

THE KINGSHIP MOTIF IN HEBREWS

Introduction

The Epistle to the Hebrews has a high Christology. Again and again it talks about Christ's superiority: Christ is superior to the angels, to Moses, to the Aaronitic priesthood. The ministry of Christ is described from his pre-existence until his *parousia*, although there is much more stress on his ministry in the time in between. "The distinctive contribution of the Epistle to the Hebrews lies in its strong emphasis on both the humanity and the divinity of Christ."¹ We are especially interested in the kingship motif in Hebrews.

However Christ is never explicitly called king in this epistle. So we will first of all try to find some allusions to the kingship motif, expressions which are connected with the office of a king. Then we will look for an arrangement in clusters. We have to consider OT quotations used in this context by the author of Hebrews, to take a look at the structure of the units containing the kingship motif, and to regard the connections of kingship and priesthood. Finally, we will ask for the significance of Christ's kingly ministry for the readers of this letter. This may, by the way, be important too for our personal relationship to a living Christ.

I. Terms Indicating the Kingship Motif

In reading and studying the Letter to the Hebrews we notice some significant words which are connected with a kingly office or ministry. These terms are:

1. Sitting at the right hand of the majesty (Heb 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2)
2. Throne (Heb 1:8)
3. Scepter (Heb 1:8)
4. Kingdom (Heb 1:8)
5. Making the enemies a footstool for the feet (Heb 1:13; 10:13)
6. Crowned with glory and honor (Heb 2:7,9)
7. In subjection to him (Heb 2:5,8)
8. Like Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Heb 7:1ff.)

¹ Mealand "The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews", *Modern Churchman* 1979 (22):194.

There may be also allusions in Heb 4:14 (“passed through the heavens”), Heb 4:16 (“the throne of grace”), Heb 7:26 (“exalted above the heavens”), Heb 7:28 (“appointed the son”), and in the mentioning of Melchizedek (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1,10,11,15,17). So, the Letter to the Hebrews is rich with the kingship motif. Some remarks to the just mentioned expressions:

ad (1) The verb *kadzō* (to sit, to sit down, to seat oneself, to set down) occurs four times in Hebrews (1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2) and is always connected with the throne of God (at the right hand of God). *Kathēmai* (to sit, to sit down) is found once in Hebrews and is also used in connection with the throne of God (Heb 1:13). In all cases Jesus is seated “at the right hand” (*en dexia*) of the Majesty” (Heb 1:3), “at my right hand” (Heb 1:13), “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty” (Heb 8:1), “at the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12), “at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). *En dexia* which is found nine times in the NT, refers always to the throne of God (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; 1Pt 3:22, beside the five places in Hebrews). It is always a quotation from Ps 110:1. *Ek dexiōn* is used ten times for the right hand of God (Ps 110:1), ten times for the right side of Jesus, and once for the right side of the altar. Sitting at the right hand of God means to partake in his government.¹

ad (2) *Thronos* occurs in Hebrews four times. In Heb 1:8 it is the throne of Christ. The throne of God is clearly spoken of in Heb 8:1 and Heb 12:2 (cf. the connection with “being seated at the right hand...”) and probably also in Heb 4:16.² In any case, Jesus has a royal throne. Heb 1:8 is a quotation of Ps 45:7f.

ad (3) *Rabdos* (scepter) can be a staff of reed or wood for measure (Rev 11:1), a stick for beating (1Cor 4:21), a shepherd’s staff (Rev 2:27), a traveler’s staff (Mk 6:8), a staff for the support of an old man (Heb 11:21), the building rod of Aaron³ (Heb 9:4), and finally a scepter. In

¹A. Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ, Hébreux 1-2* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1969), 85: “Siéger aux cotés d’un personnage qui exerce l’autorité, c’est prendre part à cette autorité... la participation la plus complète possible au pouvoir divin.”

²In the entire NT *thronos* is found 62 times, in Rev 47 times. Nine times it is the throne of Jesus. With some exceptions the bulk of the remainder speaks of God’s throne.

³Midr. Exo 16:32f reads: “It was created on the evening of the first Sabbath, served as a scepter for the kings and will come back again in the Messianic kingdom.” - G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, (eds.), *Theological Dictionary to the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 970. Both Aaron’s rod and the scepter of Jesus are mentioned in Heb although without reference to each other.

Heb 1:8 it is without question a royal scepter. A “scepter is an expression of the legitimate rule which demands respect.”¹ The term scepter is not only used in Ps 45:7f. which is quoted in Heb 1:8, but also in Ps 110:2 and Ps 2:9.²

- ad (4) *Basileia* (kingdom): There are the kingdoms of the world (Heb 11:33), but there is also the kingdom of Christ (Heb 1:8). Therefore the saints can also receive “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb 12:28). Although the word “king” is not explicitly used of Christ the Letter to the Heb knows at least his kingdom. Again it is quoted from Ps 45:7f.
- ad (5) The “footstool”--*hupopodion*--is used as a part of a quotation from Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:13 and 10:13, but also in Lk 20:43 and Acts 2:35.³ Again we have the kingship motif. The enemies are totally subjected to the Lord.
- ad (6) Furthermore, Jesus is crowned--*stephanoō* (Heb 2:7.9). The verb occurs only three times in the NT, the noun 18 times. *Stephanos* is the crown of thorns (Mt 27:29), the crown of victory (1Cor 9:25) and the crown of life (Rev 2:10), the golden crown of the Son of Man (Rev 14:14), etc. Jesus is crowned with honor and glory - *doxē kai timē*. The quotation from Ps 8:4-6 is referred to Jesus and his exaltation.
- ad (7) Heb 2:8: “...putting everything in subjection under his feet”. The verb used here is *hupotassō*, “to subject”, “to place under”. It occurs once in Heb 2:5 and three times in Heb 2:8. There also the related adjective *anhupotaktos* is found. Again Ps 8:4-6 is quoted. But the phrase “in subjection under his feet” reminds us also of Heb 1:13 and the quotation from Ps 110:1: “...till he makes thy enemies a stool for thy feet”. So, there is a logical connection between Ps 8 and Ps 110 and therefore between Heb 1 and Heb 2. Beside Rom 8:20 “all the other active statements (of *hupotassō*) are christological. They stand in express relation to Ps 8:6 in 1Cor 15; Heb 2; Eph 1. The christological interpretation of this verse is based on Ps 110:1,

¹Kittel, 970; cf. also 967ff.

²Cf., Rev 12:5; 19:15; 2:26.

³In Mt 5:35 and Acts 7:49 the earth is God’s footstool. The only other use of the noun is in Jam 2:3 : “Sit at my feet.”

as may be seen from 1Cor 15:25.27".¹

ad (8) Melchizedek, the king of Salem, the king of peace and righteousness is compared with Christ (Heb 7:1-3). Jesus is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 7:17). Interestingly enough the same psalm is quoted here, with which we were confronted again and again--Ps 110. In this case the author of Hebrews refers to v. 4. Melchizedek was king--*basileus*--and priest. He was a priest-king. Ps 110:1 stresses the kingly aspect, Ps 110:4 the priestly. Both belong together. Although in the moment we are more interested in the kingship, we may not totally separate it from the priesthood. A link to another royal psalm is the term "righteousness" in Heb 7:2, which occurs in Heb 1:8 and is a quotation from Ps 45:7f.

So far we have found that Hebrews is rich with the kingship motif. The kingship however is not an isolated office. Christ as king is in reality a priest-king as shown by the author.

II. Important Passages

1. Their OT Quotations

All the kingship motifs that we have found are based on OT citations, almost entirely taken from the Psalms. Only the possible allusions in Heb 4:14.16; 7:26 are exceptions. We have mentioned Ps 8,45 and 110 as sources of the kingship motif. We also referred to Ps 2 as a parallel text.² In fact, Ps 2 is quoted in Heb 1:5; 5:5; 7:28.³ It is a royal psalm like Ps 45 and 110. On the other hand, Ps 8 does not belong to the category of royal psalms. Ps 110 is used the most often. "It is quoted repeatedly in this letter; indeed, if we regard the letter as a written homily, we might think of Ps 110:1 as its text".⁴ This becomes very clear when we look at the frequent quotations of Ps 110. Ps 110:1 is cited in Heb 1:3.13; 8:1; 10:12,13; 12:2. "Sit at my right hand till I make thy enemies a

¹ G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, (eds.), *Theological Dictionary to the New Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 41. The exact texts are 1Cor 15:27f; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:5.8. But also Phil 3:21 and 1Pt 3:22 stress the fact that Christ is able to subject all powers and that the angels are already subordinated to him.

