Reading Hebrews in Light of the Targums
The Combined Concept of House and Rest in Hebrews 3-4 and Targum Psalm 95

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Abstract:
In recent research, many have begun to compare the Epistle to the Hebrews to different branches of Judaism, and some have even found a few points of contact with the Targums. This paper investigates one possible parallel with the Targums in the author’s use of Ps 95. Virtually all who research Ps 95 in Hebrews do not consider the text immediately prior to the quote (3.1-6) in understanding the citation, despite the fact that 3.1-6 is structurally harmonious to the rest of the chapter. Presumably, this is because 3.1-6 (dealing with house/sanctuary) seems to be thematically divergent from the main idea of the psalm and the exposition following (dealing with ‘rest’). In light of TgPss 95, however, it appears that there was an accepted theology that conglomerated the ideas of rest and house/sanctuary. In the OT, even a brief glance reveals that a combined concept of rest and house existed, as well as in the ANE. Hence, both Hebrews and the Targums encapsulate a shared theology found originally in the OT.

Introduction
Until Caird in 1959, it was commonly held that Hebrews’ interpretation of OT scripture was so ‘far-fetched’ that it could not be possible for Hebrews to have any relevance or interest for modern scholars. Many often compared Hebrews to Philo and the ‘Alexandrian’ school, and some compared it to Gnosticism. Since Caird, however, many have been prompted to examine Hebrews via new lines of investigation. While many connections to Philo remain, and more bound to be found, some scholars have gone ‘beyond’

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3 Caird, ‘Exegetical’, 44.

this comparison noting that there are ‘sharp differences between Hebrews and Philo in their respective handling of the Old Testament’.⁵

One exciting and fruitful avenue of inquiry has been to set Hebrews against a Jewish backdrop, comparing Hebrews’ methods of OT exegesis with different branches of Judaism. Terms such as ‘rabbinical method’ and ‘midrashic’ have come to the fore. These parallels to Judaism have now offered modern scholars some explanation as to what was initially understood to be ‘fanciful’ and ‘far-fetched’.

Since there appear to be strong connections between Hebrews and Judaism, one is left to wonder whether there could be any relationship with Hebrews and the Targums. It has already been observed by a few that the textual landscape of Hebrews is sparsely dotted with impressions of the Targums. Briefly, some examples are: 1) the author’s understanding of God’s people as God’s ‘house’ in 3.6 has been linked with TgOnq Num 12.7;⁶ 2) Heb 7.1 may be dependent on TgPs-J Gen 14.18, where TgPs-J is the only attested record of the way Hebrews depicts Melchizedek coming out to meet Abram (instead of the king of Sodom);⁷ and 3) The quotation of Deut 32.35 in Heb 10.30 agrees more closely to the Targums than to the LXX or the MT.⁸ To these examples I add one more in the hope that more connections might be sought between Hebrews and the Targums. To accomplish this task, this present study seeks to: 1) examine the structure of Hebrews 3 and 4, which will in turn reveal a structural problem; 2) proceed then to consider TgPss 95 to gain helpful insight into this problem; 3) explore other parts of the Targums relating to similar themes; and 4) conclude with a brief glance at the OT and the ANE to confirm the final analysis.

⁵ Guthrie, ‘Recent Trends’, 277.
Hebrews 3.1-4.16

Heb 3.7-4.16 has been the source of heavy discussion as many have questioned the author’s use of Ps 95. While this study does not attempt to answer the questions raised by those who scrutinize Ps 95 in the author’s exposition following the citation, it endeavors to throw new light on the matter not previously observed via the Targums. We begin by looking briefly at the structure of 3.1-4.16 (not 3.7!).

At the start of chapter 3, both ideas of the believer’s identification with Christ and Christ as the high priest are present, as it is immediately prior in chapter 2. However, a new theme emerges in chapter 3: the contrast of Moses and Jesus on the basis of their relationship to the ‘house’. Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses due to the fact that Moses was a faithful servant (θεράπτων) in all the house (ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ), whereas Christ was faithful as a son over the house (υἱὸς ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον).

