

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST FROM AN ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON HEBREWS

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Abstract

While some scholars tend to discern eschatological aspects of the priesthood of Christ, this study contends that His priesthood as a whole should be understood more broadly as eschatological. The purpose of the present article is to systematically articulate an eschatological perspective of Christ's priesthood in Hebrews, as this epistle is the only place in the NT where we find an explicit elaboration of priestly Christology. Considering the relevance of the present study to systematic theology, I attempt to accomplish this purpose by formulating a constructive theological reflection that privileges the discussion of key concepts that imply an eschatological framework of thought.

Keywords: Christ's priesthood, eschatology, new covenant, exhortation, Hebrews

1. Introduction

In his classic NT Christology, Oscar Cullmann argues that Hebrews, which is the only NT document that explicitly develops a priestly Christology, presents a picture of the priesthood of Christ that includes three basic aspects: (1) the once-for-all sacrifice, (2) "his present work as the exalted Lord," and

(3) “his future work as the one coming again.”¹ Cullmann indicates that this third aspect is only mentioned in Heb 9:28,² which points to Jesus’s second coming,³ but not substantially elaborated in the epistle. More precisely, he calls this presumed underdeveloped third aspect “the eschatological side” of Christ’s priestly work.⁴

To be sure, the language of the “eschatological side” is appropriate in the specific sense of eschatological (future) consummation. But when this expression is used without proper qualification to describe one aspect of Christ’s priesthood, this usage tends to overlook the fact that the priestly work of Christ as a whole is also broadly delineated in Hebrews from an eschatological standpoint. As I will briefly indicate below, studies suggest that apocalyptic eschatology constitutes the intellectual background of the epistle. Benjamin Ribbens emphasizes that “in recent years most scholars have identified Jewish apocalyptic as the dominant conceptual background of Hebrews.”⁵ From this perspective, Christ’s priesthood as a whole may be broadly understood from an eschatological standpoint in Hebrews. Indeed, this perspective expands what Cullmann saw as an underdeveloped eschatological side of Christ’s priesthood in the epistle. At the same time, his general assessment of eschatological underdevelopment seems still true, as we consider specific theological treatments of Christ’s priesthood in the literature.

For instance, in *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest*, Albert Vanhoye favors eschatological fulfillment over Platonic philosophy in his remarks on the law as a shadow in Heb 10:1,⁶ but he does not seem to elaborate the priesthood of Christ from an eschatological perspective in Part II of the book (“Jesus Christ the New Priest”).⁷ In *Jesus Our Priest*, Gerald O’Collins and

¹ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 103–4.

² “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:27–28; italics mine). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this article are from the English Standard Version (ESV; Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2011).

³ Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 103.

⁴ Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 103.

⁵ Benjamin J. Ribbens, *Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult in Hebrews* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 86.

⁶ Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Testament Priest*, trans. J. Bernard Orchard (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1986), 216. See also pp. 365–66.

⁷ See Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Testament Priest*, 61–235.

Michael Jones explore Christ's priesthood in Hebrews in two of their chapters ("3. Hebrews on Christ's Priesthood" and "4. Four Questions for Hebrews"), but eschatology is not a key concept in their approach.⁸ Similarly, Andrew Malone, in *God's Mediators*, does not seem to articulate the discussion of "Jesus as (high) priest in Hebrews" from the perspective of eschatology.⁹ Likewise, in his book *Face to Face with God*, Desmond Alexander does not use eschatology as a framework to delineate the theology of Christ's priesthood in the Bible.¹⁰ In *Toward a Priestly Christology*, I consider the eschatological framework of Hebrews in my treatment of the priesthood of Christ, but the study does not focus on eschatology.¹¹

