the προκειμένης ἐλπίδος. It is not unusual for hope to be described as something "stored in heaven" (Col 1:5) or the inheritance "guarded in heaven" (1 Pet 1:4). In Heb 6:18, hope is the promised reward/deposit which God must be trusted to return.⁶⁷

At the present time, hope like a deposit is safe and secure (ἀσφαλῆ βεβαίαν v. 19).⁶⁸ Not only is the hope firm because of God's commissive oath,

66 Thus, in registrations of property involving inheritances, the clause is frequent διαθήκη ἐφ' ἣ ἀμεταθέτω ἐτελεύτω—"which will was unchanged at his death" (e.g. *POxy* III 482:35; I 75:15; *PHarris* 74:24, 25); see further Austin Harmon, "Egyptian Property Returns," *Yale Classical Studies* 4 (1934) 149 and Hans Kreller, *Erbrechtliche Untersuchungen Auf Grund der Graeco-Aegyptischen Papyrusurkunden* (Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 919) 389, n. 2. As it evolved, ἀμεταμέλητος also became used with 'testaments' but only with the sixth century A.D.; C. Spicq, AMETAMEΛΗΤΟΣ dans Rom., XI 29," *RB* 67 (1960) 214.

67 The author's use of προκειμένης in 6:18 is parallel to his use of προκειμένης in 12:2 ("for the joy in store for him"). The dominant connotation is of a reward or prize which awaits the one who endures (examples in Bleek III 269). Since in Hebrews this object is something which God keeps safe, we may also understand here the idea of a deposit. The word πρόκειμαι is not, however, the usual word for 'deposited' objects, rather παρακατάκειμαι and κείμαι; where it does occur in discussions of deposit (e.g. *PStrassb* I 54; *PTeb* III 2:957; *POxy* XIV 1713) it may be translated "in the amount prescribed [i.e. already in the document]" but it is also possible "in the amount deposited" (μέτρον τῷ προκειμένῳ; τὸ προκειμενον πληθος; τοῦ προκειμένου παντός κεφαλαίου). For the idea of hope as guarded in heaven for the believer, see Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Hermania; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 17, 18.

68 In 2 Mac 3:22, the prayer is offered that God guard the deposits in the Temple μετὰ πάσης ἀσφαλείας. The very phrase in Hebrews ἀσφαλῆ καὶ βεβαίαν (common enough in various contexts) is used twice in *Cebes* 31 in a context in which wicked bankers who receive deposits are being used as an illustration. The phrase is not explicitly related to the illustration at hand, but there may have been some association in the author's mind.

it is secure because it has entered into the holiest sanctuary (εἰς ἑσώτερον τοῦ καταπετλασματος), the place in which the “deposit” is most secure, guarded by God’s presence.⁶⁹

Whether the author has continued the idea of ‘an inheritance kept in trust by God’ throughout the context of 6:17-19 (as we have pressed briefly in these preceding paragraphs), it is nevertheless clear that he has tried to impress his readers with the security of the inheritance promised to them. The security lies first and foremost in God’s solemn oath by Himself. In his discourse on God’s oath in 6:13 18, the author thus offers his readers inducements for remaining convicted that God will complete the hope (v. 11) and keep His promise. What then is the hope and oath of direct concern to the reader? Is it the commissive oath in Gen 22:16 or another?

“Priest Forever”: The Heir’s Hope

In 7:20-22, the author mentions a third oath sworn by God, this one addressed to Jesus. Read within chapter seven alone, this brief discourse may be understood narrowly as indicating but one more a vantage of Jesus’ priesthood over the Levitical, viz. the added benefit of God’s oath. However, taking into account what the author has done with oath elsewhere in his letter, this discourse may be read with a wider significance, involving in particular the author’s magnification of oath in chapter six.

:20 And to the degree it was not without oath—for they became priests without oath :21 but he with oath through the One who spoke to him “The Lord swore and will not repent: ‘You, priest forever’” :22—to the same degree there is now the surety of an even better covenant, Jesus.

Oath in Synchrisis. The hortatory comparisons dropped with 5:10 are resumed in chapter seven, but whereas in 5:1-10 the elevation of Jesus was implicit, in chapter seven it is explicit: “See how great is this one” (7: 4). The greatness is not carried forth in a comparison of equals, but rather with a clear regard for the weakness and even obsolescence of the inferior. By so doing, the benefits of Jesus’ priesthood are all the more distinguished.

69 For deposits in Temples, *UPZ* I 2; 5; 6; *PGrenf* I 14; and further, Raymond Bogaert, *Banques et Banquiers dans les Cités Grecques* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1968) 279-304 Franciszek Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrées des Cités Grecques* (Paris: Editions E. de Boccard, 1962) #90, pp. 153-59; and Klaus Kastner, *Die zivilrechtliche Verwahrung des gräko-ägyptischen Obligationenrechts im Lichte der Papyri (παραθήκη)* (Dissertation Friedrich-Alexander-Universität zu Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1962) 19-20.

The initial syncrisis in 7:4-10, comparing the flow of tithes and blessings between Abraham, Levi and Melchizedek, is preceded by an explanation for the identification of Melchizedek's priesthood with Jesus' priesthood: Melchizedek's resemblance (*ἁφωμοιωμένος*) to the son of God in being priest forever (7:1-3). As it happens this concern with the eternity of the priesthood forms within the chapter the most significant point of comparison/contrast with the Levitical priesthood.

This appears already within the syncrisis in 7:4-10 formulated from the story of Melchizedek's encounter with Abraham in Gen 14:17-20. In Heb 7:8, the author compares the transitory priesthoods of the Levites with the permanence of Melchizedek's. This becomes an even greater concern in 7:11-28 as the author's ideas become more constrained by the commissive utterance of Ps 199:4, *σὺ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*.

Within this context, the author in verses 20-22 draws attention to the absence and presence of oath in connection with the two priesthoods. The explicit benefit of the sworn priesthood is that Jesus is guarantor of a better covenant. Jesus' relationship to "covenant" will be explored in our final Chapter, but the question may be asked here why an oath should make it "better" and in what sense it is better.

It would appear that at this point we must again take to heart the author's serious regard for the significance of God's solemn oath, God's oath by Himself, "As I live". The author does not describe God's oath in 7:20-22 explicitly as taken "by Himself" but there are reasons to suspect that the author worked from these assumptions in what he does with the oath in chapter seven.

That God's own eternity guards the oath is indicated first of all in the divine epithet in the utterance of Ps 109:4: "He will not repent". How this theology could be related to God's oath has already been discussed in connection with 6:18. Of more interest is 7:15,16: "It becomes all the more clear if resembling Melchizedek another priest arises who becomes priest not by the law of earth-bound command, but by the power of an indestructible life." The question is whether *κατὰ δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου* (v. 16) refers to Jesus' eternal priesthood or to God's oath "by Himself".

The first interpretation has been supported by reference to the author's stress on the eternity of the priest.⁷⁰ It is a question, however, whether at this point the author is referring to the operational spheres of the two priesthoods or to the authoritarian sources which give the two priesthoods legitimacy. If it

70 "The point of the exaltation is, for the author, that Christ is now removed from the sphere of *σάρξ* and has the 'indestructible' life of the heavenly sphere;" James Thompson, "The Midrash in Hebrews VII," *NT* 19 (1977) 218.

is the latter, then verse 16 is parallel to verse 28; “the law appointed men high priests...the word of oath... a son forever”. From this perspective, in verse 16 the author would already be anticipating the oath of Psalms 109:4. Thus a paraphrase of Heb 7:16 could be this: “Jesus became priest not by the legitimizing power of the law but by an oath of the living God.”

Whether the author in fact intended this meaning in verse 16, it remains altogether appropriate to hear God's own eternality at the heart of the oath's power in 7:20-22. It is not simply that Jesus' eternal priesthood *per se* makes the covenant “better”. It is rather that God's solemn oath empowers the priesthood. Since the commitment is firm (οὐ μεταμεληθήσεται) the “covenant” which results from the acknowledged priesthood is “better” because it is eternal (so in 13:20 διαθήκης αἰωνίου).

Priesthood and Hope. While addressed to Jesus, the author makes it clear that God's commissive oath has significance for the reader, and this in two respects: by it Jesus has become the guarantor of a *better covenant* (v. 22) and through it a *better hope* has been introduced by which access to God is possible (v. 19). What our author is doing with Jesus and the better covenant, “enacted upon better promises” 8:6, will be discussed in our final Chapter. What interests us now is the author's connection of God's oath to Jesus *with* the reader's “better hope” (v. 19). Is it God's oath to Jesus which the author in 6:18 intended his readers to rely on?

Commentators are divided on the answer, some identifying the oath of significance to the Christian reader as the oath to Abraham, others the oath to Jesus.⁷¹ The author indeed does not make explicit on which commissive oath the reader is to fully rely. The immediate oath in the context is Gen 22:16, but Ps 109:4 cannot be excluded because it is explicitly connected with the reader's hope in Heb 7:18-19.

Part of both the difficulty and the solution lies in properly identifying the referents of ἐλπίς in 6:11, 18; 7:19 In 6:11, “the completion of the hope”, ἐλπίς; refers to the promised Sabbath Rest. This may be seen not only in the echoes in verbal similarity of the hortatory utterance in 4:11 (Σπουδάσωμεν /ἐνδείκνυσθαι σπουδῆν) but even more in the clear contrasting examples offered in the disobedience and disbelief of the Wilderness Generation and, on the other hand, the exemplary patience of such heirs as Abraham. The direction the author takes this hope in 6:11 is to encourage the readers to trust the

71 See Otfried Hofius, *Der Vorhan vor dem Thron Gottes* (WUNT 14; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972 85 and Klappert, *Eschatologie*, pp. 31-33.

Promisor to complete the promise, whereas in 3:6-4:13 he stresses their need to believe and keep looking forward to such a promise.

In 6:18, “the hope in store for us”, ἐλπίς again refers to the Sabbath Rest. The connection here of “hope” with inheritance is much in line with the inheritance connotation in 4:1 “the promise bequeathed”. Furthermore, his identification of Jesus as “scout on our behalf” (6:20) recalls the negative experience of the Wilderness Generation in which Ἰησοῦς (Jesus/ Joshua) did not give them Rest (4:8).

In 7:19, ἐλπίς appears to be used differently. In the context, God’s commissive oath empowers an eternal, permanent priesthood whose benefits include a continuous access to God (7:23-25). This oath is “the introduction of a better hope by which we draw near to God”. Here “hope” is connected with Jesus’ priesthood forever according to the order of Melchizedek. As such, “hope” is more than the Rest, something promised already to the Israelites; there is something new and better about it. The better hope is related to the better covenant. “Hope” is thus here not so much something which must be awaited, as something which is available both now *and* in the future.

Such an horizon for “hope” is not excluded, however, even in 6:18- 20, for while “hope” retains an identification with the Rest, it is something which the readers have claim to now (v. 18) and something which has been placed in the realm (v. 19) occupied and mediated now by the priesthood of Jesus (v. 20). Therefore, viewed from the use of ἐλπίς, the oath to Jesus may indeed have been in the author’s mind as he urged his readers to rely on God’s solemn oath.

This does not necessitate though an exclusion of the ‘oath to Abraham’ from the sphere of benefits to the reader. The ‘either/or’ choice frequently posed by commentators is really a false dilemma. It is true that the author narrates Abraham’s reception of a promise *not* directed to the reader, viz. the return of Isaac. But there is the other part of the commissive oath to Abraham—εἰ μὴν εὐλογήσω—and this promise according to our author Abraham did not receive (cf. 11:39,40). It is this, the promised “blessing” sworn by God, that the reader must also await, the city of God (11:13-16) which is the Rest. The readers’ expectation differs, however, from Abraham’s because of the second commissive oath, God’s solemn oath to Jesus. A better hope is introduced for the reader through this second oath not only because there is now a visible leader to the promised realm but also because there is access now of a better kind to God’s presence. The reader is thus called upon to be enthusiastic that he will obtain the final promised Rest because God has sworn by the most solemn oath that He will indeed bless and that He will eternally acknowledge the perfect access to the Rest, the priesthood of Jesus.

Summary

The author sees nothing contradictory nor illogical in both speaking of God's faithfulness to promise and discussing God's oath-taking in the same letter. There is no inconsistency in his mind for his intentions are not apologetic; they are hortatory. And because he desires to encourage his readers to endurance, he finds in God's solemn oath an opportunity to reaffirm God's unchanging intention to keep His promises to His people; not only to reaffirm, but also, by magnifying God's oath-taking and oath-witnessing, to assure his readers that their promised inheritance is safe and secure. They may be assured because God has sworn the eternal priesthood to Jesus. Neither decay nor death nor the passage of time will alter Jesus' priesthood because He who has sworn has sworn 'by Himself' i.e. by His own eternity. This is but one more indication within 4:14-7:28 that the readers have a 'great high priest'. As it happens, this great high priesthood, guaranteed by God's solemn oath, is God's way of being faithful to the oath He swore to Abraham, "I will indeed bless you". How the author appears to understand the relationship of Jesus to the promises made to Abraham, to the reader and even to Jesus himself is the central concern of our next Chapter.

CHAPTER 4

JESUS AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO PROMISE

It remains one of the curious features of Hebrews that despite the author's accumulation and use of commissive language he never is explicit about how Jesus relates to "promise". There are hints (8:6; 11:39, 40) but nothing as explicit as Paul's declarations: "Christ became the servant of circumcision on behalf of the truth of God, to keep the promises to the fathers" (Rom 15:8); "Whatever the promises of God, in him YES" (2 Cor 1:20).

Our author's restraint in making any explicit connections has not deterred exegetes from offering their own explanations. Frequently, these have identified Jesus *as* the "promise": Christus selbst ist das eschatologische Verheissungswort Gottes (Hofius, *Vorhang*, p. 85); Jesus' exaltation is a final and definitive form of the promise (Hughes, *Henneneutics*, p. 53); Christus selbst als letztes Wort Gottes den Charakter der Verheissung hat Koester, "Abraham," p. 107).

This identification of Jesus as the promise does, however, raise a problem. If we say that Jesus is the "promise-word of God" then we must realize that the ordinary use of "promise" has gone on vacation. A person "may have promise", i.e. have a potential for some activity, but we do not usually speak of people as "promises". We may say that someone has been promised to someone (e.g. for a certain job), but rarely is someone a "promise", i.e. a commissive utterance. If such things are said, they are metaphorical if not poetic.

It is thus a question how one, or if one, can speak of Jesus and promise in Hebrews without transgressing the boundaries of the phenomenon of promising. In pursuing an answer to this question, we will first examine those texts in Hebrews which are concerned with a depiction of Jesus' humanity (especially

12:2; 5:7,8) to see whether in these contexts there is any interest in Jesus himself as a promisee. This will, in turn, lead us to the corollary of Jesus' humanity in Hebrews, his session at God's right hand as high priest. Here we will be interested in the nature of Jesus' relationship to God's promise of a "new covenant"; those texts which mention his mediatorship of covenant will be of central concern (7: 20-22; 8:6-13; 9:15). Next, the author's expression in 10:23b that "God is faithful to promise" will be explored. The context of this *theological* consideration (10:19-25) is concerned with the benefits of Jesus' priesthood as well as the necessity of Christian fellowship. How the *homologia* of Jesus (10:23a) is related to God's dependability as Promiser (10:23b) and to the readers' mutual responsibilities for one another (10:24-25) will be a crucial question at this juncture. Finally, the question must be asked how, if at all, Jesus is related to God's final promise of Rest. The author's play on names in 4:8 (Jesus/Joshua) occurring within his warning about the promised Rest (3:6-4:13) will lead us to consider whether our author has understood Jesus as the new Joshua who leads his brothers and sisters into the promised Realm.

