

## Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1–2

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The denial of angelic rule in the world to come (Heb 2.5) provides an important clue to the purpose of Christ's exaltation over the angels in Heb 1–2. The excessive reliance upon angels for national deliverance and personal protection within Second Temple Judaism posed a threat to the pre-eminence of Christ among Jewish Christians. Rather than seek 'help' from angels, the author exhorts his readers to hold firmly to their confidence in Jesus. For as messianic 'Son', only Jesus is able to 'help' them (Heb 2.18; 4.16) remain faithful through the perils of the coming eschatological judgment.

The contrast between Christ and the angels in Heb 1–2 has aroused the curiosity of many interpreters.<sup>1</sup> Were angels merely chosen as one among other OT mediators (e.g. Moses, Melchizedek, Levitical priesthood) to show the superiority of Christ as the ideal high priest? Or were there distorted teachings on angels among first-century readers that demanded correction? Some suggest the author's purpose was to refute an angel Christology,<sup>2</sup> while others see angelic veneration similar to that practised in Colossae (Col 2.18) in view.<sup>3</sup> Yet the book contains neither a prohibition against the 'worship of angels' (e.g. Rev 19.10; 22.8–9) nor a denial of

an angelomorphic Christ.<sup>4</sup> Neither does the author seem troubled by the notion of saints worshipping *with* angels, for he presents them side by side in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12.22–3). Rather than depreciate angels the writer affirms their traditional role as 'ministering spirits' (1.14), mediating the Law (2.3).<sup>5</sup> Visiting the saints (3.2) and worshipping before God's heavenly presence (1.6; 12.22). Hence, some propose that he was merely using angels as a rhetorical device to exalt Christ.<sup>6</sup> This study seeks to explore clues suggested by his denial of angelic rule in the world to come (Heb 2.5).<sup>7</sup> It is true that Christ's contrast with angels is an important part of the rhetorical strategy developed throughout Hebrews. However, I argue here that the angel-comparison is also intended to caution the readers against a popular hope in angels for national deliverance and personal help. Rather than look to angels for deliverance, the author urges his readers to place their hope in the far greater 'Son' who has come to reign as Davidic king and wage war on the oppressors of God's people. It fittingly concludes this section by exhorting them to go to their Messianic priest (Heb 2.18), who is the only one able to grant them 'help' (Heb 2.18; 4.16) through the perils of the coming judgment.

### The eschatology of Hebrews in historical context

The author's opening announcement that the 'last days' had arrived through God's revelation of his 'Son' (Heb 1.2) sets the stage for his 'inaugurated

4 Rather than provide a polemic against an angelomorphic Christology, Gieschen argues that the author of Hebrews appeals to various commonly recognized angelic titles (e.g. 'Firstborn', 'Apostle', and 'High Priest after the order of Melchizedek') to explain the pre-existence and deity of Christ according to the patterns of angelomorphic theophanies in the OT (e.g. the Angel of the Lord). See C. A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents & Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 294–314.

5 The unalterable 'word spoken through the angels' (Heb 2.2) echoes the tradition of angels mediating the Law (Gal 3.19; Acts 7.38–53; Jos., *Ant.* 15.36) based upon the presence of 'holy ones' (or 'angels' – LXX) at Sinai (Deut 33.2).

6 Some suggest that the author seeks to establish his doctrinal correctness and rapport with his readers by rehearsing the superiority of Christ to angels common in the early kerygma of the church (Rom 8.38–9; Col 1.16; Eph 1.21; 1 Pet 3.22). For example, Lindars claims that the opening chapters are designed to 'set the tone' for the rest of the book in order to gain a hearing 'without any reference to matters of controversy' or 'an advanced doctrine of angels' found at Qumran or in apocalyptic literature (B. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) 27–8, 37–8). Yet some who affirm this approach reluctantly admit that there were misconceptions about angels in the air that the author perceived to be 'a threat to a belief in a surpassing exaltation of Christ' (Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*, 123–39).

7 Those who discuss the significance of Heb 2.5 include Y. Yadin, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Scripta Hierosolymitana Vol. 4: Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. C. Rabin and Y. Yadin; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1958) 39–40, 45–8; P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ferdmans, 1977) 13–15, 52–3; and J. D. Charles, 'The Angels, Sonship and Birthright in the Letter to the Hebrews', *JTS* 33 (1990) 171–8.

1 For an extensive bibliography of the various views on the purpose of Christ's comparison to the angels in Hebrews, see L. T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995) 124–5.

2 Some believe that Heb 1–2 was intended to oppose the title 'angel' attributed to Christ in the early church (e.g. Justin, *Dial.* 34.2). See A. Bakker, 'Christ an Angel?', *ZNW* 32 (1933) 258–65. Others believe that Christ's rule over the angels (Heb 1.6–9) was meant to distinguish Christ from various exalted angels within Jewish apocalyptic thought. See H. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 51–3 and C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982) 102–13.

3 T. W. Manson, 'The Problem of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *BRL* 32 (1949–50) 1–17. For the evidence that θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων (Col 2.18) refers to the magical veneration of angels practised within syncretistic Judaism, see C. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christian and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996).

eschatology'.<sup>8</sup> The Jews endured their plight under foreign domination by focusing their hopes on a Davidic messiah.<sup>9</sup> The author of Hebrews declares the exalting of Jesus to God's right hand (1.2–3, 13; 10.12) upon the Davidic throne, thereby inaugurating his reign as Messianic king (1.8). Many Jews longed for a new priesthood to provide purification for Israel's sins since the present priesthood had grown corrupt.<sup>10</sup> The author of Hebrews presents Jesus as a permanent priest (7.11–28) who provided complete purification for sins through his perfect sacrifice (1.3; 9.11–14, 26; 10.10–14). Due to the Temple's desecration by violence and a corrupt and politicized priesthood many also expected that the Messianic age would require a renewed or rebuilt Temple.<sup>11</sup> Hebrews declares that Jesus had built a new 'house' (3.1–6; 10.21) with access to the true tabernacle (8.1–10.18) in the heavenly Jerusalem (12.22–4; 13.14) where worshippers could offer sacrifices of praise (12.28; 13.15–16). Prominent in Jewish hopes was also the promise of a militant Messianic 'Son' who would wage war upon the wicked rulers and oppressors of God's people.<sup>12</sup> However, the author of Hebrews uses several Messianic texts (Ps 110.10; Ps 8.4–6) to explain that the Son had 'not yet' subjugated (2.7–9) his enemies under his feet (1.13; 10.11). In this way the author of Hebrews reflects the

8 See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (rev. edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990) 3.

9 Regarding the widespread impact of Davidic messianism in Palestine during the first century AD, see W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM, 1998) and N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 244–338.

