Cosmology, Eschatology, and Soteriology in Hebrews: A Synthetic Analysis

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This study analyses the spatial and temporal dimensions of the metanarrative undergirding the author's world view in an attempt to understand the relationship between the present possession and future attainment of salvation in the theology of Hebrews. The thesis of this study is that the present possession of salvation functions to enable believers to persevere to final salvation.

Key Words: eschatology, soteriology, narrative theology, world view, perseverance, faith

The book of Hebrews plays a crucial role in theological discussions concerning assurance, perseverance, salvation, and the potential loss of salvation.\(^1\) On the one hand, many argue that the warning passages within Hebrews indicate that genuine believers can lose their salvation through apostasy. Others argue that Hebrews teaches the impossibility of genuine believers’ losing their salvation because of the finality and sufficiency of the completed work of Christ. The debate often focuses on the meaning of various words (γεύομαι, μέτοχος, and so on), the syntax of various grammatical constructions (the conditional clauses of 3:6 and 3:14, verb tenses, and so on), and the author’s use of the Hebrew Scriptures.\(^2\) While these factors


2. Cf. Bateman, *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, for thorough coverage of these questions.
are essential, elements of the author’s world view are often neglected. The author’s world view, among other things, includes his perception of the temporal and spatial dimensions of the metanarrative undergirding reality and the unfolding of history.³ Lack of attention to these spatial and temporal facets of the book of Hebrews can result in misinterpretation.

This study is a synthetic analysis⁴ of the present and future aspects of salvation in light of the spatial and temporal dimensions of the metanarrative undergirding the author’s world view.⁵ It will proceed in three parts: (1) an introduction to the metanarrative undergirding our author’s world view with analysis of its spatial and temporal components, (2) an analysis of the future and present descriptions of salvation in Hebrews, and (3) a discussion of the relationship between the present possession and future attainment of salvation in the hortatory agenda of the author of Hebrews. The thesis of this study is that the present possession of salvation in the theology of Hebrews is functional: i.e., it serves to enable perseverance to final salvation.

This study will not engage introductory questions beyond the broadly agreed-on understanding that Hebrews was written to a group of Christians sometime in the latter first century to persuade (motivate, exhort) them to remain true to their Christian confession and not abandon their faith in Christ.⁶ There is a growing consensus, which will also be followed here, that apocalyptic Judaism serves as the primary background of thought for the book.⁷

3. This article will not speculate concerning authorship, but third-person-masculine pronouns will be used throughout reflecting the masculine-singular participle διηγούμενον in Heb 11:32.

4. Synthetic analysis is particularly relevant to the study of Hebrews because the author, for rhetorical purposes, often uses different words or phrases to describe the same underlying reality. It enables a more probable interpretation of ambiguous words, phrases, or descriptions through comparison and contrast with other, clearer, parallel phrases throughout the book. See McKnight, “Warning Passages.” Buist M. Fanning (“A Classical Reformed View,” in Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews [ed. Herbert W. Bateman; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007], 175–76), while disagreeing with McKnight’s conclusions, supports the validity of a synthetic methodology for interpretation within Hebrews.

5. “Metanarrative” will be used interchangeably with the phrase “foundational story” in reference to the author’s world view.


METANARRATIVE: ESCHATOLOGY AND COSMOLOGY

Richard Hays’s study The Faith of Jesus Christ cogently argues for the importance and validity of examining the narrative world lying behind nonnarrative discourse.8 The epistle to the Hebrews represents reflective, nonnarrative discourse on the significance of the metanarrative undergirding the author’s (and the recipients’) world view. The rhetorical power of Hebrews derives from the author’s conviction that both he and the recipients were themselves active participants in the unfolding drama that began with creation (1:10) and would culminate in the transformation of the world (1:11–12, 12:26–27). The narrative world undergirding the book of Hebrews both includes and draws up within itself the lives and situations of the author and audience.9

Kenneth Schenck applies elements of narrative criticism, including the Greimasian model to understand better the narrative world underlying Hebrews’s rhetorical world.10 He rightly identifies Ps 8 in Heb 2:5–10 as a succinct description of Hebrews’s foundational story.11 This story can be summarized: God created humanity for glory and honor (2:6–7), which they failed to possess (2:8) and were subsequently enabled to possess (2:10) through Christ’s accomplishment on their behalf (2:14–15).12 The immediate context indicates that the main obstacle Christ had to overcome in order for God to bring “many sons to glory” (2:10) was the devil who held the power of death (2:14). In addition, the emphasis throughout Hebrews on Christ’s decisive high priestly activity to put away sin (1:3; 2:17; 7:27; 8:12; 9:26; 10:12, 17) seems to indicate that the author of Hebrews saw sin and the resulting evil conscience (9:14, 10:22) as primary factors, along with death, prohibiting mankind from attaining the glory and honor for which they were created.