Joy, Suffering and Death: Jesus as Exemplary Promisee

Jesus is nowhere explicitly described in Hebrews as "one who has promises", in contrast to Abraham (7:6). He is, however, depicted in the context of 2:5-18 as one who trusts God: "I will place my trust in Him" (2:13). As it occurs, this confession is one of three sayings of Jesus (vv. 12,13a, 13b; Ps 21:23; Isa 8:17, 18) which demonstrate for the author Jesus' expressed willingness to identify himself with humanity (cf. 10:7, 9). Throughout this section (2:5-18) the author is stressing Jesus' solidarity with the sufferings of his brethren (vv. 9, 10, 14, 15) but with the confession of 2:13, "I will place my trust in Him", the author moves to an even more fundamental level of Jesus' solidarity with his brethren: the need to believe and trust in God. Since in Hebrews, as read from chapter eleven, faith is trust that God will keep His promises, it becomes a question whether the author has understood Jesus in 2:13 to have identified with his brethren even in this respect, viz. in their need to trust God as a faithful Promisor.

The author does not specify here that Jesus' faith was in God's faithfulness as Promiser, yet his reference to the "seed of Abraham" in 2:16 could very well be an indication of such a point of view: οὐ γὰρ δὴπου ἀγγέλων

ἐπιλαμβάνεται ἀλλὰ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ ἐπιλαμβάνεται.¹ The author's choice of "seed of Abraham" can be assessed in various ways.² Read, though, from the perspective of his depiction of Abraham elsewhere in the letter, one must reckon with the distinct possibility that the phrase denotes one who is heir to God's promise or, perhaps better, one who believes in God's promises (cf. Rom 4:16; Gal 3:16,19; Acts 7:5).³ As faithful promisee, Abraham in chapter eleven offers to the believer a pattern of God's ways with His promisees. In taking on the "seed of Abraham", Jesus would thus be identifying with the believer not only in the experience of death but also in the experience of being heir to God's promise.

To which promise Jesus might be heir is not clear from this context. This section, however, does suggest two themes which would have to be considered in connection with Jesus

as promisee. First, the constant concern for "death" here would need to be brought within the orbit of Jesus' experience as promisee. Jesus' involvement as the "seed of Abraham" appears to be related by the context to his suffering of death. Secondly, one would need to consider the possible connection of the "crowning with glory and honor" (2:9) with God's promise to Jesus. "Glory" is the realm into which the sons are led (2:10) and it must be asked whether Jesus' own reception of glory and honor is understood within Hebrews as a reception of God's promise. Both of these concerns—Jesus' death and his glory—fortunately do reappear in two other contexts in Hebrews and these in contexts in which the author is concerned with Jesus' humanity. What the author is doing with these depictions of Jesus in 12:2 and 5:7-10 and how these may be related to Jesus' trust in a faithful Promisor are questions which must now occupy our attention.

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- 1 The author's use ἐπιλαμβάνομαι is curious. More recent exegetes have read this present tense verb in thematic connection with Βοηθῆσαι, in 2:18, thus translating ἐπιλαμβάνομαι in its less used sense, "be concerned with, help". We, however, side with ancient exegetes in understanding the present tense (cf. 7:8) as within an exclamatory comment; so, "takes hold of." This utterance continues the thematic concern of the context for Jesus' identification with the 'blood and flesh' (2:14) of his brethren, in 2:16 with their peculiar role as promisees of God's promises. The author's choice of ἐπιλαμβάνομαι may have arisen as a continuation of the "grasping, taking hold of" images in μετέσχευ (2:14) and in ἔνοχοι (2:15).
 - 2 It has been taken as an indicator of the Jewish Christian profile of the congregation, as synonymous with 'believers', and as intended to be ambiguous. For the various possibilities, see Bleek, II 348-51.
 - 3 Kind Abrahams zu sein ist daher stets ein zweichender Grund für das Empfangen der Zuwendung Gottes; Klaus Berger, "Abraham II," *TRE* 1 (1977) 376.

Promised Joy: Hebrews 11:39-12:3. The only other passage in Hebrews in which Jesus is explicitly related to "faith" (excepting πιστός in 3:2) is the directive instruction in 12:1,2—"let us run with endurance our appointed race, looking to the one who *began and finished the faith*, Jesus, who for the joy in store for him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of God."

As translated, this passage gives evidence of a concern both for a faith of Jesus and for such a faith being in a "joy" promised by God. Jesus is seemingly being elevated as a model of faith for the reader who is called upon to endure; as Jesus endured by trusting God to keep His promise, so also the reader may be encouraged to be faithful in his race. This interpretation of 12:1, 2 is, however, disputed. What occasions the controversy is the translation of two phrases: τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν and ἀντὶ τῆς προκειμένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς.

The difficulty in the latter phrase turns on the sense of the preposition ἀντί. If it is translated by its frequent meaning of "instead of", then the author is depicting Jesus as forgoing some "joy" in order to endure the cross. This joy is often understood, in accordance with Phil 2:5-11, as Jesus' joy in his preincarnation "equality" with God.⁴ In this interpretation, 12:2 thus depicts three aspects of Jesus' chronology: leaving the joy of heaven, experiencing the cross, being exalted to God's right hand.

The matter, however, cannot be settled by some predetermined meaning of ἀντί, for the preposition can mean "because of" (e.g. Heb 12:16) as well as "instead of". The semantic decision, as always, is predicated on the context. The referent of "joy" is not a decisive factor either, for a post mortem joy is as likely as a pre-conception joy. For the believer, for example, "joy" can describe the post mortem experience of God's kingdom (cf. Jub 23:29; Matt 25:21; Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 4:13).⁵ That the "joy" in 12:2 may refer to Jesus' post mortem joy is a possibility, but as with the translation of ἀντί, it can only be determined by a closer reading of the context.

The difficulty in the first phrase of 12:2 (τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν) is apparent in comparing our translation above with the RSV: "the one who began and finished the faith" (above); "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (RSV). The question is whether to interpret πίστις as Jesus' *own* faith or rather *our* faith in Jesus. The choice cannot be made by simply

4 Other suggestions: forgoing the terrestrial joy of being Israel's King; forgoing Satan's offer in the desert. See Paul Andriessen, "Renonçant à la joie qui lui revenait," *NRT* 97 (1975) 434f.

5 For the arguments for ἀντί as "because of" and the joy as *post mortem*, see P.-E. Bonnard, "La traduction de Hébreux 12,2," *NRT* 97 (1975) 415-22.

staking-out a translation of the pair ἀρχηγός/τελειωτής. The translation is not made any easier by the fact that our author may have at this point coined a word, τελειωτής; there are, as of yet, no known lexical parallels. If one decides to translate τελειωτής; “finisher”, then the

translation for ἀρχηγός must be the *equivalent complement*. Translating ἀρχηγός then, “beginner” (as we have), one yet faces the problem of interpreting the meaning of faith: its reference (ours, his), its denotation (“trust”, “proof”), its connotation (race, contest).

Both of these phrases in 12:2, thus, call for a consideration of the immediate context. What the context both immediate (11:39-12:3) and larger (10:32-12:13) suggests is that in 12:2 Jesus is being presented as the supreme example of the faithful promisee.

First, the appeal to Jesus in 12:2 forms a climax to the list of heroes and heroines in chapter eleven. Through his interpretive recapitulations (11:13, 39-40) the author has portrayed the presbyters in chapter eleven as those who trusted God's faithfulness to promise, even while themselves not receiving what was promised. With Jesus next in line after such presbyters there is constraint to read Jesus as being the example *par excellence* of trust in God's faithfulness to promise. Such a thematic concern, consonant with chapter eleven, may be heard in 12:2 *if* and only if πίστις refers to Jesus' own trust in God and *if* χάρα connotes the promise of God which enabled Jesus to endure. The author's use of a particular *agon* motif in 12:1-2 suggests just such a line of interpretation.

The image from the *agon* adapted by the author in 12:1-2 is the training and performance of the *runner*. According to Victor Pfitzner, the motif of the runner was used by ancient writers when they wished in their writings to place particular emphasis on the *goal* of the *agon*.⁶ The struggle was not merely one of endurance; it was an endurance sustained by a hope for a reward.

Within these associations of the running motif, the “joy” of 12:2 takes on a particular significance. It becomes the promised reward of the ‘race’ Jesus has endured. Having despised the rigors of training and endured the struggle, Jesus has received the promise, sitting at the right hand of God. Certain language of 12:2, in fact, finds parallels in the language of the *agon*: προκειμένη can be used to designate the reward which is in store for the athlete; καταφρονέω may denote the athlete's disregard of the hardships of training.⁷ Even the appeal to an exemplary participant in the *agon* in 12:2a is not

6 Victor Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif* (NovTSup 16; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967) 31.

7 Cf. our chart in Chapter 2, p. 105, n. 55. προκειμένη can also designate the ‘contest assigned’ as in 12:1.

unlike the appeals in Stoic writers to the exemplary struggle of Hercules in his *agon* (cf. Dio 8:27,30; Epict III 22:57; 26:31; IV 10:10).

Concentration on the *agon* motif also provides a solution to the difficult phrase in 12:2 τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν Ἰησοῦν. In 2 Tim 4:7, Paul applies the images of the boxer and the runner to his own faithfulness: τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἠγωνίσμαι, τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα, τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα. His mention of “finishing the race” in connection with faith suggests at once the possibility that the author of Hebrews may have intended a connotation of πίστις in 12:2 consistent with the concern for “running” (τρέχωμεν) in 12:1—“Let us run with endurance... looking to the one who began and finished the race of faith, Jesus.” If this motif has been continued in 12:2a, then πίστις be rightly understood as Jesus' faith in God's promise.

The reward of the *agon* was not characteristically described among ancient writers as something “promised”. The author of Hebrews, however, has demonstrated earlier in his letter his inclination to bring promissory language within the sphere of the *agon*, in particular in 10:32-36. What the Christian will receive at the end of the *agon* is what God has obligated Himself to pay, viz. the promise (vv. 35, 36). In framing Jesus' experience in 12:2 within the *agon*, the author has portrayed Jesus in a way immediately empathetic with the readers' *agon*, even to the point of mentioning the goal which sustained Jesus' endurance. The author does not call the “joy” in store for Jesus a “promise” but his connection of “promise” with the readers' reward in 10:32-36 suggests this as a logical implication for 12:2.

A clue to the referent of this “joy” lies within the very structure of 12:2. As in 5:1-10 and 10:32-34, a chiasmus can be detected which here parallels “joy” with Jesus “sitting at God's right hand”. Since for our author Jesus' session is indicative of the finality and completeness of Jesus' *priesthood* (10: 11, 12), “joy”, it would seem, belongs together with Jesus' exercise of the *priesthood*. Such an association would not be unusual. In *TLevi* 18:14, for example, a new *priesthood* is the occasion for a joyous welcome: “Then shall Abraham and Isaac and Jacob exult (ἀγαλλιάσεται) and I will be glad (χαρήσομαι) and all the saints shall clothe themselves with joy”. Even within Hebrews, the anointing of the priest is described with the words of Ps 44:8 as one involving the “oil of gladness” (ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιάσεως Heb 1:9).

Attention to the *agon* motif of the runner in 12:1-2 thus provides contextual constraints for understanding πίστις as Jesus' own faith and χαρά as the goal of Jesus' race. The connection of 12:2 with the interpretive recapitulations of the presbyters, as well as with the use of promise within 10:32-36, suggests a depiction of Jesus' *own trust* in God's faithfulness to promise in 12:2. Since the “sitting at God's right hand” was promised to Jesus and since

Jesus' session is for the author an indication of his exercise of the priesthood, the inference which may be drawn is that the priesthood was in some sense promised to Jesus.

Death and the Eternality of Priesthood: Hebrews 5:5-10. In chapter seven, our author makes conspicuous use of Ps 109:4 as a commissive utterance: $\sigma\upsilon$ $\iota\epsilon\rho\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$ $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\nu\upsilon$ $\alpha\iota\omega\omicron\nu\alpha$. What the author does with the sworn utterance in this context is not, however, to depict its impact upon Jesus but rather to stress its significance for the reader: the reader is to rely on God's sworn acknowledgment to Jesus of the eternity of his priesthood (7:15-25; 6:17-20). *By contrast* the author's first quotation of Ps 109:4 in Heb 5:6 comes within a context (vv. 5-10) in which Jesus' humanity is in focus:

:5 Thus, even the Christ did not 'glorify' himself when he became high priest but it is the one who spoke to him "You are my Son, I have begotten you today" :6 as even in another place He says "You [will be] priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek":7 who in the days of his flesh offered pleas and humble entreaties with loud cry and tears to the one able to save him from death and having been heard in his humble submission to God :8 (although he was a son he learned obedience from what he suffered) and :9 having been perfected he became to all who obey him the source of eternal salvation :10 having been designated by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

For all the studied interest in Heb 5:7,8, its connection with the utterance from Ps 109:4 which precedes it has received relatively short shrift.⁸ It is an important question to us, however, whether our author in this section has at some interpretive level intended some connection between the commissive utterance in 5:6 and Jesus' $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\acute{\alpha}\beta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ in 5:7, whether there is in 5:7 a depiction of Jesus as a faithful promisee of God's promise of an eternal priesthood.

Part of the separation in exegesis of 5:6 from 5:7 has been the result of a recognition of chiasmus in 5:1-10. The two attributes of priesthood in

8 Riggenbach (p. xxix), interestingly enough, characterizes 5:5,6 as a "Verheissungswort der Schrift". For reviews of the research on 5:7-10, see Erich Grässer, "Der Hebräerbrief 1938-63" *ThRu* 30 (1964) 219-21; HansTheo Wrege, "Jesusgeschichte und Jünger-geschick", in *Der Ruf Jesus und die Antwort der Gemeinde*, ftsch. J. Jeremias, ed. C. Buchard and B. Schaller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970) 277-79; Neil Lightfoot, "The Saving of the Savior: Hebrews 5:7ff.," *EQ* 16 (1973) 166-73; Heinrich Zimmerman, *Das Bekenntnis der Hoffnung* (Cologne: Peter Hanstein, 1977) 60-69. We will not discuss the time frame presupposed for Ps 2:7 in Heb 5:6, but many interpreters have placed it within a pre-incarnational chronology.

5:1-4 are aligned with Jesus' priesthood in reverse order in 5:5-10. As we have mentioned, however, this literary structure does not present components totally parallel. The syncrisis is not one of equals, but a comparison designed to elevate Jesus' superior priesthood. His priesthood is that of a son (5:5, 8), a son though who must suffer in conformity with the seed of Abraham who also suffer (2:14-18).

There is a deliberate expansion in 5:5-10 beyond the 'attributions of priesthood' in 5:1-4. This expansion does not require a denial of the literary chiasmus, but rather calls for an openness for dominant thematic concerns of the author which may appear in this text.⁹ That concern which attracts our attention, and one which coincides with the syncrisis, is the author's 'modeling' of the priesthood. Jesus' priesthood is offered not simply as the effecting (one might say ontologically) of purification and forgiveness. The circumstances and events preceding priesthood provide a depiction of Jesus designed to be inspiring and paradigmatic to the reader. As with Jesus' endurance of the race in 12:2, Jesus' response to God's "call" in 5:7 is both a 'qualification' of priesthood as well as an heroic model for brothers who as heirs, as the seed of Abraham, must endure suffering and the maturing discipline required of sons.

