

“You Are a Priest Forever”

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“You Are a Priest Forever”

Second Temple Jewish Messianism
and the Priestly Christology
of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Eric F. Mason

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FOR
MY WIFE JACQUELINE
AND OUR DAUGHTER ANASTASIA

AND FOR MY PARENTS
DILLARD AND STELLA

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for ancient texts cited in this volume are those of *The SBL Handbook of Style* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander, et al.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999) and the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series. Most of the abbreviations below are taken from the *SBL Handbook*, supplemented by the present author's abbreviations as necessary (as for recent publications).

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (ed. D. N. Freedman)
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>AbrN</i>	<i>Abr-Nahrain</i>
AbrNSup	Abr-Nahrain: Supplement Series
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>AJT</i>	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
ALBO	Analecta lovaniensia biblica et orientalia
<i>ALD</i>	<i>Aramaic Levi Document</i>
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (eds. H. Temporini and W. Haase)
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
<i>AOT</i>	<i>The Apocryphal Old Testament</i> (ed. H. F. D. Sparks)
<i>APOT</i>	<i>The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> (ed. R. H. Charles)
<i>ATR</i>	<i>Australasian Theological Review</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd. ed. (ed. Frederick William Danker)
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>Bijdr</i>	<i>Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
<i>CQR</i>	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientaliū
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DJDJ	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan

<i>DNTB</i>	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> (ed. C. A. Evans and S. Porter)
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> (ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid)
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>DSSSE</i>	<i>The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition</i> (ed. F. García Martínez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar)
<i>EBib</i>	<i>Études Bibliques</i>
<i>ECDSS</i>	Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls
<i>EdF</i>	Erträge der Forschung
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (ed. H. Balz and G. Schneider)
<i>EDSS</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i> (ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam)
<i>EKKNT</i>	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>EV</i>	English version
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>FRLANT</i>	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HB</i>	Hebrew Bible
<i>Herm</i>	<i>Hermathena</i>
<i>HNT</i>	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBR</i>	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
<i>JGRChJ</i>	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JPS</i>	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Judaism</i>
<i>JSJSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplement Series
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSPSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KEK</i>	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th ed. with revised supplement (ed. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones)
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MM</i>	<i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament</i> (ed. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan)
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>MThSt</i>	Marburger Theologische Studien
<i>NAB</i>	New American Bible
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> (ed. L. Keck)
<i>NIBC</i>	New International Biblical Commentary

NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> (ed. K. D. Sakenfeld)
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTT	New Testament Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (ed. J. H. Charlesworth)
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
PTSDSSP	Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
SDSSRL	Studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>Sphilo</i>	<i>Studia philonica</i>
SRivBib	Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPB	Studia post-biblica
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigraphica
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich)
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and F.-J. Fabry)
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WDNT</i>	<i>The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric</i> (ed. D. E. Aune)
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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INTRODUCTION

The epistle to the Hebrews has much in common with its own description of Melchizedek, whose origins and destiny are said to be unknown (Heb 7:3). The identity of the author of Hebrews is elusive, and attempts to determine the date of composition are complicated by a scarcity of relevant clues in the book. Though it contains a tantalizing greeting relayed on behalf of certain Italians, even its destination and the identity of its intended recipients are shrouded in mystery. Other questions about this epistle abound. Not only is the identity of the author of Hebrews unknown, but much disagreement also exists about the background of this author and the influences that affected the distinctive ways he communicated his understanding of Jesus. Also, no scholarly consensus exists for understanding the nature of the problems faced by the recipients. Questions remain even about the genre of the book and its literary unity.