²Cf., the discussion on scepter.

³Also in Mt 3:17; Acts 4:25,26; 6:15; 11:15; 13:33; 17:18; 19:19; 2Pt 1:17; Rev 2:26; 11:18; 12:5; 19:15.

⁴F. F. Bruce, "The Kerygma of Hebrews," *Interpretation* 1969, 23 (1):7.

stool for thy feet.” Ps 110:4 is quoted in Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:3,11,15,17,21,24,28. “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’” Whereas Ps 110:1 is used by many NT authors¹, Ps 110:4 is found only in Hebrews. Ps 45:7f. is only used in Heb 1:8f.: “Thy throne, o God, is forever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom...” Ps 8 is mentioned in Heb 2:6-9.² “What is man that thou art mindful of him...” All these OT texts are now referred to Jesus Christ. They talk about his kingship³ and partly about his priesthood. But Ps 110 is the thread through the entire book of Hebrews--from the beginning to the end--, it emphasizes Christ’s ministry as priest-king. “...the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God is elaborated here as nowhere else in the NT.”⁴

- (1) *2Sam. 7:14*. In this chapter we have God’s promise of David concerning his royal house (Davidic covenant). God will always provide a Davidic king. The text is used in Heb 1:5 to prove the superiority of Jesus. In its ultimate sense only Jesus could be called son of God but not an ordinary descendant of David.
- (2) *Ps 2:7*. Ps 2 refers to the covenant with David concerning the kingship. Thus it is a royal psalm. It depicts the theocratic ruler in conflict with the nations. The king stands in a special relationship with God. He is his anointed one, his son. He finally will reign all the nations with his iron scepter. Therefore it is wiser to subject oneself to him and kiss his feet.⁵ Ps 2 was understood messianically at least in the first century B. C.⁶ The NT applies Ps 2 to Jesus and his sonship and talks of the apocalyptic fulfillment in Christ.⁷ Although Hebrews points

¹Mt 22:44; 26:64; Mk 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Lk 20:42,43; 22:69; Acts 2:34; 1Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1.

²Also in Mt 21:16; 1Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22.

³We should add 2Sam 7:14 quoted in Heb 1:5 and Gen 14:17-20 quoted in Heb 7:1-4.

⁴Bruce, 7.

⁵J. H. Eaton, *Kingship in the Psalms* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson Inc., n. d.), 112, sees in Ps 2 the king’s anointing (v. 2), installation (v. 6), legitimation (v. 7), empowering (v. 9). Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ Hébreux 1-2*, 133, writes: “On peut penser que ce psaume a fait partie de la liturgie du couronnement royal à Jérusalem... Il pouvait être utilisé aussi chaque année lors d’éventuelles célébrations anniversaires.”

⁶Cf., the Psalms of Solomon.

⁷Cf., Rev 19:15; cf. H. K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Message of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs: First Impressions, 1983), 53ff.

to the sonship of Christ the other themes of Ps 2 are also partly referred to, because a quoted verse often points to the entire OT context. In this case the anointing, the reign with the scepter, the subjection of the enemies--see Heb 2:8-9--are stressed by other Psalm quotations. "Thou art my son, today I have begotten thee" (Ps 2:7) is connected with Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:17), his transfiguration (2Pt 1:17), his resurrection (Acts 13:33)¹, and his exaltation (Heb 1:5; 5:5).² As the Messiah-King Jesus got his name "Son" obviously in connection with the enthronement (Heb 1:3). This name he already carried in proleptically during his life on earth.³ Therefore Jesus is superior to the angels.

- (3) *Ps 8:4-6*. Psalm is used in Heb 2:6-8 to underline the superiority of Christ by emphasizing his humility. Ps 8 is not a royal psalm. It talks about man in general pointing to his greatness and smallness. The author of Hebrews does not use the Hebrew text of the OT but the LXX. There is a difference. The Hebrew text in Ps 8:6 says: You let him want a little of God. The LXX reads: You made him a little lower than the angels. For the author this fits better into his context and can be used to prove the superiority of Christ over the angels. "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands" is omitted in Heb 2:6-8. The Jews never used this psalm directly in a messianic sense. But Jesus himself applied Ps 8:2 to himself (Mt 21:16). In 1Cor 15:25.27 Paul connects Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:7 and talks about the reign of Christ. So does the author of Hebrews.⁴ For him the key word is "to subject." "The Son of God, who took upon himself humiliation in order to bring many sons to glory, has passed

¹H. J. Kraus, *Theologie der Psalmen* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 230: "Durch die Auferstehung von den Toten ist Christus zum Gottessohn intronisiert worden..."

²Ibid., 228ff. S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: Wed. G. van Soest N. V., 1961), 19, however associated Heb 2:5 with the Lord's baptism. W. R. G. Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester - Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 8 says: "Im Zusammenhang mit der Inthronisation Jesu (1,3e) und der damit gewonnenen Überlegenheit über die Engel (1,4 vgl. 2,7.9) findet die Namensverleihung (und damit die Anrede von 1,5 statt)."

³Cf., J. W. Thompson "The Structure and Purpose of the Catena in Heb 1:5-13, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 1976, 38 (3):355.

⁴Cf., Heb 1:13 and Heb 2:6-8, where Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:4-6 are used. The passages are only divided by a warning and judgement message. But the same theme is dominant in both: Christ superior to the angels.

from the former to the latter state”¹ and is now crowned with glory and honor. All things will be subject to him.

- (4) *Ps 45:6,7*. Ps 45 is another royal psalm quoted in Heb 1:8,9. The psalm celebrates the marriage of the Davidic king.² His royal insignia are mentioned: the throne and the scepter (Ps 45:6). But the king is also called “God” (v. 7). Kraus calls this “eine gewagte Überhöhung” (a bold overstatement).³ The psalm is in close connection with 2Sam 7:13,16: throne and kingdom will last forever. V. 7 mentions the anointed one, the Messiah. Targum Jonathan ascribes this psalm to the Messiah: “Thy beauty, o king Messiah, is greater than that of the sons of men.”⁴ The author of Hebrews takes Ps 45 to underline the greatness of Jesus: He is king. He is even God.
- (5) *Ps 110:1,4*. Ps 110 is probably the most prominent royal psalm, quoted extensively in the NT. V. 1 mentions the enthronement of the king, v. 4 the bestowal of the priesthood and other verses talk about the world dominion of the king.⁵ God himself will make subject the enemies. “...as in the case of Ps 2 we note a striking unity in the presentation of God’s sovereignty and that of his king.”⁶ The king shall take seat at the throne of Yahweh himself and partake in his reign. At the same time the king is also a priest. Thus we have a priest-king. Some scholars hold that the Davidic king also was a priest and had priestly functions, although he was not a descendant of Aaron. They point to the fact that the Davidic kings offered public prayers (1Kings 8:22ff) in connection with the cult, blessed the people (1Kings 8:14ff), offered sacrifices (2Sam 6:17; 1 Kings 3:15; 8:62f), and had their own

¹Kistemaker, 106.

²Cf., Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 167f; Kraus, 138, 148; Kistemaker, 24.

³Kraus, 138.

⁴Quoted by Kistemaker, 24.

⁵Cf., Eaton, 124.

⁶*Ibid.*, 125.

priests (2Sam 8:17; 1Kings 4:2; 2Kings 10:11; even David's sons are called priests).¹ Gunkel concludes that these priests officiated in the name of the king and that therefore in reality the king was the actual priest.² However, offering sacrifices was also done by the people (1Kings 8:62) and does not necessarily imply that the king or the people functioned as priests. In 1Kings 3:4 Solomon sacrificed even at the high places. That king Ahab as an idolater had his own priests (2Kings 10:11), we would expect. It is true that the kings had an considerable religious influence. It is also true that they sometimes appointed or removed priests or had their own priests, but not without protests (2Chr 13:9). "Ordinarily there was a respected line of distinction between the priestly functions and those of the king (1Sam 13:9-13; Mt. 12:3-4)."³ Although Ps 110 was evidently applied to the Davidic Kings, it could not reach its ultimate fulfillment in them. LaRondelle states "that we face here the unique phenomenon of a direct messianic prophecy. The most convincing indication is the decree of God concerning David's Lord 'You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek' (vs. 4). This never applied to any Davidic king. . . The two offices were never united in Israel's history. . . The promise of Ps 110:4 can therefore refer only to the Messiah."⁴ Jesus applied Ps 110:1 to himself--Mt. 22:41ff. He acknowledged David as the author of the psalm. On this bases he built his argument that there are two Lords beside the king David and one of them is addressing the other one. In Mt 26:63-64 Jesus connects Ps 110:1 and Dan. 7:13: The Son of Man is sitting at the right hand of God and is coming on the clouds of heaven.⁵ According

¹Cf., Kraus, 139; J. Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible Dealing with its Language, Literature, and Contents Including the Biblical Theology* (New York: Ch. Scribner's Sons, 1909), 842; O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 11th edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1960), 58, points to the priest-kings in the Maccabean period.