The servant language of Moses employed here by the author was used in general to denote ‘servant of God,’ but more specifically it was also used to refer to ‘one who ministered in the Temple or ‘house’ of God’. Moreover, the author in 3.5 (‘Now Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant’) alludes to Num 12.7 (‘My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My house’). The context of Num 12.7 is the ‘tent of meeting’ (הֵיכָל). Hence, in Heb 3.1-6 an image of a ‘sanctuary’ is now also plausible given both the servant language used of Moses and the context of Num 12.7. Couple this with the theme of Christ as high priest and the imagery of a ‘sanctuary’ begins to emerge.

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9 Koester, Hebrews, 246.
10 Koester, Hebrews, 245-247.
The author is then quick to identify that believers are God’s ‘house’ (οὐκ οἶκός ἡμεῖς) in Heb 3.6. Yet being ‘his house’ is contingent upon the endurance of the believer’s faith:

‘if we hold fast the confidence and the boast of (our) hope’ (3.6)

ἐὰν[περ] τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος κατάσχομεν

On the surface, it seems that only this last statement of exhortation to ‘hold fast’ is what connects 3.1-6 to the OT citation of Ps 95 starting at 3.7. Ps 95 is used here as an admonition as it cautions the readers: ‘do not harden your hearts’. Interestingly, there is no mention of ‘house,’ and instead Ps 95 deals with entrance into God’s ‘rest’ (LXX – κατάπαυσίν μου = MT – תַּחַת in Heb 3.11). There is also no mention of a temple or a sanctuary, which is in the background of 3.1-6. Despite this, the author continues the admonition after the citation in 3.14:

‘For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end’ (3.14)

μέτοχοι γὰρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ γεγόναμεν, ἐάνπερ τὴν ἁρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως μέχρι τέλους βεβαιῶν κατάσχομεν

Here, the author repeats the idea of ‘holding fast’ (κατάσχομεν), and immediately following this second admonition in v. 14 the first line of the Ps 95 citation is refreshed in v. 15. The repetition of both κατάσχομεν and the citation makes clear that this warning (in

12 Lane states that v. 6b is transitionary (Lane, Hebrews, 83).
3.14) is parallel to the warning given prior to the citation (in 3.6). Furthermore, being partakers (μέτοχοι) in the second admonition is quite similar to the concept of ‘being the house’ (οὗ οἶκός ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς) in the first warning, and more importantly, μέτοχοι is also used back in 3.1. Commentators note this similarity regarding the two warnings, but generally do not make any association with 3.1-6, perhaps because it is too thematically divergent. Notably, Attridge goes one step further than the other commentators as he keenly observes that in v. 14 the author ‘picks up elements of the preceding pericope, combines and reworks them,’ but he does not develop any further connection.

The context of the second admonition reveals that it is unrelated to the entrance of the ‘house,’ but instead the author keeps in line with Ps 95 as a warning not to forfeit entrance into God’s ‘rest’. A series of rhetorical questions follow the repeated citation in 3.15 that ultimately lead to what is being referred to in 3.18: ‘And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient’. The verses thereafter are concerned exclusively with the idea of rest. The idea of ‘house’ subtly disappears from the discussion. It appears that ‘house’ has quietly transformed into ‘rest’. This is illustrated in the list below that traces the development of chapters 3-4.

1. Partakers with Christ, the great high priest (3.1)
2. Christ better than Moses as the son over God’s (sanctuary?) house (3.2-6a)

13 In 3.6, there is a slight textual variant with κατόσχομεν. The other reading is μέχρι τέλους βεβαιῶν κατόσχομεν. These are the exact same words as the second warning in 3.14, in which case the strength of the connection would be even more apparent. Moreover, the fact that a textual variant of this kind even exists means that others have also observed the similarity (whether intentional or accidental).

14 μέτοχοι is used almost exclusively by Hebrews in the NT corpus: five out of 6 occurrences in the NT.

15 Cf. H. W. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989) 117; P. Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, (NIGTC; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1993) 211, 225. Both make the observation that the two warnings are very similar and that there is a parallel connection between them. However, mention is only made of the change from being the ‘house’ to ‘partakers,’ and nothing is noted with regard to the transition to ‘rest’.

