

## AN EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORICAL-JESUS MOTIF IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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The book of Hebrews offers a richness in such themes as Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and soteriology, all of them set within the framework of a paraenetic thrust—a call to faithfulness in a time of impending difficulties.<sup>1</sup> (Cf., e.g., the term “word of exhortation” in 13:22.<sup>2</sup>) The present study deals specifically with the historical-Jesus motif. I examine first the book’s use of the term *Iēsous*, then the broader connections of the historical-Jesus motif, and finally the author’s purpose for featuring the motif.

It should be noted at the outset that my use of the term “historical Jesus” is not in the same sense as that of the critical-historical scholars or that of the form-critical school. Rather, it denotes the human Jesus or aspects of his life as mentioned in the book of Hebrews.

### 1. *The Christological Title Iēsous*

The book of Hebrews abounds in Christological titles, employing some twenty such names and titles.<sup>3</sup> The name “Jesus,” though not the most abundant, occurs ten times, and in eight of these occurrences it is strategically located—2:9; 3:1; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2, 24; 13:12.<sup>4</sup> F. V. Filson affirms that the name “Jesus” is used “to designate the central figure of the gospel story, the historical figure whose work ‘yesterday’ was God’s decisive redemptive act ‘in

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Estella B. Horning, “Chiasmus, Creedal Structure, and Christology in Hebrews 12:1-2,” *Journal of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research* 23 (1978): 37-48.

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all English Scripture citations herein are from the RSV.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations* 2 (Grand Rapids, MI, 1978): 349.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. also J. Harvill, “Focus on Jesus,” *Restoration Quarterly* 22 (1979): 129-140).

these last days' (1:2)."<sup>5</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, conversely, asserts that though some would emphasize the ten occurrences of the name, their belief that it is used in an absolute sense "rests on an optimistic delusion."<sup>6</sup>

### *The Eight Strategically Located References*

The question that confronts us, then, is this: Just how is the name "Jesus" used in the book of Hebrews? In order to determine the answer, the eight references mentioned above will now be briefly examined.

1. *Heb 2:9*. The use of the name "Jesus" in *Heb 2:6-9* is in the context of proof of the superiority of the Son over the angels. In vs. 7, *Ps 8:4-6* is quoted to show that man was made lower than the angels, but in vs. 9 the reference is applied to Jesus. Within this context, therefore, a reference to the historical Jesus is evident, for since man was made "for a little while lower than the angels," and since Jesus is referred to as being lower than the angels for "a little while," then that "while" when Jesus was lower than the angels must be the period of his incarnation.

In vs. 9 "Jesus" is used absolutely, and the participial clause which is in apposition to the name points to the period of Jesus' humanity. This occurrence of "Jesus" must, therefore, be a reference to his human name. It is a reference that calls attention to the historical Jesus and to his accomplishments for human beings. H. Montefiore notes that the name "occurs in an emphatic position in the sentence, stressing the humanity of the Saviour by its juxtaposition with 'lower than the angels.'"<sup>7</sup>

2. *Heb 3:1*. The first word in *Heb 3:1* is *hothen*, "therefore," which indicates that a conclusion is being drawn from the preceding argument—that given in 2:9-18, where Jesus is described as a merciful high priest on the basis of his humanity and his participation in suffering and temptation. On the basis of this argument,

<sup>5</sup>Floyd V. Filson, "Yesterday": *A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13*, *Studies in Biblical Theology*, 2d series, 4 (Naperville, IL, 1967): 36-37.

<sup>6</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York, 1980), p. 261. For an opposite view, cf. E. F. Scott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh, 1922), pp. 148-149.

<sup>7</sup>Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York, 1964), p. 58.

the "holy brethren" are called upon in 3:1 to consider "Jesus," the apostle and high priest of our confession.