²Cf., H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1968), 484. Also David dancing in front of the ark in a priestly garment (2Sam 6:14) is mentioned.

³S. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), 643.

⁴LaRondelle, 196.

⁵Kraus, 236, suggests: "Jesus ist der (apokalyptische) Menschensohn und Weltenrichter, der vom Himmel kommt; er sitzt 'zur Rechten Gottes'. Gemeint ist: Der bei Gott Thronende, der Erhöhte wird kommen." Exaltation and parousia are here connected.

to Kistemaker Ps 110 was understood messianically by the Jews. Later it was reinterpreted e. g. by Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, ca. 150 A. D.¹ It is probable that in the time of Jesus Ps 110 was not only accepted as a messianic prediction, but was also referred to the judgement of the world by the Son of Man and his glorification, says Michel.² The author of Hebrews applies Ps 110:1 for his exaltation Christology. But he also uses Ps 110:4. When Christ is the one addressed in Ps 110:1, then he is also the priest of Ps 110:4. So the offices of the royal Messiah and the priestly Messiah, which were separated by some Jewish circles (for the royal Messiah was expected from the tribe of Judah and the priestly one from the tribe of Levi), were united in Hebrews. As the priest-king. There is only one individual in Ps 110. Jesus could not fulfill the conditions for a levitical priest, but the priest-king of Ps 110 is a priest of a different order and therefore this problem is without relevance.³

The royal psalms are thus seen fulfilled in Jesus by the author of Hebrews. “Ils (les psaumes royaux) visent en même temps le roi présent et le roi idéal à venir. Au jour de l’intrônisation, l’espoir s’exprime que le nouveau roi sera le roi idéal par qui se réaliseront les promesses de Dieu et s’instaura le royaume de Dieu universel.”⁴ Finally, the royal psalms were not any longer referred to the earthly kings, but were accepted as predictions and prophecies concerning the messianic king of the end-time.⁵ In Hebrews Jesus Christ is this king. He is the priest-king.

2. Their Structure and Context

Looking again at the texts, which contain the kingship motif, we discover that most of them are texts within the first and second chapter of Hebrews. Almost all the remaining chapters of the letter have at least one verse with the kingship motif (Heb 4:14; 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1-2,28; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2). Nevertheless the heaviest concentration is found in chap. 1.

¹Kistemaker, 27.

²Michel, 59.

³Cf., Kraus, 7.

⁴Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 213.

⁵Cf. Kraus, 155: “Charisma und Auftrag des Gesalbten Jahwes gelangen im AT nicht zur Erfüllung.”

- (1) *Heb 1*. This is the most important chapter on the kingship. It starts with a quotation of Ps 110:1 and ends with a quotation of Ps 110:1. Between these two citations (Heb 1:3.13) as a framework an entire catena of six OT quotations is lumped together dwelling on the kingship of Jesus. We have already looked at 2 Sam. 7 and at the royal Psalms 2 and 45. Thompson suggests the following structure of Heb 1:

V. 3 - Ps 110:1	
V. 5-6	2 quotations on the Son
	1 quotation on the angels
V. 7-12	1 quotation on the angels
	2 quotations on the Son
V. 13 - Ps 110:1	

“The important place given to Ps 110:1 indicates that the catena is to be understood as an interpretation of the exaltation, a reflection on the hymn in 1:1-3.”¹ The christological hymn in v. 2b and 3 covers Christ’s life and ministry from his pre-existence over his earthly life to his exaltation. With this Christ-centered approach the Letter to the Hebrews starts. The kingly aspect of Christ is further developed in Heb 1:5-13 and again and again referred to in the rest of the book. The structure can be slightly modified to fit the passage in a better way:

- 1:1-3 Introduction and main thesis
- 1:4-14 Development of the thesis
- 2:1-4 Reaction to the thesis and consequences

We still have to make it more specific:

¹Thompson, “The Structure and Purpose,” 353.

1:1-3	proclamation by the prophets (“of old”) and Jesus (“in these last days”) (<i>laleō</i> in v. 1-2) and main thesis		
1:4	contrast with angels	→	name
1:5	questions concerning the angels and Jesus - Jesus as Son	→	
name			
	1:6		The angels worship the son
		1:7	The angels are servants
		1:8f	The Son is king and is God
	1:10-12		The Son is creator and remains the same
	1:13		question concerning the angels and Jesus
			- all are subject to Jesus
		→	subject
	1:14	→	subject
2:1-4	proclamation by the angels (past) and Jesus (present) (<i>laleō</i> in v. 2f) and consequences		

In the section 1:4-14 we discern a development, which praises Jesus in higher and higher terms: Jesus is Son (v. 5) (the messianic king); Jesus is to be worshiped (v. 6); Jesus is king and is God from eternity to eternity (v. 8f.); Jesus is creator and is Yahweh, remaining the same (v. 10ff.); everyone will be subject to Jesus (v. 13) (Jesus is king).¹ All this is found under the heading and in the parentheses of the quotations of Ps 110:1 and therefore it functions as a portrayal of the king. The use of the royal psalms, which we already have investigated, also points to this fact. Heb 1 then is a description of Christ’s kingship. Chap. 1 contains a comparison between Christ and the angels, which is continued in chap. 2. There is some discussion, if the purpose of chap. 1 is to defend Christ against a gnosticizing angel worship (e. g. Windisch) or if it presents successive stages in the enthronement (e. g. O. Michel, E. Käsemann). Thompson holds a third view: “The author intends neither to combat a definite heresy nor to present various stages of the exaltation. As in other places in Hebrews (cf. 6:19f; 7:3.16.25ff; 12:27f; 13:8), the author’s intent is to demonstrate that Christ is the one who abides.” And he points to Heb 1:8 (“for ever and ever”), Heb1:11 (“thou remaineth”), and Heb 1:12 (“the same”).² Loader discerns a chain of thoughts in Heb 1 starting with an allusion to Ps 110:1 in v. 3, followed by a statement of superiority and by

¹W. G. Johnsson *Hebrews* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 12, discerns the meaning of the catena of messianic proof-texts in chap. 1 as follows: (1) Only Jesus is the son. (2) The angels are to worship him. (3) The Son and the angels have different natures. (4) The son and the angels have a contrasting service.

²Cf., Thompson, “The Structure and Purpose,” 352, 363.

several compliments. Then the full quotation of Ps 110:1 is given. In his opinion the last verse of the chapter shows the goal of the entire passage: Our salvation is guaranteed by the kingship of Christ.¹ Although we may not neglect the fact that there might have been some kind of angel adoration among the receivers of the Letter to the Hebrews, the main point of the author is certainly to show the greatness of Jesus. With chap. 1 the author sets the stage for the entire book: Because of Jesus' exaltation, his glory and power the believers can trust in this Lord and this Lord alone. Christ is victor and King, judge and the remaining one. In him there is salvation.

- (2) *Heb 2*. While Heb 1 emphasizes Jesus as the Son of God, Heb 2 portrays him as the brother of men. Whereas chap. 1 points to his exaltation, chap. 2 depicts Jesus in his humiliation. The section starts with v. 5 comparing angels with man, and it ends with v. 18. In v. 16 angels are contrasted with the children of Abraham. Between these two poles the lowness of Jesus is shown, but also the help he provides for his "brethren". Here is a possibility of a structure of Heb 2:

v. 5	angels and subjection	→	theme:
v. 6-8	OT quotation	→	subjection of everything
v. 9	explanation	→	to him because of humiliation
v. 10-12	explanation	→	theme:
v. 12-13	OT quotations	→	help "for brethren"
v. 16-18	angels and help	→	because of humiliation

The kingly motif appears in the first part of the section. It talks about all things being "subjected" to the once humiliated Jesus (cf. this theme in Heb 1:13)² and of Christ being "crowned with glory and honor". However, in Heb 2 there is already a shift. The chapter ends with a clear reference to Christ as high priest. So, the kingly motif is supplemented by the priestly one.

- (3) *Heb 4b and 5a*. The idea of Heb 2:17-18 concerning the high priestly ministry of Jesus is

¹Cf., Loader, 18.

