

Jesus, Mount Zion and Sabbath Rest for the People of God

Parallels with Moses:

- I. What lies on the surface of Hebrews 9:25-28 is a series of comparisons and contrasts
 - A. Old Covenant Order (vs. 25)
 1. The priest “entered the holy place *year by year* with *blood not his own*” (25).
 - a. First, there is something critical to note about the high priest and the sacrifice: the high priest remained distinct from the sacrifice that he offered (Lev. 16).
 - (1) On the one hand, the high priest conforms to the positive precept of the law.
 - (a) He is a holy representative who follows the law of God with meticulous detail.
 - i) He undergoes ceremonial washing.
 - ii) He wears holy garments.
 - iii) He follows all of the regulations prescribed for the high priest.
 - (b) He is a type of Christ, who will conform perfectly to the positive commands of the law of God.
 - i) However, notice that the high priest does not suffer the curse of God.
 - ii) He is not a substitute for sinners.
 - iii) He represents them in his holiness, but he does not bear their sin.
 - (2) It is the animal sacrifice that is offered to bear the curse of God and sin of Israel.
 - (a) The animal is a substitute who bears the wrath of God and the guilt of sin.
 - (b) In this way, the animal performs a function that the priest cannot perform.
 - (c) The priest supplies obedience on behalf of Israel, but only the animal sacrifice removes guilt and sin. Only the animal sacrifice atones for the sin of Israel.
 - b. Second, notice that the priest must repeatedly offer the sacrifice “*year after year*”, implying that the effectiveness of the sacrifice is *limited, temporary, and provisional*.
 - (1) The sacrifices are offered annually, because they are not permanently effective.
 - (2) Both priest and sacrifice in the Mosaic Covenant lack the

- once for all potency required to deal with sin.
- c. Therefore, when we think of the Old Covenant priest and sacrifice, we must remember these two things: (1) The priest and the sacrifice are *distinguishable* from one another as both in distinct ways typify Christ; and (2) the sacrifice offered by the priest has only *temporary* effectiveness, thereby pointing to the need for a climactic sacrifice that takes away sin once for all.
 - d. This is precisely where the author of Hebrews lead us in the following verses.
2. New Covenant Order (25-28)
- a. Contrary to the Old Covenant order which distinguished the priest from the sacrifice, Jesus is Himself both the priest (the one who sacrifices) and sacrifice (the one given in sacrifice) cf. 25 “offer *Himself* often.” This means that in the New Covenant, the priest and the sacrifice are identical. This is precisely the point we saw about Moses—Moses offered himself to make atonement for sin (Ex. 32:30, 32).
 - (1) It is hard to see how it can be clearer that Jesus has arisen in the order of Moses, not Aaron.
 - (2) Jesus fulfills both the role of the high priest and the animal sacrifice, and he does it like Moses, not Aaron.
 - (a) As high priest, he conforms perfectly to the positive precept of God’s law.
 - (b) As a sacrifice, he offers himself for the sins of his people.
 - (c) He is not merely a high priest, but, just as Moses was the Mediator of the Old Covenant, as a type of Christ, so Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant.
 - (3) Aaron and the animal sacrifices that were offered in the Old Covenant were together types of Christ.
 - (a) Christ could not be properly represented in Aaron or the sacrifices he offered.
 - (b) Neither could typify Christ by themselves, but together they prefigured the active and passive obedience of Christ.
 - i) Jesus, like Aaron, is holy to the Lord and meticulously obeys the law of God.
 - ii) Jesus, like the animal sacrifice, is given to take away the sin of God’s people and satisfy divine justice.