16 Attridge, Hebrews, 117.
3. Admonition to remain faithful in order to be the ‘house’ (3.6b-7a)
4. Ps 95 – Admonition against hardened hearts, denial of entrance into ‘rest’ (3.7b–11)
5. Admonition to remain faithful in order to enter God’s ‘rest’ (3.12-19)
6. Promises of rest (4.1-5)
7. Rest as the ultimate Sabbath (4.6-11)
8. The word of God (4.12-13)
9. Christ as the high priest who is able to sympathize (4.14-16)

Viewed in this way, the succession of ideas in chapters 3-4 are rather loosely related, and concepts seem to mutate. The only theme that Ps 95 connects to the texts before and after it is this admonition against unbelief. Beyond that, two somewhat similar yet distinct ideas emerge: rest, and house/sanctuary. The ideas are different enough that virtually all isolate 3.1-6 on its own not connecting it with the citation, and treating Ps 95 in conjunction with the text that follows.\(^{17}\)

There is a problem, however, in isolating 3.1-6 from Ps 95, and indeed with the exposition following it. First, as noted above, the warning from 3.6 is repeated in parallel fashion in 3.14. The repetition of the word κατάσχωμεν and its position before the repeated citation of Ps 95 make this unambiguous. Second, there is an inclusio of concepts in 3.1 and 4.14-16. The whole movement of the two chapters begins and ends with Christ as the high priest, with whom we are partakers (and therefore he can ‘sympathize’ with us), whose confession we need to hold fast.

\(^{17}\) Cf. Attridge; Ellingworth; Koester; and Lane. See also W. C. Kaiser, *The Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985); D. F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews* (NABPR Dissertations Series 10; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1994); G. von Rad, *There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God*, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965); P. Enns, ‘The Interpretation of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3.1-4.13,’ in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (eds. C. Evans and J. A. Sanders; JSNTSup 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997). Enns does include 3.1-6 in his analysis, but his concerns are focused mainly on a dual application of the psalm (Israel / church) and he does not make the same observations presented here. However, Enns’ study only strengthens the observation that 3.1-6 is related to the Ps 95 quote and following.
Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus

"Οθεν, ἀδελφοί ἄγιοι, κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι, κατανοήσατε τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἄρχιερά τῆς ὀμολογίας ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize (suffer with) with our weaknesses

"Εχοντες οὖν ἄρχιερά μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ὦν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατώμεν τῆς ὀμολογίας. οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἄρχιερά μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθήσαι ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ’ ὀμοιότητα χωρίς ἀμαρτίας.

If we view the two chapters as one unit, on the one hand, we have the problem of a mutating concept (from house/sanctuary to rest). Did the author simply adjust this concept to fit his usage of the psalm? On the other hand, segregating 3.1-6 defies the flow and structure of the argument. If the above observations regarding the unity of the passage are correct, then we must deal with the theology. Certainly, it is the seemingly unconnected ideas and theology that make modern scholars divide the passage. However, if the theology proves to be unified in some way, should not the passage be seen as a whole?
As we consider the Targums, we must remember the nature of the Targums. More than any other translation the Targums encapsulated the prominent and accepted theology of the time and locale. Just how long before the final form of any of the Targums the contemporary theology existed is indeterminable. What can be said for sure, however, is that the Targums went through numerous revisions at various times and in various places before their final forms were established. That means that any interpretation in the Targums had to have at least some level of authorization to be included in the final form.

Turning to TgPss 95, there is a rather slight variation from the MT and LXX in the last line of the psalm:

Targum: Concerning whom I swore in the strength of my anger that they should not come into the rest of the house of my sanctuary.¹⁸

MT: אֲלֹהֵי צְדָקָה לֹא יִשָּׁמֵשׁ בְּאֶדֶם אֶדֶם אֶדֶם אלֹהֵי צְדָקָה

LXX: ὁς ὁμοσά ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ μου εἰς ἑσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν μου

On its own, the addition by the Targumist seems to be a very minor variation and a simple explanation of ‘rest’. What is rest? It is the ‘house of God’s sanctuary’. However, when contrasted with the issue at hand in Hebrews, this seemingly unimportant interpolation reveals a somewhat major development in theology: there is a conflation of ideas to produce

¹⁸ D. M. Stec, The Targum of Psalms (The Aramaic Bible 16; London: T&T Clark, 2004) 179. For all Targum quotations, italics indicate points of variation from the MT supplied by the translator.
one conglomerated idea; i.e. the concept of ‘rest’ has been combined with the ‘house of God’s sanctuary’. Amongst those examining Ps 95 in Heb 3.7-11 only Hofius briefly mentions the Targum’s rendering, but he does not make any correlation to 3.1-6.  