10. Ibid., 51–59.

11. Ibid., 58–59.

12. Hebrews’s use of Ps 8 should be understood both anthropologically and Christologically in light of the solidarity subsequently developed between Christ and his ‘brothers’ (2:11–18). The argument develops how, despite God’s creational intent, we do not presently see the fulfillment of the Psalm (2:8), but we see Jesus, who, entering fully into our humanity, is crowned with glory and honor (2:9). As such, he is the ἀρχηγός (“founder, pioneer”) of our salvation, guaranteeing the final fulfillment of the Psalm for humanity.
The author of Hebrews situates this metanarrative (humankind created for glory, lacking glory, and being led to the originally intended glory by the accomplishment of Jesus in his death and resurrection) within the temporal two-age dualism common in Jewish apocalyptic and early Christian eschatology. The early Christians were convinced that Jesus’ resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked the beginning of the new age, but this inauguration of the new age was incomplete. They still suffered, grew sick, died, and experienced temptation and weariness. There is thus an overlap between the old age and the new in which both ages exist simultaneously and elements from both ages define and impact the lives of individual believers.

The Temporal Framework: Inaugurated Eschatology

The “old age” is described in Hebrews as “long ago” (1:1) and “formerly” (4:6) in reference to the time before Christ came. Our author identifies the old age with the old covenant and the new age with the new covenant (8:13, 9:8–9). The old age therefore lies under the surface of the discussion of the superiority of the new covenant over the old. In addition to linking the old age with the old covenant, our author seems to associate both with the present existence of the created world (8:13, 9:8–9).

Hebrews presents the time between the two appearances of Christ to be the “last days” (1:2) and “the end of the ages” (9:26). In the present, “today” (3:7, 13, 15; 4:7; 13:8), “now” (2:8; 9:24), Christ is in the presence of
God on our behalf (9:24) to make intercession and thereby save those who draw near to God through him (7:25). The “present” is, however, also a time of incompleteness when we do not yet see everything subjected to him (2:8), because even though Jesus is currently reigning as the enthroned son, he is still waiting, from the time of his enthronement to the future day when his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet (10:13; cf. 1:13).

The present is the time of eschatological decision, during which the old age and the new age are both operative, where for a short time, “today,” the promise of entering his rest still stands (4:1). Our author’s primary purpose for writing is to encourage perseverance (cf. 3:6, 14; 6:11–12) in this present moment of eschatological fulfillment and unfulfillment. The present is thus invested with urgency and importance, as our author stresses the necessity of endurance in order to receive what has been promised (10:36).

The future consummation and fulfillment of God’s purposes in history is described as the “world to come” (2:5) and the “age to come” (6:5). This coming age will be precipitated by the return of Christ (9:28, 10:37), “the end” (3:14, 6:11), on the “day” that is drawing near (10:25). On that day, all will be brought to account in God’s judgment (4:12, 6:2, 10:30–31, 13:4), the enemies of God will be consumed by fire (10:27; cf. 6:8, 12:29), and salvation will be brought to those who are eagerly waiting for Christ (9:26).

The Spatial Framework: Cosmology

The first chapter introduces the spatial dualism that permeates Hebrews in the contrast between the created world (1:2, 10–12) and the “right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3, 1:13). The right hand of the Majesty on high is variously described throughout the book as τὴν οἰκουμένην (“the world”: 1:6, 2:5), “the throne of grace” (4:16), “the inner place behind the curtain” (6:19), “above the heavens” (7:26), the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” (8:1), “the holy places” (8:2; 9:8, 12), “the true tent” (8:2, 9:11), “the heavenly things” (8:5, 9:23), “the true things” (9:24), “heaven itself” (9:24), “Mount Zion” (12:22), “the city of the living God” (12:22), and “the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22). The primary metaphors are of a heavenly throne room, tabernacle, and city. All three of these conceptions function


19. John Proctor (“Judgement or Vindication?” TynBul 55 [2004]: 65–80) argues that κρίνω in Heb 10:30 should be translated “vindicate” instead of “judge” and functions as positive reassurance to the readers. This interpretation fails the context, being situated between two statements of judgment at the end of a paragraph of severe warning. It is not until the transition in 10:32 with but that the rhetoric changes to assurance. The most important observation, however, against Proctor’s thesis is that the author of Hebrews consistently uses καὶ πάλιν (1:5; twice in 2:13) to join synonymously parallel, not antithetical, OT quotations.