²The word "Jesus" occurs for the first time in Heb 2:9.

continued in Heb 4:14-16.¹ Between these two passages there is a kind of insertion dealing with Christ being superior to Moses and with the real rest that is available to Christians. Then Heb 4:14-16 follows talking about Jesus the high priest, Heb 5:1-4 mentioning the Aaronitic high priest, and Heb 5:5-10 talking about Jesus, the high priest. Heb 4:14: Jesus, the high priest, has passed through the heavens. This reminds us of the session of Christ. Jesus went to the Father to sit down at his right hand.² This is obviously again a kingly motif, although the priestly aspect is prevalent. Heb 4:16: Through Christ's ministry the throne of God (Heb 8:1; 12:2) has become a throne of grace. Heb 5:1-4 is somewhat parallel to Heb 5:5-10³, especially because v. 4-5 says that the high priest/Christ has not exalted himself, but was called by God. Here in v. 5-6, 10 Ps 2 and 110 are pulled together and remind us of a similar combination in chap. 1:3.5. Whereas however in Heb 1:3.5 Ps 2:7; Ps 110:1 are used and Christ's exaltation is described, in Heb 5:5-6 the author of Hebrews connects Ps 2:7 with Ps 110:4. Ps 110:4 is here quoted for the first time in the NT. So, the royal Psalm 2 is associated with the priestly office in Ps 110:4. Henceforth not only the kingship is stated explicitly (Ps 110:1; 2), but also the priesthood of the Messiah (Ps 110:4). Jesus Christ is the exalted king and high priest.

- (4) *Heb 6b and 7.* Ps 110:4 - "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" - was introduced into the letter in Heb 5:6, combined with Ps 2:7. It is used for the last time in Heb 7:28 in connection with Ps 2:7 too, although the priestly ministry of Jesus is also stressed in Heb 8ff. There however, Ps 110:1 is quoted with a statement of the author on Christ's priesthood. In between Heb 5:6 and Heb 7:28 Ps 110:4 is used eight times. In chap. 6 the fulfillment of God's promises is guaranteed. The hearers are called "to take hold of the hope offered to us" (Heb 6:18). This hope enters into the interior behind the veil. There Jesus already has entered. He had become a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6:19-20). The kingly aspect is united with the priestly: "has entered" (cf. Heb 4:14) and "priest". Heb 6:20

¹Cf., H. Zimmermann, *Das Bekenntnis der Hoffnung - Tradition und Redaktion im Hebräerbrief* (Köln: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1977), 159.

²Ibid., 169.

³Ibid., 180. He contrasts Heb 5:1-3 with Heb 5:7-10 and Heb 5:4 with Heb 5:5.6.

forms a link to Heb 7, the chapter on Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews takes up Gen 14:17-20 and shows that Melchizedek was a king and a priest (Heb 7:1-4) “like the Son of God” (v. 3), but he is especially interested in the priesthood of Christ. So he uses Ps 110:4 and milks it to the last theological drop¹: Heb 7:11,15-17--“the order of Melchizedek”; Heb 7:20-21--“the Lord has sworn”; Heb 7:28--being a priest “for ever.” Jesus is priest exalted above the heavens, guarantee of the new covenant (Heb 7:26,22).

- (5) *Heb 8-10.* The kingship motif appears again immediately after Heb 7:28, namely in Heb 8:1. Heb 8:1-2 is a summary statement on Christ as high priest and on his ministry. This is followed by an explanation on the reason why Christ could not be a priest on earth leading to the important note that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant. In general Heb 7 talks about Jesus, the priest after the order of Melchizedek, whereas Heb 8-10:18 describes Jesus as the minister of the true sanctuary. Especially the efficacy of his blood is discussed. Heb 9:24, although it reminds us of Heb 8:1 and Heb 4:14, seems not to be a direct allusion to the kingship motif. The context points to the day of atonement ministry. We get the impression that Jesus is not sitting with God on his throne, but possibly standing in front of the throne pleading for his saints. Perhaps Heb 9:11-12 is a hint to the exaltation and session of Christ. Heb 10:12-13 is found in the same larger context as Heb 9:24. Ps 110:1 is the underlying quotation.
- (6) *Heb 12.* Verse 1 refers back to chap. 11. The cloud of witnesses are the heroes of faith. The life of these heroes of faith shall stimulate the readers of Hebrews to separate from sin and to persist in the fight of faith. Chap. 12a talks about the education of the saints by the heavenly Father and their perseverance. In this process the eyes must be fixed on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith”, who endured the cross and “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). This verse clearly refers to Jesus’ kingly status, to his exaltation in heaven. The priestly aspect is missing here.
- (7) *Summary.* Looking at all the kingship motifs in the Letter to the Hebrews, we detect that they are mainly based on Ps 110. Only in the first two chapters of Hebrews and the first verses of

¹Cf. Johnsson, 48.

chap. 7 other quotations are used. When we look at the citations from Ps 110, we notice that Ps 110:1 is used in the first chapter and in Heb 8,10,12 only, whereas Ps 110:4 is quoted in Heb 5,6,7 only. Beside this we observe that the kingly aspect of Christ's office as priest-king is emphasized very strongly in chap. 1. In chap. 2 we already have a shift from the kingly to the priestly office. Then the priestly aspect prevails, although some times the kingly one gets through (cf. Heb 5:5ff.) to some degree. At the end of Hebrews, in chap. 12, the kingly aspect predominates again. We should however notice that a clear-cut separation is not always necessary, for it is one person holding both offices: Although a priest functions differently from a king, the priest is at the same time king, and the king is at the same time priest.

3. Some Exegetical Remarks

This section on exegetical remarks tries to add some significant points to the previous discussion. We again will start with chap. 1.

(1) *Heb 1*

Johnsson states that Heb 1:1-4 contains the entire Letter to the Hebrews In a nutshell: Christ's majesty and the certainty of his work. "As priest, he makes purgation of sins. As king, he is greater than the angels and awaits the full assumption of his reign."¹

V. 1-3: God has spoken in the last days by his Son. This son is the creator, but also the heir of all things (v. 2). His reign results from his exaltation (v. 3). Part of his inheritance is the name "Son" (v. 4). *Panta* (v. 2) occurs again in Heb 2:8 and describes the subjection of all things to the Lord.² V. 3 characterizes Jesus in a fourfold way:

- (a) Jesus is the exact representation of God, the Father.
- (b) Jesus is the sustainer of the universe.
- (c) Jesus is the savior.
- (d) Jesus is the exalted king.

¹Johnsson, 10.

²Cf., Loader, 67ff.

Implicitly this verse contains the entire way of Christ from his pre-existence to his humiliation and then to his exaltation.¹

“He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” According to Vanhoye *en dexia* has to be complemented by *cheiri*. The right hand means the right side and is a sign of an intimate relationship, because the right hand is the good hand, with which a person can work and express himself better.² *Ekathisen* describes an action. Jesus himself took the seat. He was not seated.³ The enthronement of Jesus is not a diminution of the majesty of God nor is the place of honor at the right hand a sign of inactivity. The dwelling on high is a privilege of God, which the Son shares with the Father.⁴ The term “God” is substituted by *megalōsunē*,⁵ and instead of *en ouranois*, which we find in Heb 8:1, the synonym *hupsēlois* is used.⁶ The exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God, signifies his enthronement as king and lord. The end of the way as savior does not mark the end of Christ’s ministry, but sets a new beginning, the beginning of his reign, which has no end.⁷ V. 5-13. The author of Hebrews does not describe how the enthronement came to pass, but that it came to pass. Therefore he can use quotations which describe Christ’s exaltation as well as quotations concerning his activity as creator. These quotations are chosen to say

¹Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 100, sees a wisdom tradition and a messianic tradition in this verse.

²Cf., Vanhoye “Christologia a qua initium sumit epistola Hebraeos (Hebr. 1, 2b.3.4),” *Verbum Domine* 1965, 43:60

³Cf., *ibid.*, 60; Loader, 119; Michel, 42: “Das ‘sich setzen’ ist der Akt, der einem besonderen Vorrecht entspricht; nach Chagiga 15a ist es allein dem Metatron gestattet, im göttlichen Gemache zu sitzen, um das Verdienst Israels aufzuschreiben. Christus ist aber nicht ‘Schreiber’, sondern Richter und Herr.”

⁴Cf., Michel, 43.

⁵Vanhoye, “Christologia”, 60, states: “Ob timorem irreverentiae, Judaei evitabant adhibere nomen Yahweh et varios titulos substituere solebant...” But in Heb 1:1 the word “God” is mentioned. It is obviously not used in Heb 1:3 “ut dignitas positionis extollabatur” (to extoll the dignity of his position).