- (4) But another point arises that shows how Aaron and the sacrifices he offered had to be merely types of Christ.
 - b. Contrary to the Old covenant order which provided sacrifices of *temporary* effectiveness (“year by year”), Christ’s sacrifice brings *permanent* results.
 - (1) If Christ’s sacrifice is not permanently effective, then he would have to be sacrificed year by year (25a; 26a).
 - (2) But, Christ has appeared *at the consummation of the ages* to put away sin by his sacrifice (26b).
 - (a) The consummation refers to the end of history as it is eclipsed by the eternal kingdom of God, the final judgment, the resurrection, etc (Matt. 13:39,40; 24:3; 28:20 have the same Greek phrase).
 - (b) So what does Heb. 9:26 mean?
 - i) *It means that the eternal judgment which will befall all unbelievers at the end of the age has already befallen Christ on behalf of his people.*
 - ii) The eternal judgment intruded into time upon Christ in his obedience and satisfaction on the cross. In other words, Christ’s death satisfies the eternal sanctions of the covenant against his people.
 - (3) Put away sin: Christ has put away sin—the sin of his people—once-for all by his own sacrifice.
 - (a) The best parallel in Paul is Romans 6:6: our old man was crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.
 - (b) He has faced your judgment ordeal as a substitute and sacrifice (he did it for you and in your place) (Lev. 16):
 - i) Scapegoat
 - ii) Sacrifice
3. This interpretation is confirmed by 27 which reads “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also . . .”
- a. In other words, Christ has already died, already borne eternal judgment, and will return free from sin to bring eternal salvation to all who eagerly await him (27; cf. 9:12).
 - b. And here is the good news of the Gospel: if Christ’s judgment is wholly past, if he died as a sacrifice to do away with your sins

once for all, and if by faith you are in Christ, then your judgment is *wholly past*.

- (1) Jesus Christ perfectly and completely satisfied the judgment of God for you in his obedient and substitutionary death on the cross.
 - (2) There is no other satisfaction that can be made for your sins.
 - (3) If you are in this Christ by faith, then you, like Christ, are beyond probation, and recipients of God's favor and love.
4. Notice that verse 28 fixes our attention on Christ's coming again.
 - a. What does this presuppose? It presupposes that while Christ stood before the eternal tribunal of divine justice, having offered himself as a sacrifice to take away sin once for all, he did not remain dead.
 - b. Unlike the scapegoat, who was led out to die and never rise again, Christ died before the tribunal of God's justice and wrath, and was raised to life.
 - c. He has been raised from the dead and vindicated as the righteous priest and sacrifice—the priest who by his sacrifice has accomplished an eternal redemption and opened entrance into the heavenly most holy place of boundless and endless communion with the living God.
 - B. Christ will return a second time, not with reference to sin, but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await his return.
 1. He will return to give Himself to his holy people in a holy realm, having secured eternal salvation for them.
 2. He does so by not only obeying God's law perfectly as a high priest, but by dying and bearing the judgment of God on behalf of his people and then rising into heaven to appear in God's presence for us.
- II. It is right here, between the first coming of Jesus and his parousia, that we need to situate the "main point" of the book of Hebrews.
- A. ^{ESV} **Hebrews 8:1** Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. (Heb 8:1-2 ESV) ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25 ESV)
 1. The main point, the controlling concern, of Hebrews, is not the "past, once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on earth, as important as that certainly is; rather, it is in his ongoing ministry in heaven as a high priest, so that he

