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Epistle to the Hebrews



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

Richard D. Draper
and
Michael D. Rhodes

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About the Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary Series

Welcome to the BYU New Testament Commentary, a project by a group of Latter-day Saint specialists offering to readers a careful, new look at the biblical records that witness the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the first generation of his church. The commentary series seeks to make the New Testament more accessible to Latter-day Saint general readers and scholars by employing much of current biblical scholarship while reflecting important LDS insights. At the same time, this effort may also be helpful to interested readers of other faiths who want to learn how a group of Latter-day Saint scholars understands the Bible. A fundamental article of faith for Latter-day Saints (Mormons) affirms the Bible “to be the word of God” while adding, understandably, that it needs to be “translated correctly” in order for it to be accurately comprehensible to modern language speakers.

These objectives have helped shape the purposes and parameters of this commentary series. Serious LDS readers of the Bible search the scriptures, looking for depth and breadth in passages whose meanings and mandates may ultimately be plain but not shallow. Such readers and interpreters are served by treatments that unite faith and research, reason and revelation, in prayerfully confronting profound and difficult issues that arise in the texts and affect one’s path of progression. The New Testament has served as an influential guide to western civilization for centuries. As such, its records have long been studied by lay people and scholars alike, resulting in a rich reservoir of information that illuminates the New Testament era culturally, historically, and linguistically. Selectively, the BYUNTC builds upon this vast body of knowledge, resting on the Greek texts of the New Testament and connecting helpful elements of linguistic, literary, historical, and cultural research and traditional scholarship together with LDS scriptures and doctrinal perspectives. The combination of all these features distinguishes the BYUNTC from other commentaries, which are readily

available elsewhere and which readers may also want to consult for more encyclopedic or specialized discussions.

The tone of the BYUNTC aims to be informative rather than hortatory, and suggestive rather than definitive in its interpretation. The opinions expressed in this series are the views of its contributors and should not necessarily be attributed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Brigham Young University, where many of those involved here are headquartered; or anyone else, though these works have benefitted from input and guidance from a number of colleagues, advisors, editors, and peer reviewers.

Each volume in this series sets in two parallel columns the King James Version (KJV) and a new working translation of the New Testament. Calling this a new “rendition” clarifies that it does not seek to replace the authorized KJV adopted by the LDS Church as its official English text. Rather, it aims to enhance readers’ understanding conceptually and spiritually by rendering the Greek texts into modern English with LDS sensitivities in mind. Comparing and explaining the New Rendition in light of the KJV then serves as one important purpose for each volume’s notes, comments, analyses, and summaries. This effort responds in modest ways to the desire President J. Reuben Clark Jr. expressed in his diary in 1956 that someday “qualified scholars [would provide] . . . a translation of the New Testament that will give us an accurate translation that shall be pregnant with the great principles of the Restored Gospel.”

Depending on their personal skills and interests, the authors of these volumes approach their scholarly sources and LDS materials differently but always with careful exposition and engaging perspectives. In several ways, they employ various interpretive tools, including semantic considerations of Greek vocabulary; cultural, historical, critical, literary, and structural analyses; and intertextual comparisons with other biblical passages, the Book of Mormon, and other scriptural works including the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Observations are also proffered about the doctrinal and spiritual reception of New Testament teachings and practices in the broad LDS religious tradition.

The format also varies moderately from volume to volume regarding introductory materials and the style of commentary. Throughout, Greek and Hebrew terms appear in transliterated form in conformity with standards adopted by the Society of Biblical Literature. In some cases, a volume reproduces the Greek New Testament text based on the Greek text published by the Society of Biblical Literature (2010) or draws upon the twenty-eighth edition of the Nestle-Aland text in *Novum Testamentum Graece* (2012).