10 Many report corruption among the priesthood, including Josephus (*Ant.*, 20.186–7, 216–18, 247), the Qumran texts (1QP Hab 8.8–9.9; 12.2–10; CD 4.17–5.11; 6.15–16) and *T. Levi* 14.5f. For a brief summary of 'the notorious events associated with the high priesthood in the period before AD 70' and their impact on the epistle to the Hebrews, see D. Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997) 316–18. Consequently, many expected a new priest to be raised up who would usher in a new era of holiness (*T. Levi* 18.2–14) and reign as an eternal king (*T. Reub.* 6.8–12). One Qumran text suggests that a priest-like Melchizedek would return to Zion 'to free them from the debt of all their iniquities' (11QM Melch 2.6).

11 Concerning the desecration of the Temple, see Josephus, *B.J.* 5.402; *Ant.* 20.162–7. Consequently many anticipated a restored or rebuilt Temple (Job 14.5–6), especially the Qumran community (e.g. 11QT Temple 29.8–10; 4QFlor 1.2–6). Ezekiel's description of a glorious new Temple (chs 40–48) following the covenant renewal and restoration of Israel to the land under the rule of a Davidic king (36–37) also suggests a rebuilt Temple. See C. A. Evans, 'Jesus' Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption in the First-Century Temple', *SBL 1989 Seminar Papers* (ed. D. J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 522–39, and 'Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?', *CBQ* 51 (1989) 237–70.

12 This militant rule is found throughout both the Messianic 'son of David' texts (Jer 23.5–6; 4 Ezra 12.31–3; 13.29–36; *Ps. Sol.* 17.4–5, 21–46; 4QPla<sup>a</sup> 3.15–25; 4QFlor 1.7–13) and 'son of man' texts (Dan 7.13–14; *Iztaoch* 46.1–6; 62.3–11; 69.27–9). See also K. Atkinson, 'On the Herodian Origin of Militant Davidic Messianism at Qumran: New Light from *Psalms of Solomon* 17', *JBL* 118 (1999) 435–60.

inaugurated-but-yet-future eschatology found elsewhere in the NT.<sup>13</sup> Although the Davidic Son had fulfilled many of the hopes of Israel, his kingdom could not fully be realized until he had 'subjugated' the corrupt institutions of Jewish society. The synoptic traditions warn that this judgment would eventually result in the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple (Matt 23.37–24.28; Mark 13.1–32; Luke 21.5–36).

The author of Hebrews echoes subtle warnings of this coming crisis throughout his letter.<sup>14</sup> In particular, his warning that the unproductive 'land' (γῆ) is 'close to being cursed' (Heb 6.8) could be a reference to the impending destruction of the Jewish homeland.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish leaders had produced 'thorns and thistles' by their rejection and crucifixion of Christ and therefore their nation was doomed to be 'burned' (Heb 6.8).<sup>16</sup> The author's claim that the old covenant was 'near to destruction'<sup>17</sup> (8.13) likewise anticipated the annihilation of the priests, sacrifices,

13 Those who find an already-present-but-yet-future eschatology in the synoptic gospels include G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986) and J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2: *Mentor, Message and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 289–506. Those who see a similar pattern in Hebrews include C. K. Barrett, 'The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube; Cambridge: CUP, 1956) 364–5, 391; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 71–2; B. Fanning, 'A Theology of Hebrews', *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (ed. R. B. Zuck and D. L. Bock; Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994) 404–5, and G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974) 575–7.

14 For a discussion of the many allusions in Hebrews to the coming crisis ending with the destruction of Jerusalem, see R. C. Gleason, 'The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26–31', *JB* 53 (2002) 97–120.

15 The word γῆ in Heb 6.8 may be understood as a reference to 'the land' of Palestine for the following reasons. First, γῆ is commonly used in the LXX for the Hebrew word אֶרֶץ to denote the land of covenant blessing. Second, the author uses γῆ without an article elsewhere in the epistle to designate 'the land of promise' (e.g. 11.9). Third, 'blessing' and 'curse' on the land in Heb 6, 7–8 correspond closely to the language of Deut 11.26–8 where God offers the survivors of the wilderness generation two options: blessing for obedience or a curse for disobedience. The list of the curses for covenant unfaithfulness in Deut 28 conclude with plagues upon the land (γῆ) that make it a place of 'burning waste, unshown and unproductive' (29.23 LXX). Since the blessings of obedience were experienced in relation to the land (28.1–12), disobedience would result in the ultimate destruction of the land as the source of those blessings. The author of Hebrews alludes to this OT background to declare that the sacred land of the Jews would soon become a place of judgment.

16 In response to the Jewish revolt the Romans systematically set fire to cities throughout their campaign, culminating in the burning of Jerusalem and the Temple (*B.J.* 3.132–4; 4.488; 6.275). Consequently, the Roman triumph celebrating the defeat of the Jewish state portrayed it as 'a country still on every side in flames' (*B.J.* 7.145).

17 Though the word ἀφαιρούμενος occurs only here in the NT, it is used frequently in the LXX (56x) to describe the physical destruction of Israel (Jer 12.11; Ezek 6.14; Micah 7.13; Joel 2.13; Jerusalem (Jer 19.8) and the Temple (Dan 9.26; Jdt 4.12). It is never used to denote a gradual

and Temple. His prediction that Christ was coming (10.5) to 'take away' or 'destroy'<sup>18</sup> all the symbols of 'the first' covenant (10.9) may also allude to the imminent crisis coming upon Israel. For the transition from the first to the second covenant was dramatically finalized in AD 70 when the Romans executed the priests, burned the Temple and removed its contents from the land.<sup>19</sup> These themes of an imminent judgment have led some to conclude that the epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> Though scholarship is divided regarding the date of Hebrews, the evidence for a pre-70 date remains compelling.<sup>21</sup> The author's claim that 'the outer tabernacle is still standing' as a symbol for the present time' (Heb 9.8-9) and that its sacrifices continue as a reminder of sins year by year' (10.2-3) suggest that the Temple was still standing.<sup>22</sup>

disappearance, as is suggested by most English renderings of Heb 8.13 (e.g. 'ready to disappear', NASB).

18 The word ἀναπέθω was often used in classical Greek to denote 'killing' or 'destroying' (LSJ, 106). This classical meaning dominates its 23 occurrences in the NT (e.g. Matt 2.16; Luke 22.2; 23.32; Acts 2.33; 5.33; 9.23).

19 Josephus recounts that not only was the Temple burned and demolished (BJL, 6.249-53; 257-66; 7.1-4) but all the Temple furnishings including the gold vessels and purple veils were taken to Rome for display (BJL, 7.160-2). And though the surviving priests begged for their lives, Titus had them put to death (BJL, 6.321-2).