- might save us to the uttermost.
- a. High Priest: represents us to God
 - b. Seated at the right hand of God (permanent access to the “face” of God as the “friend” not only of God but of the church, so that he might bring the church to God in heaven.
 - c. A “minister” or servant of the church in heaven.
 - d. For what purpose: “saving to the uttermost” those “who draw near to God” through Him (vs. 25).
2. Do you see the parallel with Moses?
 - a. Moses first comes to be “face-to-face” with God.
 - b. Moses first converses as “friend to friend” (33:11)
 - c. Moses first sees the glory of God (33:12-23).
 - d. Moses first receives the covenant that gives God’s presence and his law the specifies the terms of communion with God (Ex. 34:1-12)
 - e. Moses first bears the glory of the Lord in his countenance, which is the residue of his communion with God on the mountain.
 - f. Moses brings that glory and that covenant down to the people from Mount Sinai.
 3. Jesus, as a high priest and minister in heaven, like Moses, has first entered heaven, and he has done so as a forerunner for us (Hebrews 6:20)
 - a. Jesus is a “forerunner” in a very specific sense.
 - (1) He goes before us into heaven, so that he might bring us where he is.
 - (2) In heaven, at the right hand of God, are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:10).
 - (3) Jesus has entered into heaven, and he has done so for the precise purpose that he might bring us where he is in the invisible heavens (save to the uttermost).
 - b. And he is the forerunner as a “high priest” in the order of Mel.
 - c. He enters into heaven, so that he might be the one who mediates the glory of heaven, the glory of fellowship with God, to you, the church, in union with him by the Spirit and through faith.
 - d. He is a forerunner only as he is a high priest—he goes, so that he might bring you where he is.
 4. John 14:1-2 is helpful here:
 - a. I go to prepare a place for you.
 - b. That where I am you might be.
- B. Perhaps the broadest description is in 7:25: he ever lives in heaven, so that he might save his church to the “uttermost.”
1. Saved to the uttermost is being brought in two stages to eternal Sabbath

Rest in the heavenly presence of God.

- a. We are now brought into the presence of God and the place of Sabbath Rest in our union and communion with the ascended Christ, although our bodies remain in the wilderness (Mount Zion-Hebrews 12:22-24)
- b. We will be brought bodily into the presence of God in the place of Sabbath Rest (heaven), and there we will have "face-to-face" fellowship with the ascended Christ, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant and the one in whom we attain glory (2:10) and Sabbath Rest (4:11).

2. Movement: union with the ascended Christ while in the wilderness (while on earth) brings us, while in the wilderness, to Mount Zion. Then, through that same union with the ascended Christ we will be brought bodily to Sabbath Rest (in heaven) on Mount Zion.

- a. The communion bond that is ours in the wilderness and which brings us to Mount Zion is that same communion bond that will be brought to glorious, visible consummation, when we enter bodily into the real, but presently veiled, heavenly place where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
- b. The movement, then, is from being brought to Mount Zion by faith (in this age) to being brought to Mount Zion by sight (in the age to come).

III. Hebrews 12:18-21: ¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." (Heb 12:18-21 ESV)

- A. The first thing to note is that you have not come to what may be touched: Mount Sinai.
 1. Mount Sinai is earthly, of the earth.
 2. Mount Sinai was the earthly place where God descended to dwell in the midst of his redeemed people.
 3. This coheres with the way that both the tabernacle (8:5) and the land of Canaan (11:16) copy and shadow heaven itself.
- B. The two texts that the author of Hebrews quotes are critical to grasp.
 1. Exodus 19:12-13 PEOPLE "could not endure" (vs. 20)
 2. Exodus 19:16 MOSES "trembles with fear" (vs. 21)
- C. The basic point is this: what the people of Israel and Moses saw when it came to the phenomenon surrounding Mount Sinai was glory veiled in thick, black clouds, lightning and thunder.

- D. This is the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai—the place Moses when the first time to receive the 10 commandments—the terms of the covenant (cf. Exodus 20:1 I am the Lord Your God who brought you out of Egypt).
 - 1. This is the first giving of the law to Israel.
 - 2. These tablets are what Moses broke in Exodus 32:15-19 when Israel sins against God by worshiping the golden calf.
- E. The point in context critical for us to grasp is that only Moses goes up the mountain (read verse 20): Moses *alone* enters the Mountain—the people were terrified at God’s holy presence.
 - 1. He goes up the first time to meet with God, receive his law, and receive instructions.
 - 2. But the warnings are this: DO NOT COME NEAR LEST WRATH BREAK OUT AGAINST YOU (read verses 21-24).
 - 3. The holiness of God as he comes to dwell with his people is a terrifying thing to the people and to Moses.
- F. That is the context, in broader terms, of Moses going to the mountain in Exodus 32-34 to make atonement for the people (switch now to notes on 32-34)..
 - 1. Moses enters into the presence of God to make atonement.
 - 2. There, on the mountain, as in the tent of meeting, God’s glory passes before him in a “face to face” and “friend to friend” fashion.
 - 3. What is that telling us? That as Moses is a type of the promised Mel. High Priest, Christ, there is no longer any fear in the presence of a holy God—there is only the delight of “face-to-face” and “friend-to-friend” fellowship.

