

## CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN HEBREWS 12:28 AS ETHICAL AND EXCLUSIVE

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**Abstract:** *In the final warning passage of Hebrews, the command to give thanks by offering acceptable worship in 12:28–29 connects the ethical instructions of chapter 13 with the theological argument of chapters 1–12. Consistent with the rest of the letter, worship in Heb 12:28 is based on the cultic accomplishment of Christ. Consequently, Christian worship consists of ethical living rather than sacrifice. On this basis, chapter 13 utilizes cultic language to describe an ethical life. Finally, by citing Deut 4:24 in 12:29, Hebrews establishes Christian worship as the exclusive way to worship the God of Israel in the new covenant era.*

**Key Words:** *Hebrews, worship, sacrifice, exclusivity of Christ, Deuteronomy 4*

The new covenant is better than the old. Hebrews persistently establishes this point in chapters 1–12 (1:4; 6:9; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24). But if the old covenant and its sacrifices have become obsolete in light of Christ, then how should God’s people offer him worship under the new covenant? Worship itself has not become obsolete since it is commanded in Heb 12:28, but what form should such “acceptable worship” take? Structurally, Heb 12:28–29 links the practical admonitions of chapter 13 to the rest of the book.<sup>1</sup> Commentators have largely recognized that the ethical instructions of chapter 13 characterize the pleasing worship commanded in 12:28.<sup>2</sup> Scholars, however, have left underdeveloped the connection between acceptable worship under the new covenant and its old covenant counterpart.<sup>3</sup> In a book that stresses the superiority of Christ to old covenant reve-

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<sup>1</sup> The theory that chap. 13 is a later addition has little recent support. Most commentators cite the following as examples of this theory: George A. Simcox, “Heb. xiii; 2 Tim. iv,” *ExpTim* 10 (1899): 430–32; Wilhelm Wrede, *Das literarische Rätsel des Hebräerbriefs* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1908); A. J. M. Wedderburn, “The ‘Letter’ to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter,” *NTS* 50 (2005): 390–405. Leon Morris maintains a single author of Hebrews while calling chap. 13 “something of an appendix” (*Hebrews* [Expositor’s Bible Commentary 12; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 145). By contrast, William L. Lane writes, “The connection of 13:1–21 to the preceding section, 12:14–29, is established through 12:28” (*Hebrews 9–13* [WBC 47B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991], 497).

<sup>2</sup> Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 385; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 675; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 693; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 555; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 497; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 503.

<sup>3</sup> Two commentators briefly examine this relationship when commenting on 13:9–10: Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 637, 698; and Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 709. More significant development can be found in the following articles: Susan Haber, “From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus: The Re-Vision of Covenant and

lation and practices, readers should ask about the relation of Christian worship to old covenant Jewish worship.<sup>4</sup> Such inquiry becomes even more pressing when one considers that the hortatory subjunctive *λατρεύωμεν* comes bookended by OT allusions, first to the kingdom of God and second to Deut 4:24, and that the *λατρεύω* word group appears most frequently in Hebrews to describe the Levitical cult.

The present article will seek to establish Hebrews's conception of Christian worship and the eschatological relation of Christian worship to Jewish worship by more closely examining the command to "offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe" (12:28).<sup>5</sup> In order to achieve this goal, three lines of examination will be pursued: (1) I will examine the literary context of the command to offer pleasing worship within the final warning passage in order to understand the relation of the command to the central hortatory message of Hebrews. (2) I will trace the worship motif through the book in order to develop Hebrews's own understanding of worship. (3) I will investigate how the allusion to Deut 4:24 in Heb 12:29 grounds the commands of Heb 12:28 by relating the new covenant command to old covenant principles. These lines of examination will demonstrate that Christian worship in Heb 12:28 is based on the cultic accomplishment of Christ and, consequently, that Christian worship consists of ethical living and has become the exclusive way to worship the God of Israel.

## I. THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE FINAL WARNING PASSAGE

To hear well the final warning passage in 12:25–29, the structure of Hebrews demands the preliminary examination of two other sections: 2:1–4 and 12:1–24. Hebrews 2:1–4 corresponds to 12:25–29 in the chiasmic structure of the warning passages, while 12:1–24 gives the immediate literary context.

1. *The correspondence of 2:1–4 and 12:25–29 in the chiasmic arrangement.* Hebrews incorporates two literary genres into a beautiful unity designed for aural reception. In George H. Guthrie's influential arrangement, the genres of exposition and exhortation run parallel to one another. Each genre has its own distinctive arrangement, and Hebrews, like changing lanes on the interstate, moves repeatedly from one

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Cult in Hebrews," *JSNT* 28 (2005): 105–24; Norman H. Young, "'Bearing His Reproach' (Heb 13.9–14)," *NTS* 48 (2002): 243–61. However, neither article focuses on the importance of 12:28–29 for the discussion.

<sup>4</sup> I recognize the difficulty of the term "Christian" here. Hays makes a good case for "a form of Jewish sectarian 'New Covenantalism'" ("'Here We Have No Lasting City': New Covenantalism in Hebrews," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 155). Nevertheless, at the risk of anachronism, I use "Christian" for simplicity and because Hebrews certainly stresses the superiority of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Translations of Scripture are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

genre to another.<sup>6</sup> Guthrie and others have argued that the warning passages are arranged as a chiasm.<sup>7</sup> I offer the following reconstruction:

- α 2:1–4, Pay attention to God speaking by the Son.  
 β 3:12–4:13, If you disobey God’s word, then there is no hope of rest.  
 γ 6:4–8, It is impossible to restore the fallen to repentance.  
 β’ 10:26–31, If you trample the Son, then there is no forgiveness of sins.  
 α’ 12:25–29, Do not refuse the Speaker.

This chiasmic arrangement sets the warning of 6:4–8 at the center of the argument. A traditional understanding of chiasm claims that the central element holds the place of prominence. While not denying the prominence of the chiasm’s center, any skilled speaker understands that the first and the last things spoken also carry significant weight for those hearing a presentation. In the hortatory material of this “word of exhortation,” the first and last warnings claim these secondary positions of prominence (13:22).