These examples seem to indicate a lack of eschatological reflection in the theological literature on Christ's priesthood, particularly considering systematic treatments of this topic in Hebrews. This seeming lacuna in the theological literature is also helpful to highlight the contribution envisaged in this article, which is situated in the area of biblical systematic theology and not strictly in the area of biblical studies as such. Considering the literature briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, Vanhoye, Malone, and Alexander are biblical scholars, while O'Collins, Jones, and myself are systematic theologians. This shows that there is a shared interest in the picture of Christ's priesthood in Hebrews among biblical and systematic scholars. In fact, the intended contribution of the present article is to take a step further in this shared interest by drawing implications of the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology as the intellectual background of Hebrews, already present in the literature on biblical studies, for conceptual systematic articulations of Christ's priesthood in Hebrews. With this contribution in mind, the purpose of this article is to systematically articulate a broad eschatological perspective of Christ's priesthood as a whole in Hebrews since this epistle is the only place in the NT where we find an explicit elaboration of priestly Christology. As I have indicated in another systematic study on Hebrews, the systematic reading of the biblical text overlaps with the area of biblical theology but with the intention of grasping the logical articulation of key

⁸ See Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 45–67.

⁹ See Andrew S. Malone, *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2017), 108–15.

¹⁰ See T. Desmond Alexander, *Face to Face with God: A Biblical Theology of Christ as Priest and Mediator* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

¹¹ See Adriani Milli Rodrigues, *Toward a Priestly Christology: A Hermeneutical Study of Christ's Priesthood* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), 142, 147, 152–57, 160–61, 168, 211–12, 219, 229, 232.

concepts in the biblical material, which methodologically requires attention to the dynamics of conceptual assumptions, connections, and implications in the text.¹² Once the systematician learns the conceptual logic of the biblical text on a given topic, he or she is better equipped to critically engage with the systematic literature on the topic. Taking into account the scarcity of the systematic literature on Christ's priesthood and eschatology indicated above, I am delimiting the systematic task of the present article to the exploration of the conceptual articulation of Christ's priesthood in the eschatological perspective of Hebrews. I hope that this exploration may provide a biblical conceptual basis for critical engagements with the systematic literature on Christology in future studies, perhaps showing that an eschatological understanding of Christ's priesthood enriches and/or corrects systematic Christological accounts in the literature.

Considering this delimitation of the systematic aims in the present study, I will attempt to accomplish the purpose of this article by formulating a constructive reflection in five steps. In this construction, the following steps specify or enlarge the content of the previous step. First, I will elaborate on how eschatology is crucial in the conceptual framework of Hebrews. Second, I will discuss how the eschatological framework of Hebrews is clarified by the concept of the new covenant in the epistle. Third, I will observe how the concept of the eschatological new covenant in Hebrews is enriched by an overview of the book of consolation in Jeremiah. Fourth, I will articulate with more precision three concepts that appeared in the discussion of the previous steps, namely, priesthood, kingship, and judgment. Finally, in the fifth step, I will demonstrate how the framework and the concepts about eschatology and the priesthood of Christ that have been delineated in this study are observed in Hebrews as a whole, in the sense of an epistle focused on pastoral exhortation.

The first step is the discussion of the crucial role of eschatology in the conceptual framework of Hebrews.

2. Eschatology and the Conceptual Framework of Hebrews

Eschatology has been a key concept in contemporary discussions on the intellectual background of Hebrews. While an overview of this discussion lies

¹² See Adriani Milli Rodrigues, "Thinking Systematically with the Scriptural Christology of Hebrews: Contributions to the Theology of Christ's Threefold Office," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 58 (2020): 38.

beyond the scope of this article,¹³ I must emphasize that an eschatological perspective informs the robust position that challenges the influential view of Neo-Platonism as the conceptual background of the epistle. As a matter of fact, Charles K. Barrett's affirmation of apocalyptic eschatology instead of Philonic ontology is a significant starting point in the history of this debate.¹⁴ Barrett persuasively speaks of "the central place of eschatology in Hebrews," emphasizing that "the eschatological is the determining element" in the epistle.¹⁵

Even though the choice of the central theme of Hebrews is debated in scholarship, several passages of the document seem to support the idea that

¹³ See Ribbens, *Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult in Hebrews*, 85–99; Jody A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Lincoln Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*, SNTS 65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Geoffrey E. Sterling, "Ontology Versus Eschatology: Tensions between Author and Community in Hebrews," *The Studia Philonica Annual* 13 (2001): 191–92. See Charles K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: C. H. Dodd Festschrift*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 363–93.

