

“Preaching Hebrews – Psalm 110:1, the Meaning of Oikoumenē (Inhabited World) in Hebrews 1:6; 2:5; and Katapausis/Sabbatismos (Rest/Sabbath Rest) in Hebrews 4:9-10 as Millennial References in Hebrews”

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The key Scripture passage in Hebrews is Psalm 110:1. In fact, this OT verse is quoted more times than any other in the NT – “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Though the historical context is David’s reference to his son Solomon, Jesus himself and the NT authors indicate the reference is Messianic. Jesus is God’s Davidic King.

Christological Titles in Luke Acts and Hebrews: Jesus as “Lord”

The Lukan use of *kurios* “Lord” as a reference to God is also found frequently in Hebrews, but infrequently in the Pauline letters. In Luke, it occurs at least 18 times in the birth narratives alone. Luke introduces Jesus as “Lord” into the narrative in Luke 1:43 and again in Luke 2:11. Further uses in the next two chapters reveal the studied ambiguity of Luke in his use of the term “Lord.” For Rowe, to ask about the identity of the “Lord” is to answer “God” and “Jesus.” He stated:

Yet within the ambiguity the structure and movement of the story shift the focus from *kurios ho theos* to the *kurios Christos*. The narrative itself is the theology: the coming of the *kurios Christos* is the coming of the *kurios ho theos*. The opening of the Gospel thus narrates, in the move from promise to active fulfillment, the presence of the God of Israel in the life of Jesus.¹

¹ C. Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 139 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 200.

This same studied ambiguity occurs throughout Luke and Acts as can be seen in the Sermon at Nazareth pericope in Luke 4, the healing of the paralytic pericope in 5:17–26; the sending of the 70 pericope in 10:1–24; and the quotation of Ps 110:1 by Jesus in 20:41–44, Peter’s sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2, etc. Guthrie remarked that the use of *kurios* for God is so frequent in Acts “that it is all the more remarkable when the title is undoubtedly used of Jesus.”² Note how Peter, citing Joel 2:32, applies the title to Jesus. Fletcher-Louis spoke of an “established scholarly tradition which sees in the use of this title, and the interest in his name an identification of Jesus with Yahweh.”³ Although it is not unknown in the Pauline letters, “Lord” is certainly used primarily as a title for Jesus and not as a reference to God.⁴ “Through narrative development, Luke uses *kurios* to make an essential claim about the relation between Jesus and the God of Israel: Jesus of Nazareth is the movement of God in one human life so much so that it is possible to speak of God and Jesus together as *kurios*.”⁵ Rowe continued to point out that Luke stressed “the totality of the life of Jesus *kurios* as the embodied revelation of *kurios ho theos*.”⁶ This is of course a precise description of Heb 1:1-2.

In Luke 20:41–44, Jesus quoted Ps 110:1. The Christological use of “Lord” in Ps 110:1 (“The Lord said to my Lord”) and the use of the Greek possessive pronoun *mou* “my” is often connected by commentators back to the first use of “Lord” in Luke 1:43 where Elizabeth in her song exclaims “. . . that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”. Luke’s *kurios* Christology appears to find its genesis in Psalm 110:1. Luke’s narrative development indicates his theological

² D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 294.

³ C. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology*, 21. Fletcher-Louis added: “Given the recent work of Fossum, and others on the Jewish speculation on God’s Name, this Lukan material begs further consideration in the context of a very specific Jewish tradition.”

⁴ For the usage in Paul, see Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*, 221–26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *Early Narrative Christology*, 217–18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

focus on this concept. Note also Luke 1:32-33: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.” Of course, the theological significance of Ps 110:1 for the author of Hebrews is well known. In Hebrews 1:1-13, the author makes good use of Ps 110:1 first by the allusion in 1:3 where Jesus “sat down at the right hand” and again in direct quotation in Heb 1:13. The author quotes and alludes to Ps 110:1 in two other strategic places in the letter: 8:1 and 12:2.

The Millennium in Hebrews? (Hebrews 2:5-9; Hebrews 4:9-10).