20. Cf. Mackie, Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 157–58. A multi-tiered heaven would seem to be envisaged by 4:14 and 7:26 in line with various levels of heaven in texts such as T. Levi 2:6–10; 3:1–8; 2 En 3:1–2; Ascen. Isa. 7–9, but caution should be exercised in the absence of clearer evidence in Hebrews. This potential element of the author’s background of thought does not materially affect the present study.
for our author as a single spatial concept best described as “heaven itself” (9:24) and best understood as the abode of God himself.21 “Heaven itself” is clearly distinguished from the physical, created heavens that will be removed (1:10–12, 12:27).22 As the abode of God, “heaven itself” exists as a present, invisible reality existing alongside the created, material order.23

“Heaven itself” is the location where Christ sits enthroned and where he entered to accomplish his once-for-all high priestly sacrifice. Both the regal and cultic conceptions of “heaven itself” are joined in 8:1–2 and 10:12–13. Heaven is the spatial setting for the definitive sacrifice that inaugurated the new covenant and the new age and is where Christ reigns and lives to make salvific intercession.

Hebrews 2:5 and 12:27 indicate the dynamic relationship between the temporal and spatial elements of Hebrews’s foundational story.24 The temporal reference to the world to come (τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν) in 2:5 functions equally as a spatial reference to the world (τὴν οἰκουμένην) that Christ was exalted to (1:6) and where he is presently reigning (1:13). “Heaven itself,” the abode of God, is the future, coming world.25 Hebrews 12:27 describes how the coming eschatological shaking will effectively remove the created order so that all that is left will be what cannot be shaken.26 In these last days (the present), two spatial realities exist (heaven itself and the created universe) in correspondence with the existence and temporal overlap of two ages. In the coming day of eschatological consummation, the old age and the created world will be removed and all that remains will be the spa-
tial reality of “heaven itself” the abode and city of the living God. This identification of the present spatial reality of “heaven” with the coming age/world is illustrated by the fact that the presently existing spatial reality of the city of the living God (12:22) is the very kingdom that believers are in the process of receiving (12:28) and yet whose full attainment remains temporally future (13:14).27

**Salvation “Now” and “Not Yet”**

The preceding introduction to the temporal and spatial dimensions of Hebrew’s foundational story prepares the way to answer several related questions. What is the relationship between future and present salvation? Using the well-worn phrase “already and not yet,” it can be asked, what is it about salvation that is “already” possessed and what about it is “not yet,” awaiting future consummation?28 These questions relate directly to one’s understanding of assurance, warning, perseverance, and whether or not one can “lose salvation.”29

**Future Salvation: “Not Yet”**

Believers are the ones who will inherit salvation (1:14, 9:28; cf. σωτηρία in 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; and σῴζω in 7:25).30 This future salvation that believers

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27. Brady (“The World to Come in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 332) notes, “There seems to be a rather close parallel between the realities qualified as ‘heavenly’ and those qualified as ‘to come’. There is a world to come and a heavenly country, a city to come and a heavenly Jerusalem, good things to come and heavenly things; those who have tasted the heavenly gift have also tasted the powers of the world to come.”

28. The author of Hebrews himself notes a distinction between “now” and “not yet” in the way that “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him” (2:8–9). The “already/not yet” construct is not a modern systematic-theological tension but arises from the text itself.

29. Due to space considerations, this study will not note correlations with Pauline theology. The insightful study by A. T. Lincoln, however, must be noted for its similar focus. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul’s Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology* (SNTSMS 43; London: Cambridge University Press, 1981).


The use of the term “salvation” in 1:14, 2:3, and 9:28 clearly has a future, eschatological orientation. 6:9 posits that the believers will have “better things, things pertaining to salvation, in store for them” (in contrast to “burning” in 6:8), and so falls easily into this same forward-looking vision. The uses of the term in 2:10 and 5:9 are ambiguous when taken in and by themselves, but readily lend themselves to the same eschatological orientation when read in the context of the other passages. Even the appearance of the term in 11:7, where Noah’s trust in “things yet unseen” results in obedient action “unto the salvation of his household,” highlights this future aspect of deliverance, for “salvation” came not to Noah when he believed God’s warning, nor when he began to build the ark, but after he persisted, completed the task, and boarded it with his family.
are to inherit is developed throughout the book through a large number of synonymous expressions. Presently unattained, future salvation is equivalent to God’s Sabbath rest (4:1, 8, 11) and is the believers great hope (3:6; 6:11, 18, 19; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1), reward (10:35; 11:6, 26), promise(s) (4:1; 6:12, 17; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36), and inheritance (6:12, 17; 9:15). It is the final attainment of glory (2:10), their future city (11:10, 16; 13:14), homeland (11:14), country (11:16), and possession (10:34). It is described as a heavenly calling (3:1), seeing the Lord (12:14), the grace of God (12:15), the preservation of their souls (10:39; 13:17), the outcome of the way of life of the faithful (13:7; cf. 6:12), and a better life (11:35).