¹⁵ Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," 365–66. After this emphasis of Barrett, there are still scholars who affirm the priority of Middle Platonism as the conceptual background of Hebrews. See Lala K. K. Dey, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1975); Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*. Others suggest a combination of Middle Platonism and apocalyptic eschatology in Hebrews. See Kenneth L. Schenck, "Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews: Ronald Williamson's Study after Thirty Years," in *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, ed. D. T. Runia and G. E. Stirling (Atlanta: Scholars, 2002), 134–35; Kenneth L. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Setting of the Sacrifice*, ed. John M. Court, Society for New Testament Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23; Sterling, "Ontology versus Eschatology," 210–11; G. W. MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 196. But there are those who agree with Barrett (and Williamson) that Hebrews is conceptually incompatible with Middle Platonism, while similar to it only at the level of language. See Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 557; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 31; David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews,"* SNTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 131; Edward Adams, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 138; S. Nomoto, "Herkunft Und Struktur Der Hohenpriestervorstellung Im Hebräerbrief," *NovT* 10 (1968): 18–19.

eschatology is a crucial aspect of the conceptual framework of the epistle. Indeed, the very beginning of Hebrews sets the eschatological tone of its content: “In these last days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων) God “has spoken to us in a son” (NET).¹⁶ Assuming that Hebrews elaborates a rich Christology, the way Christ is introduced in the epistle is eminently eschatological.

In fact, an eschatological conception of Christology seems to be more clearly highlighted in two instances of Heb 9. First, the author of Hebrews indicates in vv. 9–10 that the limitations of the ceremonial regulations of the first covenant (cf. 9:1) lasted “until the time of the new order” (μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως) (NET; cf. NIV, REB).¹⁷ The continuation of the argument in 9:11 describes this new order in terms of Christology or, to be more specific, in terms of priestly Christology. In contrast to the limitations of the old order of the first covenant underlined in vv. 9–10, the new order is first depicted as Christ’s entrance into the heavenly sanctuary through His own blood (vv. 11–12; cf. v. 24). The statement that introduces this idea reads, “But now Christ has come as the high priest of the good things to come” (NET; Χριστὸς δὲ παραγενόμενος ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν γενομένων ἀγαθῶν).

The second instance in Heb 9, where the eschatological conception of Christology is distinctly underscored, takes place toward the end of the chapter, namely, in 9:26. The immediate context elaborates on the disparity between the limitations of the first covenant and the sufficiency of the new order, which is the dissimilarity between a never sufficient plurality of services/sacrifices and the totally sufficient singularity of Christ’s sacrifice, respectively. Instead of the repetition of the services performed by the high priests of the first covenant that entered the sanctuary “every year with blood” (κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν ἐν αἵματι), the sacrifice of Christ is marked by an all-sufficient singularity. If priestly Christology were defined by the never-sufficient repetition of the first covenant, the author of Hebrews argues that Christ “would have had to suffer repeatedly (πολλάκις) since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once and for all at the end of the ages (ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ¹⁸ τῶν αἰώνων) to put away sin by the sacrifice of him-

¹⁶ I use the NET version here because of its more literal rendition of ἐν υἱῷ.

¹⁷ Whereas a common valid translation of the expression καιροῦ διορθώσεως in Heb 9:10 is “time of reformation” (see ESV, NASB, RSV, KJV, NKJV), the rendition “time of the new order” seems to give more specificity to διορθώσεως. In BDAG’s remarks about the meaning of this word in Heb 9:10 we read, “καιρὸς δ. *the time of the new order*” (BDAG, 251).

¹⁸ BDAG defines συντελεία as “a point of time marking completion of a duration, *completion, close, end*” (BDAG, 974. *Italics original*).

self" (9:26). Therefore, the offering of Christ's sacrifice, His singular suffering death (cf. 9:27–28), is described eschatologically, namely, "at the end of the ages." To be sure, this is not the final eschatological act performed by Christ. As the immediate context itself indicates, the final soteriological act is His appearing "a second time ... to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28, ESV). Nonetheless, Christ's sacrificial offering is still delineated with eschatological contours.