In the case of Hebrews, then, the author was not ‘inventing’ something new, nor did he have ‘poor OT exegetical skills,’ as is commonly thought. It also could be said that our author may not have even been intentional about the matter or conscious that such a distinction would exist. In other words, it was natural for the author to think of the house of God and bring to mind Ps 95 despite the lack of reference to a house or sanctuary in the LXX or the MT because it was already accepted theology; it was probably not confusing to the readers either. The Targums, therefore, shed light on the apparent difficulty in Heb 3-4. 3.1-6 should not be isolated from the Ps 95 quote and the exposition that follows, and the author did not simply ‘forget’ about the house of God and conveniently switch it to ‘rest’.

The Targums

This interweaving of the concepts of rest and house/sanctuary in TgPss 95 is not an isolated occurrence in the Targums. In like manner as TgPss 95, the concept of ‘rest’ in TgPss 132.8, is expanded by interpolating commentary:

MT Ps 132.8: Rise up, O LORD, to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.

ככמת תודע עלמאמה עאה העולם נער

TgPss 132.8: Arise O LORD, dwell in the house of the camp of your rest, you and the

ark in which there is your Law.  

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Moreover, one astonishing observation regarding the psalm in general is that in v. 3, where it is David entering his own house, the Targumist changes ‘house’ to ‘wife’. The Targum records, ‘I will not go in to my wife’ instead of ‘I will not enter the (tent) of my house’. It can be presumed that this exchange is made in order to preserve the integrity of the later change for God’s ‘rest’ to ‘house’ avoiding any possible confusion. This heightens the observation that the Targumist was extremely aware and careful about his interpolations regarding ‘rest’ and ‘house’.

In TgIs 28.12, we again have a similar understanding of ‘rest’. Here, however, the Targumist goes even further by wholly interchanging the word ‘rest’ for ‘the sanctuary’. While the purpose and theology of TgIs 28.12 is not motivated by a desire to promulgate ‘rest-temple’ theology, it is relatively clear that in the mind of the Targumist the word ‘rest’ could be interchanged with ‘sanctuary/house’:

MT: He who said to them, ‘Here is rest, give rest to the weary,’ And, ‘Here is repose,’ but they would not listen’.  

TgIs 28.12: To whom the prophets were saying, “This is the sanctuary, serve in it; and this is the heritage of the house of rest;” yet they would not listen.  

20 Stec, Psalms, 227.  

Further strengthening the parallel between Hebrews and the Targums in their respective understanding of ‘rest/house’ is the aforementioned parallel between Heb 3.5-6 and TgOnq Num 12.7. When the author of Hebrews explains that the house of God consists of God’s people in 3.6 (‘whose house we are’ – οὗ οἶκός ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς), he again has precedent confirmed by the Targum. Heb 3.5 alludes to Num 12.7 (‘My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My house’). TgOnq Num 12.7 renders it, ‘My servant Moses; he is trusted by all My people,’ switching ‘household’ and ‘people,’ equating the two. Again, the author employs theology that has probably already been commonly accepted that also shows up later in the Targum. However, the author of Hebrews advances even beyond this. We have just established in the Targums that: a) God’s people are his house; and b) that ‘rest’ is God’s dwelling place, i.e. his house/sanctuary. By the juxtaposition of two developing ideas, there is now in Hebrews a singular developed thought: God’s rest, which is his house/sanctuary, is comprised of his people.