Mackie (Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 100) rightly draws attention to how future salvation is tied to Christ’s completed work.

31. Colijn (“Let Us Approach,” 571) discusses the wide diversity of expressions for salvation in Hebrews by writing, “The images of salvation presented in Hebrews are significantly different from the familiar images of justification and reconciliation that are the usual focus of systematic theologies. They enrich our understanding of the soteriology of the NT. They also have significant implications for the lives of believers, both individually and corporately. For the author of Hebrews, salvation is a pilgrimage toward a promise, a journey toward God.”

32. Sabbath rest: see Schenck, Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews, 60–62; Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 366–73, 391; and Son, Zion Symbolism in Hebrews, 139–40, which documents how widespread the idea of eschatological heavenly rest is in the apocalyptic tradition. Great hope: see Lane (Hebrews 1–8, 153), who writes, “The further qualification of hope as ‘having entered behind the curtain’ where Christ has entered as high priest gives to the concept of hope a precise eschatological nuance.” Reward: see N. Clayton Croy, Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–13 in Its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context (SNTSMS 98; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 221, concerning the function of a future “reward” to motivate endurance in the present.

Concerning “promise,” Schenck (Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews, 60) rightly notes, “In particular, Hebrews almost without exception uses the singular of ἐπαγγελία with eschatological overtones, interlocking it with other images to flesh out what is meant by expressions like ‘salvation’, ‘coming world’ and ‘glory and honour’. Thompson (The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy, 67) states, “The ἐπαγγελία of Hebrews is, therefore, the equivalent of κατάπαυσις (chs. 3–4) and the heavenly city of chapter 11. It is the goal of the people of God to ‘go out’ on their pilgrimage.” Anderson (“Apocalyptic and the New Testament,” 259) writes regarding “promise” in Hebrews, “‘Land’, ‘sabbath’, ‘rest’, ‘inheritance’, ‘homeland’ (patris), a ‘better and abiding possession’ (10:34), and ‘the things not seen’ (11:1) all point to the one object of hope.” Lane (Hebrews 1–8, cxlviii) adds

In Hebrews the familiar pattern of promise and fulfillment (i.e., what God has promised to the fathers he has fulfilled in sending Jesus), which is characteristic of the other documents of the NT, is modified. The stress falls on the fact that what God promised to the fathers he has repeated with assurance to the people of the new covenant. They are to find in the priestly office of Jesus the guarantee of the ultimate fulfillment of the promise. . . . The pattern in Hebrews is promise, reaffirmed with intensity, and fulfillment yet in the future. The fact that the revelation of God is possessed on earth only as promise explains why the one form of existence appropriate to the community of faith is pilgrimage.


The “world to come” (2:5), along with its spatial and temporal referents, points to the salvation which the readers were about to inherit (1:14, 2:3), of which our author had just been speaking (2:5). It is the present spatial location of Christ’s exaltation and high priestly ministry that will, in the future consummation, become the believer’s salvation, city, homeland, and country. Attainment of this future salvation in the coming Day of the Lord is presented in Hebrews as the primary goal and outcome of genuine Christian experience and is our author’s primary hortatory objective. This hortatory objective is to motivate, through every means possible, his reader’s perseverance in faith to the eventual attainment of future glory.

Present Salvation: “Now”

The following data will be divided into two primary, overlapping categories: (1) the completed work of Christ and (2) descriptions of believers in their present possession of salvation.

The Completed Work of Christ

Christ’s finished work, completed temporally in the past and spatially on earth at his death and in heaven following his exaltation, involved making purification and propitiation for sins (1:3, 2:17), tasting death for everyone (2:9, 14), sanctifying (2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12), perfecting (10:14), introducing the good things that have come (9:11; cf. 10:1), securing eternal redemption (9:12), putting away sin (9:26), and opening a new and living way into the holy places (10:19–20). He accomplished all this through a single sacrifice for sins (10:12) and has become the guarantor of a better covenant (7:22, 9:15) and the source of eternal salvation (5:9; cf. 7:25). Christ’s ongoing ministry, based on his finished work, involves making intercession for believers (7:25). This finished work

34. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews*, 57; Robinson, “Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 45; and Anderson (“Apocalyptic and the New Testament,” 255) discuss the connection between the coming world, coming age, and “rest.”