⁶Cf., in Heb 7:26 *hupsēloteros*. Vanhoye, “Christologia,” 61, holds: “In nostro loco expressio ‘in excelsis’ non est superflua. Afirmatio sic melius determinatur. ‘Sedere ad dextram majestatis divinae’ intelligi posset de dignitate terrestri. Reges Israel quodammodo sedebant ad dexteram Dei, quia palatium eorum aedificatum erat ad dexteram Templi (i. e. ad meridian).” 1Chr 28:5; 29:23; 2Chr 9:8

⁷Cf., Zimmermann, 60, Loader, 119.

something about the present Lord rather than to depict an event of the past.¹ They continue to describe his intimate relation with God and the secured redemption, something no angel could achieve. V. 5 is connected with v. 4 by *gar*. The new name is “Son”.² The close connection of v. 5 with the preceding verses speaks in favor of the understanding of “today” as referring to the time of Christ’s exaltation.³ As shown above the quotations are taken from the royal Ps 2 and from 2Sam 7.

V. 6. Thompson connects *prōtotokos* also with Christ’s exaltation.⁴ *Oikoumenē* refers to the heavenly world.⁵

V. 7 was often used in the rabbinic literature to demonstrate the power of the angels. Here it is used in the reversed sense. The angels belong to the created world and stand in contrast to the Son.⁶

V. 8-9 is a quotation from the royal Ps 45, a wedding psalm. Here we have a rich kingly imagery. First of all, the Son is called God. Not to translate *ho theos* as a vocation makes God the throne of Jesus. This does not make much sense. On the contrary, it almost exalts the Son above the Father.⁷ As king Jesus is God. His eternal throne is in stark contrast to the instability of the angels. The scepter of his kingdom is a scepter of uprightness (*enthutētos* - hapax legomenon). Vanhoye points to the fact that the scepter is also found in Ps 110:2 and in Ps 2:9, but in the first case it is a scepter of power and in the second it is one of iron to

¹Cf., Loader, 118.

²Ibid., 75, Loader holds: “Und diese Sohnschaft ist nicht auf die Zeit nach der Erhöhung beschränkt, ...sondern gilt auch für die Präexistenz.”

³Cf., J. W. Thompson, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Austin: R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1971), 29.

⁴Cf., Thompson, “The Structure and Purpose,” 356.

⁵The word is again used in Heb 2:5 to denote the world to come. Cf. Loader, 23-24.

⁶Cf. Thompson, “The Structure and Purpose,” 1976, 357.

⁷In Hebrew the auxiliary verb is missing too - *kise’acha elohim olam*. The translation “your throne is God” does not fit into the context. Cf. J. Héring, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 10; A. Seeberg, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Leipzig: Verlag von Quelle und Meyer, 1912), 15.

dash people pieces.¹ The author chose psalm citation, which speaks of a scepter of uprightness. The idea of uprightness is carried on with v. 9: “Thou hast loved righteousness (*dikaïosunē*) and hated (*anomia*)”. The king executes perfect justice. In chap. 7 he will be compared with Melchizedek, the king of righteousness (Heb 7:2). Jesus hated sin, lawlessness. Therefore he was willing to suffer and finally to die in order to save men from sin (cf. 12, Heb 12:2). “He has provided purification for sins” (Heb 1:3)² His reign is one of uprightness. Therefore he, God³, was anointed (*echrisen*) by God beyond his comrades”. *Echrisen* (from *chrīo*), “to anoint”, reminds of Christ, the anointed one.⁴ In the OT, kings and priests were anointed.⁵ Obviously this unction here was a royal one in connection with Christ’s enthronement, of which the context talks, and not one during his life on earth.⁶ It constituted an aspect of his glorification. V. 8-9 stresses “(a) that Christ is no usurper (like Zeus, who dethrones his father), but that He is anointed by God; and (b) that His reign is essentially defined as a reign of righteousness - in conformity with the most ardent and most legitimate of Jewish aspirations”.⁷

V. 10-12 contain a quotation from Ps 102. It is not a royal psalm, but a prayer of an afflicted man for Zion and for himself. In Hebrews God himself addresses his son as Yahweh. V. 10 talks about Christ’s antiquity; he was creator.

V. 11-12 emphasizes Jesus’ eternal duration. Implicitly these verses contain the idea that the

¹Cf., Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 185.

²Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 186, 188 states: “...ce n’est pas à d’une simple disposition intérieure que le Christ a obtenu son intronisation céleste, mais par une action bien déterminée.” “Le Christ, de fait, ‘aima Justice et détesta Iniquité’ : il engagea toute son existence pour la pleine réalisation du dessein de Dieu et l’élimination du péché.”

³Again we can use the vocative, although in this case the nominative makes sense too.

⁴The Hebrew reads in Ps 45:7 *meshahacha* (he has anointed you) and reminds of the Messiah.

⁵Exo 28:41; 1Sam 16:1,12-13; Elisha - 1Kings 19:15-16; cf., Thompson, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 32.

⁶Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 192, says that Jesus received a prophetic unction in the beginning of his public life. But this was only one in anticipation of his paschal unction, which alone conferred to Jesus all his glory as Christ.

⁷Héring, 10.

Son is the judge of the world.¹

V. 13 at the end of chap. 1 refers back to Heb 1:3, but this time the entire verse Ps 110:1 is quoted. Christ is invited to take place at God's right hand,² "until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." "To sit at God's throne in Jewish literature means participation in God's judgment over the world (Enoch 51:3; 55:4; 61:8; 62:2; 69:29)."³ Egyptian illustrations depict Pharaoh sitting on the divine throne at the right hand of the deity. In the Amarna Letters a Canaanite vassal calls himself the footstool for the feet of Pharaoh. In the Ancient Near East it was a custom that a victor put his foot on the neck of the defeated enemy. The throne was rather high and a footstool was necessary in any case.⁴ The OT is also familiar with this custom - Jos 10:24; 1Kings 5:17. Heb 1:13 illustrates the total victory of Christ, but the active person in this case is the Father. There is some reciprocity between Christ and God. First of all, Christ was fighting for justice and for the reign of God against iniquity (on earth). Then he was invited to be seated on the throne and to reign in glory, whereas the Father took the place in the battle field.⁵

(2) *Heb 2*

V. 5-9. Whereas Heb 1 deals with the superiority of Christ by showing that he is the exalted son, chap. 2 emphasizes his superiority by pointing to his humiliation in becoming man. The angels are now contrasted with man by the use of a quotation from Ps 8. The quote runs from Heb 2:6 to v. 8a. The LXX text is used, but Ps 8:6a is omitted. We already pointed to the

¹Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 202,205,209, compares Ps 45 and Ps 102, and as a result he sees many parallels between both, e. g. Ps 45:4-5 - Ps 102:14: intervention; Ps 45:3 - Ps 102:17: glory; Ps 45:7 - Ps 102:13.27f: eternity. He argues that Ps 45 (cf., Heb 1:8f) depicts Christ's intervention for righteousness and his personal glorification, whereas Ps 102 (cf. Heb 1:10-12) portrays the universal execution of judgment. So, he refers Ps 45 to the past and Ps 102 to the future. In the meantime God acts in behalf of his son.

²Present imperative of *kathēmai*.

³Thompson *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 34.

⁴Cf., Gunkel, 481-482; Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 218: "Dans la tombe de Tout-Ankh-Amon, on a retrouvé un trône splendidement ouvragé, qui comporte un gradin. Sur celui-ci sont dessinés neuf corps étendus: ce sont les neuf ennemis de l'Égypte. De la sorte, le Pharaon assis sur son trône avait symboliquement ses ennemis sans ses pieds."

