

ARCHĒGOS IN THE SALVATION HISTORY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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Archēgos as a title for Jesus appears only four times in the NT, twice each in Acts (3:15; 5:31) and Hebrews (2:10; 12:2). Nevertheless it seems that both linkages¹ and affinities with other terms and concepts may make it part of one or more theological "packages" that could extend its influence beyond that indicated by mere occurrence count.²

A survey of LXX³ and non-Biblical use of the term suggests a threefold connotation: (1) path-breaker (pioneer) who opens the way for others, (2) source or founder, and (3) leader-ruler.⁴ Most suggested translations of *archēgos* tend to gravitate toward one or another of these meanings.⁵ Discussions of the cultural background from which *archēgos* entered Christianity or that of the group of early Christians who used it generally seem to assume that the source-founder emphasis is more likely to be Greek while the leader-ruler connotation probably reflects a Semitic background.

James P. Martin⁶ argues that *archēgos* is closely associated with the early Church's understanding of faith within salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). It identified Jesus, as *archēgos*, as standing at the central point of salvation his-

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¹Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, "The Lucan Portrait of Christ," *NTS* 2 (1955-56) 167.

²Cf. G. Johnston, "Christ as *Archēgos*," *NTS* 27 (1981) 231.

³In the LXX *archēgos* is usually a translation for *pera'*, *qāštn* and *rō'š*. It is generally applied to the political and/or military leader of the whole or a part of the people. Lachish is called *archēgos hamartias*, a leader or example followed by others (Mic 1:13). In 1 Macc 10:47 Israel is said to have been pleased with Alexander "because he was the first (*archēgos*) to speak peaceful words to them." In Jer 3:4 *archēgos* is used in the sense of a guide.

⁴BAG 112; G. Dellling, "Archēgos," *TDNT* 1 (1964) 487-488. Note also that in Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis 94, 10-11 Mani calls Elchasaï *ho archēgos tou nomou hymōn* in referring to him as either "founder" or "special leader." According to Luigi Cizillo ("The Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis and the Elchasaites," a paper presented to the seminar on Jewish Christianity of the Society of Biblical Literature, December 22, 1982), the community of the Mani codices "has many *archēgoi*—leaders who are apparently the *presbyteroi*." However, there was only one founder-leader.

⁵(1) Pioneer, hence "guide," "hero"; (2) source or founder, hence "author," "initiator," "beginning"; (3) leader-ruler, hence "captain," "prince," "king."

⁶"Faith as Historical Understanding," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord* (ed. C. F. H. Henry; London: Tyndale, 1960) 177 ff.

tory, "which opens up the future to the completion of God's purpose,"⁷ while at the same time it proclaims his unique role in the past and present of both history and the experience of the Christian community.

I wish to endorse the general thrust of Martin's contribution, but here I want to look more precisely at the function of *archēgos* as a description of Jesus within the epistle to the Hebrews. I suggest that the specific situation faced by the intended audience and the solution proposed by the writer made *archēgos*, when employed in its broadest sense, a most appropriate concept around which to present the person and work of Christ.

I. THE SITUATION ENVISAGED

The writer of the epistle seems to have feared that his readers were in danger of sliding away from Christianity back to Judaism, which they believed to be the religion of the OT. Evidently the readers did not see this as an abandonment of one religion for another. The faith of OT Israel, they may have argued, came by revelation of God, the same God whom they served as Christians. Judaism and Christianity, the recipients probably assumed, were equally valid, alternate forms of the same religion.

The language of the epistle implies that although the readers had faced persecution in the past (10:32-34), the source of the immediate threat lay not in a frontal attack or direct challenge but in the community's own inattention, indifference and distracted state. The writer warns of "drifting away" (2:1), "neglect" (2:3), and "sluggishness" (6:12); he accuses his readers of being "dull of hearing" (5:11) with "drooping hands" and "weak knees" (12:12). He calls for them to pay "closer attention" (2:1) and to exercise vigilance (3:12), to be steadfast (3:6; 4:14), to show "earnestness" (6:11) and "endurance" (10:36, 38; 12:1).

