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Exhortation at the Threshold

An Analysis of Hebrews 10:26–31
in its Context, Co-text and Intertext

Merete Hodt

Supervisor

Postdoctoral Fellow Ole Jakob Filtvedt

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*To Preben Axel, my Husband and Best Friend,
– the Best is Yet to Come!*

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so a great a cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,
who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross,
disregarding its shame,
and has taken his seat at the right hand of God.”*

Hebrews 12:1–2

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Abbreviations follow the *SBL Handbook of Style*. Biblical quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), unless otherwise indicated. Quotations from the Greek New Testament are taken from Nestle-Aland's 28th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Question of Research

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate how the claim made in Hebrews 10:26 can be regarded as valid, given what the letter to the Hebrews¹, generally has to say about the new covenant inaugurated by the sacrificial death of Jesus. In the preceding, the author has made it plain that “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*” (10:10), and: “by a single offering he has perfected *for all time* those who are sanctified” (10:14). The author has argued that the new and greater covenant provides forgiveness for sins and open entry into the heavenly sanctuary. The recipients have learned that in the era of the new covenant sins and misdeeds will no more be remembered (10:17); it is done and dealt with once for all. But then the author forcefully states: “If we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin” (10:26). How do we understand this in light of the once for all sacrifice of Jesus – is the sacrifice of Jesus limited? Hebrews 10:26 is inextricably tied to the following verses. If we want to come to terms with the statement, we will have to analyze 10:26–31. This study will therefore be an analysis of Hebrews 10:26–31 within its context, co-text and intertext (cf. 1.4.1).

Before I expand further on the framework for this analysis (1.3) and the methodology employed (1.4), we will have a brief look at how the passage has been interpreted throughout history. This particular text is one of the warning passages (2:1–4; 3:7–4:13²; 5:11–6:12; 10:26–31; 12:1–29) in Hebrews thus the history of interpretation below will treat the warning passages and not only 10:26–31. Biblical scholars have long wrestled with these passages, attempting to hold together (or resolve the tension between) the gravity of apostasy and the unfathomable grace of God.³ The passages were, as we shall see, perceived to be problematic already in the early church.

¹ Hereafter abbreviated to “Hebrews”.

² This passage is a retelling of the narrative of the disobedience of the wilderness generation, but it clearly has a hortatory agenda. I therefore list it among the warning passages.

³ David deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews,”* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 236

1.2 History of Interpretation⁴

The challenges posed by the warning passages (especially 6:4–8 and 10:26–31) were felt already in the early church, especially among the western theologians. Hebrews states that “it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who ... have fallen away” (6:4–8) and again, in our text, “if we willfully persist in sins ... there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26). The pressing question for the early church fathers was: how are we supposed to deal with apostates? *The Shepherd of Hermas*⁵ (ca 120–140) represents the earliest known reflection on the warnings in Hebrews⁶ and permits a second repentance after baptism. Interestingly, Hermas mentions teachers who do not allow for the forgiveness of post-baptismal sins.

The practice and attitudes at least in some corners of the early church, shows – in agreement with Hermas – that apostates who brought public shame on Christ by denying him had the possibility to be restored back through making a second confession.⁷ An example of this is found in the narrative of the persecution of Gaul during the reign of Verus, preserved in Eusebius’ church history:

Through the living the dead were being brought back to life, and martyrs were bestowing grace on those who had failed to be martyrs, and there was great joy in the heart of the Virgin Mother [here, the Church], who was receiving her stillborn children back alive; for by their means most of those who had denied their Master travelled once more the same road, conceived and quickened a second time, and learnt to confess Christ. Alive now and braced up, their ordeal sweetened by God, who does not desire death of sinners but is gracious towards repentance, they advanced to the tribunal to be again interrogated by the governor ... Christ was greatly glorified in those who had previously denied Him but now confounded heathen expectation by confessing him. These were individually examined with the intention that they should be released, but they confessed him and so joined the ranks of the martyrs. (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 5.1–2 [Williamson])

However, the interpretation of the warning passages became a turbulent issue in the third century. Tertullian (d. ca. 225) insisted, contrary to Hermas, that no second repentance was

⁴ This is but a very brief summary. For an extensive survey of the interpretation of the warning passages, see C. Adrian, Thomas, *A case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning passages in the book of Hebrews* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 25–69; Craig Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36, New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2001), 19–63

⁵ I will hereafter refer to it as *Hermas*.

⁶ *Hermas* does not quote Hebrews directly, but he alludes to the text. Especially Hebrews 6:4–6 in Mandate IV, 3,1–2.6

⁷ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 236

allowed in the case of serious sins committed after baptism, including adultery and apostasy (*On Modesty* §20; cf. 6:4–8)⁸. After the Decian persecution (A.D. 249–250), the Novatian controversy targeted those who under the persecution had lapsed from their faith. The Novatians cited Hebrews when insisting that the apostates could not be forgiven. Cyprian (d. 258) disagreed, declaring that lapsed Christians should be allowed to repent and be restored back into the community (*Ep. 51* of A.D. 252).⁹

Hebrews was generally higher esteemed in the east than in the west, and one reason for this might be that their perspective was more informed by the concern for the soul's pilgrimage to God and less with church discipline.¹⁰ The warning passages were therefore less disturbing here than in the west. It does not seem like Clement and Origen found the passages troublesome. They understood them to give Christians motivation to persevere on their spiritual journey, not to cause them to despair (cf. Clement, *Stromata* 2.13; 4.20).¹¹

During the Middle Ages Heb. 6:4–6 was interpreted as denying a second baptism rather than a second repentance, and the church granted penance for post-baptismal sins.¹²

While the main focus in the early church was on how to treat apostates; those who had committed serious post-baptismal sins (adultery, murder, apostasy) or denounced their faith in times of persecution, the focus shifted in the time of the reformation. The main concern was now that of eternal security and assurance of salvation. The doctrine of “justification by faith alone” made the question of post-baptismal sins superfluous, since it did not tie salvation to a merit system of works. The pressing question was now: do these passages teach that a believer can lose his/ her salvation? Can a believer have present assurance of salvation?¹³ Luther,¹⁴ who called the passages dealing with apostasy a “hard knot” (*LuthW* 35.394), interpreted the passages in terms of faith and works. He contended that the warning against sinning deliberately (10:26) was directed towards those who taught that people could satisfy God's righteousness through the works of the law (i.e. their own effort). Accordingly,

⁸ Koester, *Hebrews*, 23

⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 23

¹⁰ *ibid*, 19

¹¹ *ibid*, 20

¹² Erik M. Heen (ed.) and Philip D. W. Krey (ed.), *Hebrews*, Ancient Christian commentary on Scripture vol. 10 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 84-85

¹³ *Ibid*, 27–29

¹⁴ One of the reasons why Luther (as well as Erasmus) preferred to ascribe Hebrews to a different author than Paul was that “he thought the passages barring sinners from repentance ran counter to Paul's teaching”. Koester, *Hebrews*, 35

Hebrews spoke of the impossibility of repentance *outside of Christ*¹⁵, since those who relied on their own merits trampled the blood of Jesus underfoot.¹⁶ Luther opened his lectures of 1517–18 by stating that Hebrews “exalts grace as opposed to the arrogance of the law and human righteousness.”¹⁷ It is not difficult to detect the influence of Luther’s interpretation of Paul’s justification by faith in his reading of Hebrews. It is a more demanding task though to detect this theology in Hebrews.

Calvin saw more continuity between the old and the new covenant. Both were expressions of God’s sovereign will and the ordering of human life – albeit the old order was provisional while the new was final. It is within this understanding of the covenant – and the corresponding theology of election – that Calvin understood the warning passages. People enter into covenant with God by divine election. If a person was *genuinely* elected, it would be impossible for him or her to apostatize. The question is thus not whether or not it is possible for God to forgive a returned apostate – God is free to choose whatever he wishes – but whether or not it is possible for an elect to lose faith. A person who is not genuinely saved (i.e. a reprobate¹⁸) could display the gifts of the Spirit and then fall away – this would be impossible if the person was elected.¹⁹

1.3 Current State of Research

It is generally accepted among most scholars that the interest of the author was not in the general issue of post-baptismal sin, but rather in the “extreme sin of apostasy, and how it could be averted”.²⁰

Some scholars today, especially those within the Calvinistic-Arminian debate, are still concerned with the question of eternal security. Adrian Thomas, for example, holds on to a Calvinistic understanding, stating that the true regenerate cannot lose their salvation. Consequently, the warning passages are not a treat to the true believers, but only to those in the community are believers only on the surface. “The advantages of this view”, according to

¹⁵ I agree with Luther that Hebrews speak about the impossibility of repentance outside of Jesus, but I do not think it is correct to cast those who reject the grace offered as those who rely on the works of the law and self-righteousness, as if grace and law are opposites in Hebrews.

¹⁶ Koester, *Hebrews*, 36

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ “Reprobate” is a word used in Calvinism to designate a sinner who is not of the elect and is predestined to damnation.

¹⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 38

²⁰ Iutisone Salevao, *Legitimation in the Letter to the Hebrews. The Construction and Maintenance of a Symbolic Universe* (JSNT 219; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 282.

Thomas, “is that it provides a reasonable solution to the apparent conflict between the warnings against eternal loss and the assurance of eternal security in Hebrews”.²¹ The disadvantage of this view is that it is doctrinally motivated,²² and that it makes the warning passages have less force than it most likely had for the first addressees²³.

As a correction to this view, I contend that salvation must be understood within an eschatological framework. It is argued, convincingly I think, that salvation in Hebrews has a consistently future orientation. Salvation is not a present possession, but a future anticipation; something the people of God is “to inherit” (1:14). The notion of “eternal security” is thus framed differently in Hebrews. The people of God have not yet obtained the salvation, but they can in the present securely hope and trust that they will receive the inheritance in the future. Hence, the warnings are against failing to obtain the promised salvation, and not against losing a salvation already possessed.

David deSilva is a contemporary New Testament scholar who has addressed the challenges posed by the warning passages in Hebrews²⁴. While Thomas attempts to solve the tension between the gravity of apostasy and God’s grace, deSilva prefers to keep the tension. “Ultimately, the NT itself leaves us living within this tension.”²⁵ According to deSilva, this is a tension deeply rooted within the social context of the first-century world of the Roman Empire. deSilva places the warning passages within the structure of the reciprocal relationship between a patron and a client through a broker. Basically, if you receive a gift or a benefit from a patron, you also receive the obligation to show honor and gratitude in return. deSilva is to be commended for his ability to hold together favor and wrath, warning and promise; and for giving the warnings a relational framework. However, it is worth noting that neither “patron” nor “client” is explicitly mentioned in Hebrews, and the literary sources (e.g. Seneca) deSilva turns to in his intertextual work are never quoted in the letter.

Although I think Hebrews’ primary intertextual web (cf. 1.5.2) is constructed by the narrative of the Old Testament (OT)²⁶ and the covenant relationship found therein (cf. 1.4), I

²¹ Ibid, 93

²² It is based upon the premise that there is a distinction in Hebrews between true believers (the elect) and false believers (the reprobates). This distinction is not clearly established within Hebrews itself, but read into the text.

²³ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 244

²⁴ See for example David A. deSilva, “Exchanging Favor for Wrath: Apostasy in Hebrews and Patron-Client Relationships,” *JBL* 115/1 (1996): 91–116

²⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 244

²⁶ It is clearly anachronistic to talk about the *Old Testament* in the first century. This is a designation later given by the church. I will nonetheless employ the term, in lack of a better designation. (*The Hebrew Bible* is not to be preferred, since the scripture Hebrews used was the Greek version. More on this in 1.5.3)

still think deSilva's contribution is helpful. It is highly probable that the readers, living within the Greco-Roman world of the first-century, had their understanding of the covenant influenced by their understanding of the patron-client relationships, given the fact that this institution was "the practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society" (Seneca *Ben.* 1.4.2).²⁷ When Josephus, for example, rewrites and expounds on the history of Israel for a Greco-Roman audience, he interestingly never explicitly refers to the notion of an eternal covenant. This is noteworthy, since covenant is a prominent concept both in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX and in many forms of Hellenistic Judaism.²⁸ Paul Spilsbury has argued convincingly that Josephus "has retained the basic meaning of the covenant (i.e. a special contractual relationship between God and Israel),²⁹ but has replaced covenant language with terminology drawn from the patron-client model of social relations in the Mediterranean."³⁰ Hence, God is Israel's patron and Israel is God's favored client.

In order to give expression to supernatural or unseen realities, people in the ancient world used the language of everyday realities. The relationship between human and divine beings, cosmic inferiors and superiors as it were, was expressed in terms of the closest analogy in the world of social interactions, namely patronage. We thus find discussion of "patron deities" by individuals and groups. The author of Hebrews, like Philo Epictetus, or the author of 4 Maccabees, shares this strategy of conceptualizing God's relationship to humanity and the obligations of piety (see, e.g., Epictetus *Diss.* 4.1.91–98; 4 Macc. 12:11–13; 13:13; 16:18–22; Philo *Vita Mos.* 2.256).³¹

It is thus probably, as suggested by deSilva, that also in the case of Hebrews the relationship between God and Israel is understood along the lines of the patron-client relationship. deSilva's insight into these relationships and its applicability to the interpretation of the warnings of Hebrews is therefore very helpful. However, I do not think that this model is the only – not even the primary – influence on the author's description of the relationship

²⁷ deSilva. *Perseverance*, 59

²⁸ E.P. Sanders has argued that covenant was the dominant paradigm under which Jews of the Second Temple Period understood their relationship with God. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 473–80

²⁹ Cf. Sanders' "covenant nomism" which he defines as, "the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments ..." (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 75)

³⁰ Paul Spilsbury, "God and Israel in Josephus: A Patron-Client Relationship," in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (ed. Steve Mason; JSPSup 32; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 173–174

³¹ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 62

between God and Israel. The biblical narrative itself has played a substantial formative role in this regard, and the relationship is deeply rooted in Israel's election by God.

David Allen³² and Scott W. Hahn³³ both contend that the warning passages of Hebrews should be read within a covenantal framework. Hahn states the following in a treatment of Hebrews 6:4–8: “Blessing and curse statements are ... characteristically *covenantal*, indicating that the argument in Hebrews is moving within a covenant framework.” According to Hahn, the new covenant is unilateral since God is the only one who gives an oath; it is solely a covenant of promise. The new covenant is thus not a covenant with obligations, but “persons in the new era may apostatize and fall back under the curse of the Old Covenant (Heb 6:1-5).”³⁴ I think Hahn introduces a false antithesis between the old covenant as a covenant of obligation and the new covenant as a covenant of promise. I think that Hebrews presents both of the covenants as being based upon promise, and both of the covenants involve certain, mutual obligations. There is indeed a *newness* to the new covenant, but this is not understood in the sense that it now is without obligations.

In his extensive study of the exhortations in Hebrews, David Allen offers a different understanding of the covenant. Allen follows Hugenburger's definition of covenant “as a relationship of obligation established under divine sanction.” He contends that the covenant DNA of Deuteronomy holds promise and obligation in tension, and by investigating the exhortative passages in Hebrews he shows that Hebrews exhibits a similar balance between the two themes.³⁵ Similar to deSilva, Allen does not attempt to dissolve the tension but rather understand it as part of a dynamic relationship between the living God and his people. I agree with Allen that the new covenant also expresses a tension between promise and obligation. I think a weakness to Allen's work in this regard is to focus too narrowly on the citations of Deuteronomy in Hebrews, and not other echoes of scripture. I also think he goes too far in designating Hebrews as a “new” Deuteronomy. However, I will utilize Allen's work extensively in this thesis.

³² David M. Allen, *Deuteronomy and the Exhortations in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Re-Presentation* (WUNT 2/238; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008)

³³ Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: a canonical approach to the fulfillment of God's saving purposes*, (AYBRL; New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009)

³⁴ *Ibid*, 280

³⁵ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 116

1.4 My proposal: Hebrews 10:26–31 is Best Read against the backdrop of the Meta-Narrative of Israel

I contend, in agreement with Allen and Hahn, that a fruitful way to read the text is within a covenantal³⁶ framework.³⁷ Hebrews 6:4–8 warns the recipients of the dreadful consequences of falling away from the living God. He compares the apostates to a ground that produces thorns and thistles, hence it will not receive a blessing from God – it is “worthless and on the verge of being cursed” (6:7). By using the terms blessing/curse the motif of the covenant is clearly evoked (cf. Deut 28). In Hebrews 10:26–31 the course of action that the recipients are warned against is compared to transgressing the Law of Moses (10:28) – they are “profaning the blood of the *covenant*” (10:29). Thus also here the covenant relationship is at stake if the recipients do not heed the warning.³⁸ Hebrews does not state that God fiercely will judge sinners *in general*,³⁹ but that God will judge the people with whom he has made a covenant that they cannot reject lest they lose the salvation they are to inherit.⁴⁰ I contend that this in turn should be read against the backdrop of the meta-narrative of Israel as re-presented by the author of Hebrews, within which plot the covenant bond between God and his people is of major importance.

³⁶ Covenant is a prominent motif in Hebrews. In fact two thirds of the occurrences of the word *covenant* in the New Testament appear in Hebrews. The author does not explain what the covenant is, thus he assumes that his audience already knows. The Greek word used is *διαθήκη*, which follows LXX's translation of the Hebrew *berit* (probably patterned after the Hittite, or later Assyrian, suzerainty contracts between a great king and a vassal people). When *διαθήκη* is used for *berit* in Hebrews, it refers to the Sinai covenant and to the new covenant of Jer 38:31–34 (LXX). We most likely find an exception to this in 9:16, where *διαθήκη* seems to take on another meaning, namely “will” or “testament”. This is the normal meaning of the Greek *διαθήκη*, thus the author most likely puns on the word, taking advantage of the two possible meanings of *διαθήκη* (cf. Ole Jakob Filtvedt, “The Identity of Israel and the Paradox of Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Norwegian School of Theology, 2014), 105. Contra Scott, Hahn, “Covenant, Cult, and the Curse-of-death: *διαθήκη* in Hebrews 9:15–22,” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights* [ed. G. Gelardini; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005], 65–88). When I refer to “covenant” in this thesis, I will therefore limit the meaning to the *first* covenant of Sinai and the *new* covenant predicted by Jeremiah and inaugurated by the blood of Jesus.³⁶ God's covenant with Abraham is definitely not absent in the homily, but it is rather referred to as *ἐπαγγελία* (6:15; 7:6; 11:13; 11:17). The Davidic covenant is also present in the homily, however the term *διαθήκη* is not applied.

³⁷ With “covenantal framework” or “covenantal structure” I refer to the notion that covenant is a more or less defined concept with a certain structure that Hebrews is influenced by, and in light of which both the new and the old covenant belong. Cf. more on this in chapter 3.

³⁸ Also the remaining warning can convincingly be read against the backdrop of the structure of the covenant with its obligations and consequences.

³⁹ F.F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, [NICHNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. 1990 (1965)], 265) has aptly pointed out that “These words have no doubt been used frequently as a warning to the ungodly of what lies in store for them unless they amend their ways; but their primary application is to the people of God.”

⁴⁰ This indicates that “Salvation” is depicted by Hebrews as entering into a given realm.

Obviously, Hebrews is an epistle or a sermon (cf. 2.2.1), and not a narrative. However, there is often an implied story behind non-narrative writing.⁴¹ I contend that in Hebrews the Scriptural story of God’s dealing with his people provide the narrative context for the presentation of Jesus as well as the identity of the addressees.⁴² This narrative can be discerned already from the outset: “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things ...” (Heb 1:1–2). The addressees are described as bring part of the story begun – but not completed – in the OT, and “their destiny is understood as fulfilling it.”⁴³

This story could be structured in many ways, but I have chosen to divide the meta-narrative into three main stages that easily can be detected throughout Hebrews: (1) *Promise* of inheritance, (2) *Pilgrimage* towards the inheritance and (3) *Perfection* – inheritance received (by being entered).⁴⁴ According to Hebrews, Abraham and his descendants never reached the inheritance promised them, thus, as Thiessen has said, “the author of Hebrews rewrites the history of God’s people as an extended wilderness period.”⁴⁵ The recipients are inscribed into this narrative. They are cast as being among those who are to inherit the promise, and they are located at the threshold of the inheritance. The author is thus able to encourage his readers to locate themselves at a momentous time in Israel’s history—a time in which entry into God’s promised rest is imminent (hence the eschatological urgency in the homily). By inaugurating *the new covenant*, Jesus has made them fit to enter their inheritance (cf. Heb 9:15; 10:19–22), something the first covenant never enabled them to do. However, as Filtvedt aptly states, “the new covenant is not adequately understood ‘only’ as an arrangement through which salvation is distributed. It is also understood as a communal bond between God and his people, to which obligations are attached, and to which warnings against breaking the covenant apply.”⁴⁶ It is within this context I contend that the severe warning of Hebrews

⁴¹ On the notion of implicit narratives in Hebrews, see Kenneth Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Setting of the Sacrifice* (SNTSMS 143; Cambridge University Press, 2007). Similar ventures include Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983) and Abson P. Joseph, *A Narratological Reading of 1 Peter*, Library of New Testament Studies 440 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012)

⁴² Thus also Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 55

⁴³ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 55

⁴⁴ I will expand further on how these three stages can be detected in Hebrews in 2.3.1.

⁴⁵ Matthew Thiessen, “Hebrews 12:5–13, the Wilderness Period, and Israel’s Discipline,” *NTS* 55 (2009): 366–379

10:26–31 should be read. This framework might not make the passage easier, but I believe it will make us understand it – and its purpose – better.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Reading as Communication – Text as Discourse

Reading texts, in this case Hebrews, is participation in a conversation.⁴⁷ All communication involves an addresser, an addressee, a context for communication, and a message. We must also account for a medium of communication, i.e. the way in which the addresser delivers his message, e.g. written text or speech. Most likely, the addresser assumes that he or she will be understood, and articulates the message as to be understood, and also, presumably, to influence the addressee. Reading Hebrews, like participating in any conversation, is open to numerous ambiguities. The interaction with the person who addresses us through the pages of Hebrews is particularly difficult both because we are distant in time and place from the sending of the message, and because the addresser is not present for consultation; we cannot ask: “Did I hear you correctly?” However, it is still possible to encounter the author as a conversation partner in the act of reading. That conversation might be taking place *in* the text itself, i.e. between the implied author⁴⁸ and the implied reader.⁴⁹ Or it occurs *behind* the text, if we attempt to get at the intentions of the author and the reception of the original addressees. In the case of Hebrews this venture remains plausible speculations at best (cf. 2.1). It might also happen *in front* of the text, i.e. in the imagination and experience of the readers of the text. Green concludes that where we locate the conversation will depend both on the agenda for our interpretation and the tools and approaches we use to achieve that agenda.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Filvedt, “Paradox,” 115

⁴⁷ Joel B. Green, “The Challenge of Hearing the New Testament,” in *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 1–9 (1)

⁴⁸ The designation “implied author” refers to the perspective from which the work appears to have been written. This perspective must be reconstructed by readers on the basis of what they find in the text. Green, *Hearing*, 240.

⁴⁹ The designation implied reader “parallels that of the implied author. The implied reader is one who can actualize the potential meaning in a text, who responds to ways consistent with the expectations that we may ascribe to the implied author”. Mark Allan Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 239–255(242)

⁵⁰ This whole paragraph is indebted to the approach of Green, “Challenge”, 1–9

One method that can help us to navigate between the apparently competing modes of interpretation that focus either on the history behind the text, the world of the text, or the reading community in front of the text is *Discourse Analysis*⁵¹, that is focused on “language in use.”⁵²

Discourse analysis brings to the fore for investigation the social and linguistic webs within which speech occurs and derives its significance. These ‘webs’ are of various kinds and can be outlined with reference to the relationship of a given text to its co-text, intertext and context.⁵³

Co-text refers to the string of linguistic data surrounding a text;⁵⁴ in this case, the entire epistle of Hebrews. The co-text of Hebrews 10:26–31 will be investigated in 2.3. *Intertext* refers to the location of a text within the larger literary and interpretive frame of reference on which it consciously or unconsciously draws for meaning.⁵⁵ Hebrews builds especially, yet not exclusively⁵⁶, on the Greek version of what we have come to call the OT. The term intertextuality will be central when we in the following will discuss the use of the OT in Hebrews. *Context* (or discourse situation) refers to the location of a text in its socio-historical environment.⁵⁷ In this thesis, the primary target of interest is the discourse situation in which the text was produced. This has traditionally been the object of the historical and socio-scientific methods seeking behind the text. However, since we do not have any text-external evidences to say something about the historical author, the historical addressees and their context, we have to take the text of Hebrews as our starting point.⁵⁸ The discourse situation of Hebrews will be investigated in 2.1. However, as we read Hebrews, “a new discourse situation is realized.” Hebrews survived its addresser and addressees, and innumerable readers have since been drawn into its conversation, realizing new discourse situations. We have already had a brief look at the reception history of the warning passages in Hebrews –

⁵¹ I am well aware of the fact that my presentation of Discourse Analysis is both simplified and selective. Gillian Brown and George Yule present a good presentation of Discourse Analysis in *Discourse Analysis*, CTL (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983). For an application of the method in New Testament studies, cf. David Alen Black., et. al., eds., *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992). My presentation is based on Joel B. Green, “Discourse Analysis and New Testament Interpretation,” in *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 175–196.

⁵² Green, “Discourse”, 175

⁵³ Green, “Discourse”, 183.

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ The intertextual “web” of the author is also informed by other literary sources. However, the investigation of this thesis is primarily – but not exclusively – concerned with the way the OT is used.

⁵⁷ Green, “Discourse”, 183.

⁵⁸ Filtvedt, “Paradox,” 40.

different readings have clearly appeared as the discourse has been engaged within new contexts. Also this thesis represents an attempt to take part in the ancient conversation Hebrews has initiated, where I listen to the voice of the text, as well as to other commentators who have taken part in the conversation before me.

As I stated above, discourse analysis is focused on “language in use,”⁵⁹ thus it is concerned with the pragmatic aspect of language. It does not seek only to understand what the text *means*, but what the text *does*. What does the author want to accomplish? How does he want to impact and influence his reader? How does the model reader respond?⁶⁰ These are questions that I want to investigate in my analysis of Hebrews 10:26–31.

1.5.2 Intertextuality – The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews

This thesis is a study of Hebrews 10:26 – 31. In these six short verses, the author refers to the OT at least three times (Is. 26:11 in 10:27; Deut 17:6 in 10:28; Deut. 32:35–36 in 10:30). Hebrews in its entirety is extremely rich on *direct citations, allusions and literary echoes*⁶¹ to specific texts, characters and motifs from the OT, so I found the use of the OT to be a necessary topic in the introduction. As Susan E. Docherty writes: “Given the centrality of the Old Testament to the whole argument of Hebrews, it seems improbably that a valuable study of it can be undertaken which does not engage seriously with the author’s use of scripture.”⁶² It is clear that the author depends on the Old Testament in his presentation of the identity, position and ministry of Jesus. He also draws on the scriptures of Israel when affirming the identity of the recipients and the direction of their wandering. Like the apostles before him, the author interprets the Christ event⁶³ in light of the scriptures. He was convinced that God through the Son, in a most paradoxical way (who would have imagined a Messiah enduring the shameful death on a cross?), fulfilled the promises he previously gave Israel, and by that

⁵⁹ Green, “Discourse,” 175

⁶⁰ Joel B. Green also uses the designation “model reader” that is borrowed from Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Exploration in the Semiotics of Texts*, AS (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1979), and it refers to the reader “supposedly able to deal interpretively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them” (“Discourse,” 177)

⁶¹ The traditional vocabulary to describe different forms of dependence— however, “To what extent are narrative or thematic connections also legitimate means of seeing the OT operative within the NT, whether through, say exodus imagery, or through the appeal to key characters such as Moses or Abraham?” David. M. Allen, “Introduction: The Study of the Use of the Old Testament in the New”, JSNT 38/1 (2015), 10.

⁶² Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation* (WUNT, 2/260; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 51.

⁶³ With the Christ event, I refer to the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.

brought the history of salvation to its completion. It is a clear continuity with the past, but something new has at the same time taken place; the age has turned. Based on this newness, the author interprets the Scriptures in light of the Christ Event.

