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The “Son” as Reformer of the Cult: Thematic Parallels between the Rule of Righteous Davidic Kings in the Hebrew Bible and the Rule of the “Son” in Hebrews

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A great majority of scholars consider that the author of Hebrews uses Day of Atonement imagery to describe and explain the meaning of Jesus’ ascension and ministry in heaven and that a typological relationship exists between them.¹ Marie Isaacs presents this view in unambiguous terms:

In his book, The Epistle of Priesthood (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2nd ed., 1915), Alexander Nairne suggested that the main message of Hebrews was, “Think of our Lord as a priest, and I will make you understand” (p. 136). We need to be more precise than that, however. It is not to priests in general, but to ancient Judaism’s high priest in particular, and even more particularly, to his part in the Day of Atonement ritual, that our author turns his thought.²

It is considered, then, that the author of Hebrews structures Jesus’ accomplishments in three stages that correspond to the Day of Atonement ritual: (1) the passion and death of Jesus correspond to the immolation of the victim (Heb 9:13, 14), (2) the ascension to heaven corresponds to the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies (9:11-12), (3) Jesus’ purification of believers corresponds to the purification of the heavenly sanctuary (9:23).³ Some add a fourth stage, Jesus’ second coming corresponds to the exit of the high priest from the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (9:28).⁴ Thus, it has been argued that the Day of Atonement motif dominates the thinking of the author of Hebrews to the extent that it shapes the form of his argument. In fact, Emile Guers called Hebrews “[l]e divin commentaire” of Lev 16.⁵

¹ E.g., “Nel mistero della sua morte e risurrezione Cristo ha quindi realizzato in pienezza tutti gli effetti che l’AT si proponeva con il suo complesso sistema sacrificale e con i solenni riti del Giorno dell’Esiazione” (In the mystery of his death and resurrection Christ has, therefore, carried out in fullness to all intents and purposes what the OT intended with its complex sacrificial system and with the solemn rite of the Day of Atonement), Fulvio Di Giovambattista, Il Giorno dell’Esiazione nella Lettera agli Ebrei, Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 199.

² “Priesthood and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” HeyJ 38 (1997): 55. “In Hebrews, the ritual of the Day of Atonement metaphorically describes Jesus’ work of salvation as a Day of Atonement ceremony performed in heaven (Heb 6-9). Jesus is the high priest of a heavenly sanctuary. He enters into the most holy place with his own blood to achieve eternal redemption for the people,” Edgar V. McKnight and Christopher Church, Hebrews-James, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, ed. Mark K. McElroy (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2004), 115.


Nevertheless, the issue is not as straightforward as it seems. Harold W. Attridge has warned that “the application of the model of the Yom Kippur ritual to the death of Christ in Hebrews is a complex and subtle hermeneutical effort.”

First, it is important to recognize that the Day of Atonement is not the dominant motif, either in the general argument of the Letter or the central section in particular. The Day of Atonement is referred explicitly in three passages in the central section of the Letter: Heb 9:6-7; 9:24-25; 10:1-4. James P. Scullion rightly reminds us, however, that “the key to this central section is not Yom Kippur itself, but the connection that the author makes between the cult and the new covenant.” Thus, Hebrews describes Jesus mainly as the mediator of a new covenant (7:22; 8:6; 9:15) and refers to his sacrifice primarily as the “blood of the covenant” (10:29; 12:24; 13:20). This is especially evident in the fact that Hebrews emphasizes the cultic image of the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood in heaven but not in the context of the Day of Atonement. Instead, it describes this sprinkling as part of the inauguration of the new covenant (10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:20; cf. 9:15-23).

Secondly, it is the ritual for the ratification of the Mosaic covenant with blood, not the blood ritual of the Day of Atonement, that provides the cultic image to present Jesus’ death and entrance in the heavenly sanctuary as providing forgiveness of sins (9:15-23).