The noun *oikoumenē* (“world”) always refers in the New Testament to the inhabited world, specifically of humanity, and possess both temporal and spatial connotations. The phrase “the world to come” is common in rabbinic and apocalyptic Judaism. One key question surrounding *oikoumenēn* is whether it refers to a future earthly world, possibly the millennium, or the world of heaven.

Before answering that question, we can state that given the immediate context and the tenor of the epistle as a whole, the “world to come” was inaugurated at Christ’s enthronement (see Heb 1:6 where the same Greek word is used) and is consummated at Christ’s second coming. Lane gives the word an interpretive translation, “heavenly world,”⁷ but such a translation cannot be fully justified by the meaning and usage of the word *oikoumenē* or by the context of the passage itself. The noun is commonly used to denote “the inhabited earth” and not “heaven” or some generic meaning like “future world,” “future life,” or “heavenly world.” For example, in Luke 2:1, it is translated “the entire Roman world;” in Acts 11:28, it is translated

⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 45–46.

“the entire Roman world;” in Acts 17:6, it is translated “all over the world;” in Acts 19:27, it is translated “the world;” and in Acts 24:5, it is translated “all over the world.”

The phrase “about which we are speaking” indicates that the author’s thought connected to 1:5–14 since *oikoumenē* occurs in 1:6. The present tense refers to present time for the author. A positive contrast to the preceding negative statement of v. 5 is signaled by the conjunction *de*. There is an implied ellipsis, “the situation is quite different, because....”

The citation is from Ps 8:4–6. The implied conclusion in 1:5 is that God put man, not angels, in control of the future world. The author quoted Psalm 8 as grounds for that conclusion. The psalmist’s use of “man” refers to humanity in this context. The singular sometimes is translated as plural to indicate it refers to mankind.

The connection of 2:5–9 with what was stated in 1:6 about the Son now comes into focus. Both Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7 contextually portray the eschatological earthly dimension of the messianic rule. The future earthly dimension of Jesus’ rule as Davidic King is pictured in Heb 1:6. The reference to bringing the Son into the *oikoumenē* (“the [inhabited] world”; 1:6) at first seems to refer to the incarnation, but in light of 2:5–9 the angelic worship is difficult to connect with that event since the author viewed the incarnation as the event that actually made Jesus “lower” than the angels for a time. In Heb 1:6 angelic worship is directed toward the Son when he is brought into the *oikoumenē* as the royal firstborn. Westcott noted that the clause with *hotan* and the aorist subjunctive indisputably refers to a future occurrence.⁸

Thus 2:5–9 clarifies the sense of 1:6 by picking up the contrast with angels with an added, “it is not to angels,” and a back reference, “of which we are speaking” (2:5). In 2:6–9 “the world to come” (v. 5) is subjected to Jesus as Son of Man who perfectly fulfills Psalm 8. If

⁸ B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 21-22.

oikoumenē is to be interpreted in a literal earthly sense, as seems likely, and given the author's point of the Son fulfilling the Davidic promises in the Old Testament passages he quoted (especially Ps 110:1), then it is difficult not to see in this word a reference to the future earthly millennium.⁹ There can be little doubt that the author of Hebrews has portrayed Jesus as the King who will fulfill the Davidic promise. This fulfillment is viewed in Hebrews as a two-stage eschatology: the already/not yet.¹⁰ Thus Jesus' kingship is portrayed in Hebrews in two dimensions: a rule presently in effect, inaugurated yet invisible; and a visible rule on this earth that is yet to be consummated but certain of fulfillment where He reigns as Davidic king during the Millennium.¹¹

Hebrews 4:9-10

The concept of "rest" is the major focus of the author in Hebrews 4:1-11. Notice the use of *katapausis* ("rest") until verse 10 where the author inserts *sabbatismos*, translated here usually as "Sabbath rest." Whether the author of Hebrews coined the term *sabbatismos* or not cannot be known with any certainty. The question is why did the author make this sudden shift and what is the significance of *sabbatismos*? Lane translated the word "Sabbath celebration" and

⁹ The meaning of *oikoumenē* as an earthly realm is defended by Buchanan (*Hebrews*, 17–18, 26–27, 64–65). Cf. Michel, *TDNT*, 5:159; Fanning, "Theology of Hebrews," 386 (on whose work I am dependent in this section); Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and a Review* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 171. Premillennialists say that the realization of Christ's dominion in Heb 2:9 will occur in the future millennial kingdom.