*Iēsoun*, the direct object of the sentence, is both absolute and emphatic. It is used as the personal human name of the Son, to highlight his humanity. Schillebeeckx counters that *archierea*, "high priest," here qualifies *Iēsoun* and therefore makes it a reference to "Jesus the high priest sent by God."<sup>8</sup> It should be observed, however, that the full expression *apostolon kai archierea* is in apposition to *Iēsoun*. Furthermore, only one article governs both nouns, implying that the human "Jesus" is both apostle and high priest.<sup>9</sup> "Apostle" refers to his earthly state, as God's representative among men, while "high priest" refers to him as man's representative to God.<sup>10</sup> This thought can be better understood in the light of the preceding discussion in 2:9-18, where his experiences in the historical state are said to have qualified him for his high-priestly office.

Thus, the human "Jesus" is vital to the argument in this verse. What is emphasized is that the person for contemplation is the glorified Jesus of Nazareth.

3. *Heb 6:20*. Chap. 6 is designed to stir up the sluggish energies of the saints, motivating them to renewed hope. God's reliability and immutability are used as evidence that their hope will not be misplaced. Vs. 19 indicates that the Christian's hope is a sure and steadfast anchor, since it is centered in the heavenly sanctuary in the very presence of God, where, according to vs. 20a, Jesus went as our forerunner (*hopou prodromos huper hēmōn eisēlthen Iēsous*).

In this context, which alludes to the high-priestly office of the Son ("a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"), it might seem that *Christos* or *Iēsous Christos* would have been more appropriate titles, especially since the high priest is an anointed one. The nomenclature, however, is *Iēsous*, used absolutely and emphatically. The implication of this use of the human name seems to indicate to the struggling Christians that they can take heart, inasmuch as their representative in the heavenly sanctuary, in whom they are to hope, is one with whom they can identify.

<sup>8</sup>Schillebeeckx, p. 261.

<sup>9</sup>See Sharp's rule in James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winebery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Washington, DC, 1979), p. 70.

<sup>10</sup>See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI, 1964), p. 515.

4. *Heb 7:22*. Chap. 7 sets forth the superiority of this new priesthood, opening with a discussion of Melchizedek, the priest-king, and his superiority to the Aaronic priesthood. Vs. 11 then introduces the new priesthood, and a discussion of its superiority to the Aaronic priesthood follows. It is in the specific context of this discussion that vs. 22 asserts: *kata tosouto [kai] kreittonos diathēkēs gegonen enguos Iēsous*, “This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant” (so the RSV, but more literally, “By so much Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant”).

In this statement, the name *Iēsous* is strategically located. Its position marks both its emphatic and its absolute usage. The glorified historical Jesus is made the surety of a better covenant. Donald Guthrie notes “that special significance must be attached to the use of the human name here, since it is as perfect representative of man that he [Jesus] becomes the *surety*.”<sup>11</sup> With its new priest, who took office by an oath, unlike the former priests, who took office by law, the new priesthood offers a better hope (vs. 9) to draw near to God. The priest, Jesus, is one who understands man’s lot, having successfully faced suffering and temptation.

5. *Heb 10:19*. Vs. 19 in chap. 10 begins an exhortation based on the argument of the previous doctrinal section. The word *oun*, “therefore,” in the opening phrase of this verse is resumptive and, as Guthrie points out, refers to “the whole preceding demonstration.”<sup>12</sup> The readers are told that it is the blood of the historical Jesus that grants access to the sanctuary. *Iēsou* (in the phrase *en tō haimatī Iēsou*, “by the blood of Jesus”) is both absolute and emphatic, and its allusion to the historical Jesus can be deduced from the reference to his blood. It is the sacrificial death of the historical Jesus, identified here by his personal name, that qualifies Jesus for his office and secures for his loyal followers an access to “the holies.”

6. *Heb 12:2*. The reference to Jesus in Heb 12:2 (“looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith . . .”) is significantly located in the Greek in at least two ways. First, it comes in the section that immediately follows the cataloging of the faithful ones given in chap. 11. Second, the absolute and emphatic *Iēsoun* is not

<sup>11</sup>Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI, 1983), p. 165.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 210.

only last in the clause which began in vs. 1, but it is also the last word in the midpoint of a chiasm comprising vss. 1-2.<sup>13</sup>

The human name of the Son is once again used here to call attention to the "human person, our Lord in His earthly life."<sup>14</sup> That it is the glorified Jesus of Nazareth that is to be the object of the Christian's gaze is indicated by the reference in vs. 2 to Christ's crucifixion preceding his being "seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

7. *Heb 12:24*. The usage of the absolute *Iēsou* in 12:24, where Jesus is spoken of as "the mediator of a new covenant," occurs in the broader context of a comparison of the "awesomeness of the giving of the law with the majesty of the new covenant."<sup>15</sup> The saints are at Mount Zion, not at Sinai (vs. 22). Here they have come to "Jesus," the Mediator of a new covenant. *Iēsou* occurs in the emphatic position; and while it is Jesus' high-priestly function to which allusion is being made, it is his historical name that is held up to inspire the faltering faith of the believers.