Timo Eskola refers to the cultic argument of Hebrews as a “christological pesher on the cultic text of Leviticus (16:15),” Messiah and the Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse (WUNT 142; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2001), 357. Gabriella Gelardini has recently suggested that Hebrews is an ancient synagogue homily for Tisha be-Av. This was the most important day of mourning in Jewish Tradition and was intimately related to the Day of Atonement. These two days are the only ones in which the most rigorous fasting is required in the liturgical year, Gabriella Gelardini, "Hebrews, an Ancient Synagogue Homily for Tisha be-Av: Its Function, its Basis, its Theological Interpretation," in Hebrews: Contemporary Methods -- New Insights, ed. Gabriella Gelardini, Biblical Interpretation Series, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Ellen van Wolde, no. 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 107-27.


9 The high point of the ritual of the Day of Atonement came when the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices upon the mercy seat and in front of it to purify the sanctuary (Lev 16:15-16). Interestingly, Hebrews departs from the language of the LXX to describe the manipulation of blood by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement: the blood is not “sprinkled” on the sanctuary but “offered” (9:7). See William L. Lane, Hebrews 9-13, WBC, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, no. 47b (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1991), 223. Also, Darrell J. Pursiful, The Cultic Motif in the Spirituality of the Book of Hebrews (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Biblical, 1993), 70.

Thus, William R. G. Loader was correct in warning us that the peculiarity of the Day of Atonement “must not be stressed so much, that it is described as the essential theme or predominant thought of this section.”\textsuperscript{11} The examples mentioned at the beginning of this paper show that it is difficult to escape the temptation of overemphasizing the role of the Day of Atonement in the argument of Hebrews. In fact, despite his own warning against this mistake, William R. G. Loader has been critiqued by Harold W. Attridge for the very same reason:

In his discussion of the high priestly act of Christ, Loader, while noting the rich texture of Hebrews, concentrates primarily on the Yom Kippur typology. While this is certainly an important element of the author’s complex argument in chap. 9, it is not clear that it is the dominant one. Rather, what seems ultimately to control the development of his theme is the notion that Christ’s death is primarily a covenant sacrifice, a theme to which Loader gives insufficient attention.\textsuperscript{12}

I want to suggest in this paper a perspective—different from a Day of Atonement typology—that may explain better Hebrews’ exposition of Jesus’ ascension and ministry in heaven.

This perspective has three main premises:

1. Hebrews conceives Jesus’ ascension to heaven as the inauguration of his office as “Son” at the “right hand of God” (Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1-2; 10:12-13; 12:1-2; cf. 4:14-16). In this sense, the title “Son”—or “Son of God”—is used in Hebrews eminently as a royal title.

2. Hebrews understands the title “Son” as the fulfillment of the promise made to David which is applied to Jesus explicitly in Hebrews 1:5: “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son” (cf. 2 Sam 7:14).

3. All other achievements related to Jesus’ ascension (i.e., the provision of rest, the institution of a new priesthood, the inauguration of the new covenant, the cleansing of sin, the reform of the cult) are a function of, or derive from, the Son’s installation as king.

In summary, I suggest that the common Christian belief that Jesus is the messiah, son of David, through whom God has fulfilled the promises made to David in behalf of his people functions as a subtext of this early Christian work and provides an integrating element to the different aspects of its argument.

This is an ambitious proposal that cannot be defended appropriately in a session of this nature. This paper is exploratory in nature. Hopefully, it will serve to outline new possible directions for the study of the argument of Hebrews.

This paper has two main sections. In the first, I will briefly analyze the aspects of the argument that Hebrews relates to the notion of Jesus’ sonship. In the second section, I will compare Hebrews’ notion of the sonship of Jesus to the rule of the sons of David in monarchic Israel and to the expectations regarding the eschatological son of David in the biblical prophets.

\textsuperscript{11} Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes (WMANT 53; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 172.

Jesus as “Son” in Hebrews

It is clear from the beginning of the Letter that the title “son” plays a fundamental role in its argument. In the introduction to his work (Heb 1:1-4), the author of Hebrews divides the history of salvation in two ages: (a) the “long ago” in which God revealed himself “in many and various ways by the prophets” and (b) “these last days” in which he “has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1-2). Thus, the present age, in which the readers of Hebrews find themselves, is characterized by the revelation in a “Son.”

