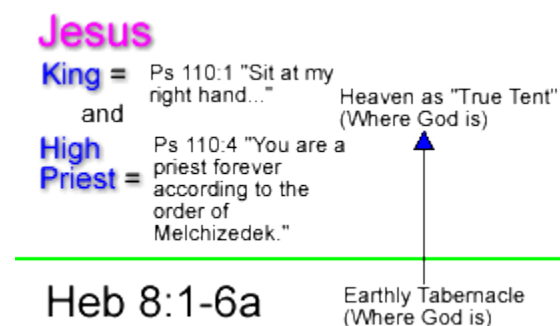


Christ as High Priest at the Heavenly Sanctuary

In Heb 8:1-6a, the author contrasts the heavenly "tent" (or tabernacle) and sanctuary (the inner courts) where Jesus serves as High Priest with the earthly tabernacle and sanctuary where the other High Priests serve. The idea of a heavenly Temple was familiar to Jews being found in the Hebrew Bible (see A. Cody, *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 9-46). For example, the prophet Isaiah has a vision of Yahweh: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple" (Isa 6:1; see 2 Sam 22:7; Pss 11:4; 18:6-7; 29:9; Micah 1:2; Hab 2:20) (see *The Heavenly Temple*). It is possible to interpret such passages as stating that heaven itself is the Temple of Yahweh, not literally that there is a Temple in heaven where Yahweh has a throne. The idea of a heavenly Temple also occurs in second-Temple texts. In the Book of Watchers, Enoch goes to the highest heaven and sees the two "houses"; the first house is the holy place, whereas the second is the holy of holies, where God's throne is located (*1 Enoch* 14). The patriarch reports, "And behold there was a second house, greater than the former and the entire portal stood open before me, and it was built of flames of fire.... And I looked and saw [therein] a lofty throne.... And the Great Glory sat thereon" (14:15-20). Likewise, in the Similitudes of Enoch, Enoch has a vision of the house or Temple in "the heaven of heavens" where God dwells [*1 Enoch* 71].) By contrast, the second-Temple text *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* depicts heaven itself as a Temple where angels worship God, corresponding to the worship of God in the Jerusalem Temple. Not surprisingly, heaven is referred to as hkl (temple) (4Q400 frg. 1, col. 1.13); db̄r (sanctuary) (4Q403 frg. 1, col. 2.13); mškn (tabernacle) (4Q403 frg. 1, col. 2.10); mqdš (sanctuary) (4Q405 frg. 23, col. 2.11); and qwdš (holy place") (4Q400 frg. 1, col. 1.14). In fact, it seems that heaven is divided into seven holy areas (4Q400 frg. 1, col. 2.10; 4Q403 frg. 1, col. 2.11, 21, 27) and these seem to be the seven debirim (or sanctuaries) of the heavenly temple, assuming that 4Q405 frg. 7, col. 7 should be reconstructed as "seven debirim of the priesthoods." This would explain the fact that *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* seems to know more than one divine chariot-throne (4Q403 frg. 1, col. 2.14-15; 4Q405 frg. 20, col. 2-frg. 21). (The divine chariot-throne, which bears the glory of God, is described in the twelfth song [4Q405 20-21-22, col. 2.7-14].) If there are seven debirim then it makes sense to have seven corresponding chariot-thrones. The author uses this belief in the existence of a heavenly sanctuary as a means of communicating to his readers the salvation-historical significance of Jesus. (On Heb 8-10, see J. Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*).

The author begins in Heb 8:1a by indicating that he is ready to state the main point to which everything that he has said so far as been leading: "Now the main point in what has been said is this" (kephalaion de epi tois legomenois) (The word kephalaion can mean "summary," but also, as in Heb 8:1, "main point" [see Plato, *Phaedo* 95b; Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.24.20; Menander in Plutarch, *Cons. ad Apoll.* 5 (103d); Philo, *Leg. all.* 2.102]; eπi + dative means "about" or "concerning."). The "main point" (kephalaion) stands in apposition to 8:1b: "We have such a High Priest," which recalls Heb 7:26-27: "For it was fitting for us to have such a High Priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those High Priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people,

because this he did once for all when he offered up himself." (C.F.D. Moule argues that the author is addressing the possible perceived problem on the part of his readers that their religion no longer has a Temple or a priesthood; his goal is to demonstrate a superior priesthood ["Sanctuary and Sacrifice in the Church of the New Testament," *JTS* n.s. 1 (1950) 29-41].) In other words, the main point of his discourse is that believers have a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven (Heb 8:1b). In describing Jesus as seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven *and* as High Priest, the author is uniting in one person the functions of king and priest. In so doing, he doubtless is alluding to Ps 110:1-4, in which, according to the author's interpretation, the Davidic Messiah described as exalted to a position of authority (Ps 110:1: kathou ek dexion mou) (see Heb 1:3) *and* as appointed as High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4). (Also,



