

## Introduction

A good case can be made for regarding Hebrews as the most pragmatic book of the New Testament. It is directly addressed to the needs of those who apparently sought the help of the writer. What it says is an enduring message of hope for Christians of any age who are prone to discouragement and opposition, or who find themselves beset by uncertainties and insecurities. The writer deals with the situation in a systematic and carefully argued way. Fundamental to all he says is Jesus Christ—who he is and what he has done and continues to do for his followers.

Many of the titles used for Christ in Hebrews belong to the early Christian tradition: Son, Christ, Lord, firstborn.<sup>1</sup> Others are unique to it and mark a ground-breaking development in Christology, in particular the concepts of pioneer (*archēgos*) and high priest (*archiereus*). Both images belong to topics that form virtually the entire content of Hebrews, the pioneer (along with the forerunner, *prodromos*) being part of the pilgrimage motif, while the high priest is integral to the Day of Atonement analogy and the heavenly sanctuary. The two motifs appear throughout Hebrews even though, as is the case in regard to pioneer, the actual terms are not always used. The way in which the motifs interact and converge is particularly important. Jesus is not only pioneer, but priest as well, and he is not priest without also being pioneer. I attempt to show that the double analogy is fundamental to our understanding of Hebrews.

In 4:14 the figure who travels through the heavens (so reminiscent of travelers to the heavenly sanctuary in Jewish writings), who is referred to as high priest, is very obviously a pioneer figure. Similarly, the closely

1. Son (1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29); Christ (3:6, 14; 5:5; 6:1; 9:11, 14, 24, 28; 10:10; 11:26; 13:8, 21); Lord (2:3; 7:14; 13:20); firstborn (1:6).

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related figure of the forerunner (*prodromos*) in 6:20 is actually called high priest. In both 9:11–12 and 10:19–20, where the context has to do with Christ's priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary, it is the pioneer who opens the way into the sanctuary. And in 12:18–24, which depicts the pioneer and his followers assembled on the heavenly Mount Zion, the language used makes Christ appear as high priest, his blood being more effective than that of the old order (12:24). How such antithetical concepts came to be linked together is a puzzle. One deploys the language of the athletic track, pilgrimage, or battlefield, the other the language of the sanctuary. Their binary character commands attention. Hebrews, it is true, likes to mingle concepts,<sup>2</sup> and some scholars believe the epistle revolves around the "Son" and the "high priest."<sup>3</sup> No one would dispute the importance of the latter, but also oscillating in the thought world of Hebrews is the pioneer-priest (high priest) duo. This dual Christology contributes to its essential message and makes Hebrews the very important part of the New Testament that it is.

Much has been written on Christ the high priest, but, notwithstanding the fact that Käsemann showed that the pioneer as part of the pilgrimage motif is an essential clue to Hebrews,<sup>4</sup> little attention is paid to this daring interpretation of Christ and nothing that I know of on the close connection of the two concepts. Roman Catholic exegetes have tended to devote their attention to what the epistle says about priesthood and cultus, while Protestants, influenced by Käsemann's interpretation of Hebrews in terms of pilgrimage, have concentrated on exhortation. I attempt to show that pioneer and priest must be taken together. Otherwise what they stand for will be in danger of veering off in separate directions, thus denying the Christian gospel.

The appendices contain background material on the key concepts. They contribute to our understanding of the interaction of the two concepts.

I offer this study in the belief that it is a way of looking at Hebrews that aids our understanding of both its innovative Christology and its intensely practical aim.

2. On the mingling of other motifs in Hebrews see 3:1; 5:5–6; Schrenk, "Archiereus," 3:276–79; Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, cxxxix.

3. Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester*; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 69–73; Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, cxliii; Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation*, 174; cf. 227, 230.

4. Käsemann, *Wandering People*. For bibliographical information see Johnsson, "Issues," 169–87; Johnsson, "Cultus," 104–8.