¹⁰ So C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, eds. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), 364.

¹¹ D. Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. C. Blaising and D. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 37–67.

viewed it as giving a more precise description of the promised rest.¹² Ellingworth said the main distinction between *sabbatismos* and *katapausis* “appears to be that they denote respectively temporal and spatial aspects of the same reality.”¹³ Some have suggested that *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* are semantically equivalent. Hofius concluded that *sabbatismos* refers to an eternal Sabbath celebration of believers in the eschaton, where the priestly people of God praise God around his throne.¹⁴

The author of Hebrews does not seem to redefine *katapausis* as a *sabbatismos*, but both are certainly related. It is significant to note that the concept of “rest” is mentioned no more in Hebrews, but the concept of “entering” is common: Heb 6:19 – 20; 9:12,24 – 25; 10:19 – 20. Jesus has entered into heaven itself so that we may have confidence to enter *now* according to 10:19 – 25. This is crucial to the understanding of the epistle and the meaning of “rest.” The “rest” for the believer is surely an eschatological rest, but that is not the focus nor the meaning in Hebrews. Whatever the rest is, it is available now, and not only in a future millennium or when believers get to heaven.

Hofius argued extensively that “rest” in Ps 95:11 meant “resting place” and that *katapausis* in its spatial usage was a technical term for the temple in the LXX.¹⁵ Laansma, however, concluded from Ps 95:11 and from the use of *katapausis* in the LXX that it is not tenable to identify in a simple fashion God’s “rest” with the temple. He did note “that this noun

¹² Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 101-102.

¹³ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 255.

¹⁴ O. Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 11 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1970), 106-10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 49.

is used in such a way throughout the LXX that a reader of the Greek would doubtless have a tendency to associate it closely with the temple.”¹⁶

Theologically it is clear from Heb 3:7 – 4:11 that God both promised and provided a rest for the people of Israel in the exodus generation. Those who disbelieved and disobeyed did not enter God’s Canaan rest. Joshua, Caleb and the younger generation who believed did enter Canaan rest according to Exod 33:14, Deut 3:20; 5:32 – 33, and Josh 23:1. But the promise was not exhausted at this time. The fact that Ps 95 indicates the rest is still available, some four centuries after its initial promise and provision, implies that “rest” means more than just entrance into the land of Canaan. Such an enlargement of the scope of the original promise was what occurred when Abraham originally received the promise of land and posterity, but the promise was not exhausted in his descendents, but was expanded to include all believers in Christ as Gal 3:16,22,29 make clear. Whatever the “rest” is in Hebrews, it is distinguished from the land as well as the Sabbath.

In Heb 4:8, we are justified in interpreting the “rest” messianically. When Joshua led the people into Canaan, God gave the people “rest.” Yet that was not the final extent of the rest which God had in mind, hence the statement in Ps 95, and our author’s argument which he builds upon this fact. Contrary to Bruce and many others who take the same approach to Heb 4:9, the “rest” is not only what believers enjoy in Heaven. That will indeed be “rest,” but that is not what the author is suggesting here. Hofius has proven there is a clear eschatological dimension to this metaphor of “rest.” But this is not the whole story. The author’s goal is to inspire faithfulness in the Christian community today. Heb 4:9 is attempting to stir believers on to serve the Lord faithfully while still on the earth. “In Heb 3:3 and 3:14, the relationship of the faithful to Christ is

¹⁶ Jon Laansma, “*I Will Give You Rest:*” *The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3-4*, WUNT 2/98 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 99-101; 314-16.

described, not as a possession, but as participation, a participation which must be maintained.”¹⁷

Miller is correct when she said: “It is not the non– fulfillment of the promise that is the point but its non– fulfillment *where unbelief prevails*, and that the promise is not exhausted by past appropriations or non– appropriations.”¹⁸

Thus, it seems best, given all the evidence, to understand the “rest” to have a three– fold dimension: the present time, a state entered at death, and that which is experienced by the believer at the eschaton. Barrett’s conclusion perhaps stated it best: “The ‘rest,’ precisely because it is God’s, is both present and future; people enter it, and must strive to enter it. This is paradoxical, but it is a paradox that Hebrews shares with all primitive eschatology.”¹⁹

