

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF PSALM 8:4–6 IN HEBREWS 2:5–9¹

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In the fall of 2001, at the annual meeting of the Institute for Biblical Research, Stanley Porter presented a plenary address entitled “Developments in Greek Linguistics and New Testament Study.” A subtext for the presentation might have read, “The Lack of Developments in the Use of Greek Linguistics in New Testament Study.” In part, Porter decried the lack of incorporation of the practice of discourse analysis in the day-to-day task of most NT scholars, this in spite of recent advances in the field. What we need, Porter suggested, is more work demonstrating the practical fruit of discourse analysis when applied to specific conundrums of NT exegesis and interpretation.

In this article, we wish to address an issue of interpretation that begs for the incorporation of discourse analysis as a means to its answer. That interpretive question has to do with the use of Ps 8:4–6 in Heb 2:5–9. We chose this text in part for the practical implications of its interpretation in current translation work, recognizing that several translations have opted for a thoroughgoing anthropological rendering of the text.² The question of how one translates the quotation of Psalm 8 at this point hits near what, for most of us, is the day-to-day task of interpreting, translating, and teaching portions of the NT. Therefore, we offer this brief study as a suggestion concerning the need for discourse analysis in addressing such passages.

I. PSALM 8 IN JUDAISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

In its OT context, our psalm follows several psalms of lament requesting deliverance (Psalms 3–7), and offers a beautiful, praise-filled counterpoint to

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² So, e.g., the TNIV translation, which reads,

But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.” In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them.

Let us make clear that we support wholeheartedly functional equivalence translations, but no translation gets it right at every point. Thus, reasoned discussion of the interpretive issues must lay a foundation for sound translation.

these, a song that proclaims God's glory and the dignity of human beings. An *inclusio* frames the psalm, a refrain celebrating the majesty of the Lord's name: "O Yahweh, our Lord, how magnificent is your name in all the earth." Two primary movements make up the body of the psalm. Psalm 8:1b–2 (8:2b–3 MT) is notoriously difficult to understand in the Hebrew, due to a grammatical puzzle,³ but the psalmist seems to proclaim that Yahweh has placed his glory on, or above, the heavens. The image of infants and toddlers, who are immensely vulnerable, rests in sharp relief with that of powerful enemies. The psalmist proclaims God as one who is able to build up a people of weakness as a force to oppose his enemies.

Verses 3–8 (vv. 4–9 MT), from which our quotation is taken, is a passage expressing the author's wonder at God's dealings with humanity for whom God has ordained a special role in the created order. Thus, these verses concern humanity's astonishing dignity. In light of God's awesome creation of his heavens, the moon and stars that he has put in their place, the psalmist reflects on the relative insignificance of people in the vast scope of God's purposes (vv. 3–4; vv. 3–5 MT). In verse 4, a question is posed in synonymous parallelism, in essence asking, "Why do you even spare a thought for people?" The term for humanity here (אָנוּשִׁים) is used most often to focus on "human frailty, weakness, and mortality,"⁴ the earthbound nature of the creature under God's heavens.⁵ Yet, mystery of mysteries, God thinks of and cares for people.

Verses 5–8 (vv. 6–9 MT) constitute a reflection on Gen 1:26–28 where God commissions human beings, created in the image of God, to rule over the fish of the sea, birds of the air, and over all living creatures. Humans have been made a little lower than אֱלֹהִים, which could be translated as a reference to angels, gods, or God himself. The LXX translates the term with ἀγγέλους, and, on that reading, human beings have their place in the created order, just below those who serve around God's throne. This emphasizes the surprising dignity of people, in spite of them being dwarfed by the massive reaches of God's creation. Yet, the stewardship humanity has been given over other works of God's hands extends the emphasis on human dignity. In its original context, the critical phrase, "you laid everything at his feet," refers to the animals, as is made clear in Ps 8:7–8 (8:8–9 MT), over whom the human has been installed as a king.⁶ At the end of the psalm the author repeats the word of praise with which the psalm opened.