8. *Heb 13:12*. Our final reference, in 13:12, cites a specific historical event in the life of the historical Jesus—his death "outside the gate." The fact that the previous verse notes that the sin-offering was made "outside the camp" implies that Jesus of Nazareth died as a sin offering outside the walls of Jerusalem. *Iēsous* in this reference is both emphatic and absolute.

### Conclusion

Contrary to Schillebeeckx's claim, a scrutiny of the foregoing eight references indicates that *Iēsous* is indeed used absolutely in the book of Hebrews. Furthermore, its occurrence in the emphatic position in the majority of instances suggests that this usage is deliberate and not incidental. Filson is therefore correct in asserting that "the basic function of the name Jesus is to designate the central figure of the gospel story, the historical figure."<sup>16</sup> The intent of the absolute use could very well be to draw attention to his real humanity.

<sup>13</sup>A more detailed discussion will be presented later in this article.

<sup>14</sup>W. H. Griffith Thomas, "Let Us Go On" (Grand Rapids, MI, 1944), p. 157.

<sup>15</sup>Guthrie, p. 259.

<sup>16</sup>Filson, p. 37.

On this basis, therefore, it can be concluded that the name is used technically in Hebrews. Its strategic positioning accords it a key place in the author's development of his theme. M. R. Vincent is undoubtedly right in his claim that "in this epistle that name [Jesus] usually furnishes the key to the argument of the passage in which it occurs."<sup>17</sup>

## 2. *A Brief Examination of Texts Referring to the Historical Jesus*

Having looked at eight key references to the name "Jesus," in order to clarify how that name is used in the book of Hebrews, we next broaden our scope to a consideration of passages that embrace the historical-Jesus motif.<sup>18</sup> Our purpose is to determine the place assigned this motif in the book. Our examination will include some of the verses and passages already noted above, but will also encompass further passages that elucidate the specific motif, even though the *name* "Jesus" does not occur.

### *Some Preliminary Matters*

The book of Hebrews opens with a presentation of the pre-existent Son as God's supreme revelation for these last days. A series of participial constructions in 1:3-4 carries him from being one bearing "the very stamp of his [God's] nature" and "upholding the universe by his word of power" through the event of his making "purification for sins" and his subsequent exaltation. Within this passage there is, thus, an implicit reference to the historical Jesus, for it was as a human being that he offered up himself for the "purification" of "sins."

A second point should be noted: namely, the juxtaposition of the themes of the historical Jesus and the subsequently exalted Lord. The point of this association seems to be that exaltation was guaranteed by the purification which took place in the human realm.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* 4 (New York, 1918): 399.

<sup>18</sup>Martin, p. 352, calls the book of Hebrews "remarkable for its heavy concentration on the humanity of 'Jesus'"; and Guthrie, p. 48, suggests that some of the clearest references to Jesus' human experience outside the Gospels occur in Hebrews.

<sup>19</sup>See Guthrie, p. 68; F. D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 7 (Washington, DC, 1980): 397 (hereinafter *SDABC*).