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JESUS THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST (4:14–16)

Greek Text

14 Ἐχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας. 15 οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖσαι ταῖς ἀσθενεῖαις ἡμῶν, πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ’ ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας. 16 προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος, ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὐρώμεν εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν. [SBLGNT]

King James Version

14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

New Rendition

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, even Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to our confessed allegiance to him. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but although he was tried and tempted in every way just like us, he was without sin. 16 So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Translation Notes and Comments

4:14 *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens / Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens:* Again the author uses the conjunction οὖν (oun), “therefore, consequently,” to signal he is now ready to make his point. That point rests on one fact: “we have a great high priest.” On this imagery, see Translation Notes for 2:17 with associated Analysis.¹¹⁹

The verb διέρχομαι (*dierchomai*), “to pass through,” means in this instance to move into or through an area or place.¹²⁰ That place is τοὺς

119. See also the section on “Jesus as High Priest” in “Excursus on the Atonement: A View from Hebrews” found at the end of chapter 2. On the typological aspects of the priest, see McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:718–24.

120. BDAG, 244.

οὐρανοῦς (*tous ouranous*), “the heavens.” With Paul, the author of Hebrews sees the celestial realm as multilevel (2 Cor. 12:2).¹²¹ To stress the Lord’s ascendancy, these witnesses state he passed *through* them (Eph. 4:10) and now presides over them (7:26; 8:1). The author uses the perfect, active participle διεληλυθότα (*dielēlythota*) to express Jesus’ movement through the heavens to show Jesus has entered his station above them and still remains there. The author’s point is that since the Lord’s ascension, this is the place from which he continues to administer all heavenly and earthly affairs (9:24; Rom. 8:34).

even Jesus the Son of God / Jesus the Son of God: With this phrase, the author again equates Jesus of Nazareth with the Son of God, emphasizing they are the same.

let us hold fast our profession / let us hold firmly to our confessed allegiance to him: The verb κρατέω (*krateō*) means “to adhere to something strongly” with an emphasis on the firmness of the grip.¹²² The force of its subjunctive mood, as found here, is hortatory: “let us hold.” It also shows they already possess a testimony. All he wants them to do is grip it as firmly as they can.¹²³ By using the first-person plural, the author includes himself and thereby softens any antagonism his exhortation may arouse.

The noun ὁμολογία (*homologia*) in this instance is a “statement of allegiance, as a content of an action,” and, therefore, the word connotes an open—that is, public—confession or acknowledgement.¹²⁴ For further study, see Translation Notes for 3:1. In our Rendition, we have expanded “confession” to “confessed allegiance to him” both to capture the full nuance of the word and to add clarity.

4:15 For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities / For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses: On the term “high priest,” see Translation Notes for 2:17.

121. It is unlikely that the author is influenced by rabbinic, Hellenistic, or even gnostic views of the celestial realm being composed of a two-, three-, or seven-layered heaven. Even so, the idea of a multilayered cosmos and heaven would not have seemed strange to those living at the time. The author’s point, however, is that Jesus ascended through however many there were to finally reach the dwelling place of the Father. Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 224 n. 10.

122. BDAG, 564.

123. Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 224 n. 15.

124. BDAG, 709.

The verb συμπαθέω (*sympatheō*) means literally “to suffer together with,” that is, “to sympathize with.”¹²⁵ The term connotes an emotional identification with another “often accompanied by deep tenderness.”¹²⁶ In addition, “it always includes the element of active help.”¹²⁷ And it needs to be stressed it does not bear in the slightest degree the air of pity sometimes associated with the English word “sympathy.” To take it otherwise would violate the author’s point that Jesus entered fully into mortality with all its weaknesses and suffering.¹²⁸