In the rest of the Letter, this title is prominent in both, the expositional and hortatory sections of the work. In the expositional sections, Jesus’ sonship plays a prominent role at different moments of the argument. First, the Son is worthy of worship and, therefore, superior to the angels who are servants and have never been called sons (1:4-14). Second, the Son is a faithful ruler over the house of God and, therefore, worthy of more glory than Moses who is a faithful servant in the house of God (3:1-6). Finally, the Son is a greater high priest than Aaron because of the superior nature of his ministry, holiness, and person. He “has passed through the heavens” (Heb 4:14) and ministers in “the true tent that the Lord . . . has set up” (8:2). Also, “has learned obedience” and “has been perfected” (5:8-9; 7:28) so that he does not need to offer sacrifices for himself (7:26-27). Furthermore, the Son “lives for ever” (7:3), therefore, his priesthood is permanent (7:24).

In the hortatory sections, the importance of this title is evidenced in the fact that the rejection of the “Son” is considered the ultimate sin and the readers are sternly warned twice against “spurning” or “crucifying again the Son of God” (10:26-29; 6:4-6). In fact, there is no longer a “sacrifice for sins” (10:26) for those who reject the Son and, therefore, “it is impossible to restore [them] again to repentance” (6:4).

Thus, Donald A. Hagner opines that “[Son] is clearly the central christological designation of Hebrews.” Marie E. Isaacs agrees: “. . . for the author of Hebrews, Jesus’ primary status is not that of Melchizedekian high priest but son of God. . . . In many ways Jesus’ work may be compared with that of his biblical predecessors, namely Moses and the high priest, but in each case it is his sonship which is used to highlight the contrast between his status and theirs.”

The Son Is King

The notion that Jesus, the Son, is king over the cosmos is emphasized throughout the epistle with the assertion five times that Jesus sat down “at the right hand” of God (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2). In fact, the Letter concludes affirming this notion when refers to Jesus as “the great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20; cf. Ps


It is the catena of seven OT quotations in Heb 1:5-14, however, that focuses on the notion of the Son as king. This catena of OT text is grammatically arranged in three sentences. Each sentence introduces an aspect of the enthronement ceremony of the Son: (a) God adopts Jesus as his royal son (vs. 5), (b) God presents the Son to the heavenly court—who make obeisance—and presents the royal symbols (throne, scepter, anointment) and proclaims the eternal rule of the Son (vss. 6-12), finally (c) enthrones the Son, which is the actual conferral of power (vs. 13).

The important thing for us is that Hebrews seems to build upon the common Christian notion that God has fulfilled in Jesus the promises he had made to David regarding his son. Second Samuel 7 contains four promises to David which later are referred to as God’s covenant with David (2 Sam 23:5; Ps 89:3, passim; 132:11-12): (1) a great name (2 Sam 7:9), (2) a place for Israel (land or temple?; vs. 10), (3) rest from his enemies (vs. 11), and (4) a Son whose throne/kingdom will be established for ever, will build a temple for God, and will be adopted by God (vss. 12-16).

Hebrews applies this promise to Jesus, the Son. God has appointed Jesus “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2; cf. Ps 2:8), given him a great “name” (Heb 1:4; cf. 2 Sam 7:9); adopted him as his own son (Heb 1:5; cf. 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7); established his throne for ever (Heb 1:8-12; cf. 2 Sam 7:13-16), and sat him at his “right hand” (Heb...
1:13-14; cf. Ps 110:1). Furthermore, Heb 4 suggests that Jesus leads the people into the rest of God and Heb 3:3-4 may suggest that Jesus is the builder of the house of God, though not absolutely and independently, but under God (8:2). Note, however, that Hebrews does not seek to prove the point of Jesus’ Davidic sonship; rather, it assumes it and builds its argument upon it. That is to say, the Davidic promises seem to function as a subtext of Hebrews more than as a part of its argument.

In the argument of Hebrews, the Son accomplishes as well other things.

The Son Is Appointed High Priest Forever

The Sonship of Jesus and his high priesthood are intimately connected.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:5-6).

The quotation of Ps 2:7 in this context is a deliberate attempt to connect the notions of sonship and priesthood. This is confirmed by the fact that sonship plays an important role in the “perfecting” of Jesus as high priest in 5:8-10:

Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (emphasis mine).