This exemplary force in the depiction has been recognized by others. Most recently, Harold Attridge, through certain verbal parallels to 'prayers' in Philo, has argued that 5:7 functions as a paradigmatic supplement to the author's hortatory utterance to his readers to come boldly to God in prayer (cf. 4:16).¹⁰ This position, however, fails to take adequate account of Jesus' role vis-à-vis the priesthood. If 5:7 followed 4:16 Attridge's interpretation would be more feasible. As it functions in 5:7, the language of prayer is certainly more than a description of the "ideal prayer of a pious man". As the repeated connections with the language of the Psalms would indicate, Heb 5:7 speaks of one praying in the midst of struggle.¹¹ Within Hebrews, the strong emotional and earnest depiction of the prayer must be viewed primarily as the author's way of portraying attendant circumstances of Jesus' testing. It is not therefore that such prayer *per se* is being recommended to the reader, as

9 One option has been to see vv. 7-10 as an expansion of vv. 4-6, i.e. vv. 7-10 indicating that Jesus did not seek the vocation; e.g. Joachim Jeremias, "Hebräer, 5,7-10," *ZNW* 44 (1952-53) 107-111.

10 Harold Attridge, "Heard Because of His Reverence (Heb 5:7)," *JBL* 98 (1979) 90-93. It may be noted here that we translate ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας "from out of his submission" in line with the concern in 4:12-13 that God's word causes a response at the very core of the human will which God himself sees and judges.

11 Cf. Ps 21:3,6,25; 30:23; 38:13; 68:4; 22:25; 114; see Zimmerman, *Bekennntnis*, p. 61.

it is that such prayer identifies Jesus with a testing and suffering to which the reader may relate (2:17, 18).

What is striking within Hebrews about Jesus' testing in 5:7 is its close similarity to Abraham's testing in 11:17-19. In this passage, the author depicts not the test of Abraham's love for his son but the test of Abraham's confidence in God's faithfulness to promise. The immediate similarity with 5:7 is the coincident issue of God's ability to raise the dead (11:19). In Abraham's case, this conviction about God's omnipotence is Abraham's response to the threat placed against God's promise of Isaac. In Heb 5:7 the question must be asked whether Jesus' plea for 'salvation from death' relates as well to a promise of God (is there a testing of Jesus' faith in God's faithfulness to promise) or whether the plea is simply the author's way of magnifying the humanity of Jesus, his struggle even with death.

The latter alternative is especially favored by those who understand *θάνατος* as "dying" and identify the event of 5:7 with the prayers in Gethsemane.¹² However, if close attention is given to the author's concern for God's promises, especially in his depiction of the faithful promisee Abraham in chapter eleven, then a testing in 5:7 of Jesus' own faith in God's promise cannot be dismissed. In such an interpretation, Jesus' participation in the seed of Abraham as heir of promise would extend even to the point of his being the threatened heir of promise. Certain features of 5:4-10 accumulate to give weight to this interpretation.

The first and most prominent feature is the author's use of Ps 109:4 in the preceding utterance of Heb 5:6—"you, priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek". By form, the force of the utterance is ambiguous. The missing copula is supplied in English translations by the present tense: "you *are* priest". The verb, however, could be either future—"you will be priest"—or present.¹³ The present has been usually preferred in Heb 5:6 because it has been assumed that it refers to Jesus' appointment to the priesthood *after* his days in the flesh. If, however, the perspective of Jesus' reception of the utterance: is pre-incarnational, then the future of εἶμι could be supplied (or even present). The force of Ps 109:4 would not be appointment then, as much as

12 E.g. Reuben Omak, "The Saving of the Savior," *Int* 12 (1958) 39-51: Jesus was "confronted with a realistic human situation which called for resistance of the most powerful urge to avoid suffering" (p. 47).

13 Cf. BDF § 128, p. 71. The Psalms text of Alexandrinus also lacks the copula; Kenneth Thomas assumes that the author is quoting from Alexandrinus; "The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews," *NTS* 11 (1964-65) 303, n. 5. It must be noted, however, that Sinaiticus, the bilingual Psalter R and the Psalms text in Hesychius' commentary do have the present tense verb (so also Rahlfs' edition of the Göttingen Septuagint). If our author's text had then his omission heightens the ambiguity of the utterance.

promissory acknowledgement. Spoken *before* his days in the flesh, the utterance would be both the sworn obligation of God as Promiser to keep without change a commitment to His son, as well as the assurance for Jesus as promisee which could sustain him in his struggle (12:2).

The parallelism of the chiasmus would not contradict this view. The prerequisite for receiving the priesthood is the call of God. Aaron's call happened to coincide with his appointment (5:4). The author's comparison with Jesus' priesthood certainly extends to the necessity of the call but it is questionable whether the author intended with 5:6 an identification of the 'call' in Ps 109:4 with the appointment. Rather, 'call' and 'designation' appear separated by the author's very intrusion of Jesus' humanity in 5:7, 8. The author seems to place a time of testing between Jesus' call to the priesthood and Jesus' full exercise of his priestly function. Such a 'calling' which would involve promise would not be peculiar in Hebrews. In 11:8 Abraham's "calling" (καλούμενος) is actually God's promise to him of an inheritance. In 9:15, the promisees in the first covenant are described as now those who through Jesus' death are called (οἱ κεκλημένοι) to the "promise" of an eternal inheritance. It would not be strange, therefore, if Jesus' own calling, in conformity with the calling of the seed of Abraham, involved a promise. A breaking of the comparisons would be occurring in 5:6 as we have already noted is the case with 5:1-3 and 5:7-10 (Jesus is not beset by weakness 5:3; 7:20).

The pattern in the depiction of Abraham, of God permitting threats to His own promises, may thus be detected in the depiction of Jesus in 5:6-8. What had been promised was an eternal priesthood. What faced Jesus as a human, though, was what had faced the Aaronic priesthood and had contributed to its ineffectiveness: death. The prospect of death was at odds with *the* characteristic feature of the priesthood God had sworn to Jesus: "you, priest *forever*".

Faced with this threat to God's promissory acknowledgement, Jesus responded with εὐλάβεια (5:7). Specifically this εὐλάβεια took the form of earnest prayer, a prayer concerned with God's oath to Jesus. In view of the eternal priesthood promised to him Jesus prayed to Him who was able to rescue him from the state of death, to the One who could preserve his eternal priesthood.

In this passage, εὐλάβεια is Jesus' submission to God's promise, forged amidst circumstances contradicting the promise. The author unabashedly portrays Jesus as a human limited in the knowledge of death and unable to rescue himself from being dead, yet one who remembered and trusted God's faithfulness to His oath. Here εὐλάβεια is being recommended as the proper attitude to be taken toward God's commissive word in the midst of threats. In 11:7; the author characterizes Noah's response to God's commissive instruction (a word contradicting what could be seen) as "submission to God" (εὐλαβηθεῖς).

Within Heb 12:25-29, the author urges the readers to display "submission" (εὐλάβεια) and engage in prayer in view of a God who keeps His word. In 5:6-8, the author portrays the model promisee who faced with the testing of his confidence in God's promises responded with obedient submission to God's will, affirming through earnest prayer his persistent conviction that God could bring him from the dead (cf. 13:20) and thus keep His promise to him of an eternal priesthood.

Summary. The author's recognized interest in Jesus' solidarity with humanity as well as his concern for God's faithfulness to promise combine to make altogether plausible an interpretation of 2:13; 12:2 and 5:6-7 in which Jesus emerges as a faithful promisee. The author's seeming reticence to come out and identify Jesus explicitly as "promisee" could be due to little more than the virtual absence of such an identification in Christian tradition and in scripture. What was available to him was Ps 109:4 and in it God's oath concerning an eternal priesthood. It was but a small step for our author to read the oath as a promissory acknowledgement to Jesus. This was made all the easier by the author's desire to exhort his readers to faithfulness by placing before their eyes the model of the human Jesus who took on the seed of Abraham.

Promises and Priestly Service: Jesus as Surety and Mediator of Covenant

One of the features of commissive language in Hebrews which initially attracted us to this investigation was the distribution of such language even in the central section of the letter, Hebrews 8-10, a section which with its particular interest in present benefits 'might' seem removed from concerns with "promises".¹⁴ Our interest in the present Chapter with Jesus' identity vis-à-vis God's activity as Promisor directs our attention again to this central section, but here no longer concerning Jesus' humanity and so his possible role as

14 This harks back to what we identified in our Introduction as the natural pigeon-holing of promises into the category of eschatology. Since the middle section of Hebrews with its utterances on type/antitype and its stress on the present is characteristically separated from 'eschatology', the presence of "promises" within this section might present itself as some thing of an anomaly. On such a crystallization of conceptual perspectives, see William G. Johnsson, "The Cultus of Hebrews in Twentieth-Century Scholarship," *ExT* 89 (1978) 104-108: "The book of Hebrews undeniably contains elements which emphasize the present aspects of salvation as well as those that look toward the Eschaton. Manifestly, the accent in the cult falls on the 'now'; it is then to be expected that almost all treatments of the cult tend to play down futurist eschatology" (p. 105).

promisee (as we have so far discussed) but rather concerning his exalted position and so his particular role with a Holy God who is Promiser.

Of special interest are three passages in the middle section of the letter which carry forward a similar refrain, though with significant variations:

7:20, 22 And to the degree that it was not without oath... to the same degree there has come now the surety of an even better covenant, Jesus.

8:4a,6If he were therefore on the earth, he would not be a priest... But as it is he has obtained a more excellent service, to the degree that he is mediator of an even better covenant, enacted upon better promises.

9:15And because of this he is mediator of a new covenant, in order that with a death occurring for the redemption of the transgressions in the first covenant those who have been called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

In these passages there is a common declaration about Jesus' relationship to God's covenant. The variations between the three passages stem in part from their particular connections with three different promises of God: the commissive oath to Jesus (7:20, 22), the 'promised' covenant (8:6) and the promised inheritance (9:15). Jesus is not explicitly described here as an agent, steward or even mediator of God's promises. What he mediates and takes responsibility for is rather the covenant. However, because the covenant is related in these three passages to promises, one is set back on the path of trying to describe just how Jesus may be related to God's promise-keeping.

In exploring the use of commissive language in these passages the question of their hortatory function is by no means excluded. As we have argued, syncrisis is not an alternative to exhortation, but can be a stylistic feature of exhortation. It is in fact our perspective that the middle section of Hebrews serves hortatory purposes.¹⁵ We take the final purpose of the syncrisis here to be an elevation of Jesus' priesthood and priestly service which the author hopes will awaken and revitalize sagging hopes. But how the priesthood could

15 Even the 'descriptions' of the first covenant (e.g. 9:1-10) as well as the repeated affirmations of its ineffectiveness and obsolescence serve in exhortation to heighten the primary consideration: Jesus is too great a priest to lose. The particular way the author goes about 'nailing the lid' on the first covenant may reflect not only inherited Jewish or Christian exegetical techniques (e.g. Michel, p. 296), but also some forensic training in the transition and supersession of *synthekai*. For the language of this semantic field, see Otto Schulthess, "Συνθήκη," *PW* suppl. 6 (1935) 1159-62.

be “the introduction of a better hope” (7:19) is a question at the heart of our concern with Jesus and promise.

While the ‘consideration’ of a “great high priest” certainly paces the hortatory syncrisis, the three passages we have listed are also part of this syncrisis and by their parallelism to one another serve, in a way similar to the recapitulations in chapter eleven, to implant in the reader’s mind another consideration: a better covenant has been inaugurated by Jesus. This in turn throws in relief the author’s quotation of Jer 38:31-34, concerned with the commissive utterances of the covenant, which is striking in any event because of its extraordinary length. Our quest then for the faithful Promiser via the priestly Jesus must take us through not only Jesus’ mediatorship of covenant but also the very promises of the covenant as uttered in Heb 8:8-12; 10:16, 17.

Permanent Surety for Us. In its immediate context, Heb 7:20-22 forms the second of three interrelated comparisons of the Levitical priesthood and Jesus’ priesthood (μὲν... δὲ 7:18, 19; μὲν... δὲ 7:20, 21; μὲν... δὲ 7:23, 24). All three comparisons utilize features of the commissive oath of Ps 109:4—its succession of the law; God’s eternity in oath-taking; Jesus’ permanent priesthood—for the purpose of highlighting the benefits of Jesus’ priesthood.¹⁶

In the first syncrisis, the principle of ‘superseding succession’ is used by the author to confirm the ineffectiveness of the priesthood instituted by law. According to this perspective, ‘seconds’ not only succeed but supersede and replace ‘firsts’ (cf. 8:7, 13). In the case of Ps 109:4, since its commissive utterance about priesthood comes temporally after the law (μετὰ τὸν νόμον Heb 7:28) it replaces the *preceding* commandment (προαγοῦσης ἐντολῆς 7:18) which had legitimized the Levitical priesthood. What emerges is not just ‘another priest’ (7:15) but a “better hope by which we draw near to God” (v. 19b).

The next syncrisis, the one which is of special interest to us, operates from the explicit recognition of the sworn force of the utterance of Ps 109:4. “They became priests without oath, he with oath by the one who said to him ‘The Lord swore and will not change his mind, You, priest forever’” (Heb 7:20b, 21). The author does not explain here in his own words why a sworn priesthood should be better than one without but a review of the declarations in the LXX concerning the Levitical priesthood indicates one possible reason

16 We take 7:16,17 as the basic consideration (‘Jesus, priest forever by God’s eternity’) which is highlighted through three comparisons with the “weaknesses” of the Levitical priesthood. Verse 25 forms the conclusion to this contained syncrisis. The two καὶ in vv. 20 and 23 do demarcate the three comparisons, but the syncrises are more interrelated than some have suggested (e.g. Spicq, SB, p. 127).

for such an isolation of the oath. In Exod 29:9, God declared that the Levitical priesthood was *forever*: ἔσται αὐτοῖς ἱερατεία ἐμοὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. Since our author insists that the two priesthoods are not simultaneous, the latter has superseded the former, the issue could arise of what faith to put in God's promise of the eternity of Jesus' priesthood, if He made the same promise of permanence about the Levitical but reneged on it! By insisting on the sworn character of Jesus' priesthood, our author could then, in logical response, be indicating the superior and appealing quality of Jesus' priesthood. In other words, when God swears His solemn oath, the oath "by Himself", as the author implies he has done to Jesus (καὶ οὐ μεταμεληθήσεται), the reader may be assured that God in this instance will not change His mind; Jesus will be priest forever.

One might have, therefore, expected the author in verse 22 to have made some such comparison: 'to the degree it was not without oath (v. 20)... to the same degree he now has a better priesthood.' Unexpectedly, however, the author completes his analogy in this manner: "to the same degree there is now the surety of an even better covenant, Jesus." The utterance, as it appears in this progression of the letter, causes one to pause and reflect for two reasons.

The author has not to this point spoken of διαθήκη and ἔγγυος and the collocation, hearing it the first time, might arrest one's attention because of one possible meaning: "surety of a last will and testament". This is strange because ἔγγυος was not a usual feature of testamentary situations.¹⁷ Of course, the solution to this puzzle, at least from the author's side, is to see how he uses διαθήκη elsewhere in his letter, and this indicates quite clearly that his reference in 7:22 is not to "testament" but to God's "covenant" of Jeremiah 38. This means that the collocation ἔγγυος διαθήκης might well be better understood by the outsider if it had been ἔγγυος συνθήκης, for the role of a surety at an agreement or contract was not an uncommon experience.¹⁸ One may suppose that the author's readers made this association readily by having already heard διαθήκη used as a vocabulary feature of the LXX and Christian teaching (e.g. in the phrase ἄμμα τῆς διαθήκης) and by their registering mentally a 'surety at covenant'.¹⁹ Still, the collocation must have occasioned reflection and that

17 Recognized by commentators, e.g. Riggensbach, p. 205, n. 65; Windisch, p. 67.

18 See Dem 33 *Apaturius* 15; Isaeus, *Dicaeogenes*; for surety on loans, Taubenschlag, *Law*, p. 299, n. 41; pp. 411-17.

