Serving in Heaven’s Temple: Sacred Space, Yom Kippur, and Jesus’ Superior Offering in Hebrews

I. Introduction

In her book, Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Marie Isaacs argues that Hebrews, as a response to the destruction of Jerusalem, seeks to shift its audience’s focus from the physical and external notions of sacred space associated with the promised land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple. These, the author of Hebrews argues, need to be replaced by “the only sacred space worth having—heaven.”¹ Through his death, Jesus has gained access to that realm. The crucifixion and corresponding access to God that it acquires reorient the traditional Jewish concept of “sacred territory as located geographically on earth” by redefining this space as “a beatific state in heaven.”² Thus, the author’s task is fundamentally a hermeneutical one. Beginning with his belief that Jesus’ death is a sacrifice that cleanses one’s interior person, he attempts to demonstrate that the physical locales and external rituals that constituted sacred space in the Mosaic economy on earth should be understood as metaphors that point to the immaterial reality of being in God’s heavenly presence. In other words, according to Isaacs, Hebrews transforms sacred physical space into a sacred spiritual state.

In my view such an approach to Hebrews fundamentally misconstrues the text. While Isaacs recognizes the influence of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology on Hebrews, she does not take seriously enough the role of Jewish apocalyptic convictions for the argument the author has constructed.³ In this paper I argue that, as in some apocalyptic texts, heaven is a sacred space for the author of Hebrews. Rather than appealing to the earthly sacred spaces as metaphors to

¹ Isaacs, 67.
² Ibid., 82.
³ Ibid., 86–88, 116.
describe heaven as the true tabernacle, the true promised land, or the true rest, for this author heaven is the eternal land in which God’s people will find true rest and in which there stands the true tabernacle built by God, not by human hands. This latter structure is the location in heaven where God’s presence dwells most fully. The heavenly temple is not, therefore, to be thought of as coextensive with heaven, but rather as the most sacred space within heaven. In Hebrews, Jesus is thought to have entered this most holy heavenly space and presented himself there before God as the ultimate sacrifice.

Importantly, such an interpretation allows for a reappraisal of the way in which Hebrews appeals to Yom Kippur to explain Jesus’ atoning work. The Yom Kippur sacrifices culminated with the presentation of blood in the inner sanctum of the Jerusalem temple. Movement through space was a constitutive element of this ritual process. The high priest’s physical act of walking into the temple’s first sanctum and passing through the curtain that separated the inner sanctum from the outer one was no mere metaphor for drawing near to the presence of God. Rather, in crossing from one sanctum to the other the high priest entered into that ultimate earthly sacred space—the space where God’s presence dwelt on earth most fully. Hebrews, I argue, has taken that ritual movement and process and coordinated these with the basic narrative of Jesus’ death, resurrection, ascension, and session at God’s right hand. In so doing, Hebrews offers not a metaphorical theology intent on explaining the spiritual significance of Jesus’ death, but an analogical theology intent on showing how the narrative about Jesus can be correlated with the ultimate atoning sacrifice in heaven.
II. Hebrews, Jewish Apocalypticism, and Human Destiny

Arguments in the last half century or so about the most plausible thought world in which to contextualize Hebrews tend to emphasize either some variety of Middle Platonism or Jewish apocalypticism. Most participants in this debate recognize that posing a mutually exclusive dichotomy between these two general categories is problematic. The term “Middle Platonism” itself names a hugely diverse set of opinions and texts. Moreover, no hermetically sealed world in which a pristine Jewish apocalypticism existed as a set of convictions uninfluenced by and somehow beyond the reach of the larger cultural realities of the Hellenistic world of the late Second Temple period can plausibly be imagined. By definition, apocalyptic Judaism flourished within the wider milieu of the Hellenistic world, and the reality of Jewish sectarianism provides ample evidence for the influence of philosophical ideas permeating Jewish religious thought.

Nevertheless, few would question the reality of systemic differences that distinguish Jewish apocalyptic and Middle Platonist assessments of reality, particularly at the levels of cosmology and eschatology. Divergent underlying presuppositions become evident when one studies specific texts to examine more metaphysical concerns like the constitution of reality, the relationship between the divine and earthly realms, future expectations (especially regarding postmortem existence of the individual), and the moral status of the material stuff of earth and earthly bodies.