Several hermeneutical questions surface in the study of intertextuality in Hebrews 10:26–31. What source is the author using? How does he use it; is it a direct quotation, an allusion or a literary echo – and according to what criteria can I identify the one or the other?⁶⁴ Does the author take the quotations out of their original context (‘proof-texting’), or does the wider context serve as a backdrop that informs the reading of the text in its new context? In my attempt to answer these questions, I have had to consider some relevant issues⁶⁵, namely: Textual Form, Context and Micro versus Macro readings.

1.5.3 Textual Form – What Source is the Author using?

It is a given in Hebrews scholarship today that the author was making use of the Greek biblical text; the Septuagint.⁶⁶ I should rather say Greek *texts*. According to Docherty, most contemporary Septuagintal scholarship emphasises the plurality of textual traditions that were in circulation very soon after the time of the first translation of the Pentateuch into Greek in the third century BCE.⁶⁷ Thus the New Testament authors most likely had a wide variety of texts available,⁶⁸ and they could freely choose between different text forms the reading that best suited their purpose. It is likely that most Jews in the first century knew the scriptures well, and it is therefore probable that the authors sporadically quoted the texts after memory. Sometimes they would even shape and alter the OT text to fit their purpose, thus the interpretation has already started in the quotation.⁶⁹ However – “whereas in previous generations textual variance was often attributed to the creative instinct of the NT writers

⁶⁴ Here I have applied Richard B. Hays’ “Hearing Echoes: Seven tests” in *Echoes of Scriptures in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1986) 29–31. (1:Availability, 2:Volume, 3:Recurrence, 4:Thematic coherence, 5:Historical Plausibility, 6: History of Interpretation, 7:satisfaction)

⁶⁵ I could also have included *Interpretive Technique*. Susan E. Docherty (*Old Testament*) offers a thorough treatment of the interpretive techniques applied by the author of Hebrews; portraying the author as a Jewish exegete, shaped by contemporary Jewish practice.

⁶⁶ Docherty, *Old Testament*, 3

⁶⁷ *ibid*, 125

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 37

⁶⁹ Joel B. Green and Richard B. Hays, “The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers,” in *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 222–238 (225).

themselves, it is now more commonplace to note that the given text – however unknown to modern interpreters – was conceivable a legitimate text form for the author concerned.”⁷⁰

1.5.4 Context – Does the Author Take the Citations Out of the Original Context?

When the author of Hebrews makes a brief reference to Deuteronomy 17:6 in 10:28, does he have the wider Deuteronomistic context in mind, or does he merely appeal to it as a random proof text? This is a question that I have wrestled with in my exegesis, and it is related to a major topic within the study of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament (OT/NT). C.H Dodd opined in 1952 that the OT quotations were not isolated proof texts – they functioned “as pointers to the whole context of the wider OT source, and as such, brought that wider narrative at fore.”⁷¹ Some OT/NT scholars have agreed with Dodd, surmising that the contextual understanding of an OT text is persevered when placed within its NT context. Other scholars opine that the meaning of the OT text changes, sometimes dramatically, or is given a very different sense or function when cited in the NT context.⁷² We cannot take for granted that the original context is persevered in the new context (nor that the opposite always is the case), but I think it is safe to assume that at the very least the author was aware of the context of the text he was using. As interpreters of the text we can thus ask: does it seem likely that the author in this specific case points to the original context; does that original context help us to understand the author’s argument? If it seems like the author ignores the original context, he probably does it deliberately, and we can investigate what force the alteration lends to the new text.

1.5.5 Micro vs. Macro – Minor Echoes Can Generate a Wider Narrative Story

Richard Hays published in 1989 the paradigmatic *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, and brought the full extent of intertextuality and literary theory into OT/NT discourse.⁷³ According to Hays, Paul “repeatedly situates his discourse within the symbolic field created by a single great textual precursor: Israel’s scripture”⁷⁴; thus the scriptures of Israel serve as a cave of Pauline echoes. I opine that the same holds true for the author of Hebrews; he deliberately invites the readers into an echo chamber in such a way that they hear in the

⁷⁰ Allen, “Introduction,” 10.

⁷¹ Allen, “Introduction” 7; C.H Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 28–60.

⁷² Allen, “Introduction,” 8.

⁷³ Allen, “Introduction,” 11.

⁷⁴ Hays, *Echoes*, 15. Hays is not unaware of the presence of nonscriptural influences on Paul’s discourse, but his investigation is limited to the exploration of the intertextual echoes of Israel’s scriptures in Paul (16).

current text resonances of earlier text.⁷⁵ Hence, as readers of the discourse we do well to listen attentively after literary echoes in the text. “This is not to say however,” Hays and Green add, “that via the phenomenon of intertextuality a NT author simply agrees with and builds on an earlier writing.” On the contrary, “his engagement with the OT might be parodic, repeating an old pattern or echoing ancient metaphors to signal difference at the very heart of similarity.”⁷⁶

As readers of a discourse we can be concerned with fine textual details as we observe echoes in the text – i.e. engagement in a “micro” reading – or we can engage in a “macro” or “big picture” reading of the material. A macro reading is driven by the micro readings of the text, and utilizes the presumably minor echoes to generate a wider narrative or story that serves as a sub-structure – “whether (new) exodus out of exile, whether entry into the land, or whether Jesus as new Moses/David.”⁷⁷ It is a macro reading that is applied by Hays in *Echoes of scriptures*. David M. Allen offers a “macro” reading of the scriptural citations and echoes in the exhortations in Hebrews, where Deuteronomy serves as the echo chamber.⁷⁸ In this approach minor echoes generate great resonance, and the interpreter is reading a great deal between the lines in the discourse. Also this thesis is an engagement in a macro-reading of Hebrews, where I locate the warning in Hebrews 10:26–31 within the author’s re-presentation of the narrative of Israel (cf. 1.4).

This approach raises some important hermeneutical question: when and why is a particular ‘macro’ take on Paul or Hebrews persuasive?⁷⁹ On which criteria can I say that my analysis of Heb 10:26–31 within the meta-narrative of Israel is persuasive. David Allen asserts that there is a certain “slipperiness” to the study of intertextuality.⁸⁰ One way that we can evaluate a macro-reading is by asking if it makes sense. Do I understand more of the passage when I read it within this certain substructure? Is the result convincing? This is predicated on the notion that “the proof of the pudding is in the eating.” However, this again raises the question of criteria: how do we evaluate whether a result is convincing or not? I am aware of the fact that reading too much between the lines of a biblical text is hermeneutically problematic. In this thesis I have therefore attempted to restrain myself from reading a meta-

⁷⁵ Green and Hays, “Old Testament,” 228. What Green and Hays say about Paul (used as an example of a New Testament writer) I apply on the author of Hebrews.

⁷⁶ Green and Hays, “Old Testament,” 228

⁷⁷ Allen, “Introduction”, 11

⁷⁸ Allen, *Deuteronomy*

⁷⁹ Allen, “Introduction”, 11

⁸⁰ *ibid*

story into Hebrews, and rather discern the meta-structure that is already embedded within the text.

2. The Context and Co-text of Hebrews 10:26–31

In this chapter, I intend to place Hebrews 10:26–31 in its context and co-text. I will start with giving a brief account of the historical context (or discourse situation) of the letter (2.1). I will then give a brief introduction to the genre of Hebrews (2.1). Here I will also touch on the issue of the author’s rhetorical strategy and the relationship between theological exposition and exhortation. I will then walk through the letter in its entirety, with the purpose of showing how 10:26–31 fits into the author's larger argument and rhetorical strategy (2.3.1). In the next section (2.3.2), I will take a closer look at how 10:26–31 relates to its immediate co-text. How is the paragraph connected with what precedes it (10:19–25) and what follows (10:32–39)? I will end the chapter with a structure analysis of the text (2.4) that will prepare the way for the analysis in the next chapter.

2.1 Context: The Discourse Situation of Hebrews

“But who wrote the epistle? God knows the truth”⁸¹

“...a detective work that has produced many suspects but no conviction”⁸²

“The author of Hebrews lives within the passion and subtlety of the discourse itself; the life he lived outside the rhetoric is not known to us, and does it truly matter?”⁸³

Discourse situation (context)⁸⁴ refers to the location of a text in its socio-historical environment. As discussed in the introduction, a new discourse situation appears every time the discourse is read. However, the primary target of interest of this thesis is the discourse situation in which the text was produced, which traditionally has been the object of the historical and socio-scientific methods seeking behind the text. However, “we simply do not know the ethnical identity of the addressees, their historical location, the precise dating of the text or the identity of the author.”⁸⁵ It is thus sensible, as Filtvedt does, to take *a historical minimalism* as a starting point. Filtvedt points out that “a Historical minimalism is not the same as a non-historic approach, where Hebrews is read as if it did not belong to any social or

⁸¹ Orgines, quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.25.14 (Williamson).

⁸² deSilva, *Perseverance*, 25.

⁸³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrew: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 44.

⁸⁴ The term roughly corresponds to the “*Sitz im Leben*” in form criticism.

⁸⁵ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 22.

historical context at all.”⁸⁶ It is rather realizing that our lack of knowledge of the history behind Hebrews leads us towards a certain extent of agnosticism.

Supplementary, it can be argued that the discourse situation – at least the only one available to us – “is more a constructed textual phenomenon than a historical event ... the situation is both embedded in the text and created by the text, as part of the argument”⁸⁷. It is thus possible to observe and discern the context of the discourse as it is pictured or constructed in the text. This in-the-text approach will prove helpful in the case of Hebrews, since it is difficult to get to the history behind the text. On discussing the authorship of Hebrews, deSilva aptly states: “While we lack a name for the author, we do not lack a personality.”⁸⁸ This statement is based on the assumption that we can get to know the author, albeit the *implied* one, by reading the text. Likewise, we can use the text as a starting point to discern the setting of the addressees, but let us, to phrase it like Luke Timothy Johnson, “respect the limits beyond which we simply indulge in speculation”.⁸⁹

The anonymous author⁹⁰ – “all attempts to overcome the anonymity remain speculative”⁹¹ – was not himself⁹² an eyewitness but rather one who was evangelized by “those who had heard him” (2:1–4).⁹³ He does not appear to be among the leaders of the community to which he writes (13:7, 17, 24).⁹⁴ He has nonetheless been in contact with the group before, since he hopes to be “restored” to them (13:19). The author makes extensive

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Eirin Hoel Hauge, “Turn Away from Evil and Do Good! Reading 1 Peter in Light of Psalm 34.” (Ph.D diss., Norwegian School of Theology, 2008), 40.

⁸⁸ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 25.

⁸⁹ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 34.

⁹⁰ Many possible authors have been suggested (e.g. Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Priscilla and Aquila), but the majority of contemporary scholars (e.g. Attridge, Ellingworth, D. Guthrie, Lane, deSilva) adopt the viewpoint of Origenes; God alone knows the identity of the author of Hebrews. For a presentation of the different views, see Koester, *Hebrews*, 42–46; Ray C. Stedman, *Hebrews*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 14–20; Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: a Commentary on the Epistle o the Hebrews*, (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1989), 1–5.

⁹¹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 45

⁹² I advisedly refer to the implied author of Hebrews as masculine, in light of the masculine singular participle in Heb. 11:32. Thus ruling out Priscilla as a likely candidate.

⁹³ Thus ruling out also Paul as a likely candidate (cf. Gal 1:11–17; 1 Cor 15:3–10)

⁹⁴ Some commentators have argued that the letter is not addressing a specific congregation, but is rather a general text. The author wrote about conditions that were typical of the second and third generations of believers, and the personal notes in 13:18–23 were added in order to make Hebrews resemble a Pauline letter. Koester convincingly refutes this. (Koester, *Hebrews*, 64). Pamela Eisenbaum, “Locating Habrews within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins,” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insight* (ed. G. Gelardini; Biblical Interpretation Series 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 213–237 claims that Hebrews was written to several different communities.

use of associative language that signifies equality and kinship. He calls them “partners in Christ” (3:14) and “brothers and sisters” (3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22). He also includes himself along with the addressees in many of the hortatory passages (2:1, 3; 4:11, 16; 6:1; 7:19; 10:19–24; 12:1; 13:13). At the same time, the author clearly assumes a position of authority and he expects that the recipients will act according to his imperatives.⁹⁵

The author does not, as John the seer did (Rev 1:1; 1:10), establish his ethos and give his message legitimacy through appeals to visions or charismatic power. Neither does he claim authority on the basis of being an apostle or community founder (contrary to Paul, cf. Rom 1:1; Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1). His authority is rather based on prior tradition, i.e. the word “declared at first by the Lord and attested to us by those who heard him” (2:3), together with a Christocentric interpretation of the OT scriptures. This becomes evident in the text of our research (10:26–31). The author proclaims a stark warning of impending judgment, and his message is legitimated not by the author’s own revelation or position, but by an appeal to the scriptures: “For we know the one who said: ‘vengeance is mine, I will repay’” (10:30). Thus instead of building his own independent *ethos*⁹⁶, the author borrows ethos from the authoritative scriptures,⁹⁷ that is, he borrows their authority and reliability to increase his own.

The majority of commentators argue that Hebrews addresses people who already identify as followers of Jesus,⁹⁸ and that they belong to the second or third generation of the Jesus movement⁹⁹ (2:1–4). Hence, it is assumed that some time has passed since the addressees were evangelized (cf. 10:32–34).¹⁰⁰ The author of *1 Clement*, who wrote his epistle at the end of the first or the beginning of the second century,¹⁰¹ most probably knew and referred to Hebrews in his writing. A dating of Hebrews in the second half of the first century is thus aptly suggested.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 25

⁹⁶ cf. 2.2 for more about the argument from *ethos*.

⁹⁷ “New Testament writers sometimes use the Old Testament ... to borrow its language and ethos.” Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the book of Romans: A Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 161.

⁹⁸ I will abstain from using the theological loaded terms “Christian” and “Christianity”. Along with “Jew” and “Judaism”, these terms are not used in Hebrews and very rarely in the NT (“Jew” is an exception). “It is therefore problematic, not only in the case of Hebrews but also more generally, to use these terms as if they represent established identities in the first century”, Filtvedt, “Paradox,” 23. I will therefore use the term “followers of Jesus”, which is an ethnically open category.

⁹⁹ I use the term “Jesus movement” in the same way as Filtvedt does: “all the communities of people who in some sense identify as followers of Jesus”, Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 23

¹⁰⁰ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 23

¹⁰¹ The dating of 1 Clement is disputed. For a discussion on how the dating of 1 Clement relates to the dating of Hebrews, see Eisenbaum, “Locating”, 224–26

¹⁰² e.g. Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 23.

Traditionally, the addressees of the letter were understood to be Jesus followers of *Jewish* origin¹⁰³. However, in the nineteenth century, there emerged a line of thought that assumed that the addressees were of *Gentile* origin¹⁰⁴, or perhaps a community of *mixed* ethnicity¹⁰⁵. Even though Craig Koester seems to favor a mixed audience,¹⁰⁶ he nevertheless states the following: “Historically, however, little can be said about their background prior to entering the Christian community.”¹⁰⁷ Ole Jakob Filtvedt makes in *The Identity of God’s People and The Paradox of Hebrews*, a claim that the focal point in Hebrews is not whether or not the addressees are Jews or Gentile. He contends that “The argument of Hebrews is...entirely free of ethnic distinctions.”¹⁰⁸ The readers are invited to identify as members of God’s people and descendants of Abraham – irrespective of their ethnic background.¹⁰⁹

We do not know where the addressees were situated,¹¹⁰ but based on the text we do know some things about their past history (2:3–4; 10:32–35) and present situation (5:11–12; 6:9–12; 10:25; 12:4).¹¹¹ The addressees, as noted above, responded to the proclamation of the gospel by the witnesses of Jesus when “God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.” (2:4)¹¹²

It is disputed whether the letter was written before or after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Internal evidence seems to favor a pre-70 date (cf. 10:2) but also this remains speculative.

¹⁰³ Those who assume that Hebrews was addressed to Jewish followers of Jesus usually hold that the occasion for the writing is the threat of some *Christians* to return to *Judaism* (cf. e.g. F.F Bruce, *Hebrews*, xxi.) They assume that Hebrews compares Jesus with respected figures in the OT (angels, Moses, the levitical high priest) out of a polemical agenda. I agree with deSilva that this is predicated upon a misunderstanding of the function of these comparisons. They are not polemical, but rather serves to set up the arguments “from lesser to greater” (cf. 3.3). “Christ is shown to be greater than the angels and Moses in order to set up the proof that undergirds the author’s warning against breaking faith with God.” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 7).

¹⁰⁴ eg. Röth, *Epistolam*; von Soden, “Hebräerbrief”; Delville, “L’Épître”; Hegermann, *Brief*. (Koester, *Hebrews*, 47),

¹⁰⁵ eg. Pamela Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in its Literary Context*, (SBLDS 156; Atlanta, Ga.:Scholars Press, 1997), 7–11

¹⁰⁶ Thus also deSilva, *Perseverance*, 7. “The letter, unfortunately named, would be equally meaningful to Christians of any ethnic origin, since both Jews and Gentiles were socialized into the same Christocentric reading of the same scriptures”, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Craig Koester, *Hebrews*, 47. Thus also Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 22

¹⁰⁸ Ole Jakob Filtvedts *The Identity of God’s People and the Paradox of Hebrews* (WUNT 2/400; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 20

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ The only clue in the text is the greeting from “those in Italy” in 13:24. This could imply that the addressees are located in Italy (e.g. Rome, cf. William L. Lane). The author would then greet from their countrymen that were present with him. It could however also suggest that the author is located in Italy.

¹¹¹ Koester discerns three phases in the history of the community addressed: (1) Proclamation and conversion; (2) Persecution and solidarity; (3) Friction and malaise. The author writes the letter during the third phase. Koester, *Hebrews*, 64–72

¹¹² Probably, the reminder of their initiatory experiences provides for the author the strongest legitimation for his challenge, as it did for Paul in Galatians 3:1–5: “Did you experience so much for nothing?” (v.4). cf. deSilva, *Perseverance*, 7–8

We also know that the addressees have experienced and are still undergoing some kind of hardship. We know that they in the past, after their conversion, endured a hard struggle with suffering, including public exposure to abuse and persecution. Some of them even experienced imprisonment and confiscation of possessions (10:32–35). In the first phase of the opposition, they faced it with enthusiasm – they even “cheerfully accepted” the plundering of their possessions (10:34). The situation seems to be different now. Some of them are in danger of drifting away from (2:1) and neglecting the message declared to them (2:3); of failing to reach the promised rest (4:1) by falling through such disobedience as the wilderness generation showed (4:12); and of growing weary and losing heart (12:3). In Hebrews 6:4–6 we can discern that the addressees were in danger of falling away (i.e. apostatize), and 12:26–31 expresses that they might be in danger of treating God with the highest contempt. Some have started to withdraw from the community (10:25).

There have been many attempts to explain why the addressees have begun to lose their commitment and confidence; strong persecution? Or a temptation to revert back to Judaism?¹¹³ Attridge has suggested: “from the response that he gives to the problem, it would appear that the author conceives of the threat to the community in two broad but interrelated categories, external pressure or ‘persecution’ (10:36–12:13) and a waning commitment to the community’s confessed faith.”¹¹⁴ David deSilva elaborates further on this idea. The members of the community were in all probability from a wide range of social rank, and not only from the lower class. We know they had experienced having their property confiscated (10:34), they were capable of charitable activity and hospitality (i.e. a criteria for higher social status. Cf. 13:2; 10:33b–34a; 13:16), and they even seem to need warnings against over-ambitions, with regard to both possessions (13:5) and status (13:14).¹¹⁵ Now they have experienced loss of status. It is a disgrace to be associated with a crucified Messiah and a low-status people “The Christians lost their place and standing in society, stripped of their reputation for being reliable citizens on account of their commitment to an alternative system of values, religious practices, and social relationships.”¹¹⁶ deSilva argues that the possibility to recover wealth and regain status in society that seems to be the major temptation and motivation to withdraw from the community.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ cf. Footnote 103

¹¹⁴ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 13

¹¹⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 9

¹¹⁶ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 16

¹¹⁷ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 9

2.2 The Genre and Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews.

Hebrews differs from other ancient letters, i.e. the letters of Paul, in that it lacks many of the literary characteristics letters usually contained. This is most evident in the introduction, in which the author neither introduces himself or the addressees. He does not open with a greeting or prayer of thanksgiving, which we so often see in Paul's letters, but starts point-blank: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors ..." (1:1). This rather resembles the beginning of a sermon. William Lane has thus bluntly stated; "Hebrew is a sermon. It is not a letter."¹¹⁸ Accordingly Hebrews shows us early Christian preaching and has been called "the oldest complete early Christian sermon that has been preserved."¹¹⁹ However, I still believe the text resembles a letter in the sense that it was written and sent to the recipients (13:22) while the author was absent (13:19), and it clearly concludes as a letter (13:23–25). Despite this, I agree that it shows signs of being a sermon (a *homily*).¹²⁰ The author himself calls the letter a "λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως" (13:22), which was a common term for a sermon both among early Christians (cf. Acta 13:15) and in the synagogue. Possibly, the author sent "these words of exhortation" to the church so that they could be read aloud, because he was not able to be present to hand over the words himself. "Given that spiritual leaders of the early church read letters in a liturgical setting, this makes perfect sense."¹²¹

I will therefore, in this thesis, refer to the text as a "sermon" or a "homily", as a reminder that Hebrews "appears to have been written with a view to orally delivery."¹²² deSilva points out that the awareness of the orality of Hebrews leads to an appreciation of the many devices employed by orators, whose "goal was not only to create an argument but to deliver it in such a way as to 'sound persuasive to [their] audience.' The author uses a wide variety of the embellishments, ornaments, and forms of argument recommended or listed by the ancient rhetorical theorists, pointing to his rhetorical artistry and acuity."¹²³

The goal of the classical orators was to persuade their audience, and the same can be said of Hebrews. According to the rhetorical handbooks, a successful speech should apply three kinds of arguments: the appeal to *logos* (i.e. the reason of the hearer), the appeal to

¹¹⁸ William L. Lane, *Hebrews – A Call to Commitment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 17.

¹¹⁹ William L. Lane, "Hebrews", DLNT, 450.

¹²⁰ William L. Lane, has compiled many indications that it is a text for oral, rather than visual, communication. *Hebrews* (2 vols.; WBC 47A–B; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1991), 1xxiv–1xxv

¹²¹ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 36

¹²² deSilva, *Perseverance*, 35–36.

¹²³ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 36. In this quote, deSilva cited Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and function of Hebrews 11* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 4.

pathos (i.e. the emotions of the hearer), and the appeal to *ethos* (i.e. the hearer's perception of the speaker).¹²⁴ Also Hebrews seems to understand "that people were not persuaded by appeals to mind alone"¹²⁵.

It has proved difficult to categorize Hebrews as either *deliberative*¹²⁶ or *epideictic*¹²⁷, since it clearly "utilizes elements of both epideictic and deliberative oratory."¹²⁸ The theological expositions in Hebrews praise the person and achievements of Jesus, comparing him favorably to the other mediators and means of redemption in the OT (by means of *synkresis*). This resembles epideictic speech. The exhortations of Hebrews however, that are punctuated throughout the homily, make it resemble deliberative speech. The exhortations are connected by phrases like *διό* and *οὖν* that suggest logical dependence on the preceding passages.¹²⁹ It thus seems like each theological exposition serves to set up the following exhortation, suggesting that the main strategy of the author is hortatory.¹³⁰ The author's exaltation of the position and ministry of Jesus as high priest and covenant mediator in the exhortations hence "ultimately serve to magnify the goods and the advantages that the believers now enjoy, and thus to magnify the folly of relinquishing those goods and advantages by 'shrinking back', 'drifting off,' or 'falling short'."¹³¹ Throughout the homily, Hebrews clearly refers to two different courses of action that lay before the hearers. He encourages them to choose to remain committed to their confession and hope, and warns them against choosing the opposite course of action, namely to turn away from the living God.

¹²⁴ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 43

¹²⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 43

¹²⁶ Deliberative rhetoric sought to promote or dissuade a certain course of action over against another or several other courses of action. (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 40). Banabas Lindars ("The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews," *NTS* 35[1989]: 382–6) places Hebrews within this category.

¹²⁷ Epideictic rhetoric sought to commemorate the honored dead and thus arouse emulation in the audience. (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 41). Attridge ("Paraenes in a Homily [λόγος παρακλήσεως],: The Possible Location and of, and Socialization in, the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'." *Semeia* 50 [1990]: 211–26) places Hebrews within this category.

¹²⁸ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 48

¹²⁹ Filtvedt, "Paradox", 49; deSilva, *Perseverance*, 48.

¹³⁰ However, Filtvedt argues convincingly that it is problematic to make exposition subordinate to exhortation, since indicatives and imperatives are intimately linked in a dynamic interplay. "The expositions are meant to substantiate the exhortations and the exhortations demonstrate the purpose of the exposition". Filtvedt, "Paradox", 49.

¹³¹ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 56

2.3 The Co-Text of Hebrews – the String of Linguistic Data that Surrounds the Text

2.3.1 The Broad Co-Text of Hebrews 10:26–31 – How does the Text Relate to the Rest of the Homily?

In the following my aim is to place Hebrews 10:26-31 within its co-text, that is, the entirety of Hebrews. In Hebrews 10:26–31 we find many themes that we could have traced through the book in order to see how they develop; warning against apostasy, sin, knowledge, sacrifice for sins, the law of Moses vis-à-vis the new covenant, death, life and impending divine judgment. However, since the homily seems to invite the recipients to see themselves as being part of a grand narrative begun but left unfulfilled within the scope of the OT scriptures (1.4), it seems plausible that all of these themes can be placed within this meta-narrative. This narrative is not explicitly referred to or laid out in our text, but the recipients would doubtlessly know that Moses (10:28) – not to mention the Son of God (10:29) – plays an important character in the narrative of Israel, thus it is implicitly referred to. I therefore think it will be helpful for our analysis to trace how the author presents this meta-narrative that he is placing the recipients within. I will obviously not be able to do justice to everything that is embedded within (and between) the lines. I will draw some lines through the homily that are relevant to our specific text, knowing that other lines would be traced if we were investigating another text or other themes. I have above (1.4) argued that the narrative can be structured in three stages – promise, pilgrimage and perfection. I will take these as a starting point, and then focus on how Jesus is presented as taking part in – and completing – this narrative – and see which part the covenant play in the narrative.

Promise of Inheritance

Promise (*ἐπαγγελία*) is a keyword in Hebrews; it is the God-given promise that drives the narrative forward towards its goal. The narrative goes back all the way to Abraham.¹³² God made a promise to Abraham, saying that he would bless and multiply him, and “Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise” (6:14–15). God is consequently the one who makes the promises – and he is faithful to keep them (6:17–18; 10:23; 11:11) – and the promises are obtained through patient endurance on behalf of those who have received the

¹³² One can even convincingly argue that it goes back to Adam and Eve and God’s original purpose for humanity. Cf. Filtvedt, “Paradox”, on the use of Psalm 8 in Hebrews.

promises. God did fulfill the promise of a great nation (11:11–12), however, Abraham was also promised an *inheritance*. The promise is therefore said to be something to inherit (6:12); and Abraham and his descendants are called the “heirs of the promise” (6:17; 11:9). Hebrews clearly states that *this* promise was never fulfilled. Abraham did not reach his inheritance, and neither did his descendants; “all of these died in faith without having received the promises but from a distance they saw and greeted them” (11:13). After going through all the examples of faith from the Septuagint, Hebrews concludes: “all of these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised,¹³³ since God had provided something better so that they would not, *apart from us*, be made perfect” (11:39, italics mine). Thus, significantly, the author inscribes himself and the addressees into the narrative of those who are to inherit the promise. Also they – like Abraham was (11:8) – have been “partakers in a heavenly calling” (3:1), indicating both the “origin and the direction of their calling.”¹³⁴

The Pilgrimage towards the Inheritance

The call of Abraham initiated a wandering; a *pilgrimage*.¹³⁵ Abraham “obeyed ... to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going” (11:8). As stated above, Abraham and his descendants did not reach the land to which they were heading, thus: “They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland” (11:14). The life of faith is thus according to Hebrews pictured as a pilgrimage; a journey between the country left behind (11:15) and the country longed for (11:16). This narrative constitutes the lens through which the author urges the recipients to make sense of their situation. Just like their ancestors left Egypt under Moses and wandered through the wilderness towards the

¹³³ Israel *did* conquer and inhabit Canaan under Joshua (cf. Heb 11:30), however, they did not – according to Hebrews – receive the promise (cf. Heb 4:8, Joshua did not give them “rest”).