Among Jewish sources, the most prominent appropriation of Ps 8:4–6 seizes on the question, "What is man . . . ?" to emphasize the insignificance of human beings. 1QS 3:17–18 plays a part in a discussion of God's sovereign design of all things and asserts, "He created humankind to rule over the world," a possible allusion to Psalm 8. Verse 20 of the same passage reads, "Who can measure your glory? Who, indeed, is man among your glorious

³ See the summary in Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 178–80.

⁴ Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms: Volume 1* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 204.

⁵ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* 182.

⁶ *Ibid.* 183.

works?,” emphasizing the insignificance of people, and the author goes on to state, “his body is but the bread of worms; his is so much spit, mere nipped-off clay” (vv. 21–22a).

Several late works also use Psalm 8 to emphasize the insignificance of human beings. In 3 Enoch, a work probably from the fifth or sixth century AD, the ministering angels bring a complaint to God (5:10). They exclaim to him, “Lord of the Universe, what business do you have with men, as it is written, ‘What is man that you should spare a thought for him?’” Given Hebrews’ use of the psalm to transition to the topic of incarnation, it is interesting that the passage goes on to say, “Why did you leave the heaven of heavens above, the abode of your glory, the high and exalted throne which is in the height of Arabot, and come and lodge with men who worship idols?” *B. Sanh.* 38b has angels, in the form of the psalm’s question, asking why God would want to create people in the first place. Later, when the flood generation does not turn out well, the angels, in effect, say to the Lord, “We told you so!”

One of the most significant allusions to Psalm 8 in relation to Hebrews is found in 2 *Esdras* 6:53–54, part of a larger section on God’s work in creation. This work, which may be from a first-century Palestinian Jew, proclaims that God is just, in spite of the evil in the world. The passage speaks of God placing Adam as ruler over all his works that he had created. Yet, in verses 55–59, the writer of 2 *Esdras* goes on to ask why, if the world was created for his people, the evil nations are being allowed to rule over and devour the people of God. He asks, “If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance?” As we will see momentarily, the same concern may be in view in Heb 2:8–9.

Thus, in extrabiblical Jewish texts, the psalm primarily emphasizes the insignificance of human beings, but a few use the psalm to speak of human dignity. When we turn to the NT, we find a very different picture. Psalm 8 appears in four places (but see also the allusions at Phil 3:21 and 1 Pet 3:22). At Matt 21:16, Jesus quotes the LXX/OG version of Ps 8:2 (8:3 MT) to argue for children’s freedom to offer praise. The quotation occurs in a context that has distinct messianic overtones.⁷ A second quotation of the psalm may be found at 1 Cor 15:27. Here, speaking of the ultimate defeat of all of Christ’s enemies, which will culminate in the defeat of death itself, Paul quotes Ps 8:6b with the words, “for he has subjected all things under his feet.” Significantly, this quotation occurs in the context of an allusion to Ps 110:1, just two verses prior, with which it has verbal analogy. At 1 Cor 15:25, Paul writes, “For he must rule until all of his enemies are put under his feet,” a clear allusion to that most-often-quoted psalm in the NT. The context here clearly is Christological, and both psalms should be interpreted as such, referring to the relationship between Christ and all that is and will be submitted to him. The same dynamic relationship between these psalms occurs at Eph 1:20–22 as well. Ephesians 1:20 alludes to Ps 110:1 when it speaks of the *session* at the right hand of God, and Eph 1:22, alluding to Ps 8:6, reads, “and he

⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC; Dallas, TX: Word, 1995) 600–602.

has subjected all things under his feet.” Here again the context clearly is Christological.