IV.

- A. In other words, there is a movement from the covenant on Sinai in Exodus 19-20 and the renewal of that covenant (replacement tablets in Exodus 34) through the Mediation of Moses.

V. Hebrews 12:22-24 ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, (Heb 12:22-24 ESV)

- A. Introduction and Overview:
 - 1. This begins with a panoramic overview of the heavenly realm where Christ dwells.
 - a. First, there is a still frame picture of Mount Zion—the city of the living God. You get the exterior description of that heavenly Jerusalem—the presently real, created dwelling place of God (vs. 22).
 - (1) Hebrews 11:16

- (a) The city was a future hope for Abraham, typified by the land of Canaan.
 - (2) Hebrews 13:14
 - (a) The city is not here—not in the present earth.
 - b. Then, you move from outside into the city, into the city of the living God. And, having entered, you move *upward*, toward the place where Christ is, seated in heaven, surrounded by angels and, above the angels, the church. There is an ascending movement up from angels (lowest vs. 22) to the church (now higher than the angels vs. 23) to Jesus (vs. 23), the one who has ascended to sit at the right hand of God (the highest place in heaven).
 - c. And Jesus, sitting in the highest place of the invisible heavens at the right hand of the majesty in heaven (vs. 23). As he sits there, he intercedes Mediator between God and his people—in other words, Jesus is the Mediator, the high priest in the order of Melchizedek, who brings you, the church, into fellowship with the triune God in heaven.
 - d. Christ (vs. 24), who is seated at the right hand of the glory of the majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 8:1).
 - (1) Christ is the one who has gained access concretely to the heavenly throne of grace (Heb. 4:16) or simply access to God in heaven (10:19).
 - (2) Another way to put it is that Christ has entered heaven as “fore-runner” 6:20 who is bringing many sons to glory 2:10.
 - 2. Verb: in verse 22 “But you have come (perfect active) to Zion” signifies realization.
 - a. You, by faith union with Christ, have come to heavenly Mount Zion.
 - b. This is so because, by the Spirit, and through Spirit-worked faith, you have fellowship with the one ascended to sit at God’s right hand on Mount Zion (1:3).
 - c. He is there in the highest heavens, and you have been brought to fellowship with Him as he has ascended to the apex of the New Jerusalem, Mount Zion.
 - 3. But you are brought to this Mountain in the ascended Christ and by faith (not by sight) in this age, and you are brought to this mountain by the ascended Christ by sight (bodily) in the age to come.
 - a. The first “coming to Zion” is already (Hebrews 12).
 - b. The next “coming to Zion” is not yet (Hebrews 4:9-11).
- VI. So, let’s look at verb in 4:3: “Those who believe are entering that rest” Εἰσερχόμεθα γὰρ