¹³⁴ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 70

¹³⁵ Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*. [by R. Harrisville and I. Sandberg, Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1984] and William G. Johnson, “The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews.” *JBL* 97/2 (1978), 239–251. Johnson has helpfully applied a phenomenological model to the motif in Hebrews. The four essentials in the religious structure of a pilgrimage are: (1) Pilgrimage involves separation from a particular point or place (e.g. home); it has a definite beginning (cf. Heb 11:15). (2) It involves a journey to sacred space; it is not an aimless, religious wandering (cf. Heb 11:10). (3) Pilgrimage is made for a fixed purpose, such as purification or forgiveness of sins. This purpose is supposed to have been attained when the pilgrim reaches the sacred place. (4) It involves hardship (e.g. physical suffering or trials of faith). These difficulties may prevent the pilgrim from reaching the desired destination or goal. (3:12-18; 5:11-6:12; 10:23-26; 12:4).

“rest” (3:7–19), they have been delivered – here the exodus motif is evoked¹³⁶ – by Jesus, their leader, and have started on a journey towards their destination, since “the promise of entering the rest is still open” (4:1). Hebrews thus constantly urges the addressees to continue in a movement forward: “Let us approach the throne of grace” (4:16); “let us go on toward perfection” (6:1); “since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary ... let us approach ...” (10:19); “let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (12:1); “lift your drooping hand and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet” (12:12); and “you *have* come to mount Zion and to the city of the living God” (12:22, italics mine). They are – quite naturally – warned against the opposite movement that hinders them from completing the journey. They are exhorted to not “have hearts that *turn away* from the living God” (3:12) so that they “fail to reach” the rest (4:1). They are warned against falling away (6:6); leaving the community (10:25) and shrinking back (10:38–39). The warning of our text, Hebrews 10:26–31, must be read together with these.

William G. Johnson, on explaining the journey of Hebrews as a pilgrimage, writes the following:

But the way is difficult. There are perils, both physical and spiritual. Sin beckons with its pleasures as of deceitful power to erode faith and faithfulness. The way at times is a struggle; even martyrdom may mark its ascent (3:12-18; 5:11-6:12; 10:23-26; 12:4). One may grow weary, be led astray by false teachings, or gradually fall back from the group in its onward progress. Or, worse still, he may decide that the pilgrim way is not for him and by a deliberate act of rejection sever his connection with the band of wanderers [6:4-6; 10:26-31 and 12:15-17]. This difficulty of the way is not to cause surprise, indeed, it is characteristic of the way.¹³⁷

The wandering might very well be full of testing and trials (12:7–11), nevertheless, they should make sure they do not stray from the way that has been opened for them (10:20).

Perfection – Inheritance Received

Thus, life of faith is for the people of God a pilgrimage – but how is the destination they are heading towards described? As has already become clear above, “the land” motif is repeatedly

¹³⁶ Filtvedt (“Paradox”, 64–66) proposes – convincingly I think – that readers can discover a subtle exodus typology at work in Hebrews 2:5–18. Jesus is presented as one who liberates death’s captives (2:15); one who takes hold of (cf. Jeremiah 38:31–34 LXX/ Heb 8:9) the descendants of Abraham in order to lead them into their inheritance (2:16). If this hypothesis is correct, it explains why Hebrews immediately after this passage compares Jesus with Moses (3:1–6) – the leader of the first exodus. “The benediction in 13:20–21 is articulated in a way which suggests that Jesus’ resurrection is interpreted with the Scriptural exodus narrative as its background. Jesus is pictured as a shepherd

¹³⁷ Johnson, “pilgrimage”, 246. Cf. Footnote 158

evoked in Hebrews. However, given the fact that Israel still after the conquest of Canaan had not received the promise, we understand that the inheritance transcends the physical land. This becomes explicit in chapter 11; Abraham and his descendants looked forward to “the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God”(10:10);¹³⁸ and “a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” (11:16) In chapter 3–4, the promised inheritance is called “the rest” (3:10; 4:1) as well as “a Sabbath rest”¹³⁹ (4:9). Another major motif that is used to describe the destination towards which the people of God is heading – also this is deeply rooted in the OT – is the cultic motif of entering God’s sanctuary. Hebrews 4:14–16 and 10:19–25 invite the addressees to draw near to “the throne of grace” (4:16) and “enter the sanctuary” (10:19). In Hebrews both the heavenly homeland and the (heavenly) sanctuary signify sacred space, that is, the divine realm; and it seems like the two motifs designate the same destination. The promise they are to receive is also called salvation (1:14); reward (11:26), blessing (12:17) and eschatological life (10:38–39). Another way of expressing the same reality is by means of the word “*perfection*.”¹⁴⁰

Jesus as the “Leader to Salvation” (2:10) and “Forerunner” (6:20)

God’s promise to Abraham – indeed to humanity (cf. the use of Psalm 8 in 2:5–18) – is left unfulfilled within the scope of the OT. It is thus significant that Hebrews inscribes Jesus into the narrative, which he does profoundly, especially in 2:5–18. After his first exhortation (2:1–

¹³⁸ “This description of the goal of the pilgrimage of the people of faith borrows qualities assigned in the OT to the first Jerusalem. God is frequently said to have ‘laid the foundations’ of Jerusalem (LXX Ps 86:5; Isa 14:32). Noteworthy is LXX Ps 47:9: ‘God laid her foundations for ever.’ The author of Hebrews applies these texts, as did other Jewish authors after the fate of the earthly Jerusalem in 587 B.c. and, even more, A.D. 70, to the ‘heavenly Jerusalem,’ which 2 *Bar.* 4:1-7 significantly claims God revealed to Adam, Abraham, and Moses. Such a tradition undergirds the author’s assertion that Abraham’s real goal was the heavenly city prepared by God (Heb 11:11, 16).” David A. deSilva, “Entering God’s rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews”, *TrinJ* 21(2000):25–43.

¹³⁹ What is meant by «rest» and «sabbath» is disputed. The term “rest” is used in Deuteronomy to designate safe and prosperous existence in Canaan (cf. Gerhard Von Rad, “There still remains a for the people of God: An Investigation of a Biblical Conception”, in *The Problem of the Hexateuch: And other Essays* [trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken; New York, N.Y.: Oliver & Boyd, 1966], 94–102). Filtvedt (“Paradox”) propose that the author “might have taken this idea as a starting point, and developed a notion of ‘rest’ which utterly transcends existence in the land of Canaan, although at the same time drawing consequently on Scriptural land-theology. deSilva (“Entering”, 39) interprets the rest apocalyptically, stating: “‘entering the rest’ can be no other than entering that divine realm.” For a discussion of several of the different positions, and how they relate to the eschatology and cosmology of Hebrews, see Harold Weiss, “*Sabbatimos* in the Epistle to the Hebrews”, *CBQ* 58 (1996): 674–89.

¹⁴⁰ “Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not *receive what was promised*, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, *be made perfect*.” (11:39–40, italics mine). Here we clearly see that “receive what was promised” and “made perfect” are parallel expressions.

4), the author returns to his synkresis of the Son and the angels, focusing on the exaltation of the Son. The author states: “For it was not to angels that he subjected the world to come,¹⁴¹ of which we are now speaking” (2:5). This statement both sums up the author’s ideas thus far and paves the way for the scriptural quote from Psalm 8 that follows. It is therefore “a key statement for unlocking the author’s train of thought.”¹⁴²

The addressees already know that Jesus is appointed heir over all things (πάντες), and that the worlds (τοὺς αἰῶνας)¹⁴³ – i.e. the present world and the world to come¹⁴⁴ – were created through him (1:2).¹⁴⁵ In 1:6 we once more read of the exalted position of the Son: “And again, when he [God] leads [εἰσαγάγ] the first-born [τὸς πρωτότοκος] into the world [τῇ οἰκουμένῃ], he says: ‘let all the angels worship him’.” Even though this can refer to the incarnation¹⁴⁶ or *Parousia* of Jesus, it most likely refer to Jesus exaltation,¹⁴⁷ thus 1:6 and 2:5 refer to the same realm that transcends the physical and temporal world. The exaltation of Jesus into heaven is thus interpreted as God leading his first-born son (τὸς πρωτότοκος) into his inheritance that is the world to come (τὴν οἰκουμένην μέλλουσα).

The combination of the terms πρωτότοκος, εἰσαγάγ and οἰκουμένη functions to create a powerful motif deeply rooted in the Septuagint. Jesus is clearly presented as the Messiah who receives universal reign (Ps 88:28 LXX). However, the terms could also be used of Israel, and her entrance into the promise land.¹⁴⁸ In other words, there is an exodus typology underlying the motif of Jesus entrance into the world to come. When these words are related

¹⁴¹ “The very term ἡ οἰκουμένη μέλλουσα is unusual, but it clearly points to the idea that there are two main stages in world history, the present age and the age to come (cf. Matt 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:21; Heb 6:5). Similar expressions are also found in rabbinic sources. The novelty in 2:5 is the term οἰκουμένη which is normally used to describe space” (Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 56)

¹⁴² Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 56

¹⁴³ For a convincing argument for a plural and spatial rendering of “τοὺς αἰῶνας”, cf. Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 56

¹⁴⁴ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 56: “By implication, Jesus’ role in creation thus points to his eschatological lordship.”

¹⁴⁵ Filtvedt has convincingly suggested that the motif of the universal inheritance given to Jesus could be understood as a development of a messianic theme in Scripture. Hebrews 1:2 is an allusion to Psalm 2:8 (*Lane, Hebrews* 1:12); “Ask it of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, and, as your possession the ends of the earths.” The perspective of the Psalm seems to have been enlarged in the context of Hebrews; “it is not only the ‘ends of the earth’ which will be given Jesus to inherit, but ‘all things,’ including the world to come.” (Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 56)

¹⁴⁶ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 56

¹⁴⁷ Convincingly argued by Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 56. Contra Attridge, *Hebrews*, 56.

Following this reading, the author depicts an enthronement scene where God presents his exalted son before the angels who worship him

¹⁴⁸ The phrase εἰσαγάγ is used of the entrance into Canaan in Exod 3:8; Deut 6:10; 11:29; 30:5; and 31:20–21. πρωτότοκος is used for Israel in Exod 4:22; Jer 38:9 and 4 Esr 6:58.

to Jesus, he is presented as the “*true Israelite* who experiences that which God promised to do for his people.”¹⁴⁹ He entered the realm towards which God’s people are heading.

The exaltation of Jesus – and its implications for humanity – is further elaborated in the Scriptural citation and exposition following 2:5. Psalm 8 celebrates the exalted position of the son of man,¹⁵⁰ who God has crowned with glory and honor, subjecting all things under his feet (Heb 2:6–8). The citation is followed by a statement that raises the problem the author is trying to deal with: “As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (2:8) Humanity has not “risen to take on the position for which they were made”¹⁵¹ – does that mean that God has failed to fulfill his promises; has he abandoned his plan for humanity? The author attempts to solve the problem by spotlighting Jesus, the *one* son of man who we do see crowned with glory and honor in the present. “In other words, in Jesus we see that which we are unable to see in humanity in general, and this would suggest that God has not abandoned his plan for humanity after all.”¹⁵² Jesus is thus presented as the human being *par excellence* who will restore humanity to its original design. The followers of Jesus are presented as his siblings (2:10) and consequently also co-heirs of the promised inheritance. God will “bring many children to glory” through him who is “the leader¹⁵³ to their salvation” (2:10).¹⁵⁴ “The fact that Jesus is the leader is taken to imply that all his followers are somehow identified as taking part of a race or a journey which is understood within a specific narrative, with its own logic. The journey has already been finished by Jesus, who has thereby brought the narrative to its climax.”¹⁵⁵ This journey is, as made a case for above, a major theme in Hebrews; and the author’s main rhetorical strategy seems to be to try to persuade the recipients to not stray from that road so that they will finish the journey (cf. 2.2).

By picturing Jesus as their leader – the one who has reached the destiny for which they are heading¹⁵⁶ – the author motivates the addressees to follow in his example.¹⁵⁷ The

¹⁴⁹ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 58. Filtvedt builds this interpretation on the arguments of Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Häbrer*, 116–117

¹⁵⁰ Even though some commentators favor a thoroughly Christological reading of the psalm, I prefer – in accordance with Filtvedt – a reading that understand “the son of man” as a reference to humanity in general without excluding Jesus. Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 59

¹⁵¹ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 59. Cf. 2 Bar 14:17–19 and 4 Ezra 6:55–59.

¹⁵² Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 60

¹⁵³ The Greek word can be translated captain (KJV), author (NASB and NIV), pioneer (RSV), leader (Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 60) and champion (Lane, *Hebrews* 1:56–57). I follow Filtvedt’s translation here.

¹⁵⁴ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 60

¹⁵⁵ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 62

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*

¹⁵⁷ More on Jesus as example in 5.5.3

addressees might wonder why they now experience suffering – thus the emphasis on the suffering of their leader is directly relevant for them. If Jesus reached his inheritance through suffering “for a little while”(2:7, 9),¹⁵⁸ it is also natural that they experience suffering before they reach their destination and receive salvation as their inheritance (cf 1:14).¹⁵⁹

Filtvedt proposes – convincingly I think – that readers can discover a subtle exodus typology at work also in Hebrews 2:5–18. Jesus is presented as one who liberates death’s captives (2:15); one who takes hold of (ἐπιλαμβάνεται)¹⁶⁰ the descendants of Abraham in order to lead them into their inheritance (2:16). If this hypothesis is correct, it explains why Hebrews immediately after this passage compares Jesus with Moses (3:1–6), whereupon he turns to the example of the wilderness generation (3:7–4:11). The picture painted of Jesus in 2:5–18 is recalled in the final benediction (13:20–21). Here God is described as “the God of peace, who brought back [ὁ ἀναγαγὼν] from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.” (13:20) The benediction “is articulated in a way which suggests that Jesus’ resurrection is interpreted with the Scriptural exodus narrative as its background. Jesus is pictured as a shepherd, echoing the way of Moses is described.”¹⁶¹ Hence Jesus is presented as “a new Moses.”¹⁶² Thus the recipients are invited to identify as part of Christ’s flock, who “will be lead from death to life if they follow in the footsteps of their leader.”¹⁶³

Perfection Attainable through the New Covenant Inaugurated by the Blood of Jesus

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (1:1–2a). In this fashion the author starts his

¹⁵⁸ The expression can also be translated in a spatial rather than temporal sense, thus it would read: “a little lower”. The majority of commentators favors the temporal rendering. Cf. Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 63

¹⁵⁹ Thus deSilva (*Introduction*, 797) writes: “From the perspective of God’s purpose and reward, the experience of deprivation and disapproval takes on positive significant. By so doing, he ... makes these same experiences an occasion for strengthening the commitment to Christ by turning the experiences of disgrace into tokens of honor and promises of greater reward.”

¹⁶⁰ The same verb is used when the author in 8:8–12 quotes the oracle of Jeremiah: “...on the day when I took them by the hand[ἐπιλαβομένου] to lead them out of the land of Egypt” (8:9).

¹⁶¹ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 115. Lane argues that Isaiah 63:11–12 and Zachariah 9:11 are the alluded to in Hebrews 13:20–21. Lane, Hebrews 2:561–563.

¹⁶² Richard N. Logenecker (*The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* [SBT 2/17; London: SCM, 1970], 37) suggests that 1:1–2 establishes a Moses/Jesus dialectic from the start, based upon Jesus as the “Prophet of Eschataogical consummation” (Deut 18:15–19). If this assertion is correct, the emphasis on listening to God’s word in and through him is inevitable: “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet ... Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.” (Deut 18:18–19)

¹⁶³ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 115

discourse, before he elaborates on the glory and majesty of this Son (1:2b – 4), who is the major agent of the creation (v. 2b)¹⁶⁴, preservation (v.3a) and redemption (v.3b) of the world. The opening lines of Hebrews draw its audience immediately into the narrative. They are reminded of God’s speech through the prophets in the past – the prophets who throughout the narrative of the Scriptures revealed God’s purposes, reminded of God’s promises and called Israel to repentance when they had turned away from his ways.

The narrative structure in the opening sentence is evident, and intrinsic to this narrative is a contrast between an old and a new era. There is a strong continuity in God’s dealing with his people then and now. It is the same God speaking, and in the past he spoke to “our¹⁶⁵ ancestors” – thus the recipients partake in the same family and are places in the same kind of situation as the ancestors were in. However, there is also a clear discontinuity; God has done something new, ushering in a new era as a new covenant is inaugurated. This transition from the era of the first to the new covenant is foundational for the argument in 10:26–31.

One of the central themes introduced in the prologue is Jesus’ ministry as high priest: “When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3b) Jesus is called high priest already in 2:17–18 and 3:1; but it is first in 4:14 the theme is extensively treated. Jesus – being a priest according to Melchizedek – is compared and elevated above Israel’s priests descending from Aaron. Their role was to represent Israel before God and to offer sacrifices that atoned for and covered over the sins of the people.

¹⁶⁴ *Jesus as the wisdom of God*: In the prologue, which is introduced by the superior revelation of God’s voice through the Son, Jesus is said to be “the reflection of God’s glory” (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης) and “the exact imprint of God’s very being” (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ) (1:3). It is through him God created the world (1:2b; cf. 1:10; 11:3), and he now sustains all things by his powerful word (1:2). Here we observe allusions to the Wisdom of Salomon, thus the author draws on the Jewish wisdom tradition in his description of the exalted Son. In Sirach 24, the personalized Wisdom praises herself and tells of her glory. God created her in the beginning (cf. Prov. 8), and God commanded her to make a dwelling in Jacob (24:8-9). In the climactic 24:23, Wisdom is also identified with the book of the covenant, the law that Moses commanded; thus the Torah has received a pre-existent status. In the Old Testament, the Law is understood within the framework of salvation history, and there is no hint of its existence before it was proclaimed at Sinai. The Jewish sages however, developed this new conception of the Torah by adopting the Greek idea of divine reason, *logos*. (Oscar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influence on Early Christianity*. [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 35) God’s wisdom previously made itself known to Israel in the Torah, but now, according to Hebrews, the wisdom of God has manifested itself in the Son, the very word of God. The application of wisdom theology to the person of Jesus marks a shift from the Torah to Jesus. We could even say that Jesus is the “Torah in person”. Thus obedience in Hebrews is not understood as walking according to the precepts of the Law, but as following after a person, Jesus. Cf. more on this in 3.6

¹⁶⁵ It is not certain whether the word “ὡμῶν” (our) originally was part of the text. However, the context suggests that the “ancestors” are implicitly understood as the ancestor’s of the addressees. See e.g. “οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν” in 3:9.

Hebrews 7:1–10:18 presents the levitical priesthood as ineffective. The levitical priests were chosen among mortals and put to serve God on behalf of the people; an honor they took only when called by God (5:1–4). The levitical priests were appointed by the law (7:28) – their priesthood was thus legitimate and necessary – but according to Hebrews not perfect. The priests were themselves subject to weakness, thus they had to make sacrifices for their own sins (5:3), and did not succeed in achieving perfection. According to Hebrews – as we saw above – this perfection is understood as being brought to its appointed end.

“If perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood ... what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to Melchizedek, rather than one according to Aaron?” (7:11) Thus the very fact that God in Ps 110 appoints a certain priest according to Melchizedek serves as a proof that the levitical priesthood is but temporary until the new priest is introduced. The sacrifices that the law required were not effective, since they could not really deal with sin; they could not perfect the worshippers in such a way that they could enter the sanctuary. The numerous priests and the repetition of the sacrifices were a constant reminder of the fact that sin was not removed. “Hebrews agrees that there is no forgiveness without blood (9:22), but will argue that animal blood cannot remove sin (10:3) or purify the conscience (9:9.13–14).”¹⁶⁶ With the high priestly ministry of Jesus it is different. As a priest according to Melchizedek, Jesus is superior to the priest of Aaron. Jesus is *one*, the priests of Aaron are many – and this makes him superior. In Greek philosophy (Platonism), “the choice between the one and the many is always resolved in favor of the one”.¹⁶⁷ They are many because they constantly die and need replacement. Jesus lives forever, and do not need anyone to replace him at his death. That makes him a superior priest, inaugurating a greater covenant, offering an ultimate sacrifice.

“If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one” (8:7). The priesthood of Jesus is intimately linked to his role as mediator of the new covenant promised by Jeremiah, and “the author develops a complex understanding of the death of Christ in terms of atonement, covenant and sacrifice.”¹⁶⁸ By this, the author explains how “Jesus tasted death for everyone” (2:9) and brings about the realization of God’s design for people.¹⁶⁹ The prediction of the new covenant promises a renewed relationship between God and his people as sins will be forgiven and remembered no more (Heb 8:10–12).

¹⁶⁶ Koester, *Hebrews*, 415

¹⁶⁷ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 65

¹⁶⁸ Koester, *Hebrews*, 337

¹⁶⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 336

In other words: the new covenant accomplishes what the old never did: it brings people to perfection. Hence Jeremiah 38 (LXX) promises a renewed covenant relationship and atonement, but it does not indicate how and by what means this is going to happen. To answer this question, the author fuses the prophetic oracle of Jeremiah together with elements from two other central OT texts: Leviticus 16 and Exodus 24. He interprets the death of Jesus as a sacrificial death, foreshadowed by the Day of Atonement rituals (9:6–14). This clearly shows that the sacrifice of the high priest Jesus (i.e. his own blood) brings about complete atonement. However, the Day of Atonement ritual in Lev 16 did not inaugurate a covenant – the event in Ex 24 did. Both the covenant ceremony at Sinai and the annual Day of Atonement involved sacrifice and blood. “Once Christ’s death is understood to be a sacrifice, the implications of the sacrifice can be understood in a twofold manner: making atonement (9:1–14) and inaugurating a covenant (9:15–22)”¹⁷⁰ – thereby fulfilling the prediction of the new covenant in Jeremiah. Jesus blood is thus both the atoning blood of Lev 16 *and* the blood that inaugurates the covenant. Since the sacrifice of Jesus once and for all have made the worshippers perfect by removing sin in such a way that they can approach God, the offerings of the levitical cult are redundant.

It is thus by the new covenant salvation is distributed. It is by inaugurating the new covenant Jesus “brings many children to glory” (2:10). In chapter 9, the author states that: “For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who ate called may receive the promise eternal inheritance” (9:15). In verses that follow the author puns on the word διαθήκη, drawing on the common meaning of the word; testament or will. It is through the death of the “testator” that the inheritance will be distributed to the heir. The promises given Abraham and his descendants are thus available through those who remain within the new covenant.

The first covenant was a communal bond between God and his people, to which mutual obligations were attached. “Hebrews appears to claim that the communal obligations of the community, vis-à-vis God, now flow from the new covenant arrangement now.”¹⁷¹ The author thus exhorts his audience to choose obedience and faith so that they can live.

Koester has treated the rhetorical strategy of Hebrews, and he convincingly traces the main movement of the homily in this way:

¹⁷⁰ Koester, *Hebrews*, 337

¹⁷¹ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 115

The body of the speech begins when the author declares that it was fitting that God, "in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation complete through suffering" (2:10). It concludes by showing the culmination of God's purposes in the heavenly Jerusalem, where, through the work of Jesus the pioneer, the righteous are made complete so that they can celebrate with the angels in glory (12:2, 22-24). Thus the broad movement of the speech shows how God brings people to the glory that he has promised them by means of the suffering and exaltation of Christ, and that life along the way is lived by faith in this promise.¹⁷²

2.3.2 *The immediate Co-Text: How does Hebrews 10:26–31 relate to Hebrews 10:19–25 and 10:32–39?*

The immediate co-text "is often of paramount importance in shaping how a text is received. This is because of memory limitations: As reading or listening progresses, comprehension of past utterances becomes more and more summary."¹⁷³ I will therefore proceed to place Hebrews 10:26–31 in its local co-text.

Hebrews 10:26–31 can be read as one entity, since the passage is – thematically as well as grammatically – delimited from what precedes it and what follows. In the preceding verses (10:29–25), the recipients are encouraged with a positive exhortation to draw near to God (vv. 20–22). This passage clearly shows the course of life encouraged by the author, and it presents the addressees with the proper response to the sacrifice and covenant mediation of Jesus. Those who draw near to God, those who are entering his sanctuary by the *new*¹⁷⁴ and

¹⁷² Craig, Koester, "Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity," (*CBQ* 64 [2002]),112

¹⁷³ Green, "Discourse", 184

¹⁷⁴ When saying that the way is *new*, it implies that it was not there before. The sacrificial death inaugurating the new covenant has granted an access to God's presence not enjoyed previously in history (cf. Heb 9:8). Filtvedt argues that there is even more to the newness. "The new way dedicated by Jesus ... implicitly contrasts with the regime of the old covenant (813)", thus representing the regime of the new covenant. Filtvedt, "Paradox", 133–134. The reference to the new way could possibly also be an echo of Isaiah 43:19. Here God declares that he is about to do a *new* thing; he will make a *way* in the desert. They do not need to remember the old thing (i.e. the exodus); this will be like a "new exodus" when God will free his people from bondage, lead them on a way through the wilderness (cf. Is 35:6–8), towards Zion (cf. Is. 35:10). This would fit the broader co-text of Hebrews, thus making it a plausible proposal. Jesus is said to free the descendant of Abraham from the slavery of the fear of death; which clearly alludes to the new-exodus motif (cf. Filtvedt, "Paradox", 66). The addressees are situated in the wilderness, on a journey, at the threshold of the promise land (4:1). The trials they experience are interpreted as the discipline of God as their father (12:7–11), the same image applied to the wilderness wandering of Israel (Deut 8:1–5). The addressees are encouraged on their wandering to "lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet" (12:12–13). This is an allusion to Isaiah 35:3. Isaiah 35 describes the joyful return of Israel to Zion. Also here the people will walk on a way (the Holy Way) in the wilderness, a way that nothing unclean but only God's people shall travel on.

*living*¹⁷⁵ way are described as having true hearts in full assurance of faith, heart sprinkled clean (by the blood of Jesus) from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water. The focus in 10:22 is on the heart of those who approach God, and this focus on the heart is not only seen in this verse, but “permeates Hebrews.”¹⁷⁶ The addressees are exhorted to not harden their hearts when God speaks (3:8); and to not have an evil and or unfaithful heart that might lead to apostasy (3:12). “The fullness of faith and the trueness of heart urged in 10:22, is thus a contrast to apostasy”.¹⁷⁷ Hearts that are true and sprinkled clean (renewed) by the blood of the covenant also recalls the promise of Jeremiah: the new covenant will impact the mind and the heart of the people (cf. 10:16). The characteristics of those who are invited to enter the sanctuary in 10:22 also resonates with another prophetic promise that is similar to Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:25–27). The context of this promise is a passage that speaks of a restoration of Israel following her rebellion, a return to the land and a renewal of God’s covenant relationship with Israel (cf. 36:28). “Together these motifs convey an image of a renewed covenant people, made fit to draw near to God in worship.”¹⁷⁸ With these words the addressees are confirmed as the community of the new covenant, and they are called upon to live accordingly. They are urged with a positive exhortation to respond in the proper way; that is to hold fast to the confession of hope without wavering, and consider how to provoke each other to good deeds and encourage each other – rather than neglecting to meet together (vv. 23–24).

Hebrews 10:26–31 is conversely a negative exhortation; a warning against choosing the opposite course of life,¹⁷⁹ that is a way not *living* but one leading to a punishment worse than *death*.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ That the way is *living* probably means that it leads to life in an absolute and eschatological sense. Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 133

¹⁷⁶ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 146

¹⁷⁷ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 146

¹⁷⁸ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 149. By the way, this supports my overarching thesis that Hebrews 10:26–31 should be read within a covenantal framework.

¹⁷⁹ It was a common feature of *deliberate speech* to present two opposite course of life and the respective consequences of choosing the one or the other. By this means the addresser would persuade his audience to choose the preferred course and refrain from the other.

¹⁸⁰ I have limited my comments on this paragraph, since it is the object of my investigation and will be treated extensively in the following chapters.