19 E.A.C. Pretorius argues that its smoothness of introduction into the argument must mean a thorough acquaintance by the readers of the collocation; "Διαθήκη in Hebrews," *Neotestamentica* 5 (1971) 42. However, this does not give enough allowance to the author's own potential rhetorical skill in using a turn of phrase which would cling to the memory.

it was intended by the author to be retained by the reader is in fact suggested by the repetition of the utterance, with variations, in 8:6 and 9:15a (cf. 12:24).

The utterance of 7:22 would have occasioned pause for a second reason. It is stated that having the oath is simultaneous with Jesus being the surety of an even better covenant. It is initially unclear whether the oath has meant a better covenant *or* meant Jesus' being surety *or* meant both. Further, how either or both could be true is not explained. Despite this absence of explanation, a closer look at the syntax of verse 22 and at the two other comparisons in vv. 18-19 and 23-25 suggests some answers.

First, κρείττονος διαθήκης may be read in parallel position to κρείττονος ἐλπίδος (v. 19), i.e. the exhortation in the syncrisis has its focus in the readers' claim to a "better covenant". Just as in vv. 17-19 the crescendo falls on better hope, so also in vv. 20-22, the presence of an oath is meant to highlight a better covenant. This would seem to be the case all the more if the καὶ before κρείττονος is the author's wording (cf. 8:6) for such would be the logical 'fit' of the syncrisis: "to the degree with oath... to the same degree an even better covenant".

The real question is whether it is the oath which has made Jesus 'surety', therefore unlike the former priests, or whether it is this role which Jesus shared with the other priests and the oath just made him surety of a *better* covenant. The insistence of some commentators (e.g. Michel p. 275; Bruce, p. 157) that the LXX does not speak of the priests as "sureties", does not gainsay the author's prerogative to presuppose this. Our author speaks of the high priest as "empathetic" (5:2) although the Old Testament is silent. That the author associated the Levitical priesthood with the maintenance of the legally constituted people of God can be read from his parenthetical remark in 7:11 ὁ λαὸς γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτῆς [Levitical priesthood] νενομοθέτηται. It is likely therefore that the author would have understood Jesus' priesthood as a surety of covenant, even if there had been no oath (cf. Calvin, p. 100).

If then the oath meant a better covenant and Jesus' priesthood *per se* the surety of the covenant, *how* was this true? Or better, what are the indications in the *immediate* context of how the author understood this to be true? Of course, the author later explicitly develops διαθήκη and from 8:6-13 we could impose upon 7:22 an elaborate significance, but it is rather following his hortatory progression in 7:16-25, and now especially vv. 22-25 that we may seek to understand the significance of oath, covenant and surety.

The third syncrisis in 7:23-25 makes most explicit the benefit which is less explicit yet at the heart of the previous two comparisons. What is magnified is the permanence of his priesthood: "Because he abides forever has a permanent priesthood" (v. 24). This at once suggests that the "better hope" (v.

19) and the “better covenant” (v. 22) are better because finally Jesus’ priesthood is permanent and unchangeable. Since the “hope” and the “covenant” involve access to God (cf. 7:19b ἐλπίδος δι’ ἧς ἐγγίζομεν τῷ θεῷ) the author can conclude the three comparisons by saying in verse 25 that approach to God is now *continually* available through Jesus, the permanent priest.

Jesus’ role as “surety” of the “covenant” has spawned speculation as to his suretyship *for which party* to the covenant, God or us. The context of 7:16-25 suggests quite strongly that Jesus has ‘taken the responsibility’ (ἔγγυος) of covenant maintenance on the part of us.²⁰ Whatever may be the case with his later description of Jesus as μεσίτης διαθήκης (8:6; 9:15; 12:24), here it is ultimately God who has taken the responsibility and guaranteed His own promises of covenant by swearing the most solemn oath to Jesus. This has not meant that Jesus is then responsible for God keeping His commissive oath or for God maintaining the covenant. His availability as permanent high priest to “continually save” and to “always intercede” (v. 25) means rather that Jesus is the permanent surety and guardian that *we are capable* of maintaining the covenant access to God.

In the final instance, though, our own maintenance of the covenant access rests on God’s dependability as well. If God proved faithless in his sworn *homologia* to Jesus (“you, priest forever”), then our own covenant access to God would be impossible. It is thus in 6:18 *the oath to Jesus* to which the reader must flee, claiming the hope. With the permanence of God’s oath the author can well speak of a better covenant because the access made available is one insured by the priest who “continually intercedes on our behalf”, having a priesthood, by God’s solemn oath, forever. Jesus is the *permanent* surety of the covenant.

Better Covenant, Better Promises. With 8:1, our author makes a transition in his elevation of Jesus’ priesthood. In 6:9-7:28, the author has magnified the permanence of Jesus’ priesthood, by highlighting God’s solemn oath and Melchizedek’s similarity to the son of God. In 8:2-10:31, the author builds on this exhortation by adding the hortatory consideration in 8:2-10:18 of Jesus’

20 Some see ἔγγυος as a stylistic variation on μεσίτης; some, as a word which fits the ‘sound’ of the phrase, γέγονεν ἔγγυος. What leads us in part to read ἔγγυος as stressing our side of the covenant is that ἔγγυος frequently guaranteed the ‘weaker’ party in an agreement. It is interesting to compare the etymology of ἔγγυος with the priesthood of the first covenant. In etymology the word breaks down into “putting into the hands”. In Exod 29, the hands of the priests are called for special attention because they must be consecrated in order to receive the sacrifices. In a sense, their hands are entrusted with the priestly liturgy.

priestly service in the true tent (τῶν ἁγίων λειτουργὸς καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς). The author thus shifts from talking about Jesus' eternal availability to talking about what Jesus has made available.

Within this context, the author twice declares Jesus' mediatorship of covenant. The first comes near the opening of the section (8:6) and provides a focus for the interpretation of 8:3-9:14. The second (9:15) marks a transition to 9:16-10:18 and provides as well a focus for its reading. Each section, moreover, may be understood as elevating Jesus' priestly service in connection with a promise of the new covenant of Jeremiah 38. These sections, so concerned with Jesus as priest and sacrifice, may be studied from a perspective of promising because the author himself aligns Jesus' liturgy with "promises" (8:6; 9:15). We may study them in order.

In 8:6, the author picks up again with variations, the connection of Jesus with covenant in 7:20, 22.

Νυν δὲ διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας ὅσῳ καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης ἣτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται

The utterance within context continues the line of thought from 8:4 (εἰ μὲν...νυν δέ cf. 11:15,16): "If he were therefore on earth, he would not be a priest for there are those who offer gifts by law!". By implied contrast, Jesus' excellence in liturgy (8:6a) must consist of its being *not* on earth and *not* by law. The former is certainly a concern of the author for Jesus as high priest has sat down at God's right *in the heavens* (8:1; 10:11-13; 1:3b). Jesus' priestly kingdom is not a part of the earthly realm but is part of the unshakeable heavens (12:25-28; 1:8, 9). Not being on earth, Jesus' liturgy is, according to the author, priestly service in the true tent which had but a shadowy copy in Moses' tent (8:5; 9:1-7,24).²¹

This excellence, in the exercise of the liturgy at the real and permanent sanctuary, consists also, within the context, in its being not by law (8:4b; cf. 10:8c). This feature links 8:6 at once with its earlier corollary in 7:20-22. There, the superiority of Jesus' priesthood was formulated in its being *not* κατὰ νόμον but κατὰ δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου, i.e. by God's eternity in oath-taking (7:16). In Heb 8:6, the author takes up this perspective and formulates the utterance in such a way that Jesus 'obtains the promise' (cf. ἐπέτυχεν

21 There would appear to be some flexibility in his use of οὐρανός. On the one hand, it sounds like Jesus has passed through the heavens (4:14) and beyond (7:26), the first tent being a copy of the heavens. However, heaven is God's presence, the Holy of Holies (10:24). If anything the first tent is not copied from "heavenly things"; it is the present, earthly realm (9:8, 9). Only the second tent is a copy of the "heavenly things".

τῆς ἐπαγγελίας 6:15; ἐπέτυχον ἐπαγγελιῶν 11:33) in obtaining the 'sworn' priestly service. The last clause in 8:6, "enacted on better promises," suggests that the author may in fact have had in mind a similar clause at the end of λειτουργία: "enacted on oath".

Such λειτουργία at the "true tent" was not a feature of the first covenant, for the regulations for worship in the first covenant were regarding an *earthly* sanctuary (9:1-7). A more excellent λειτουργία, a heavenly one, would have to involve another and *better* covenant. Accordingly, the author in 8:6b aligns Jesus' better liturgy with Jesus' mediatorship of an "even better covenant".

The author's choice here of μεσίτης rather than ἔγγυος (7:22) may be attributed to something with little more significance than an association arising with the reference to Moses in 8:5.²² Yet, if ἔγγυος in its context tends to stress Jesus' maintenance of covenant on the human side, it must be asked whether μεσίτης in its contexts tends to stress Jesus' 'guarantee' of the covenant from God's side.

There is the hint of this, but nothing quite explicit, in the subsequent clause in 8:6c. ἦτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίας νενομοθέτηται. It is in this utterance of 8:6 that Jesus is the most closely related in all of Hebrews to "promise". Linguistically, it is the covenant which is connected with promise, and Jesus is not identified as the covenant. Still as "mediator of covenant" he is involved in some way with God's promises.

That involvement is depicted in 8:6 rather tersely yet expressed in clear tones of intentionality and purposiveness, even a sense of orderliness and regularity. The covenant which Jesus mediates does not *fulfill* promises, it rather is *enacted* on promises. The author's collocation of νενομοθέτηται with "promises" sounds at first strange, but it is of one piece with the author's *theology* that God's relationship with man is not structured with 'band-aids' applied from one turn to another, but rather that the covenant access to the Holy God is something willed by God, deliberately, in a timely fashion, sanctioned and purposed in order.²³ Jesus' involvement here is not one of planning or sanctioning; the covenant takes effect and is in force by reason of God's promises. The hortatory force of the commissive language in 8:6 thus lies not in its raising of expectations, for the promises here God has already enacted, but in its instruction about a dependable God who keeps His promises, promises of great benefit to the reader.

22 For Moses as μεσίτης, Philo *Mos* II 166; *Som* I 143; *AsMos* 15 (Clemen).

23 This impression is left by the author's use of such vocabulary as ἀνάγκη (7:12, 27; 9:16, 23) ἀναγκαῖος (8:3), ἔπρεπεν (2:10; 7:26), ἔδει (9:26) ἀπόκειται (9:27). See further, E. van Dobschütz, "Rationales und irrationales Denken über Gott im Urchristentum," *ThStKr* 95 (1923-24) 235-55.

Such commissive language in 8:6 is still less than completely felicitous as long as the referents of "covenant" and the "promises" are unspecified. The author has more than 'teased' the reader by his repetition of "covenant" to this point in his letter; he has prepared and oriented their hearing to this thematic concern, but such rhetorical anticipations need their explications, and in 8:8-12 the author turns to just that.

What the author proceeds to make clear is that the "better covenant" is the "new covenant" of Jer 38:31-34 and the "better promises" the host of commissive utterances spoken by the Lord therein.²⁴ As it is introduced (vv. 7,8a) and concluded (v. 13), it appears that the author has intended the quotation to function merely as a testimony to the failure, by implication, of the first covenant.²⁵ If this were its only function, it would have been overkill, for the length of the quotation far outruns such a purpose. That the quotation had a greater significance for the author may be seen from the mere fact that he quotes selections from it later for other reasons (10:16-17). The "negative" implications which bracket the long quotation in 8:8-12 may be viewed in any event, in part, as an instructional aside after 8:6 ('a better covenant does not mean the first still obtains...'), in part, as a continuing effort to elevate Jesus' priestly service by indicating the inadequacies of the former liturgy.

We follow here our hunch that the extended quotation has more interpretive significance for the remainder of this section (9:1-10:31) than its bracketing inferences might suggest. In particular, what we seek to identify is the intersection of the promises with Jesus' liturgy. We take now the two promises isolated by the author in 10:16-17 in his adapted selection from Jer 38:31-34 to see whether or how Jesus' liturgy, as elevated in 9:1- 10:18, may be the mediation of the "better covenant enacted on better promises".

Cleansed conscience. The covenant was the declared intention of God to establish and maintain a relationship with His people: "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Heb 8:10c). As such, in its goal of mutual self identification, the first covenant was no different from the second (cf. Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12). What made the "new" covenant "better" than the "first" was

24 E.g. συντελέσω...διαθήσομαι...ἐπιγράψω...ἔσομαι...ἔσομαι...The change from φημί to λέγει may have been to conform the text to the author's opening λέγει in verse 8. The change to συντελέσω from διεθέμην may indicate greater definitiveness, but it is as likely that διεθέμην was changed because the author wanted to use it for his testamentary discourse.

25 cf. David Peterson, "The Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Argument of Hebrews," *The Reformed Theological Review* 38 (1979) 74-81.

not its goal, but its effectuation. It was “enacted” on the “better” promises of Jeremiah 38. In 9:1-10:18, the author concentrates particular attention on two of these “better” promises:

8:10b διδούς νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν ἐπιγράφω αὐτούς

8:12 ὅτι ἕλωσ ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι

To understand how the author in 9:1-14 goes about relating Jesus' priestly service with the promise of 8:10b it is necessary first to recognize how he would have understood νόμος and καρδία in the promise he quotes.

Regarding the “law”, the use of νόμος exclusively within Hebrews 7-10 is indicative of the fact that the author was interested in “law” as it related to the priesthood and priestly service. The νόμος was the visible sanctioning authority for the liturgy (κατὰ νόμον 7:5,16; 8:4; 9:22; 10:8). But while it had the appearance of effecting the covenant access to God, it could never bring it about (οὐδεν ἐτελείωσεν ὁ νόμος 7:19) for it was with its specifications and execution, but a shadow of things that were coming (10:1).²⁶ Limited by its very nature, the sacrifices it sanctioned were also limited. In 9:9-14, the author highlights this limitation in terms of the ability of the sacrifices to deal only with matters of ritual impurity (δικαιώματα σαρκός 9:10; πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκός καθαρότητα 9:13). When therefore the author quotes the promise from Jeremiah 38 that God will inscribe “laws” on the heart, we should not suppose that the author has first in mind “laws” such as ‘do not kill, do not commit adultery, etc. What the context suggests rather is that the inscribed laws were those *liturgical prescriptions* for covenant access to a Holy God.

The καρδία not surprisingly, is for the author the human faculty of reasoning and decision making. It stands under the omniscient scrutiny and judgment of the “word” of God (4:12) as did the “heart” of the Wilderness generation who decided to disbelieve God's promise and disobey God's command (3:8,10,12,15; 4:7). The “heart” as such is identical with the human will and the human volition. In 13:18, the human will is identified with conscience, συνείδησις. That καρδία and συνείδησις have closely related senses for the author is confirmed in 10:22 where the sprinkling of the heart is the

26 “Law” in 10:1 refers in its context to the plurality of sacrifices called for. This plurality constitutes that shadowy character of the law, while the need for the shedding of blood catches an aspect of the “image”.

removal of an evil conscience (cf. "evil heart" 3:12).²⁷ Recognizing the meaning shared by καρδιά (8:1 b) and συνείδησις prepares us for what the author says about Jesus' priestly service in 9:9-14.