The noun ἀσθένεια (*astheneia*), though denoting a full range of limitations and inabilities from mere timidity to severe illness, is best understood as “weakness.” We felt that this word choice is best because it addresses a deficiency or inferiority of mind, will, or body that mortals have.¹²⁹

but was in all points tempted as are we / he was tried and tempted in every way just like us: The verb πειράζω (*peirazō*) has a broader range of meaning in Greek than the English verb “to tempt.” It also encompasses both “to test” or “to try.”¹³⁰ Hence, in our Rendition, we have translated the perfect passive participle πεπειρασμένον (*pepeirasmēnon*) as “tried and tempted.” The force of that perfect is instructive, showing that “Jesus endured temptation through his entire life until its completion at/in his death (see Luke 22:28, 31), when he ‘resisted to the point of shedding’ his own blood (12:4).”¹³¹ Now, having overcome temptation, he is in a position to also enable his people to do the same.¹³²

The phrase κατὰ πάντα (*kata panta*), “in all points, in every way,” stresses the breadth of the Lord’s trials. During his mortal sojourn, he was spared from nothing. Thus, there is nothing a person goes through, including grief, loss, pain, and sorrow, that Jesus cannot empathize with.¹³³

125. LSJ, 1680; BDAG, 958. The English word “sympathize” is a direct borrowing from the Greek. See also Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, 452.

126. *Webster’s New Dictionary of Synonyms*, s.v. “sympathy.”

127. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 114; compare 10:34; 4 Macc. 4:25; 13:23; *T. Sim.* 3:6; and *T. Ben.* 4:4.

128. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 140.

129. BDAG, 142; Louw-Nida, §§23.143; 25.269; 74.23.

130. BDAG, 792–93. Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 249, notes that “righteous living does not protect us from temptation but it does protect us from succumbing to temptation.”

131. Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 226.

132. See Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 114.

133. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 115–16, and n. 65. On the Lord’s ability to be tempted, see McConkie, *Promised Messiah*, 1:273–74; 498–500; see also Alma 7:11.

In the prepositional phrase καθ' ὁμοιότητα (*kath' homoiotēta*), “in the same way,”¹³⁴ the pronoun “us” is not present in the Greek but is understood. For clarity, we have translated this as “just like us.” The KJV similarly renders this “as are we.” This understanding reinforces the point that Christ has quite literally experienced all that any mortal ever has.

yet without sin / he was without sin: With this phrase, the author makes a major distinction between humankind and our Lord. Jesus never yielded to temptation, never committed a sin.

4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace / So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence: Again, the subordinating conjunction οὖν (*oun*), “so, therefore,” draws the readers’ attention to the author’s conclusion. In this context, it means “for this reason,” pointing back to the fact that the Christians have a compassionate, sympathetic High Priest ready to accept them and minister to them. It also underscores the reason for the hortatory subjunctive mood of the verb προσέρχομαι (*proserchomai*), “let us approach.” This same phrase is often used in the LXX with covenantal overtones.¹³⁵ It is in temple worship that the participant approaches God confidently in most solemn worship because he or she has been prepared to meet him.

The noun παρρησία (*parrēsia*) carries a range of meanings, including fearlessness, boldness, and confidence. The term is especially apropos when it comes to the feeling of confidence a person should have when approaching someone of high rank whom they know is on their side.¹³⁶

The phrase τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος (*tō thronō tēs charitos*), “the throne of grace,” can refer to either the royal seat to which the Son has ascended (1:3, 8, 13; 10:12) or, more likely, based on 8:1; 12:2, to the Father’s throne. Either way, the nuance is to the power, authority, and respect that symbol represents.¹³⁷ In reality, based on 2 Nephi 9:41, it is the Son whom the person actually approaches. Of importance is the noun that describes the throne, τῆς χάριτος (*tēs charitos*), “of grace.” On the implications of this word, see below.

This passage echoes a portion of the rites of *Yom Kippur* or “Day of Atonement,” the only fast commanded by Jehovah during Moses’ administration (Lev. 16:23, 26–32; compare Ex. 30:10; and Num. 29:7–11). The

134. BDAG, 707.

135. See Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 141.

136. BDAG, 781–82; LXX Job 22:26; 27:9–10. In the Apocrypha, the righteous will stand “with great confidence” (ἐν παρρησίᾳ πολλῇ, *en parrēsia pollē*) before the judgment tribunal. Wis. 5:1; compare 2 Esd. 7:98.