The fourth occurrence of Psalm 8 in the NT, of course, is found in Heb 2:5–9, and scholars have been divided on how the author understands this use of the psalm, namely, whether it is to be understood as anthropological or Christological.⁸ While most agree that in Heb 2:9 the author sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Ps 8:4–6, the debate concerns where the Christological reading of the psalm begins and, among some researchers, whether *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* should be taken in this context as a Christological title.⁹ Our purpose here is to argue that, while Ps 8:4–6 in Heb 2:5–9 certainly is grounded in, and takes up into itself, its anthropological background, its use is at the same time Christological from v. 5 onward.¹⁰ For this, as much as any passage of the NT, is a “God-man” passage, appropriated by the writer to communicate both the exaltation and the incarnation of Christ. We argue for this perspective on the basis of five discourse dynamics in the book.

II. DISCOURSE DYNAMICS SUPPORTING

A CHRISTOLOGICAL READING OF PSALM 8 IN HEBREWS 2

1. *The relationship of Ps 8:4–6 to Ps 110:1 in the discourse.* The author of Hebrews introduces Ps 8:4–6 in part on the basis of its verbal analogy with Ps 110:1; both passages refer to the submission of something *τῶν ποδῶν*. This use of *gezērâ šāwâ* evidently was the basis of the two passages being drawn together in early Christian tradition (see the above discussion on 1 Cor 15:25–27 and Eph 1:20–22).¹¹ Of the joint employment of these two psalms here, Lane writes,

The explanatory clause *περὶ ἧς λαλοῦμεν*, “about which we are speaking,” underscores the continuity in thought between 1:5–14 and the resumption of the exposition at this point. A string of OT quotations had exhibited the transcendent dignity of the Son, particularly in his exaltation. The writer intends now to examine other OT passages that also bear upon the character and dignity of Jesus. . . .¹²

As demonstrated in Guthrie’s *The Structure of Hebrews*, the author uses an ingenious transition technique, distant hookwords, to maintain the flow from the first Christological exposition, 1:5–14, to a continuation of his exposition

⁸ For an overview of the question see William R. G. Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (WMANT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981) 29–38.

⁹ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 150–52; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991) 47–48.

¹⁰ For a reading that understands the passage to have a double sense, both anthropological and messianic, see Erich Gräßer, *An die Hebräer: 1. Teilband Hebr 1–6* (EKKNT; Zürich: Benziger, 1990) 116–18.

¹¹ So Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 215.

¹² Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* 45; similarly, Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 145; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 71.

in 2:5–9.¹³ Forms of the word μέλλω at 1:14 and 2:5, as well as the use of ἄγγελος at 1:13 and 2:5, facilitate this transition, as do the related terms οὐχί and οὐ also found at 1:14 and 2:5. These distant hookwords allow the author to insert an intervening hortatory section at 2:1–4 but maintain a smooth connection between the expository units interrupted by the hortatory block. This dynamic occurs in Hebrews every time the author switches between exposition and exhortation. Once we discern the author's intention that 2:5 functions to continue the discussion left off at 1:14, the effect is the juxtaposition of Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:4–6.

2. *The introductory formula at 2:5.* This brings us, secondly, to a further consideration of the introductory formula (IF) used at Heb 2:5. Here the author states, "He has not submitted the coming world, concerning which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has born witness somewhere, saying. . . ." First, this way of introducing our psalm quotation concerns the submission of "the coming world" (τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν) and further notes that it is a submission about which the author has already been speaking. In a recent article in which he defends the anthropological reading of the quotation at Heb 2:6–8, Craig Blomberg fails to note that it is not just the "world," or even the "cosmos," that is mentioned in the IF of verse 5, but rather the "coming world."¹⁴ This "coming world" of 2:5 should be associated with the "coming age" of 6:5 and "the city to come" of 13:14, both of which refer to the eschatological kingdom of God, in which Christians already participate to an extent (6:5), but which will be experienced fully in the future (13:5).¹⁵ There are only two possible referents for this eschatological "submission" about which he speaks. The question "how shall we escape?" in 2:3 certainly is eschatological in nature, anticipating the final judgment, yet it does not really speak of the submission of the coming world in any broad sense. Much preferred is our other option, to read the submission of the coming world as referencing the use of Ps 110:1 at 1:13, for there the placing of the enemies under the feet of Christ is expressly stated.¹⁶ However, if this be the case, the IF used to introduce Ps 8:4–6 points us back to the messianic proclamation at Heb 1:13, and it must do so for a reason, namely to draw together the submission of the enemies in Psalm 110 and the submission of all things in Psalm 8. If so, it is simply false to suggest that "[o]nly with v. 9 does Jesus enter into the argument."¹⁷ Speaking of the "submission" mentioned at Heb 2:5 along this line of reasoning, C. K. Barrett writes,