While this is not the place for a thorough discussion of each of these matters, a brief sketch of the issues is appropriate. It is common in many circles today to categorize Hebrews alongside the Catholic Epistles and Revelation—or even *as* a Catholic Epistle—but historically this has not been the case. This approach belies the fact that in the ancient manuscript tradition, the book normally circulated in the Pauline corpus.¹ Indeed, Hebrews ultimately owes its inclusion in the New Testament canon to the insistence in the ancient Eastern churches—and ultimately a compromise consensus with the West, championed by Augustine and Jerome—that Paul was its author. Difficulties with this

¹ Pamela M. Eisenbaum is even more emphatic: “While different forms of the *corpus Paulinum* circulated, and some versions did not include Hebrews, there is no evidence that Hebrews circulated with other collections of Christian writings (for instance, with documents that came to be known as the Catholic Epistles).” See her “Locating Hebrews Within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins,” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights* (ed. G. Gelardini; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 213-37, esp. 218.

identification were long recognized, however.² Origin earlier had concluded that only God knew the identity of the author (*Hist. eccl.* 6.25.14), but his caution did not inhibit subsequent speculation, and throughout the centuries numerous alternate proposals for authorship have been offered. Often—but not exclusively—those proposed have been figures in the Pauline orbit, including Barnabas, Apollos, Silas (or Silvanus), and Aquila and Priscilla.³

Pauline authorship is rarely defended in modern scholarship for a number of reasons, including literary style, theological emphases, and especially the author's claim in 2:3 to have been evangelized by an earlier generation of believers.⁴ Rather than speculate on the personal identity of the author, most modern scholars instead prefer to consider what characteristics about this person may be inferred from the text. The author, with a sophisticated literary style and broad vocabulary, is widely recognized to have produced the finest Greek in the New Testament. In light of this, the author seems almost certainly to have had some level of training in Greek rhetoric.⁵ Alongside this, he displays much facility with Jewish exegetical methods and traditions. Virtually all scholars assert that Scripture for the author was the Septuagint.⁶ The author is steeped in the texts and exegetical traditions

² See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 21-27, for a perceptive discussion of the theological issues relevant to positions on authorship of Hebrews in the early church. See also William H. P. Hatch, "The Position of Hebrews in the Canon of the New Testament," *HTR* 29 (1936): 133-51; and Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 37-39. For broader surveys of background issues, see Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; trans. H. C. Kee; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 475-502; and Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 683-704.

³ For a critique of such proposals, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 3-5.

⁴ Scholars typically note the incompatibility of this statement with Paul's insistence in Galatians 1-2 that no human taught him the gospel. See, for example, Attridge, *Hebrews*, 2.

⁵ Sophisticated Greek rhetorical methods utilized by the author are catalogued in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 20-21; David E. Aune, "Hebrews, Letter to the," *WDNT* 211-13; and Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Guides to New Testament Exegesis 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 163-84. For analysis of such rhetorical skill in a particularly significant passage, see Jerome H. Neyrey, "'Without Beginning of Days or End of Life' (Hebrews 7:3): Topos for a True Deity," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 439-55.

⁶ For a recent assessment of Hebrews' use of the Septuagint, see Martin Karrer, "The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Septuagint," in *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures* (ed. W. Kraus and R. G.

of Judaism, yet he also draws positively from Greco-Roman mythological and philosophical traditions; his intellectual capacities are profound.⁷ Taken together, these characteristics point to a Jewish-Christian author—most likely ethnically Jewish, though a proselyte is possible—whose background was in the Greek-speaking Diaspora.

Hebrews normally is considered an epistle, though it lacks marks of such in its opening section. Increasingly scholars note its homiletic nature.⁸ As for the recipients of the book, one can confidently assert little beyond the observation that they had earlier been taught by the author but now faced some crisis of faith.⁹ In the early church the book normally was understood as written to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.¹⁰ Modern scholars, however, almost always assume a Roman destination, in large part due to the statement in Heb 13:24 that ‘those from Italy send greetings.’¹¹ The author’s emphasis on exegesis of texts

Wooden; SBLSCS 53; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 335-53. See also Harold W. Attridge, “The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Scrolls,” in *When Judaism and Christianity Began: Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini* (2 vols.; ed. A. J. Avery-Peck, D. Harrington, and J. Neusner; JSJSup 85; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 2:315-42, esp. 2:316 n. 5, where he notes that the author’s correlation of ‘rest’ in Ps 95 and Gen 2:2 only works in Greek, not Hebrew. Nevertheless some deny that the author of Hebrews normally cited the LXX; see, for example, George Howard, “Hebrews and the Old Testament Quotations,” *NovT* 10 (1968): 208-16.