20 See esp. P. W. L. Walker, 'Jerusalem in Hebrews 13:9-14 and the Dating of the Epistle', *TB* 45 (1994) 37-71.

21 Advocates of a pre-70 date include Bruce, *Hebrews*, xlii-xliv; C. W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972) 261; D. A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) xvii-xix; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 30-2; Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 19-21; J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 200-20; C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (2 vols; Paris: Gabalda, 1952) 1.253-61; A. Strobel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 83; H. Trotter, Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997) 33-6; and P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996) 227-32. Those who argue for a later date include R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1997) 696-7; L. Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976) 570; and W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975) 403.

22 Some dismiss the significance of the present tense descriptions of the sacrificial system due to the use of the present tense by Josephus (*Ant.* 3.224-36) and Clement of Rome (*1 Clem.* 4) in their discussions of the Tabernacle long after the demise of the Temple (e.g. J. Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [ICC: Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924] xxii). Others caution against any use of tense to determine the date of composition because Greek tenses refer to verbal aspect rather than time (S. E. Porter, 'The Date of the Composition of Hebrews and the use of the Present Tense-Form', *Crossing the Boundaries* [ed. Porter et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1994] 295-313). However, these indicate only that the dating of Hebrews cannot be established by tense alone. Given the author's strong polemic against returning to the sacrificial system, it is difficult to conclude that the

Furthermore, if the epistle was written after the destruction of the Temple the author's silence on the matter is 'almost inconceivable' since it 'would have clinched his argument . . . that the former covenant had given way to the new'.<sup>23</sup> The warnings against rendering Jesus' sacrifice meaningless through a return to the Jewish sacrifices (6.6; 10.26, 29) make sense only if the Temple was still operational.<sup>24</sup> Also the readers' fears of death (2.15), persecution and ostracism (10.32-6) correspond to the threats used by the Jewish patriots to promote solidarity during their war with Rome (AD 66-70) prior to Jerusalem's destruction.<sup>25</sup> If the epistle to the Hebrews was written during the early years of the Jewish revolt (AD 66-8), the recipients could no doubt 'see the day drawing near' (Heb 10.25) when all these things would be fulfilled. Rather than give in to the Jewish threats by joining in their cause, the readers are exhorted to avoid God's 'vengeance' and judgment upon 'his people' (10.30) by holding firm to their confession of Christ (4.14; 10.23).

Since this reading of the eschatology of Hebrews applies most directly to a Palestinian audience, it is necessary to give brief attention to the question of destination. Some advocate a Roman destination based upon the salutation 'Those from Italy greet you' (13.24).<sup>26</sup> However, the evidence from this greeting is far from conclusive since it could also indicate the letter's origin 'from Italy rather than its destination. The author's emphasis upon the Jewish sacrificial system (Heb 7-10)

sacrifices had already come to an end. His reference to the 'tabernacle' instead of the 'Temple' may have been an attempt to avoid the political sensitivities of Jewish nationalism while still making the point that the coming of Jesus had rendered the sacrificial system obsolete (Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 207-8). Hence, the author's present-tense descriptions of the sacrifices and silence about the destruction of the Temple remain compelling arguments for a pre-70 date.

23 Lindars, *Hebrews*, 20; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 30; Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 202.

24 Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 228.

25 That Christians suffered greatly from Jewish patriots zealous for the law and the Temple is abundantly clear in the NT (e.g. 1 Thess 2.14-16; Acts 6.11-14; 9.1; 12.1-2; 21.28). Josephus recounts the case of James, the brother of Jesus, who was executed by the High Priest for 'having transgressed the law' (*Ant.* 20.200). Violent attacks intensified upon all those who refused to show solidarity with the Jewish resistance prior to the war (*BJL*, 2.264-5). See B. Reicke, 'Judaean-Christianity and the Jewish Establishment, AD 33-66', *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (ed. E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule; Cambridge: CUP, 1985) 145-52.

26 Those who advocate a Roman destination include W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Dallas: Word, 1991) lviii-lx; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964) xxxi-xxxv; and Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 699-701. In addition to the postscript greeting 'from Italy', they commonly appeal to the suffering of the readers (10.32-4) as a reference to expulsion of Jewish Christians from Rome by the edict of Claudius in AD 49 (e.g. Acts 18.2). They also stress the citation of Heb 1 by Clement of Rome as evidence that its earliest readers lived in Rome.

has convinced others of a Palestinian audience.<sup>27</sup> If so, their 'former days' of suffering (Heb 10.32–4) could refer to the Jewish persecution of Christians in Judea following Pentecost (e.g. 1 Thess 2.14–15; Acts 9.1; 12.1–2). The use of the LXX does not preclude Palestinian recipients since Hellenistic Jews made up a significant portion of the early church in Judea (e.g. Acts 6.1–6).<sup>28</sup> Walker suggests that a Palestinian destination would add 'extra poignancy in Hebrews' description of Abraham as an "alien in the promised land" (11.9)', for it would accurately describe the alienation suffered by Palestinian readers from their fellow countrymen.<sup>29</sup> If the exhortation to go 'outside the camp' (13.11, 13) refers to Jerusalem, then bearing the 'reproach' of Christ 'outside the gate' (13.12) would also suggest an audience living in nearby Palestine.<sup>30</sup> However, even if the recipients lived outside the Jewish homeland, the question of Jerusalem's future would be of vital concern for the Jews of the Diaspora since they continued to see the Jewish capital as their centre of worship.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the devastating consequences of the war with Rome were not limited to Palestine. Josephus records how the wrath of Rome fell on many Jewish communities of the Diaspora. The hostilities against Jews that began at Caesarea quickly spread to the cities of Syria (B.J. 2.457–66, 477–9). In Alexandria, Roman legions were permitted not only to plunder and burn Jewish

27 Advocates of a Palestinian destination include Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, 256–60; Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 1.247–50; and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (2 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871–2), 1.21.

28 M. Hengel has convincingly shown that pervasive impact of Hellenism upon Judaism in Palestine (*Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974] 311–12). Furthermore, the Greek biblical texts found at Qumran and Nahal Hever provide ample evidence that Hebrew-speaking Jews living in Palestine also used the LXX. For examples see P. W. Skehan, E. Ulrich and E. Sanderson, *Qumran Cave 4 IV: Paleo-Hebrew and Greek Biblical Manuscripts: Discoveries in the Judaean Desert IX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 161–97 and E. Tov, *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Nahal Hever: Discoveries in the Judaean Desert VIII* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

29 Walker, 'Jerusalem in Hebrews 13:9–14', 68 n. 52.

30 The similar use of 'outside the camp' designating Jerusalem in 4QMMT also reflects a Palestinian setting. It reads: 'We have determined that ... [Jerusalem] is the "camp," and that outside the camp [is "outside of Jerusalem"] ... For Jerusalem is the holy camp. It is the place which He chose from all the tribes of Israel, for [Jerusalem] is the foremost of the camps of Israel' (4QMMT B:29–30; 60–1).