¹³ George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-linguistic Analysis* (NovTSup 73; Leiden/New York: Brill, 1994) 97.

¹⁴ Craig Blomberg, "Better Things in this Case: The Superiority of Today's New International Version in Hebrews," *BT* 55/3 (2004) 312.

¹⁵ On the nature of the "coming world" as a future reality that has present dimensions, see Koester, *Hebrews* 213; Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 146; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 71–72; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 70.

¹⁶ So Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8 45.

¹⁷ Blomberg, "Better Things" 312.

It has not been subjected to angels; if not to them, to whom? The answer sometimes given, based upon the quotation of Psalm 8 that follows in 2.6–8, is, It is subjected to man, to the human race. This answer is, I think, mistaken. The figure who stands over against angels is, as ch. 1 makes unmistakably clear, not man in general but the Son of God; it is to him that the world to come is made subject.¹⁸

It is true that a strand of tradition in the NT speaks of human beings' ruling with Christ, in passages such as 2 Tim 2:12, Rev 20:6, and 1 Cor 6:2–4. Yet, these exist in the theological orbit of the emphasis on the rule of Christ. Therefore, it would seem significant that the author introduces the passage from Psalm 8 with words that point to the submission of the coming world to Christ.

Furthermore, the submission of the coming world in the IF of 2:5 is reiterated with the phrase, ἐν τῷ γὰρ ὑποτάξει [αὐτῷ] τὰ πάντα (“for in submitting all things to him”), immediately following the quotation. The πάντα in this case accomplishes connections in two directions. First, it constitutes a comment on the πάντα in the last line of the quotation, and, second, it echoes the relative clause at Heb 1:2b, ὃ ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων (“whom he made heir of all things”). This relative clause, moreover, echoes the broader context of Ps 2:7, quoted at Heb 1:5 in support of the superiority of Christ over the angels. It may be suggested that the submission of all things in the first case, and being made heir of all things in the second, are references to the exaltation of Christ.

One further word is appropriate here. Although 2:5–9 and 2:10–18 should be seen as distinct units, carrying out specific roles in the development of the discourse, Vanhoye is probably correct to mark the statements at 2:5 and 2:16 as forming an *inclusio*.¹⁹ Now one could argue that, if the statement at 2:5 is referring to human beings, it nicely mirrors the proclamation at 2:16.²⁰ However, it also may be that the author builds this *inclusio* primarily via analogous wording (οὐ ἀγγέλους/οὐ ἀγγέλων), but, perhaps, with associated concepts communicating a sequence, namely, exaltation (v. 5) and incarnation (v. 16). If this latter suggestion is apropos, it fits well the development of the discourse, which moves from an emphasis on Christ's exalted status to his incarnation among “the sons.”

Therefore, a convergence of factors seems to point to the IF at Heb 2:5 as overtly Christological. This has great significance for the question before us, since the quotation of Ps 8:4–6 is appropriated by the author of Hebrews

¹⁸ C. K. Barrett, *On Paul: Aspects of His Life, Work and Influence in the Early Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2003) 202; similarly, Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 72; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 72; David DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 108–10, although DeSilva expresses more openness to a double reading of the psalm's use here, i.e. as anthropological until it is recontextualized by the mention of Jesus.

¹⁹ Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Studia neotestamentica 1; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963) 78–81.

