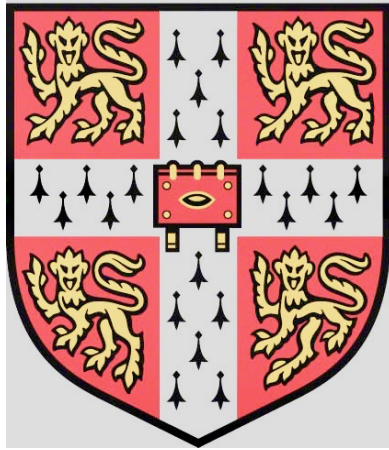


**A Promise Remains:**  
**A Study of Promise in the Epistle to the Hebrews**



Daniel Joseph Stevens  
King's College  
July 2019

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**Daniel Joseph Stevens**

**A Promise Remains: A Study of Promise in the Epistle to the Hebrews**

**Abstract**

Despite receiving little direct attention, the theme of promise often features in scholars' discussions of the central themes of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with some even asserting that promise is the foundational motif of the entire work. However, the way in which the author of Hebrews portrays divine promises and uses them to contribute to the structure of his theology has not yet been satisfactorily described. What the author means by promise, how promise relates to other types of divine commitments, and the content and timing of the promise's fulfilment all need clarification and more precise attention.

Through an exegesis of the relevant passages of Hebrews, this thesis provides a new reading of promise in Hebrews. After an exegesis of the epistle, I then describe Hebrews' overall theology of promise. I argue that, unlike in previous analyses, rest is not the primary content of promise, nor is it the primary lens through which the other instances of promise language should be understood. On the contrary, I argue that the promise is most closely associated with the benefits promised to Abraham, and then mediated through the various subsequent covenants. Further, while previous studies have left it unclear how the divine promise relates to both the Old and New Covenants, I argue that Hebrews develops a view of salvation history in which covenants are founded upon promises and then bring those promises to fruition. This is true of both the Old and New Covenants, though in different ways. I then demonstrate the ways in which this understanding of promise sheds light on the author's hermeneutic and on his method of achieving his hortatory purposes for the epistle. Finally, I conclude by re-asserting the consistency of the author's thought regarding promise and by addressing questions raised by earlier studies of this theme.

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## Citations

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Septuagint material is from:

Rahlfs, A. *Septuaginta, Editio Altera*.

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*The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

New Testament material is from:

*Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

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Rabbinic material is from:

*Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*. Translated by Maurice Simon. Edited by I. Epstein. The Soncino Press: London: 1980.

## **Abbreviations**

All abbreviations were made according to SBL style. Full references are included in the bibliography.

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## PART ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND PROLEGOMENA

## Introduction

The Epistle to the Hebrews is about a God who speaks. It begins with revelation, at first piecemeal across the ages and then focused in the life of a single man (1:1-2). This divine speech not only provides information, but also builds relationships (1:5, 8:10). Throughout the epistle, God's speech binds him. It forms commitments. The author's understanding of himself,<sup>1</sup> his history, and his community is shaped by these commitments of God, and much of the author's exhortation to his audience is similarly founded upon the ways in which God has committed himself to act. God in Hebrews is bound to his people through promise and covenant, and it is impossible to understand the epistle without understanding these terms correctly.

It is no coincidence that these concepts — promise and covenant — have been central to previous treatments of the epistle. However, of the two, covenant has received far more scholarly attention, and as such is better understood. Despite one scholar's insistence that the joint theme of promise and fulfilment is *the* fundamental motif of the epistle,<sup>2</sup> promise has been given little attention except insofar as it relates to covenant. While some scholars have placed promise near the very heart of the epistle, though with little close analysis,<sup>3</sup> most have only examined promise in service of other ends.<sup>4</sup> Many have barely dealt with promise as such at all.

Further, among those who have considered the role of promise within Hebrews, many have imported an understanding of promise into the epistle instead of letting Hebrews speak for itself. After all, promise has become such a common way of speaking of God's dealings within theological discourse that the unique contributions of Hebrews are easily overlooked. Yet, at the time of Hebrews' writing, there was no well established tradition of speaking of God's works in the

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<sup>1</sup> I will refer to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews as "the author." throughout this study. Sometimes I will also use the common, though technically imprecise, usage of the word "Hebrews" to denote the text or its author. I will also refer to the author with the masculine pronoun "he" although we do not know the identity of the author and there have been several attempts to argue that the author was in fact Priscilla (Adolph von Harnack, "Probabilia über die Adresse und den Verfasser des Hebräerbriefs," *ZNW* 1 (1900), 16-41, and Ruth Hoppin, *Priscilla: Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and Other Essays*, (New York: Exposition, 1969)). This masculine reference is derived from the author's own self-designation in 11:32.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Rose, "Verheißung und Erfüllung: Zum Verständnis von ἐπαγγελία im Hebräerbrief," *BZ* 33:1,2 (1989), 191.

<sup>3</sup> Such as Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God. An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Such as Knut Backhaus, "Das Land der Verheißung: Die Heimat der Glaubenden im Hebräerbrief," *New Testament Studies* 47:2 (2001): 171-88.

register of promise.<sup>5</sup> To speak of God's commitments as promise was a choice, and therefore meaningful in some way. To speak in this way with the frequency and regularity with which Hebrews does so is certainly indicative of an underlying pattern of thought.

And Hebrews *does* speak of promise frequently and prominently. Forms of promise (always from ἐπαγγελ-,) both nominal and verbal, appear 18 times within Hebrews.<sup>6</sup> This same word group occurs a total of 69 times within the whole New Testament,<sup>7</sup> making Hebrews account for 26.09% of all NT uses. The only book more densely packed with promise language is Galatians, with 11 uses. In a way that dovetails with Hebrews, Paul's use of promise language in Galatians appears entirely within chapters 3 and 4,<sup>8</sup> where Paul discusses Abraham.

But frequency is not all. Within Hebrews, promise often appears in the author's exhortations, particularly when he transitions from warning to holding out hope.<sup>9</sup> If, as many have argued, exhortation is central to the purpose of Hebrews,<sup>10</sup> then it must be significant that promise language appears so often within hortatory sections, and often is used to introduce those sections. Further, promise appears frequently when the author discusses Abraham (as it also does in Philo<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> At the time, Hebrew (neither as recorded in the Old Testament or in Second Temple Jewish writings) did not have a word that referred to the specific register of promise. It is not until Mishnaic Hebrew that such words are recorded (הבטחה, הבטיח, מובטח). For a survey of where this term is used within rabbinic literature, see Saß, *Leben*, 158-79. Greek did have words within this register from before the Classical period (either from the ἐπαγγελ- root or ὑπισχνε- root), but these were neither particularly common in Greco-Roman or Jewish literature for talking about divine commitments. When they were used for divine commitments in Jewish (and early Christian) literature, there was no established norm for this use. For this, see the summary of Saß and Conway's surveys below. E.g. In Josephus' *Antiquities*, promise language centres around David and Solomon, while in Philo it centres around Abraham.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 4:1, 6:12, 13, 15, 17; 7:6, 8:6, 9:15, 10:23, 36; 11:9 (2x), 11, 13, 17, 33, 39; 12:26.

<sup>7</sup> Curiously, neither ὑπισχνέομαι nor ὑπόσχεσις appear in the New Testament. The register of promise is always referred to with the ἐπαγγελ- word group. Within the apostolic fathers, ὑπισχνέομαι is used once, and does refer to a divine promise of resurrection (Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians 5:2).

<sup>8</sup> Gal 3:14, 16, 17, 18 (2x), 19, 21, 22, 29; 4:23, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 4:1, 6:12, 12:26.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Otto Kuss, "Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Seelsorger," *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift* 67 (1958), 1-12, 65-80; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das neue Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 27; Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: a Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 21; John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*, SNTS Monograph Series 75 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), 46; George Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, NovT. Supp. 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 140-3; Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> See surveys in Gerhard Saß, *Leben aus den Verheißungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 103-118; and Kevin Conway, *The Promises of God: The Background of Paul's Exclusive Use of epaggelia for the Divine Pledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 154-67.

and Paul<sup>12</sup>). Since, other than Christ, Abraham is the main example given to the audience to emulate,<sup>13</sup> this fact suggests that promise is important to the author's portrayal of how the audience is to understand their own place. Finally, promise appears twice within the doctrinal core of the epistle (Heb 7-10) and is used by the author to elucidate the nature of Christ's priesthood and covenant (8:6, 9:15). These prominent uses of promise language justify the understanding that promise is particularly important to the author of Hebrews, and that the concept deserves closer attention.

Further, the common imprecision in studies of Hebrews regarding promise is inexcusable. Many studies up to this point have used promise and covenant interchangeably when talking about God's commissive speech acts.<sup>14</sup> One of the goals of this study is to show that this is more than a verbal imprecision, but in fact endangers one's understanding of Hebrews' portrayal of the works and words of God within history. This is not simply a quibble over words. Promise and covenant cannot be interchanged within Hebrews, because the author himself distinguishes them within the text and then relates them to one another.

This study will be an investigation of the theme of promise within the Epistle to the Hebrews. Its goal will be to clarify what promise is within the thought of Hebrews, how the author uses it within the epistle's argument, and then how promise provides a window into the author's broader theology. In Hebrews, God is not only the God who speaks, but the God who has given promises. To fail to understand the nature and role of these promises is to fail to grasp the author's theology and to hear the author's exhortations.

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<sup>12</sup> E.g. Rom 4:13-14, 16, 20-21, 9:8-9, 15:8; Gal 3:14, 16-22, 29, 4:23-28. Excursus in Saß 1995, 403-8.

<sup>13</sup> Abraham is the most commonly discussed person in the epistle other than Jesus, appearing at 2:16, 6:13-7:14, 11:8-19.

<sup>14</sup> See below in the literature review. For a discussion of the nature of speech acts, cf. Mitchell Green, "Speech Acts," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/speech-acts/>. For promise and vowing as illocutionary speech act, see John Searle and Daniel Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 1-2.

## Chapter 1: Literature review

### Introduction

Within the past century, there have only been three works on promise in Hebrews: those of Cletus Groenen,<sup>1</sup> David Worley,<sup>2</sup> and Christian Rose.<sup>3</sup> There have, however, been other notable works on Hebrews that incorporate promise in a significant way. Also, works will also be included in this review that do not much deal with promise within Hebrews, but which do treat the related subject of covenant. These will be considered because they enable the present study more readily to distinguish promise from covenant and to focus on promise itself. Finally, this review will cover studies that deal with promise in literature surrounding Hebrews.

#### 1. Studies on Hebrews indirectly dealing with promise

##### 1.1 Ernst Käsemann

As so much within Hebrews scholarship does, this survey will begin with Ernst Käsemann's *The Wandering People of God*.<sup>4</sup> The influence of this work is still felt 80 years after its initial publication, particularly within Germany. The force and impact of Käsemann's arguments are only made more impressive by the fact that the first draft of this work was written while he was briefly imprisoned after preaching a sermon on Isa 26:13 which was critical of the Nazi regime.<sup>5</sup> In *Wandering*, Käsemann presents a thorough reworking of how the epistle was previously understood, orienting everything around the theme of the wandering people of God.<sup>6</sup> The fundamental convictions of the epistle, argues Käsemann, are not Christological, but derived from the existential experience of being the wandering people of God.<sup>7</sup> Instead of moving from dogma to experience, he argues that Hebrews moves from the experience of alienation, waiting, and

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<sup>1</sup> *De Notione ἐπαγγελίας in Epistola ad Hebraeos*, Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum 92 (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> *God's Faithfulness to Promise: The Hortatory Use of Commissive Language in Hebrews* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> "Verheißung und Erfüllung: Zum Verständnis von ἐπαγγελία im Hebräerbrief," BZ 33:1,2 (1989), 60-80, 178-91.

<sup>4</sup> Initially *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1938). The 1984 English translation will be used here, however.

<sup>5</sup> It is equally impressive that he wrote the first draft while in prison and that he was able to write an entire draft in the few weeks of his imprisonment.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17-20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

wandering to its convictions about Christ,<sup>8</sup> and draws from various streams of tradition as the author saw fit for his purposes.<sup>9</sup> While Käsemann thought that the theme of wandering, and much of Hebrews along with it, was drawn from a Gnostic myth of a heavenly ascent and a redeemed redeemer,<sup>10</sup> relatively few scholars have followed him this far. Despite that historical implausibility, many scholars have, however, come to accept his broader understanding of the epistle. As such, many studies after Käsemann have picked up the theme of the wandering people of God, and have seen various ways in which a concern over this lived experience is expressed within the epistle.<sup>11</sup>

For the purpose of this current study, the main point of contact comes in Käsemann's treatment of promise and gospel.<sup>12</sup> Since alienation and a lack of fulfilment are key in Käsemann's understanding of Hebrews, he gravitates toward the reference to the promise in Hebrews 3:7-4:13 and argues that, for believers on this earth, the εὐαγγέλιον is experienced only as ἐπαγγελία.<sup>13</sup> Because of his focus in this section, he makes the promised good co-extensive with a heavenly rest,<sup>14</sup> an immediate access to the presence of God. These are his two main contributions to the discussion of promise in Hebrews: promise as an emphasis on futurity and unfulfillment, and rest as what is promised. Both of these claims come directly from Käsemann's existential lens — they are what the wandering people of God look for and need, but do not yet have.

## 1.2 Erich Gräßer

From the time of his *Habilitation*, published as *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief*,<sup>15</sup> Erich Gräßer was one of the most dominant Hebrews scholars. Gräßer's *Habilitationschrift* followed Käsemann in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, "The Son and the Sons," 97-182. Significantly, "as Christ is the Son, he is such principally in relationship to the sons," 117 (emphasis original). Even Christ's sonship is derived, not from God's fatherhood or some ontological status, but in relationship with the community and its experience.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., *passim*. Notably Gnostic traditions, but also hellenistic and rabbinic Jewish sources. E.g. "The κατάπαυσις-speculation" (68-75) draws on "traditional" sources within Judaism, evidenced by the *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* (69), on Philo (70), Pythagorean doctrine (71), and Gnostic sources (73-75).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 87-96, 124-133.

<sup>11</sup> With the notable exceptions of Vanhoye, "Longue marche ou accès tout proche? Le contexte biblique de Hébreux 3,7 - 4,11," *Biblica* 49 (1968), 9-26; Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970), 116-51, esp. 142-6; Jon Laansma, *I Will Give you Rest*, WUNT 2 98 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 310-14; Matthew C. Easter, *Faith and the Faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews*, SNTS Monograph Series 160 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 196.

<sup>12</sup> Käsemann 1984, 26-9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 27-8.

<sup>15</sup> Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1965.

many points, including a partially Gnostic background for Hebrews.<sup>16</sup> He also saw themes of alienation and a feeling of wandering as central to the epistle. In *Glaube*, however, he placed the responsibility for this feeling not on some existential necessity, but on a historical shift within the Christian community.<sup>17</sup> He saw Hebrews as representing a time when the church faced a new crisis, not the “Skandalon des Kreuzes” but the “Verzug des Heilsvollendung.”<sup>18</sup> This crisis of delay, Gräßer argues, fills the epistle and is responsible for the feeling of alienation experienced by the audience. Within this schema, the author casts the now challenged experience of salvation as promise. Faith, then, within the epistle becomes a virtue of being able to patiently wait for the promise throughout the time of delay.<sup>19</sup> Again, for Gräßer, all that promise represents is the futurity of salvation. It is made future to such an extent that he says, “Zusammenfassend ergibt sich als Charakteristik des nachapostolischen Schrifttums: Die eschatologische Paradoxie des ‘Schon - Noch nicht’ löst sich auf in das pure Zeitschema des ‘Noch nicht - Dann (bald!) aber.’”<sup>20</sup> In the course of the coming study, I will evaluate this claim. What is important now is to see that for Gräßer, as for Käsemann, promise in Hebrews is a theme of futurity and unfulfillment. It is a recasting of salvation that denies any experience of its benefits in the here and now. This promise, then, requires faith to be recast as endurance,<sup>21</sup> since there can be no present relationship to the promised goods other than a steadfast waiting.

### 1.3. Knut Backhaus

The most prolific German scholar on Hebrews alive today is Knut Backhaus. While he has not written much directly on promise in Hebrews, many of his works touch upon it, and his essay “Das Land der Verheißung”<sup>22</sup> does deal directly with the theme. Of particular interest here will be both that essay and another, “Das Bundesmotiv in der frühkirchlichen Schwellenzeit: Hebräerbrief, Barnabasbrief, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*.”<sup>23</sup> Backhaus follows Käsemann in asserting, “Die Pilgerschaft des Gottesvolkes auf die Gottesherrschaft (12,28) zu, mit Christus als ‘Anführer und Vollender des Glaubens’ (12,2), unter die (in ihm endgültig begründeten und verbürgten)

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., e.g. 107, 146-8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 203-17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>22</sup> “Das Land der Verheißung: Die Heimat Der Glaubenden Im Hebräerbrief.” *NTS* 47:2 (2001): 171–88. Page numbers are from the reprinted edition collected in *Der sprechende Gott*, 175-94.

<sup>23</sup> In *Der sprechende Gott* (2009, 153-74).



Verheißung — dies ist das Grundmotiv der Heilsgeschichte in Hebr.”<sup>24</sup> For him, however, wandering was neither an existential reality nor brought on by a crisis of the delay of the parousia. Rather, this notion of wandering, he argues, along with the covenantal theology brought in to accommodate it, was occasioned by a need to legitimate Christianity over against Judaism.<sup>25</sup> In this development of a covenantal theology, the faithfulness of God in Christ is emphasised,<sup>26</sup> and God’s commitment to his people is made both universal and singular. There can only be one covenant in this understanding, as Backhaus asserts: “Der Gegenbegriff zu ‘neuer Bund’ lautet daher nicht ‘alter Bund’ im heilsgeschichtlichen, sondern ‘irdischer Opferkult’ im metaphysischen Sinn.”<sup>27</sup> In this singular covenant, some benefits are currently experienced, but others — namely an enjoyment of the presence of God in his kingdom — are still outstanding. Backhaus asserts that it is these unfulfilled commitments of God that the author refers to as promise. Indeed, “Insofern freilich die letzte Vollendung noch aussteht, bleibt auch der neue Bund im Modus der Verheißung.”<sup>28</sup>

In “Land,” Backhaus is even more emphatic. There he asserts that the promise in its pure sense is entirely unfulfilled.<sup>29</sup> This is because all the images for promise — “Landnahme, Nachkommenschaft”<sup>30</sup> — do not play any role at all.<sup>31</sup> Rather, all these images really mean God himself.<sup>32</sup> God is the “land” and the content of the promise, nothing else. Any conception of earthly blessings, whether purely physical goods or resurrection, is referred to as “heilsgeschichtlichen Anachronismus.”<sup>33</sup> Here Backhaus moves beyond what he argued in “Bundesmotiv,” denying any role to earthly salvation-history and putting all within an otherworldly salvation.<sup>34</sup> But this difference in his essays can be reconciled by understanding him as saying that covenant/promise was the organising principle of salvation history up until the coming of Christ,

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<sup>24</sup> 2009a, 164.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 162-3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> 2009b, 178. “Die Verheißung *erfüllt* sich gerade nicht.” Emphasis original.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 190. “Das Schema ‘Verheißung/Erfüllung’ kennzeichnet also keineswegs die heilsgeschichtliche, sondern die futurisch-eschatologische Konzeption des Hebr.”

but now that Christ has come, history has effectively ended. Now all that remains is a heavenly concern.

In all this, Backhaus shows both similarity with and difference from the authors before him. Again, the wandering people of God is taken as a fundamental theme of Hebrews, but this time it is seen as a development in light of a growing Christian self-definition and legitimation. Promise continues to be an element of futurity and unfulfillment. Two new contributions put forward by Backhaus are the complete flattening of promise and covenant and the notion that promise/covenant provided unity to the people of God throughout time. As they wait and wander, they all wait on the same faithful God.<sup>35</sup>

The survey thus far has been focused entirely on promise within German scholarship, because that is the scholarly community which has treated promise within Hebrews in the most detail. While this survey will soon look to Anglophone literature on issues in Hebrews and promise in the New Testament, it must be said that German scholarship has so far carried the day on this subject. Most English and French works on Hebrews, when they come to briefly mention promise at all, will usually give a brief comment and then cite Käsemann, Gräßer, Backhaus, or, with increasing frequency, Rose, who will occupy the final and largest place within this survey. So, the trends of German scholarship's understanding of promise in Hebrews traced here — promise as future and unfulfilled, the wandering people of God as a starting point towards promise, a flattening of the details of the promise, an blending of promise and covenant — are, broadly speaking, the trends within Anglophone and Francophone scholarship as well, though not without some pushback.

## **2. Studies on covenant in Hebrews**

### *2.1. Susanne Lehne*

Susanne Lehne's thorough analysis in *The New Covenant in Hebrews*<sup>36</sup> sets the agenda for this current thesis' understanding of covenant. While she may go a bit far in making covenant, especially apart from promise, the interpretive key of Hebrews in both the newness and continuity of God's speech and actions,<sup>37</sup> her analysis of the nature of covenant in Hebrews is outstanding. Of particular value is the insight that covenant in Hebrews is essentially cultic.<sup>38</sup> In the author's portrayal, whenever he says covenant, he has in mind a system involving cultus, sacrifices, and

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<sup>35</sup> 2009a, 163; 2009b, 190.

<sup>36</sup> JSNT Supplement Series 44 (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> Lehne 1990, 119-20.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 93.

priests.<sup>39</sup> While many other interpreters have seen the many connections between covenant and cult in Hebrews, Lehne is the first to demonstrate that the connection is necessary in the author's portrayal of covenant.<sup>40</sup> This fundamental insight is key, and is, in my estimation, the greatest contribution of Lehne's monograph. Unfortunately, Lehne does not go into much detail as to how the New Covenant works,<sup>41</sup> and she does not explore the ways in which promise relates to covenant. But no one study can do everything. The cultic nature of covenant, so thoroughly demonstrated by Lehne, will be accepted as proven within this study and will form part of the basis for distinguishing between promise and covenant as strongly as I do. This will be particularly relevant in chapter 5 of this thesis, in which promise and covenant are closely compared and interrelated.

## 2.2. Scott Hahn

Scott Hahn's 2009 monograph, *Kinship by Covenant*,<sup>42</sup> takes a broader canonical approach to understanding the New Covenant, but does spend a good bit of time on Hebrews. Hahn's study is somewhat lopsided, as he lets a particular theological understanding of covenant and the people of God serve as a kind of filter, reading Old Testament passages through a particular understanding of the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> His focus throughout is on how covenant creates kinship and constitutes the people of God as a people.<sup>44</sup> Of particular interest is when he turns to Hebrews and its unfolding of the New Covenant.<sup>45</sup> In this section, he addresses the issues of continuity and discontinuity among the people of God. In particular, he tries to address the problem of how Old Covenant saints can seem to be included in the benefits of the New Covenant and be grouped with the New Covenant community (Heb 11:39-40).<sup>46</sup> His solution to this problem is to say that, in

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 97-104.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 94-5. She is followed by this, apparently independently (since he does not cite her), by Darrell J. Pursiful, *The Cultic Motif in the Spirituality of the Book of Hebrews* (Lampeter: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), *passim*, esp. 4, 115-54.

<sup>41</sup> Lehne 1990, 108-117. In this section, however, she mainly discusses the role of approach and ministry language when applied to the audience (109—12), and then analyses four passages in which believers participate in a sort of New Covenant cultus (112-117; Heb 6:1-8, 9:20, 10:19-31, 13:9-16).

<sup>42</sup> *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfilment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). See even in the title how promise and covenant are treated as synonymous.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., e.g. 22-28. This is, of course, by design and part of the "canonical criticism" set out in Hahn's methodology. See also John Goldingay, "Review: *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfilment of God's Saving Promises*," *JTS* 61 (2010), 706-7; and John D. Levenson, "Review: *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfilment of God's Saving Promises*," *The Journal of Religion* 90 (2010), 240-1.

<sup>44</sup> Hahn 2009, 31-3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 278-331.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 325-6. Though he does not use this passage itself, since his survey stops at Heb 9.

reality, both the Old Covenant and New Covenant have existed throughout time, with the New Covenant in some way reaching back and including people who lived during Old Covenant times.<sup>47</sup> But Hahn's solution is, I find, unacceptable. In Hebrews, the New Covenant has a definite beginning, and should not be seen as existing before that time. The motif of continuity should be sought elsewhere, and I will argue that it is found in the promise instead.

### 3. Studies on promise in Ancient Judaism, classical literature, and the New Testament

Now I will turn to two works which are valuable to our understanding of promise language in Hebrews' historical context. Both of these works contain massive, and together comprehensive, surveys of promise language in Jewish and Greek literature, with a focus on divine promises. Similarly, both try to answer the question of why promise language began to become current in Jewish and Christian literature starting in the first century CE.<sup>48</sup> The two studies cover some different material, and come to different conclusions, so both will be surveyed here. While the current study is neither a word study nor a comparative work, the historical backdrop of promise language provided by these studies informed the philological aspects of this current study, and only serve to highlight the significance of the author of Hebrews' choice to use the relatively little used language of promise to talk about some of God's saving commitments. In the New Testament, both studies focus on Paul, but much of what they say could be transferred to Hebrews as well.

#### 3.1. Gerhard Saß

Gerhard Saß's monumental work, *Leben aus den Verheißungen*, seeks to bridge a tradition-historical survey of promise language and a biblical-theological understanding of the role of promise language within scripture.<sup>49</sup> In this text, Saß surveys most extant early Jewish literature with terms relating to promise and then compares this material with Paul.<sup>50</sup> The majority of this large work is taken up by the survey, with the rest given to the comparison with Paul. In so doing, Saß concludes that Jewish literature before Paul did not have any specific term for the promise of God,<sup>51</sup> but instead spoke specifically of God's oath.<sup>52</sup> Saß also makes a strong distinction between

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<sup>47</sup> Speaking about Hebrews' view: "The New Covenant, on the other hand, was present *in nuce* already in the covenants with Abraham and David," *ibid.*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Obviously, the question is not why it was not current in Christian literature before then, but why it should have become common to use promise language when speaking of God at the time of the first generation of Christian literature.

<sup>49</sup> Saß 1995, 40-46.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, for the survey of Jewish literature: 71-235, for his analysis of pauline material: 236-514.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-22.

promise and covenant,<sup>53</sup> arguing that promise refers more to God's mercy, whereas covenant has notions of human response to God's commands.<sup>54</sup> This distinction, however, gets pushed too far within Saß's analysis, leading him to see promise language as always referring to God's unilateral mercy.<sup>55</sup> When it comes to his analysis of Paul, again we find that promise is associated with futurity and unfulfillment.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2. Kevin Conway

Conway's monograph, *The Promises of God*,<sup>57</sup> provides a broader but shallower survey of the language of divine commitment. His survey begins with classical Greek literature and moves through the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE in both Jewish and Greco-Roman sources for all instances of divine commitment signalled by a speech act.<sup>58</sup> As such, he surveys not only promise language, but also oath language (ὄρκος, ὀμνυμι)<sup>59</sup> and even simple verbs of speaking (λέγω, רמא) when it is clear that they signal a divine commitment.<sup>60</sup> Through this survey, his main question is why Paul uses promise language, specifically ἐπαγγελ- language, the way in which he does.<sup>61</sup> In so doing, Conway demonstrates the relative rarity of divine commitments outside of Jewish literature,<sup>62</sup> and then the relative rarity of using promise language for those divine commitments within Jewish literature.<sup>63</sup> Through the survey, Paul's use of promise language and exclusive use of ἐπαγγελ- language for promise is described as peculiar,<sup>64</sup> and as an intentional innovation by Paul.<sup>65</sup> Conway's answer as to why Paul made this innovation — that ἐπαγγελία sounds similar to Paul's favourite

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 491-4, in part because of the "radikalen Antithetik von Verheißung und Gesetz in Gal 3 und Röm 4" (493).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 58-9.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., e.g. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 509.

<sup>57</sup> *The Promises of God: The Background of Paul's Exclusive Use of 'epangelia' for the Divine Pledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 39-48. The language Conway uses for these words is "pledge terms."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 42, 46.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 49. Conway refers to this use as *exclusive* use of ἐπαγγελία for the divine pledge (*passim*, including in the work's title itself), although Paul does use covenant language. By *exclusive*, he means that for commitments outside of the formal register of covenant, Paul only uses ἐπαγγελ- language, and not any of its synonyms (49).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 51-75, esp. summary on 70-75.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 76-198, esp. conclusion on 194-8.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 194-8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 200-02.

soteriological term, εὐαγγέλιον<sup>66</sup> — falls flat, but the survey's worth remains. As such, it also serves to show that Hebrews' use of promise language should not be understood as part of a longstanding convention, since there is no evidence for such a convention in its time.

While Conway's survey may suggest that Hebrews' use of promise language was influenced by Paul,<sup>67</sup> this cannot be a comprehensive description. Hebrews' use of promise language diverges from Paul's in its relationship with covenant. In Paul, they seem interchangeable, or at least overlapping, at times. In Hebrews, this is never the case. So then, from Conway's survey we learn that Hebrews' focus on promise is indeed unusual in its broader historical context, and that while influence from Paul could have some explanatory power, more answers must be sought within the text of Hebrews itself.

#### 4. Works on promise in Hebrews

##### 4.1. Cletus Groenen<sup>68</sup>

The first work published on promise in Hebrews was Cletus Groenen's 1954 dissertation, *De Notione ἐπαγγελία in Epistula ad Hebraeos*. This work has received little attention,<sup>69</sup> likely due to the fact that it was written in Neo-Latin. This short work<sup>70</sup> is primarily theological, not exegetical, and as such treats the theme of promise within a broader theological framework that does not pay close attention to the fine details of Hebrews. His dissertation includes a quick survey of promise in Jewish literature, a theological discussion on the attributes of the one making the promise and those receiving it, and then a survey of the things to which promise refers in Hebrews. His conclusion is rather general: "Nam ἐπαγγελία est: revelatio voluntatis divinae salvificae universalis, qua hominem vocavit ad beatitudinem caelestem obtinendam mediante Christo et bonis operibus."<sup>71</sup> This work has not particularly influenced scholarship's view of promise in Hebrews, but it does stand as the first study devoted to the topic.

##### 4.2. David Worley

The next study on promise in Hebrews is David Worley's 1981 thesis, *God's Faithfulness to Promise*, just recently published with a new foreword tracing the influence of this hitherto

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 308-12.

<sup>67</sup> A possibility to which I am not at all opposed. There is some evidence that Hebrews was indeed familiar with Paul. However, even if this were the case, Hebrews remains its own work with its own purpose and interpretation.

<sup>68</sup> This work was brought to my attention by Worley's (2019, 1-2) reference to Groenen. Worley is the only author who interacts with Groenen, which in itself shows the limited reach that Groenen's work has had.

<sup>69</sup> As evidenced by an absence of reference to it in the bibliographies of most commentaries or studies.

<sup>70</sup> 85 pages, counting front and end matter.

<sup>71</sup> Groenen 1954, 71.

unpublished work.<sup>72</sup> In this thesis, Worley is more interested in the why of promise language in Hebrews than its what.<sup>73</sup> In particular, building off the work of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*,<sup>74</sup> Worley focuses on the effect that promise language would have on the audience.<sup>75</sup> He does, however, examine some of the content of promise, especially in terms of the promise's relation to Abraham<sup>76</sup> and the role Jesus plays in reference to God's promise.<sup>77</sup> His conclusions are modest, but helpful. Through his historical and socio-linguistic work, Worley concludes that the author's purpose for promise language is that it "exhort[s] 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 fellowship of the church and the reader's access to God."<sup>78</sup> The role of promise is to serve the epistle's hortatory aims. Worley's conclusion regarding Abraham also serves this goal, arguing that the audience is to see itself as in a better position than Abraham by virtue of the promise, and that they are therefore more responsible and more encouraged to be faithful.<sup>79</sup> Jesus' relationship with the promises, argues Worley, is not direct, but, "By his death and blood, Jesus does, according to Hebrews, create a situation in which God keeps the promises of forgiveness and cleansed conscience."<sup>80</sup> Worley's monograph provides a strong theoretical basis for seeing how promise serves Hebrews' hortatory purpose, but beyond this, it does not much try to understand what the author means by promise or how it fits in the epistle's argument. As such, his work will play only a minor role in this study's investigation.

#### 4.3. *Christian Rose*

The last work on promise in Hebrews is Christian Rose's two-part article, "Verheißung und Erfüllung." Because of this work's relative prominence, it will serve as the primary foil for my own study, and as such will receive a more detailed interaction here than the previous works.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Worley 2019, 1-6. This foreword was written by James W. Thompson.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., e.g. 2.

<sup>74</sup> 2d ed, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>75</sup> Worley 2019, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 51-78.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 118-56.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>81</sup> Rose just recently (2019) published a commentary on Hebrews, but in it his views on promise seem unchanged and are presented in much less detail. The 1989 form of his argument will chiefly occupy this thesis. (Rose, *Der Hebräerbrief*, Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019).)

Rose's article begins by claiming that throughout the history of Hebrews' interpretation (though in fact beginning with Käsemann), it has been recognised that ἐπαγγελία is of crucial importance to the epistle's soteriology and eschatology.<sup>82</sup> Yet he finds all previous treatments unsatisfactory.<sup>83</sup> In particular, he is frustrated by previous scholars' attempts (or lack thereof) to reconcile Hebrews' seemingly contradictory statements regarding the fulfilment and non-fulfilment of the promise.<sup>84</sup> In his exegetical study, he aims to show how the author is, in fact, consistent.<sup>85</sup> In pursuit of this goal, Rose breaks Hebrews into thematic sections (Heb. 3-4; 6; 7-9; 10-12), and treats every instance of promise language as it occurs. He argues that previous misunderstandings of promise are due to a failure to make several key distinctions. He makes use of these distinctions throughout his argument, and finds the solution to many problems in their application.<sup>86</sup> First, he describes the distinction between promise-word and promised-good.<sup>87</sup> That is, ἐπαγγελία can refer to either the statement given or to the thing promised. Much of the confusion, Rose argues, comes from failing to accurately enough divide between the two. The second distinction, adopted from Käsemann is that the promised goods can be either "earthly-immanent" things or "heavenly-transcendent" things.<sup>88</sup> Finally, he posits the categories "obtained" and "still outstanding."<sup>89</sup> His work ends by highlighting the centrality of promise and fulfilment in Hebrews, asserting that it "ist *das* Basismotiv des Hebräerbriefs."<sup>90</sup>

When Rose examines Heb. 3-4, he endeavours to show that the promise made to those in the Old Testament, particularly those in the wilderness generation, was identical in content to that made to Christians now. He defines its content as entrance into God's eschatological place of rest.<sup>91</sup> The weight of this argument is placed upon the usage of ἐπαγγέλιζεσθαι, which he equates fully

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<sup>82</sup> Rose 1989, 60.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. He particularly contrasts his own with the work of Käsemann 1938, who asserts that all fulfilled promises refer to earthly ones, and all unfulfilled promises are heavenly (Rose 1989, 61), on one side, and H. Braun 1984, who argues that the New Testament usage of promise improves upon (*überbieten*) the Old Testament understanding, thus largely Christianising it and moving past the Old Testament examples (Rose 1989, 62).

<sup>84</sup> Rose 1989, 61. He groups 6:13ff, 8:6, 11:9,17,33 against 9:15, 10:36, 11:13,39.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 62. He says that his search is for an "angemessenen und in sich konsistenten Lösung."

<sup>86</sup> He also recaps these distinctions at the end of his work, 186.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 191. Emphasis original.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 64. The influence here from Käsemann is clear.



with “*das Wort der Verheißung... des Eingehens in Gottes Ruhestätte.*”<sup>92</sup> The result is that this portion of Hebrews understands “unter ἐπαγγελία bzw. εὐαγγελίζεσθαι das dem *alttestamentlichen Volk und der christlichen Gemeinde* gleichermaßen zuteil gewordene Verheißungswort.”<sup>93</sup> This would, of course, bring up the possibility of the wilderness generation potentially entering the rest and receiving the same benefits *exactly* as Christians now, but Rose avoids dealing with that by stating, “Dieses Eingehen wurde jedoch den alttestamentlichen Verheißungsträgern der Wüstengeneration aufgrund ihres Unglaubens endgültig verwehrt.”<sup>94</sup> As with earlier treatments of Hebrews, this association of promise and rest becomes determinative for the rest of Rose’s exegesis. The promise is the promise of eschatological rest in God’s presence, nothing else.<sup>95</sup> The rest of his exegesis proceeds by trying to reconcile the subsequent uses of promise language with this vision of promise as rest. Some passages fit neatly, whereas others create issues. These will all be discussed in further detail in Part 2 of this thesis.

At the end of his analysis, Rose provides a list of conclusions that synthesise his observations into more general remarks about the role of promise in Hebrews. Rose’s first conclusion is schematic and summarises the aforementioned distinctions between promise-word and promised-good, between earthly and eschatological promises, and between different groups who bear the promises, whether they be the OT people, Christians, or both.<sup>96</sup> The rest of Rose’s conclusions flow out of these distinctions, asserting that Heb 11:33 cannot refer to an obtained eschatological good, that εὐαγγελίζεσθαι is used in 4:6 because of its eschatological connections, that Canaan is insignificant in the promise to Abraham, and that no one has received the eschatological promised good yet.<sup>97</sup>

In a section devoted to further implications of his study, Rose reflects on the broader ramifications of his work for understanding Hebrews. The first, and central, concept here is that when the author is not talking about unrelated, earthly promises fulfilled long ago, “Es ist immer

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 63. Emphasis original. Again, recall Käsemann’s assertion that believers currently only possess the gospel in the form of promise (1984, 26).

<sup>93</sup> Rose 1989, 64.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> “Inhalt der ἐπαγγελία ist die den Gliedern der πρώτη διαθήκη und denen der καινή διαθήκη gleichermaßen zuteil gewordene, hinsichtlich ihrer Erfüllung gleichwohl noch ausstehende Verheißung des eschatologischen Eingangs in Gottes Ruhestätte” (ibid., 67).

<sup>96</sup> Rose 1989, 186.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 186-8.

die gleiche ἐπαγγελία, nur unter der Rücksicht von «Ausgangspunkt» und «Ziel» gesehen."<sup>98</sup> This goes on to clarify the title of this article. Ἐπαγγελία in Hebrews is *both* promise and fulfilment. If viewed as promise-word, it is the starting point, the promise itself. If viewed as promised-good, it is the fulfilment. This distinction, Rose argues, removes the possibility of any charge of inconsistency from the author of Hebrews. Finally, he closes by asserting that the promise remains in force, and that in light of his discussion, promise and fulfilment likely is *the* fundamental motif of Hebrews.<sup>99</sup>

Rose's treatment of promise and fulfilment within Hebrews is certainly provocative, and provides a helpful framework for understanding the usage of this term within Hebrews. He does a great help to students of Hebrews by bringing to the fore the possibility that ἐπαγγελία can mean promise-word or promised-good at different times, and that apparent contradictions can be resolved by noting which usage of ἐπαγγελία is meant at any given point. While this is relatively simple semantics, it does clear some confusion, especially regarding the use of promise in Hebrews 8:6 and 9:15.<sup>100</sup> Further, by drawing attention to the different types of promises and groups of promise bearers, Rose provides helpful tools in sorting out the complex usage of promise in Hebrews. Yet, Rose's treatment is not without its faults, and, as I will argue, it sometimes amounts to a muddling of Hebrews' usage of promise, rather than a clarification. While the majority of my differences from Rose will be argued in the body of this thesis, in summary I offer the following critiques:

First, the argument that all promises, other than those dismissed as purely earthly, must be the same eschatological promise conceived in the same way — rest — seems more an imposition on the text than something derived from it. Second, Rose's disregard for certain details of the text, notably OT quotations, furthers the impression that his schema is an imposition on the text. To write off the content of the quote from Jeremiah 31 as insubstantial to the promises upon which the New Covenant is founded,<sup>101</sup> or to assert that the author had no regard for the context or the plain sense of Psalm 110,<sup>102</sup> is to ignore the very evidence upon which one's argument ought to be made. Third, Rose's argument seems to lead to the conclusion that no one in the Old Testament ultimately receives a share in God's salvific plan. While he stops just short of this, he is emphatic that the Old Covenant had no aspects of hope, and had no way of bringing the promised-good to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>100</sup> See chapter 5 below.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 77.

the people. If Rose does not mean to suggest that they are entirely left out, it is unclear how in his schema they can be otherwise. Fourth, while covenant and cultic categories seem to play a large role in the actual fulfilment of promises, and while the New Covenant is founded upon promises, these categories play no significant role in Rose's explanation.<sup>103</sup> Fifth, and finally, Rose is likely right that promise is key in understanding the book of Hebrews, but it seems unlikely that it is *the* key.

## 5. Literature review summary

What can now be said about the state of promise in current Hebrews research? First, through the surveys on promise in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature, we can say that Hebrews' use of promise is noteworthy. Promise was not a well established, conventional way of speaking about God's dealings or verbal commitments. It was not unprecedented, but neither was it the most common way of speaking. Therefore, in a context in which the author also uses the language of covenant and divine speech, it is significant that he chose to describe some of God's commitments with the register of promise. And, as we will see in the next chapter, it is even more significant that the author distinguished promise from covenant and oath to refer to a different concept or set of concepts. While it has not yet been established what this concept is,<sup>104</sup> the intentional separation of promise from covenant and oath shows that the author's use of this language was in fact a meaningful decision, not mere lexical variation. Thus, promise is a worthwhile subject of study within Hebrews.

Second, from Worley's work, we can say that promise is integrated not only into the doctrinal argument of Hebrews, but into its hortatory purpose as well. Most scholars now recognise that the purpose of Hebrews is not primarily to inform, but to elicit a response. That promise is intimately tied with the hortatory purpose, both in its emotional register as a speech act and in its actual use within the epistle, suggests that a more developed understanding of promise will enable a greater understanding of the hortatory aims of the epistle and how it went about pursuing them. Even the somewhat unambitious claim that the author uses promise language to encourage the audience to continued faithfulness will yield interesting investigations. The theme of faith/faithfulness is much discussed and debated within Hebrews,<sup>105</sup> and promise's relationship with faith/faithfulness can

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<sup>103</sup> As has been suggested previously in this introduction, and as will be argued throughout this study, any account of promise in Hebrews must take into account its relationship to covenant.

<sup>104</sup> This will occupy the majority of the rest of this present study.

<sup>105</sup> E.g., Erich Gräser, *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief*, Marburger theologische Studien 2 (Marburg, N.G. Elwert, 1965); Easter 2014; Victor Rhee, *Faith in Hebrews: Analysis within the Context of Christology, Eschatology, and Ethics*, Studies in Biblical Literature 19 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

help shed light on how the author portrays the nature of faith and what exactly he wants the audience to do.

Third, this survey of broader scholarship yields several topics that this study will endeavour to address. Throughout Hebrews scholarship,<sup>106</sup> the theme of the wandering people of God is taken, to various degrees, as a starting point for understanding the experience of the audience and the needs that the author perceived among them. From this starting point, rest has been understood as the natural goal for a people made weary by their wanderings, and as such has often been seen as the sole, or main, component of the promise.<sup>107</sup> As such, promise has been made into a category completely caught up with futurity and unfulfillment. Promise is not only seen as eschatological throughout these studies, but also as resting entirely on the *not yet* side of the already-not yet tension of early Christian eschatology.<sup>108</sup> This is so much the case that some authors have even made this definitionally true, claiming that promise *is* the unfulfilled side of covenant.<sup>109</sup> Further, with Rose's work comes the question of whether Hebrews' use of promise language is internally consistent. He argues that it is, but does so by starkly dividing between certain meanings of promise and brushing aside details of the text, especially Old Testament citations, that challenge his distinctions. Further, many of these studies either gloss over or barely treat the way in which promise and salvation relates to saints who lived before the New Covenant. Often there is an assertion that they do share in the benefits, but no attempt to resolve how has been seriously made. Finally, no previous study has sufficiently distinguished between promise and covenant. By blurring the lines between these two distinct concepts, aspects of Hebrews' argument have been obscured.

All of these themes yield questions that the following study will attempt to answer. Is the wandering people of God the base motif for Hebrews' depiction of promise? Is rest the main content of the promise? Is promise exclusively a future, unfulfilled thing? Is Hebrews consistent? How do the Old Covenant saints, and even the patriarchs before them, share in the promises? In addition to these questions, more work must be done to answer the following: What is the promise in Hebrews? What is the relationship between promise and covenant? Why use the language of promise at all? The goal of this study will be to seek the answers to these questions. However, they will not be directly addressed until the end of the work. Rather, a close exegesis of all the relevant

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<sup>106</sup> With the exceptions mentioned above.

<sup>107</sup> This is true in all German authors surveyed on Hebrews, from Käsemann through Rose, despite their various differences as to how they reach those conclusions and what else they see in Hebrews.

<sup>108</sup> Gräßer 1965, 171.

<sup>109</sup> Backhaus 2009a, 162.

promise passages in Hebrews will gradually provide the raw materials needed to construct both an answer and a new way of understanding promise in Hebrews.

## Chapter 2: Assumptions and Approach

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to set out some introductory issues before the exegetical study can begin. While this will inevitably require some exegesis, it is located here instead of within the main body of the thesis for two reasons. First, the issue of the definition of promise within Hebrews is foundational for the exegesis itself. All of the exegesis within Part 2 of this thesis assumes that within Hebrews, “promise” denotes something specific that differs from either covenant or oath. This differentiation is made not for theoretical reasons, but because the use of the terms within Hebrews demands it. If this distinction does not exist, the argument of the rest of the work falls apart, so it must be established here. Second, while the argument of this thesis is largely agnostic regarding the contextual issues of author, audience, and occasion, there are some assumptions upon which my argument is built. Namely, the consistency of the author’s thought will be taken as a working assumption. While evidence will be considered throughout the exegetical portion of this thesis, I will start with the assumption that the author does not contradict himself. Beyond this basic assumption of coherence, however, none of the other assumptions laid out in this chapter is particularly load bearing. For example, if one were to propose a primarily Middle Platonic background for Hebrews, as opposed to the Jewish/apocalyptic background put forward here,<sup>1</sup> the general structure for how promise works in Hebrews would still work, even though the content of the promise would be changed.

#### 1. Defining and distinguishing concepts

At this point, it will be helpful to clarify what this study is and what it is not. All of the discussion thus far could lead to a potential misunderstanding. This thesis is not a “word study” on promise, nor is it an investigation into some free standing “theory of promise” that the author contributes to or shares in. Other than insofar as they inform the possible semantic range, this study is not particularly interested in other uses of this ἐπαγγελ- word group in broader Greco-Roman literature. Similarly, the question of why the author — like other authors within the New Testament — exclusively used the ἐπαγγελ- word group when referring to the register of promise as opposed to the ὑπισχνε- group will not occupy much space in this thesis.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the question before us is this: To what is the author referring when he uses the ἐπαγγελ- word group? It is a question on the level of *concept*, not of word. It just so happens, as I will argue, that the author of Hebrews refers to this concept exclusively through the ἐπαγγελ- word group. By missing this key

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<sup>1</sup> For more specific definitions of these admittedly vague terms, see below.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike, e.g. Kevin Conway’s (2014) evaluation of promise language in Paul,

part of the equation, previous scholars have failed to adequately address what the author means through his use of promise language. In answering this question, I will also ask how this concept is used in the argument of Hebrews, as well as how this concept fits within the author's broader thought and theology. By recognising that promise is entirely distinct from covenant and oath in Hebrews, this thesis is able to make genuinely new contributions to the understanding of Hebrews. As a study of the theme of promise in Hebrews, this work must comment on a feature of Hebrew's use of the noun ἐπαγγελία, namely the author's variation between the singular and the plural forms. Of the 14 instances of ἐπαγγελία, eight are singular<sup>3</sup> and six are plural.<sup>4</sup> While efforts to find a systematic cause for the author's singular and plural use of promise have proven fruitless,<sup>5</sup> it does not mean there is never any reason for the author's varying usage. In light of the failure of other studies to produce a firm rule for this usage, it is best not to assume that there is a single unifying difference between the singular and plural of ἐπαγγελία. For example, in two similar passages in close succession, the author claims that the patriarchal saints died μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας (11:13, plural) and then that the dead Old Covenant saints, despite being approved by God, οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν (11:39, singular). Here the thought is the same: the faithful of the past died without having received what God promised to them. In the case of the patriarchs, that is stated in the plural, while in the case of all the saints of old, including the patriarchs, it is placed in the singular. Whatever the difference, if any, it must be one of nuance, not substance. Potentially the difference has to do with the plural gesturing towards the various blessings offered. Perhaps in 11:39, in a context emphasising the unity of the people of God across time, the singular is used to slightly stress the unity of that which was offered to all God's people. These, however, are contextual shades of meaning, not systematic differences. As such, the variation in singular and plural will be briefly addressed in the future chapters, but it will not much influence the broader argument.

### 1.1 *Distinguishing promise and covenant*

How can we know that "promise" and "covenant" do not simply point to the same concept? After all, any author can use multiple terms to refer to the same idea. We even have evidence from

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<sup>3</sup> 4:1, 6:15, 17; 9:15, 10:36, 11:9 (2x), 11:39.

<sup>4</sup> 6:12, 7:6, 8:6, 11:13, 17, 33.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on attempts to resolve this question, and those who argue it is impossible, see Rose 1989, 67, esp. fn. 43.

an author in some way connected to the author of Hebrews, Paul,<sup>6</sup> who at least seems to do just that (Gal 3:17). It is possible that within Hebrews, variation between promise and covenant simply points out different aspects of the same thing.<sup>7</sup> There is nothing that prevents the author from using these two terms, or any two terms, as synonyms with no shade of difference.

But Hebrews presents us with reasons to think that this is not the case. First, promise and covenant are used in significantly different ways and contexts within Hebrews, and there is no evidence that these roles are reversible. Second, the author relates promise and covenant to each other (8:6, 9:15), and as such they cannot be identical or interchangeable, since the two stand in a definite relationship to one another. It is not the burden of this introduction to delineate all the ways these terms are used or to explain the relationship between promise and covenant. That will wait until the exegesis within the body of this thesis.<sup>8</sup> I will, however, briefly show that this differentiation between promise and covenant does in fact exist within Hebrews.

I will begin with the use of covenant in Hebrews, since that has received the most scholarly attention and can stand as a relatively fixed point. Susanne Lehne has conclusively shown that covenant in Hebrews is irreducibly cultic.<sup>9</sup> That is, a covenant<sup>10</sup> in Hebrews always administrates a system of priests, sacrifices, and purgation.<sup>11</sup> This restricted use of covenant is unique to Hebrews, but is consistent throughout the epistle.<sup>12</sup> There are no non-cultic uses of covenant within Hebrews,<sup>13</sup> and the author does not use covenantal language to describe the non-cultic aspects of the Old and New Covenants.