the author, according to the interpretive principle of gezerah shavah, interprets Ps 110:1-4 in light of Ps 2:7, as already explained; this may explain why in Heb 1:3 it is the "son" who sits down [Ps 110:1 interpreted in light of Ps 2:7], while in Heb 8:1 it is Jesus as High Priest who sits down [Ps 110:4 read intertextually in light of both Ps 110:1 and Ps 2:7].) The phrase "the throne of the majesty in the heavens" (tou thronou tês megalôsounês en tois ouranois) is explicative of "at the right hand," which derives

from Ps 110:1. (The genitive thronou tês megalôsounês is a subjective genitive, so that the meaning is the majesty's throne, periphrastically conveying the idea of God as sovereign; see also Heb 1:3: "He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high" and Heb 12:2: "who sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.") "Throne" as a symbol of God's sovereignty and power occurs in Ps 11[LXX 10]:4; 47:8 [LXX 46:9]; Isa 6:1; 66:1; Jer 17:12; Ezek 1:26; *1 Enoch* 14:18 (see also Heb 4:16; 12:2). The phrase "in the heavens" (en tois ouranois) denotes the "place" where Jesus has taken his place of authority at the right hand of God (see 9:23; 12:23; see also "on high" in Heb 1:3; "above the heavens" in Heb 7:26 and "through the heavens" in Heb 4:14).

The author affirms that Jesus is a minister of the sanctuary (tôn hagiôn leitourgous), serving at the "true tent" (hê skênê tês alêthinês) that the Lord has set up, not any man (i.e., mortal) (8:2). (Philo uses the phrase leitourgous tôn hagiôn to mean servant of holy things [*Leg. all.* 3.135; see also *Fug.* 93]; but this is not the meaning of the term in Hebrews, since the context requires the meaning of "sanctuary" or the tabernacle as a whole.) Jesus is a minister (leitourgous) because he is a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (The author is inconsistent in his terminology. He uses hagia to refer to the holy place, as opposed to the holy of holies, in Heb 9:2, but in Heb 9:8, 12, 24-25; 10:19; 13:11 the term ta hagia refers to the holy of holies. In 8:2, however, he means by ta hagia the entire sanctuary, i.e., tabernacle, which is how the LXX uses ta hagia [see *Jdt.* 4:12; 16:20; *1 Macc* 3:43, 59; 4:36, 41, 43, 48; 6:18; 7:33, 42; 9:54].) The sanctuary is also called to hagian [with kosmikon] in Heb 9:1, parallel to LXX Num 3:38; Ezek 44:27; 45:18; *1 Macc* 10:42.) (The phrase "tents, which the Lord set up" [skênai has epêxen kurios] occurs in Num 24:6; it is probable that the author was

influence by this construction.) The "true tent" refers to the heavenly tabernacle, the model for the earthly one (see below). It is probable that "true tent" and "sanctuary" are a hendiadys, so that "true tent" is expegetical of "sanctuary": the former specifies further the meaning of "sanctuary" (Moffat, *Hebrews*, 104-5; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 402; Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 130). The alternative interpretation is to take "true tent" to refer to the entire heavenly structure (see Heb 8:5; 9:8, 11, 21; 13:10) and "sanctuary" to refer to the holy of holies, a part of this larger structure (see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 217-18; Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes*, 56-57; Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester*, 163). This is less likely, because of how the author understands the "true tent" and its relation to the earthly tabernacle. The author holds that heaven itself is the sanctuary or true tent where Christ serves as High Priest, in agreement with *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*. For this reason, he implicitly rejects the view found in some second-Temple writings of an actual sanctuary located in heaven (contrary to G. Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes*). It must always be kept in mind that the author thinks typologically not literally, although he may at first appear to be speaking literally. In addition, while he makes a distinction between the holy of holies and the whole tent with respect to the earthly copy, the author holds that the heavenly original consists only of the type of the earthly holy of holies, which is heaven itself (see Heb 9:1-14). Thus, while it may appear that he believes in a heavenly tabernacle, the author is actually speaking of heaven itself, which is the type of the earthly tabernacle, its antitype, and in particular the holy of holies (see Heb 9:24). This is suggested by the fact that for the author it is as seated at the right hand of God, who is seated on a heavenly throne (Ps 110:1), that Christ serves as High Priest (Ps 110:4). (Of course, the imagery of God seated on a throne in heaven with Christ sitting beside him must be understood metaphorically of Christ's exaltation to a position of co-regency with God.) Christ's work as High Priest, which was conditional upon his ascension to the right hand of God (Ps 110:1), is typologically anticipated by what the priests do and more importantly the High Priest does in the earthly sanctuary (see Schierse, *Verheissung und Heilvollendung*, 26-64; M. Issacs, *Sacred Space*, 179-219; contrary to O. Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes*, 50-73). This true tent, the heavenly sanctuary, which is heaven itself, belongs to the same eternal order as the "rest" (Heb 3-4), the better country and well-founded city (Heb 11:10, 16), the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-23) and the unshakable kingdom (Heb 12:28). All these ideas must be interpreted typologically, having counterparts on earth, and would be indescribable without them.