²⁰ So Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 143–44, who sees in v. 16 a contrast anticipated by the οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλους ὑπέταξεν.

as reinforcing the statement concerning submission in the IF. This brings us to a third discourse dynamic in support of a Christological reading of Psalm 8 at Heb 2:5–9.

3. *The rabbinic technique employed at 2:8–9.* The development of 2:5–9 may be depicted as in Fig. 1. Here we have an introduction on the exaltation, followed by the quotation of Ps 8:4–6, followed by commentary. The commentary, beginning in v. 8b, addresses the status of the exaltation, followed by a direct application of parts of the psalm to Jesus. The structure of the whole supports the main theme of exaltation, a theme found at the beginning, the center, and the end, and is strengthened by lexical cohesion built on the back of forms of the word ὑποτάσσω. Further, the author chooses this psalm because he reads in it the logical progression from incarnation to exaltation, as his commentary of v. 9 demonstrates. It seems unlikely to us that the author, who understood verses 7–8a as directly applicable to Jesus, would not also have understood the part of the quotation at 2:6b also to refer to Jesus, especially given the tight-knit structure of the quotation, with its five iterations of αὐτός.

Introduction on exaltation	Οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις ὑπέταξεν τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν, περὶ ἧς λαλοῦμεν (allusion to Ps 110:1 at 1:13) διεμαρτύρατο δὲ ποῦ τις λέγων
Incarnation	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; margin-right: 10px;">[</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">τί ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος ὅτι μιμηθήσκη αὐτοῦ, ἢ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ὅτι ἐπισκέπη αὐτόν; ἠλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχύ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους</div> </div>
Exaltation	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; margin-right: 10px;">[</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφάνωσας αὐτόν πάντα ὑπέταξας ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ.</div> </div>
Status of exaltation	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; margin-right: 10px;">[</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">ἐν τῷ γὰρ ὑποτάξει [αὐτῷ] τὰ πάντα οὐδὲν ἀφῆκεν αὐτῷ ἀνυπότακτον. (comment on Psalm 8)</div> </div>
Incarnation	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; margin-right: 10px;">[</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">Νῦν δὲ οὕτω ὁρῶμεν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ὑποτεταγμένα (allusion to Ps 110:1)</div> </div>
	τὸν δὲ βραχύ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους ἠλαττωμένον βλέπομεν
	Ἰησοῦν
Exaltation	διὰ τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφανωμένον, ὅπως χάριτι θεοῦ ὑπὲρ παντὸς γεύσῃται θανάτου.

Figure 1

As he moves into this discussion of Psalm 8, Ps 110:1 is fresh in the author's mind. Yet, upon a close reading of Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:4–6, one recognizes a tension between the two passages. Both psalms speak of the subjugation of "enemies" (Psalm 110) or "all things" (Psalm 8) to Christ, but they appear to be oriented to different temporal frames. Psalm 110:1 anticipates the future ("until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet") while Ps 8:6 proclaims the subjugation as an accomplished fact ("You . . . put everything under his feet"). Given the potential puzzlement arising from the two passages, our author employs a rabbinic technique called "dispelling confusion," which involved discussing an apparent contradiction in a way as to clarify the passages in question. This we have labeled the "status of the exaltation" in our diagram.

The author, in effect, responds to the question, "Which is it: have all things been submitted to the Son, or does his universal reign lie in the future?" His answer: "Yes to both!" Verse 8b makes clear that God indeed has placed everything under the Son's feet already, as suggested by Psalm 8 (having "left nothing that is not subject to him"). The authority of Christ is already all-encompassing. Psalm 110:1, on the other hand, means "at present we do not see everything subject to him." Here the author's inaugurated eschatology comes to the fore, highlighting the tension between the "already" and "not yet" realities of the new covenant community.²¹

At various points, early Christian teachers present Christ's exaltation over the powers as a *fait accompli* (Eph 1:20–22; 1 Pet 3:22). This accomplished fact, however, might seem confusing at best and tacitly absurd at worst to one looking on a church ravished by the forces of darkness. Persecuted Christians among Hebrews' first audience may have been asking, "Why are we being hurt by powers already placed under the feet of Christ? Has God not subjected all things to the Son?" The author, referring to Psalm 8, answers this question in the affirmative, but, based on Ps 110:1, goes on to explain that we have yet to see the full consummation of his authority, since "we do not yet see all things subjected to him." Those who insist that the author does not turn to the Christological application of Psalm 8 until verse 9 miss this nuanced, rabbinic argument.