The warnings in 2:1–4 and 12:25–29 correspond thematically to one another due to their shared emphasis on God’s speech. Those who hear God speak must pay attention and not refuse the Speaker (2:1; 12:25). To refuse the Speaker means to come under the judgment of God. Hebrews makes an *a fortiori* comparison between ancient Israel and the church. Those who violated the message declared by angels received a just retribution (2:2). Similarly, 12:25 states that the wilderness generation “did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth.” Both passages then move by analogy to the even greater judgment that awaits those who refuse God’s final revelation through the Son. The verb *ἐκφεύγω* occurs only in 2:3 and 12:25, linking the extreme ends of the chiasm. Initially, the author asks rhetorically, “How shall we escape (*ἐκφευξόμεθα*) if we neglect such a great salvation” (2:3a)? In conclusion, Hebrews definitively answers the question: “For if they did not escape (*ἐξέφυγον*) when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven” (12:25b). Both warnings combine to speak with a single voice: They will not escape God’s judgment if they reject a salvation greater than the one experienced by ancient Israel.<sup>8</sup> To summarize, Heb 12:25–29 begins by restating the warning from 2:1–4 and only

<sup>6</sup> George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (NovTSup 73; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 144.

<sup>7</sup> Guthrie’s reconstruction of the book has significant influence in the field. While he sees the entirety of the hortatory material as arranged chiasmatically, for the purposes of this paper I focus only on the warning passages (*Structure of Hebrews*, 144). See Barry C. Joslin, “Can Hebrews Be Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches,” *CBR* 6 (2007): 99–129; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC 47A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), xc–xcviii; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 30–33. The most substantial alternative to Guthrie’s structure is Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* (LNTS 297; London: T&T Clark, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 65; Koester, *Hebrews*, 206; James Thompson, *Hebrews* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 49.

then moves forward by expanding the nature of the coming judgment before transitioning to the positive exhortations of 12:28–29.

2. *The immediate context: enduring as sons (12:1–24).* The final warning passage rises from the admonition in 12:1–24. The chapter begins with the classical inferential particle *τοιγαροῦν*.<sup>9</sup> The example of the OT faithful, and more importantly the dependence of the OT faithful upon the new covenant community for perfection, demands that the new covenant saints set aside sin and run with endurance (11:39–12:1).<sup>10</sup> In this race, the church may grow weary and fainthearted. Protection from this danger comes by looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (12:2). William L. Lane comments, “Jesus’ own experience of triumph through suffering provides perspective on the purpose of suffering in the experience of the Christian.”<sup>11</sup>

The recipients must remember, though, that their struggle has not been to the same degree as the suffering of Christ (12:3–4). Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before him” (12:2).<sup>12</sup> Likewise, the community must endure hostility for joy.<sup>13</sup> Their familial relationship to God transforms this suffering into discipline. Rather than testifying to God’s rejection, their suffering witnesses to their legitimacy in the family of God. God the Father uses pain to produce righteousness in his children (12:5–11).<sup>14</sup>

Verse 12 begins with the inferential conjunction *διό*, which in this instance ties the concern that the church will grow weary together with the discussion of discipline and leads into a conclusion. Since their discipline identifies them as sons and will result in righteousness, they must be strengthened to run the race. The practical instructions of 12:12–17 give greater clarity to the hortatory subjunctive to “lay aside every weight and sin” (12:1).<sup>15</sup> They must pursue peace and holiness as well as avoid bitterness, sexual immorality, and godlessness lest they become like Esau.<sup>16</sup> Esau could not endure to inherit the promise. Instead he traded the deferred joy of the promise for momentary sensual pleasures. Even though he later regretted his choice, no opportunity remained for repentance (12:16–17).

<sup>9</sup> BDF §107. Lane calls it an “intensified conjunction” (*Hebrews 9–13*, 407).

<sup>10</sup> “The particle refers specifically to 11:39–40 and alerts the community to find in v 1 a distillation of the prior section” (Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 407). Ellingworth sees 12:1–13 as belonging to a larger section that begins at 11:1 (*Hebrews*, 637). Cockerill groups 11:1–12:3 together (*Hebrews*, 600–601).

<sup>11</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 407.

<sup>12</sup> This is a disputed translation of *ἀντὶ τῆς προκειμένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς*. The alternative is “instead of the joy that was set before him.” This issue is ultimately insignificant for the purpose of this paper. For more discussion, see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 641; Koester, *Hebrews*, 523–24; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 413–14; O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 455–56.

<sup>13</sup> “God is training his children for the enjoyment of life in its fullest sense” (Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 423).

<sup>14</sup> “The fact that the righteous suffer is not a sign of divine displeasure, but of God’s paternal affection” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 359). See also Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 420–21.

<sup>15</sup> Attridge, Ellingworth, and Lane believe that 12:14 begins a new section that goes to 13:21. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 366; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 661; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 444–46. Guthrie’s work shows an *inclusio* marking 11:1–40 and a median-level cohesion shift at 12:1. Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 74, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Cockerill demonstrates that Hebrews 12:15–17 imitates Deuteronomy 29:15–20 to warn against violating the covenant (*Hebrews*, 635–37).

The γάρ of 12:18 introduces offline material meant to strengthen the admonition of 12:14–17.<sup>17</sup> Hebrews desires to encourage the community by reminding them of their superior position in redemptive history. Sinai blazed in untouchable fire that even terrified Moses himself (12:18–21), but Zion opens up as an inhabited city where saints and angels enjoy the presence of God and Jesus (12:22–24). God has set the joy of the heavenly Jerusalem before his suffering sons. They must endure their suffering as those who have already come to Zion.<sup>18</sup>

By tracing the final warning's connection to its parallel in the chiasm and its immediate literary context, the final warning's connection to the hortatory purpose of Hebrews becomes evident. Hebrews asserts to the suffering Jewish Christian community that God has spoken fully and finally in the Son (1:2). Those who return to the safety of Judaism reject Christ, who is the only sacrifice for sins (10:26).<sup>19</sup> Rather they must endure as sons of God, looking to their elder Brother for strength (12:1–24). The final warning therefore further clarifies and intensifies this central message.

3. *The final warning: receiving an unshakable kingdom (12:25–29)*. Sinai only gave a foretaste of God's holy nature and righteous judgment. At Sinai, his voice shook the ground. Hebrews cites Hag 2:6 to argue that God's final speech through the Son will also shake things up.<sup>20</sup> But this second shaking will correspond to the fullness and finality of the revelation in the Son. Both heaven and earth will shake, and this shaking of judgment will result in the final removal of all shakeable things.<sup>21</sup> Only the unshakable kingdom of God will remain.