What he says is that the blood of Christ "cleanses our conscience" (9:14). The author can say in the very next utterance that it is by this that Jesus is mediator of the new covenant (διὰ τοῦτο διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης ἐστίν 9:15) because what has been done in such a cleansing is what God had promised for the new covenant: "putting my laws in their dispositions, I will inscribe them in their hearts."

The author speaks of cleansed συνείδησις in 9:9-14 rather than cleansed καρδιά as mentioned in the promise because his syncrisis with the first covenant turns in this context on the ability of law to effect only the purification of σάρξ.²⁸ With the contrast to σάρξ in view, συνείδησις was probably chosen over καρδιά because it forms a more natural antonym to σάρξ than καρδιά does.²⁹ Otherwise, the promise of 8:10c and Jesus' liturgy in 9:14 coincide. In 9:11-14 Christ's journey through the tent, through 'outer space', is at the same time a transfer of his blood to the human conscience, into the 'inner space' of the human will. The goal is to purify the conscience from habitual choice of dead works to a covenant access to God (ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων εἰς τὸ λατρεῦεν θεῷ ζῶντι).³⁰ Such is the promise of 8:10c, as well. What the promise envisages (read within Hebrews) is access to God not through regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary (δικαιώματα λατρείας τὸ τε ἅγιον κοσμικόν 9:1) but a covenant access from the human will. The author says that Christ's blood has made such an approach possible.

Should we not say then that Christ 'has kept' God's promise here? We may favor this description but it must be noticed that our author prefers other descriptions, such language as in 9:11—"Christ... high priest of the good things which have come". The good things which have come, the good things

27 The use of καρδιά and συνείδησις in Hebrews certainly does not confirm Michel's contention (p. 308): In der καρδιά und διάνοια wird die profane Ebene, in der συνείδησις dagegen die gefährliche theologische erreicht. In Hebrews, συνείδησις is not moral conscience or knowledge of God *per se* as much as it refers to that conscience which comes to decision. A slightly different meaning of συνείδησις occurs in 10:2 where the collocation with ἁμαρτιῶν alters its sense, "consciousness of sin".

28 This was true in that the focus was on externals—food, drink, ablutions—but also because the blood of the animals could not, either ontologically or physically, touch the conscience, only externals.

29 See BAGD, p. 743:2.

30 The mention of "dead works", while a traditional collocation, is probably used here with a conscious allusion to the sacrifices of the first covenant which could only deal with such impurities as contact with the 'dead'.

which were to come which the law foreshadowed (10:1), the better things of salvation pertaining to the reader (6:9), all these “things” go back within Hebrews to God’s promises of Jeremiah 38 and involve Jesus’ liturgy. Still, the author’s reticence to identify Jesus as the ‘promise keeper’ may bespeak his persistent theological concern to focus on God’s faithfulness to promise: “Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself blameless to God...” (9:14).³¹

Forgiveness of Transgressions. The second promise of the new covenant which the author aligns with Jesus’ liturgy within 9:1-10:31 is the promise of forgiveness: “I will be merciful toward their iniquities and their sins I will no longer remember” (8:12). This promise, which the author repeats in 10:17 with a noticeable addition, is highlighted within 9:15-10:18. This section begins with the third of the three hortatory refrains which declare Jesus’ role with the covenant:

καὶ διὰ τοῦτο διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης ἐστὶν ὅπως θανάτου γενομένου
εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν
λάβωσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας

With διὰ τοῦτο, the author links Jesus’ mediatorship of the new covenant with the first promise, his cleansing of the human conscience by his blood (9:14), but with the ὅπως he connects Jesus’ mediatorship with the second promise, his death for transgressions in the first covenant. In verses 16-24, the author goes on to explain how it is that death and blood are important for the vitality and even the inauguration of διαθήκη, but we must linger here with the author’s identification of his death being for the redemption “of transgressions in the first covenant.”

Though the matter is disputed, there is good reason to understand the author as having distinguished within his letter certain sins which the first covenant could and could not handle. This is already suggested in the distinction we have seen between the purification of σὰρξ which was possible in the first covenant, and the purification of the heart which was not. One problem involves properly understanding the words the author uses from the semantic field of “sin”. Is he drawing on those components of sense which distinguish

31 As will become clear in later discussion, we interpret “eternal Spirit” to refer to that intimate side of God in which his purpose and intentions, expressed often in His promises, reside. ‘Eternal’ throughout this section of Hebrews relates to the pendency which unifies God’s activity.

the words from one another or is he using their synonymous sense, using the different words for stylistic variation? His clear distinction present in the matter of purification as well as his modification of the promise of forgiveness in 10:17 lead us to suspect that the author was conscious of and indeed intending some distinctions between the words.

In 10:17, the author inserts καὶ τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτῶν into the promise: "And their sins *and their lawlessness* I will no longer remember". The insertion draws attention to sins of willfulness and defiance (cf. Lev. 4-5). It is doubtful that the author is merely giving fullness of expression here because in his very next utterance (v. 18) it is the forgiveness of these very sins which has special significance: ὅπου δὲ ἄφεςις τούτων [i.e. τῶν ἀνομιῶν] οὐκέτι προσφορὰ περὶ ἁμαρτίας. The forgiveness of lawlessness means that no more offering, i.e. the plurality of offerings of the first covenant, is needed.

The specification of the promise in 10:17 reflects the author's understanding of the limitations of the first covenant, as well as the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice. For the author, the effectiveness of sacrifice in the first covenant was limited to sins of ignorance and inadvertence; the high priest, thus makes offerings for himself and τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγνοημάτων (9:7; cf. 5:2). Blood in the first covenant sanctifies only in matters of bodily purity. Sins, on the other hand, which were willful transgressions of disobedience could only bring recompense, for they were not forgiven (cf. 2:2).³²

When, therefore, the author in 9:15 connects Jesus' mediatorship of covenant with the redemption of "transgressions (παραβάσεων) in the first covenant" he is presupposing the inadequacy of the first sacrifices, but more than this he is highlighting the intersection of a promise of the new covenant with Jesus' liturgy. In 10:17, he makes the promise of forgiveness explicitly the promise of forgiveness of sins of 'commission'. What he had seen implicit in the promise, he makes verbally explicit.

The result of this forgiveness is that those who have been called are now promisees of the eternal inheritance (9:15c). Because the new covenant enacted is eternal, the just presbyters of old who endured in faith, yet did not obtain the promise, now have become full fledged heirs to God's promise of Rest. Beneficiaries now of the new covenant, the spirits of the just have been perfected through Jesus' mediatorship (c f. 12:22-24 προσεληλύθατε...καὶ πνεύμασι δικαίων τετελειωμένων καὶ διαθήκης νέας μεσίτη Ἰησοῦ). The enigmatic reference in 9:23 to "the heavenly things [purified] with better sacrifices' (τὰ

32 The fact that Jesus' blood takes care of these very sins leads the author to be so critical of those "who sin willfully (ἐκουσίως ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν 10:26) after receiving the knowledge of the truth."

ἐπουράνια κρείττοσιν θυσίαις) may in fact refer to these πνεύματα δικαίων, the spirits of the just, who had endured faithfully till death, but who were not perfected (11:39,40) until Jesus' offering through the eternal Spirit.³³

The author can thus identify Jesus as διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης because the twin promises of Jeremiah 38—the cleansing of the heart (9:14) and the forgiveness of transgressions (9:15)—have been realized through Jesus' blood.³⁴ How the author further reinforces this identification in the next section, 9:16-24, by analogies with a testator's death and Moses' purification of the first liturgy cannot be explored here.³⁵

Summary. If as “surety of covenant” Jesus functions as high priest to intercede continually for the Christians, taking on, as it were, the responsibility for our covenant maintenance, then as “mediator of covenant” Jesus as sacrifice has inaugurated, at one time, God's promised new covenant. He was sacrifice only once, he is priest forever.

The author does not identify Jesus either as Promiser or promise-keeper (much less promise) because it is God's word that insures Jesus' priesthood and God's will that Jesus offer his body. Jesus' priesthood introduces a better hope (7:19) because his priesthood continuously makes available access to God and the inheritance of Rest bequeathed to the heirs. The availability of such priesthood rests, however, on God's acknowledging Jesus forever as high priest which he has in fact sworn to do by the most solemn oath. Jesus' presentation of his blood in the heavenly sanctuary has effected consecration

33 The question may be raised here whether the τύπος which Moses saw included “the spirits of the just made perfect”. If D'Angelo is correct that the author of Hebrews understood the τύπος to be Jesus' death and exaltation (Hoses, pp. 249-54), then the spirits should also be included. However, I remain reluctant to press τύπος in 8:5 too much beyond the structure of the tent.

34 Purification and forgiveness are simultaneous (cf. 9:22!). An aspect that we cannot develop here and which the author himself does not linger on is the ἀνάμνησις ἁμαρτιῶν in 10:2,3.

35 The extensive effort of John Hughes in “Hebrews IX 15 ff. And Galatians III 15 ff.,” *NT 21* (1979) 27-96 and even the more modest attempt of G.D. Kilpatrick in “Διαθήκη in Hebrews,” *ZNW 68* (1977) 263-65, to translate διαθήκη in Heb 9:16, 17 “covenant” is quite unnecessary. As we have seen throughout his work, our author is able to move with ease between the different senses of various polysemic words. The use of θάνατος and κληρονομία in 9:15 is adequate indication of the author's line of sight to διαθήκη in 9:16, 17. On whether διαθήκη should otherwise be translated “covenant” (or “disposition”, “arrangement”...), see the discussion of Ernst Kutsch, *Neues Testament-Neuer Bund?* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978) 91-105. We have settled on the translation “covenant” because like the author's use of διαθήκη from the LXX the use of “covenant” in present Christian discourse tends to heighten its reference (the new covenant) and diminish its denotation.

of the heart and the forgiveness of lawlessness. Yet, the author in his exhortation is conscientious to stress that Jesus' voluntary act was through the auspices of the eternal Spirit (9:14): "Behold I come to do your will" (10:5-10).³⁶

In calling the promises of Jeremiah 38 "promises" the author has reminded his readers of the great benefits of Jesus' priesthood. He has at the same time reinforced the image of God as a faithful Promiser, even for promisees who never fully understood the promised blessings. He has in effect described the "outcome of Jesus' priestly Kingdom", a promise seen but not participated in by Jacob and the faithful presbyters.

A dependable "Father of spirits" can be encouraging news to a people who live in a world of change and suffering. In order that the benefits of Jesus' priesthood not be lost on the reader, the author becomes more direct in 10:19.

Priesthood and *Homologia*: Faithful Promisor and Promisees

Exhortation does not 'resume' with 10:19; it continues.³⁷ The difference from what has preceded it is not in hortatory force but in style and thematic focus. The hortatory comparisons, designed to magnify Jesus and increase the readers' confidence, are with 10:19 replaced with other hortatory styles extending and developing the hortatory considerations already mentioned in the letter. In 10:19-21, the author utilizes a language of possession (ἔχοντες... παρρησίαν...καὶ ἱερέα) to focus on the hortatory considerations. This leads to a series of three injunctions in verses 22-24: προσερχώμεθα...κατέχωμεν...καὶ κατανώμεν.

With verses 25-31, the author issues admonishment and warning, utilizing participial constructions, traditional themes of judgment and comparative argumentation of 'light to heavy'. It is characteristic of the author to follow hortatory syncrisis with warning (cf. 2:1-4; 3:12-4:13; 5:11-6:8; 12:25-29), only here the warning is separated from immediate sequence by verses 19-24. Even the commendations and reminders in verses 32-39 which follow the sober warnings may be read as in a natural hortatory sequence, as we have noticed for the sequence blame/praise in 5:11-6:8/6:9-12.

The exhortation in 10:19-39 is of interest to us not only because of its instances of explicit commissive language (vv. 23, 29, 35, 36) and of its

36 The "will" in this context involves Jesus' offering of his body once, in contrast to the plurality and repetition of the sacrifices according to the law (vv. 8, 10); there is at the same time, the obsolescence of the many sacrifices (v. 9b).

37 Typical is the comment of Otto Glombitza that 'paraenesis' picks up again with 10:19; "Erwägungen zum Kunstvollen Ansatz der Paraenese im brief an die Hebräer X 19-25," NT 9 (1967) 133.

concern for God as Promisor (ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος, v. 23; θεοῦ ζῶντος, v. 31; θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 36) but also because it is here that the author is applying God's oath and Jesus' mediatorship of the promised new covenant in a most direct fashion to the readers' immediate situation and needs. We cannot investigate the whole section in detail. What we will rather do is focus attention on how God's commissive utterances involving Jesus are made to involve the church, the congregation of promisees, in verses 19-25.

Jesus and Covenant Access. In 10:19-22, the author summarizes the benefits of the new covenant in condensed, telegraphic language and urges the "brothers" to renew their covenant relationship:

:19 Having therefore, brethren, confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, :20 which he inaugurated for us, a way, new and living, through the curtain, i.e. his body, :21 and a great priest over the house of God, :22 let us come forward with true heart, in complete trust, our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies having been washed with pure water.

To a people in danger of withdrawing the author affirms what he has been pressing throughout 8:2-10:18, that the brethren possess *παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων*. The *παρρησία* here is not inner confidence (3:1; 10:35) or the freedom to speak to God (4:16) as much as it is the right to be confident and speak freely. His elevation of Jesus' priestly service has functioned to highlight this present right of access to God (9:24).

This entrance into God's presence has been made available ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ. As sprinkled blood inaugurated the service of the first sanctuary and, according to the author, simultaneously brought the first covenant into operation (οὐδὲ ἡ πρώτη χωρὶς αἵματος ἐγκεκαίνισται, 9:18-24), so now the blood of Jesus makes available access into the true tent and inaugurates the new covenant.

In 10:20, the author moves freely between these two realities. On the one hand, the blood is the αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης, the blood which in purifying the conscience (9:14) has realized a promise of the new covenant (8:10b). The author's use of πρόσφατον and ζῶσαν to describe ὁδόν recalls and contrasts with his description of the first covenant as τὸ παλαιούμενον and γρασκον (8:13). But even here, the second reality intrudes. The inauguration of the covenant is the opening of an entrance into the Holiest Place, a way through the curtain. The image of Jesus that emerges here so briefly is not merely one

of the high priest, but another, the image of the πρόδρομος who enters into the realm behind the curtain (6:19, 20). Like an advanced scout, he opens and reveals what had been untrodden and unknown. Unlike a scout, but as a voluntary offering he is himself the way. The mediation of covenant is unveiling the presence of God.

The author's apparent identification of the curtain with Jesus' σάρξ (τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ) is at first difficult to understand because the inclination is to visualize the "curtain" as "out there" hanging in the heavens before the innermost presence of God.³⁸ What is said here, however, locates the curtain in the present age, identifying it with Jesus' σάρξ. This is in fact, consistent with the author's perspective. The "curtain" in the earthly sanctuary was part of the first tent (9: 2, 3). As part of the first tent, it blocked access into the Holiest Place (9: 8). The first tent and curtain were not antitypes of heavenly things but represented the present state of affairs of the created order (9: 9). There is no heavenly curtain according to Hebrews. The presence of a curtain in the earthly sanctuary indicates how shadowy and imperfect a copy of the heavenly things the first sanctuary was.