Is *katapausis* a place or a state? Is *katapausis* present or future? Laansma summed up his discussion on the nature of *katapausis*:

The common use of the word *katapausis* for a ‘resting place,’ its present usage and context, and the strong testimony in Jewish literature for an other worldly or future resting *place* cumulatively tilt the balance of probability in favor of taking it straightforwardly here as ‘resting place.’²⁰

The local meaning is probably the best interpretation of the “rest” throughout the entire passage. The connection between *katapausis* and *sabbatismos* is that God’s *resting place* is where He enjoys his ongoing *Sabbath celebration*. As to the time element, it appears both present and future aspects are in play.

Is it conceivable that the “rest” of Heb 4:10 may have reference to a millennial fulfillment? Although the majority of commentators do not think so, several have made this

¹⁷A salient point made by Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor*, 91.

¹⁸Neva Miller, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: an Analytical and Exegetical Handbook* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1988), 113.

¹⁹Barrett, “The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” 372.

²⁰Laansma, “*I Will Give You Rest*,” 281.

case.²¹ Buchanan’s analysis of this section, particularly Heb 4:8 – 11, challenges the assumptions made by many about the spiritual nature of the rest. Likewise, Dillow has made the case for understanding the “rest” in Heb 4:9 to be a reference to a future millennial reign of Christ on the earth. “The writer is evidently setting before his Christian readers the hope of an inheritance in the land of Canaan which was made to Israel.”²² He continued:

As Christian believers they will have an inheritance in the land of Canaan in the consummation of the present kingdom if they make every effort to finish their course. . . . That we should make “every effort” to do this proves that entrance into heaven is not mean. Otherwise a salvation by works is taught!²³

Dillow drew the conclusion that the content of the inheritance spoken of in Hebrews 3 and 4 is the millennial land of Canaan. The inheritance– rest is participation with Christ in his millennial reign. “Consistent with its usage throughout the New Testament, the inheritance (rest) must be earned Not all Christians will make that effort or will make equal effort, and those distinctions will be acknowledged by Christ. . . .during the millennial kingdom.”²⁴

One should note that the theme of “promise” in Heb 3:7 – 4:13, which is identified specifically as “entering into rest,” reappears in Heb 11 and 12. Here it is identified as the promise of a ‘heavenly city.’ It is not clear whether the author makes or intends his readers to make the connection between the concept of “rest” and the “heavenly city.” There is nothing

²¹See G. W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible 36 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), 61– 79; Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. by Thomas L. Kingsbury (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1871, 1952 reprint), 1:197 – ff.; and W. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 168 – 74, who argue for a millennial reference, as does Joseph Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*. Laansma does not address the possibility that the “rest” could have a millennial fulfillment.

²²Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, 108.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 109.

overt in the text which makes this connection.²⁵ It is, however, possible that the author had such a connection in mind.

Conclusion.

It appears that the author of Hebrews may indeed have conceived of an earthly millennium on the basis of his use of Ps 110:1; his use of the concept of “inhabited world” in Heb 1:6 and 2:5; and his use of the concept of “rest” in Hebrews 4. Even if one does not view these points in the author’s argument as overtly positing a future millennial reign, his language at the very least certainly tends to point in that direction.

If, as I have argued elsewhere, Luke is the author of Hebrews,²⁶ then the Lukan use of Ps 110:1 as the foundation of his *kurios* Christology coupled with his use of *oikoumenē*, may serve as further evidence for a millennium in Hebrews since Luke appears to interpret the Jewish Scriptures as promising a literal reign of Jesus as Davidic king on earth in the eschaton.

²⁵So J. H. Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth: Early Christian Homiletics of Rest*, SBLDS 166 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 91, 93. Comparing Heb 4:2 with 11:39 – 40, and 12:22 – 24, “The temporal focus of “today” shifts to a spatial focus. The promise of entering the “rest”. . . has experienced metamorphosis into the author’s true concern, the promise of entering into the heavenly city.” Note the similarities in 12:22 – 24 to 3:7 – 4:13.

²⁶See D. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville, B&H Academic, 2010) and *Hebrews*, New American Commentary, vol. 35 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010).