Such a state of dissipated zeal could have been caused by the passage of time since accepting Christ, a fading awareness of certain essential features of the content of the new faith, and/or preoccupation with other matters. Clearly the writer was convinced that what was needed was a "word of exhortation" (13:22)⁸ that called for renewal, growth, conscious effort, a reminder of the distinctive claims of Christianity, and above all a refreshed and enlarged view of the person and work of Christ.

The precise date and province of the epistle are of course uncertain. Although the use of the present tense in describing the worship in the Jerusalem temple (7:8; 9:6-7, 9, 13; 13:10) is not conclusive,⁹ a date just before or immediately after the destruction of city and temple in A.D. 70 seems likely. In any case the writer certainly saw the old order "in the process of passing away" (8:13), and that is the crucial point. If the book does come from the general

⁷Ibid., p. 181.

⁸Cf. Acts 13:15. "The epistle is fundamentally a practical sermon"; C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: Studies in Honor of C. H. Dodd* (ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube; Cambridge University, 1954) 363.

⁹W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 403; D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1970) 716-718.

period of the Jewish war, however, then a possible reason for the assumed preoccupation and distraction of the readers becomes clear. The inclination to return to Judaism may have been linked to patriotic motives. It would have been natural for many Jews, even some in the diaspora, to desire to unite, even symbolically, with their embattled nation in her hour of need.

For the writer, even considering the possibility of returning to Judaism indicated a failure to grasp the nature and implication of the present state of salvation history. Jesus Christ inaugurated a new phase in God's dealings with men. The result is a new period, a new age, which has supplanted that which had gone before.

The opening statement of the document demonstrates the writer's commitment to a "new age" theological perspective. He contrasts God's revelation "to our fathers by the prophets" (1:1) with that "to us by a Son" (1:2). This has come about "in the end of these days" (*ep' eschatou tōn hēmerōn toutōn*, 1:2), a much discussed phrase that I, with Montefiore, understand to mean: "With the entry of the Son into the world, a completely new era has begun, superseding the old order of existence which had all but passed away."¹⁰

Throughout the epistle we encounter both implicit and explicit evidence that, for the author, the concept of different ages and a change in the ages inaugurated by Christ was of greatest significance. Most obvious are such references as "the world to come" (2:5), "powers of the age to come" (6:5), "Christ . . . a high priest of the good things that have come" (9:11),¹¹ and "he appeared once for all at the end of the age" (9:26). In addition the writer makes much of the present reality of salvation (1:14), a "better rest" (3:18 ff.), Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary (9:24), and the perfecting in the present of forefathers who had "not received what was promised" (11:39-40). In fact, the major argument of the epistle—that of changes in revelation (1:4-2:9), the position of Moses (3:3-6; contrast Deut 34:10-11), priesthood (4:14 ff.), law (7:12), sanctuary (8:1 ff.; 9:11), covenant (8:6 ff.; 9:15-22; 10:16 ff.), sacrifice (9:12 ff.; 10:11-15), and of access before God (9:6-14; 10:19-22)—is predicated upon just such a change of ages.

To those tempted to return to Judaism the author's message is plain: In Christ salvation history has taken a quantum leap forward. You cannot go back. To turn away from Christ is to attempt to push salvation history backward, to reject the reality of "the age to come" (6:4 ff.). History, including salvation history, cannot be made to retreat. To return to Judaism is an attempt to live in the past. To do so leaves one without hope (6:4), for there remains no Jewish sacrifice for sin (10:26)—only judgment (10:27-31). In Christ the old covenant and all that pertains to it has become "obsolete . . . and . . . is ready

¹⁰H. W. Montefiore, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1965) 34. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 3 n. 14: "The use of the phrase here implies an inaugurated eschatology"; cf. J. Moffat, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1924) 4. G. W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) 4, states that the phrase indicates a particular Semitic view of time and "refers to the last days of this undesirable age which would be followed by a better future." On the eschatology of Hebrews in general see Barrett, "Eschatology" 363-393.

¹¹Reading *genomenōn* rather than *mellontōn*.

to vanish away" (8:13). Judaism and Christianity are not equally valid alternatives, for Christ "abolishes the first in order to establish the second" (10:9). He warns them "lest . . . [they] . . . fall away from the living God" (3:12).