In v.32 the author again makes a contrast to the negative course presented in vv.26–31 by reminding the addressees of their previous confidence. In the period after their enlightenment, they endured hard struggle and suffering, public abuse and plundering of their property; and they received this with joy rather than complaint – knowing that they “possessed something greater and more lasting” (v.35). The addressees are persuaded not to abandon this confidence, since that need endurance so that they can receive what was promised (v.36). In a similar fashion to 10:19–25, this passage presents a positive counterpart to the sin warned against in vv.26–31.

Hence Hebrews 10:26–31 is an entity. Nevertheless, it is closely connected to the verses that precede it and follows it grammatically by the means of the Greek conjunctions γὰρ (v.26) og δὲ (v.32) – as well as thematically. Hebrews 10:26 opens with the coordinating conjunction γὰρ. γὰρ is almost always used causally to express the cause or reason for what has been said.¹⁸¹ This connects Hebrews 10:26–31 closely to the preceding verses, it indicates the reason and motive for saying what has been said. As mentioned above, the author encourages the addressees to draw near to God and not neglect to meet with the community – but why is this so important? Because the opposite is equal to willfully persisting in sin (10:26), a course of life that will lead them in under God’s judgment (10:27–31). David deSilva underscores this connection by making the following claim:

Hebrews 10:24–25 qualifies how 10:26 will be heard by the addressees – it will not be heard as a general reference to ongoing sin against which the believer might struggle, but more specifically as a reference to those who, despite knowing the truth of deliverance and hope God provides (see 6:4–5), nevertheless chooses the temporary benefits of hiding or abandoning their connection with the believing community (10:25; see 6:6).¹⁸²

The passage after 10:26–31 opens with the coordinating conjunction δὲ that can be used either with an *adversative* meaning (expressing antithesis = but) or a *copulative* meaning (connecting words or clauses linked in sense = and).¹⁸³ In this context, δὲ functions as a particle that indicates a transition into the following paragraph, and I contend that it should be

¹⁸¹ R. Leivestad and B.H. Sandvei, *Nytestamentlig gresk grammatikk* (3d ed.; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996), 274

¹⁸² deSilva, *Perseverance*, 344. I think it is important to make this connecting a bit more nuanced. I do not think that neglecting to meet is totally tantamount to “persisting in sin” (convincingly identified as apostasy). I think neglecting to meet is *virtually* the same as apostatizing. It is, as Iutisone Salevao (*Legitimation*, 321) has put it, “almost certainly a prelude to apostasy”.

¹⁸³ Leivestad, *Nytestamentlig gresk grammatikk*, 274.

read as an adversative. The addressees should not persist in sin but rather recall the confidence they used to have. This adversative connection is expressed in most bible translation, e.g. in NRSV: “But recall those earlier days ...”¹⁸⁴ The sin that is warned against is thus also illuminated by the following verses. The author persuades the addressees to rather endure suffering with confidence than persist in the course of sin. Hebrews 10,37-39 can be seen as the conclusion of Hebrews 10:19–39; “... But we are not among those who shrink back (i.e. those described in 10:26–31) and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.” These verses also function as a bridge into the next section of the homily. In chapter 11 we encounter the heroes of faith from the Scriptures – and we learn that all of them are among those who had faith and persevered their lives – thus they portray the course of life antithetical to the course of sin portrayed in 10:26–31 (cf. more on this antithesis in 5.5.2).

The exhortation in both of the two passages framing Hebrews 10:26–31 are fueled by an evident eschatological motivating. The exhortation in 10:19–25 concludes with the following words: “... all the more as you see the Day approaching” (v.25). The coming Day of the LORD plays an integral role in the eschatological hope of Israel. It has its roots in the OT, particularly in prophetic and apocalyptic literature.¹⁸⁵ On that day God will finally execute justice on earth; he will vindicate his people and judge his enemies – essentially two sides of the same coin (cf. Heb 9:27–28). The book of Zephaniah is in particular occupied with the day of the LORD. The prophet declares that the day of the LORD¹⁸⁶ is at hand (1:7); it is near and hastening fast (1:4, cf. Heb 10:25). On that day the fire of God’s passion shall consume the whole earth (1:18; 3:8; cf. Heb 10:27);¹⁸⁷ only those who seek God – the humble remnant of Israel that seek refuge in his name and do no wrong (3:12–13) – will be hidden on that day (2:1–3). The author is most likely not thinking of one specific OT text when he mentions “the approaching Day”. Nevertheless, he is using the expression “to reflect the rich mix of promised blessing and promised judgment that characterizes the particular

¹⁸⁴ Also in the Norwegian translation (Bibel 2011): “*Men tenk nå tilbake (...)*” (10,32).

¹⁸⁵ e.g. Isaiah 2:12; Amos 5:18–20; Joel 2:1–11,30–32; Zephaniah. The New Testament authors interpreters the coming day as “the day of the Lord” as the day when Jesus will return for judgment and reward (cf. 1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess 1:5–12)

¹⁸⁶ The day of the LORD refers both to the local judgment of Jerusalem (e.g. the Babylonian invasion in 587 BC), and a universal judgment of the earth. The eschatological judgment is the backdrop against which the coming invasion of Jerusalem is set.

¹⁸⁷ Interestingly, the distinction between the peoples of the earth and Jerusalem is often blurred. It is only those among the people of Judah who seek the LORD who will be hidden and saved. Those who “have turned back from following the LORD, who have not sought the LORD of inquired of him” will be punished alongside the earth. More on this in chapter 4.

instantiation of the OT occurrence.”¹⁸⁸ This scenario is the backdrop against which the exhortation of Hebrews 10:19–25 is set. The approaching Day is supposed to motivate the addressees to approach God and not leave the community (i.e. their hiding place, so to speak).

Also the exhortation in Hebrews 10:32–39 is fueled by the expectancy of future events. The author writes: “For yet ‘in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live¹⁸⁹ by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back” (10:37–38). Here the author introduces the citation of Hab 2:3–4 with a small citation of Isaiah 26:20b for the sake of making the argument even more urgent and immanent; and perhaps also in order to evoke the image of being persevered on the day of God’s wrath. Isaiah 26:20 reads: “come, my people, enter you chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for *a very little while* until the wrath has past.” The Day is surely approaching (10:25; 10:37). The one who draws near to God (10:29); who has faith will live (10:38–39). The one who shrink back – that is the one who “willfully persist in sin” (10:26) – will be lost (10:39). The way the Habakkuk text is cited and interpreted by the author eloquently serves his pastoral goal. He outlines two courses of action – that of trusting and remaining firm and that of shrinking back (an image that evidently recalls the transgression of the wilderness generation)¹⁹⁰ – and the inevitable consequence of choosing the one or the other. This is expressed in order “to reinforce the hearer’s desire to identify with ‘faithfulness/trust.’”¹⁹¹

I have now attempted to argue that Hebrews 10:26–31 – sandwiched as it is between 10:19–25 and 10:32–39 – should be read against the backdrop of the approaching eschatological day. This is further strengthened by the fact that the author quotes Isaiah 26:11 in 10:27 and Deuteronomy 32:35–36 in 10:30 – texts that portray the future of God’s people and his enemies when he comes to vindicate.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), xxv

¹⁸⁹ “Living” in Habakkuk is interpreted by the author as eschatological salvation. deSilva, *Introduction*, 806

¹⁹⁰ deSilva, *Introduction*, 805

¹⁹¹ deSilva, *Introduction*, 806

¹⁹² In the original context Isaiah 26:11 is part of a song of victory (Is 26:1–21) – a celebration of God’s vindication of his people (Judah) and destruction of their enemies – that will be sung “On *that day*” (26:1). Deuteronomy 32:35–35 is part of the Song of Moses. David Allen contends that Deuteronomy 28–34 (frequently cited in Hebrews) played a focal role “in explaining and foretelling the outwork of Israel’s broader story”. Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 199. More on this in chapter 3.

2.4 An Analysis of the Structure of Hebrews 10:26–31

I have in the preceding attempted to place Hebrews 10:26–31 within its historical context and within the web of linguistic data surrounding it. I will now turn to the internal structure of the passage. This structure will serve as the disposition for the analysis in the following chapters.

In 10:26 the author presents a warning phrased as a conditional statement:¹⁹³ “For (γὰρ) if we willingly (Ἐκουσίως) persist in sin (ἁμαρτανόντων) after we have received the knowledge of the truth (μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας) there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία).” This statement might at first glance seem to contradict what has just been said about the once for all sacrifice of Jesus (cf. 10:10; 10:14), thus the statement needs an explanation, that is provided in 10:28–29. The statement is followed by a prediction of the judgment that underscores the graveness of the warning. The words of judgment are closely connected to the statement in 10:26; the consequence of persistent and willful sin is the judgment of God (v.27) in the place of the effect of the atoning sacrifice. The judgment of v.27 is described as being fearful or terrible (φοβερὰ); a word that reoccurs in v.31 “It is a fearful (φοβερὸν) thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:30-31 stresses and places great emphasis on what is already said in 10:27; and the words of judgment function as a frame (an *inclusio*) around vv.28-29. Hebrews 10:28–29 thus appears to be the center in the entity, and these verses provide the reasoning for the stern warning in 10:26. These considerations lead me to the following structure:

A The warning: If we willingly persist in sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (10:26)

B The Fearful Judgment of God (10:27)

C The Argument: A Comparison With the Old Covenant (10:28–29)

B' The Fearful Judgment of God revisited (10:30–31)

¹⁹³ The present participle ἁμαρτανόντων is used as an adverb, thus creating an adverbial clause, which I have interpreted as a conditional clause (concurring with most translations, e.g. NRSV; NO2011; ESV; NIV; NKJV etc.). Also a causal (or even a temporal) interpretation works grammatically, reading instead: “Because we persist in sin ... there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” However, I think a conditional reading is to be preferred within the co-text of Hebrews 10:19–39 and the homily in its entirety. The author does not seem to confront the recipients with the fact that they actually *do* persist in sin; that they *have* broken the covenant and turned away from God –albeit they have become dull in understanding (5:11) and some of them have the habit of leaving the community (10:25) – this remains a latent potential that still can be avoided. (cf. especially Heb 6:9 “Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case...”)

As I argued above, the reason for the stern warning in 10:26 is given in Hebrews 10:28–29. I will therefore start with 10:28–29, before I look at the descriptions of judgment (10:27; 10:30–31) that frames the central argument.

3. The Greater Privileges *and* the Greater Obligations of the New Covenant (10:28–29)

“The change of law introduces, not a status of lawlessness, but an order which imposes stricter obligations, and thus stricter penalties.”¹⁹⁴

3.1 The Greek text with translation

ἀθετήσας τις νόμον Μωϋσέως χωρὶς οἰκτιρμῶν ἐπὶ δυσὶν ἢ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθνήσκει·
πόσῳ δοκεῖτε χείρονος ἀξιωθήσεται τιμωρίας ὁ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας καὶ τὸ αἷμα
τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἠγγησάμενος, ἐν ᾧ ἠγιάσθη, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνυβρίσας;
Heb 10:28–29

Anyone who has violated the Law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? 10:28–29

3.2 A Comparison with the Old Covenant

The aim of my thesis is, as I already have made known, to investigate how the claim made in Hebrews 10:26 can be regarded as valid, given what Hebrews generally has to say about the new covenant inaugurated by the sacrificial death of Jesus. I see 10:28–29 as the author’s main argument for the statement in 10:26. Here we see *the logos* of the author, whose aim is to persuade his audience that his statement is right. These verses are therefore crucial for our understanding of 10:26. In 10:28–29 the author wants his readers to understand the grave consequences of wilfully persisting in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, and he does this by means of a comparison with the way transgression of the νόμος of Moses was punished. I contend that Hebrews by doing this sets up the first and the new *covenant* for comparison. Joslin has pithily assessed concerning the interrelationship between νόμος and διαθήκη¹⁹⁵ that “One is able to speak of one without meaning the other, yet one is not able to

¹⁹⁴ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 374

¹⁹⁵ Koester contends that the Hebrews refer to νόμος and the first or Mosaic διαθήκη “with little different in meaning” (Koester, *Hebrews*, 114), thus suggesting an interchangeable use of the term. Contrarily, David Allen argues – convincingly I think – that νόμος and διαθήκη are not synonymous terms and are never used

speak of one without thinking of the other.”¹⁹⁶ Thus when the author compares the act of wilfully persisting in sin with transgressing the law of Moses, it is equally heard as a comparison with the first *covenant*.¹⁹⁷ The first covenant/ new covenant comparison that is evident in this passage is established from the outset of the book.¹⁹⁸ Jesus has by his sacrificial death established the new covenant and thus “the age has been turned” in such a way that the author can write: “... in these last days¹⁹⁹ God has spoken through a son” (1:2). All through the book there is a clear then/ now rhetoric; “Hebrews’ NC ideology and determinative ἀπαξ/ἐφάπαξ motif (7:27; 9:12; 9:26; 10:10) draws a doctrinal wedge between the ‘then’ and ‘now’ dispensations (8:13; 10:9); the ‘once for all’ Christ event decisively divides the eras and ushers in the last days (1:1–2).”²⁰⁰ There is thus a clear discontinuity between the eras of the old and the new covenant – however there is also a clear continuity. Previously, God spoke to our fathers (1:1); he delivered the law through angels (2:1); he warned them on earth (12:25). Now, in these last days, God has communicated through a son (1:2; 2:3); he has warned from heaven (10:25). It is the *same God* speaking, and those who are addressed now are the descendants of those who were addressed earlier. This indicates that “the old and the new covenant belong to the same redemptive history.”²⁰¹ The recipients belong to the same narrative and the same family (c.f. 1.4), and they are cast in the same location; namely in the wilderness waiting to enter the “land”. The relationship between the old and the new covenant expresses thus both newness and continuity.

3.3 An Argument from Lesser to Greater

The author warns his readers of the coming punishment that awaits them if they commit what is expounded in v. 29. He does this by quoting a verse from Deuteronomy, and by applying a

interchangeably in Hebrews. However, he contends that they nevertheless are interrelated concepts closely entangled. (Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 213)

¹⁹⁶ Joslin, *Theology*, 7n15. Quoted by Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 213

¹⁹⁷ Also Filtvedt reads “rejecting the law of Moses” within a covenantal framework, he says: “the reason why the Israelites were punished for setting the law of Moses aside is because they had been solemnly covenanted with God through this law.” Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 109.

¹⁹⁸ “Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (SBT 2/17; London: SCM, 1970), 37 suggests that 1:1–2 establishes a Moses/Jesus dialect from the outset, predicated upon Jesus as the ‘Prophet of eschatological consummation’ (Deut 18:15–19)” Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 223

¹⁹⁹ LXX uses the same time element (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν) in Numbers 24:14; Jer. 23:20; 25:19; Dan 10:14 for “the future”, especially “the end of days”. What is significant in this context is that the author of Hebrews adds τούτων, indicating that “the end of days” has arrived. deSilva, *perseverance*, 85

²⁰⁰ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 189

²⁰¹ Filtvedt, “paradox”, 115

logical argument “from lesser to greater”²⁰² phrased as a rhetorical question, appealing to the judgment of the recipients. If violating the Law of Moses brought death, how much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who ... ? This is called a *qal wa-homer*²⁰³ (light and heavy) argument; if one thing applies in a lesser circumstance, then it is even more the case for a greater circumstance.²⁰⁴ We see a similar form of argument also in 2:2–4 and 12:25. A *qal wa-homer* argument is often, but not always, signaled by a phrase like “how much more...”. This is the case in 10:28–29 (cf. “how much less” in 12:25), but not in the similar argument in 2:1–4.²⁰⁵ The author has clearly established, from the opening sentence and throughout the letter, that the word of God spoken through the Son is superior to the previous revelation of God through the prophets, just as Jesus ministry as mediator of a new covenant is superior to the mediators of the old covenant. Significantly, even the great lawgiver Moses is not excluded when Jesus is compared and exalted above the mediators of the old order (c.f. 3:1–6). Jesus is superior to the angels (1:4–14), thus his word is at least as valid as their message (i.e. the law) and will be enforced more forcefully (2:2–3).²⁰⁶ He is worthy of greater honor than Moses, and is able to lead God’s people into the rest in a way Joshua never accomplished (3:7–4:11). Jesus is a greater high priest (7:1–28), having entered and served at the greater and perfect tent, i.e. the heavenly sanctuary (9:1–22),²⁰⁷ offering once for all a superior sacrifice that actually sanctifies and perfects the worshippers in a way the old sacrifices never did (9:23–10:18). The greater mediator has by his blood enacted a

²⁰² More on this in 3.3

²⁰³ Also called an *a fortiori* argument

²⁰⁴ Matthew C. Easter, *Faith and the Faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 50. Easter refers in his footnotes to a brief summary of Hillel the Elder’s seven rules of scriptures in Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 219–20.

²⁰⁵ Hebr. 2:1–4 is by many commentators viewed as a classical example of a *qal wa-homer* interpretation, see e.g. DeSilva, *Perseverance*, 105 and Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 134 (Ellingworth calls it an *implicit a fortiori* argument, probably due to the lack of a key linguistic marker). Contrary, Easter concludes that 2:1–4 is a different kind of argument in *Faith*, 50.

²⁰⁶ This is the interpretation of 2:1–4 if one assumes a *qal wa-homer* argument, thus DeSilva: “What holds true in the lesser case will also holds true in a greater case, so that if God’s word spoken through the lesser mediator (the angels) is enforced, then God’s word spoken through the greater Mediator (the Son) will certainly be enforced as well, and probably more forcefully (2:3a)” *Perseverance*, 105

²⁰⁷ “Hebrews operates with the idea that there is a heavenly original of which the earthly sanctuary is a mere copy and shadow.” Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 129. Jesus opened the way for his siblings into the holy of holiest, as forerunner and high priest, thus “their identity as followers of Jesus on their way to God’s glory, which was emphasized in 2:5–18, is thereby related to the cultic discourse.” Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 130. For a thorough entry into the theme of the earthly and the heavenly temple in biblical and post-biblical literature, see Torleif Elgvin, “Temple Mysticism and the Temple of Men,” *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Texts and Context*. (ed.C Hempel; STDJ 90; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 227–242

better covenant (8:1–13). According to the prophet Jeremiah, this covenant will provide the people with an internalization of the law (8:10b), a renewed covenant relationship with God (8:10c), knowledge of God (8:11), and forgiveness of sins by the mercy of God (8:12) – which paves the way for the people of God to enter the holy of holiest²⁰⁸ in the heavenly sanctuary. The *qal wa-homer* argument in 10:28–29 is loaded with all of this. The addressees are explicitly reminded that they have received the knowledge of the truth, and that they are sanctified by the blood of the covenant – they are taking part in the NC community. The new covenant is no doubt the better case in the argument, and the privileges the followers of Jesus receive are enormous. The flipside of the elevation of the new covenant above the old is that more is at stake for the worshippers; there has no doubt been more to win (cf. 9:13–14) but it is consequently also more to lose.

3.4 The Lesser Case: the Old covenant (10:28)

3.4.1 *The Punishment for Violating the Law of Moses is Death*

All of the three *qal wa-homer* passages in Hebrews contain warnings against disobeying God, and in all of the arguments the law is found in the “lesser” premise.²⁰⁹ This is also the case in Hebrews 10:26–31. On the “lesser” side of the argument is a brief reference to how transgression of the law of Moses was punished. “Anyone who has violated²¹⁰ the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses” (10:28). The verb ἄθετέω (violation) is of significance for our understanding. In this context it has the meaning “to reject something as invalid, declare invalid, nullify, ignore.”²¹¹ The same verb is used in LXX for putting aside a wife (Deut 21:13) and for treating a sacrifice with contempt (1 Sam

²⁰⁸ The privilege of having entrance into the very presence of God should not be under-estimated. Previously, only the high priest entered the holy of holiest of the earthly sanctuary once a year (cf. Heb 9:6–8). The limited access to God’s presence is according to the OT due to God’s holiness. When God in Exodus 19 descended on Mt Sinai, the people were told that if they touched the mountain they would die (Ex 19:12–15). When the sons of Aron entered the sanctuary in an unworthy manner, they were consumed by a fire from the presence of the LORD (Lev 10:1–3). When King David arranged the transportation of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, God’s anger was kindled against Uzzah; God struck him dead because he reached out his hand and touched the Ark (2 Sam 6:6–8).

²⁰⁹ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 214; Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 95.

²¹⁰ The verb used is ἄθετέω, which in this context has the meaning “to reject someth. as invalid, *declare invalid, nullify, ignore*» (BDAG, 24) When the author refers to violation of the law, he does not mean breaking a single commandment, but rejecting/ dismissing the law as the authority of God. We see the expression used in Ezekiel 22:26, where the priests are charged of violating the law: καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς αὐτῆς ἠθέτησαν νόμον μου (BGT). Interestingly, in the same verse the priests are also said to have profaned God’s holy things so that God himself is profaned among them (Ex. 22:26). The wording is very similar to what we see in Hebr. 10:29.

²¹¹ BDAG, 24.

2:17). In Hebrews, the related noun ἀθέτησις is used for the “nullification” or “setting aside” of the earlier commandment by Psalm 110:4 (7:18), and for the “removal/ nullification” of sin by the sacrifice of Jesus (9:26).²¹² It thus becomes clear that a violation of the law refers to more than the act of unintentionally breaking a commandment (something that could be atoned for, chapter 5); it refers to the rejection of the entire law of Moses as invalid – “precisely the kind of apostasy that is the equivalent of ‘sinning deliberately’ (10:26).”²¹³ I believe that it is the covenant relationship between God and the transgressor that is at stake. My treatment of the use of Deuteronomy in the verse will support this assumption.

3.4.2 *The Use of Deuteronomy and its Implications for the Interpretation of Hebrews 10:26–31*

Many scholars read 10:28b as an explicit quotation of Deut. 17:6, while others see it as an allusion because it does not have an introductory formula as is normal in Hebrews²¹⁴ – however, it is evident that the author depends on Deut 17:6. The text is possibly also related to Deut. 19:15 and Numb. 35:30, since the wording is similar, but Deut. 17:6 – in combination with 13:8 – is the closest parallel.²¹⁵ The Deuteronomy quotation is brief, and a natural question to ask is the following: how does the author use Deuteronomy? Is the author *proof texting*,²¹⁶ or does the broader context of Deuteronomy serve as background? I will argue for the last option. I believe that the author of Hebrews draws a deliberate parallel between the readers’ situation and the book of Deuteronomy, and consequently also between the two covenants they represent. The author quotes Deuteronomy extensively throughout his homily,²¹⁷ both by means direct quotation (Deut 4:24; 9:3/12:29; Deut 9:19/Hebr 12:21; Deut 32:35/Hebr 10:30a; Deut 32:36/ Hebr 10:30b; Deut 32:43/Hebr 1:6), strong allusions (Deut 32:15/Hebr 3:12) echoes (Deut 32:46; 4:9/ Hebr 2:1; Deut 32:47/ Hebr 4:12; Deut 32:4/ Hebr 10:23; Deut 32:35b/ Heb 10:25; Deut 20:3/ Hebr 12:3; Deut 29:18a/ Hebr 12:15a) and narrative allusions (Deut 33:2/ Hebr 2:2; Deut 32:8/ Heb 2:5; Deut 1:38; 3:28; 31:7; 31:23/ Hebr 4:8). We also see clear thematic parallels between Deuteronomy and Hebrews on a

²¹² Johnson, *Hebrews*, 263

²¹³ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 263

²¹⁴ Gert J. Steyn, “Deuteronomy in Hebrews,” in *Deuteronomy in the New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. S. Moyise and M.J.J. Menken. LNTS 358; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 159

²¹⁵ P. Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 537

²¹⁶

²¹⁷ Here I follow David Allen in his categorization and identification of Deuteronomistic citations in Hebrews, in Allen, *Deuteronomy*, vii-viii

macro-level. The motif of the covenant is prominent in Deuteronomy as well as in Hebrews – including the sanction of blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience²¹⁸ – as well as the imagery of the land as Israel’s inheritance.²¹⁹ The situations the discourses are located in are also corresponding. Just like Deuteronomy, Hebrews addresses a people – in fact the second generation after the exodus – in the wilderness, at the very threshold of the land of promise.²²⁰ The audiences of both of the homilies are placed at a locus of decision; will they choose faith and obedience –and live? Or will they do like their fathers who died in the wilderness did – and resign in unbelief? (cf. Heb 3:7–4:13/ Deut 1:19–45) Also the rhetorical strategy of Hebrews seems to resemble that of Deuteronomy.²²¹ Just like Moses did²²² on the plain of Moab, the author of Hebrews puts all his enthusiasm into his encouragement and exhortations. He reminds them of God’s faithfulness (13:6/ Deut 12:7) – they need not fear (13:5–6 / Deut 31:6) – and he warns them of the consequences of disobedience (e.g. Heb 2:1–4/ e.g. Deut 8:11–20). All of this is most likely not a coincidence. The author seems to have Deuteronomy in its entirety in mind when he writes his homily, and the text invites the addressees into a wide echo chamber. Pate has stated that “It is ... not necessary to argue that Hebrews uses the story of Israel as a framework”²²³ – the interplay with that meta-narrative is foundational. Thus it is reasonable to contend that the brief citation in 10:28 is not a proof-text randomly chosen by the author, but rather a text embedded within the web of Deuteronomy.

Based on this, I will conclude that competent readers would hear in Heb 10:28 the echo of broader Deuteronomistic themes and motifs. I thus think the immediate context of Deut 17:6 is relevant, as well as the broader context of the book. In Deut. 16:21–17:7 – which makes up the immediate co-text of Deut 17:6 – Moses gives directions concerning worship. The Israelites are not allowed to worship other gods but the LORD; if they do, death will be

²¹⁸ For blessings and curses in Deuteronomy, cf. Deut 28. For the blessing/cursing imagery in Hebrews, cf. Heb 6:4–8; Heb 12:16–17; cf. also Heb 10:26–31 Heb 2:1–4; Heb 3:7–4:11. Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 126–143

²¹⁹ cf. Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 143–151.

²²⁰ “Deuteronomy unveiled the next episode in Israel’s story in the land, so Hebrews unravels the next episode in Israel’s covenantal history as its NC audience stand on the threshold of their promised inheritance.” Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 205.

²²¹ Thus Dunnill writes: “The relationship between Hebrews and Deuteronomy is ... in each case an attempt to articulate God’s call and challenge to his people, not only in an authoritative preaching but through re-presentation of an event, in the celebration of a divine presence and the possibility which that presence opens up: the renewal of history.” John Dunhill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS 75; Cambridge: Cambridge University press), 1992.

²²² I do not necessarily assume Mosaic authorship, but I refer to him since he is, at the least, the implied author (cf. Deut 1,1).

²²³ C. Marvin Pate, *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 249.

the consequence (Deut 17:2–7). The covenant relationship between the LORD and the Israelites was supposed to be an exclusive relationship of commitment and love (Deut. 6:5); thus the people could not serve the LORD and other gods simultaneously (cf. the first commandment, Deut. 5:6–7). By serving other gods, the worshipper transgresses²²⁴ the covenant of the LORD (Deut 17:2). Idolatry is according to Deuteronomy the clearest expression of apostasy; thus it is more than an unintentional mistake²²⁵ that could be atoned for. The punishment of this sin is death by the hands of the people, and by doing this they would “purge the evil from their midst” (Deut 17:7). When Hebrews says: “Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses”, I believe he refers to apostasy, i.e. the breaking of the covenant relationship. The sin of abandoning the *living* God naturally leads to death. This resembles a general pattern laid out in Moses’ farewell speeches; a pattern we can call a *retributive structure of punishment and reward*. Moses lays before the people two ways of life; one leading to life and the other to death.

“See, I have set before you today *life* and prosperity, *death* and adversity. If you obey the commandment of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your hearts turn away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, that I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess...” Deut. 30:15–20

According to Deuteronomy there is an intimate connection between obedience and life/blessing and disobedience and death/curse.²²⁶ If the Israelites walk in the way of obedience, they will multiply and be blessed in the land God will give them to possess. In

²²⁴ The verb used is *παρέρχομαι*, which in this context has the meaning: “to ignore something in the interest of other matters, pass by, transgress, neglect, disobey”. (BDAG, 776) By transgressing the covenant, the person ignores and neglects the covenant relationship they enjoy with God. The expression conveys a similar meaning as the expression *ἀθετέω νόμον* (cf. footnote nr. 26)

²²⁵ In later Jewish tradition, idolatry was seen as the “intentional sin” of Numbers 15 that could not be atoned for. More on this in chapter 5.