3. The Eschatological Framework and the New Covenant

One key element that provides conceptual clarity for the eschatological framework in which priestly Christology is elaborated in Hebrews is the notion of the new covenant. This notion is explicitly described before (cf. 8:6–13) and after (cf. 10:16–18) chapter 9 and is Christologically interpreted in chapters 8 (cf. v. 6), 9 (cf. v. 15), and 10 (cf. vv. 5–10, 12, 14–18). These references belong to the section (8:3–10:18) where Hebrews develops the teaching about the priestly work of Christ.¹⁹ This means that His priesthood cannot be understood without the notion of the new covenant. The author of Hebrews points out that the new covenant is the eschatological reality that fulfills the intentions and forms of the structures and rites of the first covenant, which had "a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities" (10:1).²⁰ A crucial feature of this true form is the reality of effective purification, redemption, perfection, and forgiveness.

The concept of purification is elucidated by its correlation with three other notions, namely, redemption, forgiveness, and completion. In Heb 9:14–15, we find a helpful combination of purification and redemption in

¹⁹ In his studies about the structure of Hebrews, George H. Guthrie stipulates that the exposition of Christ's priestly work, with a particular focus on His sacrificial offering, covers Heb 8:3–10:18. See George H. Guthrie, "The Structure of Hebrews Revisited," (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Washington, DC, 2006), 2 (Figure 2: the Structure of the Book of Hebrews). This outline includes minor adjustments of his two previous publications. See George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 144; George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 39–40.

²⁰ I am aware that the lexical subject of this quotation is ὁ νόμος ("the law"). But I am comfortable applying this verse to the first covenant as a whole because the law here has cultic overtones, especially in terms of sacrifices. At the beginning of the section about the priestly work of Christ (Heb 8:3–10:18), the priests of the first covenant "offer gifts according to the law" (προσφερόντων κατὰ νόμον τὰ δῶρα; 8:4). The language of νόμος is used in chapter 7, which is part of a section on the priestly person of Christ

the discussion of the new covenant. The blood of Christ will purify (καθαριεῖ) our conscience (9:14). “For this reason (Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο) He is the mediator of a new covenant,” because His sacrifice is for “the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσιν) of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant” (9:15, NASB).²¹ Moreover, in 9:22 purification (καθαρίζεται) with blood is understood in terms of forgiveness (ἄφεσις). Another related concept is to make something/someone perfect or complete (τελειόω). In the section about the priestly work of Christ (8:3–10:18), all occurrences of this terminology are related to sacrificial offerings and believers (cf. 9:9; 10:1, 14), where the sacrifice is expected to perfect them. The author of Hebrews explains, however, that this expectation does not belong to the sacrifices of the first covenant (cf. 9:9; 10:1) but to the sacrifice of the new covenant (cf. 10:14). It is noteworthy that two out of the three instances of τελειόω in this section are connected with the conscience (συνείδησις) of believers (cf. 9:9; 10:1–2), in the sense that to be made perfect is to have the “consciousness of sins” cleansed (verb καθαρίζω; cf. 10:1–2). When 10:2 is read along with 10:3, the consciousness of sins is conceptualized as a remembrance (ἀνάμνησις) of sins. By contrast, the cleansing of the consciousness of sins in believers means they will no longer remember those sins. This spells out the meaning of “to be made perfect” by Christ’s sacrifice.

The notion of believers not remembering sins elaborated in this section is similar to the idea emphasized in the quotations about the promise of the new covenant in Jer 31 that appear in the beginning (cf. Heb 8:8–12) and at the end (cf. Heb 10:16–17) of the section on the priestly work of Christ in Heb 8:3–10:18. In this OT prophetic promise, God will be merciful toward His sinful people and “will remember [verb μιμνήσκομαι] their sins no more” (8:12; cf. 10:17). Therefore, what is objectively promised on the part of God

(5:1–10; 7:1–28, see Guthrie, “The Structure of Hebrews Revisited,” 2), in the overall sense of regulations referring to those who can be a priest in the first covenant (cf. 7:12, 16, 28). But in chapters 8–10 the language of νόμος is generally employed in the sense of cultic regulations in the priestly service of the first covenant (cf. 8:4; 9:22; 10:1, 8). This language seems to be synonymous of the terminology used to affirm that “the first covenant had regulations (δικαιώματα)” (9:1), as δικαιώματα conveys the meaning of “regulation, requirement, commandment” in this context (BDAG, 249). According to this view, νόμος is used in these sections of Hebrews both for the characteristics of the person of the priest and for the characteristics of his work in the first covenant. This explanation of the use of νόμος in Hebrews, however, does not exclude the usage of this terminology in the context of the new covenant (cf. 8:10; 10:16).