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<sup>6</sup> While the exact relationship between the two is debated, it is generally acknowledged that there is *some* connection between Hebrews and Paul, whether it be directly literary (Spicq *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gabalda, 1952/53); Ben Witherington III, "The Influence of Galatians on Hebrews", *NTS* 37 (1991), 146-52; and Claire Rothschild, *Hebrews as Pseudepigraphon: The History and Significance of Pauline Attribution of Hebrews*, WUNT, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) or simply the influence of one stream of tradition on another (Knut Backhaus, "Der Hebräerbrief und das Paulus-Schule", *BZ* 37 (1993), 183-208).

<sup>7</sup> As some have in fact argued, such as Backhaus 2009a, 153-74, 162.

<sup>8</sup> In particular, see chapter 5 below.

<sup>9</sup> Lehne 2000. While that covenant in Hebrews has cultic associations is neither new nor controversial (cf. Craig Koester, "Reviewed Work: The New Covenant in Hebrews by Susanne Lehne", *JBL* 110 (1991), 745), it is the essentially cultic nature of covenantal language in Hebrews that is Lehne's primary contribution.

<sup>10</sup> While these categories often overlap, to be precise a covenant is a speech act which establishes a formal relationship between two or more parties. In Hebrews, however, the administration of that covenant is concerned solely with cultic categories. Both the agreement and its administration can be referred to by διαθήκη.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-108.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 117, 120.

<sup>13</sup> The somewhat problematic use of "covenant" in 9:17 can be read in a cultic manner, and even if it is not properly cultic, it remains a sort of pun on the cultic use.



The opposite is true for promise within Hebrews. As will become clear in the upcoming exegesis of Hebrews, promise is never cultic within Hebrews. It is not associated with priests, sacrifices, cleanliness, or any of the cultic regulations that define covenant in Hebrews. In fact, except for the two places where the relationship between promise and covenant is described (8:6, 9:15), promise does not appear within the author's discussion of cult. Similarly, covenant language only appears once in a section of Hebrews governed by promise language (12:24), and there it only appears in a title of Christ. This distinction of function — covenant as cultic, promise as non-cultic — along with a general separation in the distribution of the terms throughout the letter strongly suggests that promise and covenant are used by the author to point to different concepts. The two are not interchangeable.

The difference between promise and covenant is only made stronger by the fact that promise and covenant are placed in a specific relationship to one another within the text of Hebrews. Hebrews 8:6 says νυνὶ δὲ διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας, ὅσω καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἥτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται. The New Covenant was enacted on the basis of certain promises. This is a distinct relationship between promise and covenant. Whatever this relationship is, it is not identity. The author suggests that in some way a promise served as a foundation for the New Covenant, and he does not state the reverse. We again find a relationship between promise and covenant in 9:15, where the author says, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης ἐστίν, ὅπως θανάτου γενομένου εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν λάβωσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας. Here there is a promise of an eternal inheritance which seems to be something other than the “first covenant” or the New Covenant mentioned. While it is not the place here to explain when this promise was stated or its exact relationship to the covenants, promise is treated as something other than the covenants. Sins against the first covenant prevented the promise's reception, and the death which inaugurated the New Covenant enables the promise to be received. If the promise were identified with the New Covenant, this would reduce the argument to a tautology: the death that inaugurates the New Covenant makes it possible to receive the New Covenant. Since it is unlikely that the author would argue in this way, this passage too is a clear sign that the author is referring to different, but related, concepts through the language of promise and covenant.

So then, through their respective distributions, registers, and relationships, promise and covenant are not collapsible within Hebrews. Promise is something other than covenant, especially given covenant's limited, cultic meaning within the epistle. This study, therefore, will be an attempt to understand the concept(s) expressed in Hebrews through promise language in

particular.<sup>14</sup> Generic terms for speech, even if in a context of commitment, will not be considered, nor will other commissive speech acts, such as the swearing of an oath (6:16-17, 7:20-21,28) or the declaration of a covenant (8:8-12), except insofar as they shed light on the author's use of promise. We will see that the author of Hebrews is doing something by speaking in the register of promise, and his meaning for this concept is different from what he signifies through other terms for speech and commitment. In essence, that is the hypothesis for this study: The author, whenever he speaks of promise, means something that he does not express when speaking of God's other acts of speech or commitment. The exegesis in the body of this study will serve as the experiments upon which this hypothesis will either stand or fall. Further, these textual experiments will not only show *that* the author means something by promise, but *what* the author means as well.

### 1.2 Distinguishing promise and oath

While promise and oath have been less confused in Hebrews scholarship than promise and covenant, they could conceivably be so.<sup>15</sup> Although oath language<sup>16</sup> is less prevalent than promise language in Hebrews, it does appear nine times within the epistle,<sup>17</sup> three times in quotations from the Greek Old Testament,<sup>18</sup> and always in discussion of a passage from the scriptures in which the formal language of swearing an oath is present.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the use of promise and oath can be distinguished within Hebrews in two ways: how conservative the author is in using these respective registers of language and how the author relates the two concepts to one another.

By conservative, I mean the author's tendency to use a certain type of language only when it is so used in his source material. While the author speaks of God making oaths, he does so only in reference to passages of the Greek Old Testament that use either ὁμνύω or ὅρκος.<sup>20</sup> The author does not mention or discuss divine oaths that are not called so within his scriptures. As such, the author's use of oath language is conservative. The situation is the opposite with promise language. As stated above, nowhere does a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures use promise language

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<sup>14</sup> ἐπαγγέλλομαι and ἐπαγγελία.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. "Der Eid nur ein Modus der Verheißung ist" (Backhaus, *Der Hebräerbrief*, RNT (Regensburg: Pustet 2009d), 249). "The author sees Psalm 110 (Psalm 109 LXX) as God's promises, oaths even, to the Son" (Amy Peeler, "Promises to the Son: Covenant and Atonement in Hebrews", in *So Great a Salvation: A Dialogue on the Atonement in Hebrews*, eds. Jon C. Laansma, George H. Guthrie, Cynthia Long Westfall, LNTS 516 (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 195).

<sup>16</sup> ὁμνύω, ὅρκος.

<sup>17</sup> 3:11, 18; 4:3; 6:13 (2x), 16 (2x), 17; 7:21.

<sup>18</sup> 3:11, 4:3, 7:21.

<sup>19</sup> Even the use in 6:16, which is a general comment about how oaths function in human society, is in service of explaining God's oath in which he swore by himself (Gen 22:16-17).

<sup>20</sup> Gen 22:16-17; Ps 94:7-11 (LXX), 109:4 (LXX).

to translate a divine commitment.<sup>21</sup> Whenever the author describes something as a promise, he is doing so as an interpretation of the scriptures that themselves only talk about God's speech. He identifies promises when the text does not necessitate that he do so. So then, the author's use of oath language is extremely conservative, while his use of promise language is inventive.

Second, there is one passage where promise and oath are directly related to one another within Hebrews, 6:13-18. While aspects of this passage will be discussed later in this thesis,<sup>22</sup> I will here note the passage to show that promise and oath are shown to be different from one another in Hebrews by how they are related. The passage reads:

Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγειλάμενος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ λέγων· εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε· καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. ἄνθρωποι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὁμύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὅρκος· ἐν ᾧ περισσότερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιδείξει τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτευσεν ὅρκῳ, ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι τὸν θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφύγοντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος·

For after God made a promise to Abraham,<sup>23</sup> since he had no one greater by whom to swear an oath, he swore by himself, saying, "Certainly I will bless you and certainly I will multiply you." And so, having patiently waited, he came to receive the promise. Now humans swear by something greater than themselves, and an oath is the certain end of any dispute of theirs. So, when God all the more desired to show the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his will, he made a pledge with an oath, so that, through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled may have strong encouragement to lay hold of the hope set before us (Heb 6:13-18).

In this passage, we see two main ways in which promise and oath are related. First, oath is secondary to promise. That is, the oath comes after the promise. This is shown through the aorist participle ἐπαγγειλάμενος, though this is contested.<sup>24</sup> More clearly, verse 17 shows that there were already "heirs of the promise" when the oath was given. There were those who had the promise

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<sup>21</sup> "This word [ἐπαγγεῖλα] has no preliminary history in the OT" (Schniewind and Friedrich, "ἐπαγγέλλω, κτλ.", *TDNT* 1964: 2:579).

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 4, below.

<sup>23</sup> The choice to translate this as "after" instead of "when" (as many translations, e.g. ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV, NRSV) is motivated by the aorist participle. See chapter 4, below.

<sup>24</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary 47A-B (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1991), 1:147; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 336.

and who needed some sort of encouragement. Then came the oath. The fact that there is a temporal sequence — first this promise, then this oath — suggests that the promise and oath are not the same thing, since something cannot follow itself. Second, the purpose of oath is simply confirmatory. This is the point of the author's digression about the function of oaths in human society. Oaths end disputes; they provide certainty. In context, this suggests that there was already a promise about which there was, or at least could be, some doubt. The oath of Genesis 22 referred to in this passage does not, in the author's eyes, add any content to the promise, it simply props it up by adding a confirmation in which God cannot lie. This does not make the group addressed the "recipients of the oath." They remain the heirs of the promise, and the oath simply confirms this.

So then, within the text of Hebrews, promise and oath do not point to the same thing. The promise is God's commitment to bless his people, and the content and dynamics of this promise are developed over the course of the epistle. The oath, however, when related to God's promise is reduced to a confirmatory supplement.

## 2. Introductory matters

It is conventional in works on Hebrews to devote some time to matters of introduction surrounding the epistle, and I too must address that thorny issue. It is equally common to point out the "riddle" of Hebrews, and how so very little regarding the context of this epistle can actually be known. This thesis will be largely agnostic regarding issues of context, because it seems impossible to hold to any position on the matter firmly, and shaky assumptions do not make for good exegesis or interpretation. On matters of the identity of the author,<sup>25</sup> the location of writing,<sup>26</sup> and the destination of the epistle, I will make no claims and base no argument on any reconstruction.

Regarding the date of composition, *slightly* more can be said. A *terminus ad quem* is provided through an allusion to the epistle in 1 Clement 36 and *passim*, marking a date somewhere between 90 and 110 CE.<sup>27</sup> The *terminus a quo* is a bit more difficult to ascertain, though the text of Hebrews does tell us that the audience did not hear from Jesus himself, but from those who heard him

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<sup>25</sup> For a recent summary on the possible identities of the author, see David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology 8 (Nashville, TN: 2010), 10-39.

<sup>26</sup> For a recent summary of the positions on this and the destination of the letter, see Carl Mosser, *No Lasting City*, 2004, an unpublished dissertation at the University of St Andrews.

<sup>27</sup> For the dating of 1 Clement, see J. B. Lightfoot, *Clement*, Part 1, Vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981); L.L. Welborn, "On the Date of First Clement," *BR* 24 (1984), 34-54; T. J. Herron, "The Most Probable Date of the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989), 106-21; Andrew Gregory, "1 Clement, An Introduction," *Expository Times* 117 (2006), 223-230; Andreas Lindemann, "The First Epistle of Clement," in *The Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*, ed. Wilhelm Pratscher, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010, 47-69.

(2:1-4), suggesting that some time had passed. Not only that, but the congregation addressed had had leaders who served for a while and then died (13:7), again suggesting some passage of time. Finally, the audience itself experienced certain hardships after having come to confess Jesus as Christ, and these negative experiences can be referred to as having happened long enough ago to require reminding (10:32). This is circumstantial, but suggests the passage of at least a decade from having heard the message about Jesus. So that places the *terminus a quo* somewhere after 40 CE. The most that can be *known* about the dating of Hebrews then is that it is likely within 40-110 CE. The usual debate about whether the epistle was written just before or after the cataclysmic events of 70 CE,<sup>28</sup> will not be considered here, and will play no part in the following analysis of Hebrews. Regarding the audience, the most that can be said definitively is that it was a group that confessed Jesus as Christ.<sup>29</sup> The occasion of the letter seems to be some sort of crisis, real or perceived,<sup>30</sup> that threatened this Christ confession in some way. It seems that at least two options before the audience were a religious practice that maintained Christ confession and another that did not, but still retained elements of Jewish practice, but even this cannot be known with certainty.<sup>31</sup>

One matter of background that must be discussed, because it is often used to determine interpretive questions, is that of conceptual background. Hebrews scholarship has largely divided into two camps regarding the background of thought which contributes to the author's soteriology, eschatology, and metaphysics. These two camps can, with admitted oversimplification, be divided

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<sup>28</sup> For a recent summary of the positions on this, see, Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 34-41.

<sup>29</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will inevitably use the term "Christian" occasionally as a shorthand to refer individuals who hold to some sort of Christ confession. This should be understood as making no claims regarding their ethnic background or standing vis-à-vis Judaism. Similarly, this is not making a claim as to whether the term "Christian" is appropriate to any movement at the time period in question. It is a simple shorthand and occasionally unavoidable.

<sup>30</sup> For a recent summary on the positions on the occasion of Hebrews, see Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2 223 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 10-17.

<sup>31</sup> The arguments regarding the inferiority of law and priesthood must have *some* referent in the lives the audience, but it cannot be known with certainty what this is.

into the apocalyptic<sup>32</sup> and the Platonic. Within the apocalyptic camp, a more specific subdivision argues for influence from Qumran or a similar strand of Judaism.<sup>33</sup> The Platonic interpretation has a further, more specific, sub-camp that argues for the direct influence of Philo.<sup>34</sup> Both of these sub-camps have fallen out of fashion — the Qumran interpretation gradually faded away as the documents from that place were better understood, while the Philonic interpretation was to many made untenable by Williamson's masterful argument against it<sup>35</sup> — while the two main camps remain. On average, recent Anglophone scholarship leans towards the apocalyptic interpretation, while German scholarship largely holds to the Platonic interpretation. In this study, I will adopt the apocalyptic interpretation, while acknowledging that it is completely possible for there to be platonically influenced elements within the text of Hebrews as well. This will influence interpretations of some elements of the promise, though much of the discussion within this thesis can move forward irrespective of reconstructed backgrounds.

Further, especially within German scholarship on Hebrews, there is a troubling trend wherein a Platonic interpretation of Hebrews is used, usually implicitly, to distance the text from the various forms of Second Temple Judaism. Parallels are sought in Greco-Roman authors in

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<sup>32</sup> Admittedly, “apocalyptic” is a thorny word, and is used so often in so many ways that it has become nearly meaningless. Sadly, it is the only word we currently have to get close to a certain cluster of ideas, so it must be used. By apocalyptic, I here mean a worldview characterised by a two-age eschatology (this age and the age to come), a conviction that God will in some way break into history to bring about the change from the current age to the coming one, and a concern for physicality in some sense, usually through resurrection and often through the notion of a new (or renewed) earth. For further resources on the use and definitions of “apocalyptic,” see C.K. Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: Essays in Honor of C.H. Dodd*, eds. W.D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 363–93; Philipp Vielhauer and Georg Strecker, “Introduction to Apocalypses and Related Subjects,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. Robert Wilson (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1992), 2:549; John J. Collins, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 A–C (London: Doubleday, 1992), 279–88; *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); J.P. Davies, *Paul among the Apocalypses? An Evaluation of the ‘Apocalyptic Paul’ in the Context of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature*, LNTS 562 (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 22–35.

<sup>33</sup> Famously argued by Yigael Yadin, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Scripta Hierosolymitana, Vol. IV: Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1958 (second ed. 1965)), 36–55; Hans Kosmala, *Hebräer — Essener — Christen: Studien zur Vorgeschichte der frühchristlichen Verkündigung*, Studia Post-Biblica 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1959), esp. 1–43; Ceslas Spicq, “L’Épître aux Hébreux, Apollos, Jean-Baptiste, les Hellénistes, et Qumran,” *Revue de Qumrân* 1 (1959), 365–90. This view was, as can be expected, most popular immediately after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and indeed before the majority of those documents were made accessible.

<sup>34</sup> Most famously argued by Spicq 1952, 1:39–91.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). Though, see a tentative reevaluation in Kenneth Schenck, “Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews: Ronald Williamson's Study after Thirty Years,” in *The Letter to the Hebrews: Critical Readings*, ed. Scott D. Mackie (London: T & T Clark, 2018).

preference to Jewish ones,<sup>36</sup> and anachronistic parallels are sought before looking to Jewish sources.<sup>37</sup> Now this is not to say that there was no such thing as Platonic Judaism. There was, and Philo stands as its great example to us. Further, this is not to put up a firm barrier between non-Jewish Greco-Roman sources and Jewish sources. Since Hengel,<sup>38</sup> it has been impossible to think of a Judaism that was not to some degree hellenised. Rather, it seems best, unless Hebrews itself grants us leave to do so, to place Hebrews within its Jewish context as holding the common hopes of Second Temple Judaism: the age to come, resurrection, and God's work within history. I am cautious, however, of building too much on any reconstructed context. While some of the arguments of this thesis will be less than persuasive to those who see a primarily Platonic background to Hebrews, the general sketch of the role of promise in Hebrews that will be argued can work equally well within either conceptual background.

### 3. Working assumptions

As far as method is concerned, this study will be largely eclectic. It will move forward through exegesis drawing on close reading, discourse analysis, and historical comparison. Theological readings and the history of interpretation will be consulted when they seem to shed light on the meaning of the passage. No particular critical lens will be dominant. Throughout, I will attempt to read Hebrews charitably. I will assume the unity of the literary composition,<sup>39</sup> and that when the author used sources,<sup>40</sup> he did so critically and carefully. This means we should assume that the author understood the import of the sources he was using, and did not simply stitch competing and conflicting accounts into a kind of pastiche. Further, I will tentatively assume a basic unity to the author's thought. That is, explanations other than self-contradiction will be sought for all

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<sup>36</sup> Such as in Eisele's 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Such as in Käsemann's (1984) and Gräßer's (1965) use of Gnostic parallels.

<sup>38</sup> *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh.s v Chr.*, WUNT 10 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969), with English translation as *Judaism and Hellenism* by J. Bowden in 1974.

<sup>39</sup> Almost all scholarship now sees the unity of the epistle. While some have questioned the relationship between chapter 13 (especially 13:20-25) and the rest of Hebrews, the majority position is to see Hebrews as a unified, carefully constructed whole (See Rothschild 2009 for a summary of scholarship on Heb 13:20-25 from 1880-2006 (47-55, esp. 47-48).

<sup>40</sup> At the very least, Greek translations of the Hebrew scriptures stand as sources for the author, whether as the books themselves or collected in *florilegia* or *testimonia* (M.C. Albl, 'And Scripture Cannot Be Broken': *The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections*, NovTSup 96 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), Susan Docherty, "Composite Citations and Conflation of Scriptural Narratives in Hebrews," in *Composite Citations in Antiquity, Vol. 2: New Testament Uses*, LNTS 593, eds. Sean A. Adams and Seth M. Ehorn (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 190-208, esp. 191-2, 206). Whether the author used any other literary sources will not particularly feature into the argument of this thesis.

places where there seems to be a difficulty in understanding Hebrews.<sup>41</sup> While it is possible for any argument to fall into inconsistency or self-contradiction, that solution will only be sought if no other plausible reading presents itself. It is universally attested that the Epistle to the Hebrews is a careful literary composition, and this study will show that its complicated but coherent argument rewards careful study.

#### 2.4. Outline

Building upon the hypothesis that the author uses promise language to refer to a distinct concept, the majority of this study will proceed as a sequential exegesis of passages of Hebrews that deal with promise. Again, while this is not a word study, concepts are encoded in words, and the author of Hebrews exclusively uses ἐπαγγελία to refer to this concept. These passages will be grouped according to both their placement within Hebrews and their conceptual unity.<sup>42</sup> However, there will occasionally be references to portions of Hebrews outside of the purview of a given chapter when broader, epistle-wide concerns need to be addressed.

Then, only after all the experimental work of a passage by passage exegesis is completed, I will develop a more comprehensive theory of the role of promise in the theology of Hebrews. This constructive project is the ultimate goal of this study. The end result will not just be a disconnected series of arguments, but rather an integrated whole that will allow subsequent readers of Hebrews to come to a better understanding of the thought of Hebrews as a whole. After all, if promise is “the foundational motif,”<sup>43</sup> or even anything close to it, then an accurate understanding of promise is certainly necessary for a sound understanding of the epistle.

Now that Part 1: Introduction and Prolegomena is finished, the rest of this thesis will proceed as follows:

Part 2: Exegesis, will be a section-by-section exegetical investigation of promise in Hebrews. Chapter 3 will focus on Hebrews 3-4. The main discussion of that chapter will concern the relationship between promise, gospel, and rest. In it, I will argue that while rest is important for understanding the author’s concept of promise, it should not be made the primary content of the

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<sup>41</sup> For example, the apparent contradiction regarding whether the promises have been received in Heb 11:33 and 11:39.

<sup>42</sup> That is, my groupings of texts may cross barriers established by structural analyses of Hebrews (such as those by Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Subsidia Biblica 1 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1989); George Guthrie 1994; and Cynthia Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning*, LNTS 97 (London: T&T Clark, 2005)). This is not to be read as a comment on those analyses, but is simply an acknowledgement that sometimes the author of Hebrews carries a theme across these boundaries.

<sup>43</sup> Rose 1989, 191.



promise. Rather, the content and nature of promise will be further clarified and defined as the author develops his argument.

Chapter 4 will deal with Hebrews 6-7. The focus there will be on the relationship between the promise and Abraham, and then between the promise to Abraham and the promise which the author understands as available to the audience. I will there argue for a unity of the promise within Hebrews, that the promise given to Abraham and that given to the audience are one and the same. More originally, chapter 4 will also argue for a new way of understanding promise, fulfilment, and typology within Hebrews.

Chapter 5 will examine Hebrews 8-9. This chapter will mainly deal with the relationship between promise and covenant. Chapter 5 will argue for a new way of understanding the interplay of promise and covenant within the author's portrayal of salvation history. The argument will draw upon Lehne's analysis of covenant as well as Rose's emphasis on the distinction between *Verheißungswort* and *Verheißungsgut*. Since this thesis, unlike previous analyses of Hebrews, maintains a firm distinction between promise and covenant in Hebrews, the intricacies of the author's argument will be examined in a new light.

Chapter 6 will move to Hebrews 10-11. This section will have two main topics: the relationship between faith and promise, and the way in which the promise relates to both Old Covenant saints and members of the New Covenant. I will argue that faith, in Hebrews, is the desired response to the God who speaks, particularly to the God who speaks in the form of promise, and that the author portrays the promise as the foundation of a kind of unity between saints of all periods of time.

Chapter 7 will briefly examine Hebrews 12. This section will deal with the eschatology of Hebrews and the way in which promise fits within that broader vision. I will argue that the promise of shaking is ultimately a promise of deliverance, and that it does not look to an abandonment of physicality as such, but rather to a kind of transformation.

Chapter 8 begins Part 3 of this thesis: Synthesis and Conclusions. In it, I will attempt a constructive theological synthesis of the results of the previous exegetical section. This chapter will be divided into four headings: 1. Promise and salvation history; 2. Promise and eschatology; 3. Promise and hermeneutics; and 4. Promise and exhortation. In this chapter, I will detail the various ways in which the theme of promise occupies a central place within the author's theology, and how it influences many of the various aspects of the epistle.

Finally, we will come to Chapter 9, the conclusion. There, I will address and reflect on the questions raised in this introduction: Is the wandering people of God the base motif for Hebrews'

depiction of promise? Is rest the main content of the promise? Is promise exclusively future, unfulfilled? Is Hebrews consistent? How do the Old Covenant saints, and even the patriarchs before them, share in the promises? I will then be able to situate this current study within current Hebrews scholarship, offering the results of the exegetical and theological accounts of promise in Hebrews for evaluation.

To anticipate the argument of the following chapters, it may be helpful here to sketch what promise is in Hebrews. I will argue, at first in a piecemeal fashion, that promise is God's fundamental word of blessing. Through promise, all the various goods offered by God — rest (4:1), people (6:13-14), land (11:14), city (11:16), kingdom (12:28) — are extended to God's people, and God commits himself to bring them to pass. This promise then stands as the foundation upon which God founds his covenants — in Hebrews only the "Old" and the "New" are recognised as "covenants" — which then in turn provide priestly systems of atonement, intercession, and approach to God which then enable the various benefits promised, the promises, to be brought to fulfilment.

## PART TWO

### EXEGESIS

## Chapter 3: The Promised rest, an exegesis of Hebrews 3-4

### Introduction

While ἐπαγγελία only appears once within Hebrews 3-4, the first time within the epistle for it or any of its cognates, this instance has been understood as pivotal both for tracing the argument of this portion of the epistle and for understanding Hebrews as a whole.<sup>1</sup> As shown in the literature review, the fact that the promised good in Heb 4:1 is rest has led many scholars to conclude that the promise throughout Hebrews is always and only a promise of rest. As the following discussion will show, while I agree that rest is of key importance for understanding promise here in 4:1, I am unconvinced that every subsequent use of promise in Hebrews must refer to rest.

It is largely agreed that Hebrews 3-4 is one unified section within the argument of Hebrews.<sup>2</sup> Not only does it centre around an exegesis of Psalm 95 (94 LXX), but it is defined by consistency of terminology,<sup>3</sup> and seems to be bounded by an *inclusio* formed by references to the high priesthood of Christ.<sup>4</sup> The impression given by the passage is of a structural and thematic unity, working towards a central point. The author is here attempting to lead the audience to a renewed vigour of faith in Christ in opposition to the negative example provided by the wilderness generation.

Heb 3:1-4:13, while advancing along exegetical lines, is primarily hortatory in nature. It contains eight imperatives or hortatory subjunctives<sup>5</sup> (ten if extended to 4:16),<sup>6</sup> and two further warnings in

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<sup>1</sup> Such as in Käsemann 1984, and those who follow the general contours of his interpretation, such as Herbert Braun, *An die Hebräer*; HNT 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1984), Erich Gräßer, *An die Hebräer*, 3 vols., EKKNT 17 (Zurich: Benziger, 1990, 1993, 1997), and Rose 1989, and in those who interpret the epistle in light of a different context, like Hofius 1970 and Spicq 1952, who makes “Le peuple de Dieu pèlerinant” the first section of his discussion of the theology of Hebrews.

<sup>2</sup> Ending at 4:11 according to Ellingworth 1993. Ending at 4:13 according to F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) (though in some of his outlines he draws the line at 4:14, see p. xix); Cockerill 2012; David DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Craig Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001). Ending at 4:14 according to Lane 1991, Albert Vanhoye, *The Letter to the Hebrews: A New Commentary*, trans. Leo Arnold (New York: Paulist Press 2015).

<sup>3</sup> πίστις (as ἀπιστία, 3:12, 19; 4:2), εἰσερχομαι (3:11, 18, 4:1, 3, 5-6, 10-11), κατάπαυσις (3:11, 18, 4:1, 3, 5, 10-11; as καταπαύω, 4:4, 4:8, 4:10), to name a few.

<sup>4</sup> Found in Heb. 3:1 and 4:14.

<sup>5</sup> κατανοήσατε (3:1), μὴ σκληρύνετε (3:7, quoting Psalm 95), βλέπετε (3:12), παρακαλεῖτε (3:13), μὴ σκληρύνετε (3:15, again quoting Psalm 95), φοβηθῶμεν (4:1), μὴ σκληρύνετε (4:7, again quoting Psalm 95), σπουδάσωμεν (4:11).

<sup>6</sup> κρατῶμεν (4:14), προσερχώμεθα (4:16).

conditional clauses.<sup>7</sup> The author interrogates his audience with a question and answer format in 3:16-18, further reinforcing the hortatory nature of the section and leading the audience to participate in evaluating the actions and attitudes of the wilderness generation. Instead of a sustained argument ultimately leading to exhortation, as occurs in other portions of the epistle,<sup>8</sup> the author here is in unique form, spreading hortatory material throughout the section and impressing the audience with the negative example of the wilderness generation while putting forward an alternative hope. The whole section, both in its exegesis and in its direct exhortation, is designed to have a direct effect on the audience, leading them to a sort of action.

### 1. Promise's place in Hebrews 3-4

Ἐπαγγελία is found at the hinge of the author's argument, as he moves from negative examples (3:7-19) to the positive hope of finding rest with God (4:1-13). As I intend to now demonstrate, ἐπαγγελία is central to the thought of Hebrews within this section, yet it is not fully developed within the scope of chapters 3-4.

ἸΦοβηθῶμεν οὖν, μήποτε καταλειπομένης ἐπαγγελίας εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ δοκῇ τις ἐξ ὑμῶν ὑστερηκεῖναι. ὁ γὰρ ἐσμεν εὐηγγελισμένοι καθάπερ κἀκεῖνοι· ἀλλ' οὐκ ὠφέλησεν ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀκοῆς ἐκείνοις μὴ συγκεκρασμένους τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκούσασιν.

"Therefore let us fear lest, while a promise to enter into his rest remains outstanding, any of you seem to fail to enter. For we also have received the good news, just as they have. But the message they heard did not benefit them, since they were not joined with those who heard and believed" (4:1-2)

Despite the importance given to this statement in several prominent interpretations of Hebrews,<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 4 is rather sparse in explicit information regarding the nature of the ἐπαγγελία.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, we learn that a promise remains, that the promise is to enter into his (God's) rest, that it relates to having heard good news, and that this hearing either can or cannot be of benefit to the hearers, depending on whether they respond in faith. The rest of the chapter is concerned primarily not with the nature of the promise, but with the nature of the rest that it offers (4:3-5, 8-10) and how the audience can be sure that the offer remains (4:6-7, 11). While later

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, both using similar terminology. ἐάνπερ τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος κατάσχωμεν, "If indeed we hold fast to the confidence and boasting of hope" (3:6) and ἐάνπερ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως μέχρι τέλους βεβαίαν κατάσχωμεν, "If indeed we hold fast to the beginning of the substance firm until the end" (3:14).

<sup>8</sup> Such as in 1:1-2:4, 2:5-18, 7:1-10:39, 11:1-12:2.

<sup>9</sup> Such as in Käsemann 1984 and Hofius 1970.

<sup>10</sup> That is, the historical circumstances of when the promise was first given, who received it, and its terms are all not discussed in this portion of the epistle.

passages in Hebrews will dwell more on the nature of promise as promise, here the author is content to speak tantalisingly of promise, focusing on one aspect of its content but not its origin or nature.

Yet we are not left in the dark. The information provided in 4:1-2 gives us sufficient basis to interrogate the rest of Hebrews 4 to unfold the author's conception of ἐπαγγελία. Namely, by grouping promise with rest, and then by further specifying the type of rest envisioned, the author develops the content of the promise. Similarly, if the author connects promise with other concepts that either traditionally or within Hebrews have theological weight, he provides insight into how he conceives of promise. So, below, we will look into 1) The information provided by the concepts grouped with promise. Then, with this information, we can ask: 2) If the promise remains, when and to whom was it initially given? 3) What is this rest and is rest the *entirety* of the content of the promise? and 4) What is the nature of the relationship between the promise and the good news?

## **2. Concepts associated with promise in Hebrews 3-4**

If the author is consistent in grouping ἐπαγγελία with certain other concepts throughout the epistle, it reveals the semantic web within which he conceptualises the promise. This section will examine these associations to yield the data to make Heb 3-4's presentation of promise understandable. The purpose of this exercise is twofold. Positively, if the author continues speaking about promise similarly to how he treats it in 3-4, it will provide insight into both the nature of promise in his thought and the relationships that concept has with other features of his theology. Negatively, this exercise will act as a kind of control. If there are ways in which the author speaks of promise in Heb 3-4 that are not repeated in the rest of the epistle, it should lead us away from turning 4:1 into an interpretive key for the rest of Hebrews.

Most obviously, within Heb 3-4 the concepts of promise and rest<sup>11</sup> are closely associated. It is a promise of rest (4:1), and much of the section is devoted to explaining the nature of that rest (4:3-11). While rest as σαββατισμός only appears once in the epistle (4:9), the way in which it is used gives it relative prominence and shows that it further defines the rest promised. Whereas 4:1 has καταλειπομένης ἐπαγγελίας εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ, 4:9 reads ἄρα ἀπολείπεται σαββατισμός τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ. The similarity of phrasing cannot be overlooked. It leads the audience to conclude that the promise that remains is a promise not of rest vaguely conceived, but of Sabbath rest. Although this is the first time the term σαββατισμός is used in extant Greek literature, it is

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<sup>11</sup> As κατάπαυσις (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3 (2x), 5, 10, 11); καταπαύω (4:4, 8, 10); and as σαββατισμός (4:9).

unambiguously a reference to Sabbath keeping with the festal connotations of the Sabbath day in Judaism.<sup>12</sup> That is,

The sense in those passages [where Sabbath or σαββατίζω is used] is not that of a ‘rest from works’ narrowly conceived, nor does the word refer to the Sabbath *day* as such; the noun refers rather to the Sabbath *observance*, or Sabbath *celebration*. This accords both with Jewish conceptions of the Sabbath as a day not merely of cessation of activity but of *festive worship and praise*, and with Hebrews’ picture of the future πανήγυρις (12,22), “festive gathering,” in the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, we have a double substitution: while the syntax replaces ἐπαγγελία with σαββατισμός, there is also a substitution in meaning between the related terms κατάπαυσις and σαββατισμός, reinforced by the author’s argument.<sup>14</sup> While this does not necessarily mean that the two terms are entirely interchangeable within Hebrews, it does suggest that their respective meanings significantly overlap. When the author causes σαββατισμός to appear in a context in which he has primed us to expect κατάπαυσις or ἐπαγγελία εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν, he is deliberately presenting the two concepts as related. As such, while discussing the relationship between promise and rest, Heb 4:9 (“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God”) is presented as an inference from the joint facts that 1) the promise remains (4:1), 2) God rested from his own work on the seventh day (4:6), 3) David would not have made his warnings unless it were still possible to enter that rest (αὐτήν, referring to κατάπαυσις; 4:7), and 4) Joshua was unable to give the people rest (κατέπαυσεν) after the time in the wilderness (4:8). While the connection between Sabbath and rest will be more fully explored in a later section, at the least we can say that Sabbath played a significant role in the author’s concept both of rest and of promise. In addition,

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<sup>12</sup> Granted, the Sabbath had many more connotations in ancient Judaism beyond festal. Yet, there is evidence within Hebrews that these are directly in view by the mention of σαββατισμός. First, the sacrificial/ritual aspects of Sabbath are unlikely to be present in the author’s thought, since much of Hebrews is devoted to an abrogation of such ritual. Further, while Sabbath in its most simple sense can be viewed as the cessation of work, if that were all that was intended, nothing would be added beyond κατάπαυσις. Within Hebrews, then, the reference to the inheritance of believers as a πανήγυρις, that is a religious festival, provides a clue that σαββατισμός in Hebrews does bear the dual connotations of rest and festivity.

<sup>13</sup> Laansma 1997, 276; emphasis original. So too Hofius 1970, 108, “Nicht in einem qualitätslosen ‘Ruhen’ hat der Sabbat sein Charakteristikum, sondern im Feiern und in der Freude.” So also Lane 1991, 102. Or again, Samuel Bénétreau, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 vols., Commentaire Évangélique de la Bible (Vaux-sur-Seine: Edifac, 1989), 1:175, describes it as “une célébration de sabbat pour le peuple de la nouvelle alliance.”

<sup>14</sup> The parallelism reinforces and specifies the author’s assertion of rest, suggesting the type of rest envisioned. So Hofius 1970, 106.

the concept of entrance, which connects promise and rest in 4:1,<sup>15</sup> remains prominent within the section.<sup>16</sup> Between 4:1 and 4:11, εἰσερχομαι and its derivatives occur eight times. This frequency is matched only by terms derived from κατάπαυσις.<sup>17</sup>

Two further concepts are given prominence within this section, faith<sup>18</sup> (and its opposites, unbelief and disobedience),<sup>19</sup> and gospel (or good news). Faith characterises those who enter rest (4:3), and its absence is the express cause of being unable to enter (3:19) and, in a difficult phrase, is that which determines whether hearing the good news has any positive effect (4:2).

It is not immediately clear what the author means by good news. Both times it is mentioned (4:2,6), it appears in the verbal, not nominal, form.<sup>20</sup> And both times a parallel is drawn between what the wilderness generation heard and what Christians now hear, once explicitly (καὶ γὰρ ἐσμεν εὐηγγελισμένοι καθάπερ ἀκαεῖνοι, 4:2), and once implicitly (οἱ πρότερον εὐαγγελισθέντες οὐκ εἰσῆλθον δι' ἀπειθειαν, 4:6). Since the wilderness generation were also εὐαγγελισθέντες, εὐαγγελίζομαι likely does not mean to hear the full Christian message of salvation. Yet, for the parallel between the

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<sup>15</sup> Note that the phrase, “to enter into rest” does not exist outside of Judeo-Christian literature. With the exception of the LXX itself and *Joseph and Asenath* 8:9, the collocation is made exclusively in Christian literature, usually when discussing this passage. If, as some believe, *Joseph and Asenath* is itself a Christian production, or represents a final Christian layer of editing, it is possible that outside of the LXX the phrase “to enter into rest” within Greek literature exists only in the Christian corpus. This fact, coupled with the frequency of repetition of the phrase, shows its unique prominence within the author’s thought. Since there is no strong precedent for such language, and the phrase appears in no prior Christian literature, it is probable that the author of Hebrews first developed the theological implications of this septuagintal phrase. For more on the origins and composition of *Jos.As.* cf. Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Asénath: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction et Notes*, *Studia Post Biblica* 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1968); Randall D. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Asenath*, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* Supplement Series 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Christoph Burchard, “Joseph et Aséneth. Question actuelles,” in *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Carsten Burfeind (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 224-46; and *Joseph und Aseneth: kritisch herausgegeben*, *Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece* 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Asenath Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3 (2x), 5, 6, 10, 11. While this connection is not unique to Hebrews, since the author derives it from Psalm 95, the author’s choice to maintain it and develop it suggests that the author had thoroughly appropriated the relationship as his own. deSilva sees the frequent repetition of “enter” and the phrase “enter into his rest” as providing “thematic coherence” to this whole passage; (2000, 152-53).

<sup>17</sup> The idea of rest is, however, slightly more prominent than that of entering, since additionally it is referred to by a pronoun (4:6) and by the noun σαββατισμός.

<sup>18</sup> πίστις, 4:2; πιστεύω, 4:3.

<sup>19</sup> ἀπιστία, 3:12, 19; ἀπειθεια, 4:6, 11; ἀπειθέω, 3:18. That disobedience is seen as equivalent to, if not the outward manifestation of, unbelief, see 3:18-19.

<sup>20</sup> εὐαγγελίζομαι.



generations (καθάρπερ κακείνοι, 4:2) to work, it cannot be completely devoid of salvific content.<sup>21</sup> Until further work is done to ascertain more clearly what the author means by promise and rest, I will not specify the good news here beyond a message from God related to some sort of deliverance or salvation.

Of the concepts associated with promise in Heb 3-4, only “enter” and “faith” retain any prominence within the epistle. The most prominent concept in this section, rest, falls entirely by the wayside. So too does good news. The exact implications of this cannot be investigated until those later passages have been analysed, but it suggests that if the concept of rest does not remain prominent throughout Hebrews, then it may be imprudent to conform all later developments of promise to the theme of rest.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the author reserves the right to clarify, expand, or even redefine terms used in earlier portions of the epistle. It remains to be seen whether Hebrews develops promise in a divergent way, but it at least is possible that the author will go on to broaden his definition of promise beyond that which is found in Heb 3-4. It is best then to understand the author’s discussion of a promise of rest as an important first step in his larger discussion of promise, but there is no grounds for seeing this first foray as fixing the meaning of promise for the rest of the epistle.

### 3. When and to whom was the promise given?

Since a promise is a personal commitment, it is fitting to ask when this promise was given and to whom. While the author speaks of this promise as if it is definite, there were no indications of such a concept either earlier in the book of Hebrews or in the Psalm quoted. Even the grammar of 4:1 suggests that he is bringing up a new topic, one that he has not previously introduced or intimated. In speaking of the promise, the author says καταλειπομένης ἐπαγγελίας εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν, without the article before ἐπαγγελίας.<sup>23</sup> This lack of an article is not because the

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<sup>21</sup> The notion that the “good news” refers to the good report about the land given by the spies to those on the brink of Canaan (see Lane 1991, 98; Vanhoye, *A Different Priest: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Miami, FL: Convivium Press, 2011), 139) seems far fetched to me. Not least so because the author makes no mention of it. Further, it is unclear how hearing a mixed report that the land was good, yet filled with dangers would correspond to the good news heard by the Christian audience of Hebrews. It is probably best to agree with Ellingworth referencing Hanson that, “the content’ of this good news ‘was probably the gospel as far as it could be apprehended before the incarnation,” (1993, 241). Or I might specify further, as far as it could be apprehended at the point given, accounting for differences between those who did, and did not, have the Psalms, for example.

<sup>22</sup> Related to this is D. Guthrie’s comment that the centrality of Heb 3-4 is overblown due to the influence of Käsemann (*Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, TCNT 15 (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 39-40). Fn. 34 is worth mentioning, “The theme of the wandering people of God occurs only in chs. 3 & 4 and can hardly claimed to be central.” Perhaps Wray 1998 goes too far in arguing that 3 & 4 are merely an illustrative side-track, but one can understand the desire to push back against the overemphasis on these chapters in recent discussions on Hebrews.

<sup>23</sup> There is a textual variant that does feature the article, but this only appears in D\*. This is not an insignificant witness, but the overwhelming weight of the evidence points to an anarthrous noun here.

concept of promise is not definite, indeed it is by virtue of its explained content, but rather because it has not been anticipated by the preceding discussion.<sup>24</sup> The author, then, has a promise in mind from somewhere within Scripture,<sup>25</sup> but he does not say when it was given or to whom. Because the author says that this promise remains (καταλειπομένης), he does not view this promise as a novelty, given to the church for the first time through Christ. While the author does not say that the wilderness generation had heard the promise, he does say that they heard the good news (4:2,6) and failed to enter the same rest which is the object of the promise which remains (3:19-4:1). This strongly suggests that the promise of 4:1 existed by the time the wilderness generation rebelled.

While this information does not yet provide us with a specific Old Testament promise, it does provide a *terminus ad quem* for when it was given. The promise here envisioned had to be given either during or before the wanderings in the wilderness. The author's argument suggests that it is imperative that the promise was given before the disobedience mentioned in Psalm 95. Significantly, while Ps 95 does not mention a promise of rest, the author's inference from God's curse on the wilderness generation (εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου, 3:11) is that the wilderness generation did not only fail to enter rest (3:19), but that they did not receive the fulfilment of a *promise* of rest (4:1-2). This is the only explanation for the causal conjunction at the beginning of 4:2 (γάρ). Whatever the good news was that they heard, it must have included a promise of rest. They were unable to receive this promised good because μὴ συγκεκρασμένους τῇ πίστει τοῖς ἀκούσασιν (4:2), that is, because of disbelief and disobedience (3:19).

The author does not specify when the promise of rest was given, but he does show that it was before the wilderness generation began wandering and proved itself disobedient. This sets up the parallel with the author's own audience. The audience, the author asserts, has similarly heard the good news and has received a promise (4:1-2), it now is up to them to not apostatise under circumstances analogous to those in which the wilderness generation did.

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<sup>24</sup> See Ellingworth 1993, 238.

<sup>25</sup> At this point, one could say that the promise does not necessarily need to come from Scripture, but could be from another source. I would suggest that this largely goes against the structure of argumentation of the book of Hebrews in two ways. First, while the author is theologically creative, developing categories such as Christ the high priest in ways that were unprecedented in Christian theology, all of his innovations are tied to Old Testament passages. It is as if the author did not view himself (or at least did not portray himself) as innovating, but rather *discovering*. Second, all later mentions of promise (either in the nominal or verbal form) within Hebrews are tied to specific Old Testament texts.

When could this promise have been given? Various options are: a non-specified promise of salvation,<sup>26</sup> God's promise to Abraham,<sup>27</sup> promises made to the nation during the Exodus or at Sinai,<sup>28</sup> or an assumed promise derived from an interpretation of Psalm 95.<sup>29</sup> At present, it is impossible to ascertain which promise is in view. Within Heb 3-4, the author does not further specify. A promise to Abraham, at Sinai, or really anywhere within the Pentateuch before the disobedience in the wilderness are all equally plausible. While it is less likely<sup>30</sup> that the author means simply a vague promise of salvation apart from any historical event, that cannot be ruled out at this point either. We can know that the promise mentioned was definite, available to the wilderness generation before their disobedience, it was soteriological in some way, and involved entering into rest. Beyond that, at this point in the epistle, nothing more can be said. Yet in light of patterns that prevail throughout the entirety of Hebrews, there is good hope that the author will more clearly define to which promise he is referring.<sup>31</sup> The author does, however, clarify the nature of the rest envisioned in these chapters, and to that we will now turn our attention.

#### 4. Promise and rest

Few concepts within Hebrews have occasioned as much discussion as that of the "rest" developed in chapters 3-4. As discussed in the literature review, starting with Käsemann's analysis in 1937, rest in Hebrews 3-4 has often been seen as determinative for the meaning of the epistle as a whole.<sup>32</sup> While there has been both strong opposition to Käsemann's hypothesis of a Gnostic

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<sup>26</sup> Attridge 1989, 126-127.

<sup>27</sup> Koester 2001, 111, or rather an interplay between a promise to Abraham and a greater, unspecified, one of rest.

<sup>28</sup> Attridge 1989; Bruce 1990, 105; Cockerill 2012 (Interestingly, he goes so far as to identify the obscure τοῖς ἀκούσασιν as Joshua and Caleb, p. 203); Lane 1991, 98; Johnson 2006, 125 (although he does not specify when beyond during "the wilderness generation"); Vanhoye 2015, 91.

<sup>29</sup> Vanhoye 2015, 91. This reading supposes that the author misunderstood the LXX where it glossed the Hebrew negative oath formula. But the text of Hebrews itself renders this impossible, since the Author glosses the oath in 3:18 as ὥμοσεν μὴ εἰσελεύσεσθαι εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν.

<sup>30</sup> I hold it as less likely both because the author comes across as certain that the wilderness generation had the very promise of which he is speaking, and because of the development of the rest of the epistle.

<sup>31</sup> The author shows a tendency to briefly mention terms, drop them, and then further define them later. E.g. Despite designating Christ as ἀρχιερεὺς in 2:17, and again in 3:1 and 4:14, he does not develop the theme until Heb 5. Similarly, despite dropping Melchizedek's name in 5:6 and 5:10, he chooses not to develop the theme until 6:20 onwards.

<sup>32</sup> As such, whether one follows Käsemann's analysis or rejects it, it has been almost inevitable that one will use the language of "the wandering people of God" in connection with Hebrews. Vanhoye, however, strongly attempted to dispel such language by appealing to the LXX of Ps. 95, culminating in the declaration, "Il ne s'intéresse pas à la traversée du désert. Il n'a pas un mot pour encourager à une longue pérégrination. Dans la situation qu'il en- visage, il n'est pas question de marches, ni d'étapes; il s'agit seulement d'entrer ou de ne pas entrer," (1958, 21). Very few have followed him all the way.

ascent myth as the background of Hebrews, as in O. Hofius' *Katapausis* and in Laansma's *I Will Give You Rest*, and general agreement, as in Gräßer's commentary and articles,<sup>33</sup> rest has taken a dominant place in the discussion of the theology of Hebrews. Rose, as well, takes the eschatological rest of God in promise and fulfilment as *the* theme of the whole letter.<sup>34</sup> While I intend to challenge the prominence of rest within the epistle as a whole, it *is* the predominant theme of Heb 3-4, and is an important part of how the author conceives of promise. Because of the detailed work analysing the function and meaning of rest in works such as those mentioned above,<sup>35</sup> I can offer the arguments in truncated form. This section will proceed by stating the basic positions regarding rest in Heb 3-4. Then, I will address the two predominant questions regarding rest in turn. First, is the rest present or eschatological? That is, *when* is the rest? Second, is the rest local or spiritual/metaphorical. Namely, *what* is the rest? Is it primarily a place or a state? Finally, after discussing the when and the what of rest, I will ask what effect the author's discussion of a promise of rest is intended to have.

#### 4.1 *When is the rest?*

Those who emphasise the present nature of rest place weight upon the declaration in 4:3, "For we who have believed enter that rest."<sup>36</sup> Often, their view of the rest is tied to the nature of Christian experience, making it equivalent to a subjective experience of peace or communion with God.<sup>37</sup> Among those who interpret rest eschatologically, there is a division between those who see

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<sup>33</sup> While predominantly leaning on Käsemann, according to whom σαββατισμός represents an Aeon of the Hebdomad (1984, 69-65), Gräßer does attempt to accommodate some of Hofius' observations by saying that they too fit within a Gnostic framework. e.g., "Abgesehen davon jedoch ist die *Alternative* σαββατισμός = eschatologische Sabbatfeier der Ruhe und Anbetung Gottes *oder* σαββατισμός = höchster Äon im Sinn alexandrinisch-gnostischer Hebdomas-Spekulationen falsch." Gräßer 1990, 1:219. Again, however, the Gnostic hypothesis is here rejected because it stands in total lack of clear evidence, both that Gnosticism existed in a recognisable form at the time of the writing of Hebrews, and that Hebrews itself makes use of Gnostic thought in any significant way. That Gräßer can accept terms current in Second Temple Judaism and say they really mean the same thing as Gnostic ideas makes his argument seem like a *via media*, when in reality it begs the question and sets up as evidence things which likely had nothing to do with Gnostic thought.

<sup>34</sup> Rose 1989, 191.

<sup>35</sup> Käsemann 1984, Hofius 1970, Laansma 1997.

<sup>36</sup> So Bénétreau 1989, 1:172-3; Johnson 2006, 126; Lane 1991, 99; Vanhoye 2015, 92. Bénétreau goes so far as to say, "Il convient, ensuite, de se demander s'il y a de bonnes raisons dans le contexte, et non dans des a priori sur la théologie et spécialement sur l'eschatologie de l'épître, de ne pas traduire par un présent en français."

<sup>37</sup> Johnson 2006, 124; Vanhoye 2015, 92, 94.

rest as local<sup>38</sup> or spiritual/metaphorical.<sup>39</sup> A local emphasis often comes from a reading of *κατάπαυσις* in its LXX contexts and through 2<sup>nd</sup> temple Jewish literature, in which the concept of rest is deeply integrated with that of land.<sup>40</sup> Among those who view the rest as spiritual or metaphorical, there is no great unity. The largest single camp would be those influenced by Käsemann, though that is by no means the majority of interpreters. There are some, however, who find the dichotomies drawn by these questions to be unnecessary.<sup>41</sup> These ask why rest cannot refer to both a state and a place,<sup>42</sup> and why rest could not be something fully realised in the eschaton, but partially realised now? While this position can appear to be avoiding a decision, the varied evidence supplied by the author could suggest that he himself rejected such dichotomies.