II. ARCHĒGOS IN HEBREWS

In 2:10 Jesus is called "the *archēgos* of salvation (*tēs sōtērias*)." Previously (beginning in 1:4) his position is contrasted with that of angels. Although Jesus is superior to angels and has brought a superior revelation and salvation, he "for a little while was made lower than the angels" (2:9). In this humiliation he suffered, tasting death, but has as a consequence been "crowned with glory and honor." These dual themes—suffering and glory—are repeated in 2:10 ff., this time in something of a cosmic-redeemer setting, as the immediate context in which *archēgos* occurs: He who is the "*archēgos* of salvation" leads "many sons into glory" and was "perfected by suffering (*dia pathēmatōn teleiōsai*)."

Two points stand out. First, both the immediate and the larger context associate *archēgos* with the type of dramatic reversal of fortune that C. H. Dodd has shown to be an important part of the "plot" common to several OT contexts and evidently prominent in the minds of NT writers as they cite them.¹² In Hebrews, however, something is added. Those associated with Jesus share in his glory and honor. Second, that Jesus is the *archēgos* of salvation raises the question of the *sōtēria* in the epistle as a whole and how it fits with the *archēgos* concept.

Elsewhere *sōtēria* occurs six times in Hebrews (1:14; 2:3; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7). In 11:7 it clearly means "to rescue from danger" (Noah built an ark for the salvation of his family). In 9:28 it refers to the future, final realization of God's work of redemption at the culmination of the eschatological drama, the final result of salvation history. With this as a clue, we may inquire if other occurrences of *sōtēria* also have a point of reference broader than simply the rescue or deliverance from either physical or spiritual danger. This appears to be the case, for each of the first four occurrences (not counting 2:10) may well refer to the time or period characterized by the salvation that is available since the completion of the work of Christ. In fact, Montefiore explicitly associates it with the new age:

The world to come [2:5] is a way of referring to this salvation *about which* he has just been *speaking*, and which is described later as "the age to come" (vi.5) and "the city to come" (xiii.14).¹³

If this is true, then calling Jesus the "*archēgos* of salvation" is equivalent to hailing him as the "*archēgos* of the new age." He is the one through whose sufferings (the "birth pangs of the Messiah") the new age becomes a reality and whose personal honor and glory, which is shared with his "sons," is a major characteristic of it.

Heb 12:2 again finds *archēgos* in a setting marking the transition from the

¹²*The Old Testament in the New* (1952; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963); cf. *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952).

¹³Montefiore, *Epistle* 55; cf. Bruce, *Commentary* 33.

past to the present and contrasting former suffering with present honor. The "cloud of witnesses" from the former age encompasses those who now "run . . . the race." Central is Jesus, the faith's *archēgos* and perfecter (*teleiōten*), who "endured the cross" but now has been "seated at the right hand of the throne of God." He opened the race, the new faith, within which his followers struggle, and he remains the focus of their attention.

Time would fail me were I here to attempt a comprehensive investigation of the epistle. Suffice it to note briefly that the same concepts—suffering as a prelude to glory and as the means of benefit for man—occur throughout the epistle, even where *archēgos* is absent. For example in 7:27—8:1 Jesus, as high priest, "offered up himself" (i.e., suffered), has been made perfect (*teteleiōmenon*) and is now "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven." Again, 10:12–14 speaks of Christ's "sacrifice for sin," session at the right hand, and the perfecting (*teteleiōken*) of men. The same concept is less obvious, but probably also present, in 4:1–10. Jesus, as had Joshua previously, provided a "rest" both for himself and others after a time of struggle (suffering?) and labor.¹⁴

Heb 5:8–9 is particularly interesting in our quest for the possibility of a conceptual atmosphere within which *archēgos* was an important part. Here the author says that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect (*teleiōthesis*) he became the source of eternal salvation (*aitios sōtērias aiōniou*) to all who obey him." Obvious are the themes of suffering, glory, and benefit for others. There are also direct lexical and probable conceptual parallels with *archēgos* contexts. A form of the verb *teleiōō* ("to complete, bring to an end, finish, accomplish, perfect")¹⁵ appears here as well as in the two examples just mentioned above (7:28; 10:14) and along with both occurrences of *archēgos*. *Sōtēria* (salvation) is associated with Jesus here just as in 2:10. Furthermore *aitios* in its masculine form means "cause" or "source,"¹⁶ ideas also inherent in *archēgos*. In fact *aitios* in 5:9 may be a virtual synonym for *archēgos*.