Rest and House in the Old Testament

The concept of rest in the OT is multi-faceted, and only a few have set out to delineate its function in depth. While the complexity of the concept is fully acknowledged here, especially in its development through the literary influence of deuteronomistic and deuteronomistic editors, space will only allow a few brief remarks concerning the concept of rest in the OT. In this particular case, the use of the Targums coupled with Hebrews allows us to tighten the focus of our purview such that we can query ‘rest’ in the OT specifically in relation to ‘house/sanctuary’. In so doing, it becomes quite obvious that the conglomerated

22 Koester, Hebrews, 245.

The concept of rest-house is not foreign to the OT, especially in Israel’s later literary periods, and in particular Chronicles.

It is not surprising that this combination of concepts is found in Chronicles where it details the building of the Jerusalem temple. In 1 Chron 22, where David charges his son Solomon to build a temple, David explains in v. 7 that he ‘intended to build a house to the name of the LORD my God’ (אַּנָּהּ לְעַבְּדָהּ לְגַנֵּחַ בְּעַבְּדוֹ לְגַנֵּחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ). However, v.8 moves on to explain why David has been excluded from building the temple (‘You have shed much blood and have waged great wars’), and in the following verses Solomon is put forward as the man who is qualified to do so:

Behold, a son will be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name

(1 Chron 22.9-10a)

While the idea is not developed by any account, there is already an association between the two concepts. Solomon will be a man of rest and God will grant him rest on every side. While there is no direct connection, it is peculiar that after these rest statements the charge is given to Solomon to build the house. Immediately following in 22.17-19, the pairing of rest and house is repeated, although David is now speaking to the leaders of Israel. There, David reminds them that God has given them rest on every side, and now it is their time to build a temple for God. It appears, then, that the prerequisite for the construction of the temple is rest and peace. Curiously, it is God’s giving of rest that initiates the people’s response to build a temple.

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24 In the verses following (1 Chron 22.17-19), the pairing of rest and house is repeated, although now David is speaking to the leaders of Israel. There, David reminds them that God has given them rest on every side, and now it is their time to build a temple for God.
temple. This idea is strengthened later in 23.25, where David states, ‘The LORD God of Israel has given rest to His people, and He dwells in Jerusalem forever’.

In 1 Chron 28.2, David repeats his earlier charge given to Solomon in chapter 22, but this time in front of a larger audience. He gathers the higher officials (28.1) and informs them of the plans to build a temple. His words are recorded in v. 2 as:

‘Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had planned to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God’

These words mirror the statement already made to Solomon in 22.7. Three points of divergence are especially poignant here. First, it has been well established by commentators that this is a much more formal rendition of the prior statement in 22.7. Of course, this makes sense given the change of audience. Second, there is now a direct shift in the concept of rest. Previously, it was a prerequisite that not only the builder would be a ‘man of rest’ but that there would also be in the kingdom ‘rest on every side’. Now, it is the ark that finds its resting place! It can be presumed that with the ark was God’s presence, and his place was now established with his people in Jerusalem. Third, the use of ‘footstool’ (ןֵּרֵשׁ אֲלָדוֹתִי) suggests the chronicler’s dependence on Ps 132, which records the dedicatory prayer of the temple (לְדֹּחֵהַ יהוה). Moreover, Ps 132 also depicts the temple as God’s ‘resting place’. Hence, due to its formal setting, the shift in the concept of rest, and its dependence on

25 R. Braun, 1 Chronicles (WBC 14; Dallas: Word, 1986) 268, 274; See also H.G.M. Williamson, 1 and 2 Chronicles (NCB; Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans/Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982) 179, where he notes von Rad’s categorization of the speech as ‘A Levitical Sermon’.

26 Braun, Chronicles, 270.

27 Braun, Chronicles, 270.

28 Williamson, Chronicles, 179-180, who also notes that the shift in the meaning of rest also confirms that Ps 132 is in mind; Braun, Chronicles, 270.
Ps 132, it is possible that בָּכָה מַחֲרוֹדָה (לֹאָדִו) had, at this point, become a *terminus technicus.*

**Ancient Near East**

There is a vast array of Ancient Near Eastern Texts, and a survey of them would be superfluous here. The only question to be asked at this point is whether the OT concept of temple and rest as presented above found its source in its ANE background. There is one particular Akkadian text, Enuma Elish (a.k.a. The Babylonian Creation Epic), with which many have found extensive OT parallels. While the extant tablets are from early to mid first millennium, most are agreed that the tradition traces back to about a millennia earlier. This creation epic is especially relevant, as almost a full two of the seven tablets are devoted to ‘rest’. Moreover, it was a narrative that was to be read out annually – possibly even acted out – during the New Year Festivals of Babylon. This is detailed in an ancient ritual tablet that gives instructions for the Festival, during which Enuma Elish was to be presented on the fourth day.