To say that the rest is entirely realisable now seems neither to suit the author's language of the rest remaining for the people of God, nor of the close association with inheritance gained later in the epistle through the use of entrance language. Yet, to say that the rest has no effect now also does not account for all the evidence that Hebrews offers. After all, "we who have believed enter into that rest" (4:3). While 4:3 certainly does not mean that people now can have the fulness of eschatological rest, it points to a present experience of *something*. It seems neither right to say that experience of rest is wholly future, nor that it is wholly present. The weight seems to be on futurity, but a tension remains.

#### 4.2 *What is the rest?*

The author uses language that has connotations of both a place of rest and that expresses a state of rest. To this interpreter, at least, it is clear from the context and from the amount of plausible (and not mutually exclusive) arguments that have been made on both sides, that the concept of rest in Hebrews contains notions of both a place of rest and a state of rest. In its fulness, it is a place in which a state of rest is enjoyed. The second temple Jewish development of

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<sup>38</sup> Cockerill 2012; Ellingworth 1993; Hofius 1970, Laansma 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Montefiore 1964, 83, who, although stating that believers are in the process of entering, quickly turns around and says, "But in this Epistle there is no realised eschatology....The text does not mean that Christians have actually entered, but that they are entering that rest." This, however, comes not from what the text says, but an *a priori* conviction of a lack of realised eschatology, which seems to be in the face of 1:2, if not the whole epistle; Käsemann 1984 (While it can be argued that Käsemann portrays rest as a place, it is unclear if the seventh Aeon is spatial in any meaningful sense. Because of this, I am taking any spatial language in reference to the Gnostic *Anapausis*, or the *Pleroma*, as spiritual metaphors although ones that potentially use spatial language to describe whichever concepts they seek to portray); Bruce 1990; DeSilva 2000; Koester 2001; Johnson 2006; Attridge, 'Let Us Strive to Enter That Rest': The Logic of Hebrews 4:1-11, in *Essays on John and Hebrews*, WUNT 264 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Namely the land in the world to come, Hofius 1970.

<sup>41</sup> Braun 1984 (though willing to see contradiction or *aporia*), Koester 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Lane 1991 seems to fall into this category by separately asserting that the rest is "distinctly eschatological," 98, and yet that "believers are already to enjoy the rest referred to in the quotation of Ps 95:11," 99.

the theme and the strong LXX association with rest and land, show that for the people of God, rest was often conceived of locally.<sup>43</sup> There was, or was to be, a place where rest occurs. The very language of “entering into rest” can suggest a spatial metaphor, though that metaphor is not necessarily active here.<sup>44</sup>

Yet this is not all. By connecting *κατάπαυσις* to what God did after creation, the author shows that a particular state is also expressly in mind.<sup>45</sup> Further still, by replacing *κατάπαυσις* with *σαββατισμός*, the author clarifies particularly what sort of state he envisions. This rest is to be a Sabbath celebration, not inactive, but festive, worshipful, and active. The Sabbath was not a place, but a time and an activity. Sabbath was a time at which certain things were and were not done. Further, the Sabbath was fundamentally a religious celebration. It was a time of worship, gathering, and often feasting. That is, Sabbath was a framework within which the activities of prayer, psalm singing, and celebration could be done in a way set apart from the work of the week. The quality of rest the author describes, then, is a cessation of weary labor, a time of worshipful focus, and a religious celebration. Not only this, but, as Spicq has argued that by connecting *σαββατισμός* to God’s rest after creation, “Ce repos destiné aux croyants doit, en effet, se concevoir en union étroite avec celui de Dieu, de même nature et de même durée que le sien, éternel.”<sup>46</sup> For a rest, a Sabbath to remain, signifies that there will be a time of worship for the people of God, and that this will stretch into an eternal state of rest in the same way as God’s rest. Rest in Hebrews 3-4, then, as both *κατάπαυσις* (potentially place)<sup>47</sup> and *σαββατισμός* (primarily state) emphasises a state of rest, while potentially gesturing towards a special place for that rest to occur as well.

#### 4.3 *The hortatory effects of a promise of rest*

In light of this, what can we say about the goal that the author holds out before his audience? Why does the author say that there still remains a promise to enter into God’s rest? The answer is

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<sup>43</sup> Hofius 1970, 59-74.

<sup>44</sup> In a theological meditation on rest in Hebrews, Mark S. Gignilliat observes that in the Old Testament, “‘Rest/ *navach*’ is the possibility of living in the promised land undisturbed” (“Plight and Solution: Hebrews and the Invitation to Rest”, in *So Great a Salvation: A Dialogue on the Atonement in Hebrews*, LNTS 516, eds. Jon Laansma, George H. Guthrie, Cynthia Long Westfall (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 178).

<sup>45</sup> The suggestion (Hofius 1970, 53-54, 91-97) that God created a place of rest for himself asserts too much on too little evidence. While Hofius proves that such a concept existed within some Jewish writings of the time period, Hebrews does not seem to show such speculation. While the world to come is sometimes spoken of as inheriting the unshakeable things that are already in some form of existence, that is not in the absence of language that suggests that all things in creation will be exchanged for something new (1:10-12) or the novelty of the world to come (2:5). Further, while there is evidence of such a spatial notion of rest, this reading invites an oddly spatial concept of God which is not evidenced in the text.

<sup>46</sup> Spicq 1953, 2:84.

<sup>47</sup> Hofius 1970, 59-74. cf. Deut 12:8, 1 Chr 6:16, 2 Chr 6:41.

found in the flow of his argument: There was a time at which God made an offer of rest, corresponding to — even participating in — the rest that God entered into when he rested from his works after creation (4:4-9). This offer was made legitimately to those of the wilderness generation, but by their disobedience they did not enter it (3:19). Even the righteous leadership of Joshua, the first named Jesus in Scripture, was unable to give rest to the following generation (4:8).<sup>48</sup> David spoke of it again, suggesting that the offer remained open in some way to subsequent generations, again on the condition of faith.

Now, the author assures his audience, the promise of God is open for those who will receive it,<sup>49</sup> God's initial speech remains valid, and his continuing speech acts both through David and through the Son serve only to reinforce that speech. But now, the work of Christ as faithful high priest has changed the relationship of the faithful to the promise, making a new way to attain it (3:1-6; 4:14-16).<sup>50</sup> The promise, then, is presented as a strong motivation for obedience and endurance now. The author provides further motivation by reorienting the audience's understanding of the past of Israel. The story of the wilderness generation's failure, which could have discouraged the audience, is turned to encouragement. In their failure an opportunity for the audience's success is left open. Similarly, the Old Testament declarations that rest was gained under Joshua (Josh 21:44, 22:4, 23:1) are relativized, even cast aside. Through the author's association of the rest promised to them with God's creative rest in Gen 1 (Heb 4:4) and his explanation of Psalm 95 (Heb 4:3), the audience is led to see Joshua's success as only a pale shadow, something not worth even considering rest, compared with the rest offered now through Jesus. So, the audience is assured that they can still succeed where the wilderness generation failed, and that a marvellous rest — the very rest of God — awaits them.

## 5. Promise and good news

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson here nicely refers to Joshua as “the Jesus of the past” (2006, 128). While the Joshua/Jesus typology can easily be overdone (Such as Bryan Whitfield's conclusion that the depiction of Jesus as faithful high priest is based on two Joshuas in Scripture, “Num 13-14 presents his [Joshua son of Nun's] fidelity, while Zech 3 presents his [Joshua son of Jehozadak's] role as a high priest” (2013, 270)), it is difficult to imagine that the audience of this letter, so focused on the person of Jesus and his work, could have heard, “εἰ γὰρ αὐτοὺς Ἰησοῦς κατέπαυσεν, οὐκ ἂν περὶ ἄλλης μετὰ ταῦτα ἡμέρας,” without at least experiencing a small amount of cognitive dissonance. Similarly, Bénétreau nicely titles the section of his commentary on Heb 3:7-4:11 as “Par l'obéissance à la parole et à la suite du nouveau Josué, entrer dans le repos,” (1989, 1157).

<sup>49</sup> The enduring nature of the promise and oath of God is expanded further in 6:13-20. Positing a promise that *remains*, not that is made anew, suggests a bridge between the times when God spoke to the fathers and his eschatological speech through the Son (1:1-2).

<sup>50</sup> This reading makes sense of the inferential conjunctions (διό in 3:7 and οὖν in 4:14) that otherwise remain opaque.

It remains to look at the relationship between ἐπαγγελία and εὐαγγελίζεσθαι. Scholars raise the question whether the promise and the gospel/good-news are identical, or merely related. Some scholars equate the two, saying that to hear the good news, in the context of Hebrews, is to hear the promise.<sup>51</sup> To see if this is the case, first we need to draw a distinction. By promise, the author can mean either the word of promise, that is, the promissory speech act, or the promised good, that which the promise pledges. The author vacillates freely between these two meanings. Whereas to hear the good news is to hear a message of good, it is not the same as experiencing the benefits enumerated therein. Hebrews makes this explicit when stating that those who formerly heard the good news were not benefitted by the message heard (4:2). Because of this lack of commensurate semantic ranges — that promise can be a message or a thing, whereas good news is always a message — simply saying, “The good news is the promise,” or *vice versa*, is an unclear statement. It is better to say that, in Hebrews, to hear the good news is to hear that the promise is available, that it will be fulfilled for all those who hear it with faith (4:3).

Lastly, it is worth asking what was the content of the message that they heard? At this point the earlier definition of “a message from God with a content related to some sort of deliverance or salvation” can be refined. Since it is declared to be like (καθάπερ, 4:2) the good news received by the Christian community,<sup>52</sup> and since it is related to the promise of entering rest in the way explained above (3:19, 4:1), we can say that the good news heard by the wilderness generation was at least the declaration that the promise of rest was available to them. To draw out the parallels from the Christian condition, the good news entails both a reaffirmation of the availability of a prior promise and a declaration that one can obtain that promised good. In the case of the Christian, the promise of deliverance is both reaffirmed and brought to fruition through the priestly work of Christ.<sup>53</sup> It is possible, then, that the good news heard by the wilderness generation involved some connection to the revelation of the tabernacle ministry given at Sinai,

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<sup>51</sup> Knut Backhaus 2009d, 160; Koester 2001, 111, “In Hebrews ‘promise’ is synonymous with ‘good news’ or ‘gospel’ (*euangelizein*), a term often used for the Christian message.” This type of statement flattens the complexity of Hebrews, and opens the door for misunderstanding. Further, it seems to have the corollary that the wilderness generation heard the Christian message, a claim that Koester does not make.

<sup>52</sup> While the author says that the wilderness generation heard the good news just as the audience did, the author does not explicitly equate the messages heard. There is something fundamentally the same, it is a comparable good news, but it does not follow within the argument of Hebrews to suggest that the content was identical between the wilderness generation and the audience. While aspects remained the same, the presence of Jesus in the declaration of the good news to the audience, and the work of his entailed therein, makes quite a difference in the author’s mind.

<sup>53</sup> This is suggested both by the fact that the Ps 95 discussion was introduced by a call to hold firm (κατάσχωμεν) to confidence in Christ (3:14) and by 4:14, “ἔχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διελθούμεν τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας. The οὖν which binds these two sections together does not make sense unless the promised rest is in some way obtained through Christ.



since the priestly ministry of the Old Covenant is frequently made a type of Jesus's ministry in Hebrews. This is not to say, along with Rose, that the wilderness generation stood at the very gates of the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> Rather, it is to say that the author is depicting the wilderness generations' relationship with God and the offer of salvation as genuine.

## 6. Conclusion

In Heb 3-4, the author firmly establishes promise as an important category for his understanding of the relationship between the people of God at various times and as a necessary motivator for the obedience of his audience. Since this is only the first section of an exegesis of promise in Hebrews, very few firm conclusions can be made at this point. However, beyond a notion of the general importance of promise, this study of Hebrews 3-4 has laid the groundwork for further study in the rest of this thesis.

In terms of structural and rhetorical function, we found that promise can play a transitional role, moving from a section of primarily negative examples to one of positive encouragement. Since many of the author's aims for the epistle are hortatory, this can suggest that promise holds a relatively prominent place in the author's thought, but it remains to be seen if this continues throughout the epistle.

While this section was not able to answer when the promise was first given, it was able to establish a *terminus ad quem*. The promise was given some time before the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness. Further, while the author does not here specify to whom the promise was initially given, he suggests that the promise is in some way generally open. Both the wilderness generation and the audience of Hebrews were in some way offered the same promise of rest. The mechanics of this are left unclear, but it already shows that there is a kind of continuity between what is offered to the wilderness generation and the audience.

So far, this study has shown that the content of the promise is of rest, definitely conceived of as a state of rest, and possibly as a place of rest as well. The experience of this rest is primarily future, yet such that now there is some, ill-defined, present experience of entering into it. This is not to say that rest is the only content of promise in Hebrews, but it is a part, and a significant one at that. Further, to hear the good news, a term which would by this point likely be inseparable to the audience from hearing the Christian gospel, is to hear that this promise remains available. Beyond this, the author does not yet make clear when the promise was given or what its specific terms were. For that, we will need to turn to the rest of Hebrews, which we will now do.

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<sup>54</sup> Rose 1989, 184. In light of the author's statements later regarding the priesthood under the old covenant, it seems best to say that he would believe that the old order under Moses and Joshua was fundamentally unable to attain the rest figured in the promise apart from the later work of Jesus.

## Chapter 4: The Abrahamic promise, an exegesis of Hebrews 6-7

### Introduction

Hebrews 6-7, particularly chapter six, is one of the two main focal points of promise language within the epistle.<sup>1</sup> Within this section, God's promise(s)<sup>2</sup> become the centre of discussion and guide the author's doctrinal explanation and exhortation. The author both roots God's promise in the patriarchal history, tracing it back to Abraham, and asserts that it remains relevant as the basis of hope and confidence for the audience in the present. As he does this, however, certain difficulties arise regarding how best to understand the author's use of promise. It is clear that he portrays both Abraham and the audience as recipients of a divine promise, but little beyond that is clear. Previous studies have varied as to how many promises are in view in this passage, when those promises were given, and what their content is. Further, there has often been some difficulty in discerning the relationship between Abraham, his promise, and the audience. This chapter will seek to resolve these issues through a close reading of the passage, ultimately putting forward a novel solution for how the author understands the nature of the fulfilment of God's promises.

After (1) a brief overview of the argument of Hebrews 5-7, I will ask (2) who receives the promise(s), and then after (3) establishing the centrality of the promise to Abraham, I will ask (3.1) when Abraham received the oath, (3.2) what relevance the promise to Abraham has to the audience, and then (3.3) I will deal with some potential objections to this reading. This discussion will then (4) lead into a broader theory of how Hebrews understands the categories of promise and fulfilment. Finally, (5) the role of Abraham's promise in Heb 7 will be briefly examined.

### 1. Overview

As with the previous chapter, an overview of the flow of the argument within Hebrews 6 and 7 will aid in understanding the way in which the author develops the theme of promise. While 5:11-6:20 are often recognised as a unit, there are several key subdivisions.<sup>3</sup> The exhortation begins with an overwhelmingly negative discussion (5:11-6:8), beginning with a specific criticism of the audience (5:11-6:3), followed by a shocking warning regarding the dangers of apostasy (6:4-8). After this, the discourse becomes much more positive, with a statement of confidence in the audience and exhortation to persevere (6:9-12). This section ends with an offer of obtaining the promise (6:12), which introduces a discussion of God's promise to Abraham (6:13-20) which serves both as instruction and as a transition back to the theme of the one who met and blessed Abraham,

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<sup>1</sup> The other is chapter 11.

<sup>2</sup> It is generally recognised that there is no discernible difference between the singular and plural of ἐπαγγελία in Hebrews.

<sup>3</sup> The divisions here largely follow the subdivisions made in G. Guthrie 1994, 144.

Melchizedek (6:20-7:21). Hebrews 5:11-6:20, then, is typically seen as a type of hortatory interlude,<sup>4</sup> interrupting the main discussion about priesthood central to the epistle.<sup>5</sup> I will argue that this is not quite the case, but that in the midst of this hortatory section, the author begins to advance his main non-cultic threads of argument, which will go on to be related to cultus in chapter 8, and then developed at further length in chapter 11.

Chapter 7 begins with an analysis of the scriptural account of Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek and its typological significance (7:1-10). Then, the argument moves from a specific priest to a comparison of types of priesthood (7:11-28), with reference to the efficacy of the priesthoods (7:11-18) and the manner of divine commission (7:19-28).<sup>6</sup>

Within this broader context, then, the locations at which promise language occurs are significant. Ἐπαγγελία does not appear within the negative discussion of 5:11-6:8, and within the focused exhortation (6:9-12) it occurs only as the very last word, providing a link to the discussion about Abraham. Within the Abrahamic portion (6:13-20) words from the ἐπαγγελ- root occur three times in quick succession,<sup>7</sup> bolstered by five instances of words relating to the swearing of an oath (ὄρκος, ὀμνυμι).<sup>8</sup> Within all of chapter 7, promise language only occurs once at 7:6, when commenting on the scriptural encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek. Overwhelmingly, then, promise language in these chapters is Abrahamic language, centred strongly around a specific event.<sup>9</sup> This tight clustering, repetition, and the close association with Abraham all lend prominence to promise language in this section.

Again, we find ἐπαγγελία at a hinge in the author's argument. It continues the positive shift in tone begun in 6:9, providing a basis for the author's optimism regarding his audience. Second, the

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<sup>4</sup> Vanhoye 1963, 116-24 (in which the section is described as a "préambule" to the third main division of Hebrews); G. Guthrie 1994, 110 (Discussed as an "ingressive intermediary transition," the most complicated of his proposed transition models in Hebrews.); though Westfall argues against this division (2005, 150-55).

<sup>5</sup> A brief look at any commentary's table of contents will reveal the prominent place given to priesthood in understandings of Hebrews.

<sup>6</sup> This discussion borrows oath language from 6:13-20, but, *contra* Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Thomas Kingsbury (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1886), 256; Hermann von Soden, *Hebräerbrief, Briefe des Petrus, Jakobus, Judas*, HKNT (Tübingen: Mohr, 1899), 55; Gottfried Schille, "Erwägungen zur Hohepriesterlehre des Hebräerbriefes", ZNW 46 (1955), 105; Friedrich Schröger, *Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefs als Schriftausleger* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1968), 129; Attridge 1989, 182; Gräßer 1990, 373; Hans-Friedrich Weiß, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, KEKNT 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 364; Martin Karrer, *Der Brief an die Hebräer: Kapitel 5, 11-13, 25*, OTKNT 20 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 2:52. I do not find the argument that this *is* the oath mentioned in 6:17 convincing. See below.

<sup>7</sup> 6:13, 15, 17.

<sup>8</sup> 6:13 (2x), 16 (2x), 17.

<sup>9</sup> When this event occurred is to be discussed shortly.

mention of promise transitions the argument from a direct discourse about the audience (6:9-12) to a historical example drawn from the life of Abraham (6:13-15), and then again to a reflection on how the promise and oath to Abraham affect the audience (6:16-20). Both of these roles are unified by a single rhetorical function: the language of promise is used to provide the audience with a future oriented hope and to undergird the exhortations to faithfulness by providing motivation.<sup>10</sup> Unlike in Heb 4, where the promise was left historically undefined and given relatively minimal content — entering into rest — the author now begins to develop at length the thread of promise that will continue throughout the epistle. As will be argued in this chapter and those following, the language of promise is used to shape the telos of endurance, faithfulness, and the whole of the Christian life.

## 2. Who are those who inherit the promises?

<sup>11</sup> Ἐπιθυμοῦμεν δὲ ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὴν αὐτὴν ἐνδείκνυσθαι σπουδὴν πρὸς τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἄχρι τέλους, <sup>12</sup> ἵνα μὴ νωθοὶ γένησθε, μιμηταὶ δὲ τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας. <sup>13</sup> Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγελάμενος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ <sup>14</sup> λέγων· εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε· <sup>15</sup> καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. <sup>16</sup> ἄνθρωποι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὁμνύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὅρκος· <sup>17</sup> ἐν ᾧ περισσότερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιδείξει τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτευσεν ὅρκῳ, <sup>18</sup> ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι τὸν θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος·

But we desire that each of you show the same zeal for full confidence of hope until the end, so that you not become dull, but rather imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and patience. For, after God had made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater than himself by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, “I will certainly bless you and I will certainly multiply you.” And in this way, having been patient, Abraham gained the promise. For men swear by something greater, and an oath is certainly the end of any dispute among them. So when God wanted all the more to show the unchangeable character of his will to the heirs of the promise, he interposed an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled may have strong encouragement to lay hold of the hope set before us (Heb 6:11-18).

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<sup>10</sup> Worley 2019, 32.

Within Heb 6:11-18, there are three distinct groups who receive promises.<sup>11</sup> The first is not specifically named, but referred to by the phrase τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, “those who inherit the promises through faith and patience” (6:12). They are separate from the audience, since they are those whom the audience is supposed to emulate ([γένησθε] μιμηταί, 6:12). And while the γάρ connecting 6:12 to 6:13 shows that Abraham is likely a member of this group, the plural suggests that there are members other than Abraham as well. At this point, we cannot say whether the author only has Isaac and Jacob (τῶν συγκληρονόμων τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῆς αὐτῆς, 11:9) or Old Covenant saints more broadly in mind, but the undefined reference here suggests that he is not strictly setting limits on the members of this group. They are people of the past who demonstrated both faith and patience<sup>12</sup> in waiting upon God’s promises. Promises here does appear in the plural, and this is picked up in the discussion of Abraham as the one who has received the promises (τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, 7:6). Since Abraham, among these saints, is considered as the recipient of multiple promises, it is likely best not to view these as distinct instances of promise delivered across time. Rather, the emphasis seems to be on the fact that these saints received, and Abraham was guaranteed, various goods that were promised. The emphasis is on the multiplicity of the blessing given to these various saints.

The second promise recipient is Abraham (6:13, 7:6). While he certainly belongs to the group mentioned in 6:12, he is singled out and treated separately. While other people are treated as heirs of the promise (6:12,17; 11:9), Abraham is the only person to whom God directly makes a promise in Hebrews (Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγελάμενος ὁ θεός, 6:13). He is the promise recipient *par excellence* (τὸν ἔχοντα τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, 7:6; ὁ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀναδεξάμενος, 11:17), and the promise and oath made with him occupy the author’s argument in this passage.

The third group, implicit in the passage, is the audience itself (6:17-20). I include the audience both because they are called to be μιμηταί δὲ τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας (6:12), and because the result of God’s promise confirming oath is that we have a strong encouragement (ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν, 6:18). The author’s shift to first person pronouns from 6:18 onwards indicates that he views both himself and his audience as heirs of the divine promise (6:17).

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<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, the language of “receiving” promises is a bit vague and will need to be clarified in the following discussion. For this portion, however, it can mean either to have been promised something, without yet receiving it, or to have received the thing promised. While delineating the groups, the *manner* of their reception is not yet important.

<sup>12</sup> The nature of this virtue is debated (Rhee 2001 suggests it is primarily Christological and eschatological, though his argument to establish this is a bit eccentric with an over-reliance on chiasmic forms, Thomas Söding, “Zuversicht und Geduld im Schauen auf Jesus. Zum Glaubensbegriff des Hebräerbriefes”, ZNW 82 (1991) also ties it to a theological and christological orientation, while Gräßer 1965, sees it as purely ethical, *faithfulness, steadfastness*).

While it may, *prima facie*, seem obvious that Abraham, people in the past, and the audience all have had something promised to them by God, the way in which the author groups them yields valuable information on how he viewed the role of God's promise in salvation-history. First, by casting all three groups as promise recipients, the author establishes a commonality between all three. Despite the strong arguments of discontinuity surrounding this passage (5:1-10, 7:11-28), especially regarding covenant and priesthood, here we are given a strong continuity between those who existed before the Old Covenant, those who lived under it, and those who live under the New Covenant. The result of this is that the audience can, without complication, become imitators of those who lived faithfully in the past (6:12). Second, more than just a commonality, it is possible that the author sets up direct relationships between the three groups. An oath made to Abraham has actual effects on the audience now (6:17-18). The oath made by God has some relationship to the hope that the audience has, where Christ sits in heaven (6:17-20). On the other hand, it is possible to read the connection not as a direct one, but rather through the lens of typology.<sup>13</sup>

These relationships raise questions regarding the author's understanding of how these different stages within salvation history relate to one another, and how different stages of God's work can affect one another. More specifically, is the promise made to each group the same, or only similar? Second, and related, what is the relationship between the concepts of promise and oath in this passage? Is there only one oath made, from which all subsequent generations have derived hope,<sup>14</sup> or is there a second oath patterned on, but different to the one cited from Gen 22?<sup>15</sup> After arguing that the passage has only one promise and one oath in mind, I will then examine whether a given promise must have one and only one fulfilment, or whether a single promise can be fulfilled in stages. To answer these questions, I will begin by examining how God's interactions with Abraham are described, since that is what the author discusses in greatest detail.

### 3. When God had made a promise to Abraham

While no scholar disputes that the promise and oath made to Abraham are important to the author of Hebrews, the details of those divine commitments and the way in which the author uses them is a matter of dispute. Much of the discussion centres around which promise and oath the author portrays. The debate not only concerns which event in Abraham's life is depicted by the

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<sup>13</sup> Attridge 1989, 180.

<sup>14</sup> Michel 1966, 251-2; D. Guthrie 1983, 154-5; Lane 1991, 152. Braun 1984 does assert "nicht zwei Eide," but does not specify what he means when saying that the passage has in view the "Christus-Verheißung... und der Eid der Gottheit" (189). Whatever the precise referent is, it seems that Abraham is not particularly in view.

<sup>15</sup> Seeing Psalm 110: Delitzsch 1886, 256; Attridge 1989, 182; Gräßer 1990, II:373; Weiss 1991, 364; Karrer 2008, 2:52. Seeing both Psalm 2 and 110: Schille 1955, 105, Schröger 1968, 129.

author, but also whether the second half of the passage (6:17-20) still speaks of the same promise and oath as does the first half (6:13-16). This section will argue (3.1) that the promise given to Abraham was that given early in his life, probably at his call, while the oath is that quoted from Genesis 22:17. Further, it will argue (3.2) that the author talks about the same promise and oath throughout the passage, without changing as his attention shifts to the audience at 6:17. After arguing these two points, (3.2) objections to this reading will be addressed, before turning to a potential problem that this reading presents. The reading put forward in this section will produce tensions regarding whether Abraham did or did not receive the promise, and whether the promise is best understood as earthly and immanent or heavenly and eschatological. At that point, this chapter will turn to (4) analyse Hebrews' unique portrayal of promise fulfilment and typology.

### *3.1. When did Abraham receive the oath?*

When was Abraham given an oath by God? Was it simultaneous with when he received the promise, or after? The author is not as clear as he could be, but he does leave enough evidence to reach a conclusion. Hebrews 6:13-15 reads, *Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγελιάμενος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ λέγων· εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε· καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας.* In this passage, there are three distinct actions that need to be related. God made a promise to Abraham (*Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγελιάμενος ὁ θεός*, 6:13). God made an oath with Abraham (*ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ*, 6:13). And, finally, Abraham gained the promise (*ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας*, 6:15). Some scholars see this all as referring to one event in Genesis 22,<sup>16</sup> while others see the author describing separate events in the life of Abraham.<sup>17</sup> Along with the conclusions of these latter scholars, both the grammar of this passage and the explicit quotation show that the oath is added as a separate, later speech-act in the life of Abraham and is not another way of referring to the promise.

The question hangs upon whether the aorist participle *ἐπαγγελιάμενος* denotes prior or contemporaneous action. While the more common reading of an aorist would suggest prior

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce 1990, 153; Weiß 1991, 359.

<sup>17</sup> Spicq 1953, 1:159-60; Lane 1991, 1:150.

action,<sup>18</sup> it is not impossible for aorist participles to be contemporaneous with the main verb.<sup>19</sup> Yet, unless there are contextual cues that lead in this direction, it is not the most natural reading.<sup>20</sup>

The way in which the author discusses the oath in 6:14-18 demonstrates that the author has two events in view: first a promise and then an oath. The oath quoted, εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε, comes from Genesis 22:17,<sup>21</sup> and the argument that God swore by himself (ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ) is derived from the Gen 22:16, κατ' ἑμαυτοῦ ὥμοσα, λέγει κύριος. The events of Genesis 22 are the end of the main portion of the Abraham narrative in Genesis and mark the last time God makes a verbal commitment to Abraham within the Torah. This specific oath comes after the climactic test of Abraham's faith, the offering of Isaac.<sup>22</sup> In Hebrews' comment on this oath, after the oath is made, Abraham μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας (6:15). If the author meant that Abraham waited from the time of the giving of this oath to the time when he had Isaac safe and secure, patience would not come into it. This oath was given after the test. The promise must have been spoken before this, or else there would have been no period of waiting.<sup>23</sup> After all, Abraham is introduced in this section as one who "inherited the promises through faith and patience" (6:12), and it would not make much sense to point to a brief stint of patience at the end of his life.

Rather, it is best to view the oath of Gen 22:17 cited in Heb 6:14 as coming a long time after the initial promise, when Abraham had had opportunity to display faith and patience. On the other

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<sup>18</sup> Thus Spicq 1953, 1:159-60.

<sup>19</sup> So Rose, saying "das Partizip Aorist ἐπαγγελάμενος bezeichnet die mit dem Verbum finitum (ὥμοσεν) zusammenfallende Handlung, so daß zu übersetzen ist: «Denn: Als Got dem Abraham die Verheißung gab, da hat er — weil er ja bei keinem Größeren schwören konnte — bei sich selbst geschworen und gesagt....»" (1989, 67). His only support for this claim is a paragraph from BDF (§339.1).

<sup>20</sup> Pace Lane 1991, 147, Ellingworth 1993, 336 (citing Lane).

<sup>21</sup> There are two divergences from the Greek text of Gen 22:17, however. The asseverative ἦ μὴν in Genesis is here substituted for εἰ μὴν, and Gen 22:17 reads πληθύνων πληθυνῶ τὸ σπέρμα σου, whereas the object of multiplication in Heb 6:14 is σε, referring to Abraham. Both of these changes are relatively minor. εἰ μὴν for ἦ μὴν is a common Hellenistic alteration of the classical oath formula, likely due to the fact that εἰ and ἦ came to be pronounced identically towards the end of the classical period and that εἰ was by far a more common word. The change from "your seed" to "you" could be motivated, but it could also have been an alteration to make the two halves of the oath more symmetrical. Cf. Ellingworth 1993, 337.

<sup>22</sup> The fact that Hebrews returns to this subject in Hebrews 11:17-19 suggests that he was well aware of the order of events in the Abrahamic narrative found in Genesis.

<sup>23</sup> This is contrary to those who would place the promise upon the basis of the oath, like Dana Harris, *The Eternal Inheritance in Hebrews: The Appropriation of the Old Testament Inheritance Motif by the Author of Hebrews*, unpublished PhD diss. (2009), 194. The chronology of Hebrews does not allow for this.



hand, one should not conflate the giving of the oath with the reception of the promised good,<sup>24</sup> since the purpose of an oath is to give confidence in something that is not yet present (6:17).

Second, and confirming that Abraham received the oath after the promise, the passage speaks of two separate things (διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, 6:18), clearly two separate speech acts, which point to the same reality. These two things, as speech-acts,<sup>25</sup> must be the promise and the oath,<sup>26</sup> both of which refer to a definite hope set in the future. Significantly, the oath is given to aid *the heirs of the promise* (περισσότερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιδείξει τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, 6:17). That the recipients of the oath are called “the heirs of the promise” implies that they had already heard God’s promise by the time the oath was given. That is to say, this divine oath exists to provide support to the promise of God.<sup>27</sup> Oaths exist for confirmation when something is in doubt (πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὅρκος, 6:16). The oath is subservient to and confirmatory of the promise, and does not constitute any new commitment, but only a new supply of confidence.<sup>28</sup> So then, the promise was an event within the life of Abraham, prior to God’s oath after the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22. The divine oath comes after the promise to confirm it.

### 3.2 *The promise’s relevance to the audience*

What then, is the relevance of this promise and oath with Abraham to the audience? Here scholarly opinions vary widely. Some will say that the commitments made to Abraham bear a typological or analogical relationship to those made to the audience.<sup>29</sup> Others will say that they are simply a way of showing that God keeps his promises.<sup>30</sup> Still within a typological mode, Abraham

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce 1990, 153, says that by receiving Isaac with the oath Abraham “did, in a very substantial sense, ‘obtain the promise.’”

<sup>25</sup> Since they are δύο πραγμάτων... ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι τὸν θεόν.

<sup>26</sup> So most interpreters. E.g. Delitzsch 1886, I:316; Spicq 1953, 2:162; Attridge 1989, 181; Bénétreau 1989, 1:262; Cockerill 2012, 288. Though there is debate as to *which* promise and oath (see below). Braun 1984 sees here “die Christus-Verheißung... und der Eid der Gottheit (189), and Gräßer 1993 does not decide between the promise and oath to Abraham and those suggested by Braun (2:381). Backhaus considers the promise and oath interpretation, but disregards it as “problematisch” because “der Eid nur ein Modus der Verheißung ist” (2009d, 249). That is, he allows his own categories, not those of the epistle, to set the meaning of this passage.

<sup>27</sup> If this is the case, then it clarifies further the argument in Heb 3:7-4:10. The author is able to say that a promise remains to enter rest, because God swore an oath (ᾧμοσα 3:11, 4:3) that the wilderness generation would not enter his rest. This oath is subsequent to and confirmatory of a *prior* promise that some would enter God’s rest.

<sup>28</sup> Worley 2019, 117.

<sup>29</sup> Attridge 1989, 180.

<sup>30</sup> Gräßer 1990, 1:373; Lane 1991, 1:152; Karrer 2008, 2:50, “Der Hebr benützt Abraham in unserer Passage als Beispiel der Gottesbeziehung und damit Vorbild im präzisen Sinn, nicht zusätzlich als Stammvater der Adressaten.” Even more radical is Weiss (1991), who states, “Im Anschluß an die Bekräftigungsformel εἰ μὴν, “fürwahr, ganz gewiß”, liegt für den Autor des Hebr der Akzent so sehr auf Gottes eigener Zusage, daß der Inhalt dieser Zusage — die zahlreiche Nachkommenschaft Abrahams — für ihn im Grunde ganz gleichgültig ist,” 360.

can be a type of *Christ*, who is the recipient of a divine oath *par excellence*.<sup>31</sup> Still others see a more organic unity between the promise made to Abraham and that available to the audience.<sup>32</sup> In the following section, I will argue that the author views the promise to Abraham as still valid and extended to the audience.

That the author speaks about the same promise throughout the passage is hinted at by the smooth transition from the author's discussion of Abraham to a reference to the audience: ἐν ᾧ περισσότερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιδείξει τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτευσεν ὅρκῳ, ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι τὸν θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος (6:17-18). Notice how subtly the author works this transition. After discussing Abraham in 6:13-15, the author broadens out to a general discussion of how oaths are used in 6:16. Then, in 6:17, the author speaks of the divine oath's benefit for τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. The similar phrase in 6:12, τῶν ... κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, would lead the readers to assume that the author is now talking about the faithful saints of old, the heirs of the Abrahamic promise. And yet, as the sentence continues, these heirs of the promise are subtly recast by the author's use of ἔχωμεν — this all happened so that *we* might have strong encouragement (6:18). “We,” that is the audience members, are the heirs of the promise now. Which promise? The definite article (τῆς ἐπαγγελίας) suggests it is one already being discussed. In context, this most likely suggests the promise to Abraham, the topic of the beginning of this section (6:13) and the occasion for the oath commented on in this passage (6:14-18). There is no strong break between the discussion of the promise to Abraham and a promise held by the audience,<sup>33</sup> rather the seamless transition suggests that it is the same promise being discussed through the whole passage. And if it is the same promise, then the same oath is discussed throughout the passage as well.

The “two unchangeable things” (6:18) also lead us to conclude that the promise and the oath throughout the passage are the same, with no disjunction between 6:13-15 and 6:16-18. In this passage, we are only told of one time God made a promise (6:13) and of one time God made an

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<sup>31</sup> In addition to being an example for believers: Gräßer 1990, 1:373 and Weiß 1991, 364.

<sup>32</sup> Spicq 1953, 2:162; Michel 1966, 252; D. Guthrie 1983, 153; Lane 1991, 152.

<sup>33</sup> *Contra* Attridge 1989, 181; Gräßer 1990, 1:381, who stresses radical discontinuity between the promise to Abraham and that to Christians, “Die den *Christen* gegebene Garantie ist neben der Verheißung selbst eben auch der Eid, aber nicht der Abraham geleistete, sondern... der Christus geleistete (7,21.28)” (emphasis original). Note, however, how Gräßer needs to import an argument from the end of chapter 7 to read the oath to Christ into Heb 6, since it has not yet been discussed. Michel's (1966, 252) response to such readings must be correct, since we cannot strongly divorce statements in Heb from their contexts, “Daß der Abraham gegebene Eid gemeint ist (6:13 = Gen 22:16f), nicht aber der nach Ps 110:4 (= Hebr 7:21) dem Christus geleistete, muß aus dem Kontext geschlossen werden.”

oath (6:14). Both of these are made τῷ Ἀβραάμ (6:13). These are rooted firmly in the author's scriptures,<sup>34</sup> and occasion further comment from the author (6:16-17).<sup>35</sup> Heb 6:17 naturally reads as a comment on why God made the oath just cited (6:14): it is because God wanted to show the heirs of the promise, mentioned just previously (6:13), how certain his will was (6:17). There are no hints within the pericope that any other promise or oath is in view, and the author immediately returns to his discussion of Abraham (7:1).<sup>36</sup> To hold that some other promise and oath are the real topics here is to import into the passage something that is not there and that the rest of Hebrews so far has not prepared the audience to expect. Rather, we are given two specific speech-acts of God recorded in the author's scriptures and mentioned at the beginning of this discussion (6:13-14), and then we are told that there are two things in which it is impossible for God to lie. The most straightforward reading is that only these two speech-acts — God's promise and oath to Abraham — are in view throughout the passage.

If only the promise and oath to Abraham are in view, how is it that they affect the audience? Simply, the audience is portrayed as κληρόνομοι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας (6:17); they are heirs of the promise to Abraham.<sup>37</sup> God's oath, at the end of Abraham's life, confirms his own unchangeable purpose to bless and multiply Abraham (6:14, 17). As those who await the fulfilment of this same promise, this ratification by God is a direct testimony to the audience, who thus are enabled to have a strong encouragement to hold on to hope (6:18).

### 3.3 A response to some objections

While the conclusion that Abraham, past saints, and the audience all share in the same promise gives us a glimpse into author's larger understanding of salvation history,<sup>38</sup> it is not

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<sup>34</sup> As in keeping with the author's general use of "oath" language, see Chapter 2, section 1.2 above.

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the author feels the need to explain why would give an oath at all in 6:16-17 because he, like some other ancient Jewish authors, saw it as strange that God should need to make an oath. Cf. Philo *Leg. alleg.* 3.203; *Schemoth rabba* on Ex 32:13; *Exodus rab* 44 (on Exod 32:13). After all, oaths are only needed when there is doubt or dispute (6:16), but God should be implicitly trustworthy.

<sup>36</sup> Those who wish to make the 6:16-18 refer to an oath made to Jesus, which then stands as an encouragement for Christians, strain the flow of the argument beyond what it can bear, as Spicq also said, "Il est difficile, comme le voudraient Delitzsch, Hofmann, Moses Stuart, von Soden, Peake, Seeberg, Wickham, d'identifier le serment des vv. 13 sv. avec celui du Ps. cx,4: "Le Seigneur l'a juré, il ne s'en repentira point: Tu es prêtre pour toujours selon l'ordre de Melchisedech" (1953, 2:162).

<sup>37</sup> "Our hope, based upon his promises, is our spiritual anchor," Bruce 1990, 154. Cf. how the author describes Issac and Jacob as "heirs of the same promise" (συγκληρόνομοι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῆς αὐτῆς) in 11:9.

<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting, however, that some authors who heavily stress the Middle Platonic background of Hebrews deny any concept of salvation history within Hebrews. Rather, they assert that the text is only concerned with an eschatologically oriented set of promises. E.g. Backhaus, "Das Verheißungsland, im Sinne des *Auctor ad Hebraeos* verstanden, läßt damit alle irdischen Landverheißungen als heilsgeschichtlichen Anachronismus verstehen." (2009b, 192).

without its complications. Two questions in particular come to the fore. First, how can these groups which within Hebrews occupy obviously different positions within God's economy be said to share in a promise?<sup>39</sup> Second, if the promise of Abraham is meant to be understood as some broader soteriological promise, in what way did he actually obtain this promised good? On the face of it, it seems like we would have to affirm that he did not, because that is what Heb 11:13 and 11:39 explicitly say.<sup>40</sup> Many interpreters, both ancient and modern, have resolved this precisely by holding to a *dissimilarity* in the promise,<sup>41</sup> stating that as far as this passage is concerned, Abraham was promised and received earthly blessings like land, a son, and general prosperity, whereas Christians have been promised a heavenly city, family, and prosperity.<sup>42</sup>

This neat conclusion, however, is not left to us, although a variation between earthly and heavenly promises may play a role. This conclusion cannot be the case for three reasons.

First, the notion that Abraham's promise and inheritance were different from that of believers could not be derived from the passage under consideration, but only from Heb 11 later. While it could be the case that Heb 11 modifies the audience's understanding of the Abrahamic promise through re-contextualising it, it is not necessarily so. There may be other factors that hold the two passages in a different kind of relationship.

Second, Hebrews has already stressed the continuity and endurance of God's promise. In Heb 4:1, the author's argument hinged around the statement, "while the promise of entering his rest still remains." And while analysis of that passage did not establish when the promise was initially given, it did establish that the promise pre-dated the wilderness generation's disobedience, since the author builds his argument on the sequence from the wilderness generation, through David, and to the audience. This single promise of rest remained across covenants, and yet the author

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<sup>39</sup> Backhaus (2009d, 247) speaks broadly of the unfulfilled "Segensverheißung an Abraham."

<sup>40</sup> Κατὰ πίστιν ἀπέθανον οὗτοι πάντες, μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀλλὰ πόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ἰδόντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοί εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (11:13). Καὶ οὗτοι πάντες μαρτυρηθέντες διὰ τῆς πίστεως οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν (11:39).

<sup>41</sup> John Damascene, *ad loc.* 6:18-19; Ps.Oecumenius, *ad loc.* 6:17-20; Theophylact, *ad loc.* 6:15; Rose 1989, 71; Koester 2001, 326, interestingly puts forward two possible resolutions. The second the standard typological reading, and the first which suggests that all Heb 6 means is that Abraham received a confirmation of the promise through the oath. The typological argument will be dealt with shortly, while the confirmation argument certainly does not fit within the passage. "Having patiently waited, Abraham received a reiteration of the same promise" is not necessarily encouraging, and could read like the proverbial, "the check is in the mail."

<sup>42</sup> Other attempts at resolving the difference are that Abraham received the opportunity to be a candidate for the heavenly fatherland (Gräßer 1990, 1.377), that the author was using two contrary sources for the different parts of his epistle (Ulrich Luz, "Der alte und der neue Bund bei Paulus und im Hebräerbrief", ET 27 (1967), 334), or that he had different rhetorical purposes to achieve at chapters 6 and 11, and so made contradictory arguments to fit those diverse purposes (Weiß 1991, 361). None of these have gained much ground.

argues that the promise had, from the beginning, referred to a rest greater than the land of Canaan.

Third, while Heb 11 does assert that Abraham has not received the promises, in a clearly heavenly sense in that passage, it asserts at the same time that Abraham himself understood the promise in terms of a heavenly city (11:10,14). So however the author resolved this tension in his own mind, it explicitly was not by relegating Abraham's promises to the earthly realm, unlike the promises given to the audience. Rather, the author's understanding of faith demands that Abraham's faith in the promise both had some earthly referent, such as the birth and preservation of Isaac, and was always also oriented towards a heavenly/eschatological city.

At this point, it may seem as if I have argued myself into a corner. Abraham needs to have both obtained and not obtained the promise, and the usual division of promises into separate earthly/immanent and heavenly/eschatological promises is denied by the course of my argument thus far.<sup>43</sup>

There is, however, a way of reading Hebrews' interpretation of the Old Testament that will meet these demands and that is drawn from the epistle itself. To resolve this difficulty, this chapter will now propose reading Hebrews' presentation of the promises neither through a strictly typological paradigm, nor through a strict promise-fulfilment paradigm. Rather, Hebrews develops a hybrid understanding of the promises that allows for multiple stages of fulfilment of a single promise, and that portrays these stages as corresponding to one another typologically. That is, Hebrews allows for multiple fulfilments of the same promise that are different in kind from one another, yet typologically related to one another. Both fulfilments are related to the promise word through the straightforward dynamic of promise-fulfilment. To one another, however, they are related typologically. The promise cannot be considered completely fulfilled until both have been met, each in its own way and time. Thus, there remain both threads of continuity and discontinuity which will satisfy the problem occasioned by the seemingly contradictory testimony of 6:15 and 11:13.

#### **4. Developing a reading strategy for Hebrews' portrayal of promise fulfilment and typology**

##### *4.1 Fulfilment-typology trajectories*

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<sup>43</sup> Another way of reading this, which stresses continuity at the expense of discontinuity, is shown by Spicq who paraphrases and agrees with Chrysostom, saying, "Il y a lieu de distinguer une double promesse, celle d'une descendance qui se réalise par la naissance d'Isaac, et la promesse que cette descendance se multiplierait en nations innombrables, ce dont naturellement Abraham ne put être témoin" (1953, 2:160). While this is hypothetically possible, the singular promise when referring to Abraham (6:15) mitigates against this. Further, this seems to place a divide arbitrarily within the promise of posterity.

While the analysis of Hebrews' interpretive strategy proposed in this chapter is new, it is developed in light of several other scholars' portrayals of how Old Testament interpretation works in the New Testament generally and Hebrews specifically. One source is developed by Dana Harris in her studies of Hebrews, which she calls typological trajectories.<sup>44</sup> By this, she means interconnected chains of typology in which one type points forward to another type, which in turn is a type of something else.<sup>45</sup> Related to this is a view common in patristic authors that typology is a three stage process, not a two stage process. While most modern readings of typology assume only two components, the type and the anti-type, patristic authors did not always conceive of typology in this way. Typological interpretation could have three features, often referred to as the shadow, the image, and the reality.<sup>46</sup> A third contributing strand to this interpretive strategy is that of multiple fulfilment, such as that found in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>47</sup> For example, the use of "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matt 2:15, citing Hos 11:1), which initially referred to the Exodus of Israel, to refer to Jesus' childhood sojourn in Egypt.<sup>48</sup> It is one statement, "out of Egypt I called my son," that is true of two separate events, each a "fulfilment" of the passage, which are typologically related to one another.

These three strands suggest that the interpretations of promises, prophecies, and types was not always straightforward in early Christian literature. Rather, a single statement or event could

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<sup>44</sup> Dana M. Harris, "Typological Trajectories in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Interpreting the Old Testament Theologically: Essays in Honor of Willem A. VanGemeren*, ed. Andrew T. Abernathy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 280-92.

<sup>45</sup> Harris 2018, esp. 286-7.

<sup>46</sup> See Melito of Sardis *Peri Pascha* and Theophylact of Bulgaria's commentary on Hebrews. These terms themselves are derived from Hebrews 10:1, which states, Σκιάν γάρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων. This led to the threefold distinction of the σκιά, here the law, the εἰκῶν, often here seen as the New Covenant ministry of the church, and the πραγμαία, seen as the eschatological ministry of Christ. This same basic pattern is used to describe the typological significance of the passover by Melito. Cf. Jean Daniélou, "Figure et Événement chez Mélicon de Sardes," in *Neotestamentica et Patristica: Eine Freundesgabe, Herrn Professor Dr. Oscar Cullmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag überreicht, Nov.T.Supp.* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 282-92, esp. 285-7.

<sup>47</sup> For a survey of views on the nature of "fulfilment" in Matthew before 1988, see W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 484-87. See also R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 166-205 and *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), 10-14. For a partial, but more recent survey and argument, see Bradley M. Trout, "The Nature of the Law's Fulfilment in Matthew 5:17: An Exegetical and Theological Study," *In die Skriflig* 49, art. #1910, 8 pages, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, Pillar NT Commentary (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 43; Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 108-9; Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, EKK (Düsseldorf: Benziger, 2002), 1:184; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Cambridge: Paternoster, 2005), 123.; R.T. France 2007, 79-81.

have multiple referents, and even be related to those referents in differing ways.<sup>49</sup> A simple promise of blessing can be fulfilled in multiple ways. Similarly, a type can have multiple resonances. My proposal here differs from these previous interpretive techniques in only one way: promise-fulfilment and typology are connected and expressed in multiple fulfilments of the same promise which typologically relate to one another.

This is done without blending or confusion of the two categories. It remains that promise-fulfilment is primarily a theme of identity. Something is promised, and then *that very thing* is received. One cannot promise a car to a person, then give them a bicycle and count the promise as fulfilled. Nor can one promise a bicycle to one person, then give another person a car and count the promise as fulfilled. The thing promised must be the thing given, and it must be given to the person promised.

Typology remains primarily a non-identical relationship: An object, person, or event exists. There is an understanding (either at the time or after the fact) that this thing points forward to some future thing. At a future time, another object, person, or event exists which shares a key quality (or key qualities) with the previous thing, but to a greater degree.<sup>50</sup> What is key here is that the type and the anti-type are not different forms of same thing. There is *similarity* along the axis of a shared quality, but there is not *identity*. For example, the Old Covenant priesthood is a type of Jesus' priesthood, because in key ways (e.g. sacrifice, purification, intercession) it is interpreted as pointing forward to Jesus' priesthood. I call this *non-identical* because Jesus' priesthood is not a part of the Levitical priesthood or genealogically related to it in any way (7:13-14). There is no relationship of cause and effect or of natural outgrowth in typology. Rather, one thing, because of certain qualities, is seen as pointing forward to another thing.