36. David M. Hay (Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity [SBLMS 18; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973], 150) indicates that this connection of salvation with Christ’s ongoing intercession introduces unresolved tension into the text between Jesus’ once-for-all accomplishment of atonement and an ongoing priestly ministry. Colijn (“Let Us Approach,” 585) argues that Christ’s ongoing intercession “runs contrary to the view that the justification of believers covers all past, present, and future sins.” Craig R. Koester (Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001], 366) links Christ’s ongoing ministry of intercession with forgiveness. He writes, “The strongest reasons for assuming that intercession in Hebrews involves petitions for forgiveness are that Heb 7:26–27 mentions human sin, that Christ’s priestly work involves making atonement (2:17), and that the new covenant brings forgiveness (Heb 8:12; 10:17). The high priest was also understood to offer prayers so ‘that sins may be remembered no more’ (Philo, Moses 2.123; m. Yoma 4:2; 6:2).” Cf. also MacLeod, “The Present Work of Christ in Hebrews,” 197. Christ’s ongoing ministry of intercession supports the future “not yet” orientation of salvation in Hebrews. He is able to save the ones who are (continuously) drawing near because he always lives to intercede for them. Presumably, at the consummation of final salvation in the return of Christ, his ministry
of Christ is inseparably linked to the present possession of salvation by believers.37

Present Salvation Described
Believers are described in the present as those who have been sanctified (2:11; 10:10, 14, 29), perfected (10:14), enlightened (6:4, 10:32), purified (9:14), called (9:15; cf. 3:1), forgiven (10:18), cleansed, and washed (10:22). They have tasted the heavenly gift (6:4), partaken of the Holy Spirit (6:4), tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age (6:5), and received the knowledge of the truth (10:26). Believers are addressed as sons (12:5, 7) and called holy brothers (3:1, 10:19), God’s house (3:6), and partakers of Christ (3:14).38 They possess confidence in the present to approach the throne of grace and draw near to God (4:16; 7:19, 25; 10:19). They are heirs of the future promise (6:17), share in a heavenly calling (3:1), possess hope, based on the faithfulness of God, as a sure and steadfast anchor (6:19), have a better possession and an abiding one (10:34), and have drawn near to Mount Zion (12:22).

Salvation is presented as an ongoing process in the imagery of believers’ entering (emphasizing the progressive aspect of the present tense) God’s rest (4:3) and receiving an unshakeable kingdom (12:28). These references serve as a link between the fulfilled and unfulfilled dimensions of salvation. Believers are, in the present, entering and receiving eschatological realities, the continuing reception of which will surely result in the final, full realization of those realities.

It is important to note the connection of the realized spatial statement of προσελήνυθατε (have drawn near) in 12:22 (to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem) to its other uses in the book. Believers are exhorted to draw near (προσέρχομαι) to God in 4:16 (the throne of grace) and 10:22 (to the holy places) by faith (11:6) because it is only those who are drawing near to God through Christ and his accomplished work (7:19) who will experience Christ’s ongoing salvific intercession (ἐγγίζω; 7:25). Mount Zion, God’s city, and the heavenly Jerusalem of 12:22 should be seen as parallel to the throne of grace (4:16), the holy places (10:22), and God himself (7:19, 25; 11:6). As such, Heb 12:22 displays the author’s conviction that his readers had, in the past, done (drawn near) what he was exhorting them to do continually (draw near).39

There are several good arguments for including the descriptions of 6:4–5 in the category of present “salvation,” but because of space consid-

38. Concerning sonship, Croy (Endurance in Suffering, 220) writes, “For our author, παιδεία is education into sonship. This connection is unmistakable in the case of the readers, but it is also true for Jesus” (emphasis original).
erations only two reasons related to this present study will be noted.\textsuperscript{40} (1) The “heavenly gift” (6:4), when seen in light of the spatial components of the foundational story, clearly points to the accomplished work of Christ in heaven as the exalted son and high priest in “heaven itself.” As such, it is a description of realized “salvation”: the perfection and sanctification accomplished by the heavenly sacrifice.\textsuperscript{41} (2) The reference to the powers of the coming age having been tasted in the present (6:5) is possibly the clearest description of inaugurated eschatology in the entire book. Hebrews presents salvation as a temporally future phenomenon tied to the coming future age as partially experienced (tasted) in the present because of the saving high priestly activity of Christ in heaven.

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF A BELIEVER’S PRESENT AND FUTURE SALVATION**

Four primary observations will be drawn from the preceding data. First, the completed “already” dimensions of salvation are primarily linked to the spatial setting of the foundational story, while the future “not yet” possession of salvation is primarily linked to the temporal setting of the foundational story.\textsuperscript{42} The present possession of salvation is tied to the completed work and activity of Christ in “heaven itself” while final and full salvation will not take place until Christ returns on that “day.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} For more comprehensive arguments that the language indicates genuine believers, see McKnight, “Warning Passages”; Grant R. Osborne, “A Classical Arminian View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (ed. Herbert W. Bateman; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 86–128; Cockerill, “A Wesleyan Arminian View”; and Nongbri, “A Touch of Condemnation in a Word of Exhortation.”

