

School of the Word
Hebrews
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HEBREWS 2:5-18

Sequence

- ▶ Heb 2:5-18
- ▶ The place in the letter
- ▶ Commentary
- ▶ Reflection

Heb 2:5 For it was not to angels that he subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. **6** Instead, someone has testified somewhere:

“What is man that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man that you care for him?
7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you crowned him with glory and honor,
8 subjecting all things under his feet.”

In “subjecting” all things [to him], he left nothing not “subject to him.” Yet at present we do not see “all things subject to him,” **9** but we do see Jesus “crowned with glory and honor” because he suffered death, he who “for a little while” was made “lower than the angels,” that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. **11** He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them “brothers,” **12** saying:

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers,
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you”;
13 and again:
“I will put my trust in him”;
and again:
“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

14 Now since the children share in blood and flesh, he likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life. **16** Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; **17** therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. **18** Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

In the letter as a whole

- ▶ 1:5-14 The Son, superior to the angels.
- ▶ 2:1-4 Invitation to pay attention (a mini exhortation, providing a link).
- ▶ **2:5-18 The Son, lower than the angels.**

Commentary

Heb 2:5 For it was not to angels that he subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.

- ▶ “For” is an important link to the argument.
- ▶ Links not only with 1:5-13, but also with 2:1-4.
- ▶ Salvation is not directed towards the angels but towards.
- ▶ This future salvation is *for us* and therefore we should pay full attention.
- ▶ Already “world” (*oikoumenē*) and subject (*hupetaxen*) point to this interpretation.
- ▶ The “world” in this case is the end-time world to come.

Heb 2:6 Instead, someone has testified somewhere: “What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? **7** You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour, **8b** subjecting all things under his feet.”

- ▶ The introduction to the citation is famously vague. Cf. 4:4; 7:17; 12:5–6 Elsewhere the writer is more precise.
- ▶ The citation is from Psalm 8:5-17
- ▶ Psalm 8 is a reflection on Genesis 1:26-28
- ▶ The Psalm as such speaks of a human being.
- ▶ In OT context: “son of man” = human being.
- ▶ Also: Daniel 7:13 — an agent of final salvation.
- ▶ So, in NT context, Jesus used “son of man”, always in a context of fragility and even the cross.
- ▶ In Greek, “a little while lower” is really *spatial* but also temporal.
- ▶ Lower than the angels: he became a human being.
- ▶ Crowned: i.e. at the Resurrection.
- ▶ Enthronement already mentioned in Heb 1:4.
- ▶ Subjecting: Cf. Psalm 109:1 / Heb 1:13.
- ▶ Cf. 2 Cor 15:25-27.

Daniel 7:13-14

13 As the visions during the night continued, I saw coming with the clouds of heaven One like a **son of man**.

When he reached the Ancient of Days and was presented before him,

14 He received dominion, splendour, and kingship;
all nations, peoples and tongues will serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion

that shall not pass away, his kingship, one that shall not be destroyed.

1 Cor 15:25-27

1 Cor 15:25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death, 27 for “he **subjected** everything under his feet.” But when it says that everything has been **subjected**, it is clear that it excludes the one who **subjected** everything to him.

Heb 2:8b Yet at present we do not see “all things subject to him,” 9 but we do see Jesus “crowned with glory and honour” because he suffered death, he who “for a little while” was made “lower than the angels,” that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

- ▶ The “already” and “not yet” of Christian faith.
- ▶ Jesus is mentioned here without title as in 3:1; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2; 12:24 and 13:12.
- ▶ Elsewhere: with Son of God or Christ: 10:10; 13:8, 20-21.
- ▶ The simple name is very striking.
- ▶ The Psalm is “applied” to Jesus.
- ▶ But, lower goes beyond incarnation to include death, that ultimately typically human experience.
- ▶ Jesus *suffered* death — a pointer to the kind of High Priest he would become.
- ▶ Grace of God: the sense of gift is evident in Hebrews: Heb 2:9; 4:16; 10:29; 12:15, 28; 13:9, 25.
- ▶ Taste = experience. For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift and shared in the holy Spirit and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (Heb 6:4–5 NABRE). (See extra texts.)
- ▶ “For” means here not instead of (“penal substitution”) but for the benefit of (salvation; cf. the Suffering Servant Songs).
- ▶ NB: for *everyone*.
- ▶ Notice: the direct application of the Psalm to Jesus.

Tasting or drinking to mean experiencing

Matt 20:22 Jesus said in reply, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?” They said to him, “We can.”

Matt 26:27 Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you,

Matt 26:29 I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father.”

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting that he, **for whom and through whom all things exist**, in bringing many children to glory, should make the **leader** to their **salvation perfect** through **suffering**. 11 He who

consecrates and those who are being **consecrated** all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them “brothers,” 12 saying: “I will proclaim your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will praise you”;¹³ and again: “I will put my trust in him”; and again: “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

- ▶ V. 10: the theme of the whole letter in one sentence.
- ▶ God is the subject of the verb.
- ▶ Leader: archēgōn.
- ▶ Perfect is not moral perfection but fulfilment of the role of High Priest.
- (1) Many means all
- (2) The son is to be perfected first.
- (3) Leader or archēgōn: pioneer and leader (both)
- (4) By means of suffering — first of all for the Son and then for us all.
- ▶ V. 11: literally to make holy. Cf. Exod passim; Lev 20:8; Ezek 20:12.
- ▶ To make holy, to consecrate, to dedicate.
- ▶ I.e. marked as belonging to God.
- ▶ From the one source: i.e. both are humans (not animals or food).
- ▶ One origin: perhaps back to Abraham, mentioned in v. 14.
- ▶ Precisely because they have the one origin, he can call them brothers and sisters.
- ▶ NB OT citation is on the lips of Jesus, here.