⁵Cf., Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 219. In his opinion the enemies of Christ are lawlessness (Heb 1:9), sin (Heb 9:28), Satan (Heb 2:14), death (Heb 2:14), sinners (Heb 12:3).

difference in the reading of Heb 2:7 in LXX (“lower than the angels”) and the Hebrew text (“lower than God”). Heb 2:8b.9 then follows as an application of the psalm text. Three important phrases are repeated in these two verses: “putting everything in subjection to him”, “he was a little lower than the angels”, “crowned with glory and honor”. There is some discussion concerning this quotation. In its original setting the psalm portrays man. It does not look like a messianic prophecy. In Heb 2 at least the application refers to Christ. Vanhoye holds the view: The quotations (Heb 2:6-8a) deals with man in general , only Heb 2:8-9 talks about Christ. Reason: the expression “son of man” is used without article. This points therefore to man in general.¹ Other scholars however understand the entire psalm in the NT setting as used in a messianic sense, although this sense does not exist in the OT.² In any case, in 1Cor 15:27 and Eph. 1:22 the same quotation from Ps 8 is clearly applied to Jesus. Heb 2:5-9 portrays Jesus’ descent and his exaltation. For “a little while” (v. 7,9--*brachu*) Jesus was humiliated, was lower than the angels. But now he is “crowned with glory and honor” (*doxē kai timē estephanōmenon--v. 7b,9*). This was realized in connection with his glorious elevation. Yet, there is still a work to be done. The subjection of all things (*hupotassō--v. 8, anhupotaktos--v. 8*) is not complete (v. 8). The final subjection still has to be achieved. “Putting everything in subjection under his feet” reminds of Heb 1:13 (Ps 110:1) and again reflects enthronement. “Ps 8:5f is emphatically viewed as a prophecy of the Son (cf. 1Cor 15:58), but it is split temporally: v. 6a relates to earthly life (Heb 2:9), while v. 6b and 7b relate to life beyond this earth (Heb 2:8b). What is meant is that Christ’s rule begins with His exaltation (v. 5) but is not yet consummated nor, of course, universally manifested, v. 8c.”³ Jesus becoming man and dying for us to save us (v. 9-10) is a requirement that no angel could meet. So, it is just his humiliation that makes Jesus superior to the angels. Heb 1 and 2 teach us that Jesus is truly God, but that he also was fully man.

¹Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 265,283-284; Seeberg, 18.

²Cf. B. S. Childs, “Ps. 8 in the Context of the Christian Canon,” *Interpretation* 1969, 23 (1):25; J. W. Pryor, “Hebrews and Incarnational Christology,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 1981:44: “But the determining factor for discovering the meaning of an OT passage in the NT is not what the passage originally meant (though this cannot be ignored), but how it is used in the new situation.” Cf. Thompson, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 39.

³Kittel, 8:42.

(3) *Heb 4-12*

Heb 4:14. G. Friedrich sees a connection between this verse and the sitting at the right hand of the throne of heaven (8:1).¹ He says that Jesus did not pass through the porch of the temple in Jerusalem as the levitical high priest did, but that Jesus went through the heavens into the real heavenly sanctuary (cf. 9:11; 6:19-20), i. e. he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.² The title “Son” is taken from Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:4. On the one hand, it refers back to Heb 1:5, on the other hand, it prepares Heb 7 by presenting Jesus as priest-king after the order of Melchizedek. Similar to chap. 2 Heb 5 shows that Christ’s exaltation and his installation as high priest followed his humiliation. The title “high priest” describes his present status as the exalted Christ. For the Jewish mind there was no problem to see in the Messiah the king. They expected him to come as a deliverer of oppression. But the fact that the Messiah had to be priest too, was somewhat neglected, although Zechariah had mentioned the twofold office: “...and he shall be a priest upon his throne” (Zech. 6:13) and although the Maccabeans held both offices.³ In any case, the author of Heb introduces Ps 110:4 to prove the priestly function of the Messiah as predicted in the OT.⁴ It is the savior (Heb 5:9), who became priest-king.⁵

Heb 7:1ff. compares Christ with Melchizedek. Heb 7:3,15 talks about Melchizedek being “like” (*aphōmoiōmenos*) Jesus and Jesus as priest arising in the “likeness” (*homoiotēs*) of Melchizedek.⁶ Again and again Jesus is called “priest after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 7:11,15,17). But in Heb 7:1-3 Melchizedek is introduced with reference to Gen 14:17-20.

¹Both verses contain the expression *ouranoi*.

²G. Friedrich “Das Lied vom Hohenpriester im Zusammenhang von Hebr. 4,14-5,10,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 1962, 18:112; cf. Seeberg, 49.

³However, the ruling function overshadowed the priestly.

⁴Jer 30:21 could also be an OT allusion to the twofold messianic ministry.

⁵Cf., Zimmermann, 75,77; Kistemaker, 116-117.

⁶The two terms only occur in Hebrews, the first one once (7:3), the second one twice (4:15; 7:15). “The text (7:3), however, does not expressly relate Melchisedec here to Christ”. - G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, (eds.), *Theological Dictionary to the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 190, 198.

Kistemaker points out that “in the description of Melchizedek the office of kingship precedes that of priesthood”.¹ In fact, v. 1 mentions his kingship before his priesthood. The kingly aspect in Heb 7:1-3 seems also to be more prominent. In v. 3 his name is translated “king of righteousness”.² This corresponds to *malki-zedek*. Then he is also named “king of Salem”, obviously according to his location.³ This is translated as peace. The Hebrew term *shalom* and similar the Greek *eirēnē* do not only refer to “peace”, but also to “well-being”, “salvation”. Although the blessing (v. 1) and the receiving of tithe (v. 2) point to a priestly function, the term priest occurs only twice in Heb 7:1-3, whereas the term king occurs four times with reference to Melchizedek. But then the royal aspect is not further developed. “The interests... run a different course”⁴ and the priesthood is stressed. In correspondence with Melchizedek’s office Christ is priest-king for ever. Eternity was already ascribed to Christ in Heb 1:8. Thompson gives a possible reason why the author of Hebrews may have chosen Melchizedek as a comparison with Christ: There was an expectation of an ideal high priest after the Maccabean period. The Qumran people looked for a high priest and for a Messiah. On the other hand, there existed a special interest in Melchizedek. He was a magnet for much speculation. Using this interest, the author of Hebrews was able to point beyond Melchizedek to Christ, and at the same time he proved that the Messiah was a single person having a twofold ministry.⁵

Heb 7:26 mentions “high priest” for the first time in chap. 7. This verse has - according to some scholars - also an implied exaltation motif.⁶ In Heb 7:28 there is the Son--Ps 2:7, who

¹Kistemaker, 122.

²This fits the description of Christ in 1:8f.

³In Ps 76:2 Salem is equated with Zion and therefore with Jerusalem.

⁴Johnsson, 49.

⁵Cf., Thompson, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 94.

⁶E. g. B. Weiss, *Kritisch-exegetisches Handbuch über den Brief an die Hebräer*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1888), 192; Héring, 63. Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 290, remarks on chap. 7: “Proclamé grand-prêtre selon l’ordre de Melchisédech, lequel était roi et prêtre (7,1-3), le Christ glorieux est à la fois celui qui siège sur le trône (8,1; 10,12) et celui qui intercède pour nous (7,25; 8,2; 9,24).”

is eternal--Ps 110:4. This son is high priest. He is even appointed by the word of the oath - cf. Heb 7:20f. The oath is found in Ps 110:4 again. Since Ps 110 is the psalm of the priest-king and Ps 2 is that of the king, we have the kingly aspect in Heb 7:28 too, although the priestly is much stronger. However the word “appointed” may allude to the exaltation too. In Greek it is *kathistēmi* - not to be confused with *kathizō* (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2 - to sit down) and *kathēmai* (Heb 1:13 - to sit down), but it is rather closely related, and it occurs in Heb 5:1; 7:28; 8:3. In 5:1 and 8:3 it refers to the earthly high priest, however contrasted with the heavenly. The following card shows the close relationship between these passages and their roots in the priest-king motif.

5:1	The earthly high priest is set into his office (<i>kathistēmi</i>).	8:3	The earthly high priest is set into his office (<i>kathistēmi</i>).	7:28	The heavenly high priest is the Son - Ps 2:7.
5:5	The heavenly high priest is son - Ps 2:7 - and 6 priest after the order of Melchizedek - Ps 110:4.	8:1	The heavenly high priest is sitting at the right hand of God - Ps 110:1 (<i>kathizō</i>).		The Son is eternal - Ps 110:4. He is set into his office (<i>kathistēmi</i>).

Heb 8:1. The main point - according to Strobel¹ - is the exaltation of Christ to “right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven”. Beside the quotation from Ps 110:1 (*ekathisen en dexia*), which occurs also in the same or in a similar way in Heb 1:3,13;10:12, and 12:2 and which we already commented on, many allusions to other verses in Hebrews occur: *megalōsunē* is also found in Heb 1:3 as a substitute for God; the *thronos* of the Majesty in heaven became the throne of grace (Heb 4:16) by Jesus Christ²; *en tais ouranois* is substituted for *en hupsēlois* (Heb 1:3), but is found in Heb 4:14: Jesus passed through the heavens. So, Heb 4:14-16 can be seen in the context of exaltation too.³ Although Heb 8:1 clearly talks about priesthood and not about kingship, the verse nevertheless states that Jesus became “Throngenosse Gottes” (companion of God on the throne).⁴ So, we have an underlying kingly motif.