\textsuperscript{41} Mathewson, “Reading Hebrews 6,” 216, 219–20, argues for the OT background to the expressions “heavenly gift” and “powers of the age to come” in his attempt to demonstrate that the expressions do not signify true believers. This approach to these two phrases in particular seems misguided in light of their clear spatial and temporal associations elsewhere in the book. The heavenly accomplishment of Christ is a more probable background to “heavenly gift” in its context within Hebrews than God’s gift of manna to the wilderness generation.

\textsuperscript{42} This important insight is indebted to Son (*Zion Symbolism in Hebrews*, 173–74), who writes,

The spatial contrast between heaven and earth is the basis of the realized eschatology (i.e., spatial dualism) which is mainly expressed in the theological sections of the epistle describing the “finality” and “once-for-all” (. . . 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; cf. 9:26, 28; 10:2) quality of the saving death of Jesus. This reveals the author’s conviction that the death of Jesus is a fully realized eschatological event . . . . The futuristic eschatology, on the other hand, is mainly seen in the paraenetic sections of the epistle in order to warn his readers not to draw back from their faith in Christ: “pay attention . . . so that we do not drift away” (2:1); “the promise of entering his rest still stands” (4:1); “hold fast to the hope” (10:23); “do not refuse him who speaks” (12:25), all of which imply that the readers have not yet arrived at the goal of their eschatological redemption. This alteration between the theological and paraenetic sections reflects not only the tension between Christians’ eschatological existence in an “already and not yet” situation, but also it reveals the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the temple symbolism. (emphasis original)

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 197, 201–2.
Second, the salvation accomplished by Christ and experienced by believers in the present serves a particular function in the theology of the book of Hebrews: to enable believers to enter into sacred space, draw near to God, and thereby access “heaven itself” while spatially still being on earth (7:19).\textsuperscript{44} Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice/offering for sins (10:11) is what sanctifies (10:10, 14), perfects (10:14), and brings forgiveness of sins (10:18) and cleansing of the conscience (10:22) in order to enable confident drawing near to “heaven itself.”\textsuperscript{45} The perfection of the believers in 10:14 is best understood as vocational and cultic. It is the act whereby Christ, by his offering, makes believers fit for access to sacred space, the heavenly tabernacle. The result of this is that believers can with confidence draw near to the holy places, the throne of God himself (10:19–22). The sacrifice of Christ, by perfecting and sanctifying believers (10:19–22), has therefore effectively removed the spatial barrier separating heaven and earth and the temporal barrier separating the old age and the new by enabling believers in the present to access both sacred space (heaven itself) and sacred time (the new age and the coming world). Functionally, the “already” aspects of salvation (sanctifying, perfecting, forgiving, cleansing) enable believers to draw near to God and thus partake spatially of heaven while on earth and temporally of the new age while still living in the old.

Third, this drawing near to God with confidence based on the work of Christ likewise serves a particular function in the author’s soteriology: to enable perseverance to final salvation. This is most clearly seen in Heb 4:16, 7:24–25, and 10:19–39. The readers are exhorted to draw near to the throne of grace with confidence based on the high priesthood of Christ in order to “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16). Christ, as the superior high priest, holds his priesthood permanently and is able “to save to the uttermost” those who are drawing near (progressive aspect) to God through him by continually living to intercede for them (7:25). Christ’s continual intercession is here linked to his ability to save and is directed toward those who are (continually) drawing near to God through him.

Hebrews 10:19–39 contains an explicit contrast between those who draw near confidently to God (10:19–22) and preserve their souls (10:39) with those who draw back from God and are destroyed (10:38–39). Drawing near is linked to holding fast the confession of Christian hope (10:23), assembling with other believers (10:24–25), and living by faith (10:38–39), while drawing back is illuminated by those who go on deliberately sinning (10:26), spurn the Son of God (10:29), profane the blood (10:29), and outrage the Spirit of grace (10:29). To summarize, the accomplished work of Christ (perfecting, sanctifying, and so on) enables drawing near to God, which


\textsuperscript{45} Schenck, \textit{Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews}, 67–68.
results in perseverance to final salvation. The realized (already possessed) aspects of salvation function to enable one continually to draw near to God in the present. This continual drawing near to God results in the grace, mercy, and help needed to persevere until the day of final salvation and judgment.