What I am proposing is that in Hebrews' treatment of promise, the author makes use of both simple promise-fulfilment and typology. There is a promise *P* that can be interpreted in earthly/

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<sup>49</sup> For example, the seed promise in Paul both *is* Christ (Gal 3:16) and *is* the audience (Gal 3:29). Here, the relationship is that believers can be the offspring (σπέρμα) of Abraham because of their connection to Christ, who is the singular offspring (σπέρμα) of Abraham. Both are fulfilments of the promise, but in different ways. Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 255-56; Bradley R Trick, *Abrahamic Descent, Testamentary Adoption, and the Law in Galatians: Differentiating Abraham's Sons, Seed, and Children of Promise*, *Nov.T.Supp.* 169 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), esp. 198-249; David A deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 340.

<sup>50</sup> "According to patristic interpreters a biblical 'type' is a person, an event or an institution with a lasting significance which enables that person, event or institution to signify someone or something in God's future acting in history," Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 230. See whole discussion on types and typology in patristic exegesis, 228-42. See also G.W.H Lampe and K.J. Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology*, SBT 22 (London: SCM Press, 1957); John E. Alsup, "Typology," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6 (London: Doubleday, 1992), 682-85; A. Di Berardino, "Typology," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, vol. 3, ed. Angelo di Berardino (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic Press, 2014), 857-58.

immanent way X and in heavenly/eschatological way Y. Both X and Y are related to *P* by promise fulfilment. In addition, X is typologically related to and must chronologically precede Y. When an individual receives X, they both have and have not received the fulfilment of *P*. When Y is received, however, *P* is finally fulfilled. To simplify, after a promise is given, there is a medial fulfilment and then a final fulfilment.

For example, God promised land to Abraham. This points to the land of Canaan as a referent (since Hebrews does call Canaan “the promised land” (11:9)), but also, and ultimately, it points to a heavenly homeland (11:10-16). When Israel conquered kingdoms, they obtained the land and in that sense received the promise (11:33). However, this was not a complete fulfilment, and the promise remains outstanding until the heavenly homeland is received (11:13, 39-40). Canaan then, is a type of the heavenly land, and both Canaan and the heavenly land are fulfilments of the same promise in their own ways. Canaan can thus be called a partial, typological fulfilment of the promise, whereas the heavenly land is the final, complete fulfilment of that same promise.

#### 4.2 Examples of this reading strategy in Hebrews

Once this method is allowed, multiple themes of Hebrews begin to fall into place. There is a promise of posterity, followed by the physical generation of Isaac and the nation of Israel, then followed by the existence of the audience itself as believers who are called the offspring of Abraham (2:16). There is a promise of land and rest, then Abraham enters into the land of Canaan but does not possess it (11:9), then under Joshua the people enter and do possess it, but also do not possess the final rest (4:8).<sup>51</sup> Last, there is God’s rest as the protological and eschatological Sabbath (4:1,9; 12:22),<sup>52</sup> which is in some way entered into by believers (4:3) and which will fully be entered after the shaking of all things (12:28). There is the promise that God will be with his people (8:10),<sup>53</sup> and a means of approach to God through the levitical cultus (10:1), then finally the approach to God directly through Christ (7:25, *et passim*). In each of these instances, both the medial and final

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<sup>51</sup> Similarly, while acknowledging that the rest of the kingdom of heaven is in view, Theophylact viewed the entrance under Joshua as a typological fulfilment *en route* to ultimate fulfilment of the original promise of rest.

<sup>52</sup> This argument builds off of Lindars’ rejection of typology in Hebrews’ use of Psalm 95, saying, “[T]his is not really a case of typology, because it is not a case of a repeating pattern. In the modern study of typology, it is usually assumed that the Old Testament discloses the pattern of God’s saving action in history, which culminates in the act of God in Christ. This then allows the exegete to refer to the fulfilment in Christ in terms of the Old Testament type, so that one can speak of redemption by Christ as a new Exodus or of Christ himself as a new Moses. But this is not the method of Hebrews. In the case of his argument from Psalm 95 the application to the future is found within the psalm itself. Those who are addressed in the psalm belong to a much later generation, and so the warning cannot apply to the original promised land, but must refer to the future. Thus in this case Hebrews argues on the basis of what Scripture actually means” (1991, 95).

<sup>53</sup> While the citation here came after the establishment of the Levitical cultus, it is itself a reference to earlier claims within the pentateuch (e.g. Ex 6:7, 19:5-6, etc.).



steps can be said to be fulfilments of what was promised. Both are presented as good and ordained by God. However, the medial stage is typologically related to the final stage, such that the final is, in the argument of Hebrews, unquestionably better to the point that it relativises or recontextualises the significance of the medial.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4.3. *The significance of this reading strategy for Heb 6:13-20*

If this manner of reading parts of Hebrews is valid, then the tension between Heb 6:15 and 11:13 is resolved. How is it that Abraham both gained what was promised (6:15) and yet did not receive what was promised (11:13, 39)?

A promise was made to Abraham,<sup>55</sup> he waited and received a fulfilment of that promise (6:15). However, in the eyes of the author, that promise still remained outstanding both for Abraham and for his heirs, since only the medial fulfilment, not the ultimate fulfilment, was realised. Even if, as 11:10 states, Abraham primarily looked to the ultimate fulfilment, the partial fulfilment is neither negated nor made invalid, it is only relativised by the ultimate fulfilment. So, Abraham did receive the promised good (6:15) and did not yet do so (11:13). While this is very close to the standard interpretation, it has one key benefit that the usual reading lacks: it provides a unity of promise both for Abraham between 6:15 and 11:13 and between Abraham (6:13) and the audience who are heirs of the promise (6:17-18).

This is further confirmed by the wording of Hebrews itself. In 6:15, Abraham ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. Hebrews uses three different verbs when describing the reception of promised goods, ἐπιτυχάνω, κομίζω, and λαμβάνω. Both times when the author uses κομίζω for receiving the promised good (10:36,<sup>56</sup> 11:39),<sup>57</sup> the reference is unambiguously to a final, eschatological reception of the promise.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, both uses of λαμβάνω (9:15,<sup>59</sup> 11:13<sup>60</sup>) discuss final, eschatological reception as well. This is especially clear in 9:15, where what is received is τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν... τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας. However, the only other use of ἐπιτυχάνω in Hebrews is this worldly. In 11:33,

<sup>54</sup> The extent of this relativising may differ depending on which promise is discussed at a given time, and will of course be debated in modern discussions — especially regarding the significance of a people vis-à-vis supersessionism.

<sup>55</sup> It seems that 6:13-20 most refers to the posterity promise, though land may play a role.

<sup>56</sup> ὑπομονῆς γὰρ ἔχετε χρεῖαν ἵνα τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ποιήσαντες κομίσθητε τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν.

<sup>57</sup> Καὶ οὗτοι πάντες μαρτυρηθέντες διὰ τῆς πίστεως οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν.

<sup>58</sup> Attridge 1989, 301.

<sup>59</sup> Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης ἐστίν, ὅπως θανάτου γενομένου εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν λάβωσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας.

<sup>60</sup> Κατὰ πίστιν ἀπέθανον οὗτοι πάντες, μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀλλὰ πόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ἰδόντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοί εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

various saints of old ἐπέτυχον ἐπαγγελιών. This is one feature among a list of accomplishments done by faith during the Old Covenant (11:32-38), and all of the things done in this long list are decidedly earthly. In the two cases where the author singles out this-worldly fulfilment — medial fulfilment in the scheme here devised — he uses ἐπιτυχάνω instead of λαμβάνω or κομίζω. This potentially draws upon the semantics of ἐπιτυχάνω.<sup>61</sup> While the verb can mean simply to “obtain” or “succeed” often it has notions of chance, luck, or a lack of intentionality. Commonly it means to run into or merely to happen upon. It is less confident or solid than other near synonyms. As such, it is likely no coincidence that the author reserves ἐπιτυχάνω for the two times in which he refers to medial fulfilment of a promise. It is not that ἐπιτυχάνω means “to receive medial fulfilment of a promise,” but, drawing on the already less than solid connotations of the verb, the author uses it, and only it, in these situations, and only in these situations. So, when the author says that Abraham ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, he is not setting up a contradiction with what he will say later. Rather, he signals medial, not final, fulfilment of the singular promise through using this somewhat shaky term.

This unity of promise with multiple, typologically related fulfilments also answers how the audience can be said to be heirs of the promise of Abraham, even though they had a somewhat different hope than he is portrayed as having in Genesis — for example, they were not promised that Isaac would be born to them. Rather, the very promise that was given to Abraham is inherited by them, with the added knowledge that an initial fulfilment had already been made. This then serves as encouragement to believe in the words of God and the God who spoke those words, while providing a typological image of the fulfilment they themselves can expect. This manner of reading, combining promise-fulfilment and typology, explains both the argument and the intended rhetorical effect of that argument in a way that handles the complex and varied data of Hebrews without privileging one set of statements over another.

## 5. Abraham as the one who has the promises in Hebrews 7

The role of promise in Heb 7 is diminished from its central place in chapter 6. Rather than moving the argument forward, it is featured only in one allusive mention while the author recounts the exchange between Melchizedek and Abraham in Gen 14. While elevating the status of Melchizedek in comparison to Abraham, the author says, ὁ δὲ μὴ γενεαλογούμενος ἐξ αὐτῶν δεδεκάτωκεν Ἀβραάμ καὶ τὸν ἔχοντα τὰς ἐπαγγελίας εὐλόγηκεν. χωρὶς δὲ πάσης ἀντιλογίας τὸ ἔλαττον ὑπὸ τοῦ κρείττονος εὐλογεῖται. “But he, although he was not from their genealogical line, received a tithe from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. And it is beyond dispute that the

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. LSJ and GE.

lesser is blessed by the greater" (7:6-7). In context, this mention of Abraham as "the one who has the promises" contrasts with Melchizedek's description as "the one who was not from their genealogical line."

Rhetorically, this has the function of making the argument of 7:6-7 go counter to expectation. One would expect the bearer of the divine promises to be superior to someone whose pedigree is not even mentioned in Scripture, yet Abraham's gift of a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek and Melchizedek's subsequent blessing of Abraham show that this is not the case. The actions of Abraham recorded in Genesis and expounded by the author show Melchizedek's superiority over Abraham. This does not, however, reject the intuition that a divine promise bearer is highly honoured and of great social standing. Rather it builds upon it, making much of Abraham in order to show how great Melchizedek must be, if he was greater even than the patriarch (7:7). By extension, Jesus must be even greater by far (7:15-17). That is to say, Abraham is not disparaged here,<sup>62</sup> but rather elevated in order to make Melchizedek shine all the more brightly in his superiority. This then further elevates Jesus as the one greater than Melchizedek.

Theologically and typologically, however, we are encouraged to see more in this mention of Abraham as "the one who has the promises," especially so soon after the discussion in Heb 6. While the author is presenting the events of Gen 14 as a historical account, he also presents them as having typological significance: Melchizedek is a type of Jesus. Levi, unborn and "in the loins of his forefather" (7:10), is a type of the Aaronic priesthood in general.

Yet Abraham's significance is not drawn out. Perhaps, as the promise bearer, he stands for those who also bear the promises, including the audience itself. The previous chapter has led the audience to identify strongly with Abraham and to seek to imitate him in pursuit of the same promise, so it is not unlikely that the audience would have seen some resonance between Abraham's blessing by Melchizedek and their own standing before the Melchizedekian high priest, Jesus. If this is so, there would have been two main theological effects of casting themselves in this light. First, the value judgment regarding Abraham would be applied to the audience. That is, as those who bear the divine promise, they are highly honoured. Such a reflection could have only been an encouragement to a group which saw itself on the margins of society,<sup>63</sup> and which was called to even more definitively walk outside the camp (13:13).

Second, in the pattern of Melchizedek and Abraham, they are given a glimpse of the blessing offered to them. The bearer of the promises of God is blessed by the Melchizedekian high priest

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<sup>62</sup> Eisenbaum sees this passage as an attempt to "deflate" and disparage Abraham in order to establish Jesus (1997, 125), but the argument does not work by lowering Abraham's status and replacing him with Melchizedek and Christ.

<sup>63</sup> deSilva 2000, 8, 11-16.

when he acknowledges the superiority of that priest.<sup>64</sup> So too will the audience be blessed if they hold to the confession of Jesus' superior priesthood. After all, the hope that God will fulfil his commitment to bless and multiply Abraham (6:14, 18) is explicitly tied to Jesus's presence as the Melchizedekian high priest in heaven (6:19-20).<sup>65</sup> This, then, converges with the author's central rhetorical thrust, that the audience ought to hold fast to their confession of, and allegiance to, this great high priest who has blessed and will bless them.

## 6. Conclusion

To summarise the answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: Abraham is the one to whom God made the promise. This promise was, at the end of his life, confirmed with an oath. The generations of the faithful after Abraham, down to the author's own day, all stand as heirs of the same promise, which is ratified and supported by the oath God made. Because of this unity of promise, the author's exposition of the life of Abraham stands as an encouragement to the audience. Though Abraham waited, he was surely blessed, and did in some way gain what was promised, though only in a medial sense. So too the audience, even if they must wait, will be blessed if they imitate his faith and patience.

In Hebrews 6-7, the author uses promise language as part of a meditation on the life of Abraham and its relevance to his audience. Abraham is the promise holder *par excellence*, and through a complex reading of the promise, the author holds Abraham forward to the audience both as example and as encouragement. He is an example because he patiently waited and trusted in God during the long years between when God made a promise to him and when he received some fulfilment of that promise. He is an encouragement, because the same God who was faithful to Abraham will be faithful to the audience, who themselves are the heirs of Abraham's promise. The author casts the audience in Abraham's position: honoured by God as those who have the promises, blessed by a Melchizedekian priest, but waiting for God's ultimate fulfilment of the promise that he gave so long ago.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>65</sup> τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος, ἣν ὡς ἀγκυραν...εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

## Chapter 5: Promise and covenant, an exegesis of Hebrews 8-9

### Introduction

Hebrews 8-9 is, on all readings, a key portion of the epistle. In it, the author develops what is usually seen as his main dogmatic purpose, the priesthood of Christ in its working and superiority. To do so, he explicitly interweaves the themes of covenant, cult, and priesthood and produces a reading of the Jewish Scriptures with little precedent. As such, the theme of covenant dominates this section and shapes the arguments made within it. Because of this, it is a particularly important part of the epistle for this current study. Precisely because covenant and promise have been almost universally confused in the history of Hebrews scholarship, seeing how the author here differentiates the two concepts and plays them off one another will provide key insights into how the author viewed promise as its own theological category. The following chapter will focus primarily on the interplay between promise and covenant, asking how the author portrays promise and covenant relating *in general*, in Hebrews 8, then how the specific promises and covenants delineated (Abrahamic, Mosaic/Old, New) relate to one another. Then, turning to chapter 9, I will ask what more the author adds to our understanding of the differentiation of and relation between promise and covenant. Finally, I will conclude by tying these threads together and stating the schema within which the author views promise and covenant working.

#### 1. Promise and the foundation of covenant in Hebrews 8

While this chapter will not be able to investigate all the nuances of covenant within Hebrews, it will examine in what ways, if any, promise and covenant differ and interrelate.<sup>1</sup> After all, the *prima facie* similarity of these two concepts — both verbal commitments, speech acts<sup>2</sup> that establish two or more parties in some sort of relationship with attendant obligations — suggests that a closer comparison of these two terms in Hebrews may yield insight into how the author views the various commitments of God. Indeed, one impetus behind this entire project was the sense that these concepts have not yet been properly distinguished within readings of Hebrews, and that many interpretations have suffered either by over-identifying promise and covenant in

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<sup>1</sup> The main fairly recent studies on covenant in Hebrews are Susanne Lehne's *The New Covenant in Hebrews*, Backhaus' *Der neue Bund und das Werden der Kirche: Die Diatheke-Deutung des Hebräerbriefs im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 29, Münster: Aschendorff, 1996. Though Backhaus' study is more a work on the the theological development and ramifications of covenant within Christianity, particularly with its implications for Jewish and Christian relations. A basic version of his thought regarding covenant can be found in his article "Das Bundesmotiv in der frühkirchlichen Schwellenzeit: Hebräerbrief, Barnabasbrief, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*."

<sup>2</sup> That is, the declaration of a covenant as a speech act. While the various obligations and their administration can also be called "covenant," I am referring to the initial declaration that establishes the relationship and its attendant obligations.

Hebrews or by not sufficiently bringing them in conversation with one another. In the following section, I intend to raise and answer two questions. First, in what ways do promise and covenant relate in Hebrews? That is, is there any kind of schematisation of how the author views promises and covenants working in his theological system? Second, what is the exact relationship between this particular set of covenants and promises? That is, how does the author portray the Old Covenant, New Covenant, and their attendant promises as relating to one another?

While Hebrews has much to say about covenants and promises, there are only two places in the epistle in which they are brought into direct contact: Heb 8:6 and 9:15. For this portion of the study, I will first focus on Heb 8:6 to introduce the options currently available in scholarship, evaluate them, and then posit another reading. Heb 9:15 will then be consulted to further develop the argument begun when considering Heb 8:6. Hebrews 8:6 reads as follows:

<sup>6</sup> νυνὶ δὲ διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας, ὅσω καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἥτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται.

“But as it is, he has obtained a priestly ministry that is better inasmuch as he also is the mediator of a better covenant, which is legislated on better promises.”

Two previous treatments of Hebrews which have made some attempt at explaining the relationship of promise and covenant in the author’s thought are those of Rose<sup>3</sup> and Backhaus.<sup>4</sup> In Rose’s reading, there is no necessary relationship between promise and covenant as such. Rather, to Rose, only the New Covenant has anything to do with promise, while the Old Covenant is foreign to, even potentially opposed to, promise.<sup>5</sup> Backhaus tends to the opposite extreme. For him, promise and covenant are fundamentally the same thing, or to be more accurate, different stages of the same thing. He repeats the claim that, “Insofern freilich die letzte Vollendung noch aussteht, bleibt auch der neue Bund im Modus der Verheißung.”<sup>6</sup> That is, there is only one fundamental type of commissive speech-act that God uses, the covenant. The covenant obligations that have not yet been fulfilled can be called promises, but this is only a way of viewing

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<sup>3</sup> 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Backhaus 2009a and 2009b.

<sup>5</sup> 1989, 74. He even goes so far as to argue that the Old Covenant did not really have any hope in it, saying, “Es ist daher auch ganz sicher nicht richtig, wenn E. Riggensbach folgert: «Allerdings verlieh auch schon die gesetzliche Ordnung eine Hoffnung, denn die ganze Opferdarbringung war von der Erwartung getragen, dadurch die Vergebung und die Beseitigung aller Störungen im Verhältnis zu Gott zu erlangen (9,22)» Ganz abgesehen davon, daß Hebr 9,22 derartige Schlußfolgerungen nicht zuläßt, verbieten sie sich allein aufgrund des dargestellten negativen Urteils des Hebr über die πρώτη διαθήκη” (75, citing Riggensbach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, (Leipzig: Deichert, 1922), 203).

<sup>6</sup> 2009a, 162; cf. 169.

them in regards to their future fulfilment. Promise is not a *thing* as such, but only a way of viewing aspects of a covenant.

I intend to chart a different course from these two arguments. In my reading of Hebrews, promise and covenant are distinct types of speech-acts, distinct entities, but they are necessarily connected through how Hebrews portrays both the basis and function of covenants. I will attempt to prove that a promise-word is that upon which a covenant is built, and that the purpose of a covenant and its attendant priestly administration is to bring individuals into the fulness of the promised-good. Before I can sketch that positive argument, however, I will attempt to demonstrate why neither Rose's nor Backhaus's proposals satisfactorily fit the data provided by Hebrews.

Rose's reading depends on a separation between the Old Covenant and the promise of God.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps most strikingly, this is put forward in Rose's assertion that contrary to the implications of the passage, the Old Covenant was not instituted on the basis of any kind of promise, but rather on the basis of law, saying, "Die πρώτη διαθήκη *nicht* etwa auf «minderen Verheißungen», sondern auf dem mosaischen «Gesetz» mit seinen einzelnen «Bestimmungen»".<sup>8</sup> Law becomes solely the domain of the Old Covenant, whereas promise becomes solely that of the New.<sup>9</sup> This reading, however, does not pay close enough heed to the argument Hebrews actually makes here, and owes

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<sup>7</sup> 1989, 74-5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 74. Emphasis original.

<sup>9</sup> One can see in this a close parallel to the traditional Lutheran dichotomy between law and gospel, and it is not a big step from there to this reading. It is, however, a step that Hebrews does not take, as will be presently demonstrated.

more to Rose's imposition of a certain kind of consistency on Hebrews.<sup>10</sup> Two elements of Heb 8:6 lead to dissatisfaction with Rose's reading. First, the comment that the New Covenant was founded ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις does not seem to be a comparison between promise and law, but between better and worse promises (or, perhaps more accurately, between good and better promises). This is confirmed by Hebrews' use of the "better" comparison.<sup>11</sup> "Better" in Hebrews is always used to compare two things along an axis of similarity, two species of a common genus. In this one verse (Heb 8:6), it is a better (διαφορωτέρας) priestly ministry in comparison with the priestly ministry of the Levites, and a better (κρείττονος) covenant, in comparison with the Old Covenant. Every instance of "better" in Hebrews works this way, comparing like with like.<sup>12</sup> To read ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις as a comparison between promise and law, as opposed between two promises of varying quality, is to read against the grain of Hebrews. Second, it is not necessarily the case that law is the sole province of the Old Covenant in Hebrews. Again, in the passage before us,

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<sup>10</sup> Rose 1989, 62 (as his stated goal), 186 (with his conclusion that "An den Stellen, an denen der Verfasser von den an die *christliche Gemeinde* ergangenen Verheißungen in Zusammenhang mit den Begriffen ἐπαγγελία, ἐπαγγέλλομαι, und εὐαγγελίζεσθαι spricht, denkt er *durchweg* — auch da, wo dies auf den ersten Blick nicht der Fall zu sein scheint (8,6; 12,26) — an die Zusage des noch ausstehenden εἰσερχεσθαι εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν; das bringen sowohl die Stellen zum Ausdruck, die vom ergangenen Verheißungswort zeugen (6,17; 8,6; 10,23; 12,26 — vgl. 4,1ff), als auch diejenigen, die vom ausstehenden Verheißungsgut handeln (9,15; 10,36; [11,39f])." That is not to say that I do not read Hebrews as consistent. The issue here is the *type* of consistency imposed by Rose, in which all theological references to promise must refer to the eschatological promise of rest, such that no other types of promise can be thought of. Never mind that this necessitates several instances of special pleading (e.g., "Es ist abschließend nun noch zu fragen, ob dieser dem erhöhten Christus geleistete Eid für die Glaubenden die «Einführung einer (unvergleichlich) besseren Hoffnung» sein kann. E. Riggensbach hat hiergegen in seiner Auslegung von Hebr 6,17f eingewendet, der Eid Ps 110,4 richte sich «in seinem Wortlaut nur an den im Psalm angeredeten Messias und ist nicht den κληρονόμοι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας gegeben, um ihnen eine kräftige Ermunterung zum Hoffen ... zu gewähren». Ähnlich bemerkt O. Michel zu unserer Stelle [Heb 6:17]: «Diesmal ist der Eid Gottes nicht Bürgschaft für die Gemeinde, sondern eine besondere Auszeichnung des Christus». Hierzu ist zu bemerken: So gewiß diese Einwände für den Wortlaut des Psalmverses selbst gelten, so gewiß gelten sie nicht für das Verständnis, das der Verfasser von diesem Vers hat," 77. This despite commenting on how careful an interpreter and author Heb. is (62)) but it also leads Rose on several occasions to say that the author did not actually mean what he explicitly said said ("Der Hebr hat *nicht* im Blick die Viedererlangung des Isaak bzw. die von Abraham in Geduld erwartete und erfahrene Bekräftigung der Verheißung durch den Eidschwur," 69; "Diese Einsicht hat zur Konsequenz, daß in Hebr 8,6 mit den ἐπαγγελίαις nicht die in 8,8-12 zitierten Verheißungen aus Jer 31,31ff angesprochen sind. Vielmehr denkt der Verfasser an die Verheißung des eschatologischen Eingehens in die unmittelbare Gottesnähe," 76). Whatever form the consistency of Hebrews takes, I do not find it convincing to look for it in the author's mind behind, but not in, the words.

<sup>11</sup> Lane 1991, 1:cxxix-cxxx; Andreas Köstenberger, "Jesus the Mediator of a 'Better Covenant': A Study of Comparatives in the Book of Hebrews," *Faith and Mission* 21 (2004), 30-49.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the comparison of promises in this verse: 1:4, names; 6:9, outcomes; 7:7, people of status; 7:19, hopes; 7:22, covenants; 8:6, covenants; 9:23, sacrifices; 10:34, possessions; 11:6, homelands; 11:35 qualities of resurrections; 11:40, blessings; 12:24, messages spoken by blood. The framework of these "better" comparisons in Hebrews (and generally) only makes sense when the comparison is one of quality over a shared attribute. Even more significantly, when the author wants to compare *unlike* attributes, he does not use the word "better," κρείττων (The above list is exhaustive for Hebrews), but makes longer statements; e.g. Heb 3:1-6, in which the difference between Jesus and Moses is expressed in their differing roles and titles. Jesus is not here a "better son" or "better servant" than Moses, but rather Jesus is son while Moses is servant.



the term usually translated “enacted”<sup>13</sup> or “established,”<sup>14</sup> νομοθετέω, refers primarily to the giving of law,<sup>15</sup> and is in fact used this way in Heb 7:11. There the people received the law (νενομοθέτηται) upon the basis of the Levitical priesthood (ἐπ’ αὐτῆς [τῆς Λευιτικῆς ἱερωσύνης]). Here, the New Covenant is legislated (νενομοθέτηται) upon the basis of better promises (ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις). While it is conceivable that this term can be used without any legal connotation — after all, use, not etymology, is determinant for the meaning of a word — the parallel usage in Heb 7:11 makes this unlikely. This is further confirmed by Heb 7:12, μετατιθεμένης γὰρ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ νόμου μετὰθesis γίνεται. Note the implications of this verse. A change in priesthood, from Aaronic to Melchizedekian, entails a change in the law, not an utter abandoning of law as such. Heb 7:11-12 shows that the author could not envision a priesthood without a law or a law without a priesthood. Thus the move to the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ in the New Covenant does not entail an abolition of the category of law, but a change in the law.<sup>16</sup> As such, an opposition of law in the Old Covenant against promise in the New Covenant is not supported within the text of Hebrews. Rose’s treatment of the passage, then, does not stand. This conclusion is even further strengthened by the fact that the internalisation of the law is a feature of the New

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<sup>13</sup> ESV, NASB, NET, NRSV.

<sup>14</sup> KJV, NIV.

<sup>15</sup> LSJ.

<sup>16</sup> Few comprehensive studies on law in Hebrews have been done, and the most complete treatment is that of Joslin in *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law: The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews 7:1-10:18*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), in which he argues for a strong continuity between the Old Covenant and New Covenant law, with the main difference being the “internalisation” of that law. While he does much to show how law is not a negative category in Hebrews as such, I find that he does not take quite seriously enough the language of “a change in the law” (Heb 7:12). In his view, it is the transformation of the same law, in large part by internalisation, as opposed to the substitution of one law with another, which I would argue must be the case after the analogy of the change in the priesthood in the first half of the same verse. So while he is certainly right against those who see no law in the New Covenant in Hebrews (He references Delitzsch 1952; Spicq 1953; Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964); Attridge 1989; Lehne 1990; Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Crossroad Publishers, 1999); Shenck 2003; Marie Isaacs, *Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, JSNT Supp. 73 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); Koester 2001; to which could be added Susan Haber, “From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus: The Re-Vision of Covenant and Cult in Hebrews,” *JSNT* 28 (2005), building off of Lehne 1990. Haber takes a strongly negative view of the law in Hebrews, such that “It is not salvageable.” (106)), more can be done to trace the complexities of this theme.

While further investigation is beyond the scope of this current work, I would suggest that the category of a “better law” in the New Covenant would not be rejected by the author, and that his view might not be far from either that of James’ “royal law” (Jas 2:8) or Paul’s “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2, 1 Cor 9:21).

Covenant enumerated in the Jer 31 quotation both in its first statement (8:10) and in its abbreviated restatement (10:16).<sup>17</sup>

What about Backhaus' opposite proposal? Does Hebrews present "promise" as only the as-yet unfulfilled aspects of a covenant? If that were the case, what would it imply about Hebrews' view of covenant? That is, what does this view suggest a covenant is? If promises, verbal commitments to do something,<sup>18</sup> are the outstanding parts of a covenant, then at its core, a covenant is an agreement to do something or a set of somethings. At its initial giving, a covenant could be called entirely promise, and gradually would become less so as its various commitments were fulfilled. At first look, this could seem to fit much of the general discussion of covenant in theological discourse,<sup>19</sup> and could be made to fit much of the content of Hebrews (e.g. one could say that the covenant is always called "promise" in reference to Abraham because it was unfulfilled during his lifetime). However, there are some grave flaws in this reading of Hebrews as well. Following Lehne,<sup>20</sup> the primary significance of covenant in Hebrews is not a series of future benefits. While such benefits are necessarily included in covenant, covenant in Hebrews is irreducibly cultic.<sup>21</sup> A covenant institutes a priestly mode of worship. Any benefits included in the covenant are mediated through a form of priestly service.<sup>22</sup> Backhaus's presentation of covenant in Hebrews is lacking inasmuch as it does not strongly deal with the cultic meaning of covenant in Hebrews. Further, Backhaus's proposal seems to make promise posterior to covenant, or at least contemporaneous with it. In Hebrews 8:6, however, the author presents promise as prior to covenant. The covenant is legislated upon the promises. This places the promises at least logically

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<sup>17</sup> Though, of course, despite these repeated quotations of Jeremiah 31, Rose maintains that the New Covenant promises are in no way related to the quotation of Jeremiah 31:31ff (1989, 76).

<sup>18</sup> This has to be the working definition of promise within Backhaus' treatment, though he does not define what he means by promise exactly. This is likely because he is understandably using the common, everyday sense of promise (*Verheißung*).

<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, my portrayal of this account of covenant does not emphasise the relational aspects of covenant that often are prominent. However, while my focus on commitments here is a matter of emphasis due to the argument, it does not do away with, or even ultimately displace, relationship. First, this is because commitments entail and create forms of relationships as such. Second, a type of relationship can be a specified term of a promise, such as what is found in the passage quoted from Jer 31, ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν (Heb 8:10).

<sup>20</sup> Summed up in her statement, "It appears that what is most distinctive and original about the writer's reworking of the covenant motif is his *cultic perspective*" (1990, 93, *emph. original*).

<sup>21</sup> Lehne 1990, 93ff. While Joslin 2008 tries to argue in reference to Jer 31 that "no Jewish understanding of a covenant with God would omit cultic ideas" (256), this does not seem to be universally true. While some interpretations of the patriarchal covenants (e.g. Jubilees) not all presentations of Noah and Abraham and their covenants have cultic elements. Further, Paul's presentation of the Abrahamic covenant (and law!) in Galatians lacks any cultic element and instead draws on motifs of cursing, blessing, and inheritance (Gal 3:7-29).

<sup>22</sup> Lehne 1990, 94; Pursiful 1993, 78-81; Peeler 2019, 199.

prior to the covenant. If the promises are logically (and potentially temporally) before covenant, it cannot be said that a promise is simply the outstanding portion of a covenant.

If covenant in Hebrews requires a priesthood and cultic system, then God's verbal commitment to Abraham cannot be called a covenant.<sup>23</sup> As already noted, this fits the way that Hebrews talks about Abraham, since that particular divine commitment is never referred to as covenant, but only as promise. So then, while it showed some potential to explain the text of Hebrews, and is tied to broader theological discourse on covenant, ultimately Backhaus's reading does not adequately explain the relationship between promise and covenant in Hebrews either.

What then can be said about promise and covenant in Hebrews? First, promise and covenant are not identical, nor are they different aspects of the same thing. Second, neither are they entirely unrelated. While Hebrews goes to some lengths to distinguish them, the author does also connect the two. Third, promise is logically prior to covenant. In every case which Hebrews considers, promise is also temporally prior to covenant. Fourth, covenants are in some sense founded upon promises. This is the case for *both* the Old and the New Covenants, and so is true for all covenants which Hebrews considers.

Can anything further be added to this from Heb 8? Two more details suggest themselves. First, priesthood is not directly predicated upon promise, but rather upon covenant. Heb 8:6 itself suggests this: νυνὶ δὲ διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας, ὅσω καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἥτις ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται (8:6). Jesus obtaining a priesthood is predicated upon his being the mediator of a covenant. Further, it is covenants that have regulations for worship, not promises. So Heb 9:1, Εἶχεν μὲν οὖν καὶ ἡ πρώτη [διαθήκη] δικαιώματα λατρείας. Throughout Hebrews, it is covenants that provide for priesthoods, not promises. God's commitment to Abraham did not legislate for a priesthood, and thus in Hebrews' categories it is a different thing, it is a promise. This will be explored further in the discussion on Heb 9:15. Second, while it can be said that in Hebrews a covenant presupposes a promise, the reverse is not true. A covenant is instituted upon promises (8:6), but a promise is simply given (6:13). A promise can be free-standing, at least for a time. Unless the text says that a covenant was built upon a given promise, it cannot be assumed that there was. In fact, the example of the promise to Abraham shows that there can be, in Hebrews' terms at least, a promise without a covenant. Again, the implications of this will be explored more shortly.

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<sup>23</sup> Melchizedek, the priest associated with Abraham's story, is not associated with any covenant, and he is explicitly *not* the one who had the promise (7:6).

With all this established, we can now investigate in further detail the precise relationships of these particular covenants and promises.

## 2. The specific promises and covenants related

In this section, I will propose a reading of how Hebrews 8 portrays the relationships between the Old Covenant, New Covenant, and the promises pertaining both to them and to Abraham. While the previous section explored the relationship between promise and covenant in Hebrews *in general*, this section will examine the specific dynamics between the promises and covenants explicitly mentioned in Hebrews. To do so, I will begin with the relationship between the promises undergirding the Old Covenant and the New, in reference to the comparison made between them in Heb 8:6. I will not spend much time directly comparing the Old and the New Covenants in Hebrews, since that has been satisfactorily done by other scholars.<sup>24</sup> As is generally accepted within studies of Hebrews, I will assume that the primary relationship between the Old and the New Covenants is typological and discontinuous.<sup>25</sup> That is, the Old Covenant foreshadowed the details of the New Covenant, and is portrayed in Hebrews as coming to an end at the advent of the New.<sup>26</sup> This typological relationship, that of good to better, of earthly to heavenly, provides a way of understanding the relationship between the promises grounding the two covenants as well

### 2.1 *The typological relationship between the Old and New Covenants*

Just as the Old Covenant has an earthly sanctuary while the New has a heavenly one, so too is the contrast between the promises of the Old and New Covenants one of the earthly and heavenly, of the temporary and eternal.<sup>27</sup> Yet it is not just that a new, better, and heavenly set is brought in to replace the old. Rather, the typological relationship between the covenants continues even in the promises upon which they are founded. The lesser promises upon which the Old Covenant was

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<sup>24</sup> Namely, Lehne 1990.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation*, SNTS Monograph Series 36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 66-71; Bénétreau, 1989, 1:51-4 (tracing various streams of “continuité et rupture” in the priestly system in Hebrews in French scholarship); Lane 1991, cxxxi-cxxxiii. While acknowledging that the Old Covenant is no longer in place, Cockerill argues that the Old Covenant has not been invalidated as such, but rather remains valid as a thing that points to Christ. As such, he argues that “The relationship between Christ’s high priesthood and the old is best described as continuity and fulfillment rather than continuity and discontinuity” (2012, 53). Yet this does not place the cult central enough to an understanding of covenant, and as such is to overlook that the Old Covenant *as priestly cult*, has been ended. There is a continuity of purpose (which I argue is ultimately found in the relationship between the covenants and the promise), but there is a strong discontinuity here as well.

<sup>26</sup> This reflects one of the theological innovations of the early Christian communities: that they viewed the New Covenant not in terms of renewal of the covenant at Sinai (as did the Qumran community), but as something genuinely new. See Lehne.

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas 2006, 168; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 221; Backhaus, 2009b, 190-2 and 2009d, 291-2; Cockerill 2012, 363.

founded are typologically related to those of the New. Because of this, while Hebrews does not expressly enumerate what the lesser promises of the Old Covenant were, we can make some guess as to what they were based on what we know in Hebrews are the benefits of the promises of the New Covenant. For example, if the New Covenant brings an eternal rest (4:1), rest within the land after the conquest was one of the lesser promises of the Old. In the New Covenant there is a promise of a heavenly fatherland and city (11:13-16), so perhaps a promise of the Old Covenant was that of an earthly land and city.<sup>28</sup> The New Covenant features a promise of a people (6:14), and the Old Covenant governed and held together a nation.<sup>29</sup> In the quotation from Jer. 31, we see a knowledge of God and forgiveness of sins promised, and in the Old Covenant, Hebrews acknowledges that people were able to draw near to God within an earthly sanctuary, after a fashion, and receive a cleansing of the flesh (9:13).

## 2.2 *The Abrahamic promise undergirding the two covenants*

With that typological relationship established, we can move on to the next question: What is the relationship between the promise(s) given to Abraham, those given in the Old Covenant, and those in the New? Or, to put it another way, is the Abrahamic promise related to the Old Covenant, the New Covenant, or both? And if *both*, does it relate to them in the same way, or in different ways?

The first step to answering this question is to examine whether the Abrahamic promise is related to either of the covenants at all. After all, in Hebrews 8:6, it mentions κρείττονες ἐπαγγελίαι and thus also implies lesser promises, but it does not specifically mention which promises are in view. The plural too must be considered. While I have spoken of the Abrahamic promise, singular (as does Hebrews 6:15, 17; 11:9), here the promises are plural (as in 6:12, and, of Abraham, 11:17). Here, with the enumeration of blessings provided from the Jeremiah quotation, it is likely that the plural is attracted to this list of multiple blessings. The singularity of the New Covenant (and of the Old) and their definitive, singular giving within time should not lead us to read this as a portrayal of many partial commitments of God followed by singular covenants, but as God's guarantee of many blessings vouchsafed by various covenants.

Drawing on the argument from the previous chapter, Hebrews groups the members of the New Covenant community with the promise made to Abraham (6:13-20), and so there cannot be *no* relationship. As argued there, the promise made to Abraham is the same promise that the author holds out to his audience and sees Jesus as securing (6:20). Further, since it is in his priestly role

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<sup>28</sup> And perhaps such is the significance of Joshua, the lesser Jesus', failure to enter into it.

<sup>29</sup> In Heb 7:11, it is ὁ λαὸς νενомοθέτῃται.

(κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 6:20) that he stands as a forerunner of the hope held by the heirs of the promise, there is good reason to see this fitting within the pattern established in the previous section. As part of his priestly, New Covenant administration, Jesus guarantees the validity of the Abrahamic promise.

But, as argued previously, the Abrahamic promise is not a simple thing. It requires two levels of fulfilment, one earthly and medial (6:14), the other heavenly and final (11:13, 39). Since Jesus' high priesthood is heavenly (τοιοῦτον ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα, ὃς ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, 8:1; εἰ μὲν οὖν ἦν ἐπὶ γῆς, οὐδ' ἂν ἦν ἱερεὺς, 8:4), his New Covenant ministry is instituted upon the heavenly register of the Abrahamic promise. That is, it is founded upon the better promises (8:6), those aspects of the Abrahamic promise which guarantee better, heavenly, and eternal goods. Thus far, the author has only defined those promised goods in terms of rest (4:1), blessing (6:14), and multiplication (6:14). Through his quotation of Jeremiah 31,<sup>30</sup> he further defines these promised goods in terms of the spiritual realities of an internalisation of the law (διδούς νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν ἐπιγράψω αὐτούς, 8:10), a true relationship with God (καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν, 8:10), and forgiveness of sins (ἴλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι, 8:12).

What then should be understood about the “lesser promises” at the foundation of the Old Covenant? It seems unlikely that the saints of Israel under the Old Covenant, the offspring of Abraham, who “through faith and patience inherited the promises” (6:12), were entirely separate from the promises to Abraham. The reading strategy developed thus far provides a ready answer. The promises at the foundation of the Old Covenant were the lower register of the promise to Abraham. The promises of the Old Covenant stand in a typological relationship with those of the New.<sup>31</sup> Corresponding to the ultimate promised goods, these would include things like rest in the land of Canaan after wandering in the wilderness, a real but external relationship with God (described by ἐπιλαβομένου μου τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν, 8:9),<sup>32</sup> and the purification administered by the earthly priests (8:4; 9:10, 13).

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<sup>30</sup> Cockerill 2012, 363.

<sup>31</sup> Heb 10:1 is particularly relevant here, Σκιὰν γὰρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων. Notice that the law, here standing in for the OC administration, had a shadow specifically of the coming *blessings*, not just of the coming administration. There were typologically related goods possessed by the Old Covenant which were distinct from the actual blessings found in the New Covenant. Contra Joslin, who suggests that the σκιά in 10:1 is the “tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices” (2008, 245), since it unclear how the temple is typological for the blessings. However, his later statement in addition to the previous is generally correct, namely that, “the *effects* of the sacrificial system foreshadowed the good things to come” (254). So while I believe he goes too far, he also does correctly identify the correspondence.

<sup>32</sup> Bénétreau 1989, 2:62-3; Koester 2001, 363

So then, while the promises underlying the Old and New Covenants are typologically related to one another, they both find their ultimate basis in God's promise to Abraham. This promise of blessing is developed and expanded, but the two registers remain. The Abrahamic promise, as argued, has two fulfilments, one medial and one final. These two fulfilments are typologically related, and the final is consistently described in Hebrews as better. Since, in Hebrews, a covenant is instituted on a foundation of promises (8:6), we can say that the Old Covenant was founded upon the lower register of the Abrahamic promise — the lesser promises — whereas the New Covenant was founded upon the higher — the better promises.

### *2.3 Summary of the foundational role of promise for covenant*

This, then, is the structure of the various promise words of Hebrews. First the promise was spoken to Abraham, but no system, no priesthood, was inaugurated upon it.<sup>33</sup> Then came the typologically related promises of the Old Covenant, shadows of the once and future promise, and upon these was the Old Covenant and its priestly service founded. Then, at the time of reformation (διορθώσεως, 9:10), came the Son. He again spoke the promise made by God to Abraham, but this time he inaugurated a covenant and a cult upon it. So finally, ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων (1:2), the promised goods (τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, 10:1), of which the law had only a shadow, might be administered to the people of God, the heirs of the promise to Abraham through the priestly work of Christ.

### **3. Promise and the Goal of Covenant in Hebrews 9:15**

Chapter 9 presents us with a somewhat different setting from chapter 8. Previously, the author was interested in providing a rationale for a covenant which replaced that given at Sinai through Moses. Chapter 9, on the other hand, accepts that a New Covenant must be given and begins to interpret that covenant in light of the death of Jesus.<sup>34</sup> The author extols the superiority of the forgiveness provided by Jesus' sacrifice (9:6-14). Then comes the verse on which this section will focus (9:15), in which the New Covenant, the death of Christ, redemption from sins, and the promise of the eternal inheritance are all brought together. But, significantly, the orientation toward covenant has changed.

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<sup>33</sup> At this point, a problem could be raised that Abraham did receive part of the promise in the birth and preservation of Isaac (6:15). While this is true, Hebrews 11:13-16 problematises this. This will be addressed in chapters 6 and 8. For now, while Isaac and Jacob are indeed parts of the promise to Abraham, they are recast as joint heirs of the promise (11:9), and so their birth (and preservation) is viewed as a merely provisional fulfilment; it is simply the maintenance of the preconditions of the fulfilment of the whole promise (whether medial or final).

<sup>34</sup> Particularly in light of the Day of Atonement offering; cf. David Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NovT. Supp. 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 215-77.

In this passage, we will not find an identical depiction of the relationship between covenant and promise. But far from challenging the previous reading, this passage provides further developments which complement what has been already said. This passage asks and answers a different set of questions than does 8:6, and so it is unsurprising that different nuances of promise and covenant are brought into view. Hebrews 8:6 was concerned with the basis of covenant, in the divine commitments which undergird and precede covenant. Hebrews 9:15 is concerned with the results and goals of covenant.<sup>35</sup> Among other things, this is reflected in the fact that ἐπαγγελία in 9:15 refers to a promised good, not to the promise word.<sup>36</sup> The two passages form bookends on the author's discussion of promise and covenant. Hebrews 8:6 shows how promises serve as the foundation for covenants, whereas Hebrews 9:15 shows, as I will argue, how covenant administration brings those foundational promises to fruition.

In the following section, I will address how Hebrews depicts promise fulfilment as a goal of covenant, and then I will return to the issue at hand and ask how this affects our understanding of the specific set of promises given by God to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, respectively. To do this, we will turn to Heb 9:15:

<sup>15</sup> Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης ἐστίν, ὅπως θανάτου γενομένου εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν λάβωσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας. And for this reason, he is the mediator of a better covenant so that, since a death has occurred which brings redemption from the transgressions committed against<sup>37</sup> the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

So, what specific relationship between promise and covenant does this passage establish? To answer this, I will first need to look at the relationship between the two covenants portrayed here. First, we are introduced to a “new” covenant which presupposes an Old Covenant, here called the “first.”<sup>38</sup> These two covenants exist in such a way that the second, the new, steps in and fulfils a fundamental inability of the first (9:13-14, see also 10:1-4). So far so conventional. Further, these two

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<sup>35</sup> While it may be an overstatement, this meaning of 9:15 is also assumed by Joslin who views 9:15 as the climax of the section (2008, 233-4) and says, “The whole of 8:3-10:18 centers [sic] around the NC's inauguration and precisely how its ‘better promises’ can be assured” (238).

<sup>36</sup> Attridge 1989, 255; Rose 1989, 61; Bénétreau 1990, 2:83-4; Lane 1991, 2:242; Backhaus 2009d, 328-9; Cockerill 2012, 403.

<sup>37</sup> While most translations (e.g. ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV, NRSV, Schlachter, Vulg) understand this as something along the lines of “in the times of” or “under,” that is more fitting to ἐπὶ + genitive, not dative. The adversative sense is far more natural.

<sup>38</sup> This provides evidence that the Abrahamic covenant was indeed not considered a covenant by the author of Hebrews, or else the Mosaic would not be “first.”



covenants function within moral and soteriological categories. There are transgressions committed against the first covenant. These transgressions place people in some sort of negative state which requires redemption. Perhaps unexpectedly,<sup>39</sup> the first covenant is unable to effect this redemption,<sup>40</sup> but we are told that there is a death that has occurred which is able to do so. The death of Jesus is understood in cultic terms — it is the high priest's sacrifice of himself — and in covenantal terms — it is this death that inaugurates the New Covenant. Of course, to say that this death is both cultic and covenantal is, in Hebrews, to say the same thing.<sup>41</sup>

What goal is provided for all this? While the redemption and purification from transgressions connect to themes that are significant throughout the epistle, it is important to note that these functions are here subordinated.<sup>42</sup> They are placed in a genitive absolute to provide background information within the sentence, but they do not state the purpose. "Ὅπως...τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν λάβωσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας provides the purpose. There is a promise of an eternal inheritance, recalling the language of inheritance from Heb 6:13-20, which those who are called will inherit.<sup>43</sup> Hebrews explicitly describes a purpose (if not the purpose) of Jesus' becoming the mediator of the New Covenant, and it is so that (ὅπως) the promise may at last be received. That this is definite, τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, suggests that it is a known or previously mentioned promise. Its association with inheritance leads us to think of the Abrahamic promise in Heb 6 (μιμηταὶ δὲ τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, 6:12; τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, 6:17).<sup>44</sup>

Further, the giving of this promise word must have been prior to both covenants, or else the argument that the Old Covenant could not achieve this while the New Covenant can would not

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<sup>39</sup> It seems like an innovation in Jewish thought, though first made by Paul in the literature now extant, that the Old Covenant does not really have the means of ultimately absolving those transgressions which it prohibits. Admittedly, Hebrews' treatment of Levitical sacrifice is complex, and he does state that the sacrifices offered were for sins (5:3, 7:27; cf. Benjamin Ribbens, *Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult in Hebrews*, BZNW 222 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 314-24). Yet it does not seem right to say, as Ribbens does, that the Old Covenant sacrifices in Hebrews are viewed as achieving forgiveness (336). While Hebrews does extend forgiveness to Old Covenant saints because of Christ's priestly work, Ribbens' solution of "sacramental, Christological types" (492) does not seem to find grounding within the text vis-à-vis sacramentality.

<sup>40</sup> Gräßer 1993, 2:186; Joslin 2008, 252; Jordi Cervera i Valls, "Jesús, gran sacerdot i víctima, a Hebreus: Una teologia judeocristiana de la mediació i de l'expiació," RCT 34 (2009): 498.

<sup>41</sup> Lehne 1990, 93, 99; Haber 2005, 105-6.

<sup>42</sup> "La mort est la condition d'entrée en jouissance d'un héritage attendu parce que promis" (Bénétreau 1990, 2:84).

<sup>43</sup> Presumably, these are at least the members of the New Covenant community. The status of Old Covenant saints in relation to this is often unexplored in commentaries at this point, but developments in Heb 11:39-40 suggest that they are included.

<sup>44</sup> This also anticipates the use of inheritance language in for the promise in 11:7, 8, 9.

make sense: How could the Old Covenant be faulted for not bringing to fruition a promise that had not yet been made? And yet this is precisely the charge that the passage makes. The death which inaugurated the New Covenant was necessary εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων (9:15). The Old Covenant's legislation and the guilt incurred by breaking it created an obstacle to the promise's fulfilment. Those transgressions needed to be redeemed and that entire system needed to be replaced by a New Covenant which could bring the promise to fulfilment. It was for this reason (διὰ τοῦτο, 9:15) that Jesus became διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης (9:15).

The inauguration of the New Covenant through Jesus' mediation enables this promise, that is the promised good, to be received. If this promised good had not been announced in advance, it would not be a *promise* that is received, but only a blessing, a benefit.<sup>45</sup> So again Hebrews implies that the promise word precedes covenant, both in the abstract and in the historical circumstances of the Old and New Covenants. But here the argument goes one step further. While the promise word is followed by covenant, covenant precedes the reception of the promised good. Covenant is instrumental in bringing about the promised good. It is not merely incidental that the reception of the promise follows the inauguration of a covenant. Rather, the covenant either effects or enables the reception of the promised good.