The author then establishes that every High Priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, so Christ the heavenly High Priest must also have something to offer (Heb 8:3) (see parallel in Heb 5:1). What it is that this heavenly priest offers will be discussed later (see Heb 9:12, 25-28; 10:11-13), though the author has alluded to it in Heb 7:27 ("He offered himself"). In Heb 8:4, the point is made that if Christ were on earth he would not be a priest at all, since priests on earth must offer gifts according to the Law and therefore must be from the Levitical priestly line. ("Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all... [*ei men oun ên epi gês, oud' an ên hiereus...*] is a contra-factual condition, the implication being that Jesus is not a priest on earth.) Since he is not on earth, Jesus is a different type of priest from a different and superior "order" (*taxis*), who serves at the "true tent" (*hê skênê tês alêthinês*), which is to say, in heaven itself (see Heb 7:13-15). (The author begins in Heb 8:4 to refer to Jesus as priest [*hiereus*]

and no longer as High Priest [archireus]. The reason for this is unclear.) It is explained that the earthly priests serve at the copy and shadow (hupodeigmati kai skia) of the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 8:5). The two terms "copy and shadow" are synonyms. (Possibly, "copy and shadow" is intended as a hendiadys: "shadowy copy.") He finds evidence of the existence of a heavenly tabernacle in the command that God gave to Moses in Exod 25:40 (see Exod 25:9; 26:30; 27:8; Num 8:4; 1 Chron 28:19) where God instructs Moses to make everything according to the pattern that God showed to him on the mountain: "See that you make it according to the pattern (LXX: kata ton tupon) shown to you on the mountain." (The word "all" [panta] is added to the LXX quotation in Heb 8:5, possibly for emphasis. Philo likewise adds the word "all" [panta] to his paraphrase [*Leg. all.* 3.102].) Moses was not allowed to build the tabernacle in any way that he desired, but was given a pattern. The author interprets this to mean that there is a heavenly sanctuary that is the pattern for the earthly one; this is where Jesus serves as High Priest. The earthly tabernacle is as a copy of the heavenly one, which Jesus entered as High Priest. (Philo refers to the heavenly pattern of the earthly sanctuary as "the incorporeal archetype of the sensible" [ton asômaton ouranon archetupon tou aisthêtou] [*Quaest. in Exod* 2.82].) But as already indicated, the author does not believe that there is *literally* a heavenly tabernacle which is then duplicated on earth, but that *heaven itself* is the sanctuary. In his view, the holy of holies in the earthly tabernacle symbolizes the presence of God in heaven, into which, according to Ps 110:1, Christ enters after being perfected (Heb 2:10) (symbolized as Christ taking his place at the right hand of God, who implicitly is sitting on a throne). (Similarly, Josephus interprets the holy place as symbolizing the earth and the sea, whereas the holy of holies symbolizes heaven, which explains why it was inaccessible to the priests [*Ant.* 3.123].) No doubt, in so arguing, the author is accommodating himself to the beliefs of his readers in order to make a theological point. Finally, in Heb 8:6a the author concludes by saying that Jesus has obtained a superior ministry (diaphorôteras...leitourgias) as heavenly High Priest.

Scholars have pointed out the Platonic flavor of this section and it could be that the author was influenced by the Platonic distinction between Ideas and the corporeal things that participate in the Ideas. Plato uses the terms "shadows" (skiai) in his allegory of the cave to describe the images cast upon the wall of the cave. The metaphor of shadow (and that which casts the shadow) functions to express his teaching about Ideas. Philo of Alexandria, operated within the confines of the Platonic intellectual world. He uses the metaphor of "shadow" (skia) to distinguish the sensible copy from its eternal Idea; he calls the world the shadow of God (*Leg. all.* 3.97-99; see also *Poster. c.* 112; *Migr. Abr.* 12; *Som.* 1.188). Likewise, Philo, in Platonic fashion, distinguishes between the heavenly archetypes of furnishings of the tabernacle seen by Moses from their "shadows" or copies, made by the craftsman Bezalel (see Exod 31:2). He also distinguishes between the heavenly archetype of the tabernacle and the material copy of it made under the supervision of Moses (see *Ebr.* 132-33; *Det. pot. ins.* 160-61; *Vit. Mos.* 2.74). Similarly, there is a probable Platonic influence on the author of Wisdom of Solomon in his description of the Temple as a copy of a heavenly original: "You have said to build a Temple on your holy mountain and an altar in the city of your habitation, a copy (mimêma) of the holy tent that you have prepared from the beginning" (9:8) (see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 219; Moffat, *Hebrews*, 105-6; A. Cody, *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 17-21). Nevertheless, it is more likely that the

author's argument is rooted in Jewish conceptions of the heavenly temple (G. Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes*) (see [*The Temple in Second-Temple Judaism*](#)). It is possible that pre-Christian Judaism was influenced by some form of Platonism in which a distinction is made between the incorporeal, eternal and intelligible realm and the corporeal, temporal and sensible, but it is unlikely that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews was directly influenced by Platonism, even through Alexandrian Hellenistic Judaism.