### *The Historical Jesus Passages*

*Heb 2:3.* In Heb 2:3 the author states that the great salvation of which he speaks was first proclaimed "by the Lord" (*dia tou kuriou*). That this is a reference to the proclamation made during the earthly life of Jesus can be deduced from the language and context. First, in the NT epistles the term *kuriou* with the definite article is used as a reference to the historical Jesus.<sup>20</sup> In the second place, reference is made at the end of the verse to a further attestation by those who were original hearers—doubtless a reference to the apostolic proclamation. Finally, God is said to have borne witness to the gospel by attestation with signs and wonders and mighty works, a statement which seems to be a reference to the miracles which accompanied the ministry of Jesus. The terms used to denote the miracles here—*sēmeion*, *teras*, and *dunamis* (vs. 4)—are identical with those used in the Gospels. They are also the very words used by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22) to refer to God's attestation of Jesus, though Peter sets them forth in the reverse order. In Heb 2:4 they are in the instrumental case (*sēmeiois*, *terasi*, *dunamesi*), and each adds an idea about the work of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> It is evident that the earthly ministry of Jesus is being linked here with the portrait of the Son painted in chap. 1.<sup>22</sup>

*Heb 2:9.* Earlier we noted that the first use of the name "Jesus" in Hebrews is found in 2:9. Here it serves not only to mark Jesus' essential humanity, but also to link the "Lord" in 2:3-4 with the human Jesus. Thus, 2:9 contains the book's second pairing of the historical Son with the exalted Lord. Whereas in 1:3b it is stated that his session "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" takes place after his having made "purification for sins," here his being "crowned with glory and honor" follows after, and is contingent on, his "suffering of death." The double parallel between 2:9 and 1:3b is evident. It appears that the suffering of death achieves purification for sins, while the crowning with glory and honor is equivalent to sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And as noted earlier, 2:9 further designates the person involved in these achievements as being the historical Jesus, identified by his human name.

<sup>20</sup>Werner Foerster, "Κύριος," *TDNT* 3 (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965): 1092.

<sup>21</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* 5 (New York, 1972): 343.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Expositor's Greek Testament* 4 (Grand Rapids, MI, 1961): 260.

*Heb 2:14.* In Heb 2:14 we find an emphasis on the necessity for solidarity between the Pioneer of salvation (cf. vs. 10) and those to be saved. The argument is that since “flesh and blood” is the realm in which the heirs of salvation exist, Jesus (cf. vs. 9), in order to identify with them, “himself likewise partook of the same nature.” Guthrie’s affirmation that this verse “sums up the perfect humanity of Jesus” is germane,<sup>23</sup> especially when considered in the light of the fact that in Rabbinic writings “*blood and flesh*” is, as stated by Vincent, “a standing phrase for human nature in contrast with God.”<sup>24</sup> This, then, is a significant reference to Jesus, attributing to him flesh and blood—i.e., humanity.

*Heb 2:17.* In Heb 2:17, the same theme is continued. This verse asserts that the solidarity with “his [Jesus’; cf. vs. 9] brethren” was not partial.<sup>25</sup> The reason for the necessity of the Son’s being fully incarnate, moreover, is “so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people.” The point is that his participation in the human experience was a necessary qualification for his high-priestly office and function.<sup>26</sup>

*Summary of Chap. 2.* Chap. 2 has the greatest concentration of references to the historical Jesus to be found in Hebrews, and gives evidence of the fact that the historical-Jesus motif is an essential one. The argument set forth in this chapter makes the point that the Son’s humanity, with its suffering and death, eminently qualified him—identified as Jesus—to become the exalted high priest, i.e., the priest-king. William Johnsson is certainly correct when he asserts that “the human experiences of the Son qualify or equip him for the role laid out in the divine purpose.”<sup>27</sup> The addressees can thus be encouraged, for solidarity in humanity guarantees sympathy and access.

*Heb 3:1.* Chap. 3 opens with a command to “consider Jesus.” As noted in the first section of this article, the technical use of the name “Jesus” in vs. 1 indicates a reference to the historical Jesus;

<sup>23</sup>Guthrie, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup>Vincent, p. 404.