31 Their frequent pilgrimages to the holy city for the feasts (Acts 2.5–11; Josephus, B.J. 6.425; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1.69) and payment of the Temple tax (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.310–13) indicate the great importance of Jerusalem to the Jewish communities scattered throughout the Roman world. See B. Lindars, 'Hebrews and the Second Temple', *Temple Antiquities: Essays on the Second Temple Presented to Ernst Rammell* (ed. W. Horbury; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991) 410–33. Regarding the profound impact of the destruction of the Temple upon the Jewish Diaspora, see M. Goodman, 'Diaspora Reactions to the Destruction of the Temple', *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (ed. J. D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992) 27–38.

homes but also to kill thousands of Jewish inhabitants (B.J. 2.494–8). Following the war, the Jews of Antioch continued to suffer Roman reprisals under Titus (B.J. 7.37–8, 46–62). Hence, regardless of their location, the exhortation to seek the heavenly city (11.10; 12.22; 13.14) rather than the earthly Jerusalem would have been meaningful to the Jewish readers.

### Angels and the intertextuality of Heb 1–2

The author concludes his extraordinary description of the Son in the opening verses of the epistle (1.2–3) by exalting him over the angels (1.4). This begins his contrast between Christ and the angels that dominates the argument and structure of chapters 1–2. An *inclusio* marked by the rhetorical questions 'to which of the angels did He ever say ...?' in 1.5 and 1.13 frames the OT citations he uses to validate the superiority of Christ's Sonship over the angels.<sup>32</sup> Quotations from Ps 2.7, 2 Sam 7.14 and Deut 32.43<sup>33</sup> confirm the uniqueness of God's Son whom the angels worship (Heb 1.5–6). Pss 104.4 and 45.6–7 identify the Son as the divine King whom the angels obey (Heb 1.7–9).<sup>34</sup> Ps 102.26–8 affirms the Son's enduring role as 'Lord' (κύριος) of creation (Heb 1.10–12).<sup>35</sup> And finally, Ps 110.1 proclaims the exalted status of the Son as seated at God's 'right hand' (Heb 1.13).<sup>36</sup> A deeper look into the broader contexts of each OT citation reveals additional elements that

32 G. H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998) 77.

33 Regarding the disputed source of the OT text cited in Heb 1.6, see H. W. Bateman IV, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Hebrews 1:5–13: The Impact of Early Jewish Exegesis on the Interpretation of a Significant New Testament Passage* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) 142–4. In summary, he argues that the LXX text of Deut 32.43 seems to be the most probable source because of its close correspondence to readings found in 4QDeut<sup>a</sup> 32.43b and Odes 2.43.

34 Regarding the use of Ps 45 in Heb 1.8–9 to identify Jesus as the Davidic son promised in the OT (2 Sam 7.4–16; Jer. 23.5–6; 30.9; Ezek 34.24; 37.24–5; Hos 3.5), see H. W. Bateman IV, 'Psalm 45:6–7 and Its Christological Contributions to Hebrews', *Trinity Journal* 22 (2003) 3–21.

35 Since the inner sanctuary and outer courts of the Temple were designed to symbolize 'heaven' and 'earth' (i.e. the land), they functioned as national symbols of the Jewish world. The 'heavens' and 'the earth' of Ps 102 may be a metaphorical reference to the Jerusalem Temple since the psalm's original purpose was to lament the destruction of Solomon's Temple. The Jewish exiles in Babylon are reminded in the psalm that even though the 'stones' of Zion lie in 'dust' (Ps 102.13–14) they should not despair, even though 'earth' and 'heaven' (i.e. the Temple) '... perish ... [and] wear out', yet 'Thou dost endure' – 'Thou art the same and Thy years will not come to an end' (Ps 102.26–7). In a similar way the author of Hebrews appeals to Ps 102 to assure his readers of the stability of Christ as they witness the demise of the Herodian Temple (cf. Heb 12.25–7).

36 The emphasis placed upon Jesus as seated at God's right hand (Heb 1.3; 8.1; 10.12; 12.2) also confirms his exalted position above the 'heavenly host', who are viewed in the OT as 'standing to the right and to the left' of Yahweh's throne (1 Kgs 22.19; 2 Chron 18.18).

contribute to the author's eschatology.<sup>37</sup> Most important to our study are the OT echoes to a great eschatological victory for the exalted Son over his enemies. Ps 2 graphically warns of the Son's wrath (v. 12) that will 'break' the nations 'with a rod of iron', shattering them 'like earthenware' (v. 9). 2 Sam 7 promises that the Lord will 'cut off all [the] enemies' (v. 9) of the Davidic Son. Deut 32 foresees the Lord coming with 'flashing sword' and 'arrows' to 'avenge the blood of His [sons – LXX]' and 'tender vengeance on His adversaries' (vv. 41–3; cf. Heb 10.30). Ps 45 echoes a similar description of the divine warrior armed with a sword (v. 3) and 'sharp arrows' aimed at 'the heart of [his] enemies' (v. 5). Ps 110 is similarly packed with holy war imagery promising victory over the Son's 'enemies' (vv. 1–2, 5–6).<sup>38</sup>

The author continues his angel-comparison in 2.1–4 by contrasting the word spoken through the angels at Sinai with the word spoken by the Lord. He then makes an enigmatic declaration that we will return to later: 'He did not subject to angels the world to come' (v. 5). This is echoed in verse 16 by a similar claim: 'He does not give help to the angels'. These two disclaimers regarding angels mark another *inclusio* framing three additional citations of Ps 8.4–6 (Heb 2.6–8), Ps 22.22 (Heb 2.12) and Isa 8.17–18 (Heb 2.13).<sup>39</sup> These OT texts serve to highlight the solidarity of the Son with his people through his incarnation. However, their broader OT contexts add more to the theme of the Son's eschatological rule. First, the promise of Ps 8.6 to put 'all things in subjection under His feet' (Heb 2.8) echoes the earlier prediction of Ps 110, 'Until I make thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet' (Heb 1.13). The author declares that the 'last days' (Heb 1.1) were inaugurated by the Son's enthronement at God's right hand (1.3, 13a). Yet he also acknowledges a delay in the full realization of the Son's dominion by noting that 'we do not yet see all things subjected to him' (Heb 2.8b; cf. 10.12–13). This anticipates his repeated exhortation to 'hold fast our confidence . . . hope, . . . [and] assurance firm to the end' (3.6, 14; cf. 10.23) when the Son will triumph over his enemies.

37 Recent studies demonstrate that many Jewish interpreters during the NT era quoted from the OT according to its greater original context (e.g. D. I. Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 C.E.* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1982] 167–9). I agree with G. K. Beale that a similar 'contextual exegesis' was practised by the NT authors who quoted 'individual references as signposts to the broad redemptive-historical theme(s) from [their] immediate and larger OT context' ('Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method', *Theologos* 14 [1989] 90–1). See also C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952) 126–7; R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CN: Yale University, 1989) 20; and Bruce, *Hebrews* (1964) 46.