Hebrews affects this jump from the shaking of judgment to the kingdom through the prophecy of Haggai.<sup>22</sup> In Haggai 2, God will shake the nations, allowing their wealth to come to the house of God. For Haggai, who prophesies to

<sup>17</sup> Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek NT: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 52; Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 459.

<sup>18</sup> Two specific OT allusions may be operating in the comparison of Sinai and Zion: First, the phrase “angels in festal gathering” may echo the mysterious event recorded in Exod 25:9–11 (12:22). In the blaze of Sinai only the elders of Israel beheld God and feasted in his presence, but every member of the new covenant community, purified by the blood of Jesus, enters into the angelic banquet halls to enjoy the divine presence. Second, the concentration of Deuteronomical allusions in chap. 12 could suggest that Sinai and Zion have replaced Mounts Ebal and Gerizim as the mountains of curse and blessing (Deut 11:29–30; 27:12–13). Sinai, the mountain of the old covenant, has become the mountain of the curse due to the obsolescence of its covenant. The emphasis on fear and judgment in 12:18–21 supports this hypothesis. Zion, by contrast, transcends earth and represents the eternal blessings of the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22–24). Cockerill's assessment that Sinai and Zion contrast “judgment and blessing” supports this notion, although he awkwardly claims that “the pastor is not pitting Judaism against Christianity” (*Hebrews*, 643). Both possible allusions require more research in order to be established. If proven, they would increase further the rhetorical power of the section.

<sup>19</sup> For a defense of my understanding of the historical background of Hebrews, see O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 9–15.

<sup>20</sup> For how Hebrews modifies Hag 2:6 see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 686–87; Koester, *Hebrews*, 547; Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 479–80.

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews has already anticipated this eschatological destruction by quoting Ps 102:25–27 in 1:10–12. So Thompson, *Hebrews*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> “It may be that the references in Hg. 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2 to a high priest called Ἰησοῦς first drew the attention of the author of Hebrews to this passage” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 685).

Zerubbabel and Joshua during the reign of Darius, the shaking of the universe elicits hope in God.<sup>23</sup> Hebrews reflects this hope by using the verb *ἐπαγγέλλομαι* to introduce the quotation.<sup>24</sup> After God removes the glory of the nations, he reestablishes the glory of the Temple so that “the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former” (Hag 2:9). At the end of the prophecy, God intensifies the coming shaking: “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth” (Hag 2:21). This time God clarifies that the shaking of “the kingdoms of the nations” will be their destruction (Hag 2:22).<sup>25</sup>

Lane gives further clarity to the relationship between Hebrews and Haggai by bringing Psalm 95 LXX into the discussion. The LXX adds the following superscript to the Psalm: “When the house was being rebuilt after the captivity” (Ὅτε ὁ οἶκος ὠκοδομεῖτο μετὰ τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν; Psalm 95 LXX NETS). Lane argues that this superscript tied together Psalm 95 LXX and Haggai in the mind of the preacher of Hebrews. The Psalm celebrates the inauguration of the Lord’s reign among the nations. Verses 9–10 overlap conceptually with the prophecy of Haggai by uniting the worship of God with the shaking of the earth:

προσκυνήσατε τῷ κυρίῳ ἐν αὐτῇ ἁγίᾳ αὐτοῦ,  
σαλευθήτω ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ.  
εἶπατε ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν Ὁ κύριος ἐβασίλευσεν,  
καὶ γὰρ κατώρθωσεν τὴν οἰκουμένην, ἥτις οὐ  
σαλευθήσεται,  
κρινεῖ λαοὺς ἐν εὐθύτητι  
(Ps 95:9–10 LXX).

Worship the Lord in his holy court,  
Let all the earth shake before his face.  
Say to the nations, “The Lord reigns!”  
For indeed he established the world, which  
will not be shaken,  
He will judge the people with justice  
(Ps 95:9–10, author’s translation).

Lane concludes that “the unstated link between Hag 2:6 LXX and the formulation of Heb 12:28 is Ps 95:9–10 LXX.”<sup>26</sup>

In both Psalm 95 LXX and Haggai 2, the inauguration of God’s kingdom and the destruction of the nations entail the reestablishment of worship in the Temple. In Heb 12:28, the church has already received this unshakable kingdom, although for the present time it remains hidden in the midst of shakeable reality. Only after God shakes off the present world will the unshakable kingdom become fully evi-

<sup>23</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 479.

<sup>24</sup> “By calling this prophecy of judgment a ‘promise’ the pastor has brought the art of combining warning and promise to perfection. The coming judgment is obviously a warning.... And yet it is a promise of final salvation” (Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 665).

<sup>25</sup> Ellingworth says that in Hebrews the meaning of Hag 2:6 “becomes very different from that which the words quoted had in their OT context” (*Hebrews*, 687). Ellingworth correctly emphasizes that in Haggai the shaking is of the nations and that the result is the establishment of a Jerusalem temple. Hebrews certainly expands these words to an eschatological scope, but in doing so Hebrews is simply following the lead of Hag 2:21. Therefore, the characterization “very different” seems too strong.

<sup>26</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 485–86. The contrast in Ps 95:9–10 LXX between ἡ γῆ, which is shaken, and ἡ οἰκουμένη, which is established so that it is not shaken, may be another conceptual link with Hebrews. In 12:25–26, Hebrews, following Haggai, uses ἡ γῆ of the present world that will be shaken. By contrast, in 1:6, the firstborn is brought into ἡ οἰκουμένη, and in 2:5, ἡ οἰκουμένη is identified specifically as “the world to come.”

dent. Even so, the church has already received this kingdom. The participle *παραλαμβάνοντες* should be read as causal in 12:28. This reception of the kingdom is the cause of the thanksgiving and worship commanded in 12:28. The preacher's commands "to have gratitude" and "to offer worship" therefore acknowledge the last day saints as participants in this long-awaited kingdom. Thus ascendancy of the kingdom for the Psalmist and Haggai, as well as for the preacher of Hebrews, involves the re-establishment of worship.<sup>27</sup>

For a people who are suffering, Hebrews advocates a mental leap between earthly and heavenly realities. The suffering of the church in Hebrews corresponds to the suffering of those who returned with Zerubbabel from exile. In both Haggai and Hebrews, God's promises do not seem to align with reality. While Zerubbabel was encouraged to await a future fulfilment, Hebrews directs the church to see themselves as the fulfilment of Haggai's prophecy and to operate on the basis of the heavenly reality that they have already begun to experience. Because they are receiving the kingdom, they must have gratitude (12:28). So, the central question for Hebrews is how will the readers respond to God's earth-shaking speech?<sup>28</sup> The suffering, disciplined sons of God cast off sin and endure for the joy of the kingdom. They participate in kingdom reality now through thanksgiving and worship. If instead they refuse the Speaker, then they will be subjected to a shaking worse than the earthquake at Sinai, and they will join the nations and the universe as subjects of God's final judgment. The only means of participating in the prophesied kingdom, both now and for eternity, is to accept the Son, through whom God speaks. He is the exclusive way to worship God.