⁷ Hans-Friedrich Weiss (among others) cites three common options for understanding the background of Hebrews’ thought: Hellenistic-Jewish, Gnostic, and apocalyptic. See his *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (15th ed.; KEK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 96-114. See also F. F. Bruce, “‘To the Hebrews’: A Document of Roman Christianity?” *ANRW* 25.4:3496-3521.

⁸ Since the late eighteenth century scholars have occasionally argued that Hebrews is a homily rather than an epistle. Similarly, some have argued that the epistolary ending of Heb 13 is secondary. Attridge (*Hebrews*, 13-14, esp. n. 117) notes, however, that virtually all modern scholars accept the authenticity of Heb 13. See also the discussion of genre and the authenticity of Heb 13 in Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (trans. M. E. Boring; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 372-74.

⁹ Several statements imply that the author had previously been among his recipients (Heb 13:19) or at the least knew a great deal about their history (Heb 2:3-4; 5:11-14; 6:9-11; and 10:32-34). See William L. Lane, *Hebrews* (2 vols.; WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991), 1:lv.

¹⁰ This destination is rarely defended today, but see Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (WUNT 163; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 191-92. Stökl Ben Ezra understands Heb 13:13 as a call for Jewish Christians to leave Jerusalem.

¹¹ Most interpreters have understood the greeting (ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας) as one sent by Italians back to their homeland, but some have read it to be a greeting sent from Italy or by displaced Italians to persons in a third location. See

from the Jewish Scriptures (especially the Pentateuch, Psalms, and prophets), his frequent use of exemplars (both positive and negative) drawn from these narratives, and his extended comparison of Jesus' activities with aspects of the Jewish sacrificial system typically have been cited by interpreters as evidence that the Jewish identity of the recipients is a key to interpretation of the book. As such, English-language scholarship on Hebrews long was dominated by theories that the author was warning the Jewish Christian recipients not to renounce Christianity and return to their ancestral faith or else was exhorting them finally to make a full break from the synagogue.¹² Alternately, a

Attridge, *Hebrews*, 409-10. For discussion of other factors pointing to a Roman destination, see Koester, *Hebrews*, 48-50. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Hebrews are those of the author, while those of other biblical passages are from the New Revised Standard Version.

¹² Eisenbaum notes this tendency in scholarship on Hebrews but proposes essentially the opposite approach, that Hebrews demonstrates that "the shared experience of persecution during this time [late first-early second centuries C.E.] may have led to a greater sense of commonality among Jews and Christians, or, at the very least, little awareness of any significant differences" ("Locating Hebrews," 236). She assumes a second-century date for the book, in part because of her assertions that the author knew a written gospel and assumes a significant gap of time between the eras of Jesus and his own. On this, see Eisenbaum, "Locating Hebrews," 227-31. Two other essays in the same volume assume Jewish contexts with fascinating but problematic theses. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken interprets Hebrews as a first-century Christian response to the imperial propaganda of the Roman triumph celebrating victory in the first Jewish war. Like Eisenbaum, she presumes that the author addresses both Jews and Jewish Christians, here understood as in solidarity because of threats from this demonstration of imperial power. For Aitken, however, the author's purpose is to counter the images of Roman imperial power and status on a number of points, especially by presenting Jesus "as the triumphator in procession to the temple" where he—not the Flavian emperor—makes the climactic sacrifice. The parallels Aitken suggests are intriguing, but ultimately her proposal suffers from a lack of concrete evidence in Hebrews itself. See Aitken, "Portraying the Temple in Stone and Text: The Arch of Titus and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights* (ed. G. Gelardini; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 131-48, esp. 142. Gabriella Gelardini, like Eisenbaum, dates Hebrews to the second century C.E., but she asserts that it is ancient synagogue homily on Exod 31:18-32:35 and Jer 31:31-34 (the *sidrah* and *hapharah* traditionally associated with the Jewish fast day *Tisha be-Av*) addressed to Jewish slaves exiled to Rome after the second Jewish war. This fast day was associated in Jewish tradition with Israel's violation of the covenant and prohibition from entering Canaan but also (among other things) with the destruction of both Jerusalem temples and Hadrian's transformation of Jerusalem into *Aelia Capitolina*. The Exodus passage, however, is never cited directly in Hebrews, an odd feature is this indeed is the major text for the homily, nor does Gelardini address here the importance of Ps 110 for the author. See Gelardini, "Hebrews, An Ancient Synagogue Homily for *Tisha be-Av*: Its Function, Its Basis, Its Theological Interpretation," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights* (ed. G. Gelardini; BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 107-27. For a more detailed treatment, see her book