As mentioned above, in our brief treatment of the use of Psalm 8 in broader Jewish literature, there exists a parallel between the reference to Psalm 8 here in Hebrews 2 and its use in *2 Esdr* 6:53–54. In the broader context of *2 Esdras* 6 (vv. 58–59) that author also asks why, if the world was created as an inheritance for the people of God, the evil nations are allowed to dominate and devour. This parallel is striking for two texts that may have been written at about the same point in history. The author of Hebrews

²¹ So Jean Héring, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock; London: Epworth, 1970) 16, who writes,

The beginning of v. 8, drawn also from Psalm 8, expresses the same assurance as Psalm 110¹ (LXX 109¹) quoted at 1¹³. But in the Epistle a comment is added of the highest importance: it is not yet the case that all His enemies are subjected. The struggle therefore continues still, as in Pauline eschatology (1 Corinthians 15^{23–28}).

answers the question by employing Ps 110:1: the evil powers' day has come and is coming!

4. *The lexical cohesion afforded by the use of υἱός in Heb 1:1–2:18.* In his analysis of the linguistic dynamics in the text of Hebrews, Guthrie demonstrates how the author of Hebrews tightly stitched his themes together with semantic threads.²² Terms including θεός along with pronominal references to God, references to God's Son, terms semantically related to "the word of God," and references to members of the Christian community serve to build lexical cohesion for the entire book.²³ Three terms, υἱός, ἄγγελος, and δόξα, seem especially important in building lexical cohesion in 1:1–2:18. Δόξα semantically links the book's introduction (1:1–4), 2:5–9, and 2:10–18, occurring in the introduction at 1:3, in the quotation of Ps 8:4–6 at 2:7, in the comment on that psalm at 2:9, and at 2:10, the first verse of the following unit (2:10–18). One finds the term ἄγγελος in the introduction at 1:4, in the string of OT texts in 1:5–14 at 1:5, 1:6, 1:7 (2x), and 1:13, in the warning of 2:1–4 at 2:2, in the unit focused on the quotation of Ps 8:4–6 at 2:5, 2:7, and 2:9, and in 2:10–18 at 2:16. Finally, υἱός is used at 1:4, the quotations of Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 in 1:5, the introductory formula for the quotation of Ps 44:7 in 1:8, in the quotation of Ps 8:4–6 at 2:6, and in 2:10–18 in that unit's first verse. It also is related semantically to the domain of family relationships found in this final unit, specifically the terms ἀδελφός at 2:12 and παῖδιον at 2:13 and 2:14.²⁴

This brings us to the question of the use of υἱός ἀνθρώπου at Heb 2:6, and whether the author intended it here as a Christological title.²⁵ The use of υἱός takes part in building lexical cohesion in Hebrews 1–2, as noted above, and all of the uses in those two chapters, with the exception of the plural form at 2:10, have the Son of God as referent. Of course, from a linguistic standpoint the use of Heb 2:6 could refer to humanity, and indeed does so in its original context. Thus the use at 2:6 could offer cohesion by collocation, whereby the same form of a term, used by an author, has two different referents. Yet, the author's dominant use of the singular form of the term υἱός throughout the book to refer to Christ should be given some weight here, especially in light of the use of υἱός ἀνθρώπου elsewhere in the NT as a Christological title. R. T. France remarks, "It is hard to imagine that any Christian, particularly a Greek-speaking Christian, after the middle of the first century could have heard the phrase υἱός ἀνθρώπου without thinking of Jesus."²⁶

²² Guthrie, *Structure* 90.