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them “brothers,” 12 saying: “I will proclaim your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will praise you”;¹³ and again: “I will put my trust in him”; and again: “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

- ▶ Psalm 22 (21 in the LXX).
- ▶ V. 2 is quoted at Mark 15:34 etc.
- ▶ V. 19 Mark 15:14 etc.
- ▶ V. 14: 1 Peter 5:8.
- ▶ Isaiah 8:7-18: Rom 2:32-33 1 Peter 2:8; 3:14-15.
- ▶ Underlining Jesus own faith in God.

Ps 22:2 My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish?

Ps 22:14 They open their mouths against me, lions that rend and roar.

Ps 22:19 they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots.

Ps 22:23 Then I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the assembly I will praise you:

Isa 8:17 I will trust in the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob; yes, I will wait for him. 18 Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me: we are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

Heb 2:14 Now since the children share in **blood and flesh**, he likewise **shared** in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life.

- ▶ Flesh and blood: the whole business of being human.
- ▶ Share 1: lit. have communion with.
- ▶ Share 2: lit. to have a share in.
- ▶ Death is the single issue for all human beings.
- ▶ The devil is the one with the power. The language here is apocalyptic.
- ▶ Jesus destroyed his power, *through death*, amazingly.
- ▶ He freed us from fear of death.
- ▶ Free from the slavery of death and sin.
- ▶ “Free” here has the nuance of being healed rather than liberated.

The Testament of Levi

Test Levi 18: 9 And in his **priesthood** the nations shall be multiplied in knowledge on the earth, and they shall be illumined by the grace of the Lord, but Israel shall be diminished by her ignorance and darkened by her grief.

- In his **priesthood** sin shall cease
and lawless men shall rest from their evil deeds,
and righteous men shall find rest in him.
- 10 And he shall open the gates of paradise;
he shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam,
- 11 and he will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life.
The spirit of holiness shall be upon them.
- 12 And **Beliar** shall be bound by him.
And he shall grant to his children the authority to trample on **wicked spirits**.

Heb 2:16 Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; 17 therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

- ▶ A final clarification re the angels.
 - ▶ Angels get mentioned again, but in a completely different context.
 - ▶ Also affirming the real humanity of Jesus.
 - ▶ “The scandalous particularity of the incarnation.”
 - ▶ High Priest: unique in the NT.
 - ▶ Merciful and faithful high priest: NB not the blood as such but the interior disposition of the priest.
- (1) The third statement about Jesus as high priest continues the purposive language: He became a priest in order to make atonement (NIV)/to make a sacrifice of atonement (NRSV)/to make expiation (REB) for the sins of the people.
 - (2) The word translated “atone” or “expiate” (ἱλασκομαι hilaskomai) is rare in the NT. A form of the word in Luke 18:13 can be translated “be merciful,” and at 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 the usage is the same as found here in v. 17. At Heb 9:5 the word occurs as a noun of place in a description of the “mercy seat,” an altar in the Temple’s holy of holies on which blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement. In Rom 3:25 it is used in a reference to Christ as our “mercy seat.”
 - (3) In the LXX, the primary uses express the mercy of God in the provisions for the removal of human sin in order to restore divine-human relations.²⁷ This removal or covering of sin, usually by blood sacrifice, is often called “expiation,” a term no longer familiar to most believers.
 - (4) Neither in the LXX nor in the NT does the word mean “propitiate” in the sense of placating or appeasing God, since it is not human but divine initiative that effects mercy and atonement. Human beings do not act or speak so as to make God gracious; we have already been alerted that the drama unfolding is “by the grace of God” (2:9).

Heb 2:16 Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; 17 therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

- ▶ First use of High Priest: Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14–15; 5:1, 5, 10; 6:20; 7:26–8:1; 8:3; 9:7, 11, 25; 13:11.
- ▶ Expiate: cf. Heb 1:3 and 9:5. Also Romans 3:25.
- ▶ Hebrews has no theology of expiation to turn away the anger of God.
- ▶ On the contrary: it is all “down” from God to us.
- ▶ V. 18 is like v. 14 and takes us back to the heart of the letter.
- ▶ Vv. 10-18 contain much of the subsequent thinking in compressed form.

Reflections

- ▶ It is evident, after only two chapters, that the writer of Hebrews is a pastor, writing a word of encouragement (13:22).
- ▶ For example, in 2:5–18, Christ is presented to the readers as a pioneer, the one who goes before them not only showing the way but also creating a path.
- ▶ Christ is also our champion, defeating the devil and setting us free from the fear of death.
- ▶ In addition, Christ is our high priest, offering a sacrifice of atonement for our sins.
- ▶ And finally, Christ is our representative before God, our advocate, intercessor for all who are being put to the test. “For us and our salvation” runs through the passage like a refrain.