137. Koester, *Hebrews*, 282–84.

Jewish and perhaps many of the gentile Christians in the author's audience would have been very aware of the nature and importance of the ordinances performed that day.

The Lord set this day apart from all others as the most holy. Its rites were designed to bring Israel as a people and the Israelites as individuals into oneness with Jehovah. On this day as part of an elaborate ritual, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, the most sacred room in the tabernacle and later the temple, and there before God's throne (called the "mercy seat") made a blood offering to atone for his sins and those of the people. As the author will develop in later chapters, Jesus as the new High Priest will himself make an offering of his own blood to accomplish what the old order was unable to do. See Translation Notes with their associated Analyses in chapters 9 and 10.

that we may obtain mercy / so that we may receive mercy: The conjunction ἵνα (*hina*), "so that," is important here because it points to the purpose of approaching the throne. That purpose is twofold. The first, as expressed in this phrase, is to "receive mercy." The semantic range of the noun ἔλεος (*eleos*), "mercy," is rather broad. It includes compassion, clemency, kindness, and pity.¹³⁸

In the present context, the noun looks to God's concern and kindness for his children expressed as compassion, sympathy, and even clemency.¹³⁹ It particularly connotes the willing assistance the Father gives to a child due to his love. It is often tied to the idea of covenant and God's outreach to those under covenant to assist them. It expresses itself most fully in God's willingness to forgive sins and thereby elevate the misery such evils bring.

and find grace to help in time of need / and find grace to help in time of need: In this clause, the author states the second reason why his readers should approach "the throne of grace." It is to χάριν εὑρωμεν (*charin heurōmen*), "find grace."

The noun χάρις (*charis*), "grace," in the present context designates the Father's favorable predisposition toward his children expressing itself in

138. BDAG, 316. The range of meanings, in Jewish circles, that the Greek noun took on may have been a result of its use to translate primarily the Hebrew חֶסֶד (*hesed*), "favor, grace," (HAL, 336–37) but also חֵן (*hēn*), "favor, grace," and רַחֲמִים (*rahāmim*), "mercy" (HAL, 1218). The noun חֶסֶד (*hesed*) connotes the force which lay behind covenant keeping and therefore was tied to love, respect, and care. It also expresses one's drive to assist another in need. *NID*, s.v. "ἔλεος"; *BDB*, 338–39; *Zobel*, *TDOT*, 5:44–64. Though the word touches in meaning the word ἰλάσκομαι (*hilaskomai*) in that both contain an aspect of mercy, it does not carry the idea of appeasing, propitiating, or reconciling estranged persons. See *BDAG*, 473–74; for discussion, see the Translation Notes for 2:17 with associated Analysis.

139. *BDAG*, 316.

compassion and understanding. The term nuances the outreach of his divine love as revealed through the ministry of the Son. It looks more particularly to the enabling gift the Father freely and lovingly gives to those who strive to do his will. This gift empowers them to do what they could not otherwise do.¹⁴⁰

The noun βοήθεια (*boētheia*) denotes “help” or “assistance” that is offered to meet a need.¹⁴¹ The stress of the word is in its outreach. It is expressed when a person, seeing a need, willingly responds to meet it. The author couples the noun with the adjective εύκαιρος (*eukairos*), “well-timed, opportune,” or “convenient.”¹⁴² The sense of the phrase is that divine help can surely be received in the Lord’s due time and season.

Analysis and Summary

The author has used considerable care and great skill to prepare his listeners for the point he wants to emphasize. He has based his appeal on the tragic history of the Israelites’ wilderness rebellion and its severe consequences. His appeal also meant that his readers, sensing what could befall them, would better appreciate what the Son, their High Priest, has done for them.