This functional separation of realized “salvation” (having been sanctified, perfected, and cleansed) as the primary means of perseverance unto final salvation instead of final salvation itself can be demonstrated from the use in Hebrews of the language of perfection and sanctification. It has been demonstrated that the language of perfection in Hebrews must be interpreted contextually. In 6:1, τελειότητα is used to urge the readers in growth toward maturity. In Heb 11:40 and 12:23, the perfection that can only be attained in the coming kingdom of heaven itself is most likely in view. The use in Heb 10:14 however is concerned with how the sacrifice of Christ was sufficient to perfect believers for the vocational cultic activity of drawing near to God in the holy places (10:19). The fact that this perfection is “for all time” is tied to the fact that the author of Hebrews was emphasizing the superior sacrifice of Christ that only had to be offered once (10:11–12).

The once-for-all sacrifice likewise sanctified believers for their cultic access to sacred space (2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12). It is his blood that sanctifies (10:29) and thereby opens up a new and living way to access the holy places (10:19–20). There is no process of growth in holiness involved in this sanctification because it is a single event tied to Christ’s single sacrifice. The use of “holiness” (ἁγιότητος) in 12:10 and “holiness” (ἁγιασμόν) in 12:14, however, must be sharply distinguished from the cultic usage tied to realized salvation in the other uses of the ἁγι- word group. We experience a process of discipline in order that we might share in his holiness (12:10), and we must strive for holiness, “without which no one will see the Lord” (12:14). Here, final salvation (seeing the Lord) is made dependent on a process of sanctification that is the responsibility of the believer to strive after and for God to develop through progressive discipline and is not tied to the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice. This supports the claim above that the cultic perfection and sanctification of believers functions to enable them to draw near to God. It is in continually drawing near in confidence, faith, and hope that believers are enabled to persevere, endure God’s discipline (12:10), strive after holiness (12:14), and “receive what is promised” (10:36).

46. Mackie (Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 124) comments, “Logic and emotional appeal are no substitute for actual encounter with the deity, as communion with him alone provides the necessary motivation for obedience and perseverance.”
49. In this cultic setting emphasizing the single, efficacious sacrifice of Christ, the present-passive participle τοὺς ἁγιαζομένους in 10:14 should be seen as indicating not a process of sanctification but rather all “those who are sanctified.” Contra Isaacs, Sacred Space, 102–3.
50. See Brady, “The World to Come in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 331, in support of connecting “seeing the Lord” with final salvation.
Fourth, the connection of “faith” to “drawing near” in 10:19–39 provides the key to understanding the dynamic relationship between the present possession and future attainment of salvation in the book of Hebrews. The link between faith and preserving their souls (future salvation) in 10:39 is followed by the famous statement of 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance (ὑπόστασις) of things hoped for, the conviction (ἔλεγχος) of things not seen.” On one hand, the “things hoped for” (a temporal reference to future salvation) should be differentiated from “things not seen” (a spatial reference to the invisible, heavenly abode of God that we do not currently see; cf. 2:8), but on the other hand it must be remembered that future salvation consists of the removal of everything except the invisible abode of God so that all that is left is the spatial reality of “heaven itself.” The things that are presently unseen are therefore identical to the things hoped for in the future.

Assurance (ὑπόστασις) is a difficult word to translate. Its semantic range includes “objective guarantee,” “certainty,” “title-deed,” “reality,” “realization,” and “actualization.” Regardless of the specific nuance, ὑπόστασις, and the following word, ἔλεγχος (“proof,” “evidence,” “demonstration”) both emphasize the objective existence of their objects as opposed to a subjective apprehension. It would seem, in light of our study of the present and future dimensions of salvation in Hebrews, that our author is here presenting faith as the vital link between the soteriological present and future. Faith would therefore function in a believer’s life to realize or actualize the temporally future and spatially heavenly salvation in their existence in the present on earth. By bringing the saving reality of the future, coming world into the present, faith results in a proleptic experience of the salvation of the coming world.

51. See Victor Rhee, Faith in Hebrews: Analysis within the Context of Christology, Eschatology, and Ethics (Studies in Biblical Literature 19; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), for a discussion of the three main interpretations of faith in Hebrews, the ethical (faith as a virtue of faithfulness/steadfastness), eschatological (faith as future hope [temporal] or belief in invisible realities [spatial]), and Christological. On p. 252, he describes a general consensus by writing, “There is no meaningful dispute among scholars concerning the characteristics of faith. They all essentially agree that faith in Hebrews involves moral qualities, such as faithfulness, trustworthy [sic], steadfastness (or endurance), hope, and confidence in God’s promise.”