²²⁶ No scholarly consensus on how we are to understand the categories of life/ death as a consequence for covenant breaking/ faithfulness. Some scholars state that it never was meant in an eschatological sense (reward: life after death), but more in the sense that obedience to the Torah leads to a good life in the land (Dunn, *New Perspectives on Paul*). Simon J. Gathercole argues convincingly that Jews in the second temple period understood the judgment (death) and reward (life) eschatologically. (“Torah, Life and Salvation: Leviticus 18.5 in Early Judaism and the New Testament,” in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New* (ed. C.A. Evans, J.A. Sanders. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2004).

other words: they will live in the fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham their ancestor (cf. Gen 12:1–3). Contrary to this, if they break the covenant with God, the blessing will be turned to a curse. Their land will be cursed (famine etc.), enemies will conquer them, and eventually they will be driven out of the land.²²⁷ We see these so-called covenant curses vividly expounded in Deut. 29:15–68. It is this retributive structure of punishment the author of Hebrews draws on in his warning against deliberate sin. This is perhaps even more evident in the warning in 6:4–6, where the image of curse as the consequence of apostasy is explicitly provoked.

I have now tried to show that the author of Hebrews argues along similar lines as Deuteronomy does, but the question of what implications this has for the interpretation of 10:26–31 still remains. For one thing, the sin that is warned against in 10:26–31 somehow corresponds to the act of violating the law of Moses. If the author in the “lesser case” refers to breaking the old covenant, i.e. the equivalent to apostasy, the sin in the “greater case” is probably also an expression of covenant infidelity.²²⁸ For another, the consequence of breaking the new covenant corresponds to – and even goes above and beyond – the consequence of breaking the law of Moses.²²⁹ The Israelites on the plain of Moab learned that covenant infidelity would lead them – not towards life – but on the way of destruction and death. The addressees of Hebrews hear the echo of that ancient warning, and “Deuteronomy’s paraenesis becomes Hebrew’s paraenesis”.²³⁰ According to Allen, the exhortations of Hebrews are a re-presentation of the Deuteronomic choice between life and death, apostasy and faithfulness, blessing and curse. *Re-presentation* refers to the way in which the author of Hebrews reworks and expands on the older Deuteronomic tradition, so that the new text claims for itself the authority already attached to that tradition.²³¹ He has pithily said, “Within Hebrews new covenant situation, the exhortation to ‘Choose Life’ remains as pressing as ever.”²³²

I propose, therefore, that 10:26–31 should be read in light of the covenant structure with its mutual obligations, promise of reward and warning of sanctions. Hence, it should not

²²⁷ The covenant curses resemble the curse of Gen, thus one could argue that the Israelites choose between the course leading to blessing/life or the default course of humanity leading to death.

²²⁸ Thus Filtved, “Paradox”, 109: “the issue at stake in 10:28–29 seems to be covenant infidelity”

²²⁹ Hahn argues along different lines. In his opinion, the NC is purely promissory and thus requires no obligation on the part of the NC community. In Hahn’s book, chapters 10–12 are not included, but he does discuss the warning passage in chapter 6.

²³⁰ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 225

²³¹ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 225

²³² Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 225

be read merely as a general statement of sin and punishment. The fact that the obligations are *mutual* should not be underestimated. God was the sole initiator of the covenant – he delivered his people from Egypt²³³ and revealed himself for them at Sinai (cf. Ex 19:3–7). God bound himself to Israel in the covenant; “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (Ex 6:7). Israel, as God’s people by covenant, is called to be faithful and obedient; and God’s faithfulness is both the foundation for the relationship and an on-going reality within that relationship. In that sense it is a relationship of mutual commitment and obligations. In another sense, God’s faithfulness to Israel on account of the covenant goes beyond and above what is expected from the Israelites – after all, in a relationship between God and man responsibility can never be equally distributed. After centuries of covenant infidelity on the part of Israel, God speaks through his messenger, saying, “I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you” (Malachi 3:6–7). This is a clear expression of God’s faithfulness despite Israel’s infidelity. That said, God’s faithfulness and mercy towards Israel does not mean that he overlooks their rebellion so that it goes unpunished. God’s righteousness is seen both in his faithfulness and grace towards his covenant-people *and* in his justice. This tension is clearly at display in God’s famous self-designation: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...” (Ex 34:6–7). God’s dealing with Israel throughout the narrative of the OT holds this promise and obligation in tension. This is a tension that is difficult to resolve, and should be understood dynamically – I contend also within Hebrews new covenant situation. Also in Hebrews the recipients are consistently reminded of God’s faithfulness towards them (3:6; 4:14–16; 6:13–20; 10:23; 12:7–13; 13:6; 13:20–21). At the same time, they are obliged to express πίστις – trust and faithfulness – in return.

3.5 The Greater Case: The New Covenant (10:29)

The move to the heavier side of the *qal wa-homer* argument is also a transition from the Mosaic era of the old covenant to the era of the new covenant, just like it is in Heb 2:2–3 and 12:25. The emphasis shifts from punishment – this will be treated in the following verses – to

²³³ The deliverance from Egypt was itself an expression of God’s faithfulness towards the covenant he made with Abraham and the patriarchs. Significantly, Moses appeals to God’s covenant with Abraham when he intercedes on behalf of the people after the golden calf incident (29:27).

the offense. However, one thing is worth noticing concerning the punishment now deserved by the transgressor. According to Johnson, the noun *τιμωρία* refers specifically to a punishment that is not corrective, but is rather a form of vengeance (cf. 10:30–31). Thus it should not be confused with the discipline (*παιδεία*) that God brings upon his sons out of love (12:7).²³⁴ I think this is an important distinction.²³⁵ However, the fact that the addressees are *warned* of the potential danger of judgment is an expression of God’s corrective love (cf. Lev 26:11). The prophets’ predictions of judgment and doom in the Old Testament were meant to bring Israel to repentance, so that God’s judgment could be restrained (cf. Jer 18:5–11; Ez 33:10–20. cf. “Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the LORD God. Turn, then, and live.” Ez. 18:31–32). Similarly, the warnings in Hebrews are meant to urge the addressees to amend their ways and choose obedience rather than apostasy; thus in that sense the warnings are expression as God’s corrective and loving discipline towards the addressees – even though the punishment that will come if they refrain from responding to God’s correction is final.

The new covenant is a covenant built upon greater promises and it accomplishes for the believers what the old covenant never did by dealing with sin in such a way that the people can approach God. The flip side of this is that more is at stake; the consequences for breaking the covenant is greater than in the past era of Moses. I think this text explicitly makes it clear that there are certain obligations connected to being part of the covenant community. It is indeed a promissory covenant in the sense that God is the initiator and that it is built on God’s promises of granting them access to their inheritance – but that does not mean that it is without obligations.

²³⁴ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 264. According to Johnson, this distinction is found in Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1369B, and it is used in Euripides, *Orestes*, 400, 425; Wis 19:13; 2 Macc 6:12, 26; 4 Macc 4:24. Cf. also Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 7.14.2–4

²³⁵ The scriptural subtext of Hebrews 12:7–11 is Proverbs 3:11–12, and most likely also probably Deuteronomy 8:1–5 (cf. Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 79–82), where the motif of God the father disciplining his son is applied to the context of the wilderness wandering. In Deuteronomy, Moses has reminded Israel of God’s faithfulness in the wilderness, and also how he led them a long way in order to humble them and test them to know what was in their hearts, whether or not they would keep his commandments. “Know then I your heart that as a parent (ἄνθρωπος) disciplines (παιδεύσαι) a child (τὸν υἱὸν) so the LORD your God has disciplined you” (Deut 8:5). This discipline that Israel experienced in the wilderness is certainly not the same as the punishment they will experience if they break the covenant. In the same way, the recipients now experience trials of various kind. This is not the same as the punishment in 10:27; but it is rather meant to help them towards faithfulness – a *παιδεία* that aims at bringing “life” (Deut 8:1; Heb 12:9; Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 82). Also in the context of proverb the goal of the discipline is to teach “the son” to choose the right path that leads to life. Cf. also 4 Macc 5:24. See more on this motif in 5.5.4.

3.5.1 A Threefold Offense against the Honor of God

In 10:29 the author sets up the counterpart to the act of violating the law of Moses. The violation of the new covenant inaugurated by the blood of Jesus is “portrayed as a threefold offense against the honor of God.”²³⁶ The author presents the act of violating the covenant relationship in a stark and striking way with the purpose of making the addressees understand what they do if they do not hold on to their confession and rather withdraw from the community (cf. 10:23–25)²³⁷ and their confession (10:23). It might seem a small thing to withdraw from the community, but the addressees are made aware that they either honor God by their course of life, or they dishonor him – there is no middle ground. The threefold offense could reflect the “two or three witnesses” of v. 28, but this is at best implicit.²³⁸ The three participial clauses do not refer to three different groups of people, since they are connected to the same \acute{o} . Rather it should be read as different aspects of apostasy that gives cumulative force to the argument (cf. the list of blessings in 6:4–5).²³⁹ “These clauses provide a definition for the sin in 10:26a.”²⁴⁰

According to David deSilva, who attempts to read the warning within the context of the patron-client relationship,²⁴¹ “the author claims no more than what was required by the Greco-Roman ethos, as expressed, for example, in Dio, *orat.* 31.65: “those who insult their benefactors will by nobody be esteemed to deserve a favour.” A person who received benefits from a patron simultaneously “accepted the obligation to ‘publicize the favor and his gratitude for it,’ thus contributing to the patron’s reputation.”²⁴² If a client behaved in the opposite way – either by taking the favor for granted or refusing the favor altogether – he dishonored and insulted the patron in the gravest way possible and could only expect $\tau\mu\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ in return. The Latin author Aulus Gellius, on treating the three reasons given by the philosophers for punishing crimes, specifically refers to $\tau\mu\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ as the preservation of honor and contends that the reason for this kind of punishment “exists when the dignity and prestige of the one who is sinned against must be maintained, lest the omission of punishment bring him into contempt

²³⁶ deSilva, *Perserverance in Gratitude*, 347

²³⁷ Ibid

²³⁸ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 538

²³⁹ *ibid*

²⁴⁰ Lane, *Hebrews* 2:294

²⁴¹ Even though deSilva primarily speaks of the apostasy as “violating the bond of patronage” (cf. “Exchanging”, 104), he still agrees that 10:26–31 “compares infractions against the Mosaic covenant with transgression of the new covenant” (“Exchanging”, 113). Thus it seems like he uses “transgression of the new covenant” and “violating the bond of patronage” as parallel statements.

²⁴² deSilva, “Exchanging”, 92

and diminish the esteem in which he is held” (*Attic Nights* 7.14.2–4). deSilva argues along these lines, saying: “the one who assaults the honor of Christ, who should rather enhance the honor of the patron, becomes the target of divine satisfaction, the restoration of the honor of Son”²⁴³. The punishment described in Heb 10:26–31 is thus, according to deSilva, understood as God’s way to maintain the glory of the Son. This is, however, not explicitly stated in the text, but rather read between the lines in light of deSilva’s patron/client reading.

3.5.2 *Those who have Spurned the Son of God...*

The first description of those who deserve God’s punishment is that they have spurned the Son of God. The Greek verb used is καταπατέω, and it literally means “to trample under foot” (literal use in Mat.5:13; 7:6; Lk. 8:5; 12:1). This is the only occurrence in the LXX of the verb with God or Christ as the object (God is the implied subject in Isaiah 63:3,6). The verb recalls the trampling of the temple by the gentiles in Maccabean times (1 Macc. 3:45, 51; 4:60; 3 Macc. 2:18; cf. Is. 63:18; Dan. 8:13).²⁴⁴ The author emphatically states that the object of the trampling is τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (cf. also 6:6). In the prologue of the letter, we are introduced to this Son of God as the exalted heir of all things and the reflection of God’s glory (1:2–3). After he made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty (1:3; 10:12; cf. Psalm 110:1a), where he is now waiting until his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet (10:13; cf. Psalm 110:1b). The reminder that the title of Jesus is “the Son of God” both increases the gravity of the affront, and places it within the context of God’s own honor; lack of honor towards Jesus implies lack of honor towards God (cf. Joh 5:22–23).²⁴⁵ The image of one who has trampled upon the Son of God is strikingly ironic and inappropriate. Acts of honor and dishonor were often described through physical representation. Instead of taking the place at the Master’s feet in worship (cf. προσκύνησις of 1:6), as would be appropriate (even the angels are called to worship him!), “one treats him with an utmost scorn...Indeed, the one who may be scorned now, and thus trampled, is the one at whose feet all his enemies will soon be brought into subjection (1:13; 10:13, 37).”²⁴⁶ This ironic image is meant to make the addressees shrink from such an insult.²⁴⁷ Truth is that if they trample upon God’s Son now, they themselves will eventually be among the enemies brought into subjection under the feet of Jesus (cf. 10:27). In their eyes, disassociating themselves from the covenant

²⁴³ deSilva, “Exchanging”, 113

²⁴⁴ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 540

²⁴⁵ DeSilva, *Perseverance*, 348

²⁴⁶ *ibid*

²⁴⁷ Koester, *Hebrews*, 457.

community might seem like a minor thing indeed – but it is equated with showing the Son the utmost disgrace. Their future solely depends on their relationship to Jesus; it is he who is the leader to their salvation (2:10, cf. 2.3.1). By rejecting him, they also reject their road to glory.

3.5.3 ...*Profaned the Blood of the Covenant by which they were Sanctified...*

The next description of the offense is also strikingly ironic. Those who are worthy of divine punishment are those who have profaned – i.e. “defiled” and “disqualified for sacrifice”²⁴⁸ – the very blood that is the source of their own sanctification. “The blood of the covenant” is a motif that is established in 9:18-22 and alluded to in 10:22, and will reappear in 12:24 and 13:20. The phrase “blood of the covenant” clearly echoes the words of Moses uttered when he solemnly inaugurated the covenant between God and Israel at Sinai (Exodus 24:8; cf. Heb 9:20). It is clear from the context, however, that this refers to the blood of Jesus who has a sanctifying quality (cf. 10:10, 14; 13:12).²⁴⁹ In 9:15–18, where the author establishes the motif of the covenant blood of Jesus, the relationship between the death of Jesus and the new covenant is expounded. It is said that Jesus is covenant mediator – i.e. “the one who is able to convey the covenant blessings in the new covenant”²⁵⁰ – *because* he sacrificed himself (9:14–15). This blessing is presented as “eternal redemption from transgressions under the first covenant” (9:). Filvedt aptly states: “Through Jesus, God has solved the problem which the first covenant was incapable of dealing with, the problem [i.e. their transgressions] which hindered God’s people from receiving their eternal inheritance. This means that God’s death and the inauguration of the new covenant ultimately prove God’s faithfulness to his promises.”²⁵¹

Thus, as we saw in 2.3.1, the promise of inheritance that was not fulfilled within the scope of the first covenant is fulfilled through the death and the blood of Jesus.²⁵² “It is this blood that grants them access to God (10:19).”²⁵³ Under the first covenant the worshippers were not allowed to enter into the holy of holiest (9:7)²⁵⁴; but now, having the hearts sprinkled

²⁴⁸ Lane, *Hebrews* 2:204.

²⁴⁹ Filvedt, “Paradox”, 109.

²⁵⁰ Filvedt, “Paradox”, 103.

²⁵¹ Filvedt, “Paradox”, 106.

²⁵² The last reference to the blood of the covenant is in 13:20–21. Here the author calls the covenant *eternal*. This eternal covenant contrasts the first covenant that will vanish (8:13). “This emphasizes that it is through Jesus’ covenant and not the Sinai covenant, that God intends to fulfill the promises he has made towards his people.” Filvedt, “Paradox”, 115.

²⁵³ Filvedt, “Paradox”, 109.

²⁵⁴ cf. footnote 195.

clean and bodies washed with pure water (cf. Ezekiel 36:26–26), they can with confidence enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus (19:19–23). If they now respond not by praise and obedience (which should be their expression of worship, 13:15–16), but by breaking the covenant, the sanctifying blood will be of no benefit to them. Koester aptly writes: “declaring Christ’s blood “profane” reinstates the defilement that separates people from God”.²⁵⁵

The addressees are called to draw near to God and enter his sanctuary (10:19). They are thus reminded that they are located at the threshold of their reward. If they reject Jesus by shrinking back (10:39) – instead of finishing the race with eyes fixed on Jesus (12:1–2) – they will lose their chance to enter.

3.5.4. ...and Outraged the Spirit of Grace.

The third and last aspect of the offense is the act of outraging the Spirit of Grace. The verb ἐνοβρίσας (bruk nevineform) implies an arrogant insult, often accompanied with violence (cf. Mt. 22:6; Acts 14:5; 1 Thess 2:2). The object of this offense is τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος. We already know that the Spirit has spoken through the scriptures, and he has been given to the believers. It was also through the Spirit that Jesus offered himself to God (9:14). The grace of God is mentioned frequently in the homily (cf. 2:9; 12:15; 4:16; 13:9), and it is from the Spirit the believers have received this grace. The author is probably not speaking of the Spirit as a gift of grace. The phrase should rather be read as adjectival: “The gracious (ie. the grace-giving) Spirit”.²⁵⁶ The contradictory notion of *outraging* a *gracious* Spirit is calculated to command attention.²⁵⁷ They should respond in gratitude, but they do the opposite.

Given the parallel the author has made between the wilderness generation and the present readers on their pilgrimage towards their homeland, this offence could possibly also be an echo of the offence of the Israelites in the wilderness. In Isaiah 63:7–9 the prophet recalls the great grace and favor that God showed Israel when he saved them by his presence (i.e. an allusion to the Exodus, cf. 63:11–14). God expects that his people and children will respond in a worthy manner – instead the response of the people is presented in a stark contrast. Instead of responding to God’s grace in gratitude and faith, “they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore he became their enemy” (Is. 63:10).²⁵⁸ The parallel to the context of Hebrews is striking. Also Hebrews 10:26–31 makes it clear that if they respond

²⁵⁵ Koester, *Hebrews*, 457.

²⁵⁶ Eliingworth, *Hebrews*, 540.

²⁵⁷ Lane, *Hebrews* 2:294.

²⁵⁸ This allusion becomes even more plausible when we consider Lane’s argument that Isaiah 63:11–12 is alluded to in Hebrews 13:20–21. Lane, *Hebrews* 2:561–563. See footnote 184.

with rebellion instead of gratitude, they will be among God's enemies on the day of God's vengeance. We will turn to that in the next chapter.

3.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have had a look at the author's main argument for his statement in 10:26. He draws on the relationship between the the new covenant and the Sinai covenant that has been established in the preceding chapter, a relationship of continuity and newness, and sets up an argument from lesser to greater. If rejection of the first covenant was punished with death, how much worse should the consequence of rejecting the new covenant not be? The author seems to appeal to the covenantal structure of retribution and apply it in the context of the new covenant. This suggests that also the new covenant is more than a mere *testament* that distributes blessings to the heirs of the promise (i.e. unilateral). It is equally a relational bond between God and his people with obligations attached (i.e. bilateral).

The obligations attached to the new covenant are thus analogues to the obligations faced the recipients of the Sinai covenant. In this comparison between the two covenants, it appears, however, to be significant differences at the heart of similarity. There is, as we have seen, a difference with respect to the gravity of the judgment that befalls those who break the covenant. Another significant difference is the nature of the obligations. All of the three *qal wa-homer* passages in Hebrews are warnings against disobeying God. In all of the arguments, the law is found in the "lesser" premise. Now, "in these last days (cf. 1:1) the recipients are warned against treating the Son, the blood of the covenant and the Spirit of grace with contempt. The obligation facing the recipients of the new covenant is "directed towards a specific person, namely Jesus, the Son of God."²⁵⁹

It seems simple enough in Hebrews 10:28; under the old covenant the consequence of covenant transgression was death without mercy. This serves as a pattern for sin and judgment also in the new covenant – it is a symmetry that apparently leaves no room for negotiation or compromise. However, this quick reference to Deuteronomy comes not many verses after the author has expanded on the sacrificial cult central to the old covenant. "Even the first covenant had regulations for worship" (9:1); and at the heart of these regulations was the sacrifices for sin, most significantly on the Day of Atonement (Heb 9:7; cf. Lev 16). The old covenant was thus not only a covenant of obligations where every transgression was justly punished – God also provided merciful regulations for atonement. The author sees the day of

²⁵⁹ Filtvedt, "Paradox"; 109

atonement as a foreshadow of the sacrificial death of Jesus. We will return to this in chapter 5, but first will look at the descriptions of the fearful judgment that magnifies the consequence for choosing the course of life that is described in 10:29.

4. The Fearful Judgment of God (Hebrews 10:27 and 10:30–31)

4.1 The Greek Text with Translation

φοβερά δέ τις²⁶⁰ ἐκδοχή^b κρίσεως καὶ πυρὸς ζῆλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοὺς ὑπεναντίους.
(10:27)

...

οἶδαμεν γὰρ τὸν εἰπόντα· ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω. καὶ πάλιν· κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν
λαὸν αὐτοῦ. φοβερὸν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζῶντος.
(10:30-31)

but a fearful, inevitable²⁶¹ expectation of judgment and a jealous fire ready to eat the
adversaries (10:27)

...

For we know the one who said: vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again: the LORD will
judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (10:30–31)

4.2 Divine judgment – Images and Language from the Old Testament

My intention with this chapter is to look at the verses describing divine judgment (10:27 and 10:30–31) in depth. The first thing one notices, is the multiple references and allusions to texts in the Old Testament (OT). How the author uses the OT will therefore be a major focus in this chapter. I will discuss whether the author takes the original contexts of the OT citations into account, or if he decontextualizes them. If he takes the context into account, it supports the idea that Hebrews creates a “scriptural world” for his addressees. The author seems to place the recipients in a situation analogue to the situation of the recipients of the Sinai covenant at the momentous time prior to the entry into Canaan.

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews is not concerned with identifying exactly (literally) what kind of judgment that is threatening the recipients if they break the covenant.²⁶² He is more concerned with exhorting them to respond. He uses images

²⁶⁰ τις is here an enclitic and used rhetorically to intensify φοβερά²⁶⁰. (BAGD (W. Bauer, W.F Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT* [2000]),1008).

²⁶¹ Lane, *Hebrews* 2:277. According to Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 534) is this perhaps an over-translation, but he agrees that τις intensifies φοβερά.

²⁶² Contra Randall C. Gleason, “The eschatology of the warning in Hebrews”, *Tyndale Bulletin*, 53/1 (2002), 97-120. Gleason contends that Hebrews’ warning is about the physical treat – the destruction of Palestine,

from the OT to paint a prospect of the fearful judgment in broad strokes, aiming at encouraging the readers towards a renewed commitment to Christ. Drawing on images, language and specific texts from the OT, the author invites the addressees to see them selves as standing in continuity with the past. They are part of God's people, and will be judged accordingly.

It is also important to remember that it was the scriptures of the OT that were authoritative for the Jesus movement, as well as for Jews outside of the Jesus movement. It is therefore natural that the author makes use of the OT scriptures to draw on their authority; the author borrows the credibility of Deuteronomy and Isaiah to increase his own (i.e. borrowed ethos).

4.3 Hebrews 10:27

The author has made it clear that the consequence for willful sin after having received the knowledge of the truth is that there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (10:26), and 10:27 follows this up by describing the judgment they will receive instead. The deliberate sinner has rejected the covenant relationship, thus becoming God's adversary (τοὺς ὑπεναντίους). What await the adversaries of God is a fearful (φοβερά) judgment and consumption by a zealous fire (πυρὸς ζήλος). This statement is clearly meant to arouse the emotions of the addressees; it is thus an important part of the argument from *pathos*. Arousing emotions was a central component of persuasion for the classical theorists of rhetoric.²⁶³ The appeal to fear (10:26–31) is bracketed by an appeal to the pathos of confidence (10:19–25; 10:32–35).²⁶⁴ By appealing to these emotion the author intended to move the hearers/ readers to make a decision.

Fear is a term that is repeated in Hebrews.²⁶⁵ In 10:31, as in this verse, the word is used as an attribute to the judgment of God, and it has clearly eschatological overtones.²⁶⁶ In 12:21 the descent of God at Sinai is said to have been so terrible that even Moses was afraid. Fear is a natural response to God's self-revelation, as is also seen consistently throughout

Jerusalem and the temple – posed by the Roman invasion, directed towards those Christians who lapsed back into Judaism.

²⁶³ deSilva, "Exchanging", 109.

²⁶⁴ "Appeals to the emotions of confidence and fear have alternated strategically throughout the exhortations of the sermon: 4:12–13 (fear); 4:14–16 (confidence); 6:4–8 (fear); 6:9–12 (confidence); 10:19–25 (confidence); 10:26–31 (fear); 10:32–36 (confidence)", deSilvia, *Perseverance*, 468.

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 296. Cf. also 2. Enoch 39:8: "Frightening and dangerous it is to stand before the face of an earthly king, terrifying and very dangerous it is ... how much more terrifying and dangerous it is to stand before the face of the king of earthly kings and of the heavenly armies?"

LXX (Gen 28:17; Deut 1:19; 2:7; 8:17; Judg 13:6; 1 Chr 16:25; Neh 1:5; 4:14; Pss 46:2; 75:7; 95:4; 98:3; 110:9).²⁶⁷ In 4:1 the recipients are told to fear (φοβηθῶμεν οὖν), so that they will not fail to enter the rest like their ancestors did. It is not explicitly stated towards what or whom this fear should be directed. The implied object could possibly be God, or it could be the thought of failing to reach the rest. Anyhow, the fear is presented as something that will prompt faith and trust. If they fear the LORD – or the consequence of not obeying and trusting him – they will not have to fear anything else; they are freed from the fear of death (2:15) and do not need to fear human rulers (11:23, 27).²⁶⁸ The author can therefore say, in the words of the psalmist, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” (13:6/ Ps 117:6)

There is a certain ambivalence regarding the fear of God in Hebrews; to fear God can be a good thing *and* a very terrible one. Confidence and faith do not necessarily stand in contrast. Rather the readers are exhorted both to fear the LORD (4:1, cf. also a call to reverence and awe in 12:28), and at the same time approach the throne of grace/ the sanctuary with confidence and full assurance of faith (4:14–16; 10:19–22). Fear, in this sense of the word, and confidence are not antithetical. Thus Ellingworth writes: “Fear is not contrasted, as a psychological condition, for example, with faith or hope; the deeper contrast is between the objective status of those who maintain their trust in Christ and his sacrifice, and that of those who know Christ and persist in willful sin.”²⁶⁹ The latter have not feared God in this life, and must face God as a fearsome judge after death (9:27). The throne of God *is* a throne of grace (4:16), but it is just as much God’s seat for judgment (9:27; 6:2b; 4:12–13). It is only by the cleansing and sanctifying blood of Jesus that one can approach God’s throne with confidence (10:19). Having profaned this blood (10:29), thus cancelling the very provision for their confidence, they will face the merciless judgment of God to their destruction.

It is intriguing that this judgment is described by the word ἐκδοχή (expectation).²⁷⁰ The closest parallel to this is in 10:13; Jesus is waiting/ expecting the subjection of his enemies under his feet (cf. 1.13). Also in 9:27 we have the concept of expectancy; Jesus will appear a second time and save those who are eagerly waiting for him. In contrast to this, the apostates have only an inevitable, fearful judgment to expect. “The interim is a period of

²⁶⁷ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 262.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ Paul Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 534.