²¹ I used the NASB rendition here to make more clear the connection between v. 14 and v. 15, a connection informed by καὶ διὰ τοῦτο right at the beginning of the latter verse.

both at the beginning and at the end of the section will become somehow a subjective reality for believers as well, and this is observed in the discussion of the section. God and, then, believers will remember sins no more, and this is a reality mediated by Christ on the basis of His sacrifice.

In fact, the section explains the effects of Christ's sacrifice on believers and indicates how it refers to God. Firstly, by quoting Ps 40:6–8, the author of Hebrews points out that the sacrifice of Christ was an offering that fulfilled the will of God (Heb 10:5–10). Secondly, the soteriological meaning of Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary is spelled out in terms of His appearance "in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24), on the basis of His one sacrifice (9:25–26). Hence, the corporeal sacrifice of Christ as the fulfillment of the will of God and His intercessory activity before God in the heavenly sanctuary seem to provide the Christological rationale for the eschatological promise of God's forgiveness of sins in Jer 31:31–34. This rationale also specifies in what sense Christ mediates a new covenant, which involves the eschatological reality of the true priest (8:1, cf. 7:11–28), the true sanctuary (8:2; cf. 9:11, 24), and the true sacrifice (9:12–14; cf. 10:4–14). To be sure, all these elements can be observed in the first covenant: priests (cf. 7:5, 11, 23, 28), sanctuary (cf. 9:1–7), and sacrifices (cf. 9:9–10, 13; 10:4). But, more importantly, they are necessary typological pointers²² to the eschatological reality of the new order mediated by Christ's priesthood, by which believers truly come to experience God's forgiveness.

As Richard Davidson helpfully emphasizes,²³ the author of Hebrews reveals that the eschatological fulfillment of the reality of each one of these three elements is already indicated in the OT. Regarding the reality of the priest, Heb 7:17 and 21 quote Ps 110:4 to substantiate the idea that Christ is the eschatological priest according to the order of Melchizedek. With respect to the sanctuary, Heb 8:5 cites Exod 25:40 to affirm the reality of the

²² I use the term *necessary* because the principle of logical necessity is expressed in Hebrews by the word group ἀναγκαῖος (8:3) - ἀνάγκη (9:23), which implies that the services of the first covenant follow a pattern that are necessary for the understanding of the reality of the new covenant. Furthermore, the typological vocabulary is used by Hebrews in its comparison between the first and the new covenant, particularly in the comparison of the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries (cf. τύπον in 8:5 and ἀντίτυπα in 9:24). Arguably, the concept of *pointers* is implicit in the logic of necessity and the notion of typology, just as in the language of ὑπόδειγμα ("sketch," cf. 8:5; 9:23) and σκιά ("shadow," cf. 8:5; 10:1) in Hebrews.

²³ See Richard M. Davidson, "Typology in the Book of Hebrews," in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 177.

true heavenly sanctuary, which assumes an eschatological role with the ascension of Christ the priest (cf. Heb 8:1–2; 9:11–12, 24).²⁴ As far as the sacrifice is concerned, Heb 10:5–9 quotes Ps 40:6–8 to affirm the eschatological reality of the one sacrifice, which is the offering of the body of Christ as a fulfillment of the will of God.

Overall, these realities are seen from the eschatological perspective of the new covenant, which is also indicated or promised in the OT. In fact, both quotations of Jer 31:31–34 in Hebrews, the first longer (8:8–12) and the second shorter (10:16–17), explicitly mention the eschatological language found in the excerpt from Jeremiah. The longer citation starts with this language, “Behold, the days are coming” (Ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται) (8:8). Likewise, the shorter quotation begins with an eschatological tone. While starting at a different point of the excerpt cited in 8:8–12, the quotation of 10:16–17 begins where we find the second usage of eschatological language in the longer excerpt: “This is the covenant that I will make with them *after those days* (μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐκείνας)” (10:16, italics mine; compare with 8:10).