εἰς [τὴν] κατάπαυσιν οἱ πιστεύσαντες,

A. Εἰσερχόμεθα indicative present middle 1st person plural.

1. As we begin to reflect on the Greek syntax, something important comes into view.
 - a. First, the present tense form that we have here certainly gives a presumption of a present time force, but it does no more than that. It does not settle or clinch the issue.
 - (1) This is so, because as Burton notes in *Moods and Tenses*, the present indicative can have various forces.
 - (2) A true present would be excluded because it would violate the wilderness model and the way it is being employed by the author.
 - (3) It can have the force of having begun something in the present that is not yet completed, but will be at a future point. The translation: “We are entering but not yet there.”
 - b. Or it can have a straightforward present for the future sense. It could be translated, “We will enter”
 - c. Funk: verbs of going or coming also have the meaning of “to be in the process of coming or going for which reaching the destination still lies in the future.” And that is someone without a strong Reformed eschatology commenting on the passage.
 - (1) The force of the present, especially in conjunction with the reference to faith, brings into view the way that Sabbath rest is being undertaken now by faith, while its future, bodily realization lies on the horizon.
 - (2) By faith, we are, in union with Christ, in a process that is underway on earth, in the wilderness, that will consummate with a future, heavenly fulfillment.
 - (3) Hebrews 4:3, then, demands that we see faith union with Christ inaugurating a process of entering rest that is presently underway, but not yet complete.
 - (4) Faith comes to the resting place while still in the wilderness; with faith gives way to sight, and earth gives way to heaven, Sabbath Rest is fully realized in a face-to-face, heavenly fellowship with God—a fellowship beyond the wilderness.
2. Second, and precisely in light of these observations, many understand the force of verse 9 and present as well as future, but because of the way they understand verse 10: **Hebrews 4:10** For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his own works, as God did from His.

- (1) There are key points to note about this text.
- (2) Two controlling points need to be made in order to understand this text properly.
 - (a) First, because of the introduction back in 4:4, God's rest on Day 7 in Genesis 2:2 is in view.
 - (b) Second, and this is critical, a parallel between the believer and God.
 - i) And the parallel is this: the resting of the believer is to his works as God's resting is to his works.
 - ii) This means that the believer rests in relation to his work as God rested in relation to his works.
- (3) Some commentators, even Calvin, think that the works from which the believer rests are the dead works alluded to in 6:1 and 9:14.
 - (a) **Hebrews 6:1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.
 - (b) ^{NAS} **Hebrews 9:14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
 - i) Rest, on this view, means to cease from relying from your own works.
 - ii) You rest from relying on your own efforts, which are dead works.
 - iii) It means to cease from your evil works.
 - iv) The point of verse 10 is justification by faith—resting from dead works that might commend a person to God.
 - (c) But there is a problem with this view—a major problem in my estimate.
- (4) Two reasons:
 - (a) First, it loses sight of the local character of the rest throughout the passage.
 - i) It is a resting place to which the writer has referred repeatedly.
 - ii) It ignores the wilderness motif.

- (b) Second, to make this about justification involves a jarring incongruity. He would draw a direct parallel between our sinful works and God's very good works at creation.
 - i) The comparison is between God resting from his very good works of creation, on the one hand, and the believer resting from his good works in the wilderness, on the other hand.
 - a) In other words, God's just as God rests from his very good works of creation, so also believers rest from their good works in the wilderness.
 - b) Also, and to fill out the comparison, just as God's resting is good, so the believer's resting is good.
 - ii) The point is not only rest, but that from which one rests.
- (c) In a sense, it is a theological point.
 - i) Nowhere else does the NT remotely approach the notion that repentance from dead works is analogous to God resting from his works at creation.
 - ii) What we have, then, is a synthetic association between sin and God's activity.
 - iii) That is not permissible. Certainly it can't be the point.
- (5) More positively, then, we should see the work of the believer is viewed positively, given the nature of the analogy between God's work and the believer's work.
 - (a) The works here are not the dead works of 6:1 and 9:14, but love and good works.
 - i) **Hebrews 6:10** For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.^{ESV} **Hebrews 6:11** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,
 - ii) **Hebrews 10:24** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