By way of brief summary, Enuma Elish is an Akkadian epic describing the interplay between the gods in the creation of the world, and the struggle for power. The final ascendant is Marduk (Assur in the Assyrian version), who quells a rebellion by one of the original creators and mother-god Tiamat. In so doing, he captures the other gods who sided with Tiamat, imprisons them, and forces them to labor. At the complaint of the imprisoned gods – the Annunaki – Marduk decides to free them, but only after their representative head, Kingu,

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29 Special thanks to my Doktorvater, Joachim Schaper, for pointing me in this direction.


is killed and his blood used to create humankind. It is at this point that we pick up the story in Tablet VI. The response of the freed Annunaki who are released from labor is as follows in lines 49-56:

When universal law was set up and the gods allotted their calling, then the Annunaki, the erstwhile fallen, opened their mouths to speak to Marduk:

‘Now that you have freed us and remitted our labor how shall we make a return for this? Let us build a temple and call it

THE-INN-OF-REST-BY-NIGHT

There we will sleep at the season of the year, at the Great Festival when we form the Assembly; we will build alters for him, we will build the Parakku, the Sanctuary’.

When Marduk heard this his face shone like broad day.

While parallels with the ANE and the OT never have a clear 1:1 correspondence and the differences can be quite substantial, one can see in this text distinct similarities with the OT. In Samuel’s version of the Nathan Oracle, after YHWH gave David rest on every side, David’s response was to (attempt) to build a temple for the one that had given him rest. That picture is readily visible in Enuma Elish, where the Annunaki who are freed from labor


33 Sandars, 98. While there are some variations among the translations of this portion of the text, the essential meaning of the temple as a resting place remains the same. E. A. Speiser, ‘The Creation Epic’, ANET (ed. J. B. Pritchard; Princeton: Princeton University, 1950) 60: ‘Let us build a shrine whose name shall be called “Lo, a chamber for our nightly rest”; let us repose in it!’; Heidel: ‘Come, let us make (something) whose name shall be called “Sanctuary.” It shall be a dwelling for our rest at night; come, let us repose therein!’; Dalley: ‘We would like to make a shrine with its own name. We would like our night’s resting place to be in your private quarters, and to rest there. Let us found a shrine, a sanctuary there. Whenever we arrive, let us rest within it’.
respond by building a temple that is called a place of ‘rest’. As mentioned earlier, the temple that Solomon eventually built was a ‘house of rest’ (בית הננים – 1 Chron 28.2) for God. So there is in both texts a sense of reciprocity, an exchange of one for the other, as well as the temple being a resting place for deities. The Akkadian text states that the Annunaki plan to ‘sleep’ there during the Great Festival. We can assume from the text and its ritual context that this ‘rest’ is not a rest of slumber. The most obvious explanation for this is to understand rest as cultic worship. Building the temple and ‘resting’ there is their act of homage; just as it is with David. David and those after him do not intend to build a temple simply to ‘house’ their God, but in building a temple they also build a place where they go to worship the Divine.

**Using the Targums**

Can one use the Targums as an aid to understanding early Christian theology? In other words, is it viable to search the Targums in light of the independent development of Judaic Targumic theology and early Christian theology? One example of a shared tradition of interpretation can be found with Athanasius roughly a few centuries after Hebrews. Athanasius appears to have adopted certain interpretations of scripture that are remarkably consistent with the Jerusalem Targum (TgPs-J) even though by virtue of his chronological placement in Christian history he would not have had any contact with the Targums.34 In his Festal Letter 13.5, Athanasius understands Issachar in Genesis 49.14 the same way TgPs-J does:

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34 It is important to state here that while one of the interpretations by Athanasius in the following passage deals with rest, and while his concept of rest is not contradictory to what has already been presented, this example is being used only to illustrate method and not content. **No further understanding of ‘rest’ is intended.**
Genesis 49.14-15:

Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds, and he saw a resting place was good, and the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to burden, and became a slave at forced labor.