4. The Eschatological New Covenant in the Book of Consolation

A general overview of the larger context of these words in Jeremiah confirms that they are correctly understood from an eschatological point of view. Scholars have suggested that Jer 30–31 constitutes an essentially poetical section, which is usually called “The Book of Consolation.”²⁵ In the words of Gerald L. Keown, “the Book of Consolation stands as a refuge

²⁴ In his eschatological remarks about the heavenly sanctuary in Hebrews, Barrett claims that “the true tabernacle exists eternally in heaven ... but the ministry exercised within it took its origins at the appointed time of O.T. prophecy, and its consequences are still in process of realization” (Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 384).

²⁵ See Gerald L. Keown, *Jeremiah 26–52*, WBC 27 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 82. See also the annotation on Jer 30–31 of the Hebrew Bible by Dalit Rom-Shiloni in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, Jewish Publication Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 976. Alternatively, other scholars have considered that the Book of Consolation covers chapters 30–33. See F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC 16 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 259; Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 334; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 551. Still, Thompson suggests that chapters 30 and 31 constitute a unit because they are “almost completely poetical, while chs. 32 and 33 are mainly prose” (Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 551).

amid the storm of divine wrath that blows through the rest of the book of Jeremiah."²⁶ The content of this section "repeatedly deals with the relationship between present suffering, further danger, and future salvation."²⁷ Thus, the main point of the Book of Consolation is the hope of eschatological salvation. In the literary structure of Jeremiah, "the Book of Consolation stands between letters that promise a hopeful future to the exiles taken to Babylon in 597 BC (chap. 29) and a sign-act in which the deed for Jeremiah's newly purchased field is sealed and stored as a guarantee of the people's restoration to the land (chap. 32)."²⁸

The message of the Book of Consolation starts with a divine eschatological promise. "For behold, *days are coming* (יָמִים בָּאִים) ... when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, ... and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it" (Jer 30:3, italics mine). The soteriological nature of this eschatological event, which is "a time of distress for Jacob," is particularly described in 30:7 (italics mine): "*That day is so great* (גְּדוֹלַת הַיּוֹם) *there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.*" In 30:9, Yahweh promises He will raise a Davidic eschatological king. In several places in chapter 30, there is the warning that Yahweh's wrath will come over the enemies of His people (cf. vv. 11, 16, 23–24). Indeed, it is precisely in the emphasis of His wrath that the eschatological language of the section becomes more acute.

Behold the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intentions of his mind. In the latter days (בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים) you will understand this. At that time (בְּעֵת), declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people. (Jer 30:23–31:1, italics mine)²⁹

Hence, the covenantal promise of 31:1 regarding the relationship between God and His people is communicated with an eschatological tone and related to His judgment against the wicked. The eschatological language is also observed in the promises of restoration in 31:27 ("Behold, the days are coming," הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים) and 29 ("in those days," בְּיָמִים), which are followed

²⁶ Keown, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 83.

²⁷ Keown, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 83.

²⁸ Keown, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 85.

²⁹ The language of Jer 30:23–24 appears also in 23:19–20 with a focus against the false prophets.

by the promise of the new covenant in 31:31–34. As I have already highlighted regarding the use of the new covenant of Jer 31:31–34 in Hebrews, the promise of this covenant is introduced with an eschatological tone, “Behold, the days are coming” (הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים) (Jer 31:31). With this tone, Yahweh promises forgiveness for His people, emphasizing that He “will remember their sins no more” (Jer 31:34).

This brief overview of the Book of Consolation reveals that many themes that, as I will explore below, appear in this section are articulated in Hebrews also from an eschatological perspective, such as the promise of a Davidic king, God’s judgment/wrath against His enemies, and the new covenant with His people. This seems to suggest that Hebrews does not merely quote the promise of the new covenant but captures in some sense the mind-set found in the Book of Consolation.

In the discussion above about the elaboration on Christ’s priestly work in Hebrews (8:3–10:18), which initiates and ends with quotations of the new covenant in Jeremiah, the mediation of the priesthood of Christ is the key to the understanding of God’s forgiveness in the new covenant. However, Hebrews also associates this priesthood with the idea of a Davidic king and divine judgment.