In fact, the author connects in 7:28 the appointment of Jesus as high priest with his perfecting as Son:

For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever (emphasis mine; cf. 4:14; 7:3).

Thus, Hebrews argues that Jesus’ status as son made him not only ruler of the universe when he sat at “the right hand” of God (Ps 110:1), but also high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Both aspects of Hebrews’ Christology are intimately related.

The Son Mediates a New Covenant

20 Psalm 110 was understood as messianic in the NT (Matt 22:42-45 [par. Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44]; Matt 26:64 [par. Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69]; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:34-35; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1). Ancient Jewish interpretation of the Psalm is varied, however. Some scholars have detected allusions to Ps 110 in the description of the enthronement of the Son of Man in 1 Enoch (45:1, 3; 51:3; 52:1-7; 55:4; 61:8; this section has been dated to 105-64 B.C.E.). Testament of Job 33:3 (first century B.C.E. or C.E.) applied Ps 110 to Job, who is described as king of a heavenly kingdom. 11QMelchizedek (second half of 1 cent. B.C.E. or first half of 1 cent. C.E.) does not refer clearly to Psalm 110. It describes, however, Melchizedek as a heavenly eschatological warrior and savior. It is difficult to think that any Jew acquainted with both passages would fail to make the connection. It is probable that 1 Macc 14:41 alludes to Ps 110:4 and applies it to Hasmonean rulers. A messianic interpretation of Ps 110 appears frequently in rabbinic writings after ca. 250 C.E. See David M. Hay, Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity (SBLMS 18; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1973), 19-33. For the use of other Davidic (Zion) traditions in the catena, see Kiwoong Son, 111-24.

21 Ellingworth, 203.
Hebrews argues that the appointment of Jesus as high priest requires a change in the law and, therefore, the introduction of a new and better law or covenant. Its argument is that the Old Covenant required that the priests were descendants of Aaron. The appointment of Jesus as high priest, who was a descendant from Judah, is evidence that that first commandment has been abolished (7:12-19).

Hebrews further argues that the first covenant has been abolished because it was weak and ineffective (7:18). It is ineffective because it does not perfect the people; that is to say, it does not provide true cleansing and—therefore—cannot provide access to God (7:18-19). Instead, even the high priests are subject to weaknesses and need to offer sacrifices for their own sins (7:27). It is weak because its high priests were mortal and, therefore, many in number (7:23-25). The new covenant, instead, appoints a Son who lives for ever and is sinless. Therefore, it is effective because it provides access to God. The Son “is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

The Son Cleanses the Heart from Sin

Hebrews 9:15-23 compares Jesus’ death to the sacrifice offered by Moses for the ratification of the first covenant. Moses’ ratification of the covenant is understood as a complex event that included the sacrifice of oxen described in Exod 24 and the anointing and inauguration of the sanctuary described in Exod 40, Lev 8-9, and Num 7. Hebrews argues explicitly that Jesus’ sacrifice fulfills two functions: it mediates a new covenant and redeems from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (9:15). Jesus’ sacrifice is understood as well as a complex event that included his death on the cross (9:15) and his entrance in the heavenly sanctuary to cleanse it and, by implication, to inaugurate it (9:23).

Jesus’ death and inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary marks the fulfillment of the promise of the new covenant “I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (Heb 8:12; cf. 10:17). Thus, Hebrews concludes that Jesus “has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26).

The Son Reforms the Cult

The effectiveness of the sacrifice of the Son to cleanse the believers has another consequence. It makes unnecessary the repetition of animal sacrifices. Hebrews emphasizes time and again that Jesus offered himself “once for all” (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10). Since Jesus’ sacrifice provides true cleansing so that there is no more consciousness of sin (10:2), Hebrews concludes that “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin” (10:17). Therefore, Jesus’ sacrifice and inauguration of the new covenant includes as well the reform of the cult from many sacrifices to one sacrifice. Instead, believers are exhorted to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise and good works as their worship to God (13:9-16; cf. 12:28).