38 For a summary of the holy war terminology used in Ps 110, see Bateman, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Hebrews* 1:5–13, 333 n. 74.

39 A. Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989) 21.

The next OT quotation, 'I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren . . .' (Ps 22.22; Heb 2.12), is taken from a psalm that every first-century Christian would have recognized as a description of Christ's agonising crucifixion (e.g. Mark 15.34; Matt 27.46). Originally this psalm of lament requested deliverance for the righteous from the threat 'of the sword' (vv. 1, 8, 20–1). The psalmist cries out in verse 11 for 'help' (βοηθῶν – LXX) from his enemies that surround him (vv. 12, 16). The turning point of the lament comes with his call to the Lord – 'O Thou my help (βοηθῆσον – LXX)' (Ps 22.19). The psalmist's theme of 'help'<sup>40</sup> is echoed by the author of Hebrews in his repeated exhortation to seek 'help' (βοηθησατω) from the incarnate Son (2.17–18; cf. 4.16). In this way the broader message of Ps 22 served to assure the NT readers while they awaited the Son's triumph over his (and their) enemies. Furthermore, Ps 22 reinforced the author's stress in context upon the Son's own suffering (2.9–10, 18), which uniquely qualified him to render 'help' to his brethren.

The OT context of the citation of Isa 8.17–18 (Heb 2.13) was also useful because it immediately follows an oracle (Isa 8.11–15) warning the prophet Isaiah to look to the Lord for 'sanctuary' rather than the city of Jerusalem (Isa 8.14). Since the Lord was about to bring judgment upon the land through the Assyrians (Isa 8.7–8), Jerusalem was declared to be 'a snare and a trap' for its 'inhabitants' (Isa 8.14–15). This introduces to the readers of Hebrews the notion that God was again bringing judgment upon the Jewish nation by means of a foreign power. The thought of Jerusalem as 'a trap' anticipates the author's later exhortation to 'go outside the camp' (13.11), for Jerusalem would soon be destroyed (13.14).

These OT echoes of a great eschatological war waged by the Son serve as a fitting prelude to the author's later allusions to the coming judgment upon Jerusalem and the Temple (Heb 6.7–8; 8.13; 10.9, 13, 25–31, 39; 12.25–7). However, the author's denial that the angels would share in this coming subjugation (2.5) alerts us to the importance of this eschatological war to his comparison of Christ to the angels. Many have linked Heb 2.5 to the Jewish belief in national angels.<sup>41</sup> This was based in part on the claim in Deut 32.8 that God had established boundaries for the nations 'according to the number of the sons of God' ('angels of God' – LXX).<sup>42</sup> There may be traces of this idea in Deut 4.19 ('all the host of heaven . . .

40 This is reflected in the LXX title of the psalm, 'For help in the morning' (ὄψερ τῆς ἀντιλάμπουρος τῆς ἑσθρινῆς).

41 Examples include Bruce, *Hebrews*, 71; P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993) 146–7; Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, 45; Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2:30; and D. E. Stevens, 'La notion juive des "anges des nations" à la lumière du texte biblique' (Ph.D. diss.: Vaux-sur-Seine: Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique, 1998), 238–47.

42 Though the MT reads בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים (sons of Israel), the Qumran reading (4QDeut<sup>93</sup>) בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים (sons of God) seems the more probable text underlying the LXX reading ἀγγέλων

God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven') and the expression 'gods of the nations' (2 Kgs 18.33; 19.12; Isa 36.11). However, the notion of guardian angels set over nations is expressed most dramatically in the book of Daniel.<sup>43</sup> It recounts how Daniel mourned for three weeks over the desolation of Jerusalem until an angelic messenger arrived with a message of encouragement for him (Dan 10.2–12). The angel explained that he was delayed by 'the Prince of Persia' for 21 days until Michael 'came to help' (מִיכָאֵל – βοηθῶ IXX) him (Dan 10.13). After delivering his message the angel informed Daniel that he must 'return to fight against the Prince of Persia [and] Greece' (10.20). The Daniel account suggests belief in national angels in several ways. First, the angel Michael is described as 'one of the chief princes (Dan 10.13) ... who stands [guard] over' the Jewish nation (Dan 12.1).<sup>44</sup> This corresponds to the ancient Jewish belief in angelic guardians standing watch along the borders of the Promised Land (e.g. Gen 28.12–17; 32.1–2, 25; Num 22.22–3, 31; Josh 5.13–15). Second, many have understood the 'prince of Persia [and] Greece' (10.13, 20) to refer to malevolent national angels due to their clear parallel with Michael.<sup>45</sup> These angel traditions in Deuteronomy and Daniel gave rise to the belief in angels set over nations within Second Temple Judaism (e.g. *T. Levi* 5.3–7; *Enoch* 56.5–6; *Jub.* 15.31–2).<sup>46</sup>

The question naturally arises, 'What eschatological role could his readers have mistakenly attributed to the angels?' This question must be answered by

<sup>43</sup> θεοὶ ('angels of God') known and accepted by Philo (*Post.* 89). For a detailed analysis of the textual evidence favouring the Qumran reading 'sons of God', see M. S. Heiser, 'Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God', *BSac* 158 (2001) 52–74.

<sup>44</sup> Many have understood Dan 10 to refer to guardian angels set over nations since the time of Origen (*Homilies on Luke*, 35). For modern examples see J. J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 374–5; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Daniel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1900) 157; M. Delcor, *Le Livre de Daniel* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie Éditeurs, 1971) 205; C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872) 416–19; Stevens, 'La notion juive', 101–59; *idem*, 'Daniel 10 and the Notion of Territorial Spirits', *BSac* 157 (2000) 410–31, and T. Longman III, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 250–1.

<sup>45</sup> The context indicates that Gabriel may be included among the angelic 'chief princes' of Israel (Dan 8.16; 9.20).

<sup>46</sup> Though the title 'prince' (מֶלֶךְ) is used elsewhere in Daniel to refer to human leaders (1.7–11, 18; 9.6, 8; 11.5), there are several indications that it may refer to celestial beings in 10.13, 20. First, the archangel Michael is called a 'prince' (מֶלֶךְ) in the context (10.13; 12.1). Second, the IXX translates (מֶלֶךְ) with the word ἀρχὼν, a common term used in intertestamental literature (*Jub.* 10.1–13; *1 Enoch* 21.5; 61.10–11; 75.1; 80.6–7) and the NT (John 12.31; Rom 8.38; 1 Cor 15.54; Eph 1.21–2; 2.21) to designate angelic powers. See Stevens, 'Daniel 10 and the Notion of Territorial Spirits', 415–18.