53. Lane, Hebrews 9–13, 326; Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 308–10.


55. Barrett (“The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 381) writes, “Faith is not merely a waiting for the fulfillment of the promise; it means through the promise a present grasp upon invisible truth.” Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1–8, cxlix.
Faith is closely connected throughout Hebrews with hope (ἐλπίς) and confidence (παρρησία), and in looking at these related expressions a clearer picture emerges. Confidence and hope are linked to believers’ inclusion in God’s house (3:6) and partaking of Christ (3:14). Belief is the means whereby we “enter that rest” in the present (4:3) and, as such, enables a present experience of an eschatological reality. It is with confidence and the full assurance of faith that believers are to draw near to God’s throne (4:16; 10:19, 22; 11:6). Keeping the full assurance of hope to the end is equivalent to the faith and patience that inherits the promises (6:11–12). It is believers’ hope that serves as a steadfast anchor for their souls and that enters “the inner place behind the curtain” (6:19; that is, the spatial reality of “heaven itself”). Hope is presented here as proleptic access to the spatial reality of heaven. In a similar expression, it is through hope that “we draw near to God” (7:19). It is believers’ “confidence” that has a great reward (10:35).

At the same time that faith (closely related to confidence and hope) is the proleptic experience and actualization of the eschatological reality of salvation in the present based on Christ’s accomplishment, the readers are made fully aware that the full object of their hope is a yet-future attainment (11:6, 10, 14, 16, 26, 39–40; cf. the list describing future salvation, pp. 551–553). This future attainment, like its proleptic experience, is dependent on the existence of faith. There will be no salvation in the day of the Lord for those who do not have faith in God or who have abandoned their faith. It can therefore be said that final salvation is dependent on persevering faith.

The necessity of the perseverance of faith for the attainment of final salvation pervades the entire book (2:3; 3:6, 12–14; 4:1, 11; 6:11–12, 18; 9:28; 10:23, 35–36; 12:1, 3, 12), explains the urgency of the warning passages, and is the motivating force behind Hebrews’ hortatory strategy. The ἵνα clause of 10:36 best communicates this conviction and should be used to inform the interpretation of the conditional clauses of 3:6 and 3:14. “You have need of perseverance (ὑπομονῆς) in order that (ἵνα) when you have done the will of God you might receive the promise” (10:36; my translation). With this statement as a clear window into our author’s driving conviction, the traditional interpretation of 3:6 and 3:14 as cause-and-effect conditional statements should be maintained. There is an inherent incompleteness and conditionality associated with believers’ present possession of salvation that will not be removed until the Day of the Lord, in which salvation

56. Barrett (“The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 381) connects “faith” with “confidence.”
58. Robinson (“Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 43) goes so far as to equate “faith” with “endurance.”
59. Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1–8, 88; Osborne, “A Classical Arminian View,” 100; Cockerill, “A Wesleyan Arminian View,” 264; Contra Fanning (“A Classical Reformed View,” 206–18), who develops an extensive argument for the possibility that the constructions may be evidence to inference and thus not conditional. In this case, possibility falls short of probability in light of other clear passages in Hebrews such as 10:36.
will be fully consummated. This incompleteness is a result of the continued existence of the old age and created world and, in a small way, is shared in part by the author of our salvation, who is likewise waiting “until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet” (10:13). His work is finished, for he endured the cross, despising its shame, but believers must still run the race before them with perseverance (ὑπομονῆς, 12:1) to the end.

**Conclusion**

Salvation in Hebrews, properly speaking, is a future event. The assurance of this future event is based solely on the faithfulness of God (10:23) and the work of Christ (finished in the giving of his sacrifice and ongoing in his intercession). The faithfulness of God and accomplishment of Christ function in the theology of the book to enable believers to draw near to God continually, with confidence, and thereby to persevere, to strengthen believers’ hope in the objective certainty of that future salvation and to intensify the consequences of the warnings for those who would abandon such a great salvation. Along with God’s faithfulness and Christ’s effectiveness as a high priest, perseverance in faith is the necessary human response and there will be no salvation in that final day for those who do not have faith.


61. This study does not materially affect theological discussions concerning election or predestination but argues against an “overrealized” soteriology that would, in any way, downplay the role of perseverance as the necessary human response required to inherit future salvation. From a Reformed perspective, the elect will surely persevere to the end because of God’s faithfulness. Nothing in this study of the theology of Hebrews contradicts this theological position. The elect, however, are only known to be the elect by their perseverance to the end (6:10–11, 10:32–36). Likewise, assurance of salvation is derived from perseverance (cf. the continued earnestness of faith and love employed in service as the attributes that accompany salvation in 6:10–11), enabled by faith in the faithfulness of God (10:23, 11:11) and not by the repetition of any particular prayer, “walking the aisle,” or some other form of religious or mystical experience.