10:12-13. The sitting is a sign of reign. “The priests of the old covenant stood before the altar which in a way represents the deity; Christ in contrast, is seated at “the right hand of God” - an enormous privilege and scandalous to Jewish ears (cf. Mk 14:63) and one which even the angels and archangels did not possess.”⁵

Jesus lived in humiliation. He died on the cross. He offered himself as a sacrifice. But as the risen savior he is now kingly priest at God’s right hand. The sacrifice is already brought. He can wait for the final subjection of all things unto him. According to Heb 1:13 this is God’s task. He, Jesus, can live in a state of rest. Heb 12:2 connects cross and exaltation, shame and glory.⁶ Here *kathizō* is found in the present perfect instead of the aorist as in 1:3; 8:1; 10:12. With that it is stressed that Christ’s session is an event of the past which still continues. Jesus

¹A. Strobel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Neues Testament Deutsch (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975), 162.

²Cf., *ibid.*, 163; Thompson, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 108.

³Loader, 17, says that Heb 8:1 looks back to the preceding part and is influenced by the idea of throne (4:16) and the idea of heaven (4:14).

⁴Seeberg, 90.

⁵Héring, 89.

⁶Cf., Thompson, *The Letter to Hebrews*, 164; Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 106.

is still partaking in the divine reign.¹ Therefore “let us look to him, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”, the priest-king and savior.

4. Kingship and Priesthood

Although we have already said a lot concerning kingship and priesthood, there are still some supplements to be made.

- (1) Hebrews is a unique letter, because it is the only document in the NT to quote Ps 110:4. In using Ps 110:1 and 4 it depicts Jesus as priest-king. Both offices are held by Jesus simultaneously. When one is dealt with, often the other one is affected too. The session of Christ is connected with his kingship, and at the same time his installation as high priest.
- (2) Already in Heb 1, which extensively deals with the kingship motif, there are some traces of the priesthood motif. This helps us to understand the close intertwining of the two motifs and the two offices. In Heb 1:3 a quotation from Ps 110:1 is used. Because a quotation often points to the entire context, where it is taken from, we may here already think of Ps 110:4 and the priest motif, though it is not explicitly stated. Heb 1:8 - “thy throne is for ever” - reminds us already of “thou art a priest for ever”.² The scepter of the Son (1:8) points to the rod of Aaron (9:4), which manifested his election as high priest.³ The term “righteousness” is found again in “the king of righteousness” (7:2), who was at the same time a priest. Vanhoye holds that also the unction (1:9) already is a kingly and priestly unction.⁴ So, there may already be several hints to Christ’s priestly office in chap. 1, the chapter on his kingship.
- (3) Heb 2 has both aspects of Christ’s ministry. Many commentators state that “crowned with

¹Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 102, notes: “...l’*aoriste* est remplacé par le parfait, qui souligne l’aspect définitif et permanent du triomphe obtenu.”

²Cf., Thompson, “The Structure and Purpose,” 358.

³Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 195, talks about “un insigne sacerdotal tout autant que royal.”

⁴*Ibid.*, 194, he says: “... le combat du Christ pour la justice et contre l’iniquité n’est rien d’autre que son sacrifice (9,26; 10,9-10). La transformation qui en résulte pour son humanité, son ‘accomplissement’ comme dira l’épître (2,10; 5,7-9; 7,11.28), est une consécration sacerdotale. L’unction qu’il reçoit n’est donc pas seulement royale, mais pontificale (cf. Exo 29,7). A l’exemple de Melchisédech, Jésus glorifié est prêtre en même temps que roi (Héb. 7,1-3). En lui se réalise la double attente messianique, messianisme royal et messianisme sacerdotal. Il est Christ, ‘oint’, à ce double titre.”

glory and honor” in Heb 2:9 rather refers to the priesthood than to the kingship.¹ At the end of chap. 2 it is explicitly spoken of Christ as high priest, but “crowned with glory and honor” still maintains the double perspective - according to Vanhoye.² Compared with Moses Christ has greater glory and honor (Heb 3:3). He has royal authority. Compared with Aaron Jesus has greater honor (Heb 5:4-5). He has the priestly dignity. Systematically the author of Hebrews leads the readers and hearers to his main section on Christ’s priesthood. He uses some hints in chap. 1. In chap. 2 the priesthood is clearly stated beside the kingship. The two motifs are melted together. Heb 4:14-5:10 sets the stage for a full discussion of the priestly ministry. So, the priestly motif prevails. In Heb 12:2 the kingly aspect comes through again.

What do these two motifs signify? Although we are not able to separate them entirely, we may say with some caution and preservation: Kingship is more or less the external aspect. It has to do with the victory over the enemies. Priesthood is more or less the internal aspect. It has to do with help for the members of the divine household. Maybe the kingly aspect is more concerned with the future, whereas the priestly is more concerned with the present time. Both are relevant. The readers need the goal of a bright future, but they have to live in the less bright present. They need Jesus as a priest now and as a king now and in the future.

5. Their Time Frame

Obviously the author of Hebrews was not interested in giving an exact time frame, a chronology for the events described here. There are some hints, but we have to be cautious.³

a. Pre-existence

The son is the creator of the world (Heb 1:2). He is Yahweh, and the heavens and the earth are the work of his hands (Heb 1:10). Therefore he is the exact representation of God (Heb 1:3), and he

¹Cf., Kistemaker, 106; Kittel, 8:175 suggests: “Christ’s passion is the presupposition of His crowning with glory and honor. This crowning is obviously His institution into the high-priestly office. The terms *doxa* and *timē* thus refer not so much to the glorifying and exalting of Christ as to his high-priestly dignity.”

²Cf., Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 290.

³Loader, 246, states: “Es ist denen zuzustimmen, die die Ansicht vertreten, daß der Verfasser eigentlich keinen solchen Zeitplan formulieren wollte.”

upholds the universe by his powerful word (Heb 1:2).

b. Incarnation

This Son and king, Jesus Christ, became for a little while lower than the angels (Heb 2:9). He partook of the same nature as man has, he became human, having flesh and blood (Heb 2:14). His life was a life of prayer, but also one of tears and blood (Heb 2:14). His life was a life of prayer, but also one of tears and sufferings (Heb 5:7). As the Son of God he learned obedience (Heb 5:8). He was sinless, holy, blameless (Heb 7:26). Finally, he was crucified, “he endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2) and became “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb 5:9).

c. Session

Loader says that the author was not interested in discussion to what extent the Son was ruling before his incarnation. It is important to him that the final reign and its final realization has begun after Easter.¹ His present status is of interest, not the events leading to it.² Nevertheless we have some hints. The session of Jesus took place after “he had made purification for sins” (Heb 1:3). The humiliation was followed by the exaltation (Heb 2:6-9), the suffering by the installation was followed by the exaltation (Heb 2:6-9), the suffering by the installation as high priest (Heb 5:5-10)³, the cross by the crown (Heb 12:2). The sitting at the right hand of God could take place only after Christ’s resurrection (Heb 13:20).⁴ When Jesus sat down on the throne of God and participated as king in the reign of God, he was set into his office as high priest (Heb 7:28). We are reminded of Acts 2:33-34 where Peter talks about the exaltation of Christ “at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear”. And then there follows the quotations from Ps 110:1. So, Ps 110:1 is interpreted as the exaltation of Christ after his resurrection, demonstrated by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. In Acts

¹Cf., Loader, 140.

²Cf., *ibid.*, 47.

³Cf., Friedrich, 111.

⁴Loader, 141, talks about “seine Auferweckung, die bald als Auferstehung bzw. Erhöhung verstanden wurde.”

5:31-32 Peter again mentions the exaltation of Christ. This time he says: “God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.” There are allusions to Christ’s royal and priestly office. The author of Hebrews probably was writing with the same theological understanding, although he is somewhat less explicit in relation to the exact time of the events than Peter is.

d. Final Victory

Although Christ is portrayed as sitting on the throne, there are still enemies existing. These enemies have to be made subject to the Son. So, we have a future dimension too in Hebrews in connection with the kingship. Loader has a section on the *parousia* of Christ in his book, but the term *parousia* does not occur in Hebrews.¹ Therefore we preferred the heading “final victory”. Nevertheless the concept which we connect with *parousia* lives on in Hebrews.² The future dimension is already present in Heb 1:13: “Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.” In Heb 10:13 Jesus is pictured as waiting for the completion of this process.³

Heb 1:10-12 implies a future judgment. The heavens will be rolled up like a mantle, but Christ remains the same. In Heb 2:8 the theme subjection is taken up again. All things have been put in subjection to Christ, the representative of man. But “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him”. The enemies still have to be made a stool for the feet. Jesus is already ruling over the angels and the heavenly world, but the cosmic realization of his reign is still future.⁴ In 1Cor 15:25-27, Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:7 are connected. The context describes the resurrection of the saints at Jesus’ future coming and mentions the end. The enemies are defeated then. The last enemy was death. Therefore

¹Cf., Loader, 57ff.; Kittel, 5:868.