Philo’s dualistic cosmology, for example, is not that of an Essene at Qumran. In the case of the latter, there is a clear and robust hope for an eschatological age in which the present world, including the human body, is in some way reconstituted so as to no longer be subject to mortality. In the opinion of the former, there is a robust teleology, but not such a clear eschatology. In keeping with the dualism of Plato, the goal or perfection of the human being is
conceived of in terms of the release of the soul from the body so that it might return to the
divine, spiritual realm to which it truly belongs. The present world with its mortal bodies is to be
left behind when the rational, immortal soul finally returns to the divine presence.\(^4\) Thus, when
speaking of Abraham’s death as the moment that he was “added to the people of God” (Gen
25:8), Philo makes it clear that this event made Abraham “equal to the angels—for angels, those
bodiless and blessed souls (\(\alpha\)sw\(\mu\)atoi kai\(\epsilon\)uo\(\delta\)ai\(\mu\)one\(\epsilon\)\(\gamma\)\(\eta\)\(\iota\)\(\alpha\)i), are the host and people
of God.”\(^5\) In another place he speaks of angels as follows: “But sometimes Moses styles the
angels the sons of God, inasmuch as they were not produced by any mortal, but are incorporeal,
as being spirits destitute of any body.”\(^6\) Salvation for the human being is escape from the
material element of the duality of the cosmos by leaving the corporeal realm and becoming a
spiritual, angelic being.

A significant body of secondary literature interprets Hebrews more or less in terms of this
kind of understanding of heaven and human destiny. It is worth noting, however, that a number
of elements in Hebrews resonate with ideas important in Jewish apocalypticism. In a recent NTS
article Scott Mackie highlights some of these motifs. He notes the mention of the heavenly
throne of God, the temple veil, the glory of God, and participation in angelic worship.\(^7\) To these I
note a few additional points, which I develop in greater length in my book \(\textit{Atonement and Logic
of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews,}\) such as the author’s reference to the world to come
(2:5; also called “the age to come” in 6:5), his identification of the present time as \(\textit{the last days}\)
in 1:2, his eschatological affirmation of the future resurrection and final judgment (6:2), his
pesher adjacent hermeneutic, and, the fact that the very core of his sermon assumes the ascension

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\(^4\) E.g., Dey.
\(^5\) Sacr. (Sacrifices of Cain and Abel) 5.5, LCL
\(^6\) Qge 1.92, LCL
\(^7\) Mackie, NTS.
of a human being through the heavens (4:14), a clue whose significance is often missed by interpreters. Plainly Hebrews is not an apocalypse, nor does it purport to offer a narrative of Jesus’ ascension through the heavens. All of these points of contact with such narrative accounts, however, suggest that Jewish apocalypticism is the most likely context within which to locate this homily.

What then of the destiny of the human being? Does Hebrews, like Philo, envision humans becoming perfected angelic spirits when they die? In fact, Hebrews states fairly clearly that the salvific goal for the human being is not to become the equal of the angels, but to be elevated above them. Based on his reading of Ps 8, the writer imagines that in the world to come the present situation, wherein angels are for a little while above humans, is reversed. While Hebrews is quite clear that the angels are pneumata (spirits; 1:7, 14), the author is equally clear that one key feature distinguishing human beings from angelic ones is that the former possess ai[ma ka]sa/rc (blood and flesh; 2:14). The kind of embodiment that constitutes a human being is, in other words, part of what makes a human being a different kind of being than an angel is.

Insofar, then, as it is a human being who has been invited to sit at God’s right hand and not any angel; and, and insofar as it is humanity who will rule over the world to come and not the angels, it follows that humans and angels continue to be different kinds of beings even in the world to come. Jesus’ humanity is, therefore, something that he must continue to have after his death in order to be exalted over the angelic hosts of heaven. Jesus’ humanity, in other words, qualifies him to sit where no angelic spirit has ever been invited to sit—at God’s right hand.

This brief discussion demonstrates the potential fruitfulness of setting Hebrews in the frame of Jewish apocalypticism. Not only does this thought world help explain so many of the opening

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8 Note, however, recent book by Barnard.
moves in the sermon it also suggests some new ways to interpret foundational assumptions in the
text such as its dualism. If my own reflections are more or less correct, Hebrews does not
embrace the kind of dualism noted above in Philo. The telos of humanity in this sermon is not to
become angelic beings—blessed, bodiless souls. Rather, in keeping with currents of
eschatological speculation that we know were important within Jewish apocalypticism, the goal
is to be elevated above the angels in a dramatic reversal of the present situation in which humans
are for a little while lower than the angels.

One apparent implication of this line of thinking, however, is that human beings can be made
fit to inhabit the latter realm and this, it stands to reason, involves humans having their bodies
with them in the heavenly realms. This further implies that in texts where this is the case, there is
no clear material/spiritual dualism. I turn now to examine these questions.

III. Embodied Humans in Heaven and Apocalyptic Dualism

The apostle Paul comments twice in 2 Cor 12:2–3 that when he considers his own heavenly
journey, he is unsure about whether he was in the body or not when it happened. The statement is
particularly interesting for the purposes of this paper, for while Paul does not speak here of his
flesh being in heaven, his statement appears prima facie to imply that he knew it was possible to
ascend into heaven with one’s body.

In apocalyptic texts there are in fact three different modes for ascending into heaven. One
can, like Levi, have a dream while sleeping in which one enters heaven.9 One can, like Isaiah,
ascend in spirit while one’s body goes into a kind of trance or suspended animation.10 Bodily
ascensions, however, are not unknown.