Summary

Hebrews conceives Jesus’ ascension to heaven as the inauguration of his office as “Son” at the “right
hand of God” (Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1-2; 10:12-13; 12:1-2; cf. 4:14-16). The identity of Jesus as Son is related to several important aspects of the argument of Hebrews.

1. The catena of Heb 1:5-14 describes the enthronement of the Son as ruler over the universe. In this sense, the title “Son”—or “Son of God”—is used in Hebrews eminently as a royal title. Hebrews understands the enthronement of Jesus in heaven as the fulfillment of the promise made to David in 2 Sam 7:14—quoted in Hebrews 1:5—that God would adopt the Son of David as his own son.

2. The Son is the ideal helper or leader for those who are being tempted and suffer in their journey to God’s rest (4:14-16). He is ideal because he has experienced the temptations and sufferings that the believers are experiencing but has remained faithful (4:15).

3. Jesus was appointed “priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:6; quoting Ps 110:4) on the basis that, being the Son (Heb 5:5; quoting Ps 2:7), God’s oath to the Davidic messiah applies to him (Ps 110:4 quoted in Heb 5:6).

4. The Son is mediator of the new covenant (7:22; cf. 10:29; 6:4). Jesus inaugurates the new covenant with the sacrifice of himself and his ascension to consecrate the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:15-23; cf. 7:22; 10:29; 6:4). His appointment as priest forever evidences the abolishment of the Aaronic priesthood and the first covenant under which it was established (7:11-12).

5. The son cleanses the conscience from sin. The inauguration of the covenant implies the fulfillment of the new covenant promises that God will provide forgiveness of sin and remove sin in the sense that God will change the human condition so that believers will be equipped to live lives pleasing to God (9:26).

6. The son has reformed the cult by abolishing the sacrifices. The effective forgiveness and removal of sin through the sacrifice of Jesus “once for all” implies the reform of the cult so that there is no longer any offering for sin (10:18). Instead, believers offer spiritual sacrifices of praise to God and good works (13:9-16; cf. 12:28).

The Rule of the Righteous Son of David in the Hebrew Bible

Righteous Davidic Kings in Monarchic Israel

A cursory study of the rule of righteous sons of David shows intriguing parallels to the achievements of Jesus as Son in the Letter to the Hebrews.

The books 1 and 2 Kings consider that only 5 kings of Judah did what was “right in the sight of the Lord” as their “father David” had done. They are Solomon (1 Kgs 3:3 [though, see 11:4]), Asa (15:11), Joash (2 Kgs 12:2; cf. 14:3), Hezekiah (18:3), and Josiah (22:2). There are other Davidic kings that received qualified praise. First Kings 22:43 and 2 Kgs 15:34 consider that Jehosaphat and Jotham (respectively) also did “what was right in the sight of the Lord” but there is no mention that they followed the example of their “father David.” The books of Chronicles refer only to Hezekiah and Josiah in these terms (2 Chr 29:2; 34:2).

A brief analysis of the actions of these righteous sons of David in the Hebrew Bible shows that their rule followed a fairly consistent pattern that reached its most perfect expression in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah.
At this moment it is only possible for us only to enumerate this actions and provide the references. Seven main elements comprise this pattern.

1. After ascending to the throne, the righteous Davidic king would renew the covenant between God and the nation. This includes the five righteous sons: Solomon (1 Kgs 8:14-26, 56-58, 61; 2 Chr 5:7-10); Asa (2 Chr 15:10-14); Joash (2 Kgs 11:17; 2 Chr 23:16); Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:10); and Josiah (2 Chr 34:29-33; 2 Kgs 23:1-3).

2. He would cleanse the land from spurious forms of worship. Again, this includes four righteous sons: Asa (1 Kgs 15:12-13; 2 Chr 14:3, 5; 15:8); Joash (2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17); Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:1); and Josiah (2 Chr 34:3-7; 2 Kgs 23:4-20). Similarly, Solomon cleanses the land from blood guilt (1 Kgs 2).