## II. THE WORSHIP MOTIF

The command to offer acceptable worship in 12:28 does not materialize *ex nihilo*. Hebrews is about worship because Hebrews is about revelation.<sup>29</sup> The preacher begins his word of exhortation with a powerful assertion that God has revealed himself fully and finally through the Son (1:2). He then seeks to exhort his readers to respond to God's revelation in faith. The response of faith is a life of worship.<sup>30</sup>

1. *λατρεύω*. The hortatory subjunctive "to worship" in 12:28 utilizes the word *λατρεύω*. Hebrews prefers this word when speaking of worship rendered by

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<sup>27</sup> Attridge claims that the quote of Hag 2:6 in Hebrews "bears no reference to the temple, but simply promises a final convulsion" (*Hebrews*, 380). In this comment, Attridge fails to recognize the emphasis on worship in the immediate literary context. Hebrews understands the fulfillment of Haggai's temple restoration as being accomplished through Christian worship.

<sup>28</sup> "The pastor's main concern throughout the sermon has been that his hearers fully heed the voice of God" (Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 661).

<sup>29</sup> "Hebrews presents the most complete and fully integrated theology of worship in the New Testament" (David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 228).

<sup>30</sup> "The exhortation for us to offer worship 'pleasing' to God presupposes that we have the faith necessary to 'please' God (11:6), like Enoch, who was testified to have the faith that 'pleased God' (11:5)" (John Paul Heil, *Worship in the Letter to the Hebrews* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011], 243).

the new covenant community.<sup>31</sup> *Λατρεύω* specifically refers to worship performed as cultic service.<sup>32</sup> The author uses the verb six times and also utilizes the nominal form *λατρεία* once. All but two of the word group's occurrences in Hebrews can be found in descriptions of the ancient cultic rites of Israel (8:5; 9:1, 9; 10:2; 13:10), but the two exceptions to this suggest that *λατρεύω* has not become an obsolete activity under the new covenant (9:14; 12:28). By offering himself as a sacrifice to God, the Son purifies the worshiper's conscience *εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι* (9:14). The Great High Priest perfects *λατρεία* by perfecting the worshipers.<sup>33</sup>

2. *Προσέρχομαι* and *ἐγγίζω*. Hebrews also utilizes verbs of approach to discuss the theme of worship. Both *προσέρχομαι* and *ἐγγίζω* are simple directional verbs meaning "to draw near" which were used by the translators of the LXX to render the Hebrew directional verbs *קרב* and *נגג*. In both Hebrew and Greek these verbs develop a more technical meaning in cultic contexts, referring to the presentation of offerings. Leviticus 21:16–24 offers the best example in both Hebrew and Greek versions. The passage regulates the holiness of priests who would approach God for worship. The Hebrew text uses *קרב* (vv. 17, 18, 21 [2x]) and *נגג* (v. 23) interchangeably. The Greek text likewise mixes the use of the verbs *προσέρχομαι* (vv. 17, 18, 21, 23) and *ἐγγίζω* (v. 21, 23). Following the lead of the LXX, Hebrews also uses these Greek verbs interchangeably.

In the semantic world of Hebrews, the new covenant people of God have become *τοὺς προσερχομένους* (7:25; 10:1; 11:6).<sup>34</sup> In chapter 12, Hebrews clarifies the

<sup>31</sup> *Προσκυνέω* occurs twice (1:6; 11:21). Both instances are OT quotations. The first is addressed to angels, and the second describes Jacob's worship while blessing the sons of Joseph. The noun *λειτουργία* appears twice, once to describe the cultic ministry of Christ (8:6) and once to refer to the cultic rites of Israel (9:21).

<sup>32</sup> See *λατρεύω*, BDAG 587.

<sup>33</sup> "The point is clear. The sacrifice that inaugurated the new covenant achieved the cleansing of the conscience that all worshipers lacked under the former covenant and that all had sought through prescribed gifts and offerings" (Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 241). See also O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 500.

<sup>34</sup> Does Hebrews conceive of the church as a new covenant priesthood? Or does Hebrews conceive of the church as general worshipers who approach God through the mediation of the Melchizedekian High Priest? This article will not attempt to answer these questions since they are auxiliary to its thesis. Leithart and Scholer make the case that the church is a new covenant priesthood. See Peter J. Leithart, "Womb of the World: Baptism and the Priesthood of the New Covenant in Hebrews 10.19–22," *JSNT* 78 (2000): 49–65; John Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (JSNTSup 49; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991). On the other hand, Peterson says that "it is simplistic to say that our writer uses this terminology to expound the view that the privileges of the Old Testament priesthood find their fulfillment in a priesthood of all Christian believers." Instead, he wants to insist that the OT priesthood has been fulfilled in Christ (*Engaging with God*, 239). An argument could be made on the basis of Psalm 110, which is so important throughout the book of Hebrews. Hebrews utilizes Ps 110:1 to support the kingly reign of the Son (1:3, 13, 8:1, 10:12–13) and Ps 110:4 to support the Son's high priestly ministry (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 11, 15, 17, 21). Such an emphasis suggests that Hebrews is bringing in Ps 110:3 by metalepsis. Psalm 110:3 indicates that the people of the Lord's kingdom serve as priests in his kingdom, possibly itself echoing Exod 19:6. The MT clearly states the idea: *עַמְךָ נֹדֵבַת בְּיוֹם חֵילֶךָ* *בְּהִרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ*. In the MT, the exaltation of the Son results in his people offering freewill offerings while arraigned in priestly garments. The LXX however does not state the idea as clearly. It only says that the Son's rule will be *ἐν ταῖς λαμπρότησιν τῶν ἁγίων* (Ps 109:3 LXX). Here *ἐν* probably functions spatially, meaning "among the brightness of the saints." Since Hebrews sees the last days fulfillment of Psalm 110

location of their worship. They have not *προσεληλύθατε* to the untouchable Sinai but rather to Zion (12:18, 22). Significantly, the parallel commands of 4:16 and 10:22 utilize *προσερχώμεθα* to explain the elevation of the new covenant community to the status of worshipers who are able to approach God freely. According to Guthrie's reconstruction, 4:14–16 and 10:19–25 uniquely straddle the divide between exposition and exhortation and thus frame the central section of the letter about the Son's superior high priesthood.<sup>35</sup> On the basis of the Son's high priestly ministry, God's purified people may now approach God in worship. Finally, following the example of the LXX, Hebrews uses *ἐγγίζω* in 7:19 to make a point similar to 4:14 and 10:22: We draw near to God through the better hope introduced by the Son.