<sup>25</sup>Montefiore, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup>See *SDABC* 7: 407; Bruce, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup>William G. Johnsson, *Hebrews*, Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta, GA, 1970), p. 20.

and moreover, the phrase “the apostle and high priest of our confession,” which is in apposition to “Jesus,” is significant. While F. F. Bruce is correct in saying that the statement marks out Jesus as God’s representative among men and men’s representative in God’s presence,<sup>28</sup> most commentators and scholars miss a salient point in this unique reference to Jesus as “apostle.” The passage is usually viewed in terms of Heb 1:2 and thus is seen as emphasizing Jesus as God’s ambassador to human beings. This is a legitimate thought, of course, but it is incomplete; for while earthly ambassadors do not assume the nationality of the countries in which they serve, Jesus, as God’s ambassador to man, assumed humanity. This is precisely the point of 2:9-18 to which *hothen*, “therefore,” in 3:1 calls attention, and thus the term “apostle” in the latter verse refers to the historical Jesus of Nazareth, God’s ambassador. (The pairing in this verse—that of the human Jesus with his high priesthood—has already been discussed in our earlier treatment of Heb 3:1.)

*Heb 4:14-16.* In Heb 4:14 the argument of 2:9-18 is resumed—i.e., the discussion of Jesus as high priest. He is here called “great,” a reference to his dignity.<sup>29</sup> He is said to have “passed through the heavens,” suggesting that he is in the presence of God, thus superior to Aaron. The identification that is made here is interesting: *Iēsoun ton huion tou theou*. These two titles—“Jesus” and “the Son of God”—used together signify the Son’s two natures, human and divine. Thus, the believers are called upon to confess their unique priest, who is both human and divine.

Furthermore, we have here an explicit linking between priesthood and the earthly Jesus. It was during his earthly existence that he in human form experienced man’s lot and that he successfully endured temptation. Consequently, vss. 15-16 exhort Christians to draw near to the throne of God with confidence, since their high priest is one who by experience can sympathize.

*Heb 5:7-10.* In Heb 5:7-10 we find the most explicit reference to the historical Jesus that we have thus far encountered. The “mortal life”<sup>30</sup> of Jesus is here called “the days of his flesh,” and the author cites events—“a historical reminiscence”<sup>31</sup>—from the life of Jesus.

<sup>28</sup>Bruce, p. 55.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Brooke F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York, 1892), p. 105.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Vincent, 4: 434.

<sup>31</sup>Guthrie, p. 128.

His prayers and supplications, which are offered with loud cries and tears, are mentioned. Most commentators agree that these are allusions to his Gethsemane experience.<sup>32</sup> Concerning the significance of this reference to the historical Jesus, Guthrie declares:

He [the author of Hebrews] seems to want to dispel any idea that Jesus is a mystical non-historical figure by abruptly reminding the readers of what happened *in the days of his flesh*. The expression is interesting because it draws attention to the reality of his human life. The writer has already made this clear in chapter 2 (see verses 14 and 17), but the present reference much more vividly introduces a clear allusion to the historical record of the life of Christ. Indeed this is one of the most vivid examples in the New Testament outside the Gospels.<sup>33</sup>

Vss. 8-10 list two achievements of the historical Jesus. He has learned obedience through the things he suffered, and he has been made perfect; thus he has become the source of eternal salvation to those who obey him. Though suffering and perfection are separated here, on the basis of 2:10 we could conclude that suffering was the agent that taught him obedience and resulted in his "being made perfect" (5:9). Heb 5:10 provides a further pairing between a reference to the historical Jesus and a reference to his high priesthood: On the basis of his achievements, he is "designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek."

*Heb 7:14.* Chap. 7 discusses Melchizedek, emphasizing his superiority over the Aaronic priesthood. In this context there is reference in vs. 14 to the historical Jesus, here designated "our Lord," as being a descendant of the tribe of Judah—a nonpriestly tribe.

*Heb 7:26-27.* Later in the same chapter, in vss. 26-27, there is treatment of Jesus' qualification as high priest and his status as the "surety of a better covenant" (vs. 22). In these verses, five significant terms feature his qualifications and illustrate his preeminence. He is holy (religious qualification),<sup>34</sup> guileless (moral qualification),<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Cf., e.g., *ibid.*, p. 129; *SDABC* 7: 429; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Columbus, OH, 1946), pp. 161-163; and Thomas, p. 63.

<sup>33</sup>Guthrie, p. 129.

<sup>34</sup>Walter Grundmann, "ακακος," *TDNT* 3:482.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

undefiled (cultic qualification),<sup>36</sup> separated from sinners (qualification that combines both ethical and divine elements),<sup>37</sup> and exalted above the heavens (divine qualification). Three of these terms allude to Jesus' earthly life, one to his high-priestly ministry as a consequence of his successful earthly life, and one to his exalted status. Here, then, is another instance where there is a pairing of the historical Jesus with exaltation.