The identification of the curtain explicitly with *Jesus' σάρξ* can be understood in two ways within Hebrews. In that the curtain not only obscured but limited access to God the same may be said for Jesus in the days of his flesh (5:7, 8). Limited as a human, he had to trust that God would deliver him from death according to His sworn acknowledgement. At the same time, it is only in the offering of Jesus' body (10:5-10) in death (2:14, 15) that a way is made available for us into God's presence.³⁹ It is thus not so very extraordinary to read that the way through the curtain was through Jesus' σάρξ for with his death and departure from the flesh the curtain was split and a new and living way into God's presence was opened.⁴⁰

If the first reminder in 10:19,20 is concerning the benefit of the covenant access mediated by Jesus' blood, a hortatory consideration the author has magnified in 8:2-10:18, then the second reminder, brief as it is in 10:21,

38 The other option, advanced most thoroughly by Hofius, is to connect σάρξ with ὁδος instrumentally. The problem with this approach remains of having to take the implied δία instrumentally rather than locatively as it is explicitly used. See the discussions of Hofius, "Inkarnation und Opfertod Jesu nach Hebr 10,19f," in *Der Ruf Jesu*, pp. 132-41; Vorhang, p. 81; N.H. Young, "τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (Heb X 20): Apposition, Dependent or Explicative," *NTS* 20 (1973-74) 100-104; G.M.M. Pelsler, "Translation Problem: Heb. 10:19-25," *Neotestamentica* 8 (1974).

39 Hofius ("Inkarnation," p. 134) tries to maintain too rigid a distinction between σῶμα in 10:5-10 and Jesus' σάρξ elsewhere.

40 cf. Nils Dahl, "A New and Living Way: The Approach to God According to Hebrews 10:19-25," *Int* 5 (1951) 404.

is concerning the dominant hortatory consideration in 4:14-7:28: 'we have a great high priest' (cf. 4:14; 8:1). The reference to his priesthood "over the house of God" recalls an earlier syncretism in 3:1-6 in which Jesus was elevated over Moses in being "son over His house". In 3:6, this "house" is identified as the people of God.⁴¹ The recipients of God's covenant have thus been broadened beyond those identified in the promise of Jeremiah 38: "I will conclude a new covenant with the *house of Israel* and the *house of Judah*. Not only those called in the past (9:15) who are spirits now perfected (12:23) but the readers as well are beneficiaries of God's new covenant. As a great priest he is empathetic with the human condition (4:14-5:10) and is a permanent surety of God's better covenant.

What the author has reiterated in 10:19-21 is what the readers have known, but need to be reminded of, that God ever desires to be their God (καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν v 8: 10c). In 10:22, the author enjoins the church to thus behave as people who are people of God.

The author comes close to instructing the "house of God" to act as priests consecrated in service to God. Both the appeal (προσερχόμεθα) and the reminder about their baptisms (βεραντισμένοι...λελουσμένοι) are set in language used in the LXX of priests' worship of God.⁴² Yet the author falls short of speaking of the church as a community of priests because he is resolute in identifying and magnifying a single priest, Jesus the Christ. It is not the high priest Jesus and a house of priests. The relationship is rather one of priest and brothers (cf. 1:9; 2:11-14). The initial call to ἀδελφοί in 10:19 is more than a rhetorical transition. It reflects not only the relationship with one another, but more importantly in verses 19-21, the relationship of the church with Jesus. The readers are participants with Jesus (3:14).

In 10:22, the remembrance of baptism is a remembrance of the first experience of receiving the promise of the new covenant of cleansed conscience (cf. φωτίζομαι 6:4; 10:32). Such remembrance of one's calling coincides for the author with an injunction to come forward to God with true heart and full faith.⁴³ The appeal is to brethren who are withdrawing. The author's warrant for them to come forward in worship and prayer is not a dissertation on their

41 For an investigation of the different referents of οἶκος in 3:2-6, see D'Angelo, Moses, pp. 142-45.

42 The priest 'approaching' God: Lev 21:17-21; the washings as initiations for the priests: Exod 29; Lev 8; see further, Dahl, "Living Way," p. 406, n. 25.

43 'True heart' is not an unusual qualification for approach to God (cf. Isa 38:3) but one must not forget the special significance it would have in light of the promise of the new covenant (10:16). The 'fullness of faith' anticipates the utterance of v. 23.

need for God, but rather reminders of God's promised benefits to them and of their own baptisms.

Homologia of Hope. In verse 23, the second of three directive instructions is issued: κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλινῆ πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος. Two features of this utterance, within its context and within the letter, are important for understanding the passage.

First, the utterance is more closely connected with verses 19-21 than verse 22. The κατέχωμεν in verse 23 is the complement of ἔχοντες in verse 19. A similar pair occur twice elsewhere in the letter: ἔχοντες...κρατῶμεν 4:14; κρατῆσαι ἔχομεν 6:18,19. The two verbs are frequently paired in ancient documents concerned with the possession and use of property.⁴⁴ Paul uses the pair in his hardship list in 2 Cor 6:10 μηδὲν ἔχοντες καὶ πάντα κατέχοντες. Our author, of course, is not concerned with real estate, and yet his use of this language may have arisen from his own concern about speaking to people who had lost the possession of property in their Christian past (10:34). It is crucial for the interpretation of this pair in Hebrews to recognize the parallelism that occurs with its use. What one *has* is what one is to *keep holding*. The object of ἔχω and κατέχω (κρατέω) is the same. The difference between the expressions is that with κατέχω there is the interest in persistence and endurance, "keep possessing, keep a claim on". The κατέχωμεν thus follows the προσερχώμεθα in grammar and style, but because of its syntagmatic relationships (and its asyndeton) κατέχωμεν should be read in tandem with the ἔχοντες clause.

The second feature to keep in mind is that the object of κατέχωμεν in 10:23 has been anticipated twice already in the letter, in 4:14 and 6:18. The author has, in fact, combined the earlier two objects to give in 10:23 the full expression: κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας 4:14; κρατῆσαι τῆς...ἐλπίδος 6:18—κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος 10:23. The recognition of this has the negative effect of diminishing the interpretive weight of any appeal to the Christian triad in 10:22-24 πίστεως...ἐλπίδος...ἀγάπης.⁴⁵ In other words, the use of "hope" in 10:23 cannot be viewed merely as constrained by the author's desire to use the Christian virtues here. The utterance of v. 23 with ἐλπὶς has a background in the letter.

44 E.g. Dem 37 *Pantaenetus* 10 (ἔχοντα καὶ κρατοῦσθ). On mortgage stones, ἔχειν καὶ κρατεῖν; Moses Finley, *Studies in Land and Credit in Ancient Athens 500-200 B.C.* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 1951) #1,2,10.

45 Other exegetes, while recognizing the presence of the triad, have found it of less interpretive value than one might initially expect; see Michel, p. 346; Glombitza, "Erwägungen," p. 146.

The object of *κατεχόμεν* in 10:23 is *ὁμολογία*. Most often *ὁμολογία* is translated “confession”. In this sense, *homologia* is thought to refer to the confession made at baptism because the preceding verse has reminded the readers of their baptism.⁴⁶ Some exegetes, however, have preferred to give *homologia* the sense of “profession”. What the Christian thus maintains is not a formalized confession, but rather in worship and life (cf. 13:15) the Christian profession. In either translation, the predicate of God's dependability as Promiser (*πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγελάμενος*) is understood as the pattern for the Christian reader's dependability to commitment: “Hold the confession of hope firm, for He who has promised is faithful”.

There are, however, problems with this interpretation. First, the object of *ἔχοντες* is not parallel with the object of *κατέχωμεν*: having the benefits from God... let us hold our confession. Secondly, the antecedents of 10:23a in 4:14 and 6:18 are virtually neglected. These antecedents would suggest that “baptism” was *not* the occasion for the mentioning of *homologia*, but rather that the utterance found expression in 10:23 for other reasons. If the Taufbekenntnis had been the referent, one would in any case have expected “confession of faith” not “of hope”.⁴⁷ Thirdly, God's explicit role as Promisor becomes really secondary to a more general affirmation of his dependability. How it is that the reader should maintain the confession because God is a faithful Promisor is not clear.

If the author's utterance in 10:23 is a fuller expression of his utterance in 6:18c, then a quite different denotation and reference for *ὁμολογία* may be proposed. In 6:18, the author encourages the readers to maintain their claim on the hope. The final basis for claiming the hope is God's oath to Jesus. It is God's utterance under oath to Jesus which is the introduction of a better hope (7:17-29) because now the Christian has confidence of an ever-present and available access to God. The question is whether *ὁμολογία* in 10:23 refers to God's sworn acknowledgment of Jesus' eternal priesthood (Ps 109:4).

Indeed, *ὁμολογία* can mean “acknowledgment” and can be used for an utterance which is sworn.⁴⁸ In his discussion of oath-taking, Clement for example can define oath as *ὁμολογία καθοριστικὴ μετὰ προσπαράληψεως θείας* (*Strom* VIII 50). More importantly, such a meaning for *ὁμολογία* fits the context. The object of *ἔχοντες* parallel's the object of *κατέχωμεν* ‘having the benefits of the new covenant in Jesus' priesthood... let us keep holding

46 E.g. Günther Bornkann, “Das Bekenntnis im Hebräerbrief,” *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959) 189,191,202.

47 So, Riggenbach, p. 318, n. 84. Westcott (p. 325) notes that the phrase “confession of hope” is remarkable, but he does not question the sense of *ὁμολογία*.

48 E.g. in Philo, *Sac* 3; *Ebr* 107; *Cong* 125; *Mut* 57; 220; *Som* II 202; *Abr* 203.

God's firm acknowledgment of our hope.⁴⁹ This interpretation at once makes better sense of the theological warrant in 10:23b. There is good reason to keep claim on God's acknowledgment of Jesus' priesthood—God is a faithful Promiser; He has and will keep his commissive acknowledgment, for in doing this He keeps His promises of the new covenant. Finally, this interpretation is consistent with the author's concern to promote endurance. Just as in 2:1 the readers are admonished to pay heed to what they have heard, in 10:23 they are encouraged to hold on to what they have heard.⁵⁰ What they have heard is God's sworn *ὁμολογία* to Jesus, a *ὁμολογία* which is their hope because it mediates access to God's presence and the promise of inheritance.

If *ὁμολογία* in 10:23 is "acknowledgment" and refers to Ps 109:4, then the author has used *ὁμολογία* within his letter in two of its related senses. In 3:1, the author uses *ὁμολογία* to mean "confession", for it is delimited in sense by its collocation with *ἡμῶν* ("the high priest of our confession, Jesus"). The same could be true for *ὁμολογία* in 4:14, but in retrospect, reviewing the passage from its parallels in 6:18 and 10:23, it would rather seem that even here the author has in mind another referent of *ὁμολογία*, and that (as is his habit) he is anticipating here his later magnification of this utterance.

Faithful Promisees. With the third directive instruction in 10:24-25, the author indicates that God's promises adjust not only the relationship of Promiser and promisee, but even promisee with promisee: "And let us be sensitive to one another, ready to provoke to love and good works, not abandoning your church assembly, as some do, but rather encouraging and even more as you anticipate the Day drawing near".

The author can connect such an utterance with his preceding instruction in verse 23 (*καὶ κατανοῶμεν*) because he sees a correlation between God's promising and the fellowship of the church. This correlation is in evidence in three other places in Hebrews. In 6:10-11, the author commends his readers for their "work and love" in serving the saints, but reminds them as well that this conviction is also the conviction that must be maintained toward

49 The adjective *ἀκλινής* is more likely to be taken with *homologia* than adverbily with *κατέχωμεν*. It is important then how one translates both *homologia* and the verb: 'hold the *homologia* firm'; 'hold the firm *homologia*'; 'keep possessing the firm *homologia*'. On the use of *ἀκλινής* see further Karl Schäfer "κρατεῖν της ομολογιας" in *Die Kirche im Wandel der Zeit*, ed. Franz Groner (Cologne: J.P. Sached, 1971) 64.

50 Both *κατέχω* and *κρατέω* often have a objects things that are external to the person but which have significance for the person: *λόγον* (Lk 8:15); *παραδόσεις* (1 Cor 11:2; Mark 7:3) *κεφαλὴν* (Col 2:19) *διδασχὴν* (Rev 2:14f).

God's completing the hope. In 12:28-13:2, the instruction to "love the brethren" and "show hospitality" follows the reminder that the reader has received the "unshakeable kingdom", a reference here to the priestly kingdom praised in Exod 19:5,6 (cf. earlier allusions to Exodus 19 in Heb 12:18-21). Finally, in 13:14-16 the reminder that "we seek a city to come" correlates with the subsequent utterances to approach God and to not neglect benevolence and fellowship.

Part of this correlation within the logic of Hebrews stems from what we may call a type/antitype relationship. What has been promised (type) should be mirrored to some degree in the fellowship of the church in the present (antitype). It is, however, quite different from the actual references to type/antitype by our author, for the connection of the reader with the promise is not so remote as a 'shadow' or 'copy'. There is actual participation now, for example, in God's final Rest through the relationship established in Jesus' mediation of the new covenant. The particular promise that has special significance for the fellowship of the church is the promise of the city (13:14; 12:22; 11:16). Since God's city is an occupied realm (12:22-24), access to God must necessarily involve fellowship with those members of the city. Nowhere in Hebrews is the promise Paradise or the Garden.⁵¹ What is promised is a priestly kingdom, an occupied realm, a heavenly city.

Promisees take on a responsibility for one another because they are brethren in the house of God. In 10:25, there is an urgency in this mutual encouragement because of the coming Day of judgment (cf. vv. 26;31). In 3:13, the urgency lies in the immediate moment, *σήμερον*, for it is "today" that the promise of Rest is bequeathed and demands a response of faith.

It is not only the object of promise that fosters the mutual care of the promisees. The correlation of God's promising and the fellowship of the promisees in 10:23-25 arises also from the character of the Promiser. A God who keeps His commitments to promise is exemplary for those whose constitution as a household of God rests on God's call. His faithfulness should call forth their dependability in commitments to one another (cf. 13:1-7).⁵² There is also a sense in which their very appreciation and understanding of God's faithfulness

51 Stressed by Hofius, *κατάπαυσις*, p. 91.

52 The verb *ἐγκαταλείπω* occurs in two interesting contexts in the LXX. One is in Moses' charge to Joshua ("I will not forsake..." Deut 31:7,8), the other is in Joshua's charge to the people who were to enter the promise ("Don't forsake your brothers..." Josh 22:3).

to promise is deepened and reinforced by their own experience in the community as brethren who are committed in word and deed to one another.⁵³

Rest and Occupied Realm: Jesus as Leader into the Promise

Jesus' role vis-à-vis God as Promisor is centered in 10:19-23 in his function as a great priest, a high priest of the things to come. He *has* made available the promises of the new covenant—the cleansed conscience (v. 22), the forgiveness of willful transgression (cf. v. 26), the pride of brotherhood (vv. 24, 25 cf. 8:11). Still however, the readers must endure and such endurance is necessary if the 'final' promise is to be obtained. Jesus' priesthood is related to this hope, for access to the Holy Promisor is now available; yet it is questionable that our author thought or intended to depict Jesus as related to God's promise-keeping only in terms of his priesthood. There is the slight suggestion of something more in 10:20; the expression "a way through the curtain" reminds us of 6:19-20 where Jesus is identified as *πρόδρομος*. If Jesus' role as "fore-runner" is related to God's promise-keeping then one should consider other related images of Jesus in Hebrews, such as "leader" and "apostle" to see if these as well are concerned with promise. The best place to begin though is in 4:3-10 where Ἰησοῦς is explicitly connected with God's Sabbath Rest.