²³ *Ibid.* 91.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 64–65, 124–25.

²⁵ On the use of the phrase as a Christological title see George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972) 39–51.

²⁶ R. T. France, "The Writer of Hebrews as Biblical Expositor," *TynBul* 47 (1996) 262; so also Donald Hagner, *Hebrews* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990) 45; Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 73.

Moreover, evidence exists for specific links between Hebrews and early Christian traditions in which υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου was used as a Christological title. For instance, building on the work of William Manson, Lincoln Hurst has strengthened the case for seeing the theology of Stephen and the Christian Hellenists as a formative influence on the writer of Hebrews.²⁷ Manson identified eight parallels between Stephen's speech and Hebrews. In his critique of Manson's parallels, Hurst rejected two points as weak, combined two others into one and added one of his own for a total of six parallels that could be easily demonstrated.²⁸ First, both recognize the divine origin of the Law but emphasize its earthly and provisional nature. Second, both depict the people of God as pilgrims who are being led by a living God rather than focusing on earthly institutions. Third, the description of God's Word as "living" in Acts 7:38 and Heb 4:12 has no other parallels in the NT. Fourth, the juxtaposition of Joshua's entry into the land with references to God's rest in Acts 7:45, 49 is another striking parallel to Heb 4:1–11 not found elsewhere in the NT. Fifth, while the similarities between Stephen and Hebrews concerning angels as the mediators of the Law can also be found in Paul, Josephus, and the rabbis, Stephen and Hebrews are the only ones who use this idea in the context of a discourse on disobedience. Finally, their development of Exod 25:40 in the context of the spiritual nature of God is striking and unique to these two occurrences. Hurst concludes that these parallels are sufficient to conclude that some of form of Manson's contention is plausible.²⁹

William Lane suggests that the parallels between Stephen's speech and Hebrews show that the author "is to be identified with the theological perspective that was first articulated by the early Hellenists."³⁰ While it may be difficult to prove solid connections between the Synoptic usage and the book of Hebrews, the most current research on the conceptual influences on the author of Hebrews has established a common tradition between Hebrews and the Stephen speech of Acts 7, and that tradition included the messianic use of "son of man." Before Stephen died as the first Christian martyr, he claimed to see τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). Admittedly, the form of the phrase in Heb 2:6 is not articular, but the author is following the OG text form of the psalm.

We do not suggest that the writer chose Psalm 8 because he saw its use of "son of man" as a messianic title. Yet, the recognition of a common tradition between Stephen's speech in Acts and Hebrews at least makes the connection possible and suggests that the writer may have recognized the rhetorical value of the phrase as a term of messianic nuances, nuances he skillfully exploits in his discussion of the heavenly Son, who became a human, in order to lead humans to glory.

²⁷ L. D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 89–106.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 105.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 105–6.

³⁰ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* cxlix.

5. *The function of Ps 8:4–6 in the development of the Christological discussion.* One of the key aims of discourse analysis is the identification of the distinct role of the various units in a discourse, and one of the most undeveloped aspects of this identification is the study of various transition techniques employed by the NT authors.

In its relation to the broader discourse of Hebrews, 2:5–9 may be identified as a nuanced form of transition.³¹ This type of transition acts as a type of “hinge” because it contains elements from the previous section and introduces elements that are prominent in the following section.³² As seen in Fig. 2, the author employs Psalm 8 because, in addition to its references to the Son’s supremacy by virtue of his exaltation, the topic of 1:5–14, the psalm mentions a time during which the Son came down to earth, taking on a “status” or position (as a human being) which was lower than that of the angels.³³