To summarize, with the exception of 10:25, Hebrews uses these directional verbs exclusively for approaching God in worship. The high priestly ministry of the Son has accomplished what the Levitical ministry could never do. It purified the people of their sins (1:3). Now God's people may confidently draw near to him through the Son to offer their own sacrifices of worship.

3. *Worship as cultic and ethical.* While this examination of the language of Hebrews has revealed the prevalence of the worship motif throughout the book, the form of this worship remains to be clearly identified. For Hebrews, worship is first cultic and then ethical. At the risk of oversimplification, chapters 1–12 stress the cultic worship of Christ, and chapter 13 emphasizes worship as the ethical living of Christians. Certainly this division is not absolute since ethical concerns penetrate chapters 1–12 just as cultic language appears in chapter 13 (e.g. 10:24; 12:16; 13:10, 15). Nonetheless, chapters 1–12 emphasize the worship offered by the Son who gave himself as the final sacrifice and thereby established a new covenant. The Son's cultic worship as Melchizedekian high priest has made "propitiation for the sins of the people" (2:18).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the preacher may command his audience to draw near to God themselves (4:16; 10:22). By the blood of Christ, the new covenant community performs their divine service through the ethical living commanded in chapter 13 where cultic language becomes descriptive of an ethical life.<sup>37</sup> Nowhere does this become more evident than in 13:16 where the preacher uses the verb that corresponds to the adverb *εὐαρέστως* in 12:28: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing (*εὐαρεστεῖται*) to God" (13:16).<sup>38</sup> Hebrews commands the church to offer acceptable worship on the

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as taking place within the covenant community, the preacher may also see the saints as these eschatological high priests. But more substantive research is needed to make this point.

<sup>35</sup> Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 79–82.

<sup>36</sup> "Paradoxically, however, Christians are liberated from cultic obligations in any earthly sense, to serve God in a new way" (Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 229).

<sup>37</sup> "Thus, the life of the faithful is a life of worship, a life of approaching God through Christ with the offerings of praise and good works, as chapter 13 will show" (Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 672).

<sup>38</sup> O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 500.

basis of their access to God that has been granted through Christ's cultic accomplishment as well as to worship by means of ethical living.<sup>39</sup>

Hebrews 12:28–29 acts as the transition between these themes. Through the work of the Melchizedekian High Priest, the readers are “receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.” The participle *παραλαμβάνοντες* is causal. The readers should be thankful *because* they are receiving an unshakable kingdom. But this thanksgiving must express itself in a particular way. The means of thanksgiving (*δι’ ἧς*) is through offering acceptable worship to God. Such worship must be offered *μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους*. Both words are rare in the NT. *Δέος* is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT, while the only other occurrence of *εὐλάβεια* is in Heb 5:7. In 5:7, God hears the prayers of Jesus because of Jesus's *εὐλαβείας*. At the very least, 12:28 calls the Christian to imitate the attitude of Christ.<sup>40</sup> A closer parallel to the Christian's experience, however, may be found in 11:7. In that verse, the participle *εὐλαβηθείς* describes how Noah constructed the ark. Having been warned about unseen events, Noah acted in faith with “reverent fear.” In 12:28, *δέος* should be understood as a synonym meant to strengthen the concept of *εὐλάβεια*, which had already been introduced in the book. Like Noah, the church has received from God the revelation of unseen realities, and like Noah, the church must act by faith, that is, they must worship through the offering of their lives. Such acceptable worship can only be offered when one has an appropriate attitude toward God—reverential awe and fear. As 12:29 highlights, such an attitude is grounded in the character of God. Christ's priestly accomplishments have opened the way to God. The new covenant people may boldly approach God because their sins have been forgiven, but the forgiveness of sins does not justify antinomian living. Indeed, the opposite is true. To understand the forgiveness attained through the sacrifice of Christ entails understanding the holiness of God. Thus the accomplishments of Christ resound in the thankful, yet reverent, living of his people.

By viewing worship as primarily cultic and consequently ethical, Hebrews also reflects the priorities of the Decalogue. Like Hebrews, the Decalogue begins with

<sup>39</sup> Corporate worship, therefore, is not central to the message of Hebrews. In fact, the preacher places corporate worship as subservient to ethical worship. The clearest reference to corporate worship in Hebrews occurs in 10:24–25, but even here corporate worship serves ethical worship. If the church neglects meeting together, then they will fail “to stir up one another to love and good works.” The purpose of the corporate gathering is to encourage one another in the last days to do good. By contrast, Heil sees liturgical worship as an important element in Hebrews. To support this claim, Heil must argue that participation in the Eucharist is presupposed by Hebrews and that “the author seems to rely upon his audience's general familiarity with key terms employed in the narratives about the institution of the eucharistic Lord's Supper” (*Worship in the Letter to the Hebrews*, 1–5). Here Heil confuses the thing signified with the thing itself. While the description in Hebrews of Christ's sacrifice may certainly inform the church's understanding of the Lord's Supper, it does not follow that this description actually refers to the Lord's Supper. Heil even reverses the order of priorities evident in the sentence structure of 10:24–25 when he writes that our ethical worship “complements our liturgical worship” (*Worship in the Letter to the Hebrews*, 286).