Jesus/Joshua. In 4:3-10, the author presses the point that the rest spoken of in David (Ps 94:7-11) is God's rest from His works on the seventh day, i.e. the Sabbath rest. Further, Ἰησοῦς did *not* give the Israelites rest: "If Ἰησοῦς had given them rest, it [i.e. Psalm 94] would not speak of another [rest] after these days" (4:8).

It is unclear whether the author is referring in 4:8 to Joshua or Jesus.⁵⁴ The immediate impression is that he means Joshua, but the "rest" he refers to in 4:8 is that rest which it was outside Joshua's power to give, viz. the Sabbath rest; in point of fact, even the 'earthly' rest of Canaan was something given

53 Isocrates raised a question which is not without relevance for our context: "How can we rely on other covenants and oaths if we do not honor pledges among ourselves?" (*Call* 30). More recently, A.I. Melden ("Promising," p. 64) has stated that promise utterances are intelligible only to those whose way of life agrees." Regarding Hebrews then, it would seem that for a people to understand, appreciate and rely on God's promising, there would need to be the experience of dependability within the community.

54 Among English translations, "Joshua"—Tyndale (1525), Great (1539), ASV (1901), RSV (1946); "Jesus"—Geneva (1560), Bishops (1568), Rheims (1582), KJV (1611). For the attempts in mss. to decide the issue, see Riggenbach, p. 105, n. 77.

to the Israelites, according to the book of Joshua (21:44; 22:4; 23:1), not by Joshua but by the κύριος.

It is thus possible that the author may have meant Jesus as the one able but the one who finally did not give the rest to the Israelites. The author views Jesus as κύριος (cf. 13:20; Num 27:17), one who through power and authority could give the rest (cf. Heb 1:2,3). Though God is the One who's acknowledged as ultimately responsible for the preparation of the heavenly city (11:16), Jesus is the one who is to come again for salvation (9:28), to come and not delay (10:37).

This does not mean, however, that the author's own imaginative construct for Jesus' role in God's promise-keeping was not in some sense influenced by the stories of Ἰησοῦς in Numbers and Deuteronomy. The author's failure to mention Joshua among the faithful in chapter eleven may be the result of Joshua's absorption into Jesus. His absence from chapter eleven is conspicuous when compared with Joshua's elevated position in other Beispielreihen of Jewish heroes (e.g. Sir 46:1-6; 1 Mac 2:55). The answer of C.P.M. Jones for why our author's list stops with Rahab may not be too far from the truth: "surely because after Rahab he is brought face to face with Joshua who is however not merely Joshua, but the figure of a greater captain who must be last of the series."⁵⁵

The inclination of early Christians to read about Joshua and think about Jesus is well documented among the church fathers.⁵⁶ The allusions are not veiled. Passages are quoted and names named.⁵⁷ This explicitness is in large measure due to the purpose of their writing; they are refuting false teaching (e.g. Barn 12:8-11; Tert *Adv Marc* III), persuading the outsider to faith (e.g. Justin *Dial* 75; 90). They are anxious to show that Jesus is mentioned even in scripture.⁵⁸ Joshua is victorious because he battles in the name of the Lord (Tert *Adv Marc* III 18). It is Jesus who speaks to Moses in Exod 23:20p21, who places his name on the angel (Tert *Adv Marc* III 16).

Expectations for some "new Joshua" are hardly necessary in understanding how the author of Hebrews could have associated Joshua with Jesus. Both

55 C.P. M. Jones, "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Lucan Writings," in *Studies in the Gospels*, eds. R.H. Lightfoot, ed. D.E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967) 113-43.

56 See Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960) 229-43 and Annie Jaubert *Origène Homélies sur Josué* (SC 71; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1960) 37-44.

57 Exod 23:20, 21—Tert *Adv Marc* III 16; *Adv Jud* 9; Justin *Dial* 75; Jesus and Amalek—Barn 12:9; Justin *Dial* 90:7.

58 The force of their proclamation may perhaps be gauged in Aquila's preference of Ἰωσοῦα over Ἰησοῦς.

were Ἰησοῦς, both were concerned with a promise-keeping God. Contemporaneous Jewish expectation are in any case difficult to document. In the traditions in Rabbinical literature, Joshua is the servant of Moses and in succession remains inferior to Moses.⁵⁹ It is only among the Samaritans that evidence suggests possible expectations of a future figure like Joshua, but even here the evidence is sparse, late and ambiguous.⁶⁰ Albrecht Oepke's hope that in the identification of the Samaritan Taheb "we perhaps have the much sought for pre-Christian Saviour Joshua-Jesus" has been unrealized.⁶¹

Numbers 13. The broad use of Numbers 14 in Heb 3:7- 4:11 suggests that the author may have been freshly acquainted with the narrative concerning Ἰησοῦς in Numbers 13.⁶² In this section, Moses sends the scouts, including Ἰησοῦς, into the land. What is striking is that two of the words in Hebrews used to describe Jesus' role, ἀρχηγός and πρόδρομος, occur in Numbers 13.

In Num 1 3:4, the twelve who are sent to scout the land are called ἀρχηγοὶ ἰδῶν Ἰσραήλ. The word ἀρχηγός denotes here one who is prominent and is the leader of a tribe, a "prince". There may also be military connotations, at least the LXX frequently uses ἀρχηγός in a military sense.⁶³ In Jewish traditions, Joshua was in fact remembered as a great military leader. Sirach has

59 cf. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 4:170. One of the few places in which Joshua attains considerable esteem is in a late midrash *Petirat Mosheh*. Here Moses is depicted as Joshua's disciple, as Joshua becomes the 'new prophet' whom Moses installs with purple robe, crown of pearls and golden throne (see Meeks, *Prophet-King*, pp. 179-81).

60 The evidence in Photius' *Bibliotheca* (PG 103: 1084D-SSA) concerning a Samaritan group (perhaps in the sixth century A.D.) who identified the 'prophet like Moses' (Deut 18:15) with Joshua is ambiguous because it is not clear whether they said he had already come or that he was coming. Hans Kippenberg opts for the former; *Garizim und Synagoge* (RVV 30; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971) 321. For a translation of Photius' account, see Stanley Isser, *The Dositheans: A Samaritan Sect in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976) 63-69.

61 Albrecht Oepke, "ἀποκαθίστημι," *TDNT* 1 (1964) 388, n. 4. The earliest sources elevate Joshua (e.g. the fourth century *Memar Marqah* V 4) but they do not apply Deut 18:15 to Joshua (cf. Kippenberg, *Garizim*. p. 323). The only other clear evidence of a Samaritan expectation of a future 'Joshua' comes from a sixteenth century polemical work in Arabic; in Adalbert Merx, *Der Messias oder Ta'eb der Samaritaner* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1909) 72-76.

62 These similarities: "bodies fell" Heb 3:17; Num 14:29,31; "living God" Heb 3:12; Num 14:9,21,28; "disobedient" Heb 3:19; 4:6,11; Num 14:43; "disbelief" Heb 3:12,19; Num 14:11; "word of hearing" Heb 4:2; Num 14:7.

63 For the lexical data: Paul-Gerhard Müller, *Christos Archegos* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1973) 72-102; Gerhard Dellling, "ἀρχηγός," *TDNT* 1 (1964) 487.

an extended praise of his military accomplishments (46:16).⁶⁴ In view, of course, is not his role as scout, but his battles, especially his defeat of Amalek (Exod 17:14).

Hebrews 2:10, Ἰησοῦς is called τὸν ἀρχηγόν τῆς σωτηρίας “the leader of salvation”. The author’s choice of ἀρχηγός may have been influenced by a remembrance of Ἰησοῦς as a military ἀρχηγός, for in 2:14-15 he describes Jesus’ “destroying” the devil and “releasing” those who were “enslaved” continually by the fear of death. Such a backdrop for ἀρχηγός in 2:10, “a reference to Joshua, the Savior’s namesake, the very type of an invincible leader” has been noted by E.K. Simpson.⁶⁵

While ἀρχηγός identifies Joshua in Numbers 13, πρόδρομος does not. The word is collocated with “grapes” and forms a horticultural term, πρόδρομοι σταφυλῆς “early grapes” (v. 20). This could be dismissed as of no value to Hebrews except for two reasons: 1. an explanation for our author’s choice of πρόδρομος has not been forthcoming,⁶⁶ 2. the passage in Numbers is *one* of only *three* occurrences of πρόδρομος in the LXX (of wasps, Wis 12:8; of figs, Isa 28:4).

In Heb 6:20, Jesus as πρόδρομος is one who has entered into the inner presence of God. Since he is a “forerunner” ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, there is the notion of precedence and of an accomplishment for our benefit. The military πρόδρομος has lines of similarity with this.⁶⁷ Montefiore (p. 117) has even said that in 6:20 “Jesus constitutes the *advance guard* who is already in heaven and who by his entry has assumed the consequent entry of all who are his.”

It is doubtful that our author so misunderstood Num 13:21 so as to understand πρόδρομοι σταφυλῆς as “scouts for grapes”. It is very possible, however, that having read and reflected on Numbers 13, 14 and sitting down to compose and write his letter our author recalled ἀρχηγός and even πρόδρομος from Numbers and these became, in the senses he found useful, fitting descriptions

64 The recurring description of Joshua in Josephus is στρατηγός, “general”: *Ant* III 59; IV 324; VI 84; VII 68,294; IX 207,280; XI 112; *War* IV 459.

65 E.K. Simpson, “The Vocabulary of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *EvQ* 18 (1946) 36.

66 Michel (p. 254, n. 3), Hofius (*Vorhang*, p. 94) and Otto Bauernfeind (“πρόδρομος,” *TDNT* 8 (1972) 235) agree that no satisfactory explanation for the author’s choice of this word has yet been offered. Perhaps the best proposal so far has been to connect it with the author’s depiction of Jesus within the *agon* in 12:2.

67 In the Macedonian army, the πρόδρομοι were a special troop, known for their ability to pursue. They also functioned as reconnaissance scouts (Polybius XII 20:7; Arrian I 12:7; 13:1; III 7:7); see further, A.F. Pauli, “πρόδρομος,” *PW* 23 (1957)102-104-and Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *The Seleucid Army* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1976) 182-83.

for Jesus' role as one who has already entered the promise and now leads others into that Rest which follows suffering.⁶⁸

Heir of Promise. If Jesus goes ahead and leads into the promise, it is only because God Himself brings him into the promise. In 1:6, in the context of a synchrisis elevating Jesus over the angels, the author reveals his conviction that God indeed has led his son into the promise: "Again, when he brought (εισαγάγη) his first born (πρωτότοκον) into the occupied realm (οικουμένην), he said 'Let all the angels of God worship him'".

The author's use of εισάγω is first of all reminiscent of the vocabulary used in Numbers and Deuteronomy for entrance into the land.⁶⁹ A reading of Numbers 14 alone would have acquainted our author with this language no less than five times (vv. 3,8,16,24,31). The verb εισάγω is used as well in later Jewish traditions which remember the entrance into the promise (e.g. Sir 44:8; Tab 8:16).

Jesus is brought into the occupied realm as πρωτότοκος. He enters the οικουμένη not as creator nor even here as high priest. He enters as "first born". In other passages in the New Testament, this status implies Jesus' precedence: in creation (Col 1:15), from the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5), among the brethren (Rom 8:29). In Hebrews, however, this identity is not uniquely Jesus'. The church is composed of πρωτότοκοι. (Heb 12: 23).⁷⁰ In Hebrews, the πρωτότοκος is the person who has the right and privilege to inherit the promise. Esau is the example of one who could not inherit the blessing because of his forfeiture of τα πρωτοτόκια, his birthright (12:16, 17). Jesus enters the occupied realm as πρωτότοκος because he is "heir of all things" (1:2). Jesus receives the promised inheritance.⁷¹

68 "Joshua" is not buried in Numbers 13 in the midst of the other scouts; he rates special attention for his name change. We only raise the possibility here that in Heb 5:9 in the phrase αίτιος σωτηρίας αιωνίου the author may very well be using the denotation of Jesus' name: "source of eternal salvation (i.e. Jesus) being called by God high priest". Similar things were done with Joshua's name. Sirach (46: 1) says that Joshua "became according to his name great in salvation". Philo, who says little about Joshua, remarks in *Mut* 121 that Joshua means "salvation of the Lord, a name for the best possible state".

69 "Une tournure bibliquelue": P.C.B. Andriessen, "La teneur Judeo-Christienne de He I 6 et II 14B- III 2," *NT* 18 (1976) 295-96.

70 For an account and criticism of Spicq's curious identification of the πρωτότοκοι of 12:25 with the angels, see Larry Helyer, "The *Prototokos* Title in Hebrews," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 6 (1977) 3-28; on the place of the "first born" in Jewish inheritance, see James Hester, *Paul's Concept of Inheritance* (SJTO 14; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1968) 3-35.

71 Within the context this functions to elevate Jesus over the angels; the angels are not heirs.

The realm which Jesus is brought into is “inhabited” (οἰκουμένη).⁷² It is not Jesus' incarnation, his coming into this present world (κόσμος 10:5), to which the author refers. It is the “coming world” (2:5). Jesus is brought into a realm occupied by angels, the church of the first born, God and the spirits of the just who have been perfected (12:22,23).

At his entrance, the angels of God greet and worship him: καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ (1:6b). Within the author's synchrisis all of this points to Jesus' elevation over the angels of God. As an heir (1:4) he receives the inheritance. The angels cannot inherit because they are not heirs; they in fact are sent to minister to the heirs (1:18). At Jesus' coming into the city of God, the angels worship him.

If the author has used Ps 96:7 here then there is but one more indication that the moment envisioned in Heb 1:6 is the moment of entrance into the promise.⁷³ By its title-heading, the Psalm is placed at the time in which “his land is established” (ὅτε ἡ γῆ αὐτοῦ καθίσταται).⁷⁴ When the angels worship him, the promised land has been entered.

We may conclude by saying that the author as not chosen to exhort his readers by any explicit appeal to Jesus as the new Joshua who leads the heirs into the promise. He does not try to place before their eyes a “new Joshua”. Nevertheless, there are clear indications that our author has developed his understanding of Jesus under the wings of scriptures, scriptures which spoke of another Ἰησοῦς who led brethren into the promise.⁷⁵

72 Cf. Isa 62:1-4; Zech 8:4. Also Albert Vanhoye, “L'οἰκουμένη dans l'ἐπίτομη aux Hébreux,” *Bib* 45 (1964) 250-51 and George Johnston, “Οἰκουμένη and κόσμος in the New Testament,” *NTS* 10 (1963-64) 353.

73 Commentators tend to favor Deut 32:43 as the source of Heb 1:6—καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ. However, in Ps 96:7 the angels are mentioned though there is a change from προσκυνήσατε to προσκυνησάτωσαν in Deut 32:43.

74 The author may have used the heading of Psalm 95 to connect 95:10 (Heb 10:27) with Haggai 2:4-10, especially 2:7 (Heb 10:26); for a discussion of this, Vanhoye, “οἰκουμένη”, pp. 250-51.