²⁷⁰ ἐκδοχή (no other occurrence in the NT) has here the meaning «expectation» The word occurs nowhere else (except by Hesychibus) with that meaning (BAGD 301), so it is probably a nuance the author gives to the word, based on the meaning ἐκδεχέσθαι («to wait», «to expect») in 10:13.

expectation, confident in the case of Christ and his people, fearful in the case of those who by their persistence in sin have made themselves his adversaries.²⁷¹ An interesting parallel to this is found in the oracles of the prophet Amos. The people of Israel is waiting eagerly for the Day of the LORD when God will show vengeance; restoration of Israel and destruction of her enemies. The prophet turns this expectation on its head. “Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light” (Amos 5:18). Being God’s people by covenant, Israel had reasons to desire the day of the LORD. But as Amos vividly illustrates, the people have become like enemies of God through breaking the covenant (social injustice and religious syncretism). If they do not repent, the Day will bring destruction and not salvation. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that the Day is surely approaching (10:25), but “only the context shows whether the events expected are good or bad.”²⁷²

The description of the inescapable judgment is further developed by a recontextualization²⁷³ of Is 26:11: “jealousy will take an uneducated people and now fire will eat them.”²⁷⁴ The author has condensed the verse by calling the fire “jealous” and leaving out the rest of the first clause. He has also made the treat more immanent by changing the future tense of the verb (“fire will eat”) to a verb expressing the action as forthcoming (ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος: “a fire about to eat.”²⁷⁵ This serves an important rhetorical purpose, since imminence is crucial to the arousal of the emotion of fear.²⁷⁶ The imminence of the judgment (and positively: the reward) is further reinforced by the intertexture in Hebr 10:37–39. Here the author strategically introduces the recontextualization of Hab 2:3–4 by a few words from Isaiah 26:20: “yet a little while.”²⁷⁷ In the original context this time element designates the length of time that God’s people are told to hide away in their chambers, until God has punished the inhabitants of the earth. As an introduction to Hab 2:3–4 it serves a double

²⁷¹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 534.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Recontextualization: When an author incorporates a long string of words that is clearly a quotation of another text without giving the ancient equivalents to quotation marks. By doing this the old text is woven seamlessly into the new without the readers having any explicit indication that a different voice than the author’s has intruded the text (David deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament; Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 801).

²⁷⁴ Translation taken from deSilva, *Introduction*, 803.

²⁷⁵ deSilva, *Introduction*, 803.

²⁷⁶ Aristotle underscores that it is important that the danger should be seen as close at hand and not distant, deSilva, *Introduction*, 783.

²⁷⁷ The fact that there are two echoes of “the song of victory” (Is 26:1–11) in Hebrews 10:26–39 might transform the whole song of Victory into an echo chamber where the warning of Hebrews finds resonance.

rhetorical goal. It both reinforces the nearness of God's judgment and making it clear that also the reward is very near, thus encouraging endurance.²⁷⁸

In the original context Isaiah 26:11 is part of a song of victory (Is 26:1–21) – a celebration of God's vindication of his people (Judah) and destruction of their enemies²⁷⁹ – that will be sung “On *that day*” (26:1, italic mine). Drawing on this, the author of Hebrews makes the point clear: if the recipients continue in their deliberate sin (i.e. breaking the covenant), they cut themselves off from the people of God; thus they will not be on the winning side when God (or Christ) comes to vindicate. The opening stanza of the song of victory describes those who will enter the gates of the “strong city”: it is the righteous nation that keeps *faith* that will enter in (Is 26:2), those of steadfast mind and who trust in the LORD (Is 26:3–4). It is an evident thematic parallel between these verses and Hebrews. Also in Hebrews, it is the “righteous nation that keeps faith” that will enter the heavenly city. If the addressees continue in deliberate sin, if they do not keep faith, they will face the same destiny as God's enemies.

The closest parallel to the phrase “a fury of fire” in Hebrews is 12:29 (Deut 4:24; 9:3); where God is said to be a consuming fire (cf. also the presence of “a blazing fire” as part of the allusion to God's descent on Sinai in 12:18–21).

4.4 Hebrews 10:30-31

After the *qal wa-homer* argument in 10:28–29, the author returns to a description of the punishment by means of two brief OT citations, both from the Song of Moses, found originally in Deuteronomy, but frequently adopted for liturgical use in the Temple, synagogue and the church.²⁸⁰ Again, like he did in 10:26, he applies the inclusive pronoun “we”: “For *we* know the one who said” (10:30, italics mine) – thus he includes himself as a recipient of the warning. Though not explicitly stated, “the one who said” is obviously God himself (cf. 10:31). Knowing God is according to Hebrews associated with the new covenant (Hebr 8:10/ Jer 38:31-34 LXX). The readers have received the knowledge of the truth (10:26, cf. “enlightened” in 6:4), and the author assumes that they consequently know the character of God and his previous speech. The introduction to the quote is possibly also related to the song of Moses. The readers know God, contrary to the Israelites' ignorance (Deut 32:28–29).²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ deSilva, *Introduction*, 805.

²⁷⁹ Against this Gleason argues that Is 26:11 originally is directed towards Israel/ Judah and not other people.

²⁸⁰ Lane, *Hebrews* 1:28.

²⁸¹ Allen refers to Gordon, *Hebrews*, 123–124 in a footnote in *Deuteronomy*, 58.

In the first citation God speaks in first person, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Hebr 10:30a/ Deut 32:35), thus making it clear that God himself is the one who initiates the punishment for apostasy. This version varies from both MT and LXX. According to deSilva, the authors version of Deuteronomy is a conflation of MT (“*Vengeance is mine*, and retribution”, italic mine) and LXX (“In the day of vengeance *I will repay*”, italics mine).²⁸² This is possible, but it could also – as Allen suggests²⁸³ – be a separate, Greek textual tradition allied to, yet different to, both MT and LXX, also used by Paul in Rom 12:19. The next citation is from Deut 32:36: “And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people’”. The Hebrew MT says: the Lord will “vindicate” his people. In the context of Deuteronomy, it is a word of comfort, as clearly seen in the parallelism: “God will vindicate his people, and have compassion on his servants” (Deut 32:36b). However, in LXX the Greek verb κρινω (judge) is used, which opens up for a negative meaning of the verb – thus the author of Hebrews can cite this verse in his stern warning against apostasy. The apostates are the target of God’s ἐκδίκησις (cf. 10:27–29), and no divine vindication is in view.²⁸⁴ “The apparent assurance of Deut 32:36 has become the warning of Deut 10:30”.²⁸⁵

Taking this into consideration, some scholars argue that the original context is eschewed when the author cites Deuteronomy. Attridge labels the citation of both Deuteronomy 32:35 and 32:36 in 10:30 as “tendentious,”²⁸⁶ and Calvin writes: “there is no reason why the Apostle should not have accommodated to a different purpose than what was set forth by Moses for the consolation of the godly, in order that believers might be the more heedful, the nearer they saw God to show Himself as the Judge of His Church.”²⁸⁷

Against this, other scholars ascribe continuity between the two contexts, stating that κρινω has the *positive* meaning of vindication also in Hebrews. Accordingly, the text does not state that God will judge his people in a negative sense, but he will vindicate his people; it is “a judgment of mercy in the favor of God’s people.”²⁸⁸ I do not think this is an adequate interpretation of Hebrews 10:30, since it neglects the overall context of 10:26–31²⁸⁹, which

²⁸² deSilva, *perseverance*, 352.

²⁸³ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 58–59.

²⁸⁴ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 59.

²⁸⁵ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 61.

²⁸⁶ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 296. He writes: “As usual in Hebrews, the original context does not determine the application of the text, since it now serves as a warning to God’s own new covenant people.”

²⁸⁷ John Calvin, *Harmony of the Pentateuch* (trans. Charles William Bingham; 4 vols.; vol. 4; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), 365. Cited in Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 61.

²⁸⁸ Leonard, *Authorship 347*. Cited in Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 61.

²⁸⁹ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 61.

clearly speaks of punishment and not a merciful vindication. The verb κρινῶ therefore has, as I see it, the *negative* meaning of “judge.”

This does not necessarily imply that the author decontextualizes the citation, as Allen helpfully points out.²⁹⁰ Allen convincingly argues that the author of Hebrews does not ignore the context of Deut 32:35–36 or the Song’s broader Deuteronomistic milieu. The verses surrounding 10:30 contribute in giving the pericope a Deuteronomistic flavor. The combination of the fear of the living God (10:31; cf. Deut 5:26²⁹¹) who controls life and death (cf. Deut 32:39) and into whose hands it is fearful to fall (10:31; cf. Deut 32:39); the image of a fiery judgment (10:27; cf. Deut 4:24; 4:33; 5:26); and the reference to the Deuteronomistic plurality of witnesses (10:28), ground the warning of 10:30 firmly in the context of Deuteronomy.²⁹² To support a sense of continuity between the two contexts, Allen argues that the Song of Moses frequently blurs the distinction between Israel and the nations, and that the divine vengeance in 32:35 is not distributed only along ethical lines.²⁹³ Deuteronomy 32:35–36 conveys the promise that God will vindicate his people, but it functions just as much as a warning *against* Israel (cf. Deut 32:44–47). Hebrews offers a valid reading of Deut 32:35–36; “and one perfectly conversant with the ethos of the Song as whole.”²⁹⁴ God will vindicate his people *if* they keep covenant with him. If they break the covenant by pursuing the way of idolatry and disobedience, he will be their enemy and they will receive divine judgment. Hebrews takes seriously this ambiguity of Deut 32:35–36 and understands the verses as warning Israel against breaking the covenant, and he reapplies them in the context of the new covenant.²⁹⁵ “Hebrews 10:30 appeal to Deut 32:35–36 would then become a double-edged sword, citing the judgment of those who spurn Christ, while at the same time announcing the vindication of those who embrace him.”²⁹⁶ This is similar to what we saw in 10:27; if the recipients persist in sin, they will be judged as God’s enemies when he comes to vindicate. If they want to be sure they are on the safe side when the Day approaches, they have to hold on to their confession – for “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God” (10:31; cf. Deu 32:39).²⁹⁷ The emphasis on the God as being *living*, supports the notion that separating

²⁹⁰ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 60; 62.

²⁹¹ Allen refers to Deut 5:36; but I believe he means 5:2.

²⁹² Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 62.

²⁹³ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 33–38,

²⁹⁴ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 60.

²⁹⁵ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 62.

²⁹⁶ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 203.

²⁹⁷ “These words have no doubt been used frequently as a warning to the ungodly of what lies in store for them unless they amend their ways; but their primary application is to the people of God” Bruce, *Hebrews*, 265.

oneself from him and the community of his people is the equivalent of separating oneself from life – death being the consequence (cf. Heb 10:28–29, cf. you turned away from the death to serve the living God). The community of believers might face danger and dishonour now among their fellow citizens, so much so that they might feel tempted to withdraw from the community (10:25). However, the author makes it clear that “There lies the danger to be avoided at all costs, and no lesser danger should seduce one into a path that leads to a greater danger.”²⁹⁸ There is not a thing imaginable that is more dangerous than to meet the Judge of all as an enemy.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The author of Hebrews brings forth a strong warning against breaking the covenant inaugurated by the blood of Christ, and the consequent punishment for this transgression is described in 10:27 and 10:30–31. Being in a covenant relationship with God (i.e. being part of God’s people) does not make a person immune to the just judgments of God – neither in the past nor in the present. Drawing on texts from the old testament that speak of God vindicating his people by judging their enemies, the author makes it clear that a person that breaks the covenant becomes an enemy of God, i.e. the target of God’s judgment on the Day of vengeance. The Song of Moses was meant to be a witness of God’s mercy and God’s judgment; it was supposed to warn the Israelites of the consequences of apostasy. The exhortations in Hebrews follow the same lines; they are pointing towards the mercy *and* the justice of the Living God. Thus the citations contribute to create a scriptural world and a narrative context for the warning. God deals with his people in the present like he has always dealt with his people. Being consecrated by the blood of Christ, the recipients are encouraged to approach the throne of grace with boldness (10:19–25). That is the great privilege of being in the New Covenant. But if a person profanes this blood by breaking the covenant, standing before the Living God as a judge is a fearful thing (10:26–31).

The author goes all out in his effort to persuade the recipients to faithful obedience and perseverance. As was customary in classical rhetoric, the author appeals to the emotions (*pathos*) in his persuasive speech, and the author’s purpose is clear: as the recipients are made to feel fear at the consequences of a certain course of action, they will recoil at the thought.²⁹⁹ They will rather be drawn to do what is encouraged in 10:29–25 and 10:32–35. The

²⁹⁸ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 355.

²⁹⁹ deSilvia, *Perseverance*, 353.

presentation of the disturbing prospect of judgment was meant to move the recipients to action; to turn to Jesus and not drift away from the faith.

So far we have seen that mutual obligation is at the heart of the new covenant. We have also had a look at the consequences for breaking these obligations. Ellingworth has aptly said: “Sins which cannot be dealt with by an atoning sacrifice can only be dealt with by judgment.”³⁰⁰ This could well serve as a summary statement of this chapter. It is also a reminder of the concept of atonement, which is central to the argument of Hebrews. This is the theme I will turn to in the following chapter.

³⁰⁰ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 533–534.

5. The Consequence of Willfully Persisting in Sin: No Sacrifice Remains (Hebrews 10:26)

5.1 The Greek Text with Translation

Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας, οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία

For if we willingly (voluntary or deliberately) persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

5.2 Is the Atoning Sacrifice of Jesus limited? Who does it not extend to?

Hebrews 10:26 is a serious statement. The consequence of persisting in willful sin is that there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins; no forgiveness of sins and consequently no entry into the sanctuary – but rather a fearful expectation of judgment (10:27; 10:30–31). The analysis of this verse will directly answer the question of research of this thesis; how can the claim made in Hebrews 10:26 be regarded as valid, given what the letter to the Hebrews generally has to say about the new covenant inaugurated by the sacrificial death of Jesus? As I argued in chapter 2., the statement is given an explanation in the verses that follow (i.e. 10:28–29). We will therefore draw on our findings in chapter 3 when we approach this verse, remembering that the sin the author describes is dishonoring God by breaking the new covenant.

The model readers (cf. 1.4.1) will at this point understand why the levitical sacrifices no longer remain (cf. 10:2, 18),³⁰¹ but why not the sacrifice of Jesus? It is said that Jesus by a single offering has perfected for all time (ἀγιαζομένους) those who are sanctified (10:14), so that they boldly can approach God (10:25). Is this atonement limited, conditioned by the conduct of those who are sanctified? To come to terms with this question, we will have to have the description of the sin (i.e. dishonoring God by breaking the covenant) in 10:28–29 in mind. We will also have to tune our ears to a literary echo in the text; attentive listeners might discern an echo of the regulations for sacrifices of sin in Numbers 15.³⁰² Looking into this text

³⁰¹ cf. Chapter 2, on the wider co-text of Hebrews 10:26–31

³⁰²

as an echo chamber (cf. 1.4.2) will help us answer the question. But first we will turn to another literary echo that is perhaps even more evident for the readers.

5.3 No Sacrifice Remains – Hebrews 10:18 and Hebrews 10:26.

..., οὐκέτι προσφορά περι ἁμαρτίας (10:18b)

..., οὐκέτι περι ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία (10:26b)

Attentive addressees will discern in 10:26 the resonance of 10:18. Even though a different word is used for offering/ sacrifice (προσφορά/ θυσία), the parallel is clear. Both of the statements are introduced with the negative averb οὐκέτι and convey the same meaning: there is no longer a sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 10:18 serves as a conclusion for the lengthy exposition on the high priestly ministry, sacrifice and covenant-mediation of Jesus (7:1–10:18); an exposition that from multiple perspectives compare Jesus favorably to the levitical priesthood. In chapter 3 we saw how the elevation of the new covenant above the first raises the stake for the Jesus-followers. If breaking the Mosaic covenant brought a just penalty, how much more will punishment be deserved if the new covenant is broken? A similar argument is seen here. Hebrews 10:18 is good news, but it also has a negative side to it. Johnson comments: “Consistent with the entire argument to this point, the statement that there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (see 10:2; 18) brings home both the promise and the peril of the priestly work of Jesus.”³⁰³ If one, who has been sprinkled clean by the blood of the covenant, thus being part of God’s people by covenant, persists in willful sin, there is no other sacrifice to turn to for ransom. There is no plan B. The sacrifices that previously maintained the covenant relationship between God and Israel are obsolete. The addressees will find it wise to not reject the *one* sacrifice that remains. If the very foundation for their repentance is rejected, they will no more have a chance to repent (cf. 6:4–6). The finality of Jesus sacrifice will be an important aspect when we discuss the possibility of repentance in 5.6.

While the verb is implied in 10:18b, it is explicit in 10:26b. The author might presumably have added the verb ἀπολείπεται in 10:26b in order to make the connection to 10:25 more explicit. Some have the habit of leaving (ἐγκαταλείποντες) the community gatherings (10:25); and in 10:26 no sacrifice will consequently be left (ἀπολείπεται). If someone abandons the community, the sacrifice will be abandoned as well, thus it will not remain. Hebrews 10:19–25 presents the addressee with the proper response to the covenant

³⁰³ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 261

mediation and sacrifice of Jesus: drawing near to God, holding onto the confession of hope, arousing each other to love and good deeds, encouraging each other and not neglecting to meet together. Taking up this course is necessary if a follower of Jesus is “to complete the journey from the life he or she left behind at repentance and conversion to the life he or she is yet to possess beyond the visible creation.”³⁰⁴ The alternative course, namely to choose the temporary benefits of abandoning the community, is interpreted as “persisting in willful sin” (10:26) – and is a course leading to death.

The passive form of ἀπολείπω, the form that is used in 10:26, refers to the passive act of being reserved for future appearance or enactment.³⁰⁵ Hence something that *remains* for the addressees is something they can *expect* in the future. If the addressees leave the community and thus reject the covenant, what is reserved for them in the future is not the effect of an atoning sacrifice (and entrance to the sanctuary as a consequence) but rather a fearful and inevitable judgment (10:27). The language of expectancy has an eschatological flavour to it. This is underscored by the fact that the passage is framed by eschatological language (cf. 2.2.5). The exhortation in Hebrews 10:19–25 ends with an appeal to the approaching Day: “...and all the more as you see the Day approaching» (10:25). The verses that follow 10:26–31 also appeal to this eschatological reality: “in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay» (10:37). The urge to avoid deliberate sin is thus strengthened by the appeal to what remains and what does not remain for them in the impending future. As we saw in the chapter 2, deliberative speech introduces the audience for two different courses of action, as well as the consequences for choosing the one or the other. The goal is to persuade the audience to choose the preferred course. Here the recipients are clearly urged to choose the course where a sacrifice for sins awaits them; and not the course that leads to judgment as its outermost consequence.

Attentive listeners might recognize that the author already has used the verb ἀπολείπεται twice in his homily, namely in the discourse on the wilderness generation. We are told that those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses (3:16) sinned in wilderness. They hardened their hearts and were disobedient; “They were unable to enter because of unbelief” (3:19). God swore that they would not enter his rest (3:11; 4:3); however the promise of entering his rest is still open and available for God’s people. It *remains* (ἀπολείπεται) for some to enter it (4:6); and “a Sabbath rest still *remains* (ἀπολείπεται) for the

³⁰⁴ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 344

³⁰⁵ BDAG, 115

people of God» (4:9). The sabbath rest of God, the inheritance promised God’s people, is thus reserved for the addressees in the future *if* they do not fall through such disobedience as their (4:11). Even though two different images are used in the two discourses, the content is essentially the same (cf. 2.3.1). If the addressees remain in their commitment and faith, what awaits them is entrance into the promise land, which the author in 10:19–25 depicts as entrance into the very presence of God. If they choose the alternative course by breaking the covenant, they will remain in their sins since no sacrifice remains, and they will consequently not be able to enter their promised reward and live.

5.4 What does it mean to sin ἔκουσίως?

The adjective ἔκουσίως is placed first in the sentence for emphasis, thus Hebrews 10:26 is more concerned with *how* the sin is committed than what kind of transgression it is. When the adjective is used with reference to an action, as it is here, it signifies their *voluntary* as opposed to their involuntary character.³⁰⁶ ἔκουσίως can be translated “deliberately” or “not under compulsion.” The latter option reflects a weaker sense of the word³⁰⁷ because it might allow for the pardon of deliberate sins committed under compulsion, e.g. in a time of persecution (cf. 10:32–35). We have thus two different (albeit related) ways to translate the word, and this will effect the interpretation of the verse. Below, we will investigate both of the two options, and find out which seems to best fit the context of Hebrews.

The verb ἀμαρτανόντων is in present participle. Accordingly the author refers to continuous sin – “more specifically, a continuation of the state existing before the readers came to ‘the knowledge of the truth’; certainly more than the permanent possibility or risk of falling back into sin.”³⁰⁸ At their conversion they repented from *dead* works (i.e. works leading to death) to faith. The course of behavior the author warns against in 10:26 is thus to continue in – or return to – “dead works”³⁰⁹; a way of life that is diametrically opposite of the new and *living* way that Jesus has opened through the curtain and into the sanctuary (10:20).

Despite the fact that the most likely textual background for 10:26 is the LXX – which we shall turn to shortly – it is nevertheless interesting to note that Greco-Roman authors express the same severe disapproval of intentional wrongdoing. Demosthenes (386–322 BC),

³⁰⁶ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 262. Johnson refers to Plato, *Republic* 556B; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.1.18; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1109B

³⁰⁷ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 532

³⁰⁸ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 532

³⁰⁹ cf. the Exodus motif in chapter 2. Jesus delivered the seed of Abraham from the slavery of death. What is warned against here is thus a return to “Egypt”.

the Greek statesman and orator, attests that in classical Greek culture a course that involves an intentional evil act is an “injustice” that deserves the most severe punishment. In his famous speech “the crown” (*De Corona* 274), he expresses as a truism that anyone who “sins willfully” receives “wrath and punishment.” On the other hand, anyone who “sins unknowingly” receives “pardon instead of punishment”. Also Aristotle defines injustice as a voluntary act of evil: “Let injustice then, be defined as voluntarily causing injury to the law ... Man act voluntary when they know what they do, and do not act under compulsion.”³¹⁰ Hence, the stern warning in 10:26 would not shock a first century reader – neither Jew nor Greek.

5.4.1 Should *Ἐκουσίως* be Translated “Not under Compulsion”?

In LXX, the word *Ἐκουσίως* is used several times. It is used for “freewill offerings” in the law (Lev 23:38; Num 15:3; 29:39; Deut 12:6:8). It can also refer generally to refer to willing obedience to the Law (1 Macc 2:42), spontaneous worship (Ps 54:6 (LXX 53:8); 119 (LXX 118):108), voluntary labor (Ex 36:2) and voluntary suffering (4 Macc 5:23; cf. 8:24).³¹¹ It is also used in Philemon of a *voluntary* good deed contrary to something forced (v.14); as well as in 1 Peter 5:2, where the elders are exhorted to tend the flock *willingly* and not under compulsion.³¹²

Could this imply that the author is differentiating between sins done *voluntary* and sins committed *under compulsion*? If this is the case, it raises a significant issue for those believers who are wearied by society’s pressure. Would God not be merciful and pardon them if they withdraw from the community due to such pressure? David deSilva makes a helpful detour to 4 Maccabees when he addresses this question. In his philosophical reflection, the author of 4 Maccabees draws on the story of the Syrian tyrant Antiochus IV’s attempts to force the old priest Eleazar and seven young brothers and their mother to break the covenant by means of torture. The author uses the story of their courage and loyalty to illustrate how devout reason rules over emotions, primarily gluttony and lust (1:4, 8). The author places the following words on the king’s lips: “whatever justice you revere will be merciful to you when you transgress under compulsion” (8:14); “For consider this, that if there is some power watching over this religion of yours, it will excuse you from any transgression that arises out of compulsion.” (4:13) The words and wisdom of Antiochus resembles the thoughts of

³¹⁰ Aristotle *Rh. 1.10.3*

³¹¹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 531

³¹² Johnson, *Hebrews*, 261

Demosthenes and Aristotle above. However, Eleazar courageously replies: “We, O Antiochus, who have been persuaded to govern our lives by the divine law, think that there is no compulsion more powerful than our obedience to the law. Therefore we consider that we should not transgress it in any respect” (4:16–17). Eleazar will rather die than dishonor God’s law, and for that he receives great praise and honor: “O man of blessed age and of venerable gray hair and of law-abiding life, whom the faithful seal of death has perfected!” (7:15; cf. Heb 2:10) By their courageous faithfulness to God and his law manifested in endurance of torture unto death, these martyrs “awakened the nation’s loyalty to God and their ancestral ways that lid a torch of faith for centuries to come.”³¹³ deSilva concludes his detour by presuming that the author of Hebrews seeks to lead the addressees to a similar stance. This is all the more evident when we consider that the martyrs of the Maccabean era are reckoned among the “cloud of witnesses” in chapter 11 (cf. 11:35–38). And considering Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of their faith, who for the sake of the joy set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame” (12:1), makes it even more clear. The addressees have not yet had to resist to the point of martyrdom (12:4); and they have no excuse if they desert the community and their faith. “The defector, apostate, or cowardly believer is not allowed the unction of thinking that she or he yields to a necessity by hiding his or her faith. Such a course remains a voluntary, willful violation of a compact (the universal law of being just and grateful to the benefactor).”³¹⁴ As we have already seen, deSilva consequently refers to the universal obligations of a client towards a patron and the violation of the compact. I think he is right to a certain extent – but I contend that even more than a universal compact is at stake for the addressees of Hebrews as was also the case for the Maccabean martyrs, namely the specific covenant that bound them to the living God.³¹⁵ The martyrs of 4 Maccabees chose faithfulness unto death. Jesus, the martyr *per excellence*, chose faithfulness unto death. Hence faithfulness should mark the pilgrimage of the addressees – even when they feel compelled to choose otherwise.³¹⁶ Based on these considerations, I think it is safe to say that the author did not have the weaker sense of the word in mind. “Deliberately” is thus a better alternative, and it is to that we now turn.

³¹³ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 346

³¹⁴ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 346

³¹⁵ In 4 Maccabees – as opposed to Hebrews – breaking the covenant is expressed solely in terms of transgressing the commandments of the Torah. What is at stake for Hebrews is not whether or not the addressees observe the Torah, but whether or not they obey Jesus – that is the way covenant fidelity is demonstrated in the new covenant era.

³¹⁶ Harold W. Attridge, “Hebrews, Epistle to the”. ABD 3:97–105 proposes (tentatively) that Hebrews is an “exhortation to martyrdom”.

5.4.2 Should Ἐκουσίως be Translated “Deliberately” (“High-Handedly”)?

A competent addressee will, as already mentioned, discern an echo of Numbers 15:22–31 in the current verse, something that is quite natural after the author’s lengthy excursion into the narrative of Numbers 14 in Heb 3:7-4:13.³¹⁷ The law of Moses distinguishes between sins done unintentionally/ sins of ignorance (ἀκουσίως, the antonym of Ἐκουσίως) and sins committed with a “high hand”. The expression is translated in LXX with ἐν χειρὶ ὑπερηφανίας, meaning “by an arrogant or defiant hand.”³¹⁸ The unintentional sins could be atoned for by sacrifices (Numbers 15:22–29; Lev 5:5–6; cf. Dt 19:4–7), as opposed to the sins done “high-handedly.” The latter kind of sin is said to be an affront to the LORD; the sinner despise (ἐφάυλισεν) the word of the LORD and break (διεσκέδασεν) his commandment. Consequently, the deliberate and arrogant sinner should be utterly cut off from the people and bear the guilt (Numbers 15:30–31, cf. Exodus 21:14 and Dt 19:11). The penalty for deliberate transgression of the law was death, something the author of Hebrews will mention explicitly in 10:28. The law did provide atonement for sins in order to maintain the relationship between God and Israel, but it was never meant to replace covenant faithfulness on Israel’s part. An Israelite could not sin deliberately, with “a high hand”, and then expect God to accept his sacrifice (numerous examples that illustrate this in the prophetic corpus, i.e. Jeremiah 7). By sinning intentionally and knowingly, the Israelite broke his covenant obligation and was consequently “cut off from among the people.” Covenant is a communal term. The members of the covenant were in a relationship with one another and with God, hence it follows from this that the breaking with the covenant bond leads to an ex-communication from the people.

The distinction between willful and unintentional sin is also found in Jewish extra-biblical sources³¹⁹ (2 Macc 14:3³²⁰; Philo, *Alleg. Interp.* 3.141; *Cherubim* 75; *Josephus, Ag.Ap* 1.3; *Antiquitates* 3.231). The community at Qumran, for example, took the severe rule of Numbers 15 at face value, and what is of particular interest is that they actually applied the phrase “sin with a high hand” as an idiom for deliberate sin, and differentiated it from sins of ignorance. If a member of the community sinned due to ignorance (i.e. transgressed *the*

³¹⁷ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 344; Richard H. Bell, “Sin offerings and sinning with a high hand”; *Journal of Progressive Judaism* 4 (1995), 25-59 (52).