III. THE TASK/FUNCTION OF ARCHĒGOS

The requirements of translation have probably promoted the attitude that the different elements of the threefold connotation of *archēgos* noted above are mutually exclusive. The traditional association of one of its emphases with a

¹⁴The fact that "Jesus" and "Joshua" are the same name (although in Greek and Hebrew forms) combined with the writer's propensity for typology raises the possibility of his assuming some sort of Jesus-Joshua messianic concept of Christology. The passing reference by Stephen in Acts 7:45, the textual variant of Jude 5, and the present context suggest such a possibility. In a paper read before the Manchester (England) Theological Society (November 1962), "Was there an Expectation in Late Judaism that the Messiah would Fulfill a Joshua Role?", R. A. Kraft presented an impressive list of texts from the OT, second-commonwealth Jewish literature, and Christian sources that may indicate that such an expectation did exist. For possible allusions to Jesus-Joshua thought in John see T. F. Glasson, *Moses in the Fourth Gospel* (SBT; London: SCM, 1963) 82 ff.; cf. Bruce, *Commentary* 77 n. 28.

¹⁵BAG 817.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 26.

particular cultural milieu may also be too rigid a distinction for all contexts. Given its full range of meaning, the word designates an individual who opened the way into a new area for others to follow, founded the city in which they dwelt, gave his name to the community, fought its battles and secured the victory, and then remained as the leader-ruler-hero of his people.

A number of Jewish and pagan¹⁷ sources illustrate one or more facets of *archēgos*. A fairly close one, in the LXX of Judg 11:6 ff., is often overlooked. Jephthah was asked to become *archēgos* over the inhabitants of Gilead in order to deliver them from the Ammonites (v 6). He agreed on condition that the position would be made permanent. The elders consented, and he was made *kephalē kai archēgos*¹⁸ even before the battle (vv 8–11). At the conclusion of his struggles “Jephthah judged Israel six years” (12:7). Other OT leaders, especially during the time of the judges, were also occasionally called *archēgos* by the LXX translators (cf. Judg 5:2, 15, etc.) as well as *sōtēr*,¹⁹ a term that, we have noted, could be a part of the context associated with *archēgos* in Hebrews.

It should be expected that in any document from a Hellenistic Jewish province the classical distinctions of the meanings of such a term as *archēgos*, even if they actually existed, would tend to be blurred. Here too the so-called Semitic and Greek nuances both may be present and even intertwined. This certainly seems to be the case in the LXX Jephthah account.²⁰ If, as I believe, Hebrews represents a Hellenistic Jewish Christian document, then here also we might expect this all-inclusive type of meaning for *archēgos*.

IV. JESUS AS *ARCHĒGOS* AND SALVATION HISTORY IN HEBREWS

For the writer of Hebrews, Jesus opened the way into the presence of God (9:11–12) and into the new age (1:2). His followers are to “seize the hope” (6:18), to “strive to enter the rest” made available (4:11), to “run the race” set before them (12:2) by Jesus. They are to accept the reality and implications of the new phase of salvation history by recognizing Jesus as better than or superior²¹ to all OT persons and institutions, which have now been rendered “obsolete” (8:13) and are “set aside” (7:18) by him. Through Jesus the city sought by Abraham (11:10) has become a reality (12:22), and those identified with him may gratefully receive an unshakable kingdom (12:28).

The past has been fulfilled, new benefits have been won through the strug-

¹⁷Cf. Delling, “*Archēgos*” 487.

¹⁸So the reading of B; but A has *kephalē kai hēgoumenos*.

¹⁹Neh 9:27; 2 Kgs 13:5; and esp. Othniel (Judg 3:9), Ehud (3:15), and frequently Moses in the accounts of Exodus.

²⁰Philo may have a similar idea in mind when describing Moses as *archēgetes* (*On Abraham* 276; *Moses* i:8); cf. Delling, “*Archēgos*” 487 n. 1.