<sup>47</sup> See D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 244–9, and L. T. Stuckenbruck, 'Angels of the Nations', *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds* (ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 29–31.

examining Heb 2.5 in the context of the author's OT citations. Key to unravelling its meaning is the verb ὑποτάσσω, used twice in the context to denote 'subjection'. Its first occurrence in Heb 2.5 is related contextually to its second use in the citation of Ps 8.4–6 (Heb 2.6–8a). The author appeals to Ps 8 to show how God had promised to place all things in subjection under the feet of the 'son of God' (Ps 8.6). This echoes back to the earlier citation of Ps 110.1 where God promised to place his enemies under the Messiah's feet (1 Heb 1.13). The Messianic implication of linking these two OT texts was clear to the readers. Jesus would soon exercise his rule as Davidic king by defeating his enemies. Since the meaning of ὑποτάσσω in Ps 8.6 is linked to the act of ruling by defeating God's enemies in Ps 110.1 (Heb 1.13), then its use in Heb 2.5 must be understood the same way. This sense of ὑποτάσσω is further confirmed by the eschatological war motif observed earlier in the greater contexts of the other OT citations. The only discernible difference in meaning between the two uses of the verb in Heb 2.5–6 is that the first applies negatively to angels and the second applies positively to Christ. In summary, the author's point is that angels will not rule by defeating the enemies of God in the coming age.<sup>47</sup> This role is reserved exclusively for the Son. To more fully understand the need for such a denial regarding angels we must now turn to the apocalyptic angelology that flourished within Second Temple Judaism.

### Jewish apocalyptic angelology

Angels appear sporadically throughout the OT as God's agents. They revealed messages to his prophets (1 Kgs 13.18; Ezek 9.1–7; Zech 1.9–14, 19; 2.3; Dan 7.16; 9.21–2), provided protection for his people (Gen. 19.11; 2 Kgs 6.15–18; Dan. 6.22), and executed judgment upon his enemies (Gen 19.12ff.; Num 22.33; 2 Sam 24.16; Ps 35.3–6; 78.49; Isa 37.36).<sup>48</sup> Later Jewish literature evidences a growing fascination with these mysterious creatures. This is particularly true in the apocalyptic writings of the Second Temple period where speculation regarding the

<sup>47</sup> Rather than 'heaven' or 'future life', the noun οὐρανός commonly denotes 'the inhabited earth' (i.e. the Roman world) in the NT (Luke 2.1; Acts 1.28; 17.6; 19.27; 24.5). The eschatological connotations of its modifier, μελλούσων (cf. Heb 6.5; 10.1), would suggest that the coming world order is in view. In light of the Messianic allusions throughout the context, Buchanan accurately defines it as 'the messianic age ... when the Romans would be subdued, and the Messiah would rule as king from his throne at Jerusalem' (*Hebrews*, 26).

<sup>48</sup> The NT presents the same pattern of angels bearing divine messages (Matt 1.20; Acts 8.26; Rev 5.2), protecting God's people (Matt 28.53; Acts 12.7–11), and executing divine judgment (Matt 13.49; Acts 12.23; Rev 8.6). For a complete list of the functions of angels in the OT, see M. Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1932) esp. 60–1.

numbers, names, and functions of the angelic hosts reached new heights.<sup>49</sup> Most important to our study is the increasing role attributed to angelic protectors during times of national crisis.

#### *Angels and national deliverance*

A nationalistic eschatology rooted in OT promises of divine deliverance flourished among various groups within Second Temple Judaism. This common hope fuelled the rise of nationalism, leading to the first Jewish revolt in AD 66–70. Christopher Rowland explains: 'One factor which played a part in the disastrous events of that time was the desperate conviction that God was going to intervene on the side of his people and destroy those who were so sorely besetting them.'<sup>50</sup> The prominent role of angels in Israel's deliverance is evident in much of the Jewish literature circulating in Palestine by the first century AD. The clearest example is the *War Scroll* (1QM) found at Qumran.<sup>51</sup> This remarkable text provides a vivid example of the apocalyptic worldview commonly found within contemporary Judaism. It foretells a great eschatological war consisting of seven battles between the sons of light (that is, the members of the community, or *Yahad*), and the sons of darkness (that is, the Romans, or *Kittim*, and wicked Israelites). God eventually triumphs over 'Belial [i.e. Satan] and all [his] angels' by destroying 'all the men of his forces . . . forever' (1QM 1.14). The elaborate descriptions of this bloody conflict frequently mention the presence of 'holy angels' fighting alongside the sons of light (e.g. 1QM 7.5; 12.3, 8; 4Q491 fr. 3.1, 10). In the final battle God sends 'help' (עזרה) through Michael the archangel, who leads them and their angelic escorts to a decisive victory. Another Qumran text (4Q529) records Michael encouraging 'the angels' with the report of an elite angelic force defending Mount Zion, declaring: 'I found there fiery troops.'<sup>52</sup> As a reward for his victory God promises to 'exalt the authority of Michael among the gods' (1QM 17.7–8). This ensures Michael a prominent role among the angelic hosts in the world to come. The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (4Q400–407) found at both Qumran and

Masada echo the same theme of angelic troops led by their 'warrior' God (4Q403 fr. 1.1–3) in armed conflict against his enemies (4Q402 fr. 4.5–10). As they march out from their military-style camps into battle (4Q405 fr. 22.7–14), these angelic armies offer continuous worship to God, exalting him for his 'warrior acts' (11Q17 fr. 5.6.3–9).<sup>53</sup>

The theme of angels waging war against the enemies of Israel is also prominent within the apocalyptic literature of the same period. The book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1–33) begins by announcing that God is coming 'with ten million holy ones . . . to execute judgement' (1.7). Later Suru'el, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqat'el and Gabriel are introduced as the angels who stand watch over God's people (20.1–7) and lead these holy ones coming to destroy the enemies of God (13.1–21).<sup>54</sup> The Similitudes of 1 Enoch likewise predict that in the last days God will send out 'the angels of plague' with 'chains' to execute judgment upon 'the kings and the potentates of this earth' (53.4–5).<sup>55</sup> Led by 'Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Phanuel' (54.6), these angels will usher in a time of peace when the righteous of Israel 'shall have rest from the oppression of sinners' (53.7). The episode of Enoch (1 Enoch 91–105) also promises that when the Most High executes judgment upon the wicked, 'He will set a guard of holy angels over all the righteous, . . . and they shall keep them as the apple of the eye' (100.4–5). The hope of angelic intervention is further indicated in the *Testament of Levi* (second cent. BCE), where Levi's angelic guide identifies himself as the one 'who makes intercession for the nation of Israel, that they might not be beaten' (5.3–6). Similarly, the *Testament of Naphtali* (second cent. BCE) predicts the deliverance of Israel, promising that if they 'be in unity with Levi and Judah [8.2] . . . the angels will stand with them' (8.4). Though the supremacy of God is generally maintained throughout apocalyptic literature, angels are given an increasingly prominent role in fighting on behalf of God's people.