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9 T. Levi 2:5.
10 Ascen. Isa. 6:10–12.
In 2 Enoch, for example, Enoch ascends into heaven bodily. Two figures put him on their wings and carry him up to the first heaven (3:1). Then he is successively lifted through the seven heavens. In the seventh heaven Enoch sees God and angels that are “fiery” and “incorporeal” (20:1; cf. 29:3, where angels are described as “bodiless”). All the heavenly armies are assembled before the divine throne. Enoch becomes terrified at this sight and falls on his face (21:2). God then sends Gabriel to Enoch who takes him and stands him directly before the face of the LORD (21:3–6). Enoch again falls on his face at the sight of God, and God commands Michael to bring Enoch up to stand amongst the angels who are before his face forever (22:7). Michael is then commanded to extract Enoch from his earthly clothing, anoint him with God’s delightful oil, and put clothes of glory upon him (22:8–9). Once this is completed Enoch looks upon himself and realizes he “had become like one of the glorious ones, and there was no observable difference” (22:10).

The description of Enoch being taken out of his earthly garment, anointed, and clothed in a glorious garment might be taken to envision Enoch becoming a bodiless, glorified spirit like the angels who have attended to him. Martha Himmelfarb asserts that “Enoch has become an angel.”11 Such a conclusion, however, oversimplifies the situation in 2 Enoch. Other parts of the text go to great lengths to emphasize that Enoch has not stopped being human to become an angelic being.

To be sure, Enoch now shines with glory equal to that of the angels. Yet, whereas they are fiery spirits, his heavenly garment still has attributes that can be described as those of a human body. In 37:2, for example, before Enoch is permitted to descend back to the earth, an angel cools Enoch’s face because he still cannot fully endure the terror of God’s burning presence.

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11 Himmelfarb, Ascent, 40.
Even more telling are the details given once his glorified, heavenly face has been cooled and he descends back to earth and to interact with his children. During this period he relates to them much of what he has learned about how they should live.\textsuperscript{12} He begins by emphasizing that while he has seen the fiery lips, face, eyes, and right hand of the LORD, he nonetheless still has his own human lips, face, eyes, and right hand. He explicitly claims to remain “a human being created equal to yourselves,” “just like yourselves,” and “identical to yourselves” (39:3–5). The shorter recension tradition even has Enoch state, “You see the extent of my body, the same as your own, but I have seen the extent of the LORD” (39:6).

The comparison between God and human beings here obviously plays upon the notion of Adam being created in God’s image. The human being can therefore be described as having been created by God as “a facsimile” of the LORD’s own face (44:1). Thus, Enoch advises, “Whoever insults a person’s face insults the face of the LORD; whoever treats a person’s face with repugnance treats the face of the LORD with repugnance” (44:2). Enoch continues teaching his family how to live rightly and promises them if they do so, they will inherit the endless “age that is coming” (50:2). He later declares that his eternal inheritance is to go back to the highest heaven (55:2).

Shortly before he returns to heaven, Enoch’s son Methuselah asks him if he will eat with his family. His response clarifies that the body about which he spoke in chapter 39—the body with which he came back to earth—is his transformed heavenly body. He says, “Listen, my child! Since the time when the LORD anointed me with the ointment of my glory, it has been horrible for me, and food is not agreeable to me, and I have no desire for earthly food” (56:2).

Thus, like his family on earth, he has a human body and is therefore the image of God. When, however, he was anointed with glory, his mortal body was obviously transformed. Having

\textsuperscript{12} The parallel with Moses coming down from Sinai with the Law is apparent.
been clothed with glory, he is now able to abide in heaven in the company of the highest angels, those who stand directly before God and his throne. His glorification has made his human body into something more at home in heaven and in God’s presence than on earth. Nevertheless, he remains an embodied human.

In a similar vein, the end of the Ethiopic text of the second century *Apocalypse of Peter* expands on the account of Jesus’ transfiguration and the appearance of Moses and Elijah. When Peter speaks of putting up three tabernacles Jesus grows angry and rebukes him. He tells Peter of a tabernacle that was not made by hands, but by his heavenly father. Peter and his companions apparently see this tabernacle and rejoice. Then a white cloud covers Jesus, Moses, and Elijah and takes them into heaven. As Peter and the others look up into the opened heavens, Peter relates, “We saw men in the flesh, and they came and greeted our Lord and Moses and Elia, and went into the second heaven.”

Clearly, then, there is room in Jewish apocalypticism to imagine embodied human beings in heaven. Equally clearly apocalyptic accounts envision this state of affairs in stark contrast to the kind of *telos* that Philo imagines for the human being. The case of Enoch is especially instructive here. Enoch becomes glorious like the angels. This transformation allows him, again like the angels, to remain in God’s heavenly presence. But as one who bears the image of God, he has not become an angel. The chief point that distinguishes him from the angels is that he continues to be embodied. Whereas Philo envisions humans becoming incorporeal