5. Priesthood, Kingship, and Judgment

The combination of priesthood and kingship is already implied in the prologue of Hebrews, where it is briefly pointed out that the Son makes purification of sins and sits at the right hand of God (1:3; cf. 10:12). Overall, the catena of citations from the OT in Heb 1:5–13 emphasizes the kingship of the Son. For instance, the catena mentions His coronation (Ps 2:7 cited in Heb 1:5), His “throne” and the “scepter” of His “kingdom” (Ps 45:6–7 cited in Heb 1:9). More specifically, the quotation in Heb 1:5 from 2 Sam 7:14, where God promises an everlasting kingdom to the house of David (cf. 2 Sam 7:13, 16), seems to indicate that the Son is the eschatological Davidic king. Furthermore, the last quotation of the catena implies that this kingship of the Son involves divine judgment against the enemies. The citation of Ps 101:1 in Heb 1:13 reads, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?” (cf. Heb 10:12). A reading of Ps 110 reveals that a key feature of the divine kingship elaborated in this chapter is the judgment against enemies. While v. 1 highlights the idea of making them a footstool, v. 2 emphasizes the “mighty scepter” of Yahweh and His “rule in the midst of” His “enemies.” The language of judgment becomes more acute in vv. 5–6, “The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his

wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth."³⁰

The usage of Ps 110 in Hebrews suggests that the author of the epistle is not simply citing a verse without knowing the tone of the chapter as a whole. While Ps 110:1 is quoted in Heb 1:13 to close the catena of citations from the OT in Heb 1:5–13, Ps 110:4 is quoted in Heb 5:6; 7:17, 21 to underscore the appointment of Christ as everlasting priest according to the order of Melchizedek. In fact, the citation in Heb 5:6 and 7:17 emphasizes Ps 110:4b, regarding the priest according to the order of Melchizedek ("You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek"), whereas the citation of Heb 7:21 emphasizes Ps 110:4a concerning the divine appointment of this everlasting priest ("The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever'"). Thus, by referring to Psalm 110, the author of Hebrews is able to connect the concepts of kingship (initially from Ps 110:1) and priesthood (from Ps 110:4), associated with the perspective of divine judgment against enemies (from Ps 110:1).

It is noteworthy that the notion of the "order of Melchizedek" makes room not only for an understanding of priesthood but also of kingship. The author of Hebrews properly describes Melchizedek as "king of Salem" and "priest of the Most High God" (Heb 7:1). This is the initial description of Melchizedek in Hebrews, which is followed by the statement informed by Gen 14:17–20 that he "met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him." In the Genesis narrative, Melchizedek also blesses God for having delivered the enemies of Abraham in his hands (Gen 14:20). Therefore, even without a clear articulation, priesthood is associated with judgment or the destruction of enemies.

Even in the context of the Dead Sea scrolls, namely, the Qumran fragment 11QMelchizedek from the first century AD, the figure of Melchizedek is associated with judgment. As Eric Mason argues, this fragment portrays "Melchizedek as a heavenly, angelic figure" who is "an eschatological priest and warrior ... making atonement for God's people and delivering them while bringing judgment on God's foes."³¹ Regarding the idea of an escha-

³⁰ This connection between divine kingship and judgment against enemies is also seen in Ps 2 (cf. vv. 5, 9, and 12).

³¹ Eric F. Mason, "Cosmology, Messianism, and Melchizedek: Apocalyptic Jewish Traditions and Hebrews," in *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students*, ed. Eric F. Mason and Kevin B. McCrudden (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 72. See also Eric F. Mason, "You Are a Priest Forever": *Second Temple Jewish Messianism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert

tological Day of Atonement associated with an eschatological figure of Melchizedek in this first-century apocalyptic Jewish tradition, James VanderKam claims that “the writer of 11QMelch” probably “used a series of biblical passages and themes that allowed him to connect Melchizedek, the day of atonement, and sabbatical and jubilee periods.”³² As VanderKam explains, “the last jubilee” (“the tenth one”) is “when the judgment takes place.”³³

Without entering into the discussion on how specifically Hebrews and 11QMelchizedek are similar and different in their portrayal of Melchizedek, I am just pointing to the general idea that eschatological judgment is also associated with the figure of Melchizedek in this first-century Jewish background. This idea seems consistent with the use of Psalm 110 in Hebrews, where the themes of kingship, priesthood, and judgment appear. Obviously, in Hebrews, Melchizedek is not an eschatological figure. Instead, it is the eschatological priest who comes according to the order of Melchizedek. In other words, the argument of Hebrews is explicitly Christological.