So then, Hebrews is describing (or creating) a framework within which God's various speech acts of commitment interrelate. Promise and covenant are distinguished by their functions. God's promise constitutes a form of relationship between the God who promises and the recipients, one of heirs and testator, that is, of father and sons.<sup>46</sup> But the author does not portray a promise as containing the means of its own fulfilment. A promise guarantees the promised good (though this guarantee may be reinforced by an oath (6:13-18)), but it does not bring it about. A covenant, on the other hand, is always contingent in Hebrews. It is predicated on a prior promise and cannot

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<sup>45</sup> That is, of course, a promised good must be promised, be announced in *advance*. This is definitional, but it does provide further evidence regarding the relative time frames of the promise and covenants.

<sup>46</sup> Peeler 2014, 130-3.

stand apart from one.<sup>47</sup> A covenant necessarily entails a law,<sup>48</sup> priesthood, and form of cultic service.<sup>49</sup> Or, to put this in another way derived from Hebrews, a covenant provides a means of approach and of purification. But approach to what? On one hand, the answer is simply God (4:16, 7:19,25), but we can also phrase it in terms of the eternal inheritance, of which the largest portion is certainly access to and experience of God, but which is never in Hebrews reduced to the beatific vision. Rather, it is also described in terms of rest (4:1), blessing and the multiplication of a people (6:13), forgiveness (8:12), homeland and city (11:16), and festival (12:22). This form of approach, this way of access into heaven that is the covenant of which Jesus is a mediator (9:15) is portrayed as the means by which a recipient of the promise receives the eternal inheritance (9:15). A covenant in Hebrews, then, whatever else it is and does, it is the way one can draw near to God and receive the blessings offered and promised long ago.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this section which is often referred to as the core of the epistle,<sup>50</sup> promise is carefully interwoven with one of the epistle's main themes: covenant. Significantly, however, promise is never reduced to or subsumed into covenant. Rather, they remain intertwined yet distinct. These two related yet different commitments of God are then used by the author to sketch his broader portrayal of God's plan through salvation history.

First there was a promise. Though not specified in this passage, we are primed by the preceding argument and linguistic ties to see it as the promise made to Abraham, unfulfilled by

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<sup>47</sup> While Hebrews acknowledges a promise without a covenant, that to Abraham, it does not acknowledge a covenant without a promise. *Contra* Rose 1989, 72-73.

<sup>48</sup> This is of course against those who would argue that the New Covenant in Hebrews rejects the entire concept of law, e.g. Haber 2005, 106, "Inevitably, the new order is established with a new covenant, a superior high priest and a better sacrifice, but there is no new Law. In Hebrews the Law belongs to the old order, it is not salvageable." This seems to go against the author's inclusion of the internalisation of the law in Jer 31 (8:10), as well as the notion that "when there is a change in the priesthood, there must be a change in the law as well" (7:12), which suggests a different law, but not an abandonment of law as such. Similarly, on the other side, this is against Joslin who would argue that the law in the New Covenant is "not an entirely new law in terms of its content, but rather is the law of Moses that has undergone μετάθεσις in light of the Christ event," (2008, 170), where μετάθεσις is defined as some sort of transformation. While I do agree that there is overlap between the law conceived of in the New Covenant and that under the Old Covenant, that similarity is more due to the typological relationships of the covenants and the notion that the details of the Old were patterned off of the New rather than some sort of partial importing of the non-cultic laws (151-3).

<sup>49</sup> While other Jewish authors (Jubilees, 1 Enoch) could view the patriarchs Noah and Abraham as Torah-observant, there was no explicit equation of cult and covenant as we find in Hebrews.

<sup>50</sup> Vanhoye 1963, 138, calling it "la section centrale." See also M. Gourgues, "Remarques sur la 'structure centrale' de l'épître aux Hébreux," *RB* 84 (1977), 26-37; Bénétreau 1990, 2:51; Westfall 2005, 188; Attridge, "The Uses of Antithesis in Hebrews 8-10," in *Essays on John and Hebrews*, WUNT 264, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 273-80.

Joshua and later Israelite history (4:1, 8), and still remaining for the audience of the epistle (6:18).<sup>51</sup> This promise, lacking a covenant, a cultic administration, contained no way in itself of bringing about its own fruition. Then came the First, or Old, Covenant. It was founded upon lesser promises, the earthly register of the promise to Abraham, types and shadows of the ultimate fulfilment. It brought with it a law, cult, and priesthood that were able to provide for the purification of the flesh (9:13).<sup>52</sup> However, since it was not built upon the full Abrahamic promise, there was no way for those under it to receive the eschatological blessings promised long before (11:39).<sup>53</sup> Then, at the time God set to solve humanity's plight (9:10), the New Covenant was inaugurated by the death of its mediator and high priest, Jesus (9:15). It was founded upon better promises (8:6), that is, the higher tier of the Abrahamic promise, and had some of its benefits enumerated in Jer 31 (8:8-12).<sup>54</sup> It brought with it a new law (8:6, 8-12),<sup>55</sup> cult (9:11-12), and priesthood (8:1-2). Through the inauguration of this covenant, the way to the promised eternal

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<sup>51</sup> See argument in Chapter 4, above.

<sup>52</sup> This is the general view of the efficacy of Levitical sacrifices in Hebrews, as pointed out by Ribbens (2016, 41), though he ultimately argues against it. In a footnote (41, fn. 16), he enumerates a long list of authors who take this position, an abbreviated list of which is: Chrysostom, 440, 444; Aquinas 2006, 184, 188–89; Martin Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews*, trans. Walter A. Hansen, Luther's Works 29 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 206, 208, 219; Westcott 1892, 253–54, 260; Windisch 1931, 84; Moffatt 1924, 118, 123–24; Montefiore 1964, 149–50, 155, 164; James Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, CBQ Monograph Series 13 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982), 103–15; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NTC (Welwyn: Baker Book House, 1984), 244–45, 250; Bruce 1990, xxi, 196, 201–7; Attridge 1989, 27, 273; Hagner 1990, 130–39; Lane 1991, 2:235–40, 261–62; Grässer 1991, 2:136, 139, 205; Lindars 1991, 88–91; Weiss 1991, 460; deSilva 2000, 306; Johnson, 2006, 225–26, 235–38; Georg Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, WUNT 2 212 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 282, 292; Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, Sacra Pagina 13 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 23, 177–84, 199–200; Schenck 2007, 133–39; Joslin 2008, 244–55.

<sup>53</sup> See argument in Chapter 6, below.

<sup>54</sup> Often the “better promises” are understood as at least some of the features of Jer 31 quoted (Bruce 1990, 186; Cockerill 2012, 363; *contra* Rose 1989, 76, “In Hebr 8,6 mit den ἐπαγγελίαι nicht die in 8,8-12 zitierten Verheißungen aus Jer 31,31ff angesprochen sind. Vielmehr denkt der Verfasser an die Verheißung des eschatologischen Eingehens in die unmittelbare Gottesnähe.”), at least in terms of forgiveness of sin (e.g. Attridge 1989, 221, 228), and often in terms of the writing of the law of God on hearts (Joslin 2008, 260).

<sup>55</sup> While I accept Joslin's argument that law and covenant are not synonymous (2008, 164), I do not accept his next step which states that a new covenant does not necessitate new laws (164). If laws are covenant stipulations or regulations (as Joslin 2008, 164), then it is difficult to see how laws can persist when removed from their covenantal framework.

inheritance was opened (9:8-10, 15).<sup>56</sup> At last the promise made with Abraham was given a means of ultimate fulfilment, and those who enter into the New Covenant gain its promised goods. This New Covenant blessing, because it was based upon the promise to Abraham, extends its blessings, the promised goods, to the members of the Old Covenant, even forgiving their earlier transgressions (9:15).<sup>57</sup> It does so, however, in such a way as not to blur the distinction between the two covenants and their respective administrations.<sup>58</sup> In this way, the promise to Abraham reaches its fruition to all the heirs of Abraham through the priestly administration of the New Covenant.

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<sup>56</sup> “Die Verheißung begründet den Bund; der Bund eröffnet den von Gott geschenkten Weg zur Erfüllung (vgl. 9,15),” Backhaus 2009d, 291. Backhaus is exactly right here, though I disagree with him throughout on the nature of the promise and its relationship to the Old Covenant. Further, when commenting on 9:15, he seems to walk back this realisation, saying, “Der Gottesbund ist die von Gott her ‘institutionalisierte’ Form der verbürgten Verheißung, das heißt: die von außen unanfechtbare, biblisch legitimierte, konkrete Lebensform derer, die die irdischen Sicherheiten verlassen haben und ihre Identität allein am göttlichen Bundesherrn ausrichten” (2009, 329). As such, he falls short of sketching the salvation-historical system of promise and covenant introduced here. This system, in which promise undergirds covenant, which then opens the way to the promise’s fulfilment, resolves the tension expressed by Käsemann, “So it is not accidental that in 8:6 the new *diathēkē* rests on the promises, while conversely in 9:15 the new *diathēkē* is the presupposition for the reception of the promise” (1984, 34).

<sup>57</sup> While Ribbens (2016, 204-5), argues that ἀπολύτρωσις here means something substantively other than forgiveness, it seems best to side with the majority of scholars and see them as more or less identical here. Ultimately reading τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων as “the regime under which were committed sins’ that could not be redeemed,” (referencing Attridge for the phrase) is a stretch of the grammar and the sense of the passage beyond what it can bear. Forgiveness that removes neither guilt nor the power of sin seems less than the forgiveness envisioned by Hebrews. Cf. Moffatt 1924, 126; David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, SNTS Monograph Series 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 137; Bruce 1990, 208–9; Gräßer 1993, 2:171–72; Weiß 1991, 476; Ellingworth 1993, 460; Koester 2001, 408, 417.

<sup>58</sup> This passage, however, does not suggest how or when the New Covenant forgiveness and promised good reaches the members of the Old Covenant. For that, one must see chapter 6, particularly the discussion of 11:39.

## Chapter 6: Faith in the promise, an exegesis of Hebrews 10-11

### Introduction

The portions of Hebrews 10 and 11 to be considered in this chapter are deeply concerned with how a person should respond to God's promise. Through direct exhortation and a retracing of Israel's history, the author guides the audience time and time again to what he believes should be their response to the promise that God has made: faith. Faith is the thread that ties this entire unit (Heb 10:19-11:39) together,<sup>1</sup> but promise also is woven throughout the author's exhortation, providing the backdrop upon which faith can shine so brightly. Indeed, while faith language is the most prominent in this section,<sup>2</sup> we also find the epistle's densest concentration of promise language.<sup>3</sup> As we shall soon see, this is no coincidence.

Unlike the previous chapters, which argued for more systematic ways of reading both promise fulfilment in Hebrews and the mechanics of the relationship between promise and covenant, this chapter will generally treat less programmatic aspects of promise. These passages contribute to our understanding of how the promise word is to be received and when the promise will ultimately be fulfilled, and they also further define the content of the promise. If the previous chapters focused more on systems, the emphasis of this chapter will fall on details. As such, the exegesis of this chapter may be a bit more piecemeal, but it still serves the over-arching purpose of understanding Hebrews' development of promise.

The author's discussion of promise in this section generally falls under two headings, and because of the frequency of promise language in Heb 10-11, the relevant passages will be considered in these groupings, and not strictly in the order in which they appear. While in some sense, this entire section is about how one should respond to God's promise, several passages particularly illuminate how the author wants the audience to receive the promise. Under this heading, we will examine Heb 10:22-25 and 11:11, both of which feature a variation on the phrase, "He who promised is faithful." This section will ultimately answer the question: What is the right response to God's promise?

The second heading, under which the remainder of the promise-language in Heb 10-11 will be considered, further clarifies the author's conception of the content and timing of the promise. In these passages, the author develops more fully the eschatological nature of the promise and further defines the content of the promise in terms of life, city, homeland, and perfection. This

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<sup>1</sup> Westfall 2005, 247.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 41 instances of πιστ- language (πίστις, πιστός, πιστεύω, ἀπιστία) in Hebrews, 26 (63%) occur within Hebrews 11.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 18 uses of ἐπαγγελ- language (ἐπαγγελία, ἐπαγγέλλομαι), 7 (39%) occur within Hebrews 11.

section will answer the questions: When is the promise ultimately fulfilled? What does it mean for the promise to include a promised land and city? And how can Old Covenant saints benefit from the promise along with New Covenant saints?

Before this discussion can properly begin, however, there must be a brief overview of the current status of faith in modern Hebrews scholarship. Since promise and faith are so strongly interrelated within this section, debates on the nature of faith in Hebrews will inevitably have some bearing on how promise is interpreted. While it is not the goal of this chapter to develop a detailed argument regarding faith in Hebrews, I will sketch the various positions and locate this present study among them.

### 1. On faith in Hebrews

The main division<sup>4</sup> in modern scholarship regarding faith/faithfulness in Hebrews is between those who view πίστις as primarily *ethical*<sup>5</sup> and those who see faith as primarily *relational*.<sup>6</sup> The ethical position states that πίστις is faithfulness, a habitual property of the person who is πιστός or has πίστις.<sup>7</sup> It is the moral quality of consistency in right action and continual adherence to a course of life. As such, it is closely related to endurance and perseverance.<sup>8</sup> The greatest defender of this position is Erich Gräßer,<sup>9</sup> though he is by no means the only scholar to advance it.<sup>10</sup> In

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<sup>4</sup> While Easter divides treatments of faith in Hebrews into four camps (Christological, ethical, eschatological, ecclesiological; 2014, 11-12), these are not presented as completely different understandings of faith, but different aspects or angles. For example, “By ‘eschatological,’ I mean to say that faith is directed in hope to the eschaton” (11). That could be true of various otherwise incompatible understandings of faith.

<sup>5</sup> Gräßer 1965, and to an extent Söding 1991. Söding distinguishes the uses of faith in Hebrews, which he sees as ethical categories of ὑπομονή and παρρησία (224) from faith in God (221), which he sees as the basis of this faithfulness. So he sees a doctrinal/theological faith in Hebrews, but underlying, not in, the use of πίστις language in the text. This is also the argument of Jason Whitlark, *Enabling Fidelity to God: Perseverance in Hebrews in Light of the Reciprocity Systems of the Ancient Mediterranean World*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 143-4. Referring to this conception of faith as “ethical” is not my own, but is the common designation within the English language literature.

<sup>6</sup> In the sense of either belief in or trust in. Such as Rhee 2001, and Easter 2014 and “Faith in the God who Resurrects: The Theocentric Faith of Hebrews”, NTS 63 (2017). See also Teresa Morgan’s argument that faith is always a relational category (*Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), *passim*).

<sup>7</sup> The ethical portrayal of faith is most like a virtue, usually one of endurance or steadfastness. So Gräßer 1965, 63; Söding 1991, 223.

<sup>8</sup> Often with reference to Heb 6:12; 10:32,36; 12:1-3. E.g. Gräßer, “Glaube ist Standhaftigkeit” (1965, 63).

<sup>9</sup> 1965, but also throughout his commentary *An die Hebräer* (1990).

<sup>10</sup> As already cited, Söding 1991. So also James W. Thompson 1982, 77-80. Others acknowledging a partial ethical dimension are Gerd Schunack, “Exegetische Beobachtungen zum Verständnis des Glaubens im Hebräerbrief,” in *Text und Geschichte: Facetten theologischen Arbeitens aus dem Freundes- und Schülerkreis: Dieter Lührmann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Stefan Maser, Marburger Theologische Studien 50 (Marburg: N.G. Elwert 1999), 208-32; and C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

Gräßer's account, the conception of faith is contrasted with Paul's view of faith, and found lacking.<sup>11</sup> Gräßer's account is dominated by a *religionsgeschichtlich* account of the movement from the earliest Christian proclamation to that of the second generation.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, he argues that both in Paul and in the Gospels, faith is irreducibly faith-in, and is always associated with some sort of relationship with Christ.<sup>13</sup> However, once one gets to Hebrews, the personal-relational aspect of faith is gone. Gräßer emphatically asserts, "Der spezifisch christliche ("christologische") Glaube findet im Hb keine Fortsetzung, weder in der reflektierten Weise des Apostels Paulus, noch in der unreflektierten der Synoptiker."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Gräßer denies influence from the Old Testament texts, since for them faith is also bound up in a personal relationship.<sup>15</sup> As he traces his view, he develops a twofold portrayal of the role of faith in Hebrews. Faith is to him a *Haltung*, an ethical orientation of hope and endurance towards the future.<sup>16</sup> However, when faith is used in eschatological and metaphysical contexts, Gräßer asserts that it also becomes a kind of ἐπίγνωσις, a hidden knowledge of the way things really are that prompts one to orient oneself toward the future with hope and steadfastness.<sup>17</sup> Faith in Hebrews, then, to Gräßer and others who hold the ethical position, is a way of living. It is a quality possessed by a person that enables them to endure and remain within the people of God.

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<sup>11</sup> "Er läßt — dem Ansatz seiner kultisch konzipierten Christologie und Soteriologie entsprechend — das Heil für den Einzelnen sich entscheiden nicht an der paulinischen fides salvificans et iustificans (die ganz fehl am Platze wäre!) sondern an dem Maße seiner Treue, die er der Gemeinschaft gegenüber bewahrt, am Bewahren der anfänglichen Festigkeit bis ans End, an der Intensität seines Achtens auf den λόγος τῆς ἀκοῆς, am unbeugsamen Hoffnungsbekenntnis, kurz: an seiner Standhaftigkeit" (1965, 218).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 64-78.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>15</sup> "Die für den atl. Glaubensbegriff maßgebende personale Relation spielt im Hb. keine Rolle. Vielmehr hebt er am Glaubensbegriff mit großer Einseitigkeit das eine Strukturelement der Festigkeit und Beharrlichkeit im Blick auf die Verheißungserfüllung, also im Blick auf ein sachliches Objekt, hervor" (ibid., 94).

<sup>16</sup> "Der Hb schreibt in einer Zeit, da die Umsetzung des Glaubens in eine Haltung in vollem Gange ist" (ibid., 214).

<sup>17</sup> "Anlage und Durchführung des theologischen Entwurfes in seiner Gesamtheit erfordert konsequenterweise die Explikation der Pistis als στάσις und - beiläufig — als ἐπίγνωσις," 214. So also, "Christliche Existenz — so meint Hb — hat ihre unabdingbare Standhaftigkeit nicht zuletzt daher, daß sie die rechte Einsicht (Gnosis) in die wahren Realitäts-Verhältnisse hat," 215.



The relational view of πίστις in Hebrews presents πίστις as faith *in*, i.e. faith *that* the person trusted will act.<sup>18</sup> Faith, on this account, is a personal trust with specific content. Within the relational position, there is one further main division, that between the “theological” and the “christological” understandings of faith. The “theological” position, noting that phrases like “believe in Christ” and “faith in Christ” or even the debated Pauline phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ (with all of its difficulties) never appear in the epistle, argues that faith in Hebrews is not in Christ, but in God.<sup>19</sup> Christ, advocates of the “theological” position would argue, is the chief example of that kind of belief in God, but is never the object of faith in Hebrews.<sup>20</sup> The “christological” position, on the other hand, while acknowledging that such phrases never appear in Hebrews, argues that the concept of faith in Christ suffuses the entire letter or is made logically necessary by some of the arguments contained within the epistle. The most recent advocate of the Christological position is Rhee.<sup>21</sup> While I am sympathetic to some of Rhee’s concerns, his method of argumentation seems unacceptable. The argument of Rhee’s monograph proceeds by finding an endlessly nested series of chiasms,<sup>22</sup> the centre of each of which conveniently provides some sort of evidence that faith in Hebrews is christological.<sup>23</sup> Yet in so doing, there seems to be no methodological control as to what makes a chiasm,<sup>24</sup> and their proposed locations and construction often seem arbitrary. Further, the sheer volume of overlapping chiasms begins to stretch into the unbelievable,<sup>25</sup> with some sections

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<sup>18</sup> So Rhee (2001, 52), where he divides this into “Christ as a model of faith [in God]” and “Christ as the object of faith.” These respectively can be seen as the theological and Christological interpretations. Easter (2014, 2017) argues for the theological interpretation of faith in Hebrews. Easter’s treatment is ultimately more complicated than a brief categorisation can allow for, since he sees faith as having four facets, “Christological, ethical, eschatological, and ecclesiological” (2014, 218). But when he refers to the object of faith, he argues that faith-in is in God (2017, 91). See also Dennis R. Lindsay, “*Pistis* and *Emunah*: The Nature of Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, LNTS 387, eds. Richard Bauckham, Daniel Driver, Trevor Hart, Nathan MacDonald (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 158-169.

<sup>19</sup> Easter (2014, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Easter (2014), 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> Rhee 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 13-17. Strangely, Rhee in this section refers to chiasm as a *method* which he “[employs] to develop [his] thesis” (13).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., e.g. 172-8, in which Heb 10:32-39 is not only made into a chiasm, but also divided into smaller chiasms bridging 10:32-34 and 10:36-39. Somehow, each of these chiasms are shown to be structured in a way that reveals a christological aspect of faith. Even if there were macro-level chiasms throughout Hebrews, and if the centre of some of them shed light on christological faith, the odds of an entire book of veiled chiasms, all of which centre on christological faith goes beyond what can be accepted.

<sup>24</sup> As pointed out by Easter 2014, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> Not to mention how overlapping or nested chiasms with different centres begins to stretch the definition of a chiasm beyond what it can bear, and calls into question the prominence given to these “centres.”

of Hebrews evidently containing a chiasm in every verse and across verses.<sup>26</sup> While a work of literature could conceivably have been written in this way, it does seem unlikely that a chain of overlapping and constant chiasms the length of Hebrews would be unnoticed as such for nearly two thousand years.

This current thesis will not take a firm, *a priori* stance on either of these two understandings of faith, nor will it attempt to prove what faith always means in Hebrews. Faith will only be dealt with insofar as it is necessary to understanding the passages which deal with promise. In so doing, we will find that when related to promise, at least, faith tends to refer to a personal trust that the one who has said the promise will fulfil what they have spoken.

## 2. He who promised is faithful

What should one do when confronted with the promise? For the author, this is not merely an academic question, but the situation he portrays his audience as actually in at the time of writing. As 4:1 says, a promise of rest still remains, and the audience needs to be careful that they do not miss out on it. In the two passages to be considered in this section, 10:22-25 and 11:1, the author leads his audience through exhortation and example to respond to the promise with faith, that is, trust in the God who promises. These two passages represent the closest association of faith and promise language in the epistle, tying the two themes inseparably together.

### 2.1. Hebrews 10:22-25

<sup>22</sup> Προσερχώμεθα μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ· <sup>23</sup> κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλινῇ, πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος, <sup>24</sup> καὶ κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους εἰς παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων, <sup>25</sup> μὴ ἐγκαταλείποντες τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς ἔθος τισίν, ἀλλὰ παρακαλοῦντες, καὶ τοσοῦτω μᾶλλον ὅσω βλέπετε ἐγγίζουσιν τὴν ἡμέραν.

Let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith, since our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us hold strongly and unwaveringly to the confession of hope, because he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another to spur on love and good works, not neglecting gathering with one another, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and this all the more as you see the day getting closer (Heb 10:22-25).

How, specifically, are faith and promise related in this passage? What does this tell us about the role the promise should play in the lives of the audience? The key is in the phrase πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ

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<sup>26</sup> Rhee 2001, e.g. 182-220, in which Heb 11 is not only made into a large chiasm, but is also subdivided into fourteen smaller chiasms.

ἐπαγγειλάμενος. There is one who has promised, God, and we are told that he is faithful. This is not an isolated statement about the character of God, but rather is given as the motivation to act.<sup>27</sup> This is seen in two ways.

First is the conjunction γάρ. This causal conjunction indicates that God as faithful promise maker is the ground for the previous exhortation, κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλινῇ (10:23). The call to a consistent hope is based upon the faithful character of God. The author does not define what the “confession of hope” is, but since it is grounded in the claim that “the one who promised is faithful,” it is reasonable to conclude that the thing hoped for would be that God would fulfil his promise. Hope, then, is an expectation of the promise’s fulfilment. Similarly in 6:18, the result of God’s confirmation to the heirs of the promise by an oath is that they hold on to hope (ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος). The reason it is reasonable for the audience to not only hold this hope, but to do so unwaveringly is because (γάρ), God is unwaveringly faithful. He is πιστός, and so he is worthy of πίστις. Hope in Heb 10:23, then, is a confident expression of faith. It is the result of trust in the God who has spoken the promise.<sup>28</sup>

This emphasis on action upon the basis of trust in God is supported by the use of faith earlier in the pericope, when the author says προσερχώμεθα μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως (10:22). The full assurance of faith here is engendered because there is a freedom of approach to God by the blood of Jesus (ἔχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, 10:19), and because<sup>29</sup> Jesus stands as a great high priest over the house of God (ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ, 10:21).<sup>30</sup> Since πίστις is presented as a grounds for certainty or assurance (πληροφορία), it must here be a position of trust. πίστις in this passage is a trust in the efficacy of God’s saving work<sup>31</sup> through Christ, who accomplishes this access to God and mediates before him.<sup>32</sup> The phrasing of Heb 10:22 recalls Heb 6:11, where the author expresses his desire that the audience maintain a zeal πρὸς τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος. In that passage, it is the confidence of

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<sup>27</sup> Attridge 1990, 289; Johnson 2006, 259; Cockerill 2012, 477.

<sup>28</sup> This is what we should expect, since neither Hebrews nor any NT author presents faith as a thing which does not produce and entail faithfulness. This is as true for the Gospels as for Paul.

<sup>29</sup> The participle ἔχοντες is certainly causal.

<sup>30</sup> Lane 1990, 2:286.

<sup>31</sup> Cockerill 2012, 473.

<sup>32</sup> *Contra* Easter 2014, 187-95, but for reasons other than Rhee, *Faith*. This account is more similar to the arguments of Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 62; Koester, “God’s Purposes and Christ’s Saving Work According to Hebrews”, in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt, *NovTSupp* 121 (Leiden: Brill 2005), 372; and McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions”, *TJ* 13 (1992), 48. At the least, Jesus is portrayed as the one who has made it possible for God to be faithful to the promise, as Worley concludes (2019, 156).

hope, not of faith, because the author's emphasis is on the future (ἄχρι τέλους, 6:11). Specifically, in that passage, the author is looking forward to final fulfilment of the *promise* after patiently waiting (6:12). Similarly, in 10:23, the audience is told to hold unwaveringly to hope because the one who promised is faithful. When the author wishes the audience to trust for something future, he can call it hope. When the author refers to a present reality, such as approach to God through Christ (10:19), hope would not be a proper term to use, so he reverts to the broader category, faith. It is fundamentally the same confidence (πληροφορία) on the same basis. God is faithful. He has accomplished some things through Christ already, while other benefits remain outstanding. Either way, the author asserts that God is faithful, and so is worthy of a confident faith generally, expressed in an unwavering hope for things future.

Second, we must ask why the author here introduces the concept of promise at all. He could easily have said, πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ θεός. So why refer to God as ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος? Promise implies future fulfilment. Promise is, in itself, a form of motivation.<sup>33</sup> That is, a promise is a motivation *if* the recipient of the promise is convinced that the promise is likely to be fulfilled.<sup>34</sup> A promise presents a call for trust. It raises the question of whether the recipient of the promise will trust and whether the giver of the promise is trustworthy. The author wishes to confront the audience with this same question: Will they trust in the God who made the promise? But he does not present them with a bare question. Rather, he guides them to an answer. πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος. God is, as Morgan points out, axiomatically trustworthy.<sup>35</sup> But again, if this is the case, why bring up this axiom *here*? In keeping with its hortatory context,<sup>36</sup> this is to engender the proper response to a πιστός promiser and promise, namely the response of πίστις. The response to a trustworthy promise is to trust. And this trust that God will do what he said, this faith, is precisely what the author is aiming to elicit from the audience. If trust is needed, the author must bring God's trustworthy speech to the foreground.

## 2.2 Hebrews 11:11

<sup>11</sup> Πίστει καὶ αὕτῃ Σάρρα στείρα δύναμιν εἰς καταβολὴν σπέρματος ἔλαβεν καὶ παρὰ καιρὸν ἡλικίας, ἐπεὶ πιστὸν ἠγάγατο τὸν ἐπαγγειλάμενον.

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<sup>33</sup> Worley 2019, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 19-21.

<sup>35</sup> Ellingworth 1993, 526; Morgan 2015, 169-70.

<sup>36</sup> Worley 2019, 37-48.

By faith even Sarah herself, though she was barren, received the ability to conceive a seed, and that despite her age, because she thought that the one who promised was faithful (11:11).

This passage, with its close similarity to the one previously examined, confirms the observations made there. Again, we have something done on the basis of (here ἐπεὶ instead of γάρ)<sup>37</sup> God's identity as the faithful promise giver. But here the relationship between this fact and the individual's response to it is made more explicit (both by πίστει and ἡγήσατο). Further, while in 10:22-25 the result of faith in God's work and promise was ethical action as represented in the hortatory subjunctives, here both the result and basis of faith are acts of God. Ethical action falls out of the picture briefly, and we are faced with a simplified story of a God who promises, a trust in that God, and a miraculous fulfilment of that promise.

While the passage does not say Σάρρα ἐπίστευσε θεῷ, it is the clear implication. Sarah became able to conceive by faith (πίστει). Sarah became able to conceive because (ἐπεὶ) she considered that God was faithful. The clause beginning with ἐπεὶ is an explanation of what her faith entailed. In her case πίστις must mean trust in God's faithfulness. By virtue of trusting in the trustworthy, promise making God, she received what was promised: the birth of a son. Faith here is not presented as an activity, but rather that which hears, trusts, and receives.<sup>38</sup>

This is made even more clear by the nature of what Sarah "did." She received the ability to conceive a seed, to translate woodenly. The awkwardness of this phrase should be felt, since it stood out to the Greek commentators because of its oddity,<sup>39</sup> and has been noted as irregular by some modern commentators as well.<sup>40</sup> Καταβολή σπέρματος is a male action, referring the male role in procreation.<sup>41</sup> Yet in the passage before us, Sarah, not Abraham, is the subject of this

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<sup>37</sup> Ellingworth 1993, 589.

<sup>38</sup> Lane 1990, 2:354-5, though he attributes the faith to Abraham (treating the nominative Σάρρα as a "Hebraic circumstantial clause" (2:344)); Johnson 2006, 292.

<sup>39</sup> Damascene clarifies this with a gloss, εἰς τὸ κατασχεῖν τὸ σπέρμα. Ps.-Oecumenius has a similar clarifying comment. Theophylact expands even further, saying, "That is, she was empowered to receive and hold on to the seed which was cast into her by Abraham. Or, since those who accurately know these things say that the woman adds a kind of seed from herself, perhaps 'to beget a seed' is to be understood as casting a seed herself."

<sup>40</sup> Bénétreau 1989, 2:144; Lane 1990, 2:354; Johnson 2006, 291; Backhaus 2009d, 390-1; Cockerill 2012, 544.

<sup>41</sup> So Philo, *De Opif. Mund.* 132, *Cher.* 49; Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.13.3. LSJ, καταβολή I.a.

action.<sup>42</sup> While we cannot be certain why the author should choose such a mismatched phrase, the author's general carefulness suggests that it was no accident. Perhaps the author wanted this awkwardness to be felt. While it is clear what he means — Sarah conceived Isaac — he phrases it in such a way as to stand out. In fact, the natural response of a Greek speaker to this line would be something along the lines of “But that is not something she could do.”<sup>43</sup> To which, one can imagine, the author would respond, “Exactly.” The odd phrase highlights the impossibility of the action. While it is something Sarah “did,” by faith, it is not really something she did or could do at all. Her faith passively received the impossible, simply because God had promised it.

And, importantly, this is an example to the audience of what faith is and does.<sup>44</sup> At least at some times, the author of Hebrews wants the audience to have a faith that does not act, or does not merely act, but which trusts the God who speaks in promise and receives from him the promised good apart from all doing. Indeed, this suggests that the audience may sometimes be in positions in which they have no ability to act whatsoever. In such cases, faith is no less necessary, but rather is crucial in order to receive from God the things which the audience cannot procure for themselves. Perhaps the distance from the Pauline picture of faith proposed by Gräßer is over-exaggerated,<sup>45</sup> at least in this instance.<sup>46</sup>

So what should one do when confronted with the promise? Trust in God. Whether that leads to immediate ethical action (10:22-25) or in a patient trust that receives from God apart from any action (11:11), the author's solution is the same. The audience should receive the promise with a confident, resolved trust because he who promised is faithful. Such a trust, the author argues, will certainly be met with its due reward.

### 3. The promise (un)fulfilled

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<sup>42</sup> This is not universally accepted. Some see the reference to Sarah as a marginal gloss that entered the text (Windisch 1931, 101; Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah*, *Analecta Biblica* 94 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 99-100), while others view it as a circumstantial clause (Lane 1990, 2:344), against all rules of Greek Grammar, while yet others read the reference as datives whose subscripts were dropped in uncial script (Riggenbach 1922, 356-9; Michel 1966, 396; Bruce 1990, 302).

<sup>43</sup> Evidence of this is found in the need the Greek commentators felt to explain the clause.

<sup>44</sup> The entire function of Heb 11 is hortatory, aiming to inspire the audience to faith and faithful actions like that of the saints listed. So Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11 in Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 85-90; Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context*, SBL Dissertation Series 156 (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1997), 84-8.

<sup>45</sup> 1965, 79.

<sup>46</sup> Intriguingly, this whole chapter is sprinkled with phrases that suggest the influence of Paul, such as τῆς κατὰ πίστιν δικαιοσύνης ἐγένετο κληρονόμος (11:7) and διὸ καὶ ἄφ' ἐνὸς ἐγεννήθησαν καὶ ταῦτα νενεκρωμένου (11:12).

We will now turn to examine the rest of the passages in Heb 10-11 in which promise language occurs. The main focus here will be on the content and timing of the promise. That is, the main questions will be: When will the promise be fulfilled? And when it is fulfilled, what exactly will be received?

### 3.1 Hebrews 10:32-39

<sup>32</sup> Ἀναμιμνήσκεισθε δὲ τὰς πρότερον ἡμέρας, ἐν αἷς φωτισθέντες πολλὴν ἀθλήσιν ὑπεμείνατε παθημάτων, <sup>33</sup> τοῦτο μὲν ὀνειδισμοῖς τε καὶ θλίψεσιν θεατριζόμενοι, τοῦτο δὲ κοινωνοὶ τῶν οὕτως ἀναστρεφόμενων γεννηθέντες. <sup>34</sup> καὶ γὰρ τοῖς δεσμίοις συνεπαθήσατε καὶ τὴν ἀρπαγὴν τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ὑμῶν μετὰ χαρᾶς προσεδέξασθε γινώσκοντες ἔχειν ἑαυτοὺς κρεῖττονα ὑπαρξιν καὶ μένουσαν. <sup>35</sup> μὴ ἀποβάλητε οὖν τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν, ἥτις ἔχει μεγάλην μισθαποδοσίαν. <sup>36</sup> ὑπομονῆς γὰρ ἔχετε χρεῖαν ἵνα τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ποιήσαντες κομίσησθε τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν. <sup>37</sup> ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον, ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἤξει καὶ οὐ χρονίσει, <sup>38</sup> ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται, καὶ ἐὰν ὑποστείληται, οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐν αὐτῷ. <sup>39</sup> ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἐσμέν ὑποστολῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν, ἀλλὰ πίστεως εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς.

But remember the former days, when, after you were enlightened, you endured a great trial of suffering, sometimes made a public spectacle by reproaches and afflictions, sometimes becoming fellows of those so treated. For you even suffered along with those in chains and welcomed the seizure of your property with joy, because you knew that you yourselves had a better and lasting possession. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you need endurance so that you might do the will of God and then receive the promise. For, “in just a little while, the coming one will come; he will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he turns back, my soul will have no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who turn back unto destruction, but of those who have faith for the preservation of life (Heb 10:32-39).

Again, promise language occurs in a transitional section of the epistle. As the author moves from hortatory material beginning in 10:19 to the example list of chapter 11,<sup>47</sup> he points the audience forward to a μισθαποδοσία, a reward which has not yet been given, and which is in some

<sup>47</sup> For the role of example lists in reference to Heb 11 see Cosby 1988, 17-24, and Eisenbaum 1997, 35-72; Bryan R. Dyer, *Suffering in the Face of Death: The Epistle to the Hebrews and Its Context of Situation*, LNTS 568 (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 131-74. For ancient discussions of example lists, see Aristotle's *Rhetoric* I.2,9,II.20; the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1429a-b; the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* IV; Cicero's *De Inventione* I.30.49, *Typica* 10.41-45; Quintillian's *Institutio Oratoria* V.11.1-2. For modern treatments of Greco-Roman example lists, cf. K. Jost, *Das Beispiel und Vorbild der Vorfahren bei den attischen Rednern bis Demosthenes* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1936); S. Perlman, “The Historical Example, Its Use and Importance as Political Propaganda in the Attic Orators,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 7 (1961), 150-66; Benjamin Fiore, “Paul, Exemplification, and Imitation,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (London: Trinity Press International, 2003), 228-57; Stephen Usher, “Symbouleutic Oratory,” in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Worthington (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 220-35.

way dependent on their continued confidence (10:35). The future aspect of this possession is strengthened as the passage continues, first by recasting it as a promise (10:36) and then by the conflated<sup>48</sup> chain of quotations,<sup>49</sup> in which the future and impending return of “the coming one” is placed before the audience.<sup>50</sup> In this future time the reward is recast again in terms of life through the term ζήσεται, and is finally recast one last time with the phrase εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς.

What does this passage tell us about the development and function of promise in the theology of Hebrews? While subtle, this passage provides us with more information about the content and timing of the promise, that is, when the promised good will finally be obtained. Regarding the content of the promise, referring to it as “a better and lasting possession,” and “a reward,” does not much illuminate the way the author envisions the promised good other than to say that it is better than earthly possessions and that it is lasting, likely eternal. So far, so familiar. The two subsequent definitions, however, shed more light.

After holding out the offer of a promise, the author further supports his exhortation with a string of Old Testament quotations (10:37-38).<sup>51</sup> Yet, in the passages quoted, there is no description of a thing given to the audience or the faithful. Instead, the reward is conceived of not in terms of place or possession,<sup>52</sup> but as life itself. ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. Admittedly, this phrase can be taken (and has been taken) in various ways. The main question which concerns this treatment is whether ζήσεται is merely descriptive of a future action or whether it presents the content of the reward.<sup>53</sup> If ζήσεται is merely descriptive, the emphasis is not on the fact that the righteous one will live, but on the manner in which they will do so, ἐκ πίστεως.<sup>54</sup> However, if ζήσεται is the content of the reward, the emphasis in the author’s use of this quotation is on the fact that the righteous one will live, that is, will survive the arrival of the coming one.<sup>55</sup> The way in

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<sup>48</sup> As opposed to “composite,” using the terminology of C.D. Stanley, “Composite Citations: Retrospect and Prospect”, in *Composite Citations in Antiquity, Vol.1: Jewish, Graeco-Roman, and Early Christian Uses*, eds. Sean A. Adams and Seth M. Ehorn, LNTS 525 (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 203-9.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Susan Docherty, “Composite Citations and Conflation of Scriptural Narratives in Hebrews”, in *Composite Citations in Antiquity, Vol. 2: New Testament Uses*, eds. Sean Adams and Seth Ehorn, LNTS 593 (London: T & T Clark, 2018), 193-6.

<sup>50</sup> *Contra* Eisele 2003, 414.

<sup>51</sup> Docherty 2018, 194-6, in which she details the way in which the citation’s divergences from known OT *Vorlagen* contribute to the author’s argument.

<sup>52</sup> As has been the case previously, and in most discussions of promise in Hebrews.

<sup>53</sup> One can, however, avoid choosing and say the passage suggests both, cf. Koester 2001, 463.

<sup>54</sup> Ellingworth 1997, 555; Karrer 2008, 2:252; Cockerill 2012, 511.

<sup>55</sup> Montefiore 1964, 184-5; Backhaus 2009d, 373.



which the quotation is introduced sheds light on the author's use of these passages. While there is no introductory formula, the author does add the word γάρ.<sup>56</sup> This casts the citation as further explanation of the preceding statement, ὑπομονῆς γάρ ἔχετε χρεῖαν ἵνα τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ποιήσαντες κομίσησθε τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν (10:36). The author tells them that if they are patient and do the will of God, they will eventually receive the promised good. The author then uses Isaiah and Habakkuk to point forward to the return of Christ when the audience's patience will be rewarded, if indeed they endure. Yet with what will they be rewarded? Unless ζήσεται is the reward, the passage does not say. But since γάρ leads us to expect some explanation of the promised good that will be received, ζήσεται must point to the content of that promise. The reward promised is that when the coming one comes, they will live instead of falling afoul of God's ill pleasure (οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐν αὐτῷ, 10:38).

That the promise is here viewed in terms of life is further strengthened by the phrase at the end of the section, εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς, "for the preservation of life."<sup>57</sup> Hebrews 10:39 is the author's encouraging reflection on the mixed warning and blessing from Habakkuk 2:4. In the Habakkuk passage, there are two options presented: one can turn back (ἐὰν ὑποστειλῇται, 10:38), and so face God's displeasure (οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐν αὐτῷ, 10:38), or one can be righteous by faith (ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως, 10:38), and so live (ζήσεται, 10:38). Similarly to Hebrews 6:9, when the author assured his audience that they have not fallen away like those whom he discussed just previously (6:4-8), the author now assures the audience that they are not those who shrink back and thus are destroyed (ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἐσμέν ὑποστολῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν, 10:39), but are those who are of faith and thus preserve their lives (ἀλλὰ πίστεως εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς, 10:39). The author thus clarifies the stakes from Habakkuk 2:4. The consequence of turning back is divine displeasure, that is, destruction. The consequence of faith is that one will live, that is, that one will preserve one's life.

While, unlike in John,<sup>58</sup> eternal life is not a concept developed in Hebrews, this is evidence that the author could view the promise, the salvific benefits of Jesus' work, through the lens of a

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<sup>56</sup> I say "adds" because in the construction of this composite quotation, ἔτι γάρ does not appear in extant witnesses to the Greek of neither Isa 26:20 nor Hab 2:3-4. Cf. Docherty 2018, PAGE. While ἔτι γάρ could be an alternate version of διότι ἔτι from the beginning of Hab 2:3 (Ellingworth 1993, 555), their placement before the Isaiah portion and the difference between διότι and γάρ suggest that the author placed this word here to attach the quotations to his argument.

<sup>57</sup> While ψυχὴ can mean "soul," it is here best understood as largely a synonym for ζωή. See the parallel in Luke 17:33, cf. Johnson 2006, 274.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Catrin Williams, "Faith, Eternal Life, and the Spirit in the Gospel of John," in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, eds. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 347-62.

preserved and abiding life. Perhaps this also recalls Hebrews' earlier enigmatic statement that Jesus, by dying, defeated the one who held the power of death (2:14). While Hebrews primarily views (or presents) the human plight in terms of guilt, sin, and impurity,<sup>59</sup> it can also present people as in some way held under slavery to fear and death by the devil (2:14-16), and in need of deliverance and life (2:15, 9:15, 10:38). Not much is said about the type of life envisioned — it is simply life — but it is contrasted with the displeasure of God (10:38). To live, then, would be to exist in God's good pleasure, and to do so securely (cf. μένουσαν).

This promised good will be finally obtained when the coming one comes. That these events are contemporaneous is the only way to make sense of the placement of the catena and the inferential conjunction γάρ (10:37).<sup>60</sup> When the coming one comes, the promised good will be obtained. Both because of the standard early Christian expectation,<sup>61</sup> and the possibility that ὁ ἐρχόμενος was used as a Messianic title,<sup>62</sup> the author is clearly referring to the parousia of Christ.<sup>63</sup> He will come and bring his reward (μισθαποδοσία) with him. While Hebrews does not much treat the return of Christ,<sup>64</sup> it is clear that the author assumes it and ascribes salvific weight to it. But here, by connecting it to the reception of the promised good, the author grants greater salvific

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<sup>59</sup> See Easter (2014)'s discussion on the "default" or "pessimistic human story," 46-77, and R.B Jamieson, *Jesus' Death and Heavenly Offering in Hebrews*, SNTS, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)'s discussion of the plight in Hebrews (99-104).

<sup>60</sup> Ellingworth 1993, 455.

<sup>61</sup> Albrecht Oepke, "παρουσία, πάρειμι," in *TDNT*, vol. V: Ε - Πα, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 858-71; F. Coccini, "Parousia", in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, vol. 3: P-Z, ed. Angelo Di Berardino (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2014), 80.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Mt 3:11,11:3; Luke 7:19, John 6:14,11:27. So J.C. McCullough, "The Old Testament Quotations in Hebrews," *NTS* 26:3 (1980), 363-79, 376; Spicq 1953, 2:331-2; Michel 1966, 364; Lane 1990, 304-5; Eisele 2003, 101-4; Mackie 2007, 132-3; Docherty 2018, 194-5.

<sup>63</sup> Whatever else the passage suggests, it seems to show that the author, from his vantage point in the second half of the first century (regardless of when the date of composition is placed), felt no anxiety over any delay of the parousia, *contra* Gräßer 1965, 70. It was still his expectation that it would occur μικρόν ὅσον ὅσον.

<sup>64</sup> In addition to this passage, only in 9:28, οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ προσενεχθεὶς εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνενεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας ἐκ δευτέρου χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας ὀφθήσεται τοῖς αὐτὸν ἀπεκδεχομένοις εἰς σωτηρίαν, and possibly 12:26, οὐδ' ἡ φωνὴ τὴν γῆν ἐσάλειψεν τότε, νῦν δὲ ἐπήγγελται λέγων· ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν.

weight to the parousia than is commonly recognised.<sup>65</sup> If the return of Christ is the event which brings the promise's fulfilment, it shades the way in which we view the content of that promise as already discussed. The promised goods of rest, land, people, nation, and life are ultimately realised when Christ returns. Jesus is both the one who makes the fulfilment of the promises possible through inaugurating a covenant upon them<sup>66</sup> (8:6) and is the one who brings their ultimate fulfilment at his return (10:37). The person and work of Jesus are intimately connected to the faithfulness of God, since God's fulfilment of his promise is wrapped up in the action of Jesus: It is his coming that marks the time when those who endure in faith will receive the promised good (10:36). It is not only that Jesus' priestly ministry enables God's fulfilment of the promise; Jesus brings the fulfilment himself through his return (10:37).

So in this dense and richly allusive transitional section of Hebrews, the promise is further defined in terms of content and timing. Another image is added for what the promise entails, an abiding possession of life in the good pleasure of God. For the first time, however, Hebrews provides an event to fix the future reception of the promised good. It will happen at the return of Christ, when the coming one comes. While the timing of this is still presented as uncertain, though soon, it suggests that the time of fulfilment is fixed and definite, while not precisely known by the author or audience.

The audience needs to not shrink back and so be destroyed, but rather to have faith and so preserve their lives. But how does this faith properly relate to the promise? What does it mean to wait for the promise, to hold on to it in faith or in faithfulness? For that, we will turn back to our examination of the role of promise in Hebrews 11, that great hall of faith.

### 3.2 Hebrews 11:8-19

8 Πίστει καλούμενος Ἀβραάμ ὑπήκουσεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς τόπον ὃν ἤμελλεν λαμβάνειν εἰς κληρονομίαν, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν μὴ ἐπιστάμενος ποῦ ἔρχεται. 9 Πίστει παρώκησεν εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ὡς ἀλλοτρίαν ἐν σκηναῖς κατοικήσας μετὰ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ τῶν συγκληρονόμων τῆς

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<sup>65</sup> C.K. Barrett, wrote, "The author of Hebrews did believe that the *parousia* was near (x.25), but lays no stress on this conviction" ("The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews", in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: Essays in Honour of C.H. Dodd*, eds. W.D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 391). In 1986, Erich Gräßer remarked how the role of the parousia in Hebrews needed to be examined ("Das wandernde Gottesvolk Zum Basismotiv des Hebräerbriefes," *ZFNW* 77 (1986), 160-179, 176n.80. Most recently, Eisele, has argued for a *parousia* concept within Hebrews that is completely redefined by Middle Platonic thought, making it not the return of Christ at all, but the individual soul's meeting Christ after death (2003, 413). This was in some ways anticipated by Groenen, though there is no evidence of a direct influence, when he said, "De eschatologia universalis autem vel de parousia Christi in hoc ambitu nullus fit sermo" (1954, 69).

<sup>66</sup> See Chapter 5, above.

ἐπαγγελίας τῆς αὐτῆς· <sup>10</sup> ἔξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν τοὺς θεμελίους ἔχουσιν πόλιν ἥς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός.

<sup>11</sup> Πίστει καὶ αὐτὴ Σάρρα στεῖρα δύναμιν εἰς καταβολὴν σπέρματος ἔλαβεν καὶ παρὰ καιρὸν ἡλικίας, ἐπεὶ πιστὸν ἠγήσατο τὸν ἐπαγγειλάμενον. <sup>12</sup> διὸ καὶ ἄφ' ἑνὸς ἐγεννήθησαν, καὶ ταῦτα νενεκρωμένου, καθὼς τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῷ πλήθει καὶ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος ἢ παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης ἢ ἀναρίθμητος.

<sup>13</sup> Κατὰ πίστιν ἀπέθανον οὗτοι πάντες, μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀλλὰ πόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ἰδόντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοί εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. <sup>14</sup> οἱ γὰρ τοιαῦτα λέγοντες ἐμφανίζουσιν ὅτι πατρίδα ἐπιζητοῦσιν. <sup>15</sup> καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐκείνης ἐμνημόνευον ἄφ' ἧς ἐξέβησαν, εἶχον ἂν καιρὸν ἀνακάμψαι· <sup>16</sup> νῦν δὲ κρείττονος ὀρέγονται, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐπουρανίου. διὸ οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς θεὸς ἐπικαλεῖσθαι αὐτῶν· ἡτοίμασεν γὰρ αὐτοῖς πόλιν.

<sup>17</sup> Πίστει προσενήνοχεν Ἀβραὰμ τὸν Ἰσαὰκ πειραζόμενος καὶ τὸν μονογενῆ προσέφερεν, ὁ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀναδεξάμενος, <sup>18</sup> πρὸς ὃν ἐλαλήθη ὅτι ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα, <sup>19</sup> λογισάμενος ὅτι καὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγείρειν δυνατὸς ὁ θεός, ὅθεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν παραβολῇ ἐκομίσατο.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went away to a place which he was going to receive as an inheritance, and he left not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise. He did this because he expected the city which has foundations, whose craftsman and builder is God.

By faith even Sarah herself, although she was barren, received the ability to conceive a seed, and that contrary to her age, because she thought that the one who promised was faithful. Therefore from a one man, and from one who was practically dead, as many children were born as the stars of the sky and as the innumerable sand by the sea shore. These all died while believing, not having received the promised goods, but having seen them from afar and greeted them, confessing that they were strangers and resident aliens upon the earth. For those who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. And if they had thought of that place from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better land, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, that he should be called their God. For he has prepared a city for them.