*Heb 10:5-18.* In contrast to the inadequate animal sacrifices referred to in Heb 10:1-4, vs. 5-18 of the same chapter set forth the adequacy of Christ's sacrifice. While the former sacrifices were repeated, Jesus' sacrifice was a single, once-and-for-all-time sacrifice of himself. This contrast is elaborated through the citing of specific aspects of the life of the historical Jesus; and significantly, vs. 12 contains a further pairing of Jesus' human life with priesthood and exaltation. In short, the passage in Heb 10:5-18 demonstrates that Christ's superior ministry began only after he had first successfully functioned in his dual capacity as victim and priest and then had been exalted.

*Heb 10:19-25.* Heb 10:19 introduces a hortatory section in which Christians are urged to approach confidently the sanctuary "by the blood of Jesus." Not only is the personal name "Jesus" used here—which, as we have seen, has a technical sense in the epistle—but the reference to his blood is obviously an allusion to his crucifixion. Here, then, the accomplishment of the human Jesus is set forth as giving Christians confidence to approach the heavenly sanctuary.

Vs. 20 states that Jesus opened "a new and living way" through "the curtain, that is, through his flesh." The phrase "through his flesh" takes us once again to the human experience of Jesus. And the reference to him in vs. 21 as "a great priest" is another instance when discussion of his humanity is followed by a reference to priesthood.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>See Lenski, p. 243, and Guthrie, p. 146, both of whom see Jesus being set apart from sinners in that while he was man he did not sin. See also Robertson, p. 386, and Vincent, p. 446, who view the phrase as referring to Jesus' exaltation above men. Perhaps the phrase makes reference to Jesus' qualification as high priest in the sense that while Aaronic priests were sinners and had to be made ceremonially clean in order to function in their office, Jesus—though man—was separated from sinners in that he never participated in sin. He is therefore a high priest exalted above men because he is ethically superior.

*Heb 12:2 and 13:11-13.* Heb 12:2 has been treated earlier, and we need here only to reiterate that the human Jesus who suffered is also the one who is subsequently glorified. The human Jesus is the author of faith, and the glorified Lord is its consummator. We have also treated earlier the central concept of Heb 13:11-13, and therefore need here only to note that this passage provides one further coupling of the historical Jesus with his role as high priest.

### *Conclusion*

We have now surveyed eleven passages that link the earthly Jesus either with priesthood or with exaltation. This recurring phenomenon is crucial in determining the author's purpose for featuring the historical Jesus. Furthermore, the majority of passages occur at critical junctures in the development of the book's thesis or argument. Some of these passages are found in conclusions to doctrinal sections, others within hortatory sections, and still others in conclusions to hortatory sections.

Contrary to Schillebeeckx, who claims that "there is no mention in Hebrews of a *special* interest in the *earthly* Jesus that stands out from the rest of the New Testament,"<sup>38</sup> the present essay reveals that the book has a definite interest in the historical Jesus. I would concur with Estella Horning that "his [Jesus'] humanity and suffering" are "repeatedly made the focus of attention" as the basis of the book's total argument and exhortation."<sup>39</sup> The next question to consider is, What was the author's purpose in thus featuring the historical Jesus?

### *3. The Purpose in Stressing the Historical Jesus*

In considering the author's purpose in stressing the historical-Jesus motif, we begin with the link made between the historical Jesus and both his priesthood and his exaltation. Six of the eleven passages surveyed place the human Jesus and priesthood side by side, while the other five pair the human Jesus with exaltation. It seems, however, that no sharp distinction is intended between his priesthood and his exaltation. The correlation of these could be based on the fact that it is in his exalted state that Jesus functions

<sup>38</sup>Schillebeeckx, p. 261.

<sup>39</sup>Horning, p. 42.

as high priest. One could, therefore, speak of this link as being between the earthly Jesus and the "exalted high priest."