²On the one hand Jesus already came (Heb 9:11; 10:7), on the other hand he will come (Heb 6:2; 9:28; 10:25,37).

³Cf., G. Theißen, *Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrieff*(Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1969), 91.

⁴Cf., Loader, 57; Strobel, 94, 100: “Es steht noch ein gewaltiges Geschehen bevor, nämlich die abschließende Unterwerfung der Feinde Christi...” “...die Herrschaft des Erhöhten wird bereits ausgeübt, obschon wir noch auf den letzten sichtbaren Akt warten.”

“son élévation glorieuse constitue la première phase des événements de la fin”.¹

e. The Time in Between

The time in between exaltation and final victory, the time in between ascension and *parousia* is the time the Letter to the Hebrews is especially dealing with. It is the “today” (Heb 3:7), what is important. Today the readers have to make their decision. Today they have to cling to that person, called Jesus, that is the most powerful king and the most compassionate high priest. This priest can forgive their sins. This king can fill them with strength. This “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8).

6. Their Location

There is no explicit statement about the location where the priest-king executes his office, but there are some hints. Heb 10:12-13 pictures Christ sitting at the right hand of God. The preceding verse talks about the daily ministry of the earthly priest in contrast with Christ’s ministry. The location for the daily ministry was the Holy Place. So, the type should be found in the Holy Place too. In other words: Jesus being at the right hand of God is here seen in the Holy Place. Therefore the Father must be in the Holy Place too. The throne of God has to be in the Holy Place in this case.²

The same situation is found in Heb 7:26-28. V. 28 talks about Christ as high priest. So does v. 28b, using the term “Son”. V. 27 and 28a describe the contrast namely the earthly high priest. This earthly high priest offers sacrifices daily. The location for this is again the Holy Place. So, the high priest, installed by God, also executes his office in the Holy Place. In Heb 6:19-20 Jesus went as a forerunner *eis to esōterou tou katapetasmatos*. *Katapetasma* can be used for the courtyard veil, for the first and for the second veil. The ministry of the high priest was not restricted to the Most Holy Place. Therefore it is possible to think of the Holy Place too when talking about the interior, where the high priest, Jesus Christ went to.

¹Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ*, 226.

²See the parallelism in the psalm quotations which speaks of “the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 8:1; 12:2) or simply of “the right hand of God” (Heb 1:3; 10:13).

Although we cannot say very much about the location of Christ's priestly and kingly ministry, we get the impression that Hebrews talks more about the Holy Place than about the Most Holy Place. In any case, Christ's place of exaltation, of sitting, and ruling cannot be restricted to the Most Holy Place. In 10:11ff he is clearly pictured in the Holy Place.

III. The Significance of Christ's Kingship

Before his exaltation Jesus was already concerned about man. He did not only create man (Heb 1:2.10). He did not only sustain him. He also died for man and achieved salvation for him (Heb 1:3; 2:9). His ministry as priest-king again focuses on man.

Jesus Christ has several attributes:

- (1) He is Son of God (Heb 1:5ff.), the Son of God. There is no other son of God in the extent Jesus is. No one can be equated with him. The angels worship him (Heb 1:6).
- (2) He is God. He reigns from eternity to eternity. His scepter is one of uprightness. His throne is stable (Heb 1:8).
- (3) He is even Yahweh, the creator, the God of Israel, the covenant God. He holds the same name as his Father (Heb 1:10).
- (4) He is judge. His character is one that loves righteousness and hates lawlessness. He will judge the world (Heb 1:8-9,10-11; 7:2).
- (5) He is high priest, mediator, intercessor, advocate (Heb 2:17).

Christ's present ministry for his saints as found in the passage dealing with kingship and priesthood is:

- (1) He brings salvation (Heb 2:3). "...he is able to save forever those who come to God through him" (Heb 7:25). He is "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb 5:9). They can be forgiven and accepted as children of God.
- (2) He is "author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2). The believer has not to rely on himself and on his own merits. He can fix his eyes on the Lord. He can cultivate an intimate relationship with Christ. He can trust him. His king has the power to initiate faith and to perfect it in him. This includes man's consent and his continual communion with the Lord (cf. Heb 2:2-3; 6:4ff.).

- (3) He accomplishes peace. He is the king of peace (Heb 7:2). Now, there is peace between God and the repentant sinner. Man can therefore have internal peace. Finally, when all enemies are subjected to Christ, then there is also external peace.
- (4) He sanctifies (Heb 2:11). Those who are sanctified are called *hagiazomenoi*. The present participle describes a continual process. “By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb 10:14). Although the believers are perfected by the single sacrifice of Christ, their sanctification process has to go on (*hagiazomenous*).¹
The Lord transforms his saints.
- (5) He is the example (Heb 12:1ff.). The saints fix their eyes on him. He was unselfish. As creator he became man. He was poor and despised, but he loved. He was tempted, but he gained the victory. He endured opposition and hostility and was willing to lay down his spotless life even for his enemies. Christ is goal, way, task, and power at the same time. Should his church then lose the heart and fail?²
- (6) He is brother among brothers (Heb 2:14,17). He is not ashamed to be one of ours. Although king and priest, he is man’s brother. He has had the same experiences that man has. He knows temptations, sorrows, and grief. He looks for communion with man and draws very near to him.
- (7) He understands man. “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin”–Heb 4:15. Nobody has to be afraid to turn to him. He suffers with the suffering and rejoices with the rejoicing. And as king he has all power to bring about a change.
- (8) He intercedes for those who turn to him. He is not a ruler who is unconcerned with his people (Heb 7:25). “...we are not to think of Jesus as an orante standing ever before the Father with outstretched arms, like the figures in the mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God; but as a throned Priest-King,

¹Cf. F. Rienecker, *Sprachlicher Schlüssel zum Griechischen Neuen Testament*, 12th edition (Gießen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1966), 544, quoting O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Meyers kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das NT, 7th edition (Göttingen, 1936): “Was Christus an uns getan hat, muß aber zur Erfaltung kommen: Wir sind vollkommen, doch erst auf dem Weg zur Vollendung, wir haben das ganze Heil, aber noch nicht das Ziel.”

²Cf. Rienecker, 554, quoting Michel, 189-190.

asking what he will from a Father who always hears and grants His requests.”¹

- (9) He helps man. “For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants” - Heb 2:16. At the throne of mercy man can find help (Heb 4:16). This help may consist of spiritual, physical, psychical, also material aid. In this area especially his kingly power is manifested.
- (10) He finally brings to an end this world (Heb 1:12). Then there will be a better one (Heb 11:16; 13:14). Then all enemies are destroyed (Heb 1:13), but he remains and his reign does not cease.

Conclusion

Indeed, Jesus is never directly called king in Hebrews, yet the kingship motif permeates the entire letter. But Jesus is not simply a king, he is not simply a powerful king. Christ is priest-king, and his kingship and priesthood is related to human beings. His exaltation is the consequence of his humiliation. As the humiliation was not something for his own sake, but for man, so his glorification and installation into the priest-king office is not only something for his own delight, it is for man again. With his ministry as priest-king Christ enters another stage of the plan of redemption. When Christ had completed his task on earth, he started his service at another level. The time will come when absolute peace is restored again. In the time between his cross and his second coming the readers of Hebrews can rely on him in every respect. In their priest-king they can find sufficient forgiveness, salvation, understanding, help, strength. Therefore there is not a single reason to fall away from the Lord (Heb 6:6). “Pontifex enim noster simul Rex et Dominus esse agnoscitur.”²

Ekkehardt Müller, Th.D., D.Min

© Copyright December 1984
All Rights Reserved

¹H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1916), 95. Cf. Loader, 252, states: “Der zurückgekehrte Sohn bittet für die Seinen. Er übt auch jetzt schon seine Herrschaft aus, die am Jüngsten Tag vor allen sichtbar wird.”

²Vanhoye “Christologia”, 61.