By faith Abraham offered Isaac when he was tested, and he who had received the promises was in the process of offering his only son, concerning whom it was said, 'In Isaac will your

seed be named.” For he reasoned that God was even able to raise him from the dead, from which, in a manner of speaking, he did receive him (Heb 11:8-19).

The passage features two developments in the epistle’s description of promise: (1) An emphasis is placed on the aspects of the promise that deal with a location,<sup>67</sup> here described as heavenly (ἐπουράνιος, 11:16), and (2) it is stated that all the saints, the faithful of the past, died faithfully without having received the promised goods (11:13).

The emphasis on place occurs on two registers. First, there is an earthly promised land. The author writes that during his sojourn in tents, Abraham dwelt in the land of promise (παρώκησεν εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, 11:9). This is not simply the land in which Abraham waited for the promise or that was on the way to the promised goods,<sup>68</sup> but rather the land which was promised. To read it in any other way, such as through positing a use of a “*genitivus itineris*”<sup>69</sup> — a use of which does not properly exist in Greek, but does in Latin — or through expanding the phrase into “Land, in das ihn die Verheißung wies,”<sup>70</sup> is to avoid what the passage actually says. The land of Canaan was, for Abraham, the land of the promise, that is, the promised land.<sup>71</sup> He did not receive it, but dwelt in it as in a foreign land (11:9). The author does not comment on why, though in light of the argument of the previous chapter, we can propose that this was because there was not yet a covenant to bring about this fulfilment. Regardless, the fact that the author here refers to an earthly promised land must be noted. While the author is about to radically relativise the importance of the land of Canaan (11:10, 14-16), he nevertheless acknowledges an earthly promised good. This is a problem for readings that demand all instances of promise refer to the heavenly rest.<sup>72</sup> The author’s acknowledgement of an earthly promised land, however, fits perfectly well with the reading developed thus far in this thesis, and indeed will further agree with the author’s statement in 11:33 that some saints under the Old Covenant did gain promised goods (ἐπέτυχον ἐπαγγελιών, 11:33).

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<sup>67</sup> Note the presence of terms like τόπον (11:8), γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας (11:9), τὴν τοῦς θεμελίους ἔχουσιν πόλιν (11:10), πατρίδα (11:14), and πόλιν (11:16).

<sup>68</sup> “Das Land, das zum Verheißungsgut führt” (Backhaus 2009b, 178).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Rose 2019, 193

<sup>71</sup> *Contra* Rose, Canaan “ist nicht das verheißene Land” (2019, 195). While the language of “promised land” has since become commonplace in describing the land of Canaan, this is the only time the land is referred to in such a way, either in the Hebrew Scriptures, their Greek versions, or the New Testament (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 323; Backhaus 2009d, 390).

<sup>72</sup> Thus Rose’s confident claim on this passage, “Das Verheißungsgut ist demnach nicht das Land Kanaan, sondern ein himmlischer Ort, die αἰώνιος κληρονομία” (1989, 180).

Yet the emphasis of the passage does not fall on the earthly promised land. Rather, the focus is on a heavenly place (11:10, 14-16). That the sought after place of rest is *heavenly* (ἐπουρανίου, 11:16) has been interpreted in several ways. It could be read in a Platonic sense as spiritual and immaterial in contrast to the physical world of sense perception.<sup>73</sup> A more apocalyptic reading could see “heavenly” as belonging to the world to come or the present realm of God and the angels.<sup>74</sup> Again, a spiritual or existential reading could take “heavenly” as merely expressing a type of quality.<sup>75</sup>

While the non-spatial view has several proponents, the text itself leads us away from this reading. The author says that these all died faithfully, yet they did not receive that which was promised (11:13). If all that Hebrews had in mind was entering the unchanging immaterial world, then certainly this sentence would have to be different.<sup>76</sup> If the promise pointed to a disembodied existence in the presence of God, it would be no surprise that they did not receive the promises in their earthly existence. The logical expectation would be that fulfilment comes upon the separation of the soul from the body. And yet the author presents a lack of earthly fulfilment as something contrary to expectation; even *these* faithful saints died without receiving the promise (11:13). If the goal were simply the unmediated presence of God,<sup>77</sup> the paragraph would be arguing that they had died in faith and then entered into the promised rest. This, however, is not what the passage says. The author can only describe the patriarchs as seeing the promises from afar (πρόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ἰδόντες, 11:13). While the passage does not explicitly say that this remains their condition, two factors lead us to conclude that it is so. If their condition had changed, it would strengthen his hortatory purpose to say so. Second, and more convincingly, 11:39-40 suggests that they still have not yet received the promise, because even after being commended for their faith as the result of their lives (μαρτυρηθέντες διὰ τῆς πίστεως, 11:39), they did not receive the promise (οὐκ ἔκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, 11:39), and await the perfection of the New Covenant people (ἵνα μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν τελειωθῶσιν, 11:40).

Further, to read Hebrews as saying that the promise is fulfilled in a disembodied existence with God is to not properly treat the way Hebrews portrays death. Death prevents, or seems to prevent,

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<sup>73</sup> Gräßer 1997, 3:126-7; Backhaus 2009d, 393-4, though at some points he sees a mix of apocalyptic expectation and Middle Platonic themes (390).

<sup>74</sup> Lane 1990, 2:358; Cockerill 2012, 541.

<sup>75</sup> Attridge 1989, 332.

<sup>76</sup> It would be something along the lines of “These all died in faith, and then received the promise which they had seen and greeted from afar...”

<sup>77</sup> Backhaus 2009b, 185; Rose 1989, 71, 72, 188; Eisele 2003, 414.

the fulfilment of the promise, as we see in Abraham's calculation that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead (λογισάμενος ὅτι καὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγείρειν δυνατὸς ὁ θεός, 11:19).<sup>78</sup> The mention of plural promises is emphatic. Abraham, ὁ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀναδεξάμενος (11:17), offered his son. It is as if the many blessings offered to Abraham are brought before the audience and shown to be jeopardised by the offering of Isaac. If death did not threaten the promise, Abraham would not have needed to trust that Isaac would have been raised from the dead. Death in Hebrews is a bad thing. Jesus' death defeated the one who holds the power of death (2:14), and he tasted death for all (2:9), presumably so that the ill effects of death would not come to others. In light of this uniformly negative portrayal of human death in the epistle, it would be odd to say that the author views death as the path to the promise's fulfilment.

Instead, it is best to read the heavenly homeland as conceived as a place. All these saints sought a homeland (πατρίς, 11:14), they desired a heavenly city (πόλις, 11:10, 16). They did not, in Hebrews' presentation, long for an ideal contemplative no-place, but rather a city that was better than (not utterly other than) that which they left (11:10, 14-16).<sup>79</sup> This notion is reinforced by 11:15, καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐκείνης ἐμνημόνευον ἅψ' ἥς ἐξέβησαν, εἶχον ἂν καιρὸν ἀνακάμψαι. This is a comparison of like with like, one *land*<sup>80</sup> for another. The author is portraying a choice made on the basis of a qualitative difference, but not a choice between two categories. Abraham left one land, went to another, and desired a further one. His promise was for a land (11:9). This was expressed in two registers, the earthly land of Canaan and the heavenly homeland. If he had thought of the land from which he left (εἰ μὲν ἐκείνης ἐμνημόνευον ἅψ' ἥς ἐξέβησαν, 11:15), presumably Ur, he could have returned and thus forfeited the promise (εἶχον ἂν καιρὸν ἀνακάμψαι, 11:15). That is the significance of "having a chance to return," not geography, but the opportunity to forfeit the entire promise. In Heb 11:15, the author portrays Abraham as making a choice of the promised land(s) instead of another land. But since he did not think of returning to the place from which he left, he laid claim to the promise. And, even though he received neither, he demonstrated his faith by even looking past the medial fulfilment to the final promised land.

This is not to say that the heavenly homeland must be physical in the same sense as earth is, or even in a sense generally meant by modern scientific understandings of the term. Rather, it is

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<sup>78</sup> This is particularly interesting in light of analyses (Alan D. Bulley, "Death and Rhetoric in the Hebrews 'Hymn to Faith,'" *Studies in Religion* 25/4 (1996): 403-29; Eisenbaum 1997, 178-9; Bryan R. Dyer 2017, 100-1; 131-74) that read the entirety of Hebrews 11 as faith in the face of death.

<sup>79</sup> Perhaps here we can see a parallel to Paul's desire to be free of the body, but not so as to be unclothed (disembodied), but rather more fully clothed (given a better body of a different character) (2 Cor 5:4).

<sup>80</sup> The antecedent of the feminine demonstrative is πατρίς (11:13).

simply to say that when the author thought of the heavenly resting place, he did so in ways that suggest some sort of real place. Further, while the language of “city” (11:10,16) can certainly be metaphorical, it has to be metaphorical for something. The images brought up by the language of “city” necessarily bring up notions of place, buildings, people, citizenship, and activity. Yes, they confessed to be strangers and sojourners upon the earth (11:13). Yes, *this* physical world was not worthy of them (11:38). But we must remember that enigmatic claim of Heb 2:5 — it is the world to come about which we speak (οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις ὑπέταξεν τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν, περὶ ἧς λαλοῦμεν). That it is a whole *world* must connote some sort of physically conceived space. To view the homeland and city as pure metaphor for a disembodied existence in the unmediated presence of God is to not take the categories or implications of the epistle seriously enough. These can all be metaphors, but we should assume that they are apt metaphors and signify something.

If the promised land is conceived of spatially, what is gained by calling it heavenly? ἐπουράνιος seems to describe a quality, a type of homeland and city. While it is likely not completely disembodied and atemporal, it shares in the attributes of heaven. It is a city from God (ἡς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός, 11:10; ἡτοίμασεν γὰρ αὐτοῖς πόλιν, 11:16). It has stability, likely eternally so, as symbolised by the fact that this city, unlike all others, has foundations (τὴν τοὺς θεμελίους ἔχουσαν πόλιν, 11:10). At the same time, the fact that death did not bring the promise to fruition and that they greeted the promises πόρρωθεν (11:13) demonstrates that this promised homeland is still future, even from the perspective of departed saints (11:13-15, 39-40).<sup>81</sup> So then, ἐπουράνιος suggests both a qualitative and eschatological dimension of the promised homeland.

These observations show why none of the patriarchs obtained the promises — the eschatological time had not yet come. They did not live until the end, and thus they had to die faithfully, seeing and greeting the promises from a long way off. This places the audience in a place of anticipation and foreshadows 11:39-40. The audience knows themselves as those who live ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων (1:2). They must then be those who live on the cusp of the promise’s final fulfilment. The witness and frustration of the patriarchs regarding the promise serve only as an encouragement to the audience.<sup>82</sup> The author turns to the audience and says that the patriarchs, as great as they were, have not yet received the promises, but you soon will.

### 3.3 Hebrews 11:33

33 οἱ διὰ πίστεως κατηγωνίσαντο βασιλείας, εἰργάσαντο δικαιοσύνην, ἐπέτυχον ἐπαγγελιῶν.

<sup>81</sup> Indeed, this confirms the claim regarding Hebrews 10, that the promise is only fulfilled upon the second coming of Christ into the universe.

<sup>82</sup> Dyer 2017, 151-61.



Who through faith conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness, gained promises (11:33).

At this point, it is customary to raise the objection of Heb 11:33,<sup>83</sup> where some saints from the past ἐπέτυχον ἐπαγγελιών. This problem is made even more acute, since a few verses later (11:39), the author will say that all those listed in Heb 11 did not receive (οὐκ ἔκομισαντο) the promise, singular. So which is it? Did the saints of old receive the promises or not? How is it that they received promises, but did not obtain the promise? There have been several solutions to this apparent problem. Some see a clash with the author's source material, either between sources for chapter 11 or between the source and the author himself.<sup>84</sup> Others have suggested that here the author is using promise in a sense different from what he usually does, and that this is then unrelated to the other uses of promise within Hebrews.<sup>85</sup> Yet others, arguing for consistency in Hebrews, have suggested that this indicates that they received promise-words, not promised goods.<sup>86</sup> Instead, in keeping with the argument developed in chapter 4, I will argue that the saints of Hebrews 11:33 gained the medial fulfilment of the promise, whereas in 11:39 the author is reflecting on the fact that they have not received the final fulfilment.

As far as regards the proposals above: source critical analyses of Hebrews' composition have proven generally unfruitful and unpersuasive. The unity and careful construction of Hebrews are generally accepted. Even when the author used sources, he *used them*, and did not uncritically stitch them together in a haphazard way.<sup>87</sup> As for the interpretation which requires an inconsistent usage here, while it is possible that Hebrews uses ἐπαγγελία in different ways, the general care of the author and the consistency of promise language elsewhere in the epistle should lead us to look for a more consistent solution here.<sup>88</sup> As will be argued, the author is not introducing a new type of promise here, but is simply referring to the earthly level of fulfilment of the same set of promises he has been discussing the entire epistle. Third, while the author could mean that people

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<sup>83</sup> E.g. Eisenbaum 1997, 82-3. "This remark has profound implications for understanding Hebrews 11" (83).

<sup>84</sup> Windisch 1931, 98-9; Michel 1966, 422-3; Braun 1984, 392.

<sup>85</sup> Attridge 1989, 348, taking this as a generic "fulfillment of God's word" [sic].

<sup>86</sup> Rose 1989, 183 and *Die Wolke der Zeugen*, WUNT 2 60 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), here with reference to the Davidic covenant (308).. Often this also makes appeal to the use of ἐπιτυχάνω as opposed to κομίζω in Hebrews as the reception of a word of promise. While coming to a different conclusion, my analysis (both regarding chapter 6 and below on this passage) does suggest that ἐπιτυχάνω is used for the reception, not of the promise-word, but of partial, typological fulfilments.

<sup>87</sup> Rose 1994, 346-7; Eisenbaum 1997, 140-2.

<sup>88</sup> The burden of this thesis, is after all to show a kind of consistent reading of promise in Hebrews, in the hopes that such a reading will explain all instances of promise language in the text and will prove persuasive.

received words of promise, that does not fit the triumphant tone of the passage. Up until the turn in 11:35b, this section is about accomplishments done by faith, not hopes. Having heard of things promised does not exactly fit with conquering kingdoms and turning back armies. Further, to simply hear a promise does not require faith. As the author argued in Heb 3:7-4:10, it is fully possible to hear the promise and yet not meet it with faith, as did the wilderness generation.

So then, what does the author mean? The author signals his intention by saying that these past saints ἐπέτυχον the promises. Drawing on the discussion in chapter 4, §4.3 above, we can say that the author is signalling medial, earthly fulfilment through his use of ἐπιτυγχάνω. In a context full of this worldly accomplishments (11:32-35a), this fits perfectly well within the author's argument. By using a verb he reserves for this-worldly fulfilment, the author avoids contradiction with his statements in 11:13 and 39. The author is simply operating within the two-stage fulfilment paradigm established earlier. The shift between singular and plural within the same paragraph strengthens this conclusion. They did receive various benefits guaranteed to them by God, but the whole of what was promised, the promise viewed as a unit, remained beyond their grasp.

The precise relationship between these this-worldly promised goods and the eschatological promise is clarified by the argument made in a previous chapter regarding partial, typological fulfilments.<sup>89</sup> A given promise, such as that of land made to Abraham, can find a kind of fulfilment in Israel's settling of Canaan, while still in the fullest sense remaining outstanding. Partial, typological fulfilments remain fulfilments, even though they are not *the* fulfilment. Further, we must also remember the position of the Old Covenant as founded upon lesser promises (8:6).<sup>90</sup> The role of a covenant, as argued previously,<sup>91</sup> is to bring individuals from promise-word to promised good. While Hebrews is clear that the Old Covenant was unable to bring about God's ultimate soteriological goals (e.g. 7:11, 8:6-7) — the fulfilment of the better promises — the author does assert that the Old Covenant was effective at doing that for which it was intended.<sup>92</sup> The Old Covenant was not an utter failure, nor was it a mistake, nor is it thoroughly denigrated in

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<sup>89</sup> See Chapter 4, above.

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 5, above.

<sup>91</sup> See Chapter 5, above.

<sup>92</sup> For example, εἰ γὰρ τὸ αἷμα τράγων καὶ ταύρων καὶ σποδὸς δαμάλεως ῥαντίζουσα τοὺς κεκοινωνμένους ἀγιάζει πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότητα (9:13).

Hebrews.<sup>93</sup> Rather, the Old Covenant accomplishes its admittedly limited goals.<sup>94</sup> In its limited sense, the Old Covenant administration obtained promises — that is, obtained the goods that were promised, because this is what covenants *do*. This passage simply says that the Old Covenant functioned as we should expect it to have done and that the broad system of partial, typological fulfilment established earlier in the epistle remained in force. The Old Covenant, founded upon lesser promises that were both types and parts of *the* promise, brought those lesser promises to fruition through its administration. It served its intended purpose.

What we have in 11:33, therefore, is neither unexpected nor inconsistent. It fits perfectly with the understanding of promise developed thus far within this thesis, and stands as an example of how the promise-fulfilment motif in Hebrews functioned during the days of the Old Covenant. There is no contradiction.

### 3.4 Hebrews 11:39-40

<sup>39</sup> Καὶ οὗτοι πάντες μαρτυρηθέντες διὰ τῆς πίστεως οὐκ ἐκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, <sup>40</sup> τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἡμῶν κρεῖττον τι προβλεψαμένου, ἵνα μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν τελειωθῶσιν.

And all these, although they were commended through their faith, did not receive that which was promised, because God was looking forward to something better for us, so that they should not be made perfect apart from us (11:39-40).

As the author closes his survey of Israelite history, he reflects on the relationship between the saints of old, his own audience, and the eschatological promise. Of primary interest here will be (1) the way in which the New Covenant mediation of the promise leads to something better (κρεῖττον τι) for the audience and (2) the nature of the shared future of Old and New Covenant saints.

#### 3.4.1 Something better for us

The author asserts that “we” (περὶ ἡμῶν, 11:40), have something better reserved for us that “they” (οὗτοι, 11:39) do not. “We” are the author and his audience, while “they” are the patriarchs and Old Covenant discussed throughout Hebrews 11. The distinction between these groups is even maintained while the author asserts a final unity among them in a joint perfection. It is *they* who will not be perfected apart from *us* (ἵνα μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν τελειωθῶσιν, 11:40). The author is claiming that the audience, in God’s plan, benefit from something better than even did all the saints of old.

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<sup>93</sup> *Contra* Haber 2005, 119.

<sup>94</sup> This argument is also different from that of Ribbens, who makes the Old Covenant sacrifices sacramental types which proleptically are given the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice (2016, 159). It seems too much to import a sacramental understanding into Hebrews, and is more in line with the text to attribute limited goals and achievements to the Old Covenant sacrifices. I do not deny that the sacrifice of Christ affects Old Covenant saints, but I do not see that as happening through the Old Covenant sacrifices in Hebrews.

What is this something better? It cannot simply be that they share in perfection with the saints of old,<sup>95</sup> for that would not be something better, but rather the same thing. It would make no sense to say that God has planned something better for the New Covenant community, namely that they receive the same thing as the Old Covenant community. The something better must be something different. And if the ultimate fates of the two groups are not only identical, but shared (ἵνα μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν τελειωθῶσιν, 11:40), the something better must refer to something other than the common final state of both groups. While the overall emphasis of the passage is on final eschatology, the something better must therefore pertain to the *present* experience of the New Covenant community. That is, the New Covenant faithful enjoy a partial but real experience of the promise even upon the earth, a thing denied to those of old. The author does not here say how, but through this phrase, he does assert its reality.

#### 3.4.2 *Perfected along with us*

In a style that closely reflects 11:13,<sup>96</sup> the author again asserts that these all (οἱ πάντες, 11:39), even those who did ἐπέτυχον ἐπαγγελιών, did not acquire (ἐκομίσαντο) what was promised.<sup>97</sup> The final fulfilment remains outstanding, and none of these great heroes, received that which was promised.<sup>98</sup> Yet, unlike in 11:13, the author here provides a reason why that should be the case. This delayed fulfilment is not simply a feature of the inscrutable will of God. Rather, τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἡμῶν κρεῖττόν τι προβλεψαμένου, ἵνα μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν τελειωθῶσιν. Perfection, here, refers to the entire scope of complete salvation made available through Christ.<sup>99</sup> The final, eschatological nature of this perfection can be seen in that it will jointly affect both the New Covenant community and all the saints of the past, overcoming death and joining the two communities together in the fulfilment of the promise. In connection with all other uses of perfection language in Hebrews, Peterson asserts that “the concept of perfection, as related to believers, consistently has in view the totality of

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<sup>95</sup> “The ‘better thing’ is that ‘the transfer of the elders to the state of perfection would not happen without us,” Peterson 2009, 157, quoting Riegenbach 1922, 382. See also Moffatt 2011, 191. The logic is akin to saying that a father delayed in giving one child a gift, because he had something better in mind for another child: that he give the same gift to both of them at the same time. How this is *something better* is unclear. Peterson, however, does add that the New Covenant community experiences this final perfection in a partial sense now through “the Christian’s immediate experience of God” (157). It is this present experience that provides a better solution to the “something better.”

<sup>96</sup> Not only by featuring the phrase οἱ πάντες, but also by making a claim that was contrary to expectation regarding the frustration of the hopes of Old Covenant saints.

<sup>97</sup> As per usual in Hebrews, κομίζω seems to be used regarding ultimate fulfilment

<sup>98</sup> Again, that none of them have yet obtained it further strengthens the eschatological/apocalyptic reading that places the promise at the return of Christ and inauguration of the world to come.

<sup>99</sup> Peterson 1982, 157.

Christ's work on their behalf."<sup>100</sup> While he may overstate his case when he applies this to other instances of perfection language in Hebrews,<sup>101</sup> it does seem to be the case that in Heb 11:40, the author is looking to the full and final effects of Christ's work. Peterson then goes on to argue that while the emphasis of 11:40 is on the final eschatological fulfilment, Christians, unlike Old Covenant saints, have some present experience of this final perfection through the ministry of Christ for them, and especially through their present access to God (4:16, 7:25, 10:19-22).<sup>102</sup>

On a rhetorical level, this is an incredibly encouraging and comforting statement. God cares so much about the audience that they are placed on a level with, and even privileged above (11:40), Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and all the great saints of the past. Even in the days of the patriarchs, the author says, God was looking to us and planning something better for us. To a congregation anticipating suffering, such a statement of the care of God could only have been refreshing to their hearts, and as such it furthers the epistle's broader rhetorical aims.

Yet, this statement is not merely rhetorical. The author is revealing something about the timing and method of God's fulfilment of his promise. He sheds light on who receives the promise and when it will be obtained. The potentially shocking detail, especially if the discontinuity of the covenants is emphasised, is that all these —the patriarchs and Old Covenant saints — and we — New Covenant Christ followers — are perfected together (μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν, 11:40). The implication is that receiving the promise and being perfected are different ways of saying the same thing,<sup>103</sup> since their present lack of the promised good in 11:39 is explained in 11:40 by God's plan of a future, united perfecting of both Old and New Covenant believers. The promise, upon which the New Covenant is founded and that is mediated by Christ, is fulfilled both for those who follow Christ through the New Covenant and for Old Covenant believers. How can this be?<sup>104</sup>

Most modern treatments of this passage leave something lacking in their explanation of this quandary. We must press the difficulty that Hebrews presents us with here. The Old Covenant could not give rest (4:8), could not wash consciences (9:9), only dealt with the body (9:10), only served as a reminder of sin (10:3), and consisted in sacrifices which God ultimately spoke against (10:6-8). How then is it that members of the Old Covenant not only share in salvation, but are

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>101</sup> As he does to 10:14 (1982, 157).

<sup>102</sup> Peterson 1982., 157-8.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>104</sup> While Hebrews 9:15 does state that Jesus' death redeems for transgressions against the first covenant, it does not state whether this effects people who lived before the time of the New Covenant, nor whether it includes the Old Covenant saints in the remainder of the benefits of the New Covenant.

perfected along with the New Covenant community? Is this a fundamental inconsistency in the logic of Hebrews? Are we left with no clear sense of how they could benefit in soteriological benefits at all, since the Old Covenant had nothing of salvation in it?<sup>105</sup>

Often, solutions appeal to the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice or the mercy of God.<sup>106</sup> While this is all well and good, it does not adequately describe the mechanism by which this salvation can extend, nor does it resolve the tension in Hebrews here.<sup>107</sup> Some, without going so far as explicitly saying so, heavily imply that there is no bridge from the Old Covenant to the New, leaving an interpreter to question whether Old Covenant saints could really be saved at all.<sup>108</sup>

These attempts seem to be unsatisfying. And as long as covenant — a theme of discontinuity within the epistle, is proposed as a solution,<sup>109</sup> or as long as covenant and promise are confused,<sup>110</sup> only unsatisfactory solutions will be found. But when we look to promise in Hebrews as something other than covenant, as a motif of *continuity* within Hebrews' depiction of salvation history, then a solution begins to reveal itself.

Ultimately, in Hebrews, there has only ever been one salvific promise. It was first given (or as far as Hebrews tells us)<sup>111</sup> to Abraham. It was to be met with faith, even though there was as yet no covenantal system by which it could be brought to fulfilment. Years later, the Old Covenant and its attendant promises came, not to replace this promise, but to provide witness to it. The Old Covenant was a type and shadow of the New in every way (8:5, 9:23, 10:1), and so its lesser promises were patterned off of this initial promise and were in some way related to it, and pointed forward to its fulfilment. The faith of Old Covenant saints was not ultimately faith in the Old Covenant promises, though it entailed that as well, but was faith in the full initial promise and the God who gave it. This is why Abraham and his descendants are heirs of the same promise (11:9), both before

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<sup>105</sup> Rose 1989, 190; Backhaus 2009a, 162

<sup>106</sup> Attridge 1989, 352; Lane 1990, 2:393; Johnson 2006, 309.

<sup>107</sup> While it is fully possible for theology to have some vague points or an appeal to mystery, it seems to me that when analysing an epistle that seems so focused on the mechanisms of salvation (covenant, priesthood, sacrifice, etc.) as Hebrews is, we should at least try to give an account for how something like this can be explained. Further, on the surface at least, this seems to not simply be a place where mechanisms are vague, but where there is a potential clash between the argument of Hebrews regarding the inefficacy of the Old Covenant and the extension of the New Covenant promise to Old Covenant believers.

<sup>108</sup> Such is the feeling one gets from e.g. Rose 1989, 190.

<sup>109</sup> As in Hahn 2009, 280-281. Significantly, Hahn does not treat beyond Hebrews 9 in his analysis.

<sup>110</sup> E.g. Backhaus 2009a, 162.

<sup>111</sup> The inclusion of Abel as the first person to have faith is interesting, and perhaps hints to a view that Abel's life after the *protoevangelion* (Gen 3:15) represented a faith in the promise *in nuce*, especially if faith is faith in the God who speaks promises.

and after the giving of the Old Covenant and along with the audience (6:15-18). Then the Son entered the inhabited world, God speaking in him the eschatological restatement of the promise and finally inaugurating the New Covenant system on the basis of that promise (8:6). At last, the mechanism of fulfilment was put in place (9:15). Because the New Covenant was founded upon a promise which even the patriarchs knew and trusted in, Jesus' New Covenant ministry is able to bring about the fulfilment of that same promise to all the saints of old. The author did not lightly say that Moses valued the reproach of Christ (11:26), nor is this a simple anachronistic slip. Rather, through the unity of the promise, the author suggests that even members of the Old Covenant were confident in the things not yet seen pertaining to the coming New Covenant administration and the fulfilment of the promise through Christ the mediator.

It is for this reason, by this unity of promise and faith, that "all these" inherit the promise along with the audience. They have always had the same faith in the same promise. This is, perhaps, why abandoning confidence in Christ (perhaps in favour of non-Christ confessing Judaism) is so destructive in Hebrews. It is not to return to the faith of their fathers (if indeed, it is a return), but to abandon it. Anything other than adherence to Christ, whether Greco-Roman religion or a non-Christ confessing Judaism, would be, in Hebrews' eyes, to abandon the worship of the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>112</sup> Promise, then, provides the mechanism of the eschatological salvation of the Old Covenant saints as well as that of the New Covenant community. Further, it does so without diminishing the value of the New Covenant. Old Covenant saints are not made perfect apart from the New Covenant, but precisely because of the administration of the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, by bringing the initial promise to Abraham to fruition, Jesus has made it possible for any and all to reach the promised goods by faith.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this section of Hebrews that is so densely populated with promise language, the author holds out the hope of the eschatological promise and encourages his audience to trust that God will bring his word to fruition. Through warnings (10:38-39), examples (11:8-19), and interpretations of the plan of God (11:39-40), the author gradually forms the promise in the eyes of the audience.

In the first exegetical section of this chapter, we saw how through direct exhortation (κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλινῇ, πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος, 10:23) and the example of Sarah (πιστὸν ἠγάγατο τὸν ἐπαγγειλάμενον, 11:11), the author shows the audience what their response to God's promise ought to be. They must have faith. That is, they must trust that God is faithful,

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<sup>112</sup> Perhaps, in an inverse form, we can see the same insight Paul had in Galatians, that for Gentiles to turn to the law for salvation would be to *return again* to the elementary principles of the world (Gal 4:9).

and will do what he has committed himself to do. Thus far throughout the letter, the audience has heard of God's promises to them and they have been warned of the consequences of failing to obtain them. Through these passages, the author casts their situation as a crisis moment in which they must choose to trust God, and so receive the promised fulfilment.

Through the second group of passages considered in this chapter, the author constructs images of eternal life (10:36-39), a heavenly homeland (11:14-15), and a city crafted and built by God (11:10,16), and sums it all up through the theme of perfection (11:40). Through the examples of the faithful saints of the past, the author assures his audience that a heavenly homeland, a city made by God for his people, is coming for all those who have faith. Even the potentially discouraging fact that the promise has not yet been fulfilled, that even the greatest of saints could only greet the promise from afar, is used to encourage the audience. They may not have received it, but that is only because God was planning something better for us (11:40). The fulfilment remains future, but it is no less certain. Eventually, both the saints of old and those of the New Covenant will be perfected together (11:40), entering into the fulness of the promised good. This is possible because the promise mediated by the New Covenant is the same as the promise to which Abraham and all those of faith after him looked. While this has not happened yet, the author shows that the promise will be finally fulfilled at the return of Christ. Soon the coming one will return and validate all God's promises (10:37-39). In all this, the author's aim is simple: to move them to faith and faithfulness on the basis of the conviction that he who promised is faithful (10:23, 11:11).



## Chapter 7: A promised kingdom, an exegesis of Hebrews 12

### Introduction

<sup>25</sup> Βλέπετε μὴ παραιτήσησθε τὸν λαλοῦντα· εἰ γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι οὐκ ἐξέφυγον ἐπὶ γῆς παραιτησάμενοι τὸν χρηματίζοντα, πολὺ μᾶλλον ἡμεῖς οἱ τὸν ἀπ' οὐρανῶν ἀποστρεφόμενοι, <sup>26</sup> οὗ ἡ φωνὴ τὴν γῆν ἐσάλευσεν τότε, νῦν δὲ ἐπήγγελλται λέγων· ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν. <sup>27</sup> τὸ δὲ ἔτι ἅπαξ δηλοῖ τὴν τῶν σαλευομένων μετάθεσιν ὡς πεπονημένων, ἵνα μείνῃ τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα. <sup>28</sup> Διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες ἔχωμεν χάριν, δι' ἧς λατρεύωμεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους· <sup>29</sup> καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκων.

See to it that you do not refuse the one who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused the one who spoke oracularly upon the earth, how could we escape if we turn away from the one who speaks from heaven? His voice shook the earth in the past, but now he has promised, saying, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” This “yet once more” signifies the changing of the things that are shaken, as what has been made, so that the things which are not shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving an unshakeable kingdom, let us have gratitude, through which we may serve God pleasingly with reverence and fear. For indeed, our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:25-29).

In this, the last instance of promise language in Hebrews, we are met with a bit of a shift. Every other use of promise has been unambiguously positive, whereas this at least seems to be a promise of destruction.<sup>1</sup> Further, this passage seems to present a difficulty for the largely un-Platonic interpretation that I have been using throughout this work. After all, it seems that here the author is unambiguously expressing a desire to leave this created (read: physical) world for an unshakeable (read: spiritual, ideal) kingdom after the destruction of spatio-temporal reality. Indeed, this is how some do interpret the passage,<sup>2</sup> using it to support a flattening of all the promise into the future, unmediated presence of God.<sup>3</sup>

How then, do I deal with these challenges in this passage? While the Platonic reading can, *prima facie*, seem an adequate explanation of the author's statements here, it does not hold up under further investigation. By interrogating the passage, I will show that here the author does not ultimately disparage physical reality, nor does he collapse the promise down to a contentless rest.

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<sup>1</sup> Koester 2001, 547, “The word ‘promise’ has connoted rest (Heb 4:1), a new covenant (8:6), and eternal inheritance (9:15; cf. 11:9), but now it warns of a final shaking.” See also Buchanan 1972, 225

<sup>2</sup> “Indeed, it seems likely that the author, whether consciously or subconsciously, associates the created realm in itself with the human problem,” Schenck 2007, 128. See also Attridge 1989, 431, Gräßer 1997, 3:332-3.

<sup>3</sup> Rose 1989, 185; Gräßer 1997, 3:332-8.

In service of this project, the following section will be arranged around the following questions: What is the content of the promise? and, How does this passage relate to the other promise passages in Hebrews?

Upon answering these questions, it will be clear that the promise in Hebrews 12:25-29 represents the final, eschatological fulfilment of the same promise Hebrews has been concerned with all along. What we have in this citation of Haggai is an eschatological assertion of the coming promised good. Furthermore, a close examination of the passage will yield an apocalyptic, not Platonic, reading.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, far from being either an anomaly or a re-interpretive key to the eschatology and worldview of the epistle, this passage is ultimately in keeping with the understanding of promise in Hebrews developed thus far throughout this work.

### 1. What is the content of the promise?

To answer this question, we need to consult the passage's discussion of the promise again:

“Ετι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν. τὸ δὲ ἔτι ἅπαξ δηλοῖ τὴν τῶν σαλευομένων μετὰθεσιν ὡς πεποιημένων, ἵνα μείνῃ τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα. Διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες ἔχωμεν χάριν, δι’ ἧς λατρεύωμεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους· καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκον.

“Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” This “yet once more” signifies the changing of the things that are shaken, that is, the things which have been made, so that the things which are not shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving an unshakeable kingdom, let us have gratitude, through which we may serve God pleasingly with reverence and fear. For indeed, our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:26-29).

As with 4:1, the main content of the promise can be discerned through the hortatory inference.<sup>5</sup> The audience ought to be thankful. Why? Because they are to receive an unshakeable kingdom. This is the conclusion of the author's inverse reading of Hag 2:6.<sup>6</sup> Both the earth and the

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<sup>4</sup> That is, contra Gräßer 1997, 3:332-8; Eisele, *Reich*. Gräßer strongly asserts, “Daß Hebr hier nicht die apokalyptische, sondern die ihn auch sonst prägende hellenistische Eschatologie rezipiert” (332) and “Mit beinahe jedem Begriff bewegt sich unser Verf. bei seiner Exegese des Prophetenwortes auf dem Boden des Platonismus und Gnostizismus” (333). Yet he has to admit that the author often uses language that certainly *seems* apocalyptic, though he brushes this off as a merely formal similarity. E.g. “Mit dem Empfang der Basileia knüpft Hebr nur formal an apokalyptische Begrifflichkeit an” (336-7).

<sup>5</sup> That is, just like how in 4:1, we are given an exhortation about the promise of rest still remaining as an interpretation of the curse of Ps. 95, so too here we have an exhortation to thankfulness in light of an unshakeable kingdom given as an interpretation of the judgment of Hag 2:6.

<sup>6</sup> While Hebrews' specific interpretation of this passage is unique, there is evidence that early rabbinical Judaism also did view this passage as Messianic, so Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 398. Cf. b.Sanh. 97b: עקיבא שהיה דורש ולא כרבי עקיבא שהיה דורש (חגי ב, ו) עוד אחת מעט היא ואני מרעיש את השמים ואת הארץ, where Akiva is cited as using Hag 2:6 to assert that the Messiah would come shortly after the destruction of the temple, though the text is disagreeing with him.

heavens will be destroyed, and for a final time at that. But the author also maintains the conviction that not everything will be shaken, or not shaken so as to be destroyed forever. Thus, he introduces a new category of things, τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα. These things remain, so *this* must be what the promise promises to those who will receive it with faith. Thus, finally, through an interesting (and unprecedented thus far within Hebrews) theological move, he describes the τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα as a kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

But to what do these things point? Several interpretive debates centre around this passage. Does Hebrews envision the complete and final disposal of the spatio-temporal world or its transformation? That is, does Hebrews have a doctrine of a new creation *ex nihilo*? Further, what are τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα, and in what way do they differ from τὰ πεποιημένα? Finally, when does this shaking occur? Is the language here eschatological/apocalyptic, or is it merely a cypher for a dimensional distinction between this world of space and time and the cognitive realm of ideas?

### 1.1 Eisele's individualising interpretation

The most ambitious reading of this passage, and of the eschatology of Hebrews as a whole, is Wilfried Eisele's *Ein unerschütterliches Reich*. In this work, Eisele argues that all the apocalyptic language in Hebrews has been repurposed to accommodate a thoroughly Platonic world view.<sup>8</sup> To Eisele, Hebrews does not have a two-age eschatology, but rather all temporal descriptions are simply metaphors for the distinction between the earthly world and the ontological realm of ideas and being.<sup>9</sup> Hebrews has no view of the future as such,<sup>10</sup> but only uses the future as a way of gesturing towards an ontological distinction. The unshakeable kingdom for Eisele is the immaterial, timeless heaven in the presence of God,<sup>11</sup> and the time of shaking at which one enters into it is the death of the individual when the soul enters heaven.<sup>12</sup> This thus means that the return of Christ, when this happens, is not some future return of Christ to the world, but rather the soul's

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<sup>7</sup> That is, while the kingship of Christ has been discussed in Hebrews up until this point (e.g. throughout Heb 1), a kingdom has not been mentioned up until this point.

<sup>8</sup> Eisele 2003, 376.

<sup>9</sup> "Das traditionell zeitliche Schema der Apokalyptik tritt bei ihm hinter räumlich-ontologischen Vorstellungen zurück" (ibid., 132).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 416-21, in a section called "Metaphysik, Mythos und Geschichte." His argument here is that Hebrews interprets the historical Christ event in mythological and metaphysical terms, thus moving from a historical view of the future to a focus on individually joining in on the timelessness of God.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 400-1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 424. This radical individualisation of eschatology is anticipated by Groenen, "Epistola ad Hebraeos docet et evoluit eschatologiam individualement in relatione ad notionem ἐπαγγελία. Eschatologia universalis vero nullo modo in hanc notionem ingreditur" (1954, 69). He does not go as far as saying that Hebrews has no such categories at all, but does argue that universal eschatology has nothing to do with the author's concept of promise (Eisele 2003, 66-9).

being ushered into the presence of Christ in heaven upon death.<sup>13</sup> So too, the resurrection is not a resurrection to the body in the future, but is existence as a spirit (which Eisele asserts exists in continuity with the body as a *sort of* body)<sup>14</sup> in heaven in the timelessness of eternity.<sup>15</sup> As such, in Eisele's reading, Hebrews does not speculate on the fate of the actual physical world, nor does he have a recognisable doctrine of the parousia.<sup>16</sup> Rather, in a thoroughgoing Middle Platonism, Hebrews' conception of salvation, resurrection, and the parousia are all the same: freedom from the temporal world of change and spiritual existence in the cognitive realm in the presence of God after death. Thus Eisele presents a complete, Platonic (re-)interpretation of the entire eschatology of Hebrews.

As can likely be inferred from things said in this thesis so far, I do not find Eisele's reading particularly convincing. I put it forward, however, since it will provide a helpful dialogue partner as the most comprehensive Middle Platonic reading of Hebrews' worldview and eschatology. In the rest of this section, I will argue that Hebrews 12:25-29, and Hebrews' eschatology broadly, is best understood within an apocalyptic eschatology that looks forward to a new heavens and a new earth, not within a Platonic context. We will then come to see the promise of Heb 12:25-29 as a kingdom in a transformed world, inaugurated by the arrival of the king into that world. To do this, I will begin by interrogating Eisele's understanding of the time and place of the shaking, and will then move further to the nature of the unshakeable kingdom.

Eisele's most original contribution is radically individualising both the parousia and the "shaking" of the heavens and the earth by placing them within the experience of each human being upon death. While this reading may seem extreme, and can even provoke a relatively quick dismissal,<sup>17</sup> it is remarkably consistent with his premises. That is, a thoroughly Middle Platonic view of salvation would be relatively unconcerned with the physical world, and any redemption would occur at death, that is when one is delivered from the body and from the world of change

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<sup>13</sup> "Das zweite Erscheinen Christi meint nach Hebr 9,27-28 nicht eine Parusie Christi auf Erden, sondern das Wieder-sehen der Glaubenden mit ihm, sobald sie ihm im Durchgang durch den Tod in das Allerheiligste der unsichtbaren Welt des Himmels nachgefolgt sind" (Eisele 2003, 414).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 424-5.

<sup>16</sup> Eisele, however, asserts that meeting Christ again in heaven *is* a doctrine of the parousia, just as spiritual, timeless existence in heaven in an eternal now *is* a doctrine of the resurrection. Cf. 2003, 414, 425.

<sup>17</sup> Such as in Kenneth Schenck's review of this work in *CBQ* 67, 2005, 140-1.

and time, not in some awaited earthly future.<sup>18</sup> So, for consistency, Eisele's account merits consideration. But does it hold up to the text of Hebrews itself?

It does not seem so. The radical individualisation of the “shaking” is certainly clever, but it does not match the text. The shaking of the heavens and earth is made parallel to the shaking of the earth at Sinai, which the author treats as an actual, physical event that was open to common view (12:18-21).<sup>19</sup> This suggests that the shaking will also be a physical, historical event. Further, the emphasis on the phrase ἔτι ἄπαξ suggests not only a futurity,<sup>20</sup> but also a singularity.<sup>21</sup> The shaking will happen only once. While Eisele might respond that it does only happen once, *per person*, in Hebrews events that are repeated in any way are considered provisional, not final, and are denied the descriptive ἄπαξ.<sup>22</sup> Further, while Eisele agrees with the consensus that Heb 12:25-29 is describing events inaugurated at the parousia,<sup>23</sup> his redefinition of the parousia as an individual soul's post-mortem encounter with Christ does not fit Hebrews' description of that event. In his composite citation of Isa 26:20 and Hab 2:3-4, the author writes ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἥξει καὶ οὐ χρονίσει (Heb 10:37). It would be strange to describe Jesus as “the coming one” and his action as “coming” if he in fact is the one who waits in the same place for people to come to him.<sup>24</sup> At the least, that would be an unclear use of the language. Second, it is significant that when movement language is applied to Christ in Hebrews, it is always movement from one plane of existence to another,<sup>25</sup> so it would be particularly strange for it here to *actually* mean that he

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<sup>18</sup> This is as I argued above when discussing Heb 11. Less thoroughgoing Platonic readings of Hebrews still place their emphasis on the soul's access to the presence of God as the sole salvific good. Often these scholars do not investigate the role of a future resurrection or of the parousia. In fact, Gräßer's comment on the lack of a good understanding of the parousia's role in Hebrews is taken as a starting place for Eisele's work. Cf. Eisele 2003, 1, citing Gräßer 1986, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce 1990, 362-4. The importance of God having spoken to Moses publicly, in view of all the people, is suggested at John 9:29.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Backhaus 2009d, 452.

<sup>21</sup> Attridge 1989, 381; Nicholas J. Moore, *Repetition in Hebrews*, WUNT 2: 388 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 217.

<sup>22</sup> Moore 2015, 209-10. As Moore emphasises, this does not mean that repetition is negative; it is simply not final. He in fact argues that most instances of repetition in Hebrews are neutral or positive things (210). The final once-ness of Christ's acts (with the exception of his ongoing intercession) is what shows or makes the repetition of other things less than efficacious (62-6).

<sup>23</sup> Eisele 2003, 125.

<sup>24</sup> Eisele's argument that the term ὁ ἐρχόμενος is due to a traditional reference to Jesus dating back to John the Baptist's use of the term to describe Jesus (101-3) as well as a reference to God's timelessness as ὁ ἐρχόμενος (105) does not hold up. While Eisele here tries to make this term refer to his own emphases — the finality of Jesus' one coming to earth in his earthly ministry and a move into timelessness — these cannot be found in the passage, and are strained. The passage is talking about one who *will come* to the world.

<sup>25</sup> 1:6 — εἰσάγω; 6:19-20, 9:24, 10:5 — εἰσερχομαι; 10:7,9 — ἦκω.

will stay put and wait for souls to come to him. So then, it is safe to say that the text of Hebrews here in 10:37 leads us to view the shaking of all things occurring along with the parousia, the future return of Christ to the world of space of time.<sup>26</sup>

If this is so, we must ask what the meaning of the shaking actually is. What things are shaken? And what things remain after the shaking? Here, we must leave Eisele behind, since his reading has no concern for the fate of the physical world. On this issue, scholarship is largely divided between those who interpret the shaking as the complete removal of the physical world<sup>27</sup> and those who see a hope for a restored world as well.<sup>28</sup> Much of this discussion centres around the use of the word *μετάθεσις* (12:27) in the author's explanation of Hag 2:6. The word itself, however, provides little help, as it can mean either removal or transformation, though its broader usage does lean towards some sense of change more than complete destruction.<sup>29</sup> The general Greek usage of the term, however, can serve well enough for either camp.<sup>30</sup> *Μετάθεσις* is a change of some sort. Its semantic range can include abolition, exchange, change of location, or transformation.

#### 1.2 *The meaning of μετάθεσις*

The use of *μετάθεσις* within Hebrews, though, may shed some light. In 7:12, we find *μετατιθεμένης γὰρ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ νόμου μετάθεσις γίνεται*. Contrary to those who would here see an abolition of the law as such,<sup>31</sup> the parallel with a *μετάθεσις* of priesthood, a clear change of one for another (and, as always in Hebrews, for a better one at that), suggests that *νόμου μετάθεσις* is a change of one law for another as well, and perhaps for a better one. Granted, this is not properly change in the sense of transformation, but rather it is an *exchange*: one law for another, one priesthood for another. In 11:5, the author writes, *Πίστει Ἐνώχ μετετέθη τὸ μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον καὶ οὐχ ἠύρισκετο διότι μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός. Πρὸ γὰρ τῆς μεταθέσεως μεμεαρτύρηται εὐαρεστηκέναι τῷ θεῷ*. Here, Enoch's *μετάθεσις* is a change in location, and certainly not a form of

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<sup>26</sup> That is to say, that Hebrews shared the common expectation of the parousia evidenced in the earliest stratum of Christianity.

<sup>27</sup> The use of *μετάθεσις* here has been much commented on. Most scholars take it to mean the removal of the physical, created world with no further nuance. So Moffatt 1924, 221-2; Windisch 1931, 115; Thompson 1982, 48-9; Braun 1984, 442-4; Attridge 1989, 380-1; Gräßer, 1997, 3:335-6. Ellingsworth, offers a slightly nuanced interpretation, arguing that *μετάθεσις* does mean removal, and that "their [the heaven and the earth's] destruction may be implied, but total annihilation probably lies beyond the author's horizon" (1993, 688).

<sup>28</sup> For authors who here read it as having to do more with transformation than destruction, see: Spicq 1953, 2:412; Michel 1966, 474; Schröger 1968, 193; Buchanan 1972, 136; Backhaus 2009d, 452-3.

<sup>29</sup> LSJ, *μετάθεσις*.

<sup>30</sup> Acknowledged by Ellingsworth 1993, 688; Schenck 2007, 126, "We accordingly cannot determine the meaning on a straightforwardly lexical basis."

<sup>31</sup> Haber 2005, 106.

destruction. At the very least, he is moving from earth to heaven. It is possible, though the author does not speculate further, that this could also be a reference to traditions that speak of a transformation of Enoch as well,<sup>32</sup> but if so the author does not make anything of it. Thus in all other uses of *μετάθεσις* and its cognates in Hebrews, destruction is not the focus, but change of some sort, whether it be replacement, or shift in location.

### 1.2.1 *μετάθεσις* in other Jewish literature

Other uses of *μετάθεσις* in second temple literature support this. In the Old Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures there are nine uses of either *μετάθεσις* or *μετατίθημι* over eight verses. One of them is, of course, Gen 5:24, in which God took Enoch away (*μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεός*). Of the remaining eight uses, four refer to simple movement (of mountains (Ps 45:33 LXX); of boundary markers (Deut 27:17, Prov 23:10, Hos 5:10)). Two instances appearing in the same verse are negative and could mean destruction. These appear in Isa 29:14, *διὰ τοῦτο ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ προσθήσω τοῦ μεταθεῖναι τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον καὶ μεταθήσω αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀπολῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν κρύψω*. While this could refer to the destruction of the people of Israel, it more likely refers to removing them from the land, since the translation was made by surviving, post-exilic Jews. The remaining two uses refer to some sort of change. In 1 Kings 20:25, we find *πλὴν ματαίως Ἀχααβ ὡς ἐπράθη ποιῆσαι τὸ πονηρὸν ἐνώπιον κυρίου, ὡς μετέθηκεν αὐτὸν Ἰεζαβελ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ*. Here *μετέθηκεν* means to change Ahab's mind for the worse, to lead him astray. Finally, in Isa 29:17, the Lord says that *μετατεθήσεται ὁ Λίβανος ὡς τὸ ὄρος τὸ Χερμελ*. Here it is transformation that is view; Lebanon will become like Carmel. In the Greek additions to Esther, the term appears once in Esther's prayer: *μετάθες τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς μῖσος τοῦ πολεμοῦντος ἡμᾶς εἰς συντέλειαν αὐτοῦ* (14:13). There it is a change of heart. Throughout the five instances in Maccabean literature, the terms are used exclusively for changes of heart or action. Ptolemy changes the mind of the king (*τὸν βασιλέα μετέθεκεν*, 2 Mac 4:46). Antiochus tried to convince the youngest of the seven brother-martyrs by offering to enrich him if he were to *μεταθέμενον ἀπὸ τῶν πατρίων* (2 Mac 7:24). Antiochus wrote to Lysias complaining of the Jews' disapproval of *τῇ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐπὶ τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ μεταθέσει* (2 Mac 11:24). The priests prayed that God would prevent Ptolemy from entering the temple by changing the desire of one so evilly determined (*τὴν ὁρμὴν τοῦ κακῶς ἐπιβαλλομένου μεταθεῖναι*, 3 Mac 1:16). Finally, the temperate mind is able to change some passions (*τὰ μὲν αὐτῶν μεταθεῖναι*, 4 Mac 2:18). Within the Second Temple wisdom literature, both Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sirach describe

<sup>32</sup> For ancient sources: 1 Enoch 12:3, 15:1; 2 Enoch 22:8, 71:14; Jub 4:23, 10:17, 19:24-27; Philo *Mut. nom.* 38, Josephus *Ant.* 1.3.4. Pierre Grelot, "La Légende d'Enoch dans les apocryphes et dans la Bible," *RevScRel* 46 (1958): 5-26, 181-210; Hugo Odeberg, "Ενώχ" in *TDNT* (1964), 2:556-60; Attridge 1989, 317. For a lengthy discussion of Enochic traditions in connection with Hebrews, see Moffitt 2011, 166-78.