<sup>40</sup> “This likens us to the worshiping Jesus, who in the days of his flesh offered both prayers and supplications with strong outcrying and tears to the God able to save him from death, and he was heard from his reverence (5:7)” (Heil, *Worship in the Letter to the Hebrews*, 271–72). See also Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 243.

the assertion that God has spoken and that God's people must listen (Exod 20:1; Deut 5:1). God's speech and his redemptive acts merit the people's obedience. Commands 1–4 regulate Israel's acts of worship (Exod 20:3–11; Deut 5:7–15). Commands 5–10 require ethical living from God's people (Exod 20:12–17; Deut 5:16–22). Deuteronomy 6:1 binds these multiple commands into one, thus clarifying the central thrust of the Decalogue: "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules." The single command that unites the Decalogue is to "love the LORD your God" (Deut 6:5). The correspondence between the Great Commandment and the Ten Commandments transformed all of life into a sacred act, expressed both in cultic activity and ethical living. Deuteronomy anchors such obedience in thanksgiving. Israel must not again test the Lord with their grumbling, as they did at Massah (Deut 6:16). Rather, when the coming generation questions the meaning of God's commands, parents are instructed to teach that the commands are rooted in Israel's story of salvation (Deut 6:20–25). The Lord commands what is always for their good in order to preserve their lives (Deut 6:24).

Not accidentally, the failure of Israel was primarily cultic and consequently ethical as well. Israel rejected the God of their salvation by worshiping idols. Idolatry and immorality are inseparable. Hebrews reflects this understanding in its evaluation of Esau, who was both *πóρνος* and *βέβηλος*.<sup>41</sup> Ancient Israel failed to love God, both in their cultic practices and in their behavior. Against this backdrop, the effectiveness of new covenant ministry becomes even more evident. The old covenant failed because Israel served idols and acted immorally.<sup>42</sup> Hebrews highlights this dilemma in 8:7–8. In 8:7, Hebrews concedes that the old covenant was not "faultless," and thus the new covenant was a necessity. Hebrews grounds this assertion in 8:8: "For he finds fault with them" (*μεμφόμενος γὰρ αὐτοὺς*). The use of the third-person plural pronoun rather than the singular pronoun takes the reader by surprise and shifts the responsibility for the fault. Rather than writing that God found fault in the covenant itself, Hebrews clarifies that he found fault with "them," the people. Consistent with the book's general tone, Hebrews views Christian worship as the effective accomplishment of the old covenant's ideals. The quotation of Jer 31:31–34 validates the necessity of the new covenant. The new covenant is "enacted on better promises" because God takes on the responsibility to cause his people to obey, both cultically and ethically (8:6). God will resolve the issue of immorality by putting his laws in the hearts and minds of his people (9:10; Jer 31:33). Such inward transformation exists on the basis of God's cultic initiative. They will be his people, knowing him from the least to the greatest, because God will forgive their sins forever (9:10–12; Jer 31:33–34). Hebrews makes clear that the church is this forgiven and transformed people. The new covenant people of God have heard God speak through the Son. To listen to the Speaker means to worship

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<sup>41</sup> Esau's sexual immorality may even be metaphorical for idolatry. The existence of such a metaphor only further affirms the conflation of idolatry and immorality. See Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 638–39; O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 475.

<sup>42</sup> For a more comprehensive treatment of this theme, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

him in reverence and awe. The cultic requirements of worship have been accomplished by the Son. Sins have been forgiven, and therefore Christians enjoy access to God through the Son. The church offers acceptable worship by ethical living in a fallen world as the means of thanksgiving. Hebrews emphasizes the ethical nature of worship because in this ethical dimension the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant is clearly seen.

### III. THE RHETORICAL FORCE OF DEUT 4:24

Hebrews utilizes the allusion to Deut 4:24 in 12:29 in order to characterize Christian worship as the exclusive way to approach God. If Jewish Christians escape suffering by returning to the safety of Judaism, they will be unable to offer pleasing worship to God in reverential fear and awe. The inauguration of the new covenant has rendered the cult of Judaism obsolete and thus as ineffective at pleasing God as pagan idolatry. Certainly Hebrews does not argue that Jewish worship was intrinsically evil like paganism. The Levitical cult was indeed instituted by God and served his purposes within its own epoch of salvation history. Nevertheless, in light of God's unchanging character, the rise of another priest in the likeness of Melchizedek renders the Levitical cult just as ineffectual at pleasing a jealous God as pagan rites. Hebrews briefly, yet forcefully, makes this argument through the means of allusion to Deut 4:24.

1. *Deuteronomy and Hebrews.* Deuteronomy and Hebrews reflect one another both in form and in purpose.<sup>43</sup> Both books are written sermons, and both warn the contemporaneous generation not to follow the wilderness generation in faithlessness. For both the Israelites at the edge of the promised land and the Jewish Christians in the Roman Empire, the task is simple: by faith, trust in the God of the covenant and do not depart from him. Deuteronomy 4 commands Israel to "listen to the statutes and the rules" (Deut 4:1). The people of God must listen to what God has spoken in order to enter the promised land (Deut 4:1, 5; cf. Hebrews 1–4). Deuteronomy 4:9 LXX uses the verb *προσέχω* to warn God's people of the danger of departing from their God, the same verb utilized in the warning of Hebrews 2:1.<sup>44</sup> Moses reminds them that they "approached" (*προσῆλθετε*) Sinai as it burned (Deut 4:11). Hebrews 12:18 and 22 use the same verb to make the opposite point:

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<sup>43</sup> Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews*.

<sup>44</sup> Deut 4:23 LXX repeats the command. Ellingworth connects the verb in Hebrews 2:1 with its occurrence in Deuteronomy 32:46 LXX, since Hebrews quotes Deut 32:43 in 1:6 (*Hebrews*, 136). In any case, *προσέχω* occurs more often in Deuteronomy than in the rest of the Pentateuch combined (9 times in Genesis–Numbers; 14 times in Deuteronomy). Hebrews 2:1 imitates the instructions of Deuteronomy. Here I disagree with Lane who claims that *προσέχειν* in 2:1 represents "the turning away from language sanctioned by the LXX toward an idiomatic hellenistic diction" (*Hebrews 1–8*, 35). While *προσέχειν* may also develop a nautical metaphor, it seems more likely that Hebrews reflects its usage in Deuteronomy. For further development of the nautical metaphor, see Koester, *Hebrews*, 205. Attridge rightly emphasizes that the nautical metaphor, if it exists, "is not fully developed" (*Hebrews*, 64).

the new covenant people have not come to Sinai but to Zion.<sup>45</sup> As for ancient Israel, they heard God's voice, but they did not see his form (Deut 4:12, 15–16). Therefore, for them to make and worship a carved image meant to repudiate the formless God of the covenant (Deut 4:15–23). God will not tolerate such a betrayal from his people. The burning of Sinai reflected God's character.<sup>46</sup> He "is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deut 4:24). Baal-peor had already demonstrated this truth, as Moses reminded them earlier in the discourse: "Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor" (Deut 4:3). The remnant survived God's judgment because they "held fast" to God (Deut 4:4). However, should they later choose to follow the example of their kinsmen then they too would face God's fiery anger.