6. Eschatology, Pastoral Exhortation, and Christ’s Priesthood

Notably, the notions of kingship and judgment are related to the systematic connection of Christ’s eschatological priesthood with the exhortative nature of Hebrews as a whole. In other words, the notions of kingship and judgment are part of the answer to be articulated for the following guiding question: How is the eschatological perspective of Christ’s priesthood useful for understanding Hebrews as “a word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22)?³⁴ To put it in another way, which pastoral exhortations could be highlighted from an eschatological perspective of the priesthood of Christ? How are they relevant for the audience of the epistle “in these last days” (cf. 1:2)? Two seemingly paradoxical notions are key for answering these questions from Hebrews, namely, a great time of opportunity and a great danger of judgment. This apparent eschatological tension is insightfully encapsulated in the question, “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (2:3).

of Judah (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).

³² James C. VanderKam, “Sabbatical Chronologies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Their Historical Context*, ed. T. H. Lim (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 176.

³³ VanderKam, “Sabbatical Chronologies in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 176.

³⁴ For a helpful study on eschatology and exhortation in Hebrews, see Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

The question is a penetrating combination of danger of judgment and time of opportunity.

From this crucial standpoint, the author of Hebrews argues that the audience needs to “hold our original confidence firm to the end” (3:6). In this time of opportunity, there remains an eschatological rest for God’s people (4:9). But there are also negative examples of people who rejected the rest promised by God, who eventually faced His judgment (cf. 3:7–4:2, 11–13). In fact, the main problem of these people was not their weaknesses but their unbelief in the power of God (cf. 3:12, 19). More specifically, they did not hold their original confidence. In a time of opportunity, holding original confidence means taking advantage of the reality of Christ’s priesthood, who may help the audience in their weaknesses (4:14–16).

The time of opportunity does not merely look forward to the eschatological reality but is already a truly eschatological experience by means of Christ. Believers are already enabled to receive a kingdom (12:28), to share “in the Holy Spirit,” and to taste “the heavenly gift” and “the powers of the age to come” (6:4–5). But this incredible opportunity is not a guarantee against God’s wrathful judgment, if they reject the Son of God (6:6). Therefore, the author of Hebrews urges his audience “to have the full assurance of hope until the end” (6:11). Indeed, the time of opportunity is already a truly eschatological experience because the priestly work of Christ mediates the inauguration of a new covenantal relationship with God (8:6, 8–12), the “time of the new order” (9:10, NET) characterized by the “good things to come” (10:1). By means of this priesthood, God’s forgiveness can be a reality in the life of believers (10:22).

However, this is not the end yet. The Day is drawing near (10:25). This is the final judgment, “a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (10:27), and this applies to God’s own people (10:31). The warning is, “Yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay” (10:37). Christ will come in the context of judgment to save His people (9:27–28). This final salvation is the full effect of His soteriological priesthood. On the other hand, this final judgment against the adversaries means that the enemies are being made finally footstool for His feet (cf. 1:13; 10:13). It is from this perspective that the eschatological consummation brings the kingship of Christ to its full measure and His priesthood to its full soteriological effect.

7. Conclusion

There is a profound connection between Christ's eschatological priesthood and the exhortations of Hebrews. Barrett correctly affirms that the warnings in Hebrews are "reinforced by eschatological considerations."³⁵ I would add that these eschatological considerations not only alert about the danger of divine judgment but also emphasize the time of opportunity in the new order already mediated by Christ's priesthood, an opportunity of divine forgiveness, and an initial experience of the reality of this order. Viewed from the perspective of opportunity, this judgment means positively the full measure of Christ's kingship and the full measure of the soteriological effect of His priesthood.

³⁵ Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," 363.