The author has also carefully developed his case to emphasize not only his readers’ need for continued faithfulness to the Son of God but also for the obligation that rests upon them to make a bold, public declaration (ὁμολογία, *homologia*) of their belief.¹⁴³ With the authority of scripture behind him, the author has shown them that nothing is hidden from the eyes of the Divine (4:13). All will answer to him—not just for what they have done but also for what they have thought and intended. None can escape the reckoning (λόγος, *logos*) demanded by “the all-penetrating ‘word’ of the all-knowing God” (see 4:13).¹⁴⁴ The author’s intent is for his readers to feel the full weight of the responsibility that now lies upon them.

Using the anxiety he has created, the author now turns to assure his readers that they can make a more than adequate response to God’s demands. More importantly, they will have divine help in doing so.¹⁴⁵ This assurance is grounded on the reality of the Son’s enthronement (4:14). He now sits

140. BDAG, 1079–81. For further study, see Translation Notes for 2:9 with accompanying documentation.

141. BDAG, 180.

142. BDAG, 407.

143. BDAG, 709.

144. Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 218.

145. Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 218–19.

at the seat of power. In addition, he is also the great High Priest who has already purified his people from sin (1:3).

Now comes the point. Given who the Savior is and what he has done for them, there is no reason for them not to “hold fast” to their “confessed allegiance [ὁμολογία, *homologia*] to him” (4:14).

In case that incentive is not enough, the author presents another reason for them to not abandon their faith in the Son or hesitate in bearing their witness of him. This Son of God, this great High Priest, can sympathize with his people. Why? Because he has been tried and tempted (πειράζω, *peirazō*) in the same ways they have (4:15).¹⁴⁶ Indeed, he has suffered “in every way” (κατὰ πάντα, *kata panta*) possible.

The author’s teaching suggests the Savior not only experienced all of the temptations that mortals face but also all the trials of mortality, including hunger, thirst, sickness, and pain of body, as well as the mental and emotional anguish caused by others. As the prophet Alma explained so eloquently, “He shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12; compare D&C 62:1; 101:2).¹⁴⁷

Explaining and expanding on this idea, Elder Bruce R. McConkie asked, “Why does Christ intercede for his erring brethren with such infinite compassion? Because he knows by experience the anguish and pain of mortal suffering and the severity of Lucifer’s temptations; because he can put himself in the position of feeble man and then feel the infinite joy of the soul who overcomes the world and feels himself reconciled to Him who is perfect and Almighty.”¹⁴⁸

Though tempted on every point and tried in every way, the Master never yielded to sin (4:15). Elder Howard W. Hunter noted,

It is important to remember that Jesus was capable of sinning, that he could have succumbed, that the plan of life and salvation could have been

146. BDAG, 792–93.

147. See also McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:154. Farley, “Temptations of Jesus,” 181, notes that, though the Gospels record specifically the Lord’s temptations in the wilderness, they were not the only ones he endured.

148. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:154. See also J. Devan Cornish, “Learning How the Atonement Can Change You,” *Ensign* 32, no. 4 (April 2002): 20–23.

foiled, but that he remained true. Had there been no possibility of his yielding to the enticement of Satan, there would have been no real test, no genuine victory in the result. If he had been stripped of the faculty to sin, he would have been stripped of his very agency. It was he who had come to safeguard and ensure the agency of man. He had to retain the capacity and ability to sin had he willed so to do. As Paul wrote, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:8); and he “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He was perfect and sinless, not because he had to be, but rather because he clearly and determinedly wanted to be. As the Doctrine and Covenants records, “He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them.” (D&C 20:22.)¹⁴⁹