3. The king would build or repair the temple and then cleanse it in order to consecrate it. This includes five sons. Solomon built the temple and consecrated it (1 Kgs 5-8; 2 Chr 2-7). Asa repaired the altar and brought votive offerings to the temple (2 Chr 15:8; cf. 1 Kgs 15:15; 2 Chr 15:18) and Joash repaired the temple (2 Kgs 12:1-16; 2 Chr 24:4-14). Hezekiah and Josiah both repaired the temple and cleansed it in order to re-consecrate it (2 Chr 29; 2 Chr 34:8-13; 2 Kgs 22:3-7).

4. The king would reform the cult by ordinances that secured a better service for the worshipers and reorganize or reestablish the cultic function of the priests and Levites. This includes four sons. The changes to the organization of priests and levites ordained by David were implemented by Solomon (2 Chr 8:14-15), and reinstated by Joash (2 Chr 23:17-19), Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:2), and Josiah (2 Chr 35:1-16).

5. The king would either reign over “all Israel” or promote its reunification. This includes 4 kings. Solomon reigned over “all Israel” (1 Kgs 4:1; 2 Chr 1:2-3). Joash (2 Chr 15:9), Hezekiah (2 Chr 30:5-18), and Josiah (2 Chr 34:5-7) promoted the reunification of Israel through the cult.

6. God would give Israel “rest” by defeating the enemies of the king. This is mentioned in the rule of 3 sons: Solomon, as a result of the victories of David (1 Kgs 5:4; 8:56; cf. 2 Sam 8:1-14); Asa, who defeats Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chr 14:1, 6, 7; 15:15, 19); and Hezekiah, who defeats Sennacherib (2 Chr 32:22).

7. In several cases a faithful priest would rise alongside the Davidic king. This happens in the rule of 3 kings: Solomon is anointed together with Zadok (1 Chr 29:22; cf. 1 Kgs 2:26-27), Joash and Jehoiada (2 Kgs 12:2; 2 Chr 24:2, 14, 16), Josiah and Hilkiah (2 Kgs 22:4-7; 2 Chr 34:9-14).

Davidic Expectations in the Prophets

These seven main elements that comprised the pattern of the rule of righteous Davidic kings are alluded as well in the oracles of the prophets concerning the Davidic ruler God would raise in the future. In Isaiah, the exilic, and post-exilic prophets, however, these elements are elevated to an eschatological dimension.

1. Righteous kings promoted the renewal of the nation’s covenant with God; the eschatological king of Ezek 37:26-27 will mediate a new “covenant of peace,” “an everlasting covenant” between God and the nation (cf. Isa 55:3).

2. Righteous kings cleansed the land from idolatry; the eschatological king Ezek 37:23 “will save them
from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them” and forgive them (cf. Isa 55:7).

3. Righteous kings repaired the temple; the eschatological king “shall build the temple of the LORD” (Zech 6:13; cf. Ezek 37:26, 28).

4. Righteous kings reformed the cult by modifying the laws of the sacrifices and reorganizing the priesthood; the eschatological fulfillment implicates the writing of the law in the heart of the nation so that “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD” (Isa 11:9; Ezek 37:24; cf. Hos 3:5; Zech 12:10; also related are Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27).

5. Righteous kings attempted to reunite Israel by means of the cult; the eschatological king, however, will “gather the dispersed of Judah [and Ephraim] from the four corners of the earth” (Isa 11:10-13; cf. Amos 9:11-12; Hos 3:5; Ezek 37:16-22; Mic 5:3).

6. God defended the righteous kings from their enemies and provided rest for the land; the eschatological king “shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth” and even the natural order will be transformed so that no one will “hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain” (Isa 11:3-9; cf. Isa 9:5-7; Mic 5:4-5).

7. Finally, alongside righteous kings often appeared the figure of a faithful priest; alongside the eschatological king “there shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them” (Zech 6:13; cf. Jer 33:16-26; Hos 3:4-5).

Davidic Expectations in Early Judaism

Davidic Expectations and the Hortatory Argument of Hebrews

The Early Judaism period attests to the diversification of the messianic hope in general and the Davidic hope in particular. Some, like Josephus, renounced a Davidic hope. For others, the Davidic covenant is part of a glorious past that continues to live in the heroics of contemporary rulers (1 Macc 2:57), or consider that its functions have been taken over by the current priesthood (Sirach). Finally, a third group still clings to the Davidic covenant as a source of an eschatological hope that promises a holy and righteous ruler that restores Israel (Pss. Sol. 17), or a military figure that leads in the war against eschatological enemies (Qumran), or a figure that pronounces judgment but whose function is only temporary (4 Ezra). This state of affairs reflects the fragmentary nature of early Judaism.