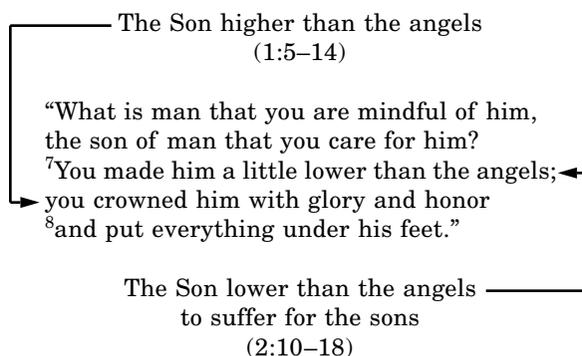


Figure 2

The statement about the incarnation in the psalm, as interpreted by our author, reads, “You made him a little lower than the angels.” This phrase contains a term that can be translated in one of two ways. The term “little” (βραχύ) either can refer to a small measure of distance or substance (“just a little lower”), or to a small amount of time (“for a little while”). This latter meaning seems to fit the context better since the author is not interested in the degree to which the Son was of a lower status than the angels. The temporal interpretation, on the other hand, well suits the understanding that Christ walked the earth as a human being for a time before being exalted

³¹ Koester, *Hebrews* 220.

³² Guthrie, *Structure* 96–111.

³³ On the use of “intermediary transitions” see Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews* 105–11. This reading of the role of 2:5–9 in the discourse is much in line with Héring, who writes, “This passage takes up again the theme of the superiority of the Son to the angels, but adds to it a new note; namely, that of His abasement below the angels during His earthly life” (*Epistle to the Hebrews* 14).

back to heaven.³⁴ The psalm moves from this statement of humiliation to a statement of glorification in which the Son of Man is said to have been “crowned with glory and honor” and to have had “everything” placed “under his feet.” The author picks up on both of these elements of the psalm and applies them to Christ at verse 9. Thus, a Christological reading of Ps 8:4–6 at Heb 2:5–9 makes sense of the discourse development, as the author moves smoothly from the exaltation of Christ in 1:5–14, through a transition containing elements of both exaltation and incarnation at 2:5–9, to the incarnation at 2:10–18.

III. CONCLUSION

In this study we have sought to argue for a Christological reading of Psalm 8 in Heb 2:5–9 by pushing beyond the immediate context of the unit to broader discourse concerns. Along the way, we have addressed issues such as transition devices, macro-development of the discourse, and lexical cohesion, which are all aspects of discourse analysis. We assert that the compounded data, offered in light of a variety of discourse dynamics, suggest that Heb 2:5–9 should be read as Christological. In other words, the author’s reading of Psalm 8 presupposed the anthropological backdrop of the psalm but understood its fulfillment as seen in the incarnation and exaltation of Christ. Héring writes,

Though the Psalmist was thinking of man in general, in our Epistle it is a case of man with a capital M, that is, of Christ, regarded in His capacity as “son of Man” in the technical and theological sense of the Gospels, or of the “heavenly Adam” in the Apostle Paul’s terminology.³⁵

And F. F. Bruce adds that in Hebrews’ use of Psalm 8, Christ is depicted as fulfilling the psalm, indeed as fulfilling the declared purpose of the humanity, as the true representative of that race. Quoting T. Carlyle’s translation of Luther’s *Ein’ feste Burg*, Bruce thus calls Christ “the Proper Man, Whom God Himself hath bidden.”³⁶

In recent years, discourse analysis, when applied to the NT literature, has begun to bear fruit, offering a means of extending exegesis to include an analysis of dynamics above the sentence and unit levels. The importance of such an extension is what we have sought to illustrate in this paper. Yet much remains to be done if discourse analysis is to be meaningfully and broadly embraced in the day-to-day work of NT scholars. At the end of the day, the argument for such a move that will ring loudest will be the steady presentation of helpful answers, or at least reasonable proposals, on specific exegetical questions. To such an end, may we all work to answer Stan Porter’s very appropriate call.

³⁴ So Hagner, *Hebrews* 45–46; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 76.

³⁵ Héring, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 15. Also see, e.g., Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* 45–50; Hagner, *Hebrews* 45.

³⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 74.