Throughout his ministry, he remained pure and holy in thought, emotion, and deed. There were certain ramifications for the rest of humankind for his doing so. According to Joseph Smith, Jesus “kept the law of God, and remained without sin, showing thereby that it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin; and also, that by him a righteous judgment might come upon all flesh, and that all who walk not in the law of God may justly be condemned by the law, and have no excuse for their sins. And he being the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and having overcome, received a fullness of the glory of the Father.”¹⁵⁰ The statement that a person can live without sin should likely be taken with a caveat. Jesus revealed that it was indeed possible but only under a certain condition. Joseph Smith pointed out this condition, stating, “None ever were perfect but Jesus, and why was he perfect? because he was the son of God, and had the fulness of the Spirit, and greater power than any man.”¹⁵¹ Thus, being enabled by being God’s Son and having a fulness of the Spirit, the Lord possessed powers that others must grow into. Having a “fulness of the Spirit” gave the Lord the unique ability to resist sin. The Prophet’s words suggest that when others obtain the “fulness of the Spirit” they too will be able to do in practice what was otherwise impossible. At one time,

149. Hunter, “Temptations of Christ,” 17–19.

150. W. Jeffrey Marsh, *His Final Hours* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 37–38, quoted in Robin Scott Jensen, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Riley M. Lorimer, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 2: Published Revelations*, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 2:52–54.

151. *Times and Seasons* 2 (June 1, 1841): 429–30, online as “Discourse, 16 May 1841, as Reported by *Times and Seasons*,” Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16may-1841-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/1>. See also Rodney Turner, “Grace, Mysteries, and Exaltation,” in Millet, *Studies in Scripture, Volume 6*, 119.

he prayed that those who participate in temple worship “may grow up in thee, and receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 109:14–15), suggesting that gaining this helpful and necessary power is possible.

That Jesus was perfect, however, should not be construed to mean that Jesus did not feel the press of mortality with all its burdens and temptations. But by resisting—by never yielding to the pangs of hunger or thirst or pain of body or of spirit, by never giving into temptation or seduction no matter how strong—he felt their full and crushing weight as no mortal ever has. And as he endured the crucible of Gethsemane where he prayed—no, begged—the Father not to make him drink the bitter cup, he learned the full cost of obedience. Thus, he can sympathize fully and completely with all his fellows.¹⁵²

As a result, as one scholar clearly noted, “the High Priest of our Christian profession is not an absentee Master, not a distant Deity, not one who ‘cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities’—because he too has known the perils and pains of mortality and the anguish of alienation—he knows our needs, he fully understands. Because of the intercession of Christ, we are entitled to ‘come boldly unto the throne of grace.’”¹⁵³

The operative word here is “boldly” (παρρησία, *parrēsia*, or “with confidence”). Because of what the Savior has done—because of how he can sympathize with those who suffer under the plague of weaknesses and flaws—those who stay true to him need have no fear in approaching either him or the Father (4:16). Indeed, he is their advocate (παράκλητος, *paraklētos*; 1 John 2:1; see also Isa. 51:22; 2 Ne. 2:9; Jacob 3:1; Moro. 7:28; D&C 29:5; 32:3; 45:3).¹⁵⁴

But what does it mean to approach “the throne of grace”? Two aspects are possible. The first is prayer, in which the person comes before the Father in supplication or thanksgiving (LXX Jer. 7:16). In ancient times, it was before the royal throne where people appeared to plead for relief or assistance and where mercy could be found.¹⁵⁵ Both Christians and Jews believed God had two thrones. One was in heaven (8:1; Ps. 11:4; 103:19; Isa. 6:1; Rev. 4:1–2, 9; 7:10–12; 19:4) and the other on the earth. The latter was in the temple and known as the “mercy seat” (9:5; Ex. 25:17–22;

152. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 114; Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 116, and n. 65; compare O’Brien, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 184.

153. Robert L. Millet, *Jesus Christ, the Only Sure Foundation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), viii.

154. For development, see Translation Notes for 2:17 with associated Analysis.

155. For example, see Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 59.6.3; and Josephus, *Ant.* 18.107.

2 Kgs. 19:15; Ps. 80:1; 99:1). Before Christ finished his ministry, that throne could be approached only by the high priest and then only on an annual basis (this ceremony is detailed in Lev. 16). As the author will later explain (9:6–10), the symbolism behind the ritual showed that direct access to the Divine was closed as long as the Levitical order was in place. But through the Atonement, that throne (that is, direct access to the Father) had now become open to all (10:19).