few scholars have argued (unpersuasively) that elements in the text demand a Gentile readership. Proposals that the recipients are a congregation of mixed ethnicity also find support.¹³

Ultimately, however, the ethnicity of the recipients is not a determinative factor for interpretation of the book. Views that assume that the author is urging his readers against Judaism are particularly problematic. Instead, the author's comments concern the recipients' fidelity to Christ; the problems addressed are not attraction to alternate teachings but rather the dangers of cessation of faith and disobedience. The author repeatedly warns against or chides the readers for laxity in their commitment to their confession (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:8; 10:26-39; 12:18-29), and he notes the failure of some to assemble together (10:25). No restoration is possible for those who abandon their faith (6:4-8), though the author is confident that his addressees have not yet met this dire fate (6:9-12). While persecution seems to be a factor in their wavering (10:32-34), the author notes that no one in the community he addresses has shed blood because of this (12:4).

Though some scholars attempt to date Hebrews quite specifically in the 60s C.E., chiefly in the context of Nero's persecutions, one scarcely can be more precise than to date the book to the last few decades of the first century C.E. As such, most propose a date between 60-100 C.E., with the upper range determined by use of the book in *1 Clement*.¹⁴

'Verhartet eure Herzen Nicht': *Der Hebraer, eine Synagogenhomilie zu Tischa be-Aw* (BIS 93; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

¹³ Scholars who understand the recipients as primarily Jewish Christians tend to see a possible reversion to Judaism as the problem addressed by the author; those who think the recipients were Gentile Christians or a church of mixed background tend to see apathy or persecution as the problem. For a brief survey of options and identification of major proponents of each view, see Koester, *Hebrews*, 46-48.

¹⁴ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 9. Similarly, Koester (*Hebrews*, 54) dates the book to 60-90 C.E. Lane is bolder, dating the book to 64-68 C.E., the interval between the great fire of Rome and Nero's suicide; see Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:lxvii. F. F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 21) similarly argues for a date just before the outbreak of persecution in 65 C.E. while Barnabas Lindars (*The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* [NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 21) supports 65-70 C.E. Ceslas Spicq (*L'Épître aux Hébreux* [2 vols.; Paris: Gabalda, 1952-53], 1:261) argues for 67 C.E., and Paul Ellingworth (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 33) sees reasons to date it just before either 64 or 70 C.E. David A. DeSilva (*Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 20-21) is less specific but also prefers a date before 70 C.E. Weiss (*Hebräer*, 77) argues for a later date of 80-90 C.E., as does Mathias Rissi (*Die Theologie des Hebräerbriefs* [WUNT 41; Tübingen: Mohr, 1987],

One cannot even be confident about whether it was written before or after Rome's conquest of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Attempts to date the book in light of the author's silence about the destruction of the Jewish temple falter because Hebrews' sacrificial discussions consistently address the tabernacle—admittedly sometimes with confusion about its physical arrangement (9:4)—rather than the temple. Similarly, while the author uses language implying a continuing sacrificial system, this too does not assist in dating; like this author, both rabbinic and patristic writers used similar language for centuries. Finally, such attempts are further complicated by the observation that the author seems to know the Jewish sacrificial system chiefly through exegesis, not first-hand experience.