Enoch's removal in terms similar to those found in Genesis (Wis 4:10; Sir 44:16). Ben Sirach also comments on a friend who changes to enmity (καὶ ἔστιν φίλος μετατιθέμενος εἰς ἔχθραν, Sir 6:9). The trend among all these passages is that μετάθεσις seems to mean any kind of a change, but not destruction.

Josephus and Philo provide too many instances to list in detail here,<sup>33</sup> but a summary will be provided. In Josephus μετάθεσις and μετατίθημι are used in the following ways: Once, it signifies a change in administrative responsibilities (*BJ.* 2.247). Twice they are a simple change of location (*A.J.* 10.33, *BJ.* 7.199), a change of form of government (*A.J.* 13.301, *BJ.* 1.70), the removal of unwanted images (*A.J.* 18.57, 19.305), the transfer of shame or honour (*A.J.* 1.22, 12.387), and the alteration of planned marriages (*BJ.* 1.562, 563). Three times they point to a change of details in a written work or account (*C. Ap.* 1.42, 52, 2.115) and a change of customs or forms of worship (*A.J.* 9.265, 20.38; *C. Ap.* 2.155). Four times, they signify a change of name (*C. Ap.* 1.250, 256, 286 (2x)). Seven times, they mean a change of mind or heart, including repentance (*A.J.* 5.110, 200; 8.208; 15.19; 20.123; *Vita* 165, 195). Of all these instances, none means to destroy, and even the most negative — the removal of Roman standards and a statue of Caesar (*A.J.* 18.57, 19.305) — is certainly only a change of place. Philo presents us with a wider range of uses than does Josephus, or any other Jewish author of the period. Most frequently, and least helpfully, he uses μετάθεσις and μετατίθημι nine times to describe either what happened to Enoch or situations which are like what happened to Enoch (*Mut.* 38, *Abr.* 17, 18, 19 (2x), 24, 47; *Praem.* 16, 17). I say least helpfully, because he defines this in contradictory ways. Once, he defines the μετάθεσις of Enoch as τροπή and μεταβολή (*Abr.* 18), clearly denoting transformation. However, he also defines Enoch's μετάθεσις as ἀποικία (*Praem.* 16), a change of place. In the other instances, there is no clear way of discerning which definition Philo has in mind. Since the majority of Philo's work consists in analyses of texts, it should be no surprise that many of his uses have to do with wording or phrasing. Μετάθεσις and μετατίθημι refer once each to a change in word order (*Sacr.* 11), a change in phrasing (*Mut.* 13), and a change in the reading of a text (*Flacc.* 131). In the same sphere, five times they signify a change in name or the word used for something (*Mut.* 60, 130; *Abr.* 81; *Aet.* 54; *QG* 4.67). Outside of strictly textual uses, there is one use each for transformation (excluding discussion of Enoch, *Post.* 43), the notion of change as such (*Gig.* 66), changing the law (*Mos.* 2.34), change of place (excluding discussion of Enoch, *Flacc.* 184), and a change of action (*Legat.* 1). Twice they can refer to a change of circumstances (*Jos.* 136, *Legat.* 68). Three times they signify a change of mind (*Gig.* 66, *Deus* 26, *Praem.* 57). Finally, five times the terms refer to rearrangement (*Aet.* 113 (2x), 115; *Legat.* 104, *Prov.*

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<sup>33</sup> Josephus has 29 uses of μετάθεσις and μετατίθημι, and Philo has 38.



2.44). Again, the same pattern holds. While *μετάθεσις* can refer to any kind of change, in none of these uses is destruction in view.

In the rest of the New Testament, there are three instances of *μετατίθημι* and none of *μετάθεσις*. In Acts, Stephen's speech recounts when Jacob and the fathers died and were brought back to Shechem to be buried (*καὶ μετετέθησαν εἰς Συχὲμ καὶ ἐτέθησαν ἐν τῷ μνήματι*, 7:16). In Galatians, Paul is shocked that the Galatians should move away from the one who called them and towards another Gospel (*Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον*, 1:6). Finally, Jude accuses some wicked men of transforming the grace of God into licentiousness (*τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν χάριτα μετατιθέντες εἰς ἀσέλγειαν*, 4). Again the pattern holds. Change, for good or for ill, or even just of location, is signalled by *μετάθεσις*, but not destruction as such.

The purpose of this summary is to show two things about *μετάθεσις* relevant to its use in Heb 12:27. First, *μετάθεσις* can mean any kind of change, and the word itself does not tell us what kind of change is in view. It can be anything from simple movement to complete transformation. It encompasses both change and exchange. Second, *μετάθεσις* is not a particularly apt word to refer to destruction. In none of the 85 citations discussed above does *μετάθεσις* mean destruction. That is not to say that it absolutely cannot, but it does lead us to look for a meaning other than destruction when it is used.

#### 1.2.2 *μετάθεσις* in Hebrews 12:27

This brings us back to Heb 12:27. What is *ἡ τῶν σαλευομένων μετάθεσις ὡς πεποιημένων*? The use of *μετάθεσις* discussed in the previous section suggests that this is not a term that the author would choose to express utter destruction, but rather change of some kind.<sup>34</sup> This change can be a partially destructive one, such that some parts of what is changed no longer remain. It can even be viewed as exchange, a swap of one thing for another thing in the same category, as in the case of when one priesthood was done away with to make way for another (7:12). Here Hebrews suggests, though without directly saying it, that there will be some sort of world after the shaking and translation of the current world. There will not be *nothing* left. This is further confirmed by the enigmatic way this phrase ends. It is “the changing of the things that are shaken, *since they have been made*” (12:27). If this truly referred to a complete destruction of the created world, it would clash with many other details in Hebrews. Human souls, angels, and even the heavenly temple are

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<sup>34</sup> Schenck, claims “the two primary options [for *μετάθεσις*’ meaning] seem attested in the two other occurrences of the word group in the epistle (7:12; 11:5)” (2007, 126). Yet, as shown above, while 7:12 involves destruction or removal, it *also* includes a sense of change or transformation. Thus transformation is the dominant connotation of *μετάθεσις* in the epistle.

all made, yet they seem to persist through the shaking (12:22-24). The author's own inference in the following sentence supports this. Διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες ἔχωμεν χάριν (12:28). "We," the author and the audience, will continue to exist after the shaking. Otherwise they would not be able to receive this unshakeable kingdom. They are certainly created things. Thus, *some* created things survive the shaking. If the utter removal of created things were envisioned, Hebrews would not be offering anything to its audience, not even a disembodied existence in the heavenly sanctuary, because even these things are part of created reality.

It is much better to view this passage as speaking about some kind of change which occurs to both the heavens and the earth. That does not mean that nothing will be destroyed. The type of change is not spoken of, and the dramatic language of shaking (σειώ, 12:26; σαλεύω, 12:27) and the image of God as a consuming fire (πῦρ καταναλίσκον, 12:29) suggest that some things will indeed be destroyed. But there will be something, some sort of cosmos, on the other side of this cataclysm.

It is this, a preservation through the cataclysmic shaking of the heaven and the earth and the reception of an unshakeable kingdom in the changed heaven and earth that the author holds out as God's promise to the audience. And, for the first, time, he describes this eschatological good as a kingdom.<sup>35</sup> While possibly drawing on a wider early-Christian description of the eschatological state as a kingdom,<sup>36</sup> the author comes full circle to the description of Christ at the beginning of the epistle as a king (1:5-9). The promise of place, which the author has variously described as land (11:9) and city (11:10, 16, 12:22, 13:14), is now described in terms of its relationship to Christ — it is a kingdom. It is unshaken and unshakeable because its king sits on the throne of God (1:3, 8), and will be the one who rolls up the heavens which he made (1:10-12), and who will change those same heavens themselves (1:12).

## 2. The promise of Hebrews 12 in broader context

How then does promise function here in its last use within the epistle? In a heavily apocalyptic section, the author reflects on a prophetic passage which depicts the violent shaking of both the heavens and the earth. He accepts this, and does see it as a scene of judgment in which destruction is visited on all that is not united to the word of the promise. But in this scene of destruction, he also sees a promise of salvation. The ominous notes ultimately serve the purpose of the promise in this section. While the pericope begins with a warning (βλέπετε μὴ παραιτήσησθε τὸν λαλοῦντα, 12:25) and ends with a fearsome description of God as a consuming fire (πῦρ καταναλίσκον, 12:29), these are in service of the positive promise of a kingdom. He takes the

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<sup>35</sup> With terminology, as Spicq points out, that speaks of the Christians' "accession à la royauté" (1953, 2:413). They not only enter a kingdom, but receive it, seemingly as some sort of co-regents.

<sup>36</sup> As seen throughout the Gospels and Paul.

promise of a kingdom as an inference of the warning (διό, 12:28). The dire depiction of God is not used to terrify, but to motivate the audience with the possibility of genuinely pleasing that God by their service (λατρεύωμεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους, 12:28). Yes there is to be fear, but it is to be the fear of those who serve a God who is well disposed to them, who can be pleased by their actions, and who is giving them a kingdom (12:27).

Not all of this shakeable realm, that is, of the things which have been made, will be shaken so as to be destroyed. Some will be transformed into things which cannot be shaken. Far from being a prediction of a jumbled chaos of cosmic wreckage — a post-apocalyptic scene, if you will — the author envisions this remainder as a glorious and abiding kingdom. It is this kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, the one who is both God's eschatological restatement of the promise and the guarantor of that same promise, that is held out to the audience. The promise before them is not mere survival, but full entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ after the great eschatological shaking.

### 3. Conclusion

This last mention of the promise within Hebrews fittingly looks forward to the promise's final fulfilment. The last definition of the promised good given within Hebrews calls it a kingdom, thus attaching the promise to the theme of the kingship of Christ established at the beginning of the epistle (1:8) and hinted at through a discussion of Melchizedek (7:1-2). The promise will come, it will have cosmic implications, and it will result in an eternally abiding kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Far from being disconnected from the author's depiction of promise up until this point, or a stock apocalyptic scene separate from the author's larger arguments about Christ, we find here a thoroughly eschatological restatement of the promise upon which Hebrews has been reflecting thus far. The promised salvation, proclaimed and inaugurated by Christ, is left in the audience's eyes as an eternally stable kingdom in the presence of the king.

## PART THREE

### SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

## Chapter 8: Hebrews' theology of promise

### Introduction

What has been accomplished in this work so far, and where will we go from here? I have examined individual sections within Hebrews and have attempted to explain the best way of understanding the author's use of "promise," often in contradistinction to how other scholars have understood it until now. This has yielded an in-depth, but fragmented, picture of the use and role of promise within Hebrews. It remains to fit these pieces together to provide a unified whole.

Yet this chapter will not simply be a re-hash of what has been stated before, or a summary of the argument to this point. Rather, the aim of this chapter is to present a constructive account of Hebrews' theology as it relates to promise. The goal of this chapter is to synthesise the information gleaned from the preceding exegesis and to address issues that Hebrews seems interested in. The conclusion following this chapter, on the other hand, will answer questions raised by other scholars and expressly noted in the prolegomena portion of this thesis.

It is my view that the author's use of promise language<sup>1</sup> reveals a deep reflection on God's work throughout history, particularly on the role God's speech plays in both his unfolding and outworking of salvation across the ages.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, not to understand the author's unique development of the saving purpose and speech of God expressed through the language of promise is to fail to grasp fully the author's soteriology, eschatology, hermeneutics, and view of history.

Christian Rose, building on others before him,<sup>3</sup> claimed that promise was *the* base motif of Hebrews.<sup>4</sup> While I believe that may be overstating things a bit (not least by ignoring the related motif of covenant), promise certainly is of immense importance within the theology of Hebrews. In the following chapter, I will show just how crucial promise is for the epistle. To answer the question, "What is the author's theology of promise?", I will present an account of the following four topics: 1. Promise and salvation history, 2. Promise and eschatology, 3. Promise and hermeneutics, and 4. Promise and exhortation. In this constructive account, building upon the

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this is not claiming that there is anything essential or necessary about it having been "promise" as such. The author could have used other terminology, or could have been less consistent in his use of this family of words. But as it happens, and as has been demonstrated thus far throughout this thesis, the author for whatever reason has chosen to use the language of promise to refer to this particular set of concepts. Why this was the case will be speculated upon in the conclusion.

<sup>2</sup> For the recognised importance of God's speech within Hebrews, see Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, LNTS 507 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Namely Backhaus, who himself was modifying Käsemann's claim by involving promise.

<sup>4</sup> Rose 1989, 191.

groundwork laid in the previous chapters, I will demonstrate how the category of promise orients the author's development of all these themes, and serves as a bedrock conviction for the author.

### 1. Promise and salvation history

Hebrews begins with the God who speaks. God's creative activity (κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, 11:3), providential power (φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, 1:3), and salvation (ὁ δι' ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος...σωτηρίας, ἣτις ἀρχὴν λαβοῦσα λαλεῖσθαι διὰ τοῦ κυρίου, 2:1-3; Βλέπετε μὴ παραιτήσησθε τὸν λαλοῦντα, 12:25) are all described in Hebrews as functions of God's speech. Further, the whole epistle is filled with divine speech. The Father speaks to the Son, the Son speaks back to the Father, and the Spirit turns outward, speaking to the people of God. In Hebrews, God's activity and speech are deeply intertwined and are portrayed as having been so from the beginning. So it should not be surprising that the author's depiction of God's arranging of salvation history centres around two types of speech act, promise and covenant. As has been suggested above and will be demonstrated shortly, Hebrews' understanding of history and God's dealing with it is defined by the interplay of these two types of divine speech. And of the two, promise provides the ground upon which covenants are founded and find their meaning.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1.1. Abraham and the promise

The first explicit mention of the promise within history is when "God made a promise" to Abraham (6:13). It is, however, possible to speculate whether the patriarchs before Abraham, particularly Abel, Enoch, and Noah, had some access to the promise as well. The tight connection between faith and God's speech, particularly his speech in the form of promise,<sup>6</sup> leads us to inquire what sparked the faith of Abel and Enoch in particular, since no word was given to them as far as we are told. It is possible that the author envisioned some sort of nascent version of the promise given even to the earliest patriarchs. Passages like Genesis 3:14-15 could have led him to this.<sup>7</sup> But even more, as will be argued below, the pervasive presence of promise in the author's hermeneutic could easily have led him to see an implicit promise, even *the* promise, standing at the beginning of human history and awaiting its fulfilment throughout the long march of generations.

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<sup>5</sup> This is along the lines of the argument made in Chapter 5, in which it was argued from Heb 8:6 that covenants must be founded upon promises in Hebrews.

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 6, above.

<sup>7</sup> This "protoevangelium" was recognized within relatively early Christian theology; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.21 is the earliest definite reference, but it is impossible to know whether such a passage were on the author's mind or had even received a Christological interpretation yet.

But with Abraham, the promise is stated in such a way that its contours are defined for the rest of the author's depiction of salvation history. It is a promise of "blessing" (6:14). This blessing includes a land (γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, 11:9), a city (τὴν τοὺς θεμελίους ἔχουσαν πόλιν, 11:10), a great posterity (πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε, 6:14), and established a relationship of trust, loyalty, and reward with God (6:13-15). On first blush, the promise seems relatively straightforward and temporal, but the author states that this was never the full story. Taking a cue from Abraham's wandering in the land, the author infers that there was more to the promise than its most clear referents. While in the promised land, Abraham yet sought a homeland (πατρίδα, 11:14). Even more specifically, the author tells us that he expressly expected a city designed and built by God (11:10, 16). Two misunderstandings must be avoided here. First, the author does not present this as his own inference, a later reflection on the story as to what the promise must typologically point to for the author's own day.<sup>8</sup> He asserts this was Abraham's expectation. This, the author claims, was Abraham's understanding of the promise from the beginning (11:8-16). Second, he does this without denigrating the physical promise of the land.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to what some have argued, Canaan is in fact referred to as the land of promise (11:9).<sup>10</sup> It was not the land in which the promise happened to be spoken or the land on the way to the promise. Rather the author still calls it the "land of promise" (11:9), that is, the promised land.<sup>11</sup>

From the very beginning, then, the author presents a two-tiered structure for the promise. It is not simply one thing or another. It is neither completely earthly,<sup>12</sup> nor completely heavenly.<sup>13</sup> It is both. Both need to be resolved. Yet, there is also no ambiguity as to which is the greater side of the promise. As everywhere in Hebrews, the heavenly is superior. It is what, the author says, really filled Abraham's mind and sustained his hope (11:13-16). This two-tiered structure reflects Hebrews'

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<sup>8</sup> As Lane characterises it, "As a commentary on the traditional account of Abraham's migration, v 10 is closely related to the eschatological perspective developed in vv 13-16" and "This is, of course, a perspective informed by primitive Christian eschatology" (1990, 2:351). This is of course true, but it is important to note that the author does not *present* this as commentary, but rather as simple recounting.

<sup>9</sup> *Contra* Backhaus 2009b, 192.

<sup>10</sup> *Contra* Backhaus 2009b, 178.

<sup>11</sup> Lane 1990, 2:350. The normal Old Testament phrasing for this would be "the land which God swore to give." The only references to the land in this way within (potentially) Jewish literature are *T.Jos.* 20:1, and *T.Abr.* (Recension A) 8:5; 20:11. The dating, and Jewishness, of these texts is contested, however. Cf. George Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 231–41; 248–53. and *Studies on the Testament of Joseph* (Missoula, MO: Scholars Press, 1975); *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); Lawrence M. Wills, "The Testament of Joseph," in *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 229–41; and "The Testament of Abraham," in *ibid.*, 269–94.

<sup>12</sup> As Rose 1989, 71 in reference to the promise to Abraham.

<sup>13</sup> As Backhaus 2009b, 178.

cosmology broadly,<sup>14</sup> and will also go on to organise the author's depiction of salvation history's course. Because, as elsewhere throughout the epistle, the earthly must always be realised before that which is heavenly.

One other feature of the promise to Abraham is salient at this point: at Abraham's death, it remains unfulfilled (11:13). In fact, both tiers of the promise remained unfulfilled. Abraham had neither the heavenly city (11:10), nor even any hold in the land of Canaan (11:9). Rather, through his whole life, it remained as a foreign land. In terms of posterity as well, far from being multiplied, he had only one child "in whom [his] offspring would be counted" (11:18), followed by a single grandson who was also an heir of the promise (11:9). His immediate descendants found no better. Isaac and Jacob, fellow "heirs of the same promise" (11:9), also dwelt as resident aliens within the land (11:9). In the face of this discouragement, God further ratified the promise with an oath (6:13-18),<sup>15</sup> yet this did nothing to speed its fulfilment. As Abraham and his direct descendants lived and passed away, the promise was outlined, and these important facts remain: The promise is two-tiered, earthly and heavenly. The promise is certain, guaranteed by "two things in which it is impossible for God to lie" (6:18).<sup>16</sup> And the promise is unfulfilled.

The question then arises, how is this promise to be fulfilled? How are the earthly and heavenly blessings to come to fruition? To answer this, the author introduces the concept of covenant and moves into the next epoch of salvation history.

### 1.2. *Moses, the Old Covenant, and partial, typological fulfilment*

We find that the promise not only was unfulfilled, but that, by itself, it was unfulfillable. Within the soteriological structure that Hebrews builds, a promise cannot be brought to fruition without a covenant built upon it.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, no covenant can exist by itself, but must be built upon a promise (ἐπὶ ... ἐπαγγελίαις νενομοθέτηται; 8:6).<sup>18</sup> Here, in Hebrews' discussion of covenant, we find the place where Hebrews is most unlike the rest of the New Testament. Unlike Paul, for example, where promise and covenant are largely synonymous when brought together (Gal 3:17),<sup>19</sup> Hebrews

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<sup>14</sup> Schenck 2007, 115-143.

<sup>15</sup> An oath which the author portrays as still relevant to his audience (6:19-20). See argument above in Chapter 4.

<sup>16</sup> That is, the promise and confirmatory oath. Cf. Attridge 1989, 181; Lane 1990, 1:152; Cockerill 2012, 289. Not the two oaths of Ps 2:7 and 110:4 (as Schröger 1968, 128-9), or "die den Christen gegebene Verheißung und der dem Christus geleistete Melchisedekschwur ψ 109,4" (as Gräßer 1990, 1:381).

<sup>17</sup> See the discussion above in chapter 5, particularly on Heb 9:16.

<sup>18</sup> See also the discussion above in chapter 5, particularly on Heb 8:6.

<sup>19</sup> "[Verse] 17 contains a number of terms that are either the same as or synonymous with those used in vv 15-16. The nouns διαθήκη (vv 15, 17) and ἐπαγγελία (vv 16, 17) are the most obvious," Richard Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990). See also Moo 2013, 230-1; deSilva 2018, 310-2.



uses the lexical distinction to signal the conceptual, structural distinction that he develops. In service of this, covenant language is reduced to its cultic significance,<sup>20</sup> as has been remarked previously. Similarly, in service to this soteriological structure, “promise” gains its narrow, unique meaning which it carries in Hebrews. While the author never states why a promise must be mediated by a covenant, it remains the case that the only two covenants that Hebrews acknowledges are mediations of a promise (8:6). Hebrews makes both covenants exclusively cultic, because the author believes issues pertaining to sin, purification, and access to God stand as a roadblock on the way to the promise’s fulfilment. It is only after a redeeming death occurs that the New Covenant can be instituted to bring the promise to fulfilment (9:15). Through his reflection on the Old and New Covenants, the author’s unfolding of history shows that it is the case that a promise must be mediated by a covenant if it is to be brought to fruition.

And within the author’s portrayal of salvation history, the first move towards promise-fulfilment was made in the covenant at Sinai, alternately called the first (8:7) or old (8:6, 13) covenant. Hebrews’ attitude towards this covenant is complex. While some have argued for a complete repudiation of the Old Covenant within Hebrews,<sup>21</sup> most recognise that this is not the case.<sup>22</sup> It is, however, always the lesser when compared to the New Covenant, but this is never portrayed as a comparison between bad and good, but rather between good and better.<sup>23</sup> For Hebrews, the Old Covenant is temporary (8:13), limited (9:9), and related to earthly things (9:23). But it remains good, genuinely given by God (8:9), and a valuable source of the speech of God even after it has been set aside as a covenant (12:25-27). It is precisely in its limited, this-worldly nature that we see how the Old Covenant fits into the author’s overall structure of salvation history. Indeed, if it were anything other than limited as it is, it would cause the author’s carefully constructed schema to fall apart.

So what, in Hebrews, does the Old Covenant do, and how does this relate to the author’s broader system? Is it after all anything other than an awkward parenthesis which the author sloppily accommodated because he could not successfully ignore it?<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> So Lehne 1990, 120.

<sup>21</sup> Such as Haber 2005.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. recent works by Moore 2015, 210; Ribbens 2016, 204.

<sup>23</sup> Moore 2015, 149-57.

<sup>24</sup> While none say this, the way the Old Covenant in Hebrews is treated by some scholars tends to give this impression. E.g. “Die Antwort auf die Frage, weshalb Gott dann überhaupt die zur Zeit der Geltung der πρώτη διαθήκη gar nicht erlangen konnten, gibt m.E. 11,40... Der Verfasser erblickt dahinter Gottes ‘geheimnisvollen’ Plan der Erwählung” (Rose 1989, 190); Backhaus 2009a, 162-3, where the Old Covenant *only* serves to provide types for the New. In terms of its own goals, it only “vergeblich suchten” (162).

While many treatments of the Old Covenant in Hebrews focus on what it could not do, it is worthwhile to examine the epistle's positive statements regarding the Old Covenant and its priestly administration. If we do so, we find that it did offer various forms of cleansing and purification. It cleansed the body from some form of defilement (9:10). It offered ordained gifts and sacrifices for sins to God (5:1, 8:3, 9:9), which were neither wholly efficacious (9:13) nor misguided. These sacrifices in some sense dealt with the unintentional sins of the people (9:7). The Old Covenant sacrifices also purified the earthly sanctuary to make it suitable for use in divine worship (9:23). All this to say that the Old Covenant was an operating, functioning cult and did have some benefits for those who participated in it, particularly relating to ritual purity,<sup>25</sup> and it accomplished some sort of limited good regarding sins and access to God in worship.

Yet, Hebrews is clear, the Old Covenant not only was temporary, but contained within itself the signs of its limitations, particularly through the repeated nature of its rites.<sup>26</sup> Its sacrifices could never atone for sin (9:13), nor cleanse the conscience of the worshipper (9:9). In fact, the need for repeated sacrifice is interpreted by the author as a sign that the sacrifices could not accomplish forgiveness (10:1,11). In a daring interpretive move, the author asserts that the main expression of the Old Covenant system, sacrifice, should have always been understood as a daily reminder of the system's limitations (10:3).<sup>27</sup> Repeated sacrifices and the repeated appointment of mortal priests, argues the author, should have been understood as evidence of planned obsolescence, proof that any Old Covenant worshipper should have known that such things would only be around until the time when God would solve humanity's plight (9:10).<sup>28</sup>

While this is largely a negative description, it can be seen as one last positive function of the Old Covenant and its system. It prepared the people for the New Covenant. This is, in part, what the author means when he calls it and its accoutrements a copy (8:5) and a shadow (8:5, 10:1). Types typify. Shadows outline that which casts them. So too, the author asserts, the Old Covenant pointed to the New Covenant, which would bring about the complete fulfilment of the promise.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For discussions on the relationship between sin, impurity, and levitical sacrifice, see Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, HBM 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005). For a reading of Hebrews in light of these treatments of the Hebrew scriptures, see Moffitt 2011, 256-71.

<sup>26</sup> Moore 2015, 166-8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>28</sup> Within the author's thought world, repetition is inherently a sign of inferiority when compared to singular, efficacious things. While repetition as such is not bad, within Hebrews it is never as determinative as things that are singular. See Moore 2015, 209-12.

<sup>29</sup> See argument above in Chapter 5, regarding Heb 8:6 and 9:15.

Yet is that the only relationship between the Old Covenant and the promise? Does it only point forward to its eventual fulfilment by typifying the New Covenant? Some have suggested as much, making it unclear why there should have even been an Old Covenant at all.<sup>30</sup> This could indeed work if one sees no real relationship between the Old Covenant and the promise,<sup>31</sup> but it does not fit the author's confident assertion of a common salvation shared by Old Covenant saints and his own audience. There must therefore be some relationship between the promise and the Old Covenant. There must be a way in which the faith and obedience demonstrated by Old Covenant saints connects them to the salvation mediated by Jesus through the New Covenant, since the author is emphatic that they will share in it (11:39-40). Hebrews is never explicit as to what this is, but the exegesis in the preceding chapters shows a way which coheres within the logic of Hebrews.<sup>32</sup>

The key is provided by Hebrews 8:6. Νυνὶ δὲ διαφορωτέρας τέτυχεν λειτουργίας, ὥς καὶ κρείττονός ἐστιν διαθήκης μεσίτης, ἐπὶ κρείττοσιν ἐπαγγελίας νενομοθέτηται. As argued earlier, the contrast here is not between the promises of the New Covenant and the lack of promises in the Old Covenant, far less that the Old Covenant was founded upon laws while the New Covenant was upon promises.<sup>33</sup> Rather, it is a contrast between the greater promises upon which the New Covenant is instituted and the lesser promises upon which the Old Covenant was based.<sup>34</sup> Both covenants were founded on promises. Both covenants inaugurate a priestly cultus which enables one to move from promise-word to promised good.<sup>35</sup> The difference is not *structural*, but in terms of content.

So what were the lesser promises upon which the Old Covenant was founded?

Hebrews leads us to see them as the earthly aspects of the Abrahamic promise. In keeping with the epistle's characteristic distinction by which that which is earthly is lesser and that which

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<sup>30</sup> As Backhaus's comment, "Was irdische Kulte im Irdischen vergeblich suchten, das hat Gottes Heilstat in Christus vom Himmel her endgültig und vollkommen geschenkt: die versöhnte Einheit des Menschen mit Gott" (2009a, 162). To emphasise the vanity of the Old Covenant is to make it seem meaningless.

<sup>31</sup> Again, see Rose 1989, 190. Not that he does deny these benefits to them (79), but that he makes an argument that leaves no intelligible way for them to attain the benefits.

<sup>32</sup> Chapter 5, above; see especially the discussion regarding Heb 8:6.

<sup>33</sup> *Contra* Attridge 1989, 221; Rose 1989, 73; Backhaus 2009d, 291. This would be a strange way to make this contrast, since the New Covenant's inauguration is described by νομοθετέω, the setting down of a law. It is not, as Attridge claims, a "juxtaposition of Law and promise" in a Pauline sense (1989, 221), since the New Covenant, is νενομοθέτηται upon promises.

<sup>34</sup> As argued above. See also Koester 2001, 383-4; Johnson 2006, 203. "Les alliances, l'ancienne comme la nouvelle, étaient structurées par des promesses divines" (Bénétreau 1989, 2:58).

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 5, particularly the discussion about Heb 9:15.

is heavenly is greater, they must be promises pertaining to earthly realities.<sup>36</sup> Land, posterity, and people were all legislated for and expected in the Old Covenant stipulations. Through the administration of and adherence to the regulations of the Old Covenant, the people were able to receive a fulfilment, in part, of the earthly aspects of the promise. It is not until after the Old Covenant is given that the descendants of Abraham came to possess the land. And while Joshua could not give them rest (4:8), he could give them the land as a type of the later Joshua. Further, a failure to obey the stipulations of the Old Covenant is precisely what caused the wilderness generation to fail to enter the land and possess it (3:7-19). That is, by refusing its covenantal mediation, they could not receive the goods promised to them by the earthly aspects of the Abrahamic promise. On the contrary, those who faithfully adhered to the covenantal regime did gain promises (11:33).<sup>37</sup> Indeed, throughout the rapid, positive summary of the history of Israel within the land (11:32-34), we see the earthly fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises meted out to those who faithfully lived during the administration of the Old Covenant. Covenants within Hebrews are the method by which God moves his people from the word of promise to the promised goods. These statements of blessing and failure suggest that the Old Covenant was adequately fulfilling its mission. It could not give rest or ultimate forgiveness, for these were not the promises upon which it was founded. But it did accomplish that for which it was sent.<sup>38</sup>

And, as argued earlier,<sup>39</sup> these fulfilments are best viewed not only as fulfilments of one tier of the promise, but also as typological fulfilments of the greater promises. This enables us to see the promised goods mediated by the Old Covenant, then, as *partial, typological fulfilments* of the promise. The promises brought about by the Old Covenant are both organically related to the promise with which Hebrews is most concerned (a relationship of part to whole) and typologically related to it as well (a relationship of shadow to reality). This twofold relationship can then account for the puzzle of Hebrews' seemingly inconsistent discussions of the relationship between the people of God under the Old Covenant and the people of God under the New.

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<sup>36</sup> So Chrysostom, *Hom. XIV*, Ps. Oecumenius *ad.loc.cit.*, Theophylact, *ad.loc.cit.*

<sup>37</sup> So Spicq, 1953, 2:363-4; Bénétreau, "La dialectique de la réalisation actuelle de certaines promesses et de la non-réalisation de la promesse plénière" (1989, 2:162). *Contra* Rose 1989, 183-4. Also see argument regarding ἐπιτυγχάνω in chapter 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Contra* those who see a complete disparagement of the Old Covenant cult within Hebrews, such as Attridge, "The deprecatory generalizing of the sacrifices has biblical precedents and is a way to express disdain for what may be considered antiquated and superficial offerings" (1989, 248); and Haber 2005, who sees a broader polemic against Judaism as a whole (119,121).

<sup>39</sup> See above Chapter 4, discussing Heb 6-7.

The typological distinction, most clearly brought out in Hebrews' discussion of the two covenants and their respective cults (Heb 7-10), accounts for the great difference in the author's accounts of the two covenantal groups. The experience of the Old Covenant people is regularly denigrated within Hebrews, and they are frequently denied a this-worldly experience of soteriological goods that the author asserts he and his audience presently enjoy.<sup>40</sup> Joshua could not give them rest (4:8), but the author and his audience enter into it even now (4:3).<sup>41</sup> Old Covenant worshippers could not have a cleansed conscience, but only a reminder of sins (10:2-3). On the other hand, those who draw near to God through Christ have their consciences purified from dead works (9:14) and sprinkled clean (10:22). Throughout their earthly sojourn, the author denies the Old Covenant generations any real experience of the heavenly or soteriological promised goods which he sees as the ultimate goal of the promise to Abraham. They instead only enjoyed pale shadows of these realities. This is because of the typological distinction. The earthly promises are not the better promises. The Old Covenant is not the New Covenant. And so, the better promised goods mediated by the New Covenant, were not available to those born under the Old Covenant administration during their earthly lives.

If that were all that Hebrews said, we would be forced to conclude that there really was nothing of salvation for those under the Old Covenant. Yet we do have more. We must not forget the organic, part-to-whole relationship between the lesser promises undergirding the Old Covenant and the higher tier of the promise. Through this organic unity, we can see how the author is able to eventually join Old Covenant saints with the New Covenant community and its benefits (11:39-40). This unity is best seen in Hebrews 11, where the distinction between the people

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<sup>40</sup> Provided one sees the author as describing present experience of these realities. So e.g. Pursiful 1993, 129, 134-7, but *contra* Käsemann 1984, 26-7; and Mark Nanos, "New or Renewed Covenantalism," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, Nathan Macdonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 183-8, 186. Nanos even goes so far to say that "the author and the addressees know that such a *new* covenant has not in fact been experienced" (186), since the perfect knowledge of the law mentioned in Jer 31 is not experienced by those who need to be taught by the letter itself.

<sup>41</sup> So Andrew T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 212-3; Bénétreau 1989, 1:172-3; Lane 1990, 1:99; Pursiful 1993, 129; Johnson 2006, 126-7. While the present entrance into rest is hotly debated, it does seem to be the best reading of the author's wording. He could easily have used the future if he so chose.

of the Old and New Covenants is practically erased.<sup>42</sup> It is also worth noting, though this is not usually brought out,<sup>43</sup> is that in Hebrews 11 we see not only a unity between the Old and New Covenant peoples, but also with those who lived before the first covenant was given (11:4-22). This should lead us to see that covenant is not in view here at all. The category of covenant could only create divisions within the people of God across time. Rather, it is promise that runs through this chapter as a uniting thread (11:9,11,13,17,33,39).<sup>44</sup> How, though, is promise able to have this function within the text?

While different parts of the promise were mediated at various times, for Hebrews' broader purposes, it cannot be stressed enough that it remains a single promise. It was the same for Abraham as for the audience (6:13-20).<sup>45</sup> Not only that, but Jesus is equally for Abraham and for the audience the forerunner and anchor of hope in this same, shared promise (6:14-20). Through the unity of the promise, Abraham too has a share in Christ. Similarly, the various Old Covenant saints in Hebrews 11 will only receive the promise — here emphatically singular<sup>46</sup> — along with the New Covenant community. Similarly, the same promising God is the God of the promise for people of all times. The confession of the New Covenant community is based on the fact that “he who promised is faithful” (10:23), just as it was for Sarah (11:11). Among other things,<sup>47</sup> faith in Hebrews is a trust in the God who made the promise. And the nature of this faith has been materially unchanged through the different periods of salvation history. Certainly this is one of the points of Hebrews 11. The author does not distinguish between Old Covenant faith and New Covenant faith because there is no such distinction. They are so much seen as the same that Moses' action by faith is portrayed as considering “reproach for Christ's sake greater wealth than the treasures of

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<sup>42</sup> Eisenbaum is right to note this (1997, 187-8) and be a bit puzzled by it. Yet, as others have also said, (George Howard, “Review of *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context*,” *JBL* 117:4 (1998), 754-6; Robert L. Brawley, “*The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context* (review),” *Shofar* 17 (1998), 151-2) it is not clear that the de-nationalisation of the people of God is the best solution here. Rather, as will be argued below, I believe that this close association across covenants is only possible in Hebrews on the basis of a unity of promise and a unity of the promising God.

<sup>43</sup> As can be seen by its absence in most commentaries and treatments.

<sup>44</sup> It is certainly no coincidence that the chapter which most unites the people of God across time features the highest density of promise language within the epistle. When the author wants to distinguish, he speaks of covenant. When he wants to unite, he speaks of promise.

<sup>45</sup> As argued above, *contra* Rose 1989, 70-2.

<sup>46</sup> While efforts to find a systematic cause for the author's singular and plural use of promise have proven fruitless (for a discussion on attempts to resolve this question, and those who argue it is impossible, see Rose 1989, 67, esp. fn. 43), it does not mean there is no reason for the author's varying usage. Here, the singular number of the promise contributes to the argument the author is making in this section.

<sup>47</sup> That is, I am not here discounting ethical aspects of faith.

Egypt” (11:26). Faith in Hebrews has nothing to do with covenant except insofar as it is trust that God will make a way for the promise to be realised through a covenant.<sup>48</sup>

So, across time, the author portrays the people of God as having the same faith in the same God who made the same promise. There is a fundamental unity underlying the divisions that Hebrews made earlier in his argument through discussing covenants.<sup>49</sup> While the saints of old could not, during their earthly life, enjoy the benefits which were to be mediated by the New Covenant, they none the less maintained a stake in the ultimate, salvific fulfilment of the promise once it was mediated by Christ. And this is exactly what we find in the author’s discussion. Abraham had no substantial enjoyment, but remained a stranger, because there was no covenant. Even when the author acknowledges that Abraham did receive the promise of a son in Isaac (6:13), this is later relativised. Later on, both Isaac and Jacob are simply “fellow heirs of the same promise” (11:9), not fulfilments of the promise. Similarly in the author’s discussion of the *Aqedah*, Isaac is portrayed as one through whom the promise would come, but not the promised fulfilment itself (11:17-18). Old Covenant saints had partial, typological fulfilment (11:32-38)<sup>50</sup> because they were under the administration of a limited, temporary covenant that was typologically related to the greater one to come. New Covenant community members now enjoy partial fulfilment of the full promise, but in the tension of “already but not yet,” since they live in the last days but before the return of the coming one (10:37). All the blessings that can be experienced within an untransformed world are now enjoyed, but the final fulfilment still awaits Christ’s return. It is to this experience of tension in the author’s development of salvation history that we now turn.

### 1.3 *Jesus, the New Covenant, and (not yet) complete fulfilment*

As was common in early Christian expectation, Hebrews divides the career of Christ into distinct comings of Christ. One occurred within living memory of the epistle’s composition (2:3) and inaugurated the last days (1:2). These “last days,” however, take on an aspect of waiting, of

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<sup>48</sup> Perhaps this is part of why faith is so absent in the portions of Hebrews dealing with covenant, cult, and the priesthood of Jesus. It may not be that the author would deny “faith in Jesus” in some sense, but rather that he does not find faith particularly fitting for his category of covenant. On the contrary, faith is the fitting response to the God who speaks, particularly to the God who speaks in the form of promise. This is why faith language and promise language are so often intertwined within Hebrews.

<sup>49</sup> While for different reasons, I largely agree with Backhaus’s statement that, “Sucht man also den geschichtstheologischen Leitbegriff des Hebr, so lautet dieser nicht *διαθήκη*, sondern *ἐπαγγελία* und — als Komplementärbegriff — *λαὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*” (2009a, 163).

<sup>50</sup> The otherwise puzzling claim here that they “gained promised goods” (11:33), seemingly in conflict with 11:13 and 11:39, is thus made completely clear. It does not need to be weakened to mean that they heard the promise-word (as Rose 1989, 183-4), but can be taken in the force it apparently has within the passage: that they did receive some of the things promised. They received the partial, typological fulfilment of the promise, or, in other words, the lesser promises.

being a *Zwischenheit*,<sup>51</sup> since the things begun in them by Jesus' first coming cannot be resolved until he returns. The characteristic administration of this between time is the New Covenant. As has been much studied, the relationship between Jesus, the New Covenant, and priesthood occupies a large portion of Hebrews' argument.<sup>52</sup> For this reason, priestly categories such as atonement<sup>53</sup> and purification<sup>54</sup> have occupied a large place in scholarly treatments of Hebrews in general and of its soteriology in particular. Often, if Hebrews' contribution to New Testament theology is summarised, it is in terms of this high priestly christology.

While this priestly christology (and soteriology) has certainly been Hebrews' most influential contribution, the text does have more to say about the work of Christ. Further, it must be seen that Christ's priesthood in Hebrews is subordinate to another goal. Since priesthood in Hebrews is a function of covenant,<sup>55</sup> and covenant is God's method of moving from promise-word to promised good,<sup>56</sup> Christ's priesthood, atonement, and mediation of the New Covenant serve the prior goal of bringing the promise to fulfilment. This is not in any way to reduce the significance of Christ's priestly work in Hebrews. Far to the contrary. It is to show that priestly work within the larger soteriological structure contained within Hebrews.

This is nothing other than to say that the author is consistent in his thought and argumentation. The promise showcased in Hebrews 4,6,7,8,10,11 and 12 is not disconnected from the New Covenant discussed in chapters 7-10. Hebrews does not present two conflicting, or even unrelated, soteriological systems, but one integrated scheme of promise and covenant. For the thought of Hebrews to be coherent, this must be the case. To try to give an account of promise that does not take covenant into account is to not fully discuss promise within Hebrews. Similarly, to give an account of covenant without relating it to the foundational promises of God is not to fully discuss covenant within Hebrews.

This contrast of promise and covenant raises the question of how the New Covenant priestly ministry of Jesus and the promise relate. That is, how do members of the New Covenant

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<sup>51</sup> Gräßer 1965, 158-60.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Lehne 1990; Dunnill, 1992; Hahn 2009; Backhaus 2009a.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Recent studies by Moffitt 2011; and Jamieson 2018.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Ina Willi-Plein, "Some Remarks on Hebrews from the Viewpoint of Old Testament Exegesis," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods — New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 25-36; Christian A. Eberhart, "Characteristics of Sacrificial Metaphors in Hebrews," in *ibid.*, 37-64; Nehemia Polen, "Leviticus and Hebrews...and Leviticus," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham, Daniel B. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, Nathan MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 213-228; and the discussion of כֹּהֵן in Moffitt 2011, 257-71.

<sup>55</sup> As argued above in Chapter 5. See also Lehne 1990, 97-9.

<sup>56</sup> As argued above in Chapter 5.



community experience the fulfilment of the promise? And then, how does the work of Christ in his first coming and during the *Zwischenheit* relate to the work of Christ vis-à-vis his second coming?

Again, Hebrews 8:6 leads us to a solution. The New Covenant was founded on better promises. That is, as I have said, the higher tier of the promise to Abraham, the heavenly blessings and benefits. This complex of heavenly benefits can simply be referred to as the promise (6:17, 10:36, 11:4,39), though when viewed in respect to its various benefits it can be referred to as plural promises (6:12, 7:6, 8:6, 11:17),<sup>57</sup> From the time of its initial statement to Abraham until the coming of Christ, there was no way for the promise to come to fruition. The way was closed (9:9).<sup>58</sup> So Jesus came to make a way (10:20). And through his priestly work, his sacrifice of himself, he did just that.<sup>59</sup>

Hebrews presupposes an alienation between humanity and God.<sup>60</sup> This alienation can only be resolved through purification and atonement.<sup>61</sup> Because of sin and defilement, humans cannot of themselves draw near to God, and as such death — which leads to the presence of the soul before God the judge (καὶ καθ' ὅσον ἀπόκειται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαξ ἀποθανεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κρίσις; 9:27)— is a fearful thing (2:15). Nowhere does Hebrews suggest that the fundamental problem is materiality,<sup>62</sup> but everywhere humanity's problem is cast in the language of sin and defilement.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps it is just for this reason that the promise requires a covenant — a priestly administration — before it could be fulfilled. While the promise cannot be flattened to the unmediated presence of God, many of the entailed blessings, such as God's own rest (4:1-5) and the city of God (11:13-16, 12:22-24) do take place in his presence. As such, fulfilment of the promise to a people who have not received the proper purgation is either unthinkable to the author, or else a horror (10:31, 12:29). So the priestly work of Christ is not an add-on, an accident, or unconnected to the promise. Nor is the

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<sup>57</sup> Though this does not fully account for the variation of singular and plural in Hebrews' promise language, it does go some way to resolving the question. The number of the promise is, at least in part, a way of viewing the promise. It can be seen in respect to its constituent details or as a unified whole.

<sup>58</sup> It is striking that the author does not simply say that a way to the heavenly sanctuary did not exist, or that it was unavailable, but that it was actively *closed*. Something prevented access.

<sup>59</sup> While the exact content of what Jesus offered is debated (with Moffitt arguing that he offered his life (2011, 278-85) and Jamieson (2018, 128-179, esp. summary on 178-9) arguing that he offered his death), Hebrews does at one point say that Jesus offered himself (9:25).

<sup>60</sup> "The primary theme of Hebrews may be stated as a predicament and a solution, both expressed in cultic terms. The predicament is humanity's experience of separation from God because of sin" (Pursiful 1993, 155-6).

<sup>61</sup> Pursiful 1993, 156; Moffitt 2011, 301-2; Jamieson 2018, 181-2.

<sup>62</sup> *Contra* Eisele 2003, 129, 375-7.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Heb 1:3, 3:13, 9:14,26; 10:18, 12:15.

promise reducible to things that the covenant has not yet brought to reality.<sup>64</sup> Rather, the promise and the human problem of sin, death, and alienation from God, which endangers the reception of the promised goods are the reason for why the New Covenant and its priesthood were given.

Here too we find the unity of the seemingly disparate and often confusing statements regarding Jesus' defeat of the power of death (2:9,14-15; 9:15). While such language is commonplace within early Christian proclamation, often it has seemed a bit alien within Hebrews' broader depiction of salvation.<sup>65</sup> But these statements fit together if we understand that Hebrews is chiefly concerned with the fulfilment of the promise, and that death while alienated from God was the primary obstacle to the promise's fulfilment. So then, the priestly work of Christ in the New Covenant makes it possible for the promise to be fulfilled by eliminating humanity's alienation from God and making a clear way of approach to God (10:20). Once the way is open, the author further argues that the actual experience of members of the New Covenant community changes. The promise is not merely fulfillable, but is in some sense fulfilled.

And here we come to the paradox of Hebrews' description of salvation accomplished and experienced. At times, Hebrews makes lofty statements. The world has entered the last days (1:2). Members of the New Covenant community in some way are now entering into rest (4:3) and stand now within the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-24). Yet suffering (10:32), temptation (2:18), sin (3:13), and the possibility of ultimate failure (6:4-8) still remain. The tension between what Hebrews claims New Covenant members have and what he describes as their experience is great.<sup>66</sup> It is so great that it has led at least one scholar to conclude that the New Covenant has *not* in fact been inaugurated at all.<sup>67</sup> This is certainly too far, and does not take Hebrews' explicit positive statements seriously enough, but it does show how severe this tension in Hebrews can be. This tension leads us to the author's portrayal of promise and eschatology.

## 2. Promise and eschatology

As should now be clear, Hebrews is very concerned that his audience should not fail to receive the promise (4:1-3), but rather that they should obtain it (10:36). This final reception will not happen until the return of Christ (10:36-39). This return of Christ will also be the shaking, and

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<sup>64</sup> *Contra* Backhaus 2009a, 162.

<sup>65</sup> Jamieson's recent work on the relationship of the death of Christ and his atoning work did not particularly treat these passages at length, because they do not fit into (and he suggests were prior convictions to) Hebrews' *cultic* system of atonement. "Hebrews, as it were, already knows that Jesus died for others (2:9), that his death enacted penal sanctions due to others (9:15)" (2018, 181).

<sup>66</sup> Käsemann's *The Wandering People of God* (1984) is largely an extended meditation on this tension, ultimately placing the emphasis far on the side of the negative aspects of this experience.

<sup>67</sup> Nanos 2009, 186.

change, of both the heavens and the earth (12:25-29). This cataclysmic event will be once for all, cosmic, and both destructive and transformative.<sup>68</sup> Some of created reality will remain, though transformed in a way not specified by the author. What remains will then take part in an unshakeable kingdom (12:28), which will be received by those who heed God's speech (12:25-28).<sup>69</sup> Here too we find the conceptual unity of Hebrews' twin depiction of Christ as king and priest.<sup>70</sup> His priesthood serves to prepare a people for his kingdom. Were they not purified, forgiven, freed from the curse of death, and re-joined to God as his people, the faithful throughout the ages could not fittingly be members of Christ's kingdom. They would be destroyed in the great shaking, burnt up by the consuming fire that God is. But now that Christ has come as high priest of the now-present (or coming (9:11)?)<sup>71</sup> blessings, those who have faith preserve their lives (10:39) and receive the unshakeable kingdom of Christ (12:28).

And so at last we come to a complete explanation of Hebrews 11:39-40 in light of the author's systematic view of salvation history. Again, it says, Καὶ οὗτοι πάντες μαρτυρηθέντες διὰ τῆς πίστεως οὐκ ἔκομίσαντο τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἡμῶν κρείττον τι προβλεψαμένου, ἵνα μὴ χωρὶς ἡμῶν τελειωθῶσιν.<sup>72</sup> The saints of the past did not experience the complete fulfilment of the promised good. Not only that, they had no direct experience of it, since there was not yet any covenant to mediate the full promise to them. Those of the Old Covenant had types and shadows, but the reality was kept from them. Nor did they find the promise's fulfilment at death. At the time of the author's writing, those saints of old still had not received the fulfilment. But they did have faith in the God who promised, that he would faithfully bring about what he said. And so they lived

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<sup>68</sup> Ellingworth 1993, 688. *Pace* Cockerill's comment, "The question as to whether the eternal abode of the blessed is heaven or a renewed earth would probably have seemed strange to the author of Hebrews" (2012, 668 fn. 34), by conceiving of the eternal state as a kind of οἰκουμένη, the author portrays it as a world/universe of some sort. While admittedly this new world can be described as heavenly, it is not improper to say that the universe, in Hebrews' conception, is partially removed and partially transformed.