TgPs-J Gen 49.14-15:

Issachar is loaded with the Law. He is a strong tribe, knowing the determinations of the times; and he lies down between the territories of his brothers. He saw that the repose of the world to come was good, and that (his) portion of the land of Israel was pleasant; therefore he bent his shoulder to labor in the Law, and his brothers offered him gifts.35

Athanasius’ Festal Letter, 13.5:

Now to this the example of Issachar, the patriarch, may persuade, as the Scripture saith, ‘Issachar desires that which is good, resting between the heritages; and when he saw that the rest was good, and the land fertile, he bowed his shoulder to labour, and became a husbandman’…he gathered abundance from the holy Scriptures, for his mind was captivated not by the old alone, but by both the heritages. And hence as it were, spreading his wings, he beheld afar off ‘the rest’ which is in heaven, and,—since this ‘land’ consists of such beautiful works,—how much more truly the heavenly [country] must also [consist] of such; for the other is ever new, and grows not old. For this ‘land’ passes away, as the Lord said…And he did not contend with those who smote him, neither was he disturbed by insults; but like a strong man triumphing the more by these things, and the more earnestly tilling his land, he

35 M. Maher, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis (The Aramaic Bible 1B; T & T Clark LTD, 1992) 159-160.
received profit from it. The Word scattered the seed, but he watchfully cultivated it, so that it brought forth fruit, even a hundred-fold.\(^{36}\)

Hence, there are two aspects of Genesis 49.14-15 that are parallel in the Targums and Athanasius. Referring to this very phenomenon, James Ernest states that there was ‘an interpretation in the Jerusalem Targum that the “rest” meant the world to come and the “inheritance” was the law. Of course, the Targum was not available to Athanasius, but the same line of interpretation seems to have entered the Christian tradition’. \(^{37}\) Consequently, the above illustration shows the ideological overlap between two distinct traditions. Were it not for the Targums, we would have been left to wonder how or why Athanasius understood this passage in this manner.

**Conclusion**

The Ancient Near East has given us a context to which we can understand the concept of rest: one’s home is one’s place of rest. Hence, the resting place of the gods was quite simply their home, i.e., the temple. This understanding continued to persist into OT times and in this way permeated the cultural milieu. It seems to be a very common understanding that the temple is a place of rest, and more than that, there is also an act of reciprocation. One provides back to the gods for receiving rest.

This combined concept of rest as house/temple after the OT then found a vehicle into both Jewish and Christian theology. The author of Hebrews at this point had on effectively two hermeneutical lenses. On the one hand, the author at times understands OT scripture in line with Jewish tradition. On the other, the author makes sense of these same scriptural texts

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with a new hermeneutical lens in light of Christ. Where these two lenses do not conflict it is natural for typical Jewish understandings to be present. In this way, the Epistle to the Hebrews shares a *common tradition* regarding rest with the Targums.

It is notable, however, that such a defined concept in the OT has never entered the discussion regarding Heb 3.1-6 and Ps 95, even though all the necessary elements are present. This amplifies the importance of the Targums, as McNamara notes:

The tradition or traditions or sources enshrined in the Targums probably originated and developed over a number of centuries, possibly from the second century BCE to the sixth or seventh century of our era. Some recent writers speak of the tell-like structure of the Targums, to which we are asked to have sensitivity. The Targums, or sections of them, may well be, as it were, mounds of information, with layers of interpretation from different ages and centuries. This is an approach to Targumic tradition that deserves further research, and may have light to throw on the formation and understanding of certain biblical books or blocks of tradition.38

Indeed, the Targums frequently do have certain tendencies (aversion to anthropomorphism, Shekinah, etc.), but this does not negate that the Targums were, in fact, a running commentary on scripture. In this way the Targums can be extremely useful in aiding our understanding of other interpretations of scripture.

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38 McNamara, ‘Melchizedek’, 30.