²¹*Kreissōn, kreittōn*, a term used thirteen times in this epistle: 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 (twice); 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24.

gles and sufferings²² of Christ. Consequently he has received the superior name (1:4) that is proclaimed and praised "in the midst of the congregation" (2:12), in demonstration of which name works and love are shown (*enedeixasthe eis to onoma*, 6:10). It is the name readers are admonished continually to acknowledge (13:15).

Now, following his sufferings and victory, Jesus is elevated to the position of honor and power "at the right hand" (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Christians are to rally around him (13:13), for he is Lord (1:10; cf. 2:3; 12:6; 13:20). In times of stress and difficulty his followers find encouragement and strength as they look to and consider the person and example of Jesus, their great hero (12:2-3).

There are other points of contact, but these will suffice to suggest that the author of Hebrews proclaims Jesus as the *archēgos*, the pioneer-founder-victor-leader-ruler-hero who established the new age and remains in that capacity for the people of God of that new age. The two occurrences of the term are but the tip of the iceberg of a distinct way of thinking and talking about Jesus. This provides a substratum for at least a part of the theology of primitive Christianity,²³ especially for that of the epistle to the Hebrews.

For the readers—those who had been enlightened by the "powers of the age to come" (6:6)—a return to Judaism was no valid option. In the onward movement of salvation history the former founding heroes—Moses, Joshua, Aaron, and the other worthies of chap. 11—and all for which they stood have been supplanted. In Jesus salvation history has reached a new phase, a new stage of completion (*teleioō*) that has a permanence not found in the former, a once-for-all character (*hapax*, 6:4; 9:26, 28; 10:2). Therefore readers must leave the framework provided by the earlier phase of salvation history, they must go "outside the camp" (13:13) to Jesus who himself was thrust "outside" (13:12) and rejected by representatives of the old order. To attempt to return to it would be apostasy, a rejection of the benefits of Christ's crucifixion, an act of contempt for Jesus (6:6).

V. THE ARCHĒGOS AND SALVATION HISTORY IN THE FUTURE

Even with the inauguration of the new age, salvation history is not yet complete. The writer is conscious of the tension between a "realized" but "not yet consummated" eschatology. There is a distinction between the age of ful-

²²Lampe, "Lucan," in commenting on *archēgos* in Acts, draws attention to the identification of this term with the suffering servant. The same connection appears to be present in Hebrews.

²³Cf. the statement of V. Taylor: "It is perhaps significant that the name 'the pioneer' appears in two strata only of New Testament teaching, in the Jerusalem sources used in the Acts of the Apostles, and in an epistle despatched to Rome by a teacher who for the time being is an exile from home. We appear to catch a glimpse of an item of Palestinian tradition in transit westward. The name never becomes a technical expression and did not gain a wide currency, but it indicates the direction of men's thinking in the primitive church, and it testifies to a valuation of Christ's person which became permanent"; *The Names of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1953) 91-92.

fillment and the final age or world to come.²⁴ The work of Jesus, even as pioneer-victor-founding hero, is not yet complete. All things are "not yet in submission to him" (2:8); he "will appear a second time" (9:28) and awaits "until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet" (10:13; cf. 1:13). Readers are to "exhort one another, so much the more as you see the day approaching" (10:25).

But even in times of change and incompleteness there is stability. The old order with its institutions passes. The new is established but not yet consummated. The distraught believer may still find "an anchor for the soul" (6:19) because the entirety of salvation history is centered in him who is the *archēgos* of the new age of salvation (2:10), of the faith (12:2), for those who follow him. This *archēgos*, this "Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8).

VI. EPILOGUE

It is inevitable in a study such as this that the question will be asked, "How then should *archēgos* be translated in the English Bible?" The variety of suggested translations already noted attests the complexity of the matter. "Pioneer-founder-victor-leader-ruler-hero" is obviously too cumbersome, and the English reader is likely to miss the connotation that these are not mutually exclusive functions but all held and performed simultaneously by the same individual. Since some choice must be made perhaps something like "pioneer prince" or "founding king" is the best we can do. Certainly here, as in so many cases, the translator could do well to include a note that provides the reader with some idea of the full meaning of the term.

²⁴Cf. W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (SBLMS; Philadelphia: SBL, 1952).