

Item #40 (Hebrews 2,10 and Hebrews 2,17)

This was Entry #48 on my previous website.

Hebrews 2,10 and 2,17 seem to serve parallel functions in the passage 2,5-18, as presented in the present writer's understanding of the structure. Each introduces a subsection about Christ as high priest: 2,10 about Christ as heavenly high priest, and 2,17 about Christ as earthly high priest. Each follows a subsection about Christ as victim: 2,10 follows the subsection about Christ as heavenly victim, 2,17 follows the subsection about Christ as earthly victim. Finally, each verse is introduced by an illative particle: γάρ ("for") in 2,10, and ὅθεν ("wherefore") in 2,17. Thus it seems safe to presume that inasmuch as the functions of each of the verses are deliberately depicted as being parallel, the meanings of the verses are in some way parallel.

The following translation of v. 10 seems appropriate: "For it was fitting that He, on account of whom and through whom all things were made, in leading many sons to glory, should perfect the originator of their salvation through sufferings." The word "to perfect" (τελειόω) is a technical term from the Old Testament where it signifies the consecration of the priest for priestly service. In 2,10 it indicates the consecration of Jesus for priestly service, that is, that the subject matter has changed from Jesus as earthly victim to Jesus as heavenly priest. The way in which Jesus is here pictured as being consecrated is, of course, different from the way the Old Testament priest was consecrated. There it was by the anointing of hands; here, it is by the resurrection.¹ The reason is that this new priesthood of Jesus is ontological, i.e., based on His body, just as His first priesthood was. His first priesthood had a mortal body so that He could die; His new, definitive priesthood has an immortal body which as such is not subject to the limitations of time and space.

¹ For an ample discussion grounding these assertions cf. Chapter 4 of the author's presentation of the epistle in his book *Hebrews—An Interpretation* (Subsidia Biblica 47; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2016).

The verb “to perfect” occurs at the end of the sentence, thus indicating its paramount importance. Adjacent to it is the phrase “through sufferings”. In the context of 2,9, this phrase alludes to Jesus as earthly victim: He offered up His earthly body in His role as earthly high priest. God was under no constraint in raising Jesus up from the dead through sufferings: the phrase “through whom [are] all things and for whom [are] all things” indicates by indirection His sovereign freedom. The phrase “the originator of their salvation” refers to the institution of the Eucharist (cf. 2,3). In the context, this alludes to Christ as heavenly victim. Finally, the phrase “in leading many sons to glory” indicates the result of Jesus’ role as heavenly victim (cf. 2,9 in the light of 2,14-15).

In the context of the interpretation given in 2,9 by the present author, it was “appropriate” (ἔπρεπε) that the risen Jesus appear as Eucharistic victim to enable the many sons whom God is leading to the glory of the resurrection to experience the vindication of His faith-trust in the face of death as a child of Abraham and as the originator of faith-trust in the face of His own death. But in the larger context of the phrase “through whom are all things and for whom are all things”, i.e., God’s sovereign freedom, the verse expresses the complete gratuity of the salvation wrought by God in Christ.

The parallel verse of 2,17 introducing Jesus as earthly high priest and following the subsection on Jesus as earthly victim may be translated as follows: “Wherefore He had to be like His brothers in every way so that He might become a merciful and trustworthy high priest with regard to the things of God for the expiation of the sins of the people.” Here the mention of Jesus “becoming a high priest” explicitly indicates the beginning of a new subsection devoted to Jesus as high priest. The previous subsection spoke about Jesus as earthly victim by mentioning that He took on “blood and flesh” (2,14ab—the inversion referring to the stress on blood as an agent of expiation in 2,17 and 9,22). Vv. 14bc-16 refer to the circumstances of this victimhood. 2,17 predicates necessity with reference to these circumstances: Jesus took on Himself the responsibility not of angels but of the “seed of Abraham”, i.e., He took on responsibility for persons who had faith-trust in the face of death. And hence He had to take on a mortal body and

all that went with it. Angels cannot die and hence have no need of the virtues of faith-trust. Jesus “had to be like His brothers in every way”, otherwise He would not meet the criterion of a child of Abraham: persons who have faith-trust must have a mortal body.

The use of “brothers” in 2,17 instead of “children” is significant: Jesus had to have faith trust in the face of His own death, not just faith in the face of another’s death. “Merciful and trustworthy” refer to how the earthly high priest is “merciful” within and “trustworthy” without. As 2,18 implies, unless the earthly Jesus as high priest in His work of expiation could experience what those for whom He died experienced, He could not have provided the example they need to look up to Him in their trials in the face of death.

Viewed in summary, the use of “it was appropriate” (ἔπρεπε) in 2,10 and “He had” (ἔφελε) in 2,17 are designedly complementary. The “it was appropriate” of v. 2,10 refers immediately to the gratuity of the resurrection but ultimately to the gratuity of salvation which reaches its preliminary culmination in the risen Christ. The “He had” of 2,17 refers to the necessity of what follows from this gratuitous gift: given the gratuitous nature of salvation, there was a necessity for Jesus to take on everything that those to be saved shared in, which is to say a mortal body so that He could shed His blood in expiation for their passive salvation, and the virtue proper to the facing of this death (faith-trust) for their active participation in this passive, gratuitous salvation. **(21 March 2012; with slight modifications 19 December 2019)**

In view of the fact that Jesus as man had the Beatific Vision perhaps it is necessary to say that he had “fidelity” to the “parable” of Isaac rather than “faith” in God. **(19 December 2019)**