<sup>69</sup> The use of the word receive here, παραλαμβάνω, not enter, is interesting. It suggests some kind of co-regency, likely influenced by Ps 8.

<sup>70</sup> While the author likely derives this depiction from Ps 110, at least in part, it is not well grounded to assume he uncritically incorporated his sources, especially a source as fundamental as Ps 110 (While Jared Compton certainly goes too far in seeing Ps 110 undergirding every expository section of Hebrews (*Psalms 110 and the Logic of Hebrews*, LNTS 537 (London: T & T Clark, 2015), cf. summary on 165-8), he certainly is right in showing its paramount importance for the epistle). From Ps 110, the author discerns that Jesus was both king and priest, but the dynamic of how those two roles relate was for him to develop.

<sup>71</sup> A good many witnesses read "coming," μελλόντων, here, including Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, as well as the Byzantine text and the Latin versions. P46 and Vaticanus, however read "which have come," γενομένων, which the NA28 prefers as original.

<sup>72</sup> To become perfect here is best viewed as receiving the full of God's salvific benefits, and thus reaching the full goal for which God made one. For more along these lines, see Peterson 2009, especially 156-9.

faithfully, looking forward and greeting the promise from yet a long way off. This was because God had prepared something better to be given to the New Covenant community and so that there might be an ultimate unity in the people of God.

What is this something better? As argued in chapter 6, it refers to a lived experience of some of the benefits of the promise while on the earth. That is, the New Covenant faithful enjoy a partial but real experience of the full promise even upon the earth, a thing denied to those of old. The New Covenant community really now has a clean conscience and full forgiveness, and is in some way present before God and able to enter into his rest. They share in the benefits of the age to come as far as it is possible to do so within this present age. Yes, they still are sojourners and aliens, but they are not wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. They are rather on the road home, and the air is already suffused with the savour of it.<sup>73</sup> This fits with the portrayal of the New Covenant within Hebrews. The New Covenant community now has a better priest who serves in heaven (4:14), access to the throne of God as a throne of grace (4:16), complete forgiveness and a washed conscience (9:9; 10:2,22), and has in some way come to the eternal city (12:22). All these have some bearing on the present experience of the New Covenant community, and they are all benefits that the Old Covenant saints did not have. New Covenant saints indeed are in a better position than those of old. Their current life is something better than the utterly dispossessed wandering of those before them.

Yet there will be an ultimate unity. Neither group will be made perfect without the other. Because all are united by faith in the same promise and the same promising God, they will all together share in its final fulfilment. Perfection, unshakeable standing in the kingdom of Christ, will be given to all members of the people of God of all ages when the coming one comes (10:37). Death was not what brought them to fulfilment, but neither was it an impediment for those who had faith that God is able even to raise the dead in order to fulfil his promise (11:17-19).

The promise is the organising principle, along with the covenants built upon it, of the author's understanding of salvation history and its culmination in the age to come. The promise is the eschatological hope held out to believers of all time within Hebrews. The promise, and faith in it and its God, is the fundamental principle of unity among the people of God across time. While the author certainly held other themes at the centre of his theological world as well, promise certainly had an important position among them.

### **3. Promise and hermeneutics**

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<sup>73</sup> "The author of Hebrews envisions the hearers of Hebrews as a community traveling to the heavenly homeland" (Easter 2014, 196). So also Laansma 1997, 310.

Reflecting upon the conclusions of the previous sections, I am led to see the ways in which promise served as an orienting category for the author of Hebrews. In this section, I will argue that this is not only true for the author's theology, but that it was also an orienting principle for how the author interpreted his scriptures.

The issue of Hebrews' interpretive method has received a good bit of scholarly attention. Some have tried to trace a Palestinian Jewish, or even early Rabbinic methodology within the text.<sup>74</sup> Others have tried reading Hebrews as a disciple of Philo's methods,<sup>75</sup> or as a member of broader trends within Middle Platonism.<sup>76</sup> Others still have appealed to broad (and often ill defined) categories of midrash to explain the author's interpretive choices.<sup>77</sup> Still others have sought for a theological, usually christological, foundation for his hermeneutic.<sup>78</sup> Others, either as *a priori* method,<sup>79</sup> or as the result of a detailed study,<sup>80</sup> have asserted that the author used a mix of hermeneutical strategies, particularly both early Rabbinic and Hellenistic/Alexandrian Jewish.<sup>81</sup> And finally, still others see the author's interpretation as motivated by his rhetorical ends and a process of recontextualising the scriptures to his own situation.<sup>82</sup> I do not find an arbitrary reading strategy within Hebrews, but beyond that I will be relatively agnostic in this section on most issues of hermeneutic method in Hebrews. Rather, I seek to argue for what is admittedly only one aspect of the author's larger interpretive method, one piece among the set of lenses the author used when interpreting the texts of his scriptures. In particular, I will investigate how the theme of

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<sup>74</sup> Ellingworth, *The Old Testament in Hebrews: Exegesis, Method and Hermeneutics*, PhD dissertation (1977) 386-93; Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews*, WUNT2 260, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). Docherty draws on insights from Arnold Goldberg, "The Rabbinic View of Scripture," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, eds. P.R. Davies and R.T. White (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 153-60; and *Rabbinische Texte als Gegenstand der Auslegung. Gessamelte Schriften II*, eds. M. Schlüter and P. Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

<sup>75</sup> Spicq 1952, 1:39-91; Stefan Nordgaard Svendsen, *Allegory Transformed*, WUNT2 269 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). Though it must be noted that Svendsen asserts that Hebrews only took hermeneutical methods from Philo, and that "Philo and the writer of Hebrews would have agreed on practically nothing" (248).

<sup>76</sup> Gräßer 1965; Eisele 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Buchanan 1981, XIX-XXI.

<sup>78</sup> Hughes 1979, 101-10; Angela Rascher, *Schriftauslegung und Christologie im Hebräerbrief*, BZNW 153 (New York: De Gruyter, 2007). Specifically, Rascher argues that the Christ event caused the author to reinterpret the Old Testament scriptures, but also provided a unity and continuity for those Scriptures in God's saving works (203-4).

<sup>79</sup> Schenck 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Schröger 1968.

<sup>81</sup> Significantly, while Schröger sees similarities between Hebrews and Philo's works, he denies direct literary influence (1968, 306).

<sup>82</sup> Attridge 1989, 23-8.

promise led the author to see both statements of success and, paradoxically, curses within his scriptures as expressions of the promise. Further, and for this reason, I will argue that promise also influenced the way in which the author interpreted the motivation of the Old Covenant saints.

We find evidence of promise's role in the author's hermeneutic in some of the most perplexing interpretive moves within Hebrews. First, we turn to the author's use of Ps 95 in Heb 3-4. The psalm is unambiguously a warning which recounts the divine rejection of the wilderness generation and tells others not to follow their example of disobedience. And while rhetorically the author does use the psalm to warn against unbelief and disobedience, that is not the only inference he makes. Rather, the author takes the harshest statement from the psalm, the curse that εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου (3:11), and reads it not only as evidence that there is such a thing as God's rest, but also that it is promised to God's faithful and obedient people (4:1). Similarly, in his citation of Hag 2:6, in which the destructive judgment of both the heavens and the earth is proclaimed, he finds evidence of hope. Again, precisely in the negative detail of the shaking of all things, he sees a promise of an unshakeable kingdom (12:26-28).<sup>83</sup> In each case, the curse itself provides a description for the promise. They shall not enter rest, so there must be a promise of rest that is the inverse of the curse. Everything will be shaken, therefore it must be the case that the promise entails something unshakeable. This is not only trying to read between the lines looking for hope. Rather the author's convictions about the promise lead him to see the curses and judgments he quotes as themselves necessarily related to the promise. Any curse is the opposite of the promise, its deprivation. Therefore these negative statements themselves stand as testimonies to the promise for the author.<sup>84</sup>

This is a surprising interpretive move, and must be seen as such. On both occasions that the author quotes a declaration of judgment found in his scriptures, he sees the promise in the precise details of the curse. It is as if the curses of scripture are, to the author, inverses of the promise. To see a curse or judgment proclaimed is enough for the author to mirror read the details of the promise. This does not seem to be accidental, as it is crucial to his argument and exhortation at both instances. Rather, this is indicative of the author's method. The promise

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<sup>83</sup> As Lane notes, "It is not immediately apparent to a modern reader that there is an allusion to the reception of 'an unshakable kingdom' in the quotation of Hag 2:6 LXX" (1990, 2:484). His appeal to Vanhoye's solution that sees a reference to Ps 95 in the word σαλεύειν does not seem to find enough basis in the text of Heb 12 itself. ("Ὁ δὲ οὐρανὸς ἐκταθῆναι καὶ ἡ γῆ σαλευθῆναι" dans l'épître aux Hébreux," *Bib* 45 (1964): 248-53.

<sup>84</sup> This is more than the theme of "salvation through judgment" (cf. James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011)), in which God's acts of judgment on one group bring salvation for another (such as the Exodus). Rather, this is an inverse reading of declarations of judgment to sketch out the shape of salvation.

occupies such a place in the author's understanding of salvation and God's dealings with humanity that it thoroughly colours his reading of curses and judgment. After all, what could judgment be other than to be deprived of the promise?

We find confirmation of this in the way the author treats something his sacred texts portray as a success: the conquest of the promised land under Joshua.<sup>85</sup> The Greek text of Joshua is clear that Joshua succeeded and did give the people rest. Καὶ ἔλαβεν Ἰησοῦς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, καθότι ἐνετείλατο κύριος τῷ Μωϋσῇ, καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοὺς Ἰησοῦς ἐν κληρονομίᾳ Ἰσραὴλ ἐν μερισμῷ κατὰ φυλὰς αὐτῶν. καὶ ἡ γῆ κατέπαυσεν πολεμουμένη (Josh 11:23).<sup>86</sup> Even more emphatic is Josh 21:44, καὶ κατέπαυσεν αὐτοὺς κύριος κυκλόθεν, καθότι ὥμοσεν τοῖς πατράσιν αὐτῶν.<sup>87</sup> This seems a challenge to Hebrews' scheme.<sup>88</sup> Joshua not only gave them rest, but in such a way that it was as (καθότι) the Lord had sworn to the fathers, presumably Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet this is precisely what Hebrews denies. Εἰ γὰρ Ἰησοῦς κατέπαυσεν, οὐκ ἂν περὶ ἄλλης ἐλάλει μετὰ ταῦτα ἡμέρας (Heb 4:8).

So how does the author deny what the book of Joshua affirms? The near solution is that the psalmist would not have spoken of a remaining rest if it had already been given (4:6-8). But this neglects a crucial point: Psalm 95 does *not* mention an outstanding rest. It only suggests one if one reads in the way in which the author does. That is, it only speaks of another rest if we hear it through the filter of the promise.<sup>89</sup> Once we do, however, the author's understanding of Joshua becomes clear. Because of his bedrock conviction in the promise — God's plan throughout salvation history that can only be fulfilled across the two comings of Christ — he is able both to read mirror images of the promise amidst judgment and to relativise the successes of Old Covenant saints. While the author would not deny the good of the conquest — he places it among the good things accomplished by faith (11:30-34) — he does deny its ultimacy. If pressed, it is possible that the author would say that Joshua did give them a kind of rest, much like how some did gain promises (11:33). Yet he would necessarily relativise it. And he could do so easily. Joshua,

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<sup>85</sup> The incongruity here has been noticed before see Westcott 1920, 98; Lane 1990, 2:101, Cockerill 2012, 209-10. Bruce tries smoothing this over by saying, "The 'rest' which they were in danger of forfeiting through stubbornness of heart must have been something different from the 'rest ... from all their enemies round about' which God had given to Israel in Joshua's day," and "he is more concerned to point the contrast between the temporal 'rest' which Israel entered under Joshua and the true rest which is still reserved for the people of God" (1990, 108, 109). Yet the author does *not* make this contrast. He does not say Joshua gave them a lesser rest here, but that he did not give them rest.

<sup>86</sup> See also Josh 14:15.

<sup>87</sup> See also, Josh 23:1.

<sup>88</sup> Namely, it seems that Joshua *did* give them rest, which the author reserves for the New Covenant community.

<sup>89</sup> Gräßer's contention that the logic comes from a prejudice against earthly things, "Kanaan *kann* gar nicht die Katapausis sein, weil es *irdisch ist*" (emphasis original, 1990, 1:215), can partly be true, but the issue is not just that of *the* rest, but whether Joshua gave them rest (κατέπαυσεν) at all.

the lesser Ἰησοῦς, could have gained a partial, typological fulfilment fitting his position as the leader of the people under the Old Covenant.<sup>90</sup> The typology is obvious and directly in line with how Hebrews reads the scriptures throughout the epistle.<sup>91</sup> So then, we find the promise again guiding the author's interpretation. It finds blessings in curses. It relativises past successes. And, as we will now examine, it provides the basis for past acts of faithfulness. Even where it is not explicit in the texts the author is interpreting, to the author the motivation for faithfulness is always the promise.

Abraham is paradigmatic for Hebrews' discussion of faith, faithfulness, and pious action.<sup>92</sup> As such, Abraham is the centre of the author's portrayal of the relationship of promise and faith. While Jesus is the perfect example of faithfulness,<sup>93</sup> Abraham's faithfulness is given more discussion than Christ's. This is not to say that the author viewed Abraham as more faithful than Christ, but rather that when he looked to the past for an example of the audience's role and the demands placed upon them, Abraham was a more ready example than Christ. Perhaps this is because Jesus' faithfulness was both an example for (12:1-4) and on behalf of the audience, whereas Abraham's was only an example.<sup>94</sup> And, significantly for our purposes, the author cannot talk about the faithfulness of Abraham without speaking about the promise as well. Abraham's faith and faithfulness were his responses to the promise. This is true both in 6:13-7:10 and in 11:8-19. Abraham is always both the paradigm of faith and "he who has the promises" (7:6).

This association between faith, faithful action, and the promise is not insignificant. As argued earlier, faith is the response to the God who speaks, particularly to the God who speaks in promises. Abraham left the land and wandered because he believed he was promised a true homeland and city (11:8-14). He, along with Sarah, looked forward to Isaac because God had promised offspring (11:11). He sacrificed Isaac because he knew that God had promised to bring his

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<sup>90</sup> Richard Ounsworth in fact argues that Joshua's *success* where Moses failed lends to Joshua typology throughout the epistle (*Joshua Typology in the New Testament*, WUNT 2 238 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 165-72).

<sup>91</sup> For more on Joshua typology in Hebrews, see Attridge 1989, 130, Richard Ounsworth 2012, and Whitfield 2013. Whitfield however seems to go too far, seeing Joshua typology (both regarding the son of Nun and that of Jehozadak) more frequently than one should. Cockerill 2012 is probably too emphatic when he says, "the pastor [his name for the author] develops no Joshua/Jesus typology," (209).

<sup>92</sup> As he also is elsewhere, such as in Paul. For Abraham's frequent role as "hero *par excellence*" in Jewish tradition and in Hebrews, see Eisenbaum 1997, 53, 154-63; and for a specific discussion on his faith in early Jewish tradition, see Saß 1995, 403-7.

<sup>93</sup> Easter 2014, 163-4; Christopher A. Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith*, WUNT 2 338 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 2-6, *passim*.

<sup>94</sup> It could also reflect the possibility that the author and/or audience had a written text regarding Abraham's deeds to which he could refer, but did not possess one for the life of Jesus.



blessing through Isaac. So, unwaveringly confident in the promise and that God would fulfil it in the face of impossibility, he offered his only son precisely because he had received the promise (11:17-19). All of Abraham's life that we are shown in Hebrews was one of faith and faithfulness. And the author's consistent interpretation of Abraham's faithfulness is that he was motivated by the promise.

And this is not true only for Abraham, but for all the saints of old. The conclusion to Hebrews 11 is telling. "All these, although they were commended through their faith, did not receive the promise" (11:39). Why end his discussion of faith this way? His use of the participle provides a clue. *Μαρτυρηθέντες* is unambiguously concessive in this passage, which suggests that something contrary to expectation is happening here. The inference is clear. For their faithfulness, all the saints of old described in Hebrews 11 should have received the promise. Why? The logic demands only one answer. Their faith was in the promise. It was what they looked forward to. It enabled them to endure and hold fast.

Within Hebrews, the promise is portrayed as the main motivation for all those of old who lived faithfully. That is to say, the author's conviction regarding the promise affects the way in which he interprets the stories of all the faithful of the past. If they endured, if they were faithful, they did so because of the promise, regardless of whether the scriptures say anything to suggest this. The author is not bothered by the lack of specific evidence that those discussed in Hebrews 11 knew of or hoped in the promise. To him, their faith and faithfulness is the evidence.

The author's convictions regarding the promise colour his reading of his sacred texts.<sup>95</sup> It is by no means the only lens through which the author interpreted, but it certainly is one of them, and one to which the author made frequent recourse.<sup>96</sup> No account of the author's interpretive method can be complete without an adequate understanding of how thoroughly the promise coloured the author's eyes.

#### 4. Promise and Exhortation

The author's concern with the promise is far more than historical. While promise is pivotal in both the author's understanding of salvation history and his interpretive method, it is also central

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<sup>95</sup> Sam Williams argues similarly regarding Paul in Galatians, demonstrating how his convictions about the promise (though there tied up with the Holy Spirit) guided how he read the Abraham narrative (1988, 714-6).

<sup>96</sup> In the language of Susan Docherty (2009; 107-12, 179-81, 196-9), developed in interaction with the work of Alexander Samely (cf. "Scripture's Implicature: The Midrashic Assumptions of Relevance and Consistency," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36 (1992):167-205; *Rabbinic Interpretation of Scripture in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Forms of Rabbinic Literature and Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)), the primacy of the promise and the certainty of God's fulfilling it in Christ are "scriptural axioms" for the author's interpretive method.

in his hortatory purpose. It is not only the case that the promise was the motivation for saints gone by, but also that the author holds it out as a strong motivation for his own audience as well.

Promise, then, is near the heart of the author's purpose for the epistle.

While the precise purpose of Hebrews and its occasion have been the subject of much debate and little clarity,<sup>97</sup> it is universally acknowledged that exhortation is key to the epistle.<sup>98</sup> While attempts to classify Hebrews as deliberative rhetoric are often forced,<sup>99</sup> its repeated shifts between exposition and exhortation,<sup>100</sup> coupled with the severity of its warnings and the pathos of its attempts at persuasion, suggest that the author was seriously concerned with eliciting a response from the audience. And while the need for this exhortation is debated, most agree that it aims at a renewed allegiance to Christ and an enduring faithfulness in the face of real or imagined difficulties.<sup>101</sup>

The author uses multiple strategies to pursue his hortatory aims. His exposition on the nature and work of Christ is frequently tied to exhortation.<sup>102</sup> Further, harsh warnings and rebukes (3:12-19, 6:4-8, 12:25-29) are used to rouse the audience and frighten them with the prospect of divine displeasure. Examples are given to emulate (Heb 11). Moving imagery is employed (12:22-24). Authoritative scriptures are interpreted (e.g. 1:5-13, 3:7-11). Most every tool available to the ancient rhetorician is employed by the author to exhort his audience.<sup>103</sup> And here too, among all this hortatory material, we find the promise occupying a prominent place.

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<sup>97</sup> For a summary of the various positions and debates surrounding the occasion and purpose of the letter, see, Mosser 2004, 15-21; and Mackie 2007, 12-17.

<sup>98</sup> E.g. Otto Kuss 1958, 1-12, 65-80, Michel 1966, 27; Attridge 1989, 21; Dunnill 1992, 46; George Guthrie 1994, 140-3; Mackie 2007, 19-20

<sup>99</sup> The most recent and thorough of these is Michael Wade Martin and Jason A. Whitlark's *Inventing Hebrews: Design and Purpose in Ancient Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). They divide the work into the traditional parts of a deliberative speech of *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *peroratio* (cf. summary on 251-3), which quickly becomes complicated by a using a mixed "disjointed *narratio* with *argumentatio*," two *exordia*, and two *perorationes*. Across these divisions, they further divide the book into five sections centred around covenantal themes. By design, the work deals relatively little with the linguistic/discourse analysis outlines of Hebrews developed by Guthrie 1994 and Westfall 2005. As with many attempts to pin down or structure Hebrews, it has some good insights, but struggles to reflect all the realities of the text. For a much more tentative association of Hebrews and ancient rhetoric, see Hermut Löhr, "Reflections of Rhetorical Terminology in Hebrews" in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods — New Insights*, Biblical Interpretation 75, ed. Gabriella Gellardini (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 199-210.

<sup>100</sup> As noted by structural analyses of Hebrews such as Guthrie 1994 and Westfall 2005.

<sup>101</sup> Mackie 2007, 11-17; Richardson 2012, 223

<sup>102</sup> Such as the transitions from discussing Christ's priesthood to encouraging the audience in light of it. E.g. (4:14, 10:19-21).

<sup>103</sup> Martin and Whitlark 2018, 13, *passim*.

The strongly hortatory role of promise is shown by its motivational use in describing the faithful lives of past saints, its distribution within the epistle, and the way the broader social function of promises is leveraged in the epistle.

#### *4.1 Promise and motivation for those past and present*

As has been examined above, the author presents the promise as a key motivating factor in the faithfulness of past saints. In those places where the author shows how the promise benefitted those of old, he turns to the audience and calls them to similar endurance on the basis of the promise. In Heb 6:13-20, when the author discusses the promise to and faith of Abraham, he seamlessly transitions from Abraham to the audience, saying that they have reason to be confident just as he did. The smoothness of this transition has caused some scholars confusion, leading them to introduce a second promise and oath not mentioned in the passage.<sup>104</sup> But the paragraph stands well as it is. God made a promise to Abraham. He confirmed that promise with an oath. Therefore, because of two things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, the audience should have strong encouragement (6:13-18).<sup>105</sup> The exhortation of this passage is grounded in the promise, that unchangeable saving word of God which was made all the more certain by an oath, and which is guaranteed by Christ the forerunner (6:20). This same Christ, as priest in heaven, mediates this promise and makes its reception possible.

This grounding of exhortation in promise is also indicated at the end of Hebrews 11. None of the saints of old, no matter how great, received the promise (11:39). But the audience, if they too have faith, will be perfected, that is, they will receive the promise along with them (11:40). Hebrews 11 stands as an encomium to faith, but its purpose is not merely to praise, but rather to spur the audience on to faith and faithfulness. In part, this is accomplished through an example list.<sup>106</sup> But it is also accomplished by holding out a reward, the promise, mentioned throughout Hebrews 11 and again at its close. This final flourish on the discussion of faith finishes by putting the promise before the audience's eyes. This promise, that which motivated the saints of old, is also to be the basis of the audience's own faithfulness.

#### *4.2. Promise's distribution within Hebrews*

The vast majority of the promise language within Hebrews occurs within hortatory sections. This at least suggests that the author sees promise language as particularly suited to exhortation.

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<sup>104</sup> E.g. Schröger 1968, 128-9; Gräßer 1990, I:381.

<sup>105</sup> These two things are the promise and the confirmatory oath, as argued above. So Attridge 1989, 181; Lane 1990, 1:152; Cockerill 2012, 289.

<sup>106</sup> Cosby 1988, 85-90; Eisenbaum 1997, 84-88.

Of the 18 uses of promise language in the epistle, 15 serve hortatory purposes.<sup>107</sup> Among the other three uses, one is an epithet for Abraham (7:6), and the other two are those which elucidate the relationship between promise and covenant (8:6, 9:15).<sup>108</sup> As such, promise is overwhelmingly hortatory within Hebrews, unlike covenant. It also seems to occupy a particular place of transition within Hebrews' structure. Three times promise is used to transition from warnings to encouragement (4:1, 6:12, 12:26). Once it is used at the transition between discrete units within Hebrews (10:36).<sup>109</sup> In particular, it closes the doctrinal discussion of covenant (10:23,26) and aids the transition to the hortatory faith section. This suggests that promise is not only hortatory within Hebrews, but that it sometimes serves as a structural marker when the author wished to move to a section of encouragement.

#### *4.3. Promise and its broader social function*

This hortatory function is not surprising, but rather fits within the natural use of promise language within Greco-Roman culture, and human parlance more broadly.<sup>110</sup> Further, Worley's study in particular draws on sociological theory to show how promises function as a way of building confidence.<sup>111</sup> That is to say, there is significance in the author's choice to use promise language to describe an aspect of divine commitment. As has been stated before, and as these studies suggest,<sup>112</sup> there was no well established precedent of speaking of God's commitments as promises. Therefore the author's choice of promise is a choice to use language that inspires confidence, that confers a sense of encouragement. Whether this was conscious or unintentional, we cannot know. It could be that the word just felt right. Regardless, by using the language of promise the author tied this salvific theme directly to his purpose of exhorting the audience to continued faith and faithfulness.

### **5. Conclusion: Promise in the theology of Hebrews**

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<sup>107</sup> 4:1; 6:12,13,15,17; 10:23,36;11:9 (2x),11,17,33,39; 12:26.

<sup>108</sup> Their irregular placement justifies the weight given to them earlier in this thesis in using these passages to determine the structure of promise and covenant within Hebrews.

<sup>109</sup> Guthrie 1994, places the shift between 10:39 and 11:1, which is true, yet does not comment on the transitional nature of 10:32-39, which is discussed in Westfall 2005, 245-7.

<sup>110</sup> Worley 2019, 22-28, with the exception of promises used to deceive on 26-27. While Conway argues that Greco-Roman literature "had minimal influence" on Pauline usage (2014, 74) and that the parallels are rather few (71-75), the specific rhetorical functions of the examples he enumerates do line up with the notion that promises are inherently hortatory.

<sup>111</sup> Worley 2019, 27-28.

<sup>112</sup> Saß 1995, 497-502, where he situates promise as part of Paul's radical reconceptualisation of how to interpret scripture in light of Christ, taking much of the place of covenant. Similarly, Conway 2014, 194-8.

Hopefully, the theological synthesis above shows the value of the exegetical work done in this thesis. Promise is woven throughout the thought and argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews and plays an important role in the various goals of the epistle. The author seems to have incorporated the promise into nearly every aspect of his thought. Promise is the basis of the soteriological system of Hebrews, in which promise provides the foundation for a covenant, which enacts a law, which legislates a priesthood, which ministers to worshippers so that they might be able to receive the promised good. Promise provides unity to the people of God throughout the ages, whether they lived before the first covenant, under the Old Covenant, or now under the New Covenant. The promise, though dating back to early history, remains the author's eschatological hope. It entails rest, people, land, and city, all gained fully at the return of Christ in his kingdom, when the king-priest comes to rule with those whom his ministry has perfected to be able to receive his unshakeable kingdom.

As such a pervasive motif, the promise shapes the author's hermeneutic. It is found inverted in all curses and judgments. It relativises all past successes. And, since it entails all the soteriological goods to which the author looks forward, it is the motivation of all past and present acts of faith and faithfulness. The promise still remains, and so those to whom the author wrote must stand fast. They must trust in the faithful God who has promised. They must be faithful themselves. Only so can they preserve their souls and receive the promise along with the faithful of all ages past.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

### Introduction

Through examining all the passages concerning promise in Hebrews, the author's theology of promise has been argued to be a far-reaching thing, spreading through not only the author's soteriology and eschatology, but through his entire view of history and hermeneutic. While I am unwilling to go as far as Rose and say that promise is *the* base-motif of Hebrews,<sup>1</sup> it certainly is a crucial part of the very foundation of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In this conclusion, I will summarise this thesis's portrayal of promise and then locate my depiction of promise within current scholarship by a comparison with Christian Rose's conclusions and by answering some questions posed by the literature review. I will close by gesturing to possible implications of this work.

#### 1. Summary: Promise in Hebrews

At long last, we can now ask: what does the author of Hebrews mean by promise? Promise is the word of God that offers the multifaceted blessings extended to God's people and that are to be received through a persisting trust. As shown throughout Hebrews, the promise is the offer of rest (4:1), people (6:13-14), land (11:14), city (11:16), and kingdom (12:28). Through the covenants built upon it, the promise is God's offer of forgiveness (8:12), internalisation of the law (8:10), and knowledge of God (8:11). The promise is the author's shorthand for all God's salvific blessings, not in some vague sense, but in the concrete gifts of people, place, and the presence of God. It is the guarantee of salvation upon which all of God's other words and acts of salvation, such as covenant administration or the priestly service of Christ, are based. It is the common hope of God's people throughout history, and points forward to their common reward, thus granting them a common identity as a people which holds to the confession that "he who promised is faithful" (10:23, 11:11). Promise is fundamental to the author's understanding of God's dealing with humanity. God is the God who speaks, and not only is all the good which he speaks an aspect of the promise, but all the ill he speaks serves as an inverse of the promise into which the faithful can look to receive encouragement and hope.

In this sense, promise seems to take at least part of the role of another term in the early Christian lexicon: gospel. Within much other early Christian literature, gospel is the message of salvation and the hope and grounding of the people of God. So what has happened within Hebrews? Has promise eclipsed gospel in the author's thought? What is the connection between ἐπαγγελία and εὐαγγέλιον? In Hebrews, both the audience and the wilderness generation received

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<sup>1</sup> Rose 1989, 191.

the good news (καὶ γὰρ ἔσμεν εὐηγγελισμένοι καθάπερ κάκεῖνοι 4:2; cf. Heb 4:6).<sup>2</sup> The conjunction γὰρ shows that the good news heard by the audience was that which made them know of the outstanding promise of rest (4:1). Both groups were given a message regarding the availability of the promise in which they were to trust. To Hebrews then, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι is to tell the message about the promise. It is to proclaim that God has made a promise, and that it is available for anyone who receives it with a steadfast trust (4:2). The good news in Hebrews is that anyone who hears it can benefit from God's promise of blessing, if only they trust him. Thus Käsemann's statement that the gospel is only experienced in the form of promise,<sup>3</sup> that is, in futurity and unfulfillment, gets things backwards. It assumes the priority of gospel and then asserts promise as a mode within which the gospel can exist. Rather, in the author's explanation, promise is encountered in the form of gospel. That is to preach the gospel is to say that the promise is available. This good news does not profit those who do not receive it with faith (4:2), and that is exactly how promise and faith are related throughout the rest of the epistle. Only those who have a steadfast faith, οἱ πίστεως (10:39), can receive the promised goods (10:36). To proclaim the good news, in Hebrews, *is* to speak the promise. The promise is what makes the proclamation good.

## 2. Christian Rose, revisited

I will now briefly compare my conclusions with those of the only other substantial focused study of promise in Hebrews, that of Christian Rose. To start with, there is a good level of agreement between Rose's work and my own. I accept and find helpful his distinctions between promise-word and promised good,<sup>4</sup> earthly-immanent and heavenly-transcendent,<sup>5</sup> and obtained and still-outstanding.<sup>6</sup> To this last division, I would want to subdivide obtained promises into those medially obtained and finally obtained. For Rose, all obtained promises are types of the promise, whereas I have argued that even these types are parts of the ultimate promise, that they are the lower, earthly tier of the same complex promise. Similarly, I agree with Rose that the author is consistent in his use of promise language.<sup>7</sup> I also agree with Rose that when Hebrews talks about the promise in relation to salvation it is "immer die gleiche ἐπαγγελία."<sup>8</sup> I would,

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the author never uses the noun εὐαγγέλιον, opting for the verb εὐαγγελίζομαι in his only two uses of "gospel" language. In terms of *frequency* at least, it seems that promise language has indeed eclipsed gospel language.

<sup>3</sup> 1984, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Rose 1989, 66.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 188.

however, add that this remains in a sense true when talking about Old Covenant believers and the things both offered to and received by them. As argued above, Old Covenant believers received earthly, partial, typological fulfilments as a part of the one singular promise. These cannot be separated from *the* promise as mere analogies, as Rose does. So much for the agreements between Rose's study and my own.

There remain a series of significant divergences between my conclusions and those of Rose. First, my analysis of promise takes into account its relationship with covenant, particularly in light of covenant's cultic nature within Hebrews. This is missing within Rose's study, and leaves one wondering how these two different categories, each so important to Hebrews, function together within the author's argument. Second, my analysis takes more seriously the scriptural quotations that the author adduces in favour of his argument. Instead of dismissing the author's use of Psalm 110 or Jeremiah 31,<sup>9</sup> I argue that these passages do not provide exceptions to be explained, but rather confirm the author's argument. Third, unlike Rose, I do not see rest as dominating the author's use of promise. The author continues to define promise in all of his uses, never going back to rest language. The promise of rest is not clearly reflected in any of the other uses of promise in the epistle, and apart from a conviction that wandering and rest are dominant themes in Hebrews, there are few reasons to grant Hebrews 3-4 interpretive priority. Fourth, I do not believe that promise is entirely unfulfilled within the text of Hebrews, but rather there is a partial reception of it by members of the New Covenant community who even now enter into rest (4:3) and even now are at the heavenly city (12:22). Fifth, the Old Covenant is not a mystery within my interpretation. When, in his conclusions, Rose asks why the promise would be offered at all to those under the Old Covenant, since there was no means of obtaining it, he refers to the "geheimnisvollen Plan" of God.<sup>10</sup> My explanation has a place for the Old Covenant as the means of bringing about partial, typological fulfilment of the one promise within a system in which the earthly must always precede the heavenly. This fulfilment is partial, in that it is genuinely related to the promise, but typological, in that it points forward to the better, coming fulfilment.<sup>11</sup> Further, the method by which Old Covenant saints, as well as those who were before the Old Covenant, can participate in salvation and the eschatological promise is clearer within my explanation. Rose does not deny

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<sup>9</sup> At each of these citations, Rose asserts that what the author really means is *not* what is said in the passage, but instead either something from another passage or a different meaning entirely. Cf. Rose 1989, 60-70, 76, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 190. He also, on the same page but in a different heading, asserts that the purpose of the Old Covenant was to show the need of forgiveness of sins. This more or less Lutheran reading certainly is true within Hebrews, but is less than the full picture of the Old Covenant within Hebrews.

<sup>11</sup> To avoid confusion, it is partial in reference to the promise word, but typological in reference to the ultimate promised good.



salvation to them, but he does portray it as difficult to understand how they can be included. Within my portrayal of a unitary promise administered by various covenants — though only medially so by the Old Covenant — but ultimately possessed by faith, the unity of the people of God and the means by which Old Covenant saints can inherit the blessings mediated by the New Covenant work of Christ is more apparent.

It must also be said that my work has attempted more than did Rose's, likely because of considerations of length (two long articles vs. a thesis). I have simply had more space to explore the implications of promise within Hebrews. Thus, the considerations of promise and hermeneutics, along with the involved system of promise and covenant, are contributions of this thesis not yet seen in Hebrews studies. In sum, I think this thesis provides a consistent interpretation of promise within the Epistle to the Hebrews that has greater explanatory value than those currently on offer.

### **3. Initial questions revisited**

After the literature review, this thesis posed several questions about the role of promise in the epistle. These questions were left unanswered, because they could not properly be addressed before a detailed study of promise's role within the epistle. Now we can turn again to these questions to locate the results of my study within Hebrews scholarship. Some of the questions posed in the introduction, such as "What is promise within Hebrews," and, "How do the Old Covenant saints, and even the patriarchs before them, share in on the promises?" will not be addressed here, because they have already been dealt with within this conclusion.

#### *3.1. Is promise exclusively a future, unfulfilled thing?*

The language of promise is not used to foreground notions of futurity and unfulfillment. Promise is not primarily a motive of alienation or distance in Hebrews, but rather one of certainty and encouragement.<sup>12</sup> The language of promise in Hebrews is not used to emphasise the audience's experience of distance from God or from the end of their hope. Rather, it is used to address this feeling directly and encourage the audience in the face of it. The function of promise language is to make the things hoped for feel more near to the audience and to make their reception feel certain.<sup>13</sup> This is true especially because of the way the author uses promise to point to the axiomatic faithfulness of God. His faithfulness, displayed in his promise, underwritten by his oath, and demonstrated in the ministry of Christ, is portrayed as absolutely certain. And it is this faithfulness that the author's language of promise foregrounds. So, while the language of promise

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<sup>12</sup> *Contra* Käsemann 1984, 26-29; Gräßer 1965, 70, 94.

<sup>13</sup> Worley 2019, 33.

does necessarily deal with future things, it does not serve to emphasise their futurity. On the contrary, it makes these things seem more near.

In addition to this, the author does not talk about promise as an entirely unfulfilled thing. Although the passage is debated, he seems to say that in some sense, the faithful now enter the rest of God (4:3). Not only that, but the better promises upon which the New Covenant is inaugurated, including things like forgiveness and spiritual washing, are throughout the epistle asserted to be experienced by the audience now. These benefits, including direct access to God, are present to the author, not simply future. At one point, the author even lists benefits currently enjoyed by the audience and refers to those who have been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, and who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age (6:4-5). The only way around seeing some present experience would be to deny the author's association between the benefits of the New Covenant enumerated in Jeremiah 31 and the promise (8:6).<sup>14</sup> Since I am unwilling to do this, some of these spiritual aspects of the promise must be already fulfilled. It is only those aspects of the promise that cannot be fulfilled within the present world that are unfulfilled. They await the world to come. But that does not mean there is *no* fulfilment whatsoever. Further, even those eschatological benefits are in some mysterious way presently experienced. After all, the author places the audience *within* the heavenly city (12:22-24). They are not merely on the way to that city or at the foot of the heavenly mountain,<sup>15</sup> but rather at the very centre of that city at the throne of God (12:23,24). So, while promise does deal with future things, it neither stresses futurity nor is purely unfulfilled.

### 3.2. *Is rest the main content of the promise?*

No. While many previous treatments have treated rest as the sum total of promise, it does not seem that Hebrews portrays it in this way. Structurally, the author only discusses rest within 3:11-4:11. While rest is important to the author in that section, there is no reason to give the theme of rest interpretive priority over the remainder of the epistle. On the contrary, other themes surrounding promise, such as land, city, and posterity, recur within the author's discussion. If rest were a central, indeed the sole, content of the promise, it would be odd for the author to mention it relatively briefly and then never develop it further. This is different from how the author addresses all the other themes that various scholars have seen as important to him. Covenant, promise, sonship, faith, priesthood, and sacrifice are all developed at multiple locations within Hebrews. Each is mentioned, dropped, and then picked up again and expanded. It is much safer to

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<sup>14</sup> Which, in fact, is what Rose does to avoid any notion of fulfilment of the promise (1989, 61).

<sup>15</sup> *Contra* Koester 2001, 550; Johnson 2006, 328.

say that while important, rest does not have pride of place within the theological world of Hebrews, and does not control the rest of the references to promise or soteriological goods in general.

Thematically, this proves to be the case as well. When discussing the promise, the author uses multiple images to provide a clearer definition. The author's picture of the promise is multifaceted. It certainly involves rest, but it involves the activity of participation within a kingdom, the social relationships of a people, the bustle of a city. It is far better to view all of these images as mutually defining. We should resist the urge to flatten the author's depiction of salvation or the eschaton into a single thing, and rather allow it to be as multiform as the author portrays it. The promise, though singular, points to many things.

### *3.3. Is the wandering people of God the base motif for Hebrews' depiction of promise?*

No. This is not to say that there is no element of the audience's alienation upon the earth within the epistle. There is. It is most prominent in the author's discussion of Abraham (11:9-16), but it does not suffuse much of Hebrews. I would argue that this material alienation is not fundamental to the author's understanding of the audience, their plight, or the solution. While it is very important to the author, it is a temporary, inconvenience. Further, the audience is not aimlessly wandering, but moving towards their home. This element of alienation and distance is mitigated by all the author's assertions of nearness, whether directly to the throne of God (4:16), the heavenly sanctuary (10:20), or the heavenly city (12:22-24). They are both far and near. In exile and at home. To place all the emphasis on alienation and distance is to ignore half of what the author says about the audience.

Further, it is worth noting that most recent treatments of the occasion of Hebrews do not see the audience's plight as an existential alienation upon the earth, nor a theological alienation because of the delay of the parousia<sup>16</sup> or because of a need to self-define vis-à-vis Judaism.<sup>17</sup> Rather, the audience's problem seems to be twofold: a kind of spiritual apathy and an anticipation of physical suffering of some sort.<sup>18</sup> Promise, as a hortatory solution to these problems,<sup>19</sup> must be able to address the wide range of these issues. It is not simply rest as a solution to wandering. But a festive city and nearness to God to combat apathy, as well as a lasting possession and a better resurrection to motivate those fearing the loss of property and life. The underlying need of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Contra* Gräßer, 1965, 94.

<sup>17</sup> *Contra* Backhaus 2009a, 159.

<sup>18</sup> Attridge 1989, 12-13; Mackie, 2007, 11-17; Worley 2019, 41-2.

<sup>19</sup> Worley 2019, 49-50.

audience is complex and is often presented through concepts other than wandering. Wandering, or at least travel,<sup>20</sup> is indeed present, but it cannot be made the base motif for any part of Hebrews, and certainly not for Hebrews' depiction of promise.

### *3.4. Is Hebrews consistent?*

Yes, it is remarkably consistent. The author's use of promise language is not muddled or conflicting. Rather, the author weaves a singular promise through his conception of salvation history. The understanding of promise developed in this thesis reads the author as both a consistent thinker and a deeply intricate one. While describing the same, unitary promise, the author is able to develop its complex relationship to the patriarchs, Old Covenant saints, and his own New Covenant community. By holding to this same promise, mediated in various ways by the two covenants, he is able to assert the goodness of the Old Covenant while showing the necessity of the work of Christ to bring about the long awaited promised goods. If this reading is correct, it shows the author to be a deeply systematic thinker, and that promise was one of his fundamental convictions in writing this epistle. Promise language is not used in a haphazard manner, and it is certainly understandable in terms of a single promise with two stages of fulfilment. Since this reading seems to explain the evidence of Hebrews, and do so in a manner better than a charge of inconsistency, it is best to accept that Hebrews is consistent, until a better explanation for the way promise language is used can be offered.

### *3.5. Why use the language of promise at all?*

This answer will inevitably be speculative. We cannot know with certainty why the author chose to use promise language to refer to this particular set of concepts. We can, however, trace at least three factors that reasonably could have influenced the author's choice.<sup>21</sup> First, there was the growing tendency within Jewish literature to begin speaking of God's commitments as promises.<sup>22</sup> This was still in its early stages around the time that Hebrews was written, and was by no means systematic at this point in time. However, the fact that sources as disparate as Philo, Josephus, 2 Maccabees, Luke, and Paul can all use promise language to describe God's verbal commitments suggests that this was a growing trend at the time, for whatever reason. The author of Hebrews, as in some way a part of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, would likely have been influenced by this linguistic current. Further, within this point, we cannot discount the possibility that there was influence from Paul, either indirect or direct. Some have argued that Hebrews shows an awareness of some

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<sup>20</sup> Vanhoye 1958, 26; Laansma 1997, 310; Easter 2014, 196.

<sup>21</sup> I will not here interact with Conway's suggestion that a similar sound between *εὐαγγέλιον* and *ἐπαγγελία* contributed to the use of promise language in Paul, and thus in early Christianity (2014, 224-30).

<sup>22</sup> Traced throughout both Saß 1995; and Conway 2014.

of Paul's epistles,<sup>23</sup> but even if this was not the case, the claim to know Timothy<sup>24</sup> suggests that were not many degrees of separation between the author and Paul. This shared social milieu would be enough for some theological influence. If this is the case, then it is possible that Paul's relatively frequent use of promise language could have directly or indirectly influenced the author, though he does diverge in how he uses this language.

Second, the social function of promissory language, that it encourages and refers one to the faithfulness of the promise maker,<sup>25</sup> directly serves the author's hortatory purposes. Promise language seems to be a natural product of the combination of the author's conviction that God is the God who speaks and that the audience needs to renew their trust in this God. By using the language of promise, he weds these two registers together, effectively working towards his goals.

Third, the author's argumentation requires him to distinguish one kind of divine commitment from covenant. Because the author reserves covenant for purely cultic matters, he needs another way of speaking about God's verbal commitments. Since covenant was taken, and oath was overly formal,<sup>26</sup> the options before the author was either to simply use a word for "to say,"<sup>27</sup> or to search for another word. Since it seems that the author wanted to refer to a specific sub-category of speech, the generic terms λέγω or λαλέω would not properly serve this purpose. Through the elimination of other options, this could have influenced him toward the language of promise.

None of these reasons is comprehensive. Reasons two and three also provide no explanation for why the author exclusively used ἐπαγγελ- language instead of other ways of referring to promise (e.g. ὑπισχνέομαι, ὑπόσχεσις), though any influence from Paul would lead in this direction.<sup>28</sup> Together, however, they present a plausible set of reasons for why the author could have used promise language in the way that he did.

#### 4. Broader implications of promise in Hebrews

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<sup>23</sup> Spicq 1952, I:139-68; Witherington 1991; Rothschild 2009, *passim*, esp. 63-118.

<sup>24</sup> If genuine, that is. If this is not genuine, as some have argued (Frumentius Renner, "An die Hebräer": Ein pseudepigraphischer Brief, Münsterschwarzacher Studien 14 (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1970), 77; Rothschild 2009, 76-81), then the late composition of Hebrews would make it all but impossible for the author not to know of Paul.

<sup>25</sup> Worley 2019, 19-21.

<sup>26</sup> The fact that the author only refers to "oaths" when God is mentioned as "swearing" in an Old Testament passage shows that he reserved this term for a formal register of commitment.

<sup>27</sup> Which would be the route set by the precedent of Greek translations of the Hebrew scriptures.

<sup>28</sup> One intriguing feature of his use of promise language, as noted by Conway (2014: 30-6, 194-7), is the exclusive use of this word family.

Hebrews, of course, does not exist within a vacuum. The reception, copying, and spread of the Epistle to the Hebrews around the Roman world in the first few centuries of the church shows that the theology of the epistle was incorporated into the thought and practice of the early Christian movement. As such, it was related to other early Christian documents, most strongly to the Pauline corpus,<sup>29</sup> and its unique contributions were harmonised with these other texts.<sup>30</sup> Having now looked closely at Hebrews' development of promise, we can briefly turn to suggest a few areas in which Hebrews' contribution ought to be examined. This will, of course, not be the place to begin those investigations, but I will gesture toward them to sketch out some possible areas of fruitful study into the implications of Hebrews' concept of promise. I will only briefly refer to three areas: the comparative, the developmental, and the covenantal.

Comparatively, Hebrews' use of promise can be profitably compared with the use of promise in other early Christian texts. Paul's letters are an obvious contrast point, since he clusters promise language around Abraham as does Hebrews, but he does not strongly distinguish between promise and covenant. Luke-Acts would also offer an interesting parallel, since promise language only appears *after* the resurrection of Christ,<sup>31</sup> whereas before that time, Luke uses the language of oath, covenant, and speech.<sup>32</sup> This comparison could potentially yield some theological insight as to why, after the resurrection, the early Christian community found it particularly appropriate to speak of God's verbal commitments through the lens of promise. Further, this quirk of distribution within the Lukan corpus suggests that his reservation of promise language was intentional, providing evidence for a conscious reflection on the use of promise language analogous to what I have argued regarding Hebrews in this study.

Developmentally, a study could be done through the early church to trace whether Hebrews' use of promise was adopted or expanded. 1 Clement would provide a clear starting point, since it is the earliest evidence we have for the reception of Hebrews, but any early Christian work which speaks of God's commitments as promises could be examined to see if traces were left behind by Hebrews' unique development of this language. As theology developed, promise became a regular

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<sup>29</sup> As evidenced both by the authorship discussion and codicological grouping within the Pauline corpus. Both of these have extant testimony as early as the late second century/early third century.

<sup>30</sup> Though Hebrews' apparent refusal of second repentance, or repentance after baptism, posed the greatest difficulty for some who wanted to fit Hebrews in either the Pauline or Christian canon. Many found ways of being able to do so, but for some it was significant enough to exclude Hebrews from either apostolic authorship or from scriptural status altogether.

<sup>31</sup> The first use is at Luke 24:49, in the mouth of the resurrected Christ. This is followed by nine uses of promise language in Acts (1:4, referring back to the use in Luke 24:49; 2:33,39; 7:5,17; 13:23,32; 23:21, 26:6).

<sup>32</sup> E.g. the songs of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) and Zechariah (1:68-79).

way to speak of God's commitments, so much so that many studies of the New Testament take promise language for granted. To trace the development of this language, however, could provide insights into the ways the early Christian movement appropriated God's commitments and the ways in which these commitments were used for hortatory purposes.

Finally, we return to covenant. The theme of covenant has been prominent in all stages of Christian theology, likely in part because of the prominence of covenant within Judaism and the way in which the early Christian community legitimated itself through the doctrine of the New Covenant.<sup>33</sup> Not only was covenant important to the development of early Christian identity, however, but various understandings of covenant have occupied much of the broader systemisation of theology. Particularly since the Reformation, forms of covenant theology have orientated entire approaches to Scripture. It is not entirely clear how Hebrews' salvation-historical structure of promise and covenant works with these theological systems. It is likely that what Hebrews calls promise could fit within many definitions of covenant, but the precise interrelations of promise and covenant, or two different types of covenant, to move away from the language of Hebrews, do not necessarily map neatly on existing systems. At least one theologian, John Owen, began to think through the implications of Hebrews' unique account for broader covenant theology. He also recognised two different types of covenant within Hebrews, roughly corresponding to Hebrews' own distinction between promise and covenant.<sup>34</sup> However, he did so in language somewhat foreign to Hebrews, and because of this he did not fully appreciate the distinct nature of what Hebrews calls promise and covenant. Much more could be done theologically on this front.

## 5. Conclusion

The thread of promise runs throughout the theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The author presents it as one half of his structure of salvation history. It is so certain to the author that it not only stands as the obvious means of encouraging his audience, but it colours his entire view of the scriptures. In the promise, the author sees all of the blessings of salvation offered by God and secured by Christ. This is why preaching the gospel is, for the author, to proclaim that this promise exists and is available for all who receive it by faith. The promise calls the audience to steadfastness and hope, because the one who promised is faithful.

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<sup>33</sup> For an example in explicit contradistinction to Judaism, see the Epistle of Barnabas 4:6-9.

<sup>34</sup> Those covenants which require the death of some animal, he calls a "testament," whereas those that do not are simply covenants (John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* 8:1-10:39, The Works of John Owen, Vol. 22, ed. William Goold (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 2000), passim, but see esp. 74. Owen's use of testament comes close to what the author calls covenant, while his use of covenant is similar to the author's use of promise.

It is my hope that through this study, the depth and complexity of promise within Hebrews have become a bit more clear, and that the promise is able to shine through the pages of the epistle all the more strongly. The message of Hebrews is clear, a promise still remains, and this is a source of hope and good news.

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