Other examples include Judas Maccabeus's miraculous deliverance by five men 'from heaven' during his battle with the Idumeans:

When the battle became fierce, there appeared to the enemy from heaven five resplendent men on horses with golden bridles, and they were leading the Jews. Two of them took Maccabeus between them, and shielding him with their own armour and weapons, they kept him from being wounded. They showered arrows and thunderbolts on the enemy, so that, confused

53 See Davidson, *Angels at Qumran*, 246–7.

54 The book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36) was in circulation in Palestine as early as the 2nd century BCE, as evidenced by the relatively large number of Qumran manuscripts (7) containing parts of it.

55 Though the book of Similitudes (37–71) is the only part of 1 Enoch not found at Qumran, most date it no later than the 1st century AD. See J. J. Collins, 'The Books of Enoch', *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds*, ed. Evans and Porter, 316.

49 Concerning the impact of apocalyptic literature upon Jewish angelology, see Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 240–62. Regarding angels in the Qumran material, see J. J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997) 130–49, and M. J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1–36, 72–108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992) 142–285.

50 Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 31.

51 See Davidson, *Angels at Qumran*, 228–32.

52 See Edward Cook's introduction to 4Q529 in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (ed. M. Wise, M. Abegg, Jr. and E. Cook; San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996) 427. This may help to explain Josephus's cryptic reference to priests who, while serving in the Temple before its destruction, heard mysterious unseen beings declaring 'We are departing from here' (BJ, 6.300). The departure of angels assigned to protect the Temple served as a fitting omen of its imminent destruction.

and blinded, they were thrown into disorder and cut to pieces. (2 Macc 10.29–30)

Similarly, Philo appeals to the Jewish hope of angelic warriors under the direction of their divine ‘Captain’ protecting Israel (*Conf.* 175). Among the omens of coming destruction, Josephus records that heavenly armies were seen in the clouds during the Roman siege of Jerusalem:

There appeared a miraculous phenomenon, passing belief. Indeed, what I am about to relate would, I imagine, have been deemed a fable, were it not for the narratives of eyewitnesses and for the subsequent calamities which deserved to be so signalised. For before sunset throughout all parts of the country chariots were seen in the air and armed battalions hurtling through the clouds and encompassing the cities (*B.J.* 6.297–9).<sup>56</sup>

If interpreted in the light of Elisha’s ‘chariots of fire’ surrounding his city for protection from the King of Aram (2 Kgs 6.15–19), such reports may have reassured the misguided hopes of the Jewish defenders of an imminent angelic rescue.

The denial that God ‘did not subject to angels the world to come’ (Heb 2.5) was a direct challenge to the prominence of angels in the national hopes of Israel. No angelic army would come to deliver the Jewish patriots from their Roman oppressors. Instead the Jewish nation would experience the judgment of God for their covenant unfaithfulness. The Son’s coming victory over those who rejected him would culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as predicted by Jesus (Matt 23.37–24.28; Mark 13.1–32; Luke 21.5–36). This corresponds to the verdict of ancient historians that the destruction of Jerusalem was an act of God and the Romans were mere instruments of divine wrath.<sup>57</sup>

#### *Jewish reliance upon angels*

The denial of ‘help to angels’ (2.16) prepares the readers for the promise of ‘help’ from Jesus (2.17–18; cf. 4.18). The author concludes chapter 2 with Christ’s high-priestly role that uniquely qualified him to ‘help’ his readers overcome their present difficulties. His use of the word ‘help’ (βοηθήω) is significant in several ways. First, it echoes the OT emphasis upon Yahweh as the ‘helper’ (עֲזָרָה) of Israel (Exod 18.4; Deut 33.7, 26; 1 Sam 7.12; Pss 115.9–11; 146.5). This is demonstrated by the fact that עֲזָרָה is commonly translated by cognates of the verb βοηθήω throughout

56 The meticulous Roman historian Tacitus echoes the same account: ‘In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armour’ (*Histories* 5.13).

57 Josephus records the confession of one surviving rebel leader, Eleazar, who attributed the burning of the city not to the Romans but to God as punishment for their many sins (*B.J.* 7.332–3). Likewise the early church considered the fall of Jerusalem as ‘the judgement of God . . . for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles’ (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.5.3; cf. *Barn.* 16.1–2). Unfortunately, this notion has been tragically misused to justify anti-Semitic atrocities against Jews for centuries.

the LXX. Generally, βοηθήω was used in the OT to indicate military assistance (Josh 10.6; 1 Sam 7.12; 1 Chr 5.20; Pss 46.5; 79.9). Its cognates often denote God’s eschatological deliverance of Israel (Isa 41.10, 13, 14; 44.2; 49.8; 59.7, 9; 63.5). The term also signified divine assistance to the poor (Ps 72.12) and fatherless (Ps 10.14), healing of the sick (Ps 28.7), and personal protection (Pss 54.4; 86.17). Hence, courage during times of crisis often came with the realization that Yahweh was the ‘helper’ (עֲזָרָה; βοηθός – LXX). The author of Hebrews picked up on this important OT theme by encouraging his readers to come to Jesus for ‘help’ (2.18; 4.16). His point is that Jesus had assumed the role of Yahweh as the ‘helper’ of his covenant people. He made this clear in his later citation of Ps 118.6, ‘The Lord is my helper (βοηθός), I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’ (Heb 13.6). The vagueness of the English word ‘help’ weakens its impact in modern translations. The author intended his readers not merely to look to Jesus for a helping hand as they faced their present crisis. Rather, he wanted them to hold fast to Jesus as the sovereign Lord (κύριος) of the OT who faithfully exercised the full weight of his divine power to deliver his people from threats of persecution, violence, and death.<sup>58</sup>

Second, the author’s exhortation to seek ‘help’ from Christ must be understood in light of the widespread reliance upon angels for personal protection and health. The practice of seeking ‘help’ from angels is well attested within both Jewish and Christian literature during the Greco-Roman period. The prominence of the archangel Raphael in the story of Tobit (3rd–2nd cent. BC) provides an early example of the expanding roles assigned to angels for exorcism (Tob 8.3), protection (12.3), and healing (3.17; 12.14). Raphael is clearly identified as the primary source of help from God in the story by his alias name, Azariah (5.12; 6.6, 13; 7.1), derived from the Hebrew term רָפָא (‘to help’). The growing tendency to venerate angels is evidenced by Tobit’s offer of praise to ‘all the holy angels’ (11.14). Angels were also regarded as intercessors before God within Jewish apocalyptic literature. *1 Enoch* claimed that ‘the holy angels’ in heaven ‘interceded and petitioned and prayed on behalf of the children of the people’ (39.5; cf. 47.2; 104.1). Therefore, worshippers are encouraged ‘to raise up [their] prayers . . . before the angels’ since they ‘bring [their] sins . . . before the Most High’ (*1 Enoch* 99.3). According to the *Testament of Levi* the archangels ‘functioned as heavenly priests offering ‘propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord in behalf . . . of the righteous’ (3.5). The reliance upon angels is also affirmed in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (AD 1st–2nd cent.). This popular

58 Similarly Philo uses βοηθός as a divine title to comfort the Jews of the Diaspora: ‘When amid the wars and ills of life you see the merciful hand and power of God extended over you as a shield (βοηθός), be still’ (*Somm.* 2.265).