Hebrews 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- (b) God will not overlook your work and love as you serve the saints.
 - i) Where are these good works evidence?
 - ii) Where are these good works performed?
 - iii) Where are the saints served?
 - iv) In the wilderness as you see the day approaching—in the wilderness until the end—that is the context of the good works.
- (6) These are not dead works, but desert works.
 - (a) They are the wilderness works of the church on the way between Exodus and Sabbath Rest.
 - (b) These are the wilderness works of the church as the end or day approaches.
- b. The rest is the reality to be entered after wilderness works are over.
- c. And he concludes this section by exhorting the believers to strive to enter into that rest.
- 3. **Hebrews 4:11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. Σπουδάσωμεν οὖν εἰσελθεῖν εἰς ἐκείνην τὴν κατάπαυσιν, ἵνα μὴ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ τις ὑποδείγματι πέσῃ τῆς ἀπειθείας
 - a. Note two keys here.
 - (1) First, he speaks in the subjunctive, let us strive.
 - (a) The church is to be about the business of striving.
 - (b) And the subjunctive here has a hortatory force. It is an exhortation.
 - (c) And the striving has its telos in rest, understood here as Sabbath rest.
 - (2) Second, the purpose clause explicitly tethers the church's situation to the wilderness testing of Israel, urging that no one fall by following the same pattern of disobedience.
 - (a) Clearly, disobedience is the reality that stands in the way of rest.
 - (b) That rest, then, is something that the disobedient will not attain. You cannot attain rest while you either live (or die) in the wilderness.
 - (c) Both the dead, whose bodies are under the

wilderness ground, or the living, whose bodies are on the wilderness ground, have not yet entered the heavenly realm of Sabbath Rest.

- b. This places rest as future and brings into view being brought bodily into Mount Zion to rest in the presence of the ascended Christ.
- 4. Now, to return to the other view that sees the believers resting from dead works breaks down the basic distinction the author has made throughout the passage: the present need for perseverance, on the one hand, and the future when there will be no need to persevere, on the other hand.
 - a. The present is the wilderness; the future is rest.
 - b. In this passage, *the opposite of rest is not sin but tested faith*.
 - (1) The view that finds present rest in verse 10 confuses the goal, which is rest, with the means to the goal (persevering faith).
 - (2) It confuses hoping in the present with the thing hoped for (rest).
- 5. The wilderness/rest motif makes it clear that what is called for is good works in the wilderness, and the antithesis of works is rest.
 - a. The wilderness, while it is a place of testing, is also a place of redemption.
 - b. 3:16 includes "all those Moses led out of Egypt."
 - (1) It is both a place of testing and salvation.
 - (2) The presupposition of temptation to apostasy is salvation.
- 6. Realized eschatology creates the wilderness congregation as the new and final wilderness community.
 - a. The index of present eschatology throughout this passage is not rest but the rest, but wilderness contrasted with rest.
 - b. The works in view in 4:10 are not sinful works but wilderness works.
 - c. The closest NT parallel to Hebrews 4:10: **Revelation 14:13** And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"
- B. The larger point, then, is that the bodily presence of Christ, beheld by sight, is the climax of Sabbath rest in heavenly land. When you see Christ, with your own resurrected and ascended eyes, in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God, and you have face-to-face fellowship with him, you have left wilderness altogether and have entered heavenly Sabbath Rest.
 - 1. The writer operates with a simple eschatological profile.

- a. Christ and the church: the bodily absence of Christ means the church's wilderness existence, but the bodily presence of Christ means the church's rest.
 - b. That is the most basic way to put the matter.
 - 2. When Christ appears bodily, or when you are brought bodily to the ascended Christ, you will be brought to glory on heavenly Mount Zion.
 - 3. There you will find every delight that belongs at the right hand of God in Christ.
- C. **Hebrews 4:14 - 16** ¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. **Hebrews 4:14-16** ¹⁴ Ἐχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας. ¹⁵ οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖσαι ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας. ¹⁶ προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος, ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὐρωμεν εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν.
- D. Hebrews 4:14-16 is an exhortation for the church to hold fast its confession during its wilderness pilgrimage *en route* to Sabbath rest, and this text marks a transition for us in our study into the heavenly high priesthood of Christ. We are transitioning, and I think seamlessly, into the christological concern of the book.
 - 1. Two controlling points stand out as we note the location and content of 4:14-16, and they graph onto the geographical aspects of wilderness and rest, respectively.
 - a. First, the location of 4:14, coming as it does on the heels of the long section on wilderness is not accidental.
 - (1) The writer is not introducing high priesthood arbitrarily; rather, he introduces high priesthood as it address the need of the church in the wilderness.
 - (2) High priesthood, as the author says, is something "we have" (Ἐχοντες).
 - (a) The we is clearly those who are in the wilderness.
 - (b) Christ's high priesthood, his heavenly ministry, exists with a view toward those who are not yet resting.
 - (c) His high priesthood brings into focus the concrete need of those who are in the wilderness.
 - (3) Related to this, the author sets the earthly situation of Christ into a context that is compatible with that of the