75 Others who have pursued this idea: Rendel Harris, *Testimonies* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1920) 2:51-55; D. Plooiij, *Studies in the Testimony Book* (Amsterdam, 1932) 39-42. Both Harris and Plooiij pressed the significance not only of Joshua son of Nun for understanding Jesus in Hebrews, but also of the great priest Joshua in Zechariah. Harris did not go much further in Hebrews than 3:7-4:14; Plooiij, however, raised the possible connection of Exod 23:20 with “apostle” in Heb. 3:1. We may also mention here the canonical interpretation of Wilhelm Vischer, who hears the book of Joshua throughout the first four chapters of Hebrews; *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946) II 1: 58-62. Jean Danielou, who traces the use of Joshua/Jesus in the early church, sees only a hint “of the typology of Joshua” in Hebrews; *Shadows to Reality*, pp. 230-31. Also see Anthony T. Hanson *Jesus Christ in the OT* (London: SPCK 1965) 58-82. In result, the author of Hebrews may well have agreed with Origen: “this book [i.e. Joshua] is not concerned so much with the deeds of Jesus the son of Nun as it is to portray the mysteries of my Lord Jesus” (*Hom Josh.* 13).

Summary

Jesus' role vis-à-vis God as Promisor may be summarized in words which the author uses to begin his letter: "In these last days, God has spoken to us by a son whom he made heir of all things."

1. It is with Jesus' priesthood and priestly service that the author sees the "days coming" of Jeremiah 38 having come. *In these last days* the covenant has been enacted on better promises through Jesus' liturgy.
2. It is God who promises and keeps promises. It is only by His will and His faithfulness that Jesus' priesthood is effective and permanent. *God has spoken.*
3. The son is involved in God's commissive activity, first by his own example, as one who had to endure before receiving the promise, and secondly by leading a way to the promised presence of God. *God speaks to us by a son*, a son who made access available by the cleansing of the conscience and the forgiveness of transgressions.
4. The *son is heir* together with his brethren. The inhabited realm entered into by the son is a realm which now intersects with the earthly habitat of the church. The brethren may now come to God's city together in worship and prayer. Responsibly promoting love and good works here, the brethren can be assured through Jesus' perfection that one day they will reach the expected Rest and cease from their works.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study we have attempted to interpret the commissive language in Hebrews from a heightened awareness of what is entailed, presupposed and implied in the activity of promising. This has necessitated a shift in the prevailing exegetical question from ‘what is the author saying’ to the broader question of ‘what is the author *doing*’ with commissive language. This broadening of the question has involved a concern not only for a commissive vocabulary in Hebrews but also a regard for those features of promising which obtain in the best of promises, what we have called the ‘felicities of promising’. This has not excluded traditional concerns for the content of promise, but has meant a redirecting of efforts from the exploration of the exegetical background of the promised object to the investigation of the relevance of the promised object to the situation of the promisees. Because this commissive language occurs in a literary whole, the question of the ‘forces’ of this language has had to become at times a question of the ‘functions’ of this language within the larger literary intentions of the letter. This has led us then to venture forth and propose from the beginning a reconstruction of the situation of the readers as well as the author’s purposes in responding to them. It is from our use of these combined perspectives that we have drawn the following conclusions.

What the author of Hebrews has attempted to do with commissive language is exhort his readers to a faithfulness before God and a dependability in brotherly love in the face of financial and social pressures, as well as a waning of Christian enthusiasms, which threaten the fellow ship of the church and the readers’ access to God. The author’s hortatory use of commissive language is most noticeable in three sections of Hebrews.

1. In chapter eleven the author adapts a particular feature of promising into the hortatory feature of “exemplary illustration”. From among the various pictures of Abraham available, our author has selected stories concerned with Abraham’s experiences as promisee and has formulated these in such a way that Abraham and Sarah are depicted as promisees who desire the promises

and are confident that God will be faithful. As part of a listing of exemplars of endurance, the depiction of Abraham functions to embolden the readers who are in a more favorable position than Abraham, having the promises of the new covenant, yet who can draw strength from Abraham and Sarah's experiences since they too face experiences which threaten the promises. As the climax to the listing of presbyters, Jesus himself, in his trust that God would save him from death and keep His solemn oath, functions for the reader as an exemplar of a faithful promisee who endured threats to the promise and was finally brought into the promised realm.

2. In chapters six and seven, the author attempts to solidify the readers' confidence in God's faithfulness as a Promisor by magnifying the solemn oath which God swore by Himself. Such an oath should be strong encouragement to the readers, according to the author, because it is the strongest verbal assurance which God can give to human ears that He will not change His mind about His commissive word. It is the strongest assurance not only because the promisee has the trustworthy word of the divine oath-taker, but he can also rely on the truthful guardianship of the divine oath-witness. What God's solemn oath thus assures for the reader is the eternal availability of Jesus as high priest and ultimately the reception of the blessing sworn to the heirs, the inheritance of God's Rest.

3. The author's third use of commissive language in exhortation involves his use of the promises of the new covenant—the promises of forgiveness of transgressions and of cleansed conscience—in syncrisis and in the magnification of Jesus' greatness as high priest. What the author tries to do with these "better promises" in the center section of his letter is to impress his readers with the great privilege available to them of access to God through the mediatorship of the new covenant in Jesus' priesthood. These promises enjoyed by the reader make Abraham's faithfulness without such assurances quite remarkable while at the same time they make the readers' neglect of such promises a serious matter.

The author's decision to use "promises" in his work does not indicate immediately that his readers were complaining about a failure of God to keep His promises. That the author was not addressing such concerns may be noted by his use of God's solemn oath. If criticisms about God's promises had been circulating among his readers, it is doubtful he would have mentioned God's oath for this could have further aggravated the situation by raising questions about God's need to swear. As it is, the author shows no recognition of any criticisms in his comments unlike Philo who in his comments on God's oath does mention such criticisms. It was, of course, not unusual for past "promises" to be used in complaints, yet as our taxonomy of characteristic uses of

past promises has shown, past “promises” could also be used in contexts in which exhortation was being attempted.

It is altogether likely that the readers had not thought to connect God’s faithfulness to promise with their discouragement and their separations from one another. They were no doubt acquainted with promises of God and probably, as with our author, had come to use *ἐπαγγελία* as *the* word to denote God’s promises. It is to our author’s credit, however, that he diagnoses their problem as lying in part in their failure to appreciate the privileges and responsibilities of being God’s promisees. Indeed from one perspective what the author is trying to do is to get the readers to appreciate what it means to think, live and act as promisees of God’s promises. His reminders of promises familiar to them (the City; the Rest) and his instruction concerning promises perhaps less familiar to them (promises of the new covenant) function to promote and reinforce their identity as promisees. Even his exhortations to brotherly love and mutual responsibility for one another play a role in his exhortation to be faithful promisees. Unless in their relationships to one another they are reliable people, faithful to their own promises, they will probably not fully understand what it means to be a people who trust the unseen God to be faithful to His promises.

The limitation of our investigation to three broad sections of Hebrews has meant that certain “promises” and commissive utterances have not been adequately treated: the promise of Rest (3:7-4:13), the blessing of Esau (12:15-17), the promised shaking (12:25-29), the fidelity expected in the community (13:1-8). These await further study. What we must now judge, however, are the results of having approached the commissive language in Hebrews from a heightened awareness of the phenomenon of promising.

The delineation of the concept of promise into the *felicities of promising* has introduced certain basic categories for approaching and talking about the author’s use of commissive language. In the case of Abraham, it has permitted us to perceive an alternation between a depiction of heirs expecting a promise of benefit and a depiction of Abraham and Sarah confidently trusting God’s faithfulness to promise. In the case of God’s solemn oath, the importance of the ‘character’ and ‘sincerity’ of the promiser for felicitous promising has been underlined.

The felicities of ‘clarity of procedure’ and ‘promises of benefit’ have otherwise posed interesting but as of yet unanswered questions. It may be that the promises of Rest and the City of God are *without* commissive utterances because the author presupposed that his readers were already familiar enough with these promises; he need only remind them. On the other hand, when he quotes the commissive utterances of the new covenant, it may be because he

thinks his readers have not yet appreciated their role as promisees of such "better promises". The matter is not clear and in any event is not crucial for interpretation.

The reasons for our author's choice of Rest and City as the promises the readers are to expect to inherit, rather than other promised objects, are again matters of speculation. In light of the readers' situation, the promise of a permanent city could be a welcomed sight to a people who have faced and may face again financial hardships. If the nature of the promise as an 'occupied' realm is intended as a check on promisees who may be tempted to withdraw from one another, then the author has used the promised objects to educate the readers as to behavior appropriate for promisees. The promise of Rest can, of course, be readily associated with people who are tiring and need rest. It is a question, though, whether our author's choice of Rest dictated his use of Psalm 94, or the reverse, or whether the coincidence of the two was fortuitous. We may assume in all of this that the author intended that what the promises *said* be relevant to the readers' needs of the moment, otherwise what the author intended *to do* with his commissive language could be infelicitous.

Our concern for the phenomenon of promising has also led us to reconsider Jesus' role vis-à-vis God as promise-keeper. Our author is fairly consistent in placing the responsibility for making and keeping promises on God and God alone. By his death and shed blood, Jesus does, according to Hebrews, create a situation in which God keeps the promises of forgiveness and cleansed conscience, but even here the effectiveness of Jesus' activity as high priest rests on God's faithfulness to His solemn oath which acknowledges Jesus' priesthood. Faith in Hebrews, thus, remains faith in God as Promiser rather than faith in Jesus or in his priesthood.

Our interest in *promising as an activity*, the "forces" of promising, prepared us and even prompted us to consider the rhetorical uses of oath. The way in which ancient orators understood and used forensic oath provided us with resources for discerning our author's own use of the forensic and commissive oath.

In placing such a high premium on the human experience of promising, we have tried not to overlook other influences on our author's uses of divine promising, in particular his acquaintance with certain exegetical traditions concerning Abraham. We have also attempted to take account of the differences between human and divine promising, especially those differences resulting from the stories of God's commissive activity in scripture. Yet we have been intent on giving special attention to the "forces" and "felicities" of promising as they occur in Hebrews.

As much as we found ourselves concerned with the logic of promise, we have been forced time and time again to come to terms with the 'logic of exhortation' and more than this with distinguishing features that are often characteristic of hortatory literature. Within the compass of our work, we have certainly not been able to give ample time to the discussion of exhortation, yet we think that what we have discovered about the nature of exhortation and especially the way syncrisis can be used in exhortation is on target for the study of Hebrews and warrants further investigation for a later time.

Finally, it is one of the ironies of Hebrews, yet at the same time one of its most telling points, that the author can be so concerned about God's faithfulness to *promise* and in the same breath, without any sense of contradiction, be equally concerned about God's faithfulness to *oath*. It is ironic because the presence of oath-taking in human society is a way of compensating for false witnesses and unreliable promisors. That our author would unabashedly use the divine oath is but one more indication that what our author is doing is not responding to criticisms of the promises but rather taking the initiative to place before his readers' eyes a God who has obligated Himself, even with the most solemn oath, to bring about a relationship with the seed of Abraham which will endure forever.

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For Greek and Latin authors the texts of the Loeb Classical Library have been used; the English translations have also been consulted in the formulations of our translations. Where the Loeb edition was unavailable for a certain author, the texts of the Teubner series have been used.

For the Greek Old Testament the edition of Alfred Rahlfs has been used except for Genesis where we have followed the Göttingen text edited by John Wevers. For various ‘pseudepigraphical’ texts we have followed the

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GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO PROMISE

The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews

A Bibliographical Addendum

By Lee Zachary Maxey

I. Proem

The purpose of this bibliographical addendum is twofold. One goal is to supplement and augment the original bibliography of *God’s Faithfulness to Promise*, an outstanding work that remains a significant partner in the ongoing scholarly conversation regarding Hebrews. This addendum references works contained in Worley’s original bibliography, and, in addition, cites resources on Hebrews *per se* which appeared after the defense and acceptance of his original dissertation. Another goal is to stimulate and foster new and continuing research and scholarship on Hebrews, one of the most important and influential books of the New Testament.

Most scholars of Hebrews would agree that Hebrews is an exegetically difficult work. Its interpretative habitat can be forbidding, having unwelcome

haints around nearly every verse and chapter. For decades, this environment has occasioned the acknowledgement that Hebrews is a riddle—a designation popularly known as ‘the riddle of Hebrews.’ This characterization indicates that questions regarding the authorship of Hebrews, its date of composition, its literary or rhetorical structure, its intended audience, the physical and social location of that audience, and even the ‘ethnicity’ of its audience (e.g. Christian Jews, Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians etc.), are inquiries which are extremely difficult to resolve or are downright insoluble. Despite this state of affairs, biblical scholars of various denominational, theological, and methodological backgrounds have engaged in a spirited and stimulating discussion regarding this most enigmatic work. For most of the 20th century, however, the conversation partners of Hebrews were few and far between. This situation has changed. After the publication of major commentaries by DeSilva (2000) and Koester (2001), scholarship on Hebrews has mushroomed. Between 2001 and 2018, for example, at least fifteen major book length English language commentaries on Hebrews have appeared. Furthermore, interspersed between the publications of the commentaries are numerous freestanding and collected sets of articles that address some passage, theme, or aspect of Hebrews.

This Bibliography, whose *terminus ad quem* is 2018, consists of two major sections: Primary Texts and Tools and Secondary Sources. A quick perusal of the Primary Texts and Tools section indicates that the section contains tools for the interpretation of Hebrews from a classical rhetorical perspective. This is because Classical Rhetoric has reemerged as an interpretative tool for reading Hebrews, and, most important, *God’s Faithfulness to Promise* reads Hebrews from a classical rhetorical perspective. This perspective involves employing paraenetic or hortatory rhetoric as a means of interpretation (see Chapter 2). Paraenetic rhetoric, a species of classical deliberative rhetoric, aims, in general, to persuade an audience to pursue a course of action. In addition, some of the tools that appear in this section can aid the student of Hebrews both to apprehend and to appreciate the elegant and expressive Greek of the document. The Primary Text and Tools section also contains bibliographies on Hebrews and other relevant works that can aid the serious student of Hebrews. With regard to Hebrews *per se* there are two resources of exceptional note: (1) J. Paul Tanner’s ‘English Based Bibliography for the Epistle to the Hebrews’ and (2) Brian Small’s blog entitled *Polumeros kai Polutropos* (‘in many and various ways’: Hebrews 1:1a). Tanner’s work—whose *terminus ad quem* is 2012—is noteworthy not only because of its sheer length (42 typescript pages), but that it contains an index and that many of its entries are annotated. To date, Small’s blog, which contains a link to Tanner’s bibliography, is currently the go-to resource for secondary resource material on Hebrews.

Initially posting on 2 January 2009, Small's blog contains information regarding published *and* forthcoming publications on Hebrews. Further, it has links for books, articles and essays, theses and dissertations, book reviews, and even sermons on Hebrews. The final section of this bibliography, Secondary Sources, cites resources on both Hebrews and other relevant secondary works. Significantly, the works on Hebrews indicate that the voices of the conversation regarding this work of Scripture have become a bit more diverse. Indeed, we have now begun to hear with greater acuity the voices of both women and scholars of color.

In closing, this addendum is dedicated to the memory and humble spirit of Dr. David Worley, who served both the academy and the church. By faith, I will one day meet him in "the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8)."

II. Primary Sources and Tools¹

A. Primary Texts, Grammars, and Dictionaries

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1 Abbreviations for biblical secondary resources may be found at B. J. Collins, *et al.*, *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (SBL: Atlanta, 2014), 171-260. Abbreviations not found in the SBL Handbook are cited at Journal Abbreviations for *L'année Philologique Online*. Available Online: http://www.annee-philologique.com/files/sigles_fr.pdf.

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