While acknowledging that numerous questions remain, however, one can safely conclude that the author—an articulate Christian fluent in Greek and the Septuagint, equally comfortable with Jewish exegetical and Greek rhetorical methods—is distressed by the spiritual condition of his friends. He writes to exhort them toward faithfulness to their Christian confession.

Despite—or perhaps because of—these many unanswered questions, Hebrews has not lacked its share of scholarly treatments and commentaries. In English alone three extensive commentaries on this epistle were published in major series between 1989 and 1993. Since they were in preparation at essentially the same time, these offer three largely independent analyses of the book. Two major commentaries incorporating social-scientific and rhetorical criticisms appeared about a decade later, followed shortly by another pair of highly-anticipated volumes.¹⁵ Numerous important monographs on various issues related

13). For further discussion, see Helmut Feld, *Der Hebräerbrief* (EdF 228; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 14-18; and Schnelle, *History*, 367-68.

¹⁵ The former three are the aforementioned commentaries by Attridge (Hermeneia), Lane (Word), and Ellingworth (NIGTC). Though written more for the pastor than academician, the earlier commentary by Bruce (NICNT) was also revised during this period. The works by DeSilva (non-serial) and Koester (AB) followed, as did Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006); and Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews* (SP; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2007). Shorter works appearing in recent years include R. McL. Wilson, *Hebrews* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (NIBC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990), a revised version of a 1983 commentary in the defunct Good News Commentary series; Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews* (IBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Fred B. Craddock, "The Letter to the Hebrews," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (12 vols.; ed. L. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 12:1-

to Hebrews have also appeared in recent years, testifying to the increased recent interest in this epistle. New program units on Hebrews were added at the annual North American and international meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, and in 2006 the University of St Andrews hosted an international conference on the book's significance for Christian theology.

Despite this renewed interest in the epistle, relatively little has been written in recent years about its key motif, Jesus as high priest, but this was not the case in previous decades. The centrality of this motif in Hebrews is obvious, but scholars lack a consensus about the currents of thought that influenced the author's conception of Jesus as the priestly messiah. The purpose of this study is to revisit this question, examining past arguments while drawing upon the fruits of decades of scholarship on Second Temple Judaism since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The contention advanced here is that currents in Second Temple Judaism—particularly ideas evidenced in the Qumran texts—provide the best background for understanding the presentation of Jesus as priest in Hebrews.

The study unfolds as follows. The first chapter addresses Hebrews' presentation of Jesus, especially as high priest. Each passage in which this is the major subject is examined, and the chapter concludes with a synthesis of Hebrews' thought on the motif. The second chapter is a survey of previous proposals for understanding the conceptual background of Hebrews' priestly thought. The third and fourth chapters include analyses of eschatological or messianic priestly traditions and Melchizedek traditions, respectively, in Second Temple Judaism, with emphasis on texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes the study with the argument that messianic priestly and Melchizedek traditions at Qumran provide the best sources of shared thought with Hebrews' presentation of Jesus as priest.

173; George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Robert P. Gordon, *Hebrews* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000; and Edgar McKnight in Edgar McKnight and Christopher Church, *Hebrews-James* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2004), 1-320. Though not commentaries, one should also note Lindars, *Theology* (1991); Kenneth Schenck, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story Behind the Sermon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); and Andrew T. Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (London: T&T Clark, 2006). A new volume on Hebrews in the International Critical Commentary series has been announced as in preparation; it will replace James Moffatt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924).