The second aspect of approaching the throne is judgment, in which righteous people come to God in order to receive their reward (Ps. 58:11; Rev. 3:21; 2 Ne. 9:15–18; Alma 5:15–16; 12:12; 41:14). Though the prospect of standing before the throne of God “strieth the wicked with awful dread and fear,” for the righteous it is “the pleasing bar of God” (Jacob 6:13; compare Moro. 10:34). That being the case, it is little wonder that the righteous should feel a great deal of confidence as they approach it.

What is the purpose of approaching the throne of grace? The author gives two reasons (4:16). The first is so the faithful may obtain mercy (ἔλεος, *eleos*). The noun connotes compassion and sympathy grounded in love that the Father has for his children.¹⁵⁶ It expresses itself most clearly as the Father’s forgiveness of sin, resulting in the cessation of the misery that evil brings. The second is so the contrite may find the power of grace in their time of need.¹⁵⁷ The noun “grace” (χάρις, *charis*) denotes the enabling power that flows from the Father and the Son because of their love and kind benevolence to faithful individuals. By means of this gift, the faithful are enabled to do what they could not do on their own.¹⁵⁸ As Elder Bruce C. Hafen stated,

The Savior’s grace can bless us, beyond its compensation for our sins, in our quest for divine perfection. While much of the perfection process involves a healing from sin and bitterness, the process involves an additional, affirmative dimension through which we may acquire a Christlike nature, becoming even as the Father and Son are.

In his own development toward perfection, the Savior received *the Father’s* grace. He “received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace . . . until he received a fulness.” (D&C 93:12–13.) His life

156. BDAG, 316.

157. See Gene R. Cook, “Receiving Divine Assistance through the Grace of the Lord,” *Ensign* 23, no. 5 (May 1993): 81.

158. BDAG, 1079–81. For studies on grace from a Latter-day Saint perspective, see Dew, *Amazed by Grace*; Millet, *Grace Works*; and Draper and Rhodes, *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 146–82.

was sinless; hence, he received grace not to compensate for his sins, but to empower his personal growth: “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And *being made perfect*, he became the author of eternal salvation.” (Heb. 5:8–9; italics added.)¹⁵⁹

The same is true of the faithful Saint. The Lord promised that those who strive to keep his commandments “shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:20). Receiving the Savior’s grace means becoming not only sin-free but also righteous. When the soul feels that happen and accepts it, all feelings of guilt are left behind. As the two blessings of mercy and grace are taken together, we see the power that comes from approaching the throne. Through grace, all guilt is removed; through mercy, all misery is removed.

The point is this: through the Savior’s obedient sacrifice, the sins of the faithful have been “purged” and their conscience cleansed “from dead works” (9:14). Feeling the joy and assurance these bring, the son or daughter can approach the Father in full confidence (4:16). This confidence transcends feeling. It is also grounded on the sureness that they have been authorized to enter the Father’s presence.¹⁶⁰

In sum, the author ends this hortatory section by not only recalling his doctrinal theme but also enriching it. He does so by declaring “we have a living high priest” who has gone “through the heavens” and is “*the Son of God*” (4:14, italics added). In short, Christ has accomplished his mission. For that reason, the author admonishes his readers to “hold fast” to their testimonies (4:14). The Greek verb translated as “hold fast” (κρατέω, *krateō*) is related to the noun κράτος (*kratos*), “strength,” and emphasizes the force needed to accomplish a task. This last phrase, “hold fast to the confession” (that is, “testimony”), is expressed in just three words in the Greek text (κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας, *kratōmen tēs homologias*), and one of them is a definite article. The severe brevity greatly enhances the force of the author’s heartfelt desire and allows him to bring this section of work to a close with a resounding bang.¹⁶¹

159. Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* 30, no. 5 (May 1990): 7–13, italics in original.

160. Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 228.

161. Vanhoye, *Letter to the Hebrews*, 95.

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