Among those who cling to the hope in the fulfillment of the Davidic promises, the hopes of the prophets that we mentioned above continue to have significance. The author of Psalms of Solomon 17 expects that the hoped-for Davidic king—almost a divine figure—will mediate the renewal of the covenant, gather the Jews from the land of their exile, cleanse the nation from sin, and bring righteousness and holiness to the nation. Expectations regarding the priests and the temple are notoriously absent, however.

The Qumran covenanters expected the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in the last days as well (4Q504, 4Q252, 4Q174, 4Q161, 4Q285, probably 4Q246). The Branch of David is an eschatological figure that will lead the forces of the Sons of Light to victory against their eschatological enemies (the Kittim). It is interesting that this figure appears alongside the “sons of Zadok,” the priests, but has a subordinate role to them.
In fact, they oversee his activities. It is significant, however, that in the document 4Q174 (Florilegium), the hope for the restoration of the throne to the Davidic line is one of several expectations for the “last days.” The others are the building of the sanctuary of the Lord—which is intriguingly described as “a temple of man” (I, 1-6), the provision of rest from the sons of Belial (I, 7-9), and the restoration of a righteous priesthood from the line of Zadok (I, 14-19; quoting Ezek 44:10 in line 16).

**Conclusion**

Let me summarize the similarities between the rule of righteous Davidic kings and the rule of the Son in Hebrews.

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<td>Cleansing of the Land from Spurious form of Worship</td>
<td>Cleansing of the conscience (9:14) and removal of sin by the interiorization of God’s law in the believers (9:24-10:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The building or repair of the temple is followed by its consecration through cleansing</td>
<td>God builds the temple (3:3-4; 8:2) Jesus consecrates the heavenly sanctuary with better sacrifices (9:23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform of the Cult. This includes: (a) the centralization of the sacrifices at Jerusalem as disposed in Deuteronomy 12 (b) new stipulations regarding the priestly and Levitical courses as revealed to David (1 Chr 28:11-19)</td>
<td>Substitution of the Levitical priesthood with a new high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5-7). Substitution of animal sacrifices with the “once for all” sacrifice of Christ (10:18). Inauguration of a new spiritual worship for the believers (12:28-29; 13:10-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunification of Israel</td>
<td>God establishes a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Heb 8:8)²²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Rest” from the enemies</td>
<td>Availability of God’s rest (3:7-4:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The emergence of a faithful priest</td>
<td>Jesus is a faithful high priest over the house of God (3:1-6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²² This was brought to my attention independently and almost simultaneously by George H. Guthrie and David Moffitt after the Hebrews Consultation meeting at SBL’s Annual Meeting 2007 (San Diego).
Of the seven aspects of the rule of righteous Davidic kings, Jesus fulfills six of them. I suggest that the notion that Jesus is the righteous king of the Davidic expectations constitutes an important subtext of the argument of Hebrews.

In this complex New Testament document, the author seeks through carefully crafted arguments, compelling logic, and moving examples to strengthen the sagging faith of these Christians who courageously suffered in the past public shaming, persecution, and financial loss but have now begun to drift away from Christ and are even in danger of blatant unbelief. In this context, the author exhorts the believers: “let us hold fast to our confession” (4:14; cf. 3:1; 10:23). The confession to which he refers was probably a confession similar to the description of the Gospel in Rom 1:3-4: “the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (cf. Rom 8:34). On the basis of this Christian notion of the Davidic messianic identity of Jesus he exhorts the readers “Do not . . . abandon that confidence of yours” (10:35). Instead, they should follow the Son “crowned with honor and glory” whom God has appointed the ἄρχων (prince) of their salvation (2:6-10). “Therefore,[—the author concludes—]since we are receiving a kingdom[—I would specify “a Davidic kingdom”—]that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe” (Heb 12:28).