³¹⁸ Johnson, *Hebrew*, 262.

³¹⁹ As well as in Greek sources (Plato, *Republic* 556B; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.1.18; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1109B).

³²⁰ The former high priest Alchimus realized that there was no way for him to be safe or have access to God’s altar because he willfully had defiled himself (Ἄλκιμος δέ τις προγεγονώς ἀρχιερεὺς, ἔκουσίως δὲ μεμολυσμένος ἐν τοῖς τῆς ἀμειξίας χρόνοις, συννοήσας ὅτι καθ’ ὄντιναοῦν τρόπον οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῷ σωτηρία οὐδὲ πρὸς τὸ ἅγιον θυσιαστήριον ἔτι πρόσοδος.).

hidden law) they had to be discipline. If they sinned “with a high hand” they were ex-communicated from the community. A deliberate sin was a transgression of the *revealed law*, the Law of Moses. The rabbis made Numbers 15 more lenient by applying it not to any kind of deliberate transgression of the law but specifically to idolatry (i.e apostasy *per excellence*, cf. chapter 3).³²¹

Having discerned and considered the echo of Numbers 15, the willful sin of Hebrews 10:26 most likely correspond to the ‘high-handed’ sin of the old covenant law; a sin done deliberately and consciously. This is underscored by the fact that the sin is specified as done “after we have received the knowledge of the truth” (10:26). The language of this expression is not typical for the author, and Ellingworth suggests that it is a formula describing the initial act of Christian enlightenment (cf. 6:4), with close parallels in other NT texts (cf. 2 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Tit 1:1).³²² The description of initiation into the new covenant community as receiving knowledge fits well with Jeremiah’s promise – Israel will truly *know* both God and his will (law inscribed on the mind and the heart). Thus no sin can henceforth be called a sin of ignorance. The new covenant inaugurated by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus is accordingly not a license to remain in sin. Rather it carries normative implications for the community; it is, as we have already made a case for (cf. chapter 3), a covenant of mutual obligations.

David deSilva is aware of the allusion to Numbers 15:22–31, and according to him “this is a recontextualized in the context of Christians who have come to the knowledge of what God requires and then have deliberately violated the patron-client bond.”³²³ I commend deSilva for placing the warning within a relational context, but I prefer to instead speak of “violating the covenant”, as I already have made a case for. I think this is more in tune with the symbolic world of Hebrews. If the warning is seen as deliberately violating the covenant bond between God and his people, it is a close parallel to the “sin with a high hand” of Numbers 15.

In a similar fashion to the use of Deuteronomy in 10:28, the principle of Numbers seems to apply also in the new covenant context. However, what does it mean to “sin with a

³²¹ For a brief survey on how the severe ruling of Numbers 15 was applied in Jewish tradition, see Bell, “Offerings”.

³²² Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 532

³²³ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 345

high hand” now, when the law is no longer an abiding norm for the people of God?³²⁴ The author depicts two different courses, one leading to life and the other to death. He uses examples from Israel’s narrative as proto-types for these two courses, and towards that we now turn.

5.5 Narrative Accounts of Sin and its Opposite in Hebrews

5.5.1 *Israel’s Paradigmatic Sin in the Wilderness*

The first explicit reference to “sin” in Hebrews is in 3:16. The author asks the rhetorical question: “But with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not those who sinned (ἁμαρτήσασιν), whose bodies fell in the wilderness?” Those who “sinned” are those who were “disobedient”; they fell because of “disbelief” (3:17). This is part of the lengthy discourse on the wilderness generation (3:7–4:11) that clearly serves the sermon’s hortatory agenda. The author quotes Psalm 95:7b–11, a psalm that recalls the disobedience of the fathers at the spy event of Kadesh Barnea (cf. Numbers 14).³²⁵ In Psalm 95 the recollection of the past furthers a paraenetic end in the present, and Hebrews actualizes the exhortation of the Psalm in order to make it speak directly to the addressees – “Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (3:12).³²⁶

David Allen has convincingly argued that Psalm 95,³²⁷ even though it clearly recollects the event of Numbers 14, is influenced by Deuteronomy. deSilva agrees and states: “by incorporating Psalm 95:7–11 (LXX) into his sermon (Heb 3:7–11), the author has recited and recontextualized a text that itself recontextualizes Deuteronomy 11:26–28,”³²⁸ thus the

³²⁴ Cf. Filtvedt on the standing of the law of the old covenant in Hebrews, “Paradox”, 89–99. In his conclusion, he states: “The giving of the law is not mentioned as an important part of the history of Israel, nor is the law applied to as an abiding norm for the people of God.” (98)

³²⁵ In the MT it seems like Psalm 95 recalls Israel’s repeated testing in the wilderness, but building on LXX Hebrews makes it clear that the event that is described as Israel’s sin is their disbelief and disobedience at Kadesh Barnea. Thus, “Hebrews upholds the spy episode at Kadesh Barnea as the quintessential example of wilderness disobedience (Heb 3:16–19; 4:2; 4:6, 4:11)”, Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 192

³²⁶ The expression “to have an evil and unbelieving (or unfaithful) heart” often has the connotations of transgressing the covenant (Jeremiah 7:21–24; 11:1–8; cf. also 4:14; 13:11; 16:11–13; 18:11–12; Ezek 6:9); hence this warning has also clear covenantal connotations.

³²⁷ “Today”, “listen”, “heart”, “go astray”, “know my way” are all expressions that are at home in the vocabulary of Deuteronomy (cf. Deuteronomy 11:26–28). To not listen, to go astray in one’s heart and not know God’s way become epitomes of covenant infidelity.

³²⁸ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 232. “I place before you today (σήμερον) blessing and curse (εὐλογίαν καὶ κατάραν); the blessing (εὐλογία) if you hear (ἐὰν ἀκούσητε) the commands of the Lord your God which I am

quotation begins to spin a web of resonances also with Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy situates Israel, the second generation after the exodus, on the threshold of their promised inheritance. This location is *the* place of decision; will the new generation loose faith like their fathers did? Here Deuteronomy exhorts them to rather choose obedience; hence they will be blessed and live long in the land. In Deuteronomy “The key to the future is described in terms of obedience in the present informed by remembrance of the past,”³²⁹ and the sin at Khardesh Barnea is recalled several times (Deut. 1:19–45; 9:22–24). The same is equally true regarding Hebrews. The author deliberately appeals to the wilderness generation as the “embodiment of unfaithfulness.”³³⁰ Hebrews, like Deuteronomy, gives the spy rebellion a particular structural and symbolic significance; it stands as a paradigm or eptiome of disobedience.³³¹ According to Allen, the spy rebellion is similarly identified as the effective demonstration of Israelite faithlessness, disobedience and covenant infidelity also in the Damascus Document of Qumran (CD 3).³³²

This raises the question of why *this* event is used to embody “sin” for the addressees of Hebrews? At Kadesh Barnea Israel’s rebellion is very clearly displayed. The covenant is built upon the promise that God himself will give them the land as an inheritance, but the people of Israel do not trust God or his promise despite everything they so far have witnessed of God’s faithfulness and might. “The people manifested finally and fatally their distrust in their patron’s ability to provide.”³³³ This is highly relevant for the addressees, for they are in a “fully analogous situation”³³⁴:

The situation of the recipients is that they are tempted like the wilderness generation to exchange the invisible promise of salvation for a visible, but temporary good in order

commanding you today (σήμερον), and the curses (τὰς κατάρας) if you do not hear (ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούσητε) the commands of the Lord your God, as many as I command you today (σήμερον), and if you wander (πλανηθῆτε) from the way (ἀπὸ τῆς ὁδοῦ) which I commanded you, going off to serve the gods whom you did not know (οὐκ οἴδατε)”

³²⁹ McConville and Millar, *Time*, 16. Cited by David Allen in *Deuteronomy*, 182. The statement is originally said of Deuteronomy, but could equally have been said of Hebrews. The then/now rethoric is according to Allen akin to (maybe even derived from) the rethoric found in Deuteronomy.

³³⁰ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 190

³³¹ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 192

³³² Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 192. Gaza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin, 2004), 129 suggests some parallels between the hortatory tone of CD and that of Hebrews.

³³³ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 144

³³⁴ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 174

to avoid affliction, hardship, and suffering from a threateningly hostile environment, that is the larger society or majority culture³³⁵

Based on these considerations then, how does Hebrews depict the nature of “sin” for its audience? Sin is to not trust God’s promises in the face of a reality that presumably stand in a conflict with the realization of God’s promises. If they persist in this sin, if they choose the path of unbelief and disobedience like their fathers did, the “promise of entering the rest.” As in Deuteronomy and Psalm 95, the past failure of the fathers (Numbers 15) is used in the author’s appeal to faith and covenant faithfulness.

5.5.2 Commemorating Israel’s Past: the Course of Faith is the Opposite of Sin

We have seen that the disobedience of the wilderness generation has become the embodiment of sin. We turn to the “heroes of faith” or “the cloud of witnesses” (12:1) that, as we shall see, embody the opposite course of life. In both cases Hebrews “creates a past that has become alive and significant for the audience.”³³⁶ The positive exposition on πίστις in Hebrews 11:1–40 complements its negative expression earlier in 3:7–4:11. We are told that the fathers’ sin in the wilderness was an expression of ἀπιστίαν(3:18–19), thus we naturally expect that sin is the antithesis of πίστις. The addressees have just been told that having πίστις is the way to persevere life (περιποίησιν ψυχῆς) on the day of Christ’s appearance (10:37–39), contrary to persisting in sin (10:26–31) that brings death (10:28). Hebrews 10:37–39 thus serves as a bridge from the warning in 10:26–31 to the exposition on faith in chapter 11. In chapter 11 the author shows more fully what the opposite course of “willfully persisting in sin” looks like, a course leading to life rather than death. The purpose is clearly paraenetic, cf. how it ends with an exhortation in 12:1–3³³⁷. The author wants to urge the addressees to make the embodiment of faith their goal, and the list of examples of faith is an invitation to the

³³⁵ Überlacker, “Paraenesis,” 335; quoted in Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 192

³³⁶ Philip F., Esler, “Collective Memory and Hebrews 11: Outlining a New Investigative Framework” in *Memory, Tradition and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (eds. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher; SemeiaSt 52; Atlanta: Society of Biblical literature, 2005), 151–171 (160)

³³⁷ The list of examples is similar to other lists of examples found in both Jewish and Greco-Roman texts. Hebrews 11:1–12:3 is similar to Senceca’s *De beneficiis* (cf. *Ben.* 3.36.2–3.38.3) in style and form, and 4. Maccabees in terms of content. The author of 4 Macc also takes the sacred history as his resource for finding suitable examples. The speaker (the mother of the seven sons) in 4 Macc 16:16–2 introduces several examples from the OT (Abraham, Daniel and his three companions: Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael) in order to support the particular of action of choosing to remain obedient to God’s commandments (en expression of loyalty toward God) even under the pain of death. deSilva, *Perseverance*, 378–379

addressees to join in the contest that many have run before.³³⁸ The addressees have earlier been exhorted to “be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:12), and the list of examples in chapter 11 resembles these words and is evidently referring to the same people.

Hebrews 11 opens with a definition of “faith” rich with rhetorical ornament³³⁹, “πίστις is the ὑπόστασις of things hoped for, the ἔλεγχος of things not seen” (11:1)³⁴⁰, and the examples that follow illustrate what faith looks like in lived life. It is evident that the author has selected and shaped his address to address the specific situation of the addressees, to meet their pastoral need and to support his exhortation and rhetorical strategy. They need to be reminded that the promise of a reward and heavenly homeland is real, even when they cannot see the evidence of it in their present situation. In the past the addressees endured hard struggles, and cheerfully accepted the plundering of their possessions, knowing that they themselves possessed something better and more lasting. Now, however, they are tempted to abandon the confidence that will bring a great reward, and they are in need of exhortation to endure so that they can do the will of God and receive what has been promised (10:32–35). Several of the examples clearly resonate with their past and present experiences.

Unfortunately, time would fail me to³⁴¹ go through all of the examples of faith, hence I have chosen to rather have a closer look at one of the examples, namely that of Moses. Within this passage we find the only occurrence of the word ἀμαρτίας in the example list, and the text clearly illustrates that the course of πίστις and the course of ἀμαρτίας are antithetical.

The first thing that is interesting to notice is that neither the giving of the law nor the observance of the law is mentioned, something that is quite intriguing when the author commemorates on Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel. Hence, a life of πίστις is not primarily

³³⁸ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 378–79

³³⁹ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 381

³⁴⁰ The translation of the “definition” of faith is highly disputed. How do we translate ὑπόστασις? Some translations are “subjective” while others are “objective”. The subjective suggestions translate it steadfastness or assurance, while objective suggestions translate it solid foundation, essential reality or legal guarantee. Ole Jakob Filtvedt (“Paradox”, 163–164) suggests convincingly that ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος should be read as part of a parallelism, thus pointing to the same thing. Whereas ὑπόστασις can have a subjective translation, ἔλεγχος cannot. Thus the parallelism reads: Faith *is* the reality and proof of something. What does this mean? There have been many suggestions (cf. the discussion in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 307–313). Again, I think Filtvedt’s reading is plausible. He suggests that “the act of having faith” is implicit in the sentence, thus it reads: “faith is (belief in) the reality of things we hope for and the proof of thing unseen”. (“Paradox”, 164) Thus he maintains both the objective and the subjective aspect of the statement. He concludes: “To have faith and to be faithful is a subjective attitude, but is oriented towards an objective reality” (165).

³⁴¹ Yes, it is meant as an allusion to Heb 11:32

a law-abiding life.³⁴² A life of πίστις is rather – according to the example of Moses – choosing to endure suffering and disgrace for the sake of being loyal to Christ and his people, instead of choosing to enjoy the “fleeting pleasure of sin”.

...By faith (Πίστει) Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin (ἀμαρτίας). He considered abuse suffered for Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward (τὴν μισθαποδοσίαν). By faith he left Egypt, unafraid (μὴ φοβηθεῖς) of the king’s anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. (Heb 12:24–28)

Moses left the greatest wealth, status and honor imaginable in favor of “ill-treatment with the people of God”. “He left behind the honors of the throne of Egypt in order to join himself to slaves, people of the lowest status and subject to insult and physical outrage”³⁴³. The pleasure that Moses abstained from is called “fleeting”³⁴⁴, and it is qualified as “sin” (ἀμαρτίας). Many scholars have contended that this “sin” is signifying more than a transgression of God’s commandments. According to David deSilva, “the author appear to have in mind not a lack of rigor, but a lack of regard for God’s gifts and an unwillingness to endure what is necessary to attain them”³⁴⁵.

Looking to Moses as an example for imitation, the addressees will understand more of what it means to “willfully persist in sin”. Sin is to value pleasure, wellbeing and status – the world’s friendship – more than the worth of God’s friendship. If the addressees refuse fellowship with the people of God (cf. 10:25) on account of the temptation to seek pleasure or status in the society of unbelievers, they willfully persist in sin (cf. 10:26). The course of sin is to seek the temporary reward of society rather than the eternal³⁴⁶ advantage of God’s promised inheritance and glory. The comparison of temporary versus eternal advantage is a common topic in argumentation both within the synagogue and the church (cf. 4 Macc. 15:2–8, 23; 2 Cor. 4:16–18) due to the cosmology and worldview prompted within these cultures. The temporary realm is destined by God for removal at his coming intervention in history; the eternal and “abiding” (10:34; 12:27; 13:14) will be the sole remaining realm after the

³⁴² Cf. 4 Macc. Conquered the pleasures of sin by being obedient to the Torah

³⁴³ deSilva, *Perseverance* 408

³⁴⁴ Here the platonic preference for the eternal, lasting and steady above the temporal, shifting and changing is evident. Cf. deSilva, 408–409 (both platonic and apocalyptic)

³⁴⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 409

³⁴⁶ Temporary vs. eternal advantage, and how it is used in deliberate speech. Cf. deSilva, *Perseverance*, 409

“shaking” (cf. 12:25–29). “Thus the honor or ease this temporary enjoyment of worldly status and wealth bestows has no lasting value and is subject to being transformed into lasting disgrace and pain at God’s visitation.”³⁴⁷ This antithesis between the temporary and the eternal became a powerful tool for motivating the members of the church or the synagogue to persevere in the preferred behavior, even if the cost was martyrdom.³⁴⁸ I think this is exactly Hebrews’ strategy as well.

5.5.3 *Sin is that which Hinders the Recipients from Following Jesus*

“Therefore (Τοιγαροῦν), since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us...” (12:1). The hortatory agenda of the list of examples becomes evident in 12:1–3; thus 11:1–40 is incomplete without the exhortation it has paved the way for. deSilva has aptly stated: “the example of Jesus in 12:1–3 is shaped in such a way as to capture the essence of the major examples of ‘trust’ in 11:1–40. It crystallizes the ‘many’ examples into one overarching pattern.”³⁴⁹ The course of faith, opposed to the course of sin, is thus ultimately to follow the course of Jesus. “He is the true Israelite, in the sense that he is the perfect example of what Israel was supposed to be.”³⁵⁰

The recipients are exhorted to “lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely (τὴν εὐπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν)”³⁵¹ and rather “run with perseverance the race that is set before” them (12:1–2). Again, two different courses of action are laid out for the recipients. If they persist in sin, they might be slowed down and distracted, thus they might not reach their destination. The opposite course is to “lay aside” the sin and persevere. The author does not explain what kind of sin that might be a hindering to them. He rather puts the emphasis on the opposite course, namely to imitate Jesus in his endurance. 1

Jesus, similarly to Moses, endured (ὕπομνω) hardship and dishonor – even the shame of a cross – for the sake of the joy that was set before him. “This joy should be understood in terms of his vindication and exaltation to the right hand of God’s throne.”³⁵² The addressees are called to follow the movement of Jesus; a movement through suffering and shame to glory and exaltation (12:2). Also they are called to endure (12:1; cf. 10:36) the race *set before*

³⁴⁷ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 408

³⁴⁸ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 409

³⁴⁹ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 377

³⁵⁰ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 171

³⁵¹ Other ancient sources (p⁴⁶ 1739 it^{d7e?z?}) read τὴν εὐπερίσπαστον ἁμαρτίαν. This translates “the sin that so easily distracts”. Both of the different wordings provoke the image of a runner in the race that is being distracted by the weight of sin.

³⁵² Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 169

them.³⁵³ On the other side of the cross, Jesus is said to “has taken the seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2), and the addressees are reminded of the opening scene of the homily.

...we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffering of the death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. It was fitting that God, for whom and through him all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. (2:9–10).

As we saw in 2.3.1 Jesus role as an example is embedded in a narrative about a journey. After his suffering, he reached the destination towards which his followers are heading. As Filtvedt points out, the life of Jesus is presents as consisting of two stages:³⁵⁴ (1) temporal humiliation, suffering and death, followed by (2) glory, honor and perfection.³⁵⁵ This journey of Jesus towards glory is paradigmatic for his followers. By emphasizing the suffering and dishonor of Jesus, the addressees will understand that the hardship they themselves are undergoing is both natural and temporary. This emphasis strengthens the force of the author’s strategy that is to urge them to choose obedience and faithfulness rather than withdrawal.

It is emphatically stated that Jesus disregarded the shame attached to the dying on the cross (cf. also 6:6; 13:13), thus the notion of shame and honor is evoked. Filtvedt comments: “shame and honor are cultural constructs which depends on a ‘court of reputation’”³⁵⁶. Jesus was not merely ignoring the shame, but in his paradigmatic journey through the cross, he was utterly subverting it. David deSilva had aptly written concerning this: “He was providing a paradigm for the Christian minority group of counting for nothing the negative evaluation from the outside world, thinking only of the evaluation of God ... While in the public court of opinion Jesus took the most disgraceful seat – on a cross – in God’s court of opinion, Jesus

³⁵³ “The fact that there was a joy which was *set before* Jesus, and which Jesus obtained through faithful endurance, indicates that there is a prize to be won also by the addressees, if they finish the race which has been *set before them*” Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 170. The verb that is translated “set before” (προκειῖσθαι) is used in 12:1 and 12:2, and it also echoes the hope that is set before (προκειμένη) the recipients, towards which they flee (6:18). Ibid

³⁵⁴ The paradigmatic suffering of Jesus echoes that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, who after his suffering, rejection and dishonor was exalted by the LORD (53:10–12). This intertextual link is strengthened by the fact that it is said that Jesus offered himself “to bear the sins of many” (εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας) (9:28), which clearly echoes the suffering servant who also “bore the sins of many” (ἁμαρτίας πολλῶν ἀνήνεγκεν) (Isaiah 53:12).

³⁵⁵ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 62

³⁵⁶ Filtvedt, “Paradox”, 170

was worthy of the highest honor.”³⁵⁷ The recipients have experienced loss of status and privileges (cf. 10:32–36), and they might be tempted to withdraw from the minority community and thus regain their honor. Here the author reminds them of their former confidence. They “possess something greater and more lasting” (10:34), and lest they get distracted by the temporal advantages of persisting in sin, they will finish the race and receive what has been promised.

5.5.4 *The Example of Esau*

The narrative of Esau is another example that the author utilizes to embody the course of sin. This example in particular shows how foolish it is to choose that course. Esau exchanged his birthright; his inheritance; his blessing for a single meal (12:16). At the surface it can seem well exaggerated and unfair to call Esau an adulterer³⁵⁸ and an immoral person (12:16); did he not merely accept the invitation for a meal because he was hungry after a hard day’s work? (Gen 25:29–34)³⁵⁹ Probably the author chooses the example of Esau because his behavior has a symbolic significance. In the Greek-roman world of the first century “the belly” had become a catchword for a life controlled by pleasure.³⁶⁰ Esau exchanges the future reward of being the firstborn son of his father for the sake of satisfying his belly in the present. His behavior is the diametrically opposite of the example of Jesus³⁶¹ who did not “satisfy his belly” in any way, but endured suffering and shame for the joy that was waiting on the other side. Jesus looked ahead on the future reward, while Esau had eyes only for temporal pleasure. Esau did not look ahead and think of the consequences of his choice. When he eventually realized he had lost

³⁵⁷ David A deSilva, “Despising Shame: A Cultural-Anthropological Investigation of the Epistle to the Hebrews”, *JBL* 113 (1994): 444.

³⁵⁸ “Adulterer” can be understood in a spiritual sense, connoting “spiritual infidelity” towards the LORD, faithlessness or distrust (often idolatry). Cf. Numbers 41:33.

³⁵⁹ Hebrews conflates Genesis 25:29–34 (Esau sells his birthright) and 27:1–37 (Esau loses his blessing and cries) into one event.

³⁶⁰ Cf. Karl Olav Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles* (SNTSMS 120; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See Philo: “For it was not for the sake of a trifling cooked pottage that [Esau] gave up his rights as first-born and yielded to the younger [brother] but because he made himself a slave to the pleasures of the belly. Let him be reproved and condemned as one who never was zealous for restraint and continence” (*QG* 4.168).

³⁶¹ As well as the example of Moses (we could perhaps say all the heroes of faith in chapter 11). Cf. “Esau stands as a foil to Moses, who rejects the ‘temporal enjoyment of sin’ and chooses to endure hardship (11:25) in order to attain the reward” (deSilva, *Perseverance*, 461)

his blessing, it was too late; he found no space to repent³⁶² even though he sought it with tears.

Mathew Thiessen has offered a convincing explanation of why Esau all of a sudden appears on the scene. Thiessen contends that the example of Esau is not a random choice by the author, but an example that coheres with the literary context of Hebrews 12. He argues that – given the narrative framework of the letter – the exhortation to finish the race in 12:1–2, and the following quotation of Proverbs 3:11–12 with an encouragement to “endure trials for the sake of discipline (παιδεία)” (12:3–11) is consistent with the Jewish conception of Israel’s period of wandering as a time of παιδεία.³⁶³ Thiessen goes through literary evidence from Deuteronomy³⁶⁴, Wisdom of Solomon³⁶⁵, Philo³⁶⁶, and Josephus³⁶⁷, and concludes that there “was an established tradition within early Judaism of interpreting the wilderness wanderings as a period of educative discipline (sometimes described using athletic imagery) in which God’s people were prepared for entry into the land of promise, and that this discipline demonstrated the legitimate familial ties between the people and God their father.”³⁶⁸ Thiessen also, significantly, places Esau within this context:

Why does the author appeal to the negative example of Esau after situating his readers in the wilderness period? It is possible, as attested throughout Philo’s writings, that Esau functioned in Jewish tradition as a paradigmatic example of an undisciplined person, a character flaw that was well known to both the author and readers. For instance, in *Alleg. Interp.* 3.2 Esau allegorically stands for the life of the undisciplined (ἀπαιδισία).³⁶⁹

Utilizing the example of Esau, the author again illustrates for the recipients that there are two different ways they can choose to follow and respectively two different outcomes in the

³⁶² More on the notion that Esau did not find space to repent in 5.6.

³⁶³ Mathew Thiessen, “Hebrews 12:5–13, the Wilderness Period, and Israel’s Discipline.” *NTS* 55(2009), 369.

³⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 8:2–5-

³⁶⁵ Wisdom 11:9–10.

³⁶⁶ Philo, *Preliminary Studies* 163–177. In this passage Philo uses the wilderness period to serve as an allegory for life, linking the event at Marah (Exod 15), Deuteronomy 8, Prov 3:11–12, and – significantly – the figure of Esau. Thiessen, “Wilderness”, 371.

³⁶⁷ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.6; 3.15; 3.311.

³⁶⁸ Mathew Thiessen, “Wilderness”, 373.

³⁶⁹ Thiessen, “Wilderness”, 376.

future. Hence the warning of 10:26–31 is reinforced³⁷⁰, both giving content to what it means to “willfully persisting in sin” and restating the dreadful consequence.

In the passage that paves the way for the example of Esau, the author encourages the recipients by saying: “lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet” (12:12) – even though they face trials (12:3–11). This is a recontextualization that conflates two different OT passages. The call to lift hands and strengthen knees is most likely an echo of Isaiah 35:3.³⁷¹ This is part of an oracle describing the return of the redeemed of the LORD to Zion (35:10). These are wandering on a highway through the wilderness – thus the “new exodus” motif is evoked. The way is called Holy, and only the clean will walk on it, and they will not go astray.³⁷² The parallel to the context of Hebrews is clear. Also the recipients, those who have been cleansed (cf. 10:19–22), are encouraged to continue the road that leads them – through the wilderness – to Zion (cf. 12:22).

The call to “make straight paths for your feet” is an echo of Proverbs 4:26. The context of Proverbs speaks of choosing the paths that are good rather than the wicked. This is one of the core teachings of Proverbs. It propounds that it lays before every person a choice between entering and walking down the way of wisdom – leading to life (cf. 4:4; 4:13), or the way of the wicked – leading to death (cf. 5:5). The “son” is exhorted to choose the way of life by being attentive to the father who gives instruction and guidance – “Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live” (4:4).³⁷³ Proverbs 4:26 – the verse that is referred to by Hebrews – says: “keep straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or the left; turn your foot away from evil” (10:26–27). This clearly resonates with Deuteronomy 5:32 (as well as 28:14), thus suggesting that the two ways of proverbs resonate with the two ways of Deuteronomy (cf. 3.4.2). “To make straight the path for your feet” is the same as not turning aside to the right or to the left from the way of the LORD – thus it is equal to remaining within the covenant by obeying God’s

³⁷⁰ Thus deSilva (*Perseverance*, 463): “Esau’s example thus is made to reinforce 10:26–31 and 6:4–8.”

³⁷¹ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 657. See also Philo, *Preliminary Studies*, 164. “many people are very quickly fatigued and fall, thinking labor a terrible adversary, and they let their hands fall out of weakness (αἱ χεῖρες ὑπ’ ἀσθενείας) like tired athletes, determining to return to Egypt to the indulgence of their passions.” Thiessen comments: “Thus, like Heb 12:12, Philo also places drooping hands in the context of the exodus where they signify the danger of falling back from entry into the land of promise.” Thiessen, “Wilderness”, 376

³⁷² “Go astray” is an idiom for breaking the covenant. Cf. also “they always go astray in their hearts” 3:10.