church in the wilderness: He can empathize with those who suffer and are tempted, because he has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he is without sin.

- (a) The implication, of course, though not made explicit, is that Christ was himself tempted in the context of wilderness.
 - (b) Christ's suffering is a thematized suffering, and it is not suffering in general; rather it is a suffering that partakes of the wilderness-hardships that test faith and obedience.
- (4) Christ, in other words, to the extent he was tempted *πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας.*
- (a) Literally, in all things in like manner, he was tempted as we are.
 - (b) Christ, in other words, as high priest, has entered into the precise situation in which the readers find themselves.
 - (c) He was tempted in the wilderness and therefore is familiar with those temptations.
 - (d) Assumed here is not merely a common humanity, but a common context in which that humanity existed—under the wilderness conditions.
- (5) Christ, as high priest, has experienced the temptation of the wilderness, as one without sin.
- b. Second, and related closely to this, he has passed through the heavens.
- (1) This gives a decidedly vertical orientation to the heavens, now in relation to the wilderness.
 - (2) Rest, as rest from wilderness, brings into view a future, heavenly place, with something of a temporal concern.
 - (3) And, it seems that the movement in view is temporal movement from the earthly wilderness to a passage through the heavens.
 - (a) Following wilderness comes entrance into the heavens, which is construed as rest.
 - (b) Rest is the telos, the end point of the wilderness, and the rest is a heavenly rest.
 - (4) But Christ as high priest has passed through the heavens (*διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς.*), the heavens,
 - (a) This brings into view a vertical dimension that in some sense exists above and beyond the

wilderness.

- (b) And the verbal idea of διεληλυθότα is that of passage.
 - i) διελεισομαι (future middle 1 sing) in Exo 12:12 brings into view the Lord “passing through” the land of Egypt to strike down the firstborn.
 - ii) This “passing through” is the event that inaugurates Israel’s passage out of Egypt.
 - iii) The Lord’s passing through Egypt is the ground for Israel’s passage out of Egypt and into the Land of Rest.
 - iv) Jesus has passed through the heavens, with the context of wilderness as that which he has left.
 - v) He passes beyond wilderness into the heavens.
 - vi) What I think this brings into view is that the “passage” of the son of God through the heavens has an Exodus dimension to it.
- (c) What is clear, at least by implication, is that the heavens are a realm beyond wilderness.
- (d) Having been tempted in every way as we are, without sin, Jesus has now passed through the heavens.
- (e) And the heavens are the geographical locus of the city, the homeland, the realm of rest.

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- E. ^{ESV} **Hebrews 4:16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - 1. Here the writer sums up the point of Jesus’ high priesthood as that high priesthood addresses the need of his people in their time of need (εις ευκαιρον βοηθειαν.).
 - 2. Jesus has entered into heaven to make heaven a throne of grace, so that we might receive mercy and find grace in the wilderness.
 - a. When you enter into the presence of God in the name of Christ, with Christ seated at the right hand of the throne of God, that throne is a throne of grace.
 - (1) Grace is demerited favor to those who have no claim to it.
 - (a) Jesus makes the throne of God not a throne of judgment but a throne of grace.