In Heb 12:29, Hebrews uses Deut 4:24 to ground the command to give thanks by offering acceptable worship. To be even more specific, the citation grounds the attitude of this worship—"with reverence and awe."<sup>47</sup> Lane explains the general effect of the allusion: "God's holy character remains unaltered under the new covenant."<sup>48</sup> As with Israel in Deuteronomy, God will not tolerate covenant unfaithfulness from his people. Pleasing worship must be offered because God's jealous character demands exclusive devotion. That said, the question remains: what is the alternative to pleasing worship for Hebrews? The polemic of Deuteronomy 4 gives a clear alternative. Either the people will worship God or idols. In Hebrews, however, the alternative to pleasing worship is not pagan idolatry.<sup>49</sup> Rather the alternative is to reject what God has spoken through the Son by attempting to return to the obsolete revelation and rites of the old covenant.<sup>50</sup> This dissonance between Deut 4:24 in its original context and its appropriation in He-

<sup>45</sup> Προσερχομαι is a common directional verb in the LXX. The connection here is not merely verbal, but the contextual use of the verb: to approach Sinai in worship. See above for more discussion of προσερχομαι. See also Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 646.

<sup>46</sup> Heil, *Worship in the Letter to the Hebrews*, 243.

<sup>47</sup> Lane, following McCown, describes the statement as "an apothegm." He explains, "In such sentences, the mood is indicative (ἔστιν understood), the style rhetorical, the motif judgmental, and the function hortatory" (*Hebrews 9–13*, 487). See also W. G. McCown, "Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΣΕΩΣ: The Nature and Function of the Hortatory Sections in the Epistle to the Hebrews" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1970), 213.

<sup>48</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 487.

<sup>49</sup> By contrast, Jason A. Whitlark argues that "one of the purposes of Hebrews is to resist the pressures the audience (likely Gentile Christians) was feeling from its imperial culture (in Flavian Rome) to abandon its confession of Jesus Christ." In order to defend this assertion, Whitlark must claim that these "critiques were not made directly but circuitously through a variety of methods (oblique statements, double entendre, implicit analogies, etc.). In order to hear these critiques, one had to be sensitized to the imperial milieu of the audience" (*Resisting Empire: Rethinking the Purpose of the Letter to "the Hebrews"* [LNTS 484; London: T&T Clark, 2014], 189). While Whitlark's thesis is challenging, he bears the burden of proof, and a more straightforward reading of Hebrews remains preferable.

<sup>50</sup> "That Hebrews presents the community of Christ-believers and its Christ cultus in opposition to Judaism and its Levitical cult, and not against the pagan society in which the community existed, is significant.... It is a conscious attempt to separate and individuate from the parent religion by highlighting the superiority of the new order over the old, and driving an irrevocable wedge between Judaism and the nascent Christian community" (Haber, "From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus," 123–24).

brews amplifies the rhetorical force of 12:29. If they reject what God has spoken through the Son, they reject God himself.<sup>51</sup> The change in covenant corresponds to a change in cult.<sup>52</sup> In the last days, the practice of old covenant Judaism has become equivalent to the idolatry of Baal-peor in its ineffectiveness to please God because the Son has perfected forever those who once offered worship repeatedly through the shadow of the good things to come (10:1–2).

2. *Worship imagery in Hebrews 13.* Hebrews works out this division between Christian and Jewish forms of worship in 13:9–10. In these verses, Hebrews warns against being led astray by “diverse and strange teachings” (13:9).<sup>53</sup> These teachings *are* the foods that do not benefit “those devoted to them” (13:9).<sup>54</sup> By contrast, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tent (οἱ τῇ σκηνῇ λατρεύοντες) have no right to eat” (13:10). Verse 10 clarifies verse 9: those who are devoted to unbeneficial foods are those who serve the tent.<sup>55</sup> Peter O’Brien writes, “Our author is clearly distinguishing two groups, two ways of worship, and two approaches to God.”<sup>56</sup> Those who continue to approach God through the Levitical law “have no right to eat” from the altar possessed by Christians.<sup>57</sup> This altar should be understood metaphorically like the other cultic language in 13:15–16. The altar refers to Christ’s death.<sup>58</sup> To eat from the altar of Christ means to share in the benefits of his sacrificial death, that is “to be strengthened by grace” (13:9). Those who con-

<sup>51</sup> That Hebrews identifies the Son as God in 1:10–12 by applying Ps 102:25–27 to him further supports this claim. So Cockerill, “In Deuteronomy Moses warns God’s people that abandoning the covenant by turning from God to idols is apostasy. The pastor [of Hebrews] warns his hearers that abandoning the New Covenant by turning away from the work of Christ is the contemporary equivalent of such idolatry” (*Hebrews*, 637).

<sup>52</sup> “Hebrews assumes a strong association between the covenant and the cult” (Haber, “From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus,” 109).

<sup>53</sup> The adjective ξένος means “strange” in the sense of “foreign.” In Acts 17:18, Paul’s Athenian critics accuse him of proclaiming ξένων δαιμονίων, “foreign divinities” (translation my own). In Eph 2:12, Paul reminds Gentile Christians that they were once ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, “foreigners to the covenant of promise.” The adjective ξένος may indicate that the revelation of God through the Son transforms the ancient religion of Israel into foreign teachings, but even if interpreters do not take ξένος in this way, 13:9–10 teaches that devotion to the Levitical tent excludes a person from the altar of grace. For alternative interpretations of ξένος, see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 706–7.

<sup>54</sup> Hays rightly argues that food in chap. 13 is symbolic for teaching, just as in 5:11–14 (“Here We Have No Lasting City,” 154). Hebrews prevents us from needing to identify a single form of this teaching by using the plural διδασκαλίαις and modifying it with ποικίλαις. Cockerill’s general description seems most helpful: “some persisted in denying the obsolescence of the old despite the coming of Christ. Such teachings acknowledged Christ but denied his complete sufficiency as the only Savior. Thus, they tended to weaken the hearers’ commitment to Christ in the face of opposition and to retard their separation from the relative safety of the synagogue and its practices” (*Hebrews*, 693). See also Attridge, *Hebrews*, 394–96. Contra Lane who argues for a background of cultic meals (Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 532–36).