59 The use of κύριος in Hebrews indicates the author’s intent here to identify Jesus as Yahweh of the OT (Heb 1.10; 7.14; 8.8, 10, 11; 10.16; 13.6, 20).



work, which nearly achieved canonical status within the early church, reports Hermes's numerous encounters with angels (*Vis.* 3.2), including Segri, who delivered him from a demonic beast (*Vis.* 4.2), and his angelic 'shepherd' guide (*Vis.* 5), who revealed to him a series of parabolic visions.

Inscriptions on amulets from the Greco-Roman period further confirm the widespread reliance upon angels for exorcisms, healing, and protection among the Jewish population.<sup>60</sup> The importance of protective amulets during times of national crisis is evidenced by their use among the Jewish soldiers in the army of Judas Maccabeus.<sup>61</sup> Most significant to our study are a number of amulets from Palestine and Syria that contain the following inscription on the front and back: 'One God who conquers evil' (ἐἷς θεὸς ὁ νικῶν τὰ κακά) and 'Iaō Sabaōth Michael, help' (Ἰαὼ Σαβαώθ Μιχαήλ βοηθῆ).<sup>62</sup> These illustrate the common use of the verb βοηθῆ ('to help')<sup>63</sup> to request assistance from angels.<sup>64</sup> Similar inscriptions on Christian amulets from the Greco-Roman period indicate that the Jewish reliance upon angels eventually became widely accepted within the early Christian community. Examples include Christian amulets containing prayers to angels for protection, curses, good luck, and healing.<sup>65</sup> Their inscriptions often list

60 Since many of the amulets used below to illustrate a dependence upon angels within Jewish communities date from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, some may question their value to illuminate the 1st-century background of NT writings. However, since some of the evidence cited here is pre-Christian (e.g. *Tobit*; *i Enoch*), later material can accurately reveal the trajectory of development of earlier beliefs during the intervening period. Furthermore, Greek amulets with similar petitions for deliverance found dating back to the classical period reveal the great antiquity of such practices (e.g. R. Kotansky, 'Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets', *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (ed. C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (Oxford: OUP, 1991) 107–40). Regarding the date of evidence for Jewish dependence upon angels, see Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 17–20, 32–60.

61 When Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen ... under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens [i.e. amulets] of the idols of Iamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear' (2 Macc 12:39–40).

62 See C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950) nos. 238, 299, 300, 309 (minus Βοηθῆ), and E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 3, *Illustrations* (New York: Pantheon, 1953) no. 1049. The five nearly identical amulets cited here give some indication of the popularity of this inscription.

63 A comparison of amulet inscriptions in Bonner's work (*Magical Amulets*) reveals the common use of the contract verb βοηθῆ (present active imperative, 2nd sing.), reflecting the change of ending from the standard 'εἶ' to 'ι' (i.e. itacism).

64 Other angelic names commonly used on amulets include Gabriel, Ouriel, and Raphael (Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, nos. 310, 339, 342).

65 See M. Meyer and R. Smith, eds, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999) nos. 23, 24, 29, 54. The use of amulets throughout the early church is evident from their frequent prohibition by the church fathers (e.g. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 2.29.45; Chrysostom, *Adv. Iudaeos*, Hom. 8, 5). See B. M.

angelic names of power together with Jesus in order to add to their potency for the bearer.<sup>66</sup> These syncretistic practices highlight the relevance of the exaltation of Christ over angels in the book of Hebrews. Rather than seek help from angels during their present crisis, the readers are encouraged to come to the exalted Son who 'has inherited a more excellent name than they' (Heb 1.4). For Jesus is 'The Lord [their] Helper (βοηθός)' (Heb 13.6) and therefore able to 'aid' (βοηθήσαι) them (2.18) and provide 'help (βοηθεῖται) in time of need' (4.16).

### Conclusion

The excessive reliance upon angels within Second Temple Judaism posed a threat to the pre-eminence of Christ among Jewish Christians of the first century. The attraction of Jewish nationalism during the first Jewish revolt was fuelled by the apocalyptic vision of a great eschatological war in which angelic armies were expected to play a prominent role in overcoming the enemies of Israel. The author of Hebrews saw a very different scenario of coming events. Rather than a Jewish victory over the Romans, the author anticipated the imminent destruction of the land (Heb 6.7–8), the Temple (8.13), and Jerusalem (13.14) as predicted by Jesus (Matt 23.37–24.28; Mark 13.1–32; Luke 21.5–36). Rather than place their confidence in an angelic rescue of the Jewish homeland, he encouraged his readers to fix their hope on Jesus for deliverance from the coming destruction (Heb 3.6; 6.11, 18–19; 7.19; 10.23; 12.2). On a personal level the author also challenged the practice of invoking angels for help from the threat of physical harm. The Son's enthronement at God's right hand identified him as the Lord (κύριος) of the OT, the 'helper' (βοηθός) of his people (Heb 13.6). Rather than be merely a part of his rhetorical strategy, the author's comparison of Christ to the angels served a vital purpose. For if his audience embraced the popular Jewish reliance upon angels, they might fail to receive the necessary 'help' (Heb 2.18; 4.16) from Jesus Christ to live faithfully in the 'last days' (Heb 1.1).<sup>67</sup>

Metzger, 'A Magical Amulet for Curing Fevers', *Studies and Documents* (ed. I. Geerlings; Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1967) 89–94.

66 For example, one dating from around AD 300 states: 'I invoke you, O god almighty, who is above every ruler and authority and lordship and every name that is named, ... through our lord Jesus Christ, the beloved child. Send [out] to me, O master, your [holy] archangels, ... Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Sarnel, Ragucl, Ouriel, Anael. And let them accompany me today, ... and grant me victories, favor, ... [and] success with all people' (Meyer and Smith, eds, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 36). Other examples show that Jesus was entreated as one among many within the divine counsel of beings. See A. Henrichs and K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, vol. 2 (2nd edn; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1924) 209–32.

67 This is an expanded version of my paper originally presented orally to the Hebrews Study Group at the 52nd annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 15–17, 2000, Nashville TN. I wish to express my thanks to Calvin Redmond, Martin Abegg and Douglas Penney for their helpful suggestions that have improved the article.