- (b) It is free, full, God given grace to sinners, who, apart from Christ have no claim to it, but in Christ have every claim to it.
 - (2) You can enter into the throne of grace with confidence!
 - (a) Christ is there, with your name written over his heart.
 - (b) Christ is there, interceding for you.
 - (c) Christ is there for you; not against you. He is there praying for you; not against you.
 - (d) He lives to make intercession for you in heaven.
 - b. In the wilderness, you see, things are difficult.
 - (1) The wilderness is the place of hardship and trial, of testing and suffering, of loss and even death.
 - (a) Jesus is beyond hardship.
 - (b) Jesus is beyond trial.
 - (c) Jesus is beyond suffering.
 - (d) Jesus is beyond death.
 - (2) And this Jesus perfectly empathizes with you as you live in the wilderness of this world.
3. And as your high priest, he gives you mercy and grace to assist you in your time of need.
- a. Mercy is tender affection.
 - (1) Mercy involves the Lord taking pity on you as his child.
 - (2) Mercy involves a kind and loving disposition toward you in your affliction.
 - (3) The one seated at the right hand of the throne of grace has compassion for you and love for you—tenderness and care for you.
 - (4) And when you look to him, you find mercy from him.
 - b. But he also gives you grace to assist you in your time of need.
 - (1) Think about that for a moment with me.
 - (2) Your time of need is not first and foremost some crisis in your life; your time of need is in this entire wilderness age.
 - (a) Your time of need is the time between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.
 - (b) Your time of need is your wilderness testing in this age.
 - (3) Jesus, not only empathizes with you, but he gives you grace, the demerited favor to assist you in your time of need.

4. He gives you grace so that you might hold fast your confession.
 - a. What is that confession?
 - b. That we have a faithful a merciful high priest, who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, and he is there to save us to the uttermost—to bring us to rest.
 - c. That is what we confess—that is the substance of our confession.
5. And the wonder of the Christian faith is this: the one we confess gives us what we need to hold fast our confession.
 - a. Jesus gives what he requires; he supplies what he demands.
 - b. He himself has passed through the wilderness, and he himself will supply you with the grace to enter before the throne of grace to find mercy and receive grace to help you in your time of need.
6. it is specifically as the Son of God, who passed through the heavens, that we find the mercy and grace to assist us in time of need.
 - a. That is to say, it is specifically in Christ that we find the resources to overcome wilderness and enter rest.
 - b. Christ, having passed through the heavens, has passed beyond wilderness.
 - c. So that in him are the resources for traversing wilderness and entering into the rest that is held out for the people of God.
7. Second, it is specifically as the Son of God, who passed through the heavens, that we find the mercy and grace to assist us in time of need.
 - a. That is to say, it is specifically in the divine power of the Son of God, raised from the dead as a high priest, that we find the resources to overcome wilderness and enter rest.
 - (1) Christ, the Son of God, having passed through the heavens, has passed beyond wilderness.
 - (2) So that in him are the resources for traversing wilderness and entering into the rest that is held out for the people of God.
8. So, the final, concluding observation, is this: Christ continues to labor in heaven on behalf of his church, precisely because the church has not yet been brought to rest.
 - a. Intercession in heaven is not merely to provide ongoing grace and mercy in the wilderness, although that is certainly the case, it is mercy and grace to assist the church in her pilgrimage.
 - b. The mercy and grace supplied by Christ is therefore to be thought of as a grace that also brings the church through the heavens and into rest.
 - c. From this vantage point, then, the author of Hebrews associates the ongoing work of Christ as high priest with bringing

- redemption to its consummation in Sabbath rest.
9. High priesthood has a unique, eschatological focus.
 - a. High priesthood is the office in terms of which Christ not only secures the redemption of his people from sin, but translates them out of the wilderness and grants them rest.
 - b. It is here that we see the deepest eschatological rationale of the priesthood—to bring the church into rest in the presence of God.