<sup>55</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 532.

<sup>56</sup> O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 521. See also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 710.

<sup>57</sup> “There is a complete break between the levitical and the Christian cultus” (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 709).

<sup>58</sup> “To eat from the altar’ is a figurative expression for participating in the sacrifice (Lev. 7:5–6; Num. 18:9–10)” (O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 522). See also Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 696–97; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 712. Heil agrees that the altar signifies Christ, but typical of his work he fuses the sacrifice of Christ with the Eucharist (*Worship in the Letter to the Hebrews*, 285).

tinue to serve the obsolete and ineffectual sacrifices of the tent cannot experience the grace of Christ.<sup>59</sup> As verse 15 states, pleasing worship may be offered to God exclusively δι' αὐτοῦ, through the Melchizedekian High Priest.

3. *Supersessionism?* Such an interpretation will likely draw the charge of supersessionism.<sup>60</sup> Here Norman Young's caution is helpful, "The polemic of Hebrews may appear at first to be out of step with the current post-Holocaust *rapprochement* between Jews and Christians. However, one must not flatten the early Christian text in order to facilitate such a worthy process."<sup>61</sup> Hebrews, nonetheless, does not reject the Jews as an ethnic group nor does it reject Jewish worship as intrinsically evil. Rather, Hebrews rejects Jewish worship as obsolete in the last days. While it represented the only way to God in the previous epoch, it can no longer grant that access because Christ has fulfilled its intention.<sup>62</sup> This is starkly different from later teachings in the early Christian movement. Marcionism was rightly rejected by the early church for its failure to recognize the continuity between the old covenant and the new covenant. Neither does Hebrews make the same case as Diognetus. Diognetus equates Jewish sacrifice with pagan sacrifice in that while idols cannot accept sacrifice, the Creator of the Universe has no need of the sacrifice (Diogn. 3). For the author of Diognetus, Jewish rites are intrinsically erroneous because they violate God's nature as self-sufficient Creator (Diogn. 3–4).<sup>63</sup> For Hebrews, however, the argument is made on the basis of salvation history.

In the old covenant, the jealous God of Israel would not tolerate his people worshipping foreign gods. In the new covenant, that same God will not tolerate a

<sup>59</sup> Haber recognizes that the polemic against Judaism is "grounded in a theological argument against the Israelite cultic order as legislated by the priestly Torah," rather than a polemic against the practices as such ("From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus," 121).

<sup>60</sup> Even the appropriateness of the term "supersessionism" is disputed. Lillian C. Freudmann has voiced concern that Hebrews contributes to the "anti-Semitism" characteristic of much of Christian history. She writes of the NT in general: "Aside from misconstruing verses from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament authors made direct, hostile charges against Jews and pejorative statements against them" (*Antisemitism in the NT* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994]). The characterization of Hebrews as representative of "anti-Judaism" is slightly more helpful, although the term is a disputed one. See William Klassen, "To the Hebrews or Against the Hebrews? Anti-Judaism and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, vol. 2: *Separation and Polemic* (ed. Stephen G. Wilson; Studies in Christianity and Judaism 2; Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1986), 1–16; Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70–170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 110–42. On the other hand, Wall and Lane however have attempted to argue that Hebrews does not promote a separation from Judaism (Robert W. Wall and William L. Lane, "Polemics in Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles," in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* [ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 173). For a comprehensive overview of the debate, see Lloyd Kim, *Polemics in the Book of Hebrews: Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism, Supersessionism?* (PTMS 64; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Young, "Bearing His Reproach" (Heb 13.9–14), 260.

<sup>62</sup> Rudolf Bultmann is helpful here: "The Christian Church is the true People of God. But this contrast with the historical Israel, this eschatological break in history, does not mean discontinuity in the history of salvation but precisely the opposite—continuity.... The worship of ancient Israel had been a foreshadowing anticipation of the occurrence of salvation in Christ" (*Theology of the NT* [trans. Kendrick Grobel; Waco, TX: Baylor, 2007], 97).

<sup>63</sup> I owe these observations to my colleague Aubrey Sequeira.

continuing devotion to the obsolete cult of Judaism, since it either denies Christ or at least reduces his significance. Those who attempt to draw near to God through the Levitical cult actually repudiate the God they claim to worship. Acceptable worship can only be offered by eating from the altar of Christ, by bearing the reproach of his sacrifice.<sup>64</sup> As 13:15 makes clear, it is exclusively “through him” that we can “offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.” God’s jealous anger burns against those who attempt to offer sacrifices apart from the priesthood of the Son.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Hebrews demonstrates the continuity of the covenants in order to argue fundamentally for their discontinuity.<sup>65</sup> The rites of ancient Israel should be discontinued because their fulfillment has come. The seam that joins together chapters 1–12 and chapter 13 exemplifies this. The new covenant community must offer pleasing worship because the God of the new covenant *is* the God of the old covenant. He is a consuming fire. In light of his jealous character, worship must be offered exclusively *to him*, and in light of what he has spoken through the Son, worship must be offered exclusively to him *through the Son* in an attitude of reverence. Ancient Israelite religion served its role as a shadow, but under the Melchizedekian high priesthood it has become obsolete and as ineffective at pleasing a jealous God as paganism. Worship that pleases God must be offered on the basis of the cultic accomplishment of the Son. Only by faith in the King-Priest’s work can one be purified from sin and invited, even commanded, to draw near to God in worship. In the new covenant, ethical living has replaced Israel’s cultic rites as the way to worship the God of Israel through Christ.

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<sup>64</sup> Young argues that Hebrews 13:13 commands readers “to make a clean break from Judaism both in understanding and in practice” (“Bearing His Reproach’ (Heb 13.9–14),” 243).

<sup>65</sup> Haber makes this point well, “The priestly Torah serves a dual but somewhat contradictory role in the argumentation of Hebrews. It provides the comparative categories through which the author validates the continuity of the Christ event with Israelite tradition: covenant, priesthood and sacrifice. At the same time, however, it becomes the quintessential foil against which the superiority of the new order is established, affirming the discontinuity of Israelite tradition” (“From Priestly Torah to Christ Cultus,” 106).