³⁷³ This is a clear echo of the exhortation in Deuteronomy to choose life by obeying the commandments of the law.

commands. The verses that follow begin to map out what paths are straight (12:14) and what paths are not (12:14–17). It is here we find the example of Esau, as an embodiment of walking the wicked road, i.e. persisting in sin.

It is thus plausible to read the reference to Esau as an example of one who breaks the covenant. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that Esau's choice led to loss of his birthright (πρωτοτόκια) and blessing (εὐλογία), terms that clearly evokes the motif of the covenant. This is furthered strengthened by the fact that Esau is used as an example of “a root of bitterness” that “springs up and causes trouble” (12:15). This metaphor is taken from Deuteronomy 29:18. In its original context the metaphor designates a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart was already (at the threshold of the promise land) turning away from God to serve idols. They bless themselves, thinking in their hearts, “we are safe even if will go our own stubborn way” (29:19) – therefore God will not pardon them. As we have already seen, idolatry was the epitome of covenant infidelity, thus it follows that such a person would be cursed (Deut 29:20). This same metaphor is used by the author in his warning against following the course of Esau; thus we can draw from this that the recipients are warned against breaking the covenant. If they do, they will end up losing their inheritance and be cursed instead of blessed.

The author has reminded the recipients that – being “in the wilderness” – they are disciplined by the LORD. The struggle they face is not an evidence of God having abandoned them. On the contrary, it is an evidence of their relationship as children of God. If they, like Jesus did, persevere and accept God's discipline as faithful children, they will soon enter their inheritance and receive their reward. If they refuse their father's discipline, choosing rather temporary ease and pleasure, they will end up losing their inheritance – just like Esau did. The negative example of Esau is thus an embodiment of the warning in Hebrews 10:26–31.

5.6 Is it Impossible for an Apostate to Repent in the New Covenant?

According to Hebrews 10:26, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus will not benefit a person who deliberately chooses to persist in sin. What that person can expect on the day of God's vengeance is therefore judgment in place of mercy. The author of Hebrews has drawn on the principle from Numbers 15:22–31 that states that the priests shall make atonement before the LORD for the one who sins unintentionally, while the one who acts with a high hand will not be forgiven. Does this mean that there is no hope of restoration for the one who has

apostatized? Is there no room for repentance?

It is interesting to note that Philo believed the Day of Atonement could deal even with deliberate sins, appealing to “all their sin” in Lev 16:16 in support.³⁷⁴ However, it seems like the author of Hebrews holds a narrow view of the scope of the OT cult. It is said of the high priest in 5:2 that “he is able to deal gently with the *ignorant* and wayward”. When describing the high priest entering the Holy of Holiest once a year, he says: “he offers for himself and for sins committed *unintentionally* by the people” (9:7).³⁷⁵ Maybe he read Lev 16 in the light of Num. 15:30-31.³⁷⁶ Later Jewish tradition (*m. Yoma* 8.9) appears to agree with Hebrews that the Day of Atonement atones only for unintended sins.³⁷⁷ Milgrom, however, claims that Jewish interpreters of the law permit sacrificial atonement for deliberate crimes against God provided that the person repents before he is arrested for the crime.³⁷⁸ This principle is applied by later rabbinic sources. Milgrom cites the following: “R. Simeon b. Lakish said: ‘great is repentance, which converts intention sins into unintentional ones’” (*b. Yoma* 86b) and again: “Because he has confessed his brazen and rebellious deeds it is as if they have become as unintentional before him” (*Siphre Ahare* par 2:4,6).³⁷⁹ According to Milgrom these principles are based on Lev 5:20–26 (LXX) and Num 5:6–8. Even though the phrase “repentance turns intentional sins into unintentional” is not explicitly stated in the OT, the idea is certainly present. The prophets call the people to repent when they have broken the covenant; God will have no regard for their sacrifices *if* they do not repent in humility (Joel 2:12–14; Amos 5:21–24). In Jeremiah, God says to the prophet: “at one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it” (Jeremiah 18: 7–8). These words indicate that the prophetic oracles concerning Israel, Judah and the neighboring nations were conditional in nature. Accordingly, they were not meant to be static predictions of future events to, but they urged people to respond and repent, so that God could turn from his verdict.

Hebrews seems to be aware of the fact that the only way to be restored after having broken the covenant is through repentance. This is addressed in two different passages; 6:4–8 and 12:15–17. The problem in 6:4–8 is that it is *impossible* to restore again to repentance

³⁷⁴ Philo, *Special Laws* 1.234–38; 2.296; *Posterity* 48
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³⁷⁶ Bell, *Offerings*, 53

³⁷⁷ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 223

³⁷⁸ Jakob, Milgrom, *Leviticus I–XVI* (AB, New York: Doubleday, 1991), 50

³⁷⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus I–XVI*, 373

those who have fallen away. They will therefore be cursed instead of being a recipient of a blessing from God. Esau’s problem in 12:15–17 is that he found no room for repentance (μετανοίας τοπον,) ³⁸⁰ hence he did not inherit the blessing. Hebrews thus implicitly states that *if* the apostates and Esau had repented, they would have received the blessing. The problem is that it that they have no chance to repent. Thus it does not seem like the author is ignorant of the fact that repentance brings forgiveness, but he indicates that that door will not be open for them if they choose the course of wilfully persisting in sin. Why does it not seem like there is room for repentance in Hebrews? I do not think there is a simple answer but rather several important elements to consider; the once-for-all nature of the sacrifice of Jesus, the eschatological urgency in the homily and the author’s rhetorical strategy.

According to Hebrews 10:26–31, the verdict of persisting in sin is that no sacrifice for sins will remain. This passage does not explicitly address “repentance”, but Lane has skillfully shown that Hebrews 6:4–8 and Hebrews 10:26–31 are parallel warnings, ³⁸¹ hence “no sacrifice remains” corresponds to “it is possible to restore to repentance”. In chapter 6, “repentance” refers to the initiation into the new covenant community (6:1). According to 6:4–8 it would be impossible to restore again to that repentance after they had experienced the various elements of their new life. Salevao contends that apostasy implies a violation of these elements. Since these elements were in nature final and once for all, it follows that they could not be repeated. The same applies in Hebrews 10:26–31. Christ died once-and-for-all (7:27, 9:12,26; thus perfecting for all times those who are sanctified (cf. 10:10; 10:14). “Apostasy would mean forsaking the the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice and its benefits, and since there was no other sacrifice, there could be no restoration.” ³⁸² Attridge has commented:

³⁸⁰ “The phrase appears also in Wisdom 12:10, which speaks of God’s gracious treatment of the Canaanites, ‘judging them little by little’ rather than all at once so that those who remained could have a chance to repent”. deSilva, *Perseverance*, 463 – there is an eschatological urgency here. Esau did not have time to repent, he spiled his chance.

³⁸¹ Lane (*Hebrews* 2:291) schematically presents the parallelism in this way: (1) *Description of the apostate*: fallen away; crucifying again the Son of God; holding him up to contempt (6:6) | | Persisting in deliberate sin, trample on the Son of God; profaned the blood of the covenant; outraged the Spirit of grace (10:26,29). (2) *Prior experience*: once for all brought into the light; have experienced gift from heaven and share in the Spirit; experienced the goodness of God’s word and the coming age (6:4–5) | | Have received the knowledge of the truth; sanctified by the blood of the covenant (10:27, 29). (3) *Impossibility*: “it is impossible to ... restore them to repentance” (6:4–6) | | “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (10:26). (4) *Expectation*: loss (6:6); curse (6:8); burning (6:8) | | fearful expectation of judgment (10:27) ; raging fire (10:27); severe punishment (10:29); fear (10:31).

³⁸² Salevao, *Legitimation*, 281–282.

our author's position on repentance is primarily theological, reflecting his estimation of the decisiveness of the Christ's sacrifice ... Christ's sacrificial death is the only way to a true and effective cleansing of conscience and remission of sin. It is the bedrock on whether the 'foundation' (6.1) of repentance is built. Those who reject this necessary presupposition of repentance simply, and virtually, by definition cannot repent.³⁸³

This perspective focuses on the final character of Jesus sacrifice, and the final character of being renewed and sanctified. It is significant to take notice of the fact that this perspective also assumes a definite and final nature of the transgression committed, thus most commentators contend that the warning passages refer to the specific act of turning away from and rejecting God (i.e apostasy). I contend that none of the warnings in Hebrews imply that followers of Jesus cannot sin or make a mistake. The motif of the athlete and wanderer in 12:1–2 provides a realistic portrait of a follower of Jesus. It does not say that the fight against sin (cf. 12:3) is history. It does not say: "Now that we *have* laid aside every weight and sin, let us run with perseverance..." What it does say is this: "let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and easily distracts us, and let us run with perseverance, with our eyes fixed on Jesus." (12:1–2, paraphrased). The danger is not that the recipients might sin, but that their sin might make them turn away from God and stray from following Jesus. In other words, the danger is that they are "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13), not sin *per se*. The proper response when the followers of Jesus face the reality of sin is thus to continue running towards Jesus. He is, after all, able to sympathize with them in their weakness (4:15); and they are invited to "approach the throne of grace with boldness", so that they "may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (4:26)". It is when they shrink back and withdraw from the throne that it becomes fearful since mercy and grace will not be found apart from there (cf. Heb 10:26–31).

Another element that is important to remember is the eschatological urgency of the homily.³⁸⁴ As we have seen (2.3.2), the warning in Hebrews 10:26–31 is framed by a focus on the imminent Day that will bring both vengeance and vindication. This eschatological urgency is evident from the outset of the homily. The first chapter, for example, begins and ends on eschatological notes. God's word in the Son has come "in these last days", and the Son now awaits the forthcoming subjection all his enemies (1:13).³⁸⁵ deSilva has written:

³⁸³ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 169

³⁸⁴ Attridge (*Hebrews*, 169) states contra this that the author's position is not "in an obvious way with his eschatology, as if the immanence of the end precludes time for a second repentance".

³⁸⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 83

“Both the timing of the message and the status of the messenger become significant considerations in the sermon. Response to *this* message will determine one’s eschatological (and eternal) destiny. There will be no future call to repentance or opportunity to give God what is due to God, for the time for judgment and reward is imminent (10:25; 10:37–39).”³⁸⁶ Thus the author warns his audience that the Parousia of Christ is near, and when he comes it will be too late to repent. It is said of Esau that he “found no room to repent” (μετανοίας τοπον). “The phrase appears also in Wisdom 12:10, which speaks of God’s gracious treatment of the Canaanites, ‘judging them little by little’ rather than all at once so that those who remained could have a chance to repent”.³⁸⁷ In the case of Esau, no such chance remains. He sold his birthright, and once the meal was eaten the purchase was sealed. The tears of Esau are thus not an expression of repentance, but he cries when he realizes that he has no chance to repent. As Calvin once uttered: “Too late will be the groans at last, who slight the grace offered now.”³⁸⁸ The tears of Esau resonates with the response of the wilderness generation after God had sworn that he would not grant them the promised land. They cried. Moses recalls the event in Deut 1:45: “when you returned and wept before the Lord, the Lord would neither heed your voice nor pay you any attention.” When the Israelites changed their mind and set out to conquer the land, it was too late (Numbers 14:39–45). God had already passed his sentence (Numbers 14:28–35). David Allen has pointed out that “the land motif functions as a hortatory tool, utilized as a sobering lesson of the implication of faithlessness, potentially anticipating the impossibility of repentance discourses of 6:4–8 and 12:15–17.”³⁸⁹ The rebellion of the wilderness generation recalled and actualized in chapter 2 and 4 got the most grace consequences because they rebelled at the threshold of their inheritance. They were at the locus of entry, and they refused to “run the race set before them” because they feared the threat posed by the peoples of Canaan more than they trusted God who had given them the promises.

Hebrews also situate the recipients “at the very end of the wilderness period, along with all previous generations of God’s people.”³⁹⁰ In Hebrews 4:3, the author says: “For we who believe *enter* (Εἰσερχόμεθα) that rest.” Commentators have debated how the verb “to enter” in present tense should translate. Is the rest something that the believers enter now, or

³⁸⁶ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 85

³⁸⁷ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 463

³⁸⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Cornish, 1845) 35 (as cited by deSilva, “Exchanging”, 112)

³⁸⁹ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 146.

³⁹⁰ Thiesse, “Wilderness”, 376

is it a future reality? deSilva convincingly argues that the verb should be translated as a “true present” that highlights its progressive or continuous aspect.³⁹¹

Such a reading allows the verse to impact the hearers with all the immediacy that the author desires, while at the same time not violating the future aspects of entering that rest which are so clearly indicated in the surrounding context.” Thus, “we who believe are entering that rest,” that is, we are crossing that threshold into the “better” promised land. But we must still “strive earnestly to enter” since wavering on the threshold can still prove disastrous, as it had in the past (4:11).³⁹²

Thus the consequence of a potential apostasy is so fatal because they are at the verge of entering into God’s realm. The sacrifice of Jesus has ultimately sanctified and perfected them in such a way that they can enter the sanctuary (10:19), but as deSilva pointed out: “wavering at the threshold can still prove disastrous.”³⁹³ The Day is approaching, and they should all the more make sure they press on towards their goal.

When considering the warning passages, it is also important to remember the author’s rhetorical strategy and the discourse situation. Hebrews does not address believers who *have* persisted in wilful sin. The author warns the addressees of the serious consequences of turning away from the living God *before* they actually have done it, in order to give them a chance to respond in a proper manner. This is “in order to avert disaster, not to drive them to despair of the grace of God.”³⁹⁴ We simply do not know how the author would address people who actually *had* apostatized. David deSilva correctly asserts that “To use this passage, then, as a basis for trying to determine when someone has crossed the point of no return, or to apply it so as to bar from the church those who do in fact repent, would be to remove the warning from its rhetorical setting”.³⁹⁵ Also Carlston has aptly commented that Hebrews “must be understood dynamically, as a radically serious warning. It looks ahead toward a potential apostate, not backward toward an actual penitent”.³⁹⁶

³⁹¹ Thus also Attridge (*Hebrews*, 126): “This verb should not be taken simply as a futuristic present, referring only to the eschaton or to the individual’s entry to the divine realm at death, but as a reference to the complex process on which ‘believers’ are even now engaged, although this process will certainly have an eschatological consummation.”

³⁹² deSilva, “Entering”, 32.

³⁹³ *ibid.*

³⁹⁴ Koester, *Hebrews*, 455.

³⁹⁵ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 241.

³⁹⁶ Carlston 1959.301, quoted in Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 532.

5.7 How should we Understand the Warning Passages?

The warning passages of the homily are certainly unsettling for the reader; and they raise the question of how we should read and apply them. Are we supposed to derive doctrines from what the texts say; or are we rather supposed to put the emphasis on what the texts want to *accomplish*? Stated differently, are we supposed to read the texts primarily in a principled or pragmatic way?

David deSilva has a particular focus on the rhetorical strategy of Hebrews, putting emphasis on the pragmatic aspect of the warnings. He states that «it would be inappropriate to derive from these texts a ‘doctrine of the impossibility of a return’ for the apostate for a number of reasons.»³⁹⁷

For one, deSilva argues that the exhortations of Hebrews should be read in light of the notion that «Greco-Roman texts³⁹⁸ especially bear witness to a kind of ‘double standard’ in patron-client relationship».³⁹⁹ It was taken for granted that the recipients of a gift (the clients) were to keep in mind certain facts, and that the giver of the favor (the patron) was to keep in mind other facts. For a client it was important to remember the necessity of always returning a favor and express gratitude; they should never forget the debt they owe their benefactor. They knew that if they showed themselves ungrateful they deserved to be excluded from future favors. The patrons, on the other hand, were to keep in mind the importance of giving with no thought of receiving anything in return, and of extending favor even to those who had been faithless towards them. Seneca makes this explicit:

The one should be taught to make no record of the amount, the other to feel indebted for more than the amount (*Ben.* 1.4.3);

In the case of the benefit, this is the binding rule for the two who are concerned – the one [the giver] should straightforward forget that it was given, the other one should never forget that it was received (*Ben.* 2.10.4)

Clients are thus advised to think one way, and the patrons another. “If these mind-sets get mixed up or crossed, the beauty of reciprocity, the gracefulness of grace, becomes irreparably marred.”⁴⁰⁰ According to deSilva, the author of Hebrews seems to move in this social ethos

³⁹⁷ deSilva, *Introduction*, 795

³⁹⁸ deSilva refers in particular to Seneca’s rhetoric about reciprocity in *De beneficiis*

³⁹⁹ deSilva, *Introduction*, 795

⁴⁰⁰ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 241

and the rhetoric of Hebrews resembles the discourse of Seneca. «If human patrons could extend grace to the ungrateful, how much more does this remain possible for God?»⁴⁰¹ The hortatory material in Hebrews is directed towards the clients of the divine patron. The discourse is not designed to say anything about the way in which the patron (i.e. God) might behave, but rather to motivate the clients to appropriate attitudes and action. deSilva argues that both the doctrine of “eternal security” and the teaching that God would not forgive a repentant apostate break with this social ethos.⁴⁰²

David deSilva also argues that the warning texts clearly appeal to the emotions. deSilva opinions that if we derive doctrines from a text like Hebrews 10:26–31 or 6:4–8 we exchange an argument from *pathos* for an argument from *logos*. The author is not aiming at persuade his audience by giving a logical argument, but by arousing emotions in the addressees. The author strategically arouse fear for the sake of preventing apostasy or any other inappropriate response to God’s favor.⁴⁰³

I think deSilva’s assertion that the warnings display an argument from pathos is valid. However, does not the author in Hebrews 10:26–31 also appeal to the reason (Logos) of his audience? I have argued above that the author draws on the symmetrical structure of the covenant in his argument in 10:28–29, and I think this is an argument from logos. Salevao takes this as an indication that Hebrews sets forth a “doctrine of the impossibility of a second repentance.” He argues that the covenantal structure in the OT was tight and uncompromising. Drawing on the covenant motif with its blessings and curses, Hebrews exhibits the same tight and symmetrical structure of sin and retribution.⁴⁰⁴ I commend Salevao for seeing the parallel between the covenant motif and the warning passages in Hebrews. However, I think he evaluation of the old covenant is too rigid. As Allen has convincingly shown, also “the covenantal DNA of Deuteronomy holds promise and obligation in tension . . . the Deuteronomic covenant discourse does not sit easily with the notion of pure obligation and militates against any simplistic distinction between grant and treaty covenants.”⁴⁰⁵ Even though also he emphasizes the structural similarities between the covenant in Deuteronomy and Hebrews, Allen draws our attention the the rhetorical strategy of Deuteronomy. He aptly states that when the exhortation in Hebrews is seen “as reflective

⁴⁰¹ deSilva, *Introduction*, 795.

⁴⁰² deSilva, *Perseverance*, 244.

⁴⁰³ deSilva, *Introduction*, 795.

⁴⁰⁴ Salevao, *Legitimation* 318–326.

⁴⁰⁵ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 116

of Deuteronomic decision, problematic issues of doctrinal correctness and eternal security are replaced by hortatory appeals for continued community participation and warnings against apostasy... Covenantal obedience and loyalty, not soteriology, are the Deuteronomic terms of thought, and these seem to be the same categories adopted by Heb 6:4–8.»⁴⁰⁶

I do not want to make the warning have less force than it probably had for its first audience. I contend that Hebrews 10:26–31 is more than a rhetorical hyperbole; I think it expresses a real danger and a real possibility of apostasy. However, I agree with deSilva that

Once the tension [between the gravity of apostasy and the unfathomable mercy of God] is resolved one way or another, the beauty of grace, both as God’s favor and our response, is threatened. The enterprise of biblical theology, particularly when the goal is to reduce the dynamics of a living God’s relating with his creation to a logical, systematic order, might fundamentally at odds at this point with the creative and necessary paradoxes and tensions of living relationship.⁴⁰⁷

5.8 Chapter Summary

“If we willfully persist in sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin” (10:26). In this chapter we have seen that Hebrews most likely draws on the distinction in Numbers 15 between sins committed in ignorance that can be atoned for, and sins committed with a “high hand”, that is deliberately and arrogantly, for which there is no sacrifice for sins. Numbers 15 shows that the God of Israel cannot be manipulated by the sacrifices of his people. If an Israelite willingly and arrogantly breaks the covenant, in particular by turning to idols, God will not accept his or her sacrifice. That person will be ex-communicated from the covenant community, since he has deliberately broken the covenant bond. Hebrews assumes that to be applicable also in the new covenant situation. In light of the author’s lesser-to-greater argument in 10:28–31 (cf. chapter 3), it is actually all the more applicable in the era of the new covenant. If no sacrifice for sins remained for one who arrogantly and deliberately set aside the law of Moses, how much less will a sacrifice for sin remain for the one who deliberately set aside the new covenant inaugurated by the blood of Jesus?

⁴⁰⁶ Allen, *Deuteronomy*, 134.

⁴⁰⁷ deSilva, *Perseverance*, 244.

Conclusion

The objective of this Master's thesis has been to investigate how Hebrews 10:26 can be regarded as valid, given what Hebrews generally has to say about the new covenant inaugurated by the sacrificial death of Jesus. "If we willfully persist in sin after we have received the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (10:26) – how can that be? Hebrews 10:26 is part of an extended exhortation, thus our study has been to analyze Hebrews 10:26–31 in light of its context, co-text and intertext.

Since we cannot know anything certain about the context in which Hebrews was composed from text-external sources, I have taken the text itself as a starting point to discern the situation of the addressees. Hebrews appears to address a community within the Jesus movement that faces some kind of problem. At least some in the group have developed the habit of not attending the common gatherings of the community (10:25), which could indicate a waning commitment towards the group, their leader (i.e. Jesus) and their confession. Several times the author warns them against drifting away (2:1), failing to reach the rest (4:1), a sluggish attitude (5:11), apostasy (6:4–6; 10:29) and shrinking back (10:35). On the contrary, he encourages them to persevere in faith and commitment (3:6; 3:12–14; 4:11; 6:12; 10:23–25; 12:3, 13) so that they eventually will receive the promised reward. Possibly the recipients are tempted to withdraw from their commitment by the possibility of enjoying temporal pleasures and the advantages and security of regaining status and honor in the eyes of society.

The author lays before his audience two different courses of action and the consequences that will be the eventual outcome if they choose to follow the one or the other. His rhetorical strategy seems to be to magnify the advantages of choosing to persevere on the course of faith that they have started on, as well as amplifying the grave consequences of choosing to turn away from the living God. The course of temporal advantage leads to eternal death, and the course of temporal abasement leads to eternal reward. In so doing, the author sets out to persuade, in every possible way, his audience to choose the right path.

We have seen that the author of Hebrews constructs "a scriptural world", in which he locates his audience by inscribing them into the narrative of Israel. Thus this thesis has established the setting for Hebrews 10:26–31 within the meta-narrative of Israel as represented by the author of Hebrews. In this re-presentation of Israel's narrative three main stages have been detected: promise of inheritance, pilgrimage towards the inheritance and perfection (inheritance reached). This story was started but left incomplete within OT, thus

Hebrews re-narrates the story of Israel as an extended wilderness wandering. This story comes to an end as a result of Jesus' high priesthood, hence "Jesus has brought Israel's story to its paradoxical climax."⁴⁰⁸ Inscribed into the narrative, Jesus reaches – by his suffering, death and exaltation – the realm towards which Israel is heading. Jesus has thus become the forerunner and the leader to salvation, taking the descendant of Abraham by the hand to lead them to their inheritance (exodus motif). By offering himself as an ultimate sacrifice for sins, he also inaugurates the new covenant prefigured in Jeremiah 38:31-34 (LXX). It is through this new covenant Jesus distributes the inheritance to the people. As sins are forgiven and the conscience purified, the recipients of the covenant have open entrance into the heavenly sanctuary (i.e. the inheritance and the rest). By virtue of making perfection attainable for God's people, the new covenant is greater than the old.

The recipients are inscribed into this narrative. They have been freed from the slavery of death, and on the journey towards their inheritance they have reached the threshold of the land. Their situation is thus analogue to that of the Israelites at the threshold of Canaan in Deuteronomy. This is the setting for the exhortation issued in Hebrews 10:26–31, and the Deuteronomistic call to choose life rather than death echoes at the heart of the exhortation.

I started the analysis of the exhortation with 10:28–29 (chapter 3). Here the author explains why persisting in sin leads to the fact that there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. He argues by means of an argument from lesser to greater (*qal wa-homer*). If covenant infidelity in the era of Moses brought death, how much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who break the covenant inaugurated by the blood of Jesus? Thus the author draws on the same covenantal structure of retribution that is evident in Deuteronomy, only raising the stakes. This clearly shows that the new covenant is more than a unilateral *testament* through which salvation is distributed as an inheritance. It is analogue to the old covenant in the sense that it is a relational bond between God and his people where obligations are attached and to which sanctions apply. However, the broader co-text of Hebrews suggests that there also is a clear discontinuity between the old and the new covenant. Formerly (10:28; cf. 2:1; 12) covenant fidelity was expressed in terms of obeying the commandments of the law (in particular abstaining from idol worship). Now, the obligation of the covenant is directed towards the person Jesus, the Son of God.

Chapter 4 investigated 10:27 and 10:30–31. Here the consequence for breaking the covenant is expressed in the language of the OT. The expected Day of the LORD represented

⁴⁰⁸ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; London: SPCK, 1992), 410

for Israel both a message of hope and of warning, depending on whether or not they were abiding within the boundaries of the covenant. On the day of vengeance, God would re-establish justice; he would vindicate his people and judge their enemies. However, if Israel broke the covenant, they would be subjects of God's judgment instead of mercy. Hebrews draws on this motif in his warning. The Day is approaching (10:25), and if they break the covenant they will be judged alongside God's enemies instead of receiving the reward. These verses undergird the eschatological urgency of the exhortation. The recipients are at the threshold, and the day of reward and retribution is imminent.

Chapter analyzed Hebrews 10:27. The reference to "willfully sin" most likely echoes the "sin with a high hand" – i.e. sins committed deliberately, in open rebellion to God – of Numbers 15. According to the law of Moses, sins committed in ignorance could be atoned for by means of sacrifices, while deliberate sin could not be atoned for. Given the fact that more is at stake for the recipients of the new and greater covenant (cf. chapter 3), it follows quite naturally that the principle of Numbers 15 also applies in the context of the new covenant. If the atoning sacrifices did not cover sins done deliberately in rebellion towards God and his will, how much less will a sacrifice remain for those who deliberately persist in rejecting the new covenant inaugurated by the blood of Jesus? In 10:29 the sin is described as "defiling the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified." The blood they defile by breaking the covenant is the same blood that Jesus offered as a sacrifice. If they thus defile that blood, they simultaneously defile the atoning sacrifice of Christ, alienating themselves from its effects. If no sacrifice remains, the recipients will not be cleansed and sanctified. If the recipients are not sanctified, they will not be able to enter the inheritance. What is at stake is thus whether or not the audience will receive what has been promised. God, who has given the promise and provided a way through which the inheritance can be distributed, is faithful. Therefore, the author can say: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain" (6:19). However, the heirs have to persist on their pilgrimage of faith, not straying from the way, lest they will not reach their inheritance.

Hebrews 10:26–31 forcefully serves the author's rhetorical strategy by envisioning the course of life that he does not encourage, the course exemplified and embodied by the wilderness generation and Esau. By showing the audience the utmost consequence of choosing to give up their confidence and commitment, Hebrews wishes to persuade its audience to choose otherwise; to follow the paradigmatic example of Jesus and the "heroes of faith." Hebrews 10:26–31 is not primarily a prediction of future events. Neither is it primarily

a doctrine of soteriology. It is first and foremost a call to response at a momentous time and place in history, as long as it is called “today” (3:13); an exhortation at the threshold to choose life rather than death. The model reader responds to these words of exhortation like William of St. Thierry does:

Where academic writers explained the warnings against apostasy as prohibitions against rebaptism, monastic writers sought to let the warnings move readers to self-examination and repentance. When William of St. Thierry (d. 1148) read the warning about those who spurn the Son of God (Heb 10:26–31), his response was not explanation but confession: “Lord, truly I have sinned,” but “have I spurned you also, Son of God?” He prays, “No, no, most merciful!” But grant that “I may repent” with a “faith devout and pure,” so that you may say even to me, “Go, for your faith has made you whole.”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁹ Koester, *Hebrews*, 28

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