An analysis of the passages where this pairing occurs reveals that they may be divided into four groups: (1) Four passages seem to indicate that the earthly experience of Jesus *qualified* him for priesthood or exaltation. (2) Three passages are hortatory in nature. Two of these exhort the believers on the basis that the exalted human Jesus is priest or that his blood grants access for confident approach to the sanctuary. The other exhorts the readers to go forth to meet Jesus outside the camp, since he suffered outside the gate. (3) Two passages seem to emphasize *chronology*, suggesting that exaltation took place subsequent to the sacrifice. (4) The final two passages hold up the exalted human Jesus as a model. The specific references for each of these four groups is as follows:

<i>USAGE</i>	<i>REFERENCES</i>
Qualification	2:9; 2:14; 2:17; 5:7-10; 7:14; 7:26-27
Exhortation	2:3; 4:14-16; 6:17-20; 7:22; 10:19-25; 13:11-13
Chronology	1:3-4; 10:12
Model for Christians	3:1; 12:2

It is obvious that the "Qualification" and "Chronology" passages are descriptive rather than paraenetic. We therefore focus our attention here on the two aspects more directly in line with the author's obvious and overt paraenesis—"Exhortation" and "Model for Christians."

#### *Exhortation: The Accessible Exalted Lord*

The book of Hebrews in the "Exhortation" passages we have noted and also quite pervasively elsewhere emphasizes that the exalted Lord is not to be regarded as inaccessible. He is gone, but only as a forerunner (6:20). He is exalted above the heavens and seated "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3), but he is performing a vital function as a unique link (mediator) between God and man. In short, God's Son, who entered into solidarity with us, has become qualified by his human experiences to serve as high priest in God's presence, thus granting human beings access to God. As J. Harvill observes: "The doctrine of Jesus' high priestly

ministry is directly bound up with the reality of his humanity and cannot be understood apart from that doctrine (see esp. chaps. 2 and 4). This is because the essence of priesthood is to form a link between man and God."<sup>40</sup> The fact that it is the human Jesus who is exalted to high priesthood means that man can approach the mercy seat with confidence. This fact is therefore used as a source of exhortation to motivate the believers.

### *Model for Christians*

A further purpose of the book of Hebrews seems to be to inspire Christian addressees.<sup>41</sup> Since the glimpses which are given of the congregation (3:12; 5:11; 10:25, 35-36; 12:3; and passim) reveal that they are "marked with lassitude of faith, fear of suffering, and lack of faithfulness towards the congregation,"<sup>42</sup> the church apparently contained members who were having difficulty to maintain their equilibrium and loyalty amid trial and suffering. That this epistle could have been written to such a congregation without intending to display Jesus as an example to follow in the face of suffering seems inconceivable. The author seems to be saying: Here is a model; trust him and follow his example. Bruce puts it aptly:

But the question for them [the addressees] to face was: were they to fall back and lose everything or press on to perfection? Our author urges them to press on, in spite of all the suffering it may involve, and he sets before them the example of Jesus, who set his face 'like a flint,' refusing to turn back, and was thus made 'perfect through sufferings.' His example and His present aid might well encourage them too to persevere.<sup>43</sup>

It does indeed seem that the great emphasis in Hebrews on the earthly Jesus was designed to give the suffering Christians a model.

<sup>40</sup>Harvill, p. 130.

<sup>41</sup>In contrast to my contention here, William Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence* (Nashville, TN, 1979), p. 70 (cf. also his *Hebrews*, p. 87), is emphatic that Christians are not called upon to do what Christ did, but rather to trust in what he has done. To Johnsson, the book of Hebrews fails to point to Jesus as example at the places where such would be most effective.

<sup>42</sup>W. G. Kümmel, ed., *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN, 1965), pp. 280-281.

<sup>43</sup>Bruce, p. 104.

Ralph Martin detects good use of the “imitation of Jesus motif” in the epistle. He calls attention to the author’s showing Jesus in his suffering and testing, in his endurance to the end, as well as in his learning of obedience. The progression in the Jesus experience is from suffering to being crowned with honor. “‘Follow Him’ (12:2) is the author’s clarion call.”<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, it appears that the author is using nontraditional vocabulary for his appeal to imitation. Twice the believers are urged to “consider” Jesus. In the first instance, the word *katanoeō* is used (3:1). This word implies setting one’s mind upon an object, immersing oneself in it, thus apprehending it in its whole compass. It is used here in Hebrews to impress upon the readers the duties involved in being a Christian: the duty of looking to the Mediator of salvation, and that of concentrating upon his exemplary moral conduct.<sup>45</sup>

In the second instance, the word is *analogisasthe* (12:3), its only usage in the NT. It implies the careful estimate of one object with regard to another. B. F. Westcott sees the writer as saying, “Consider Christ, reckoning up His sufferings point by point, going over them again and again, not the sufferings of the Cross only, but all that led up to it.”<sup>46</sup>

Besides these two instances, a verb of “seeing” is also used in motivating the readers. Occurring in 12:2, *aphorōntes* implores them to look away from all that detracts and fix their gaze only on Jesus, and in 13:13 the hortatory subjunctive is used to invite the readers to join the author in going forth to Jesus outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. This involves following the example of Jesus, who suffered outside the gate (vs. 12).

While these three Greek words do not occur in what might be called “effective” sections, they are to be found in hortatory contexts. This concentration on Jesus is appropriately termed the “Christian’s Jesus-fixation” by Harvill, who believes that “‘looking unto Jesus’ is not a Christian option, but a way of life.”<sup>47</sup> While a “Jesus-fixation” presupposes trust, it produces more than trust. By beholding we become changed, and it seems that the author is

<sup>44</sup>Martin, p. 104.

<sup>45</sup>Ernest Würthwein, “κατανοέω,” *TDNT* 4: 973-975.

<sup>46</sup>Westcott, p. 397.

<sup>47</sup>Harvill, p. 129.

holding up Jesus as an example, a model, whom Christians through their Jesus-fixation can emulate as they face suffering. Westcott observes that "if the eyes are steadfastly turned to Him," the believer "cannot fail to ponder the vision and to estimate the power of His work in relation to Life," and that "if the leader bears the brunt of the battle the soldier can follow."<sup>48</sup>

Of many passages in the book of Hebrews suggesting or implying the imitation of Jesus, we notice one, Heb 12:1-2, a bit further at this point. It is pivotal in the epistle, forming a bridge between chaps. 11 and 12, and thus, as Horning states, it links "the Christology of Hebrews to its basic paraenetic message: exhortation to faithfulness in following Jesus."<sup>49</sup>

When the structure of the passage is scrutinized, a chiasm is detected. This inverse parallelism is significant, for the first four lines refer to the believers and the last four to Jesus, with a "Jesus-fixation" statement at the center. This chiasm is evident both in the Greek and in the English. Following is Horning's diagram in English:

**Therefore**

we,                    *having seated around about us such a cloud of witnesses,*  
                          *setting aside every weight and every clinging sin . . .*  
                          *with patient endurance . . .*  
                          let us run the race that is set before us . . .  
                          *keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith,*  
                          *who for the joy that was set before him . . .*  
                          *patiently endured a cross . . .*  
                          *despising shame . . .*  
                          *is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*<sup>50</sup>

Usually, the center of a chiasm is the most important part, carrying the principal point. N. W. Lund states that the center is always the turning point and carries a change of trend of thought, an antithetical idea, and usually divine names and titles.<sup>51</sup> At the center of this chiasm is to be found the personal historical name of the Son, in the midst

<sup>48</sup>Westcott, p. 397.

<sup>49</sup>Horning, pp. 37-48.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>51</sup>N. W. Lund, *Chiasm in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1942), pp. 40-41.

of a "Jesus-fixation" statement. Horning is convinced that the parallelism between the believers (first four lines) and Jesus (last four lines in inverse order) highlights an imitation motif. She says, "It is a challenge to imitate the faith demonstrated in the single-minded life and death of Jesus," and also states further that "both the structure and vocabulary of our text require that we see discipleship in terms of imitation of Jesus or following in his steps."<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps it would not be too much to say that Heb 12:1-2 is representative of the underlying concern of the entire epistle, especially when seen in the light of the exhortation of 13:13: "Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp" and bear the abuse he endured.

<sup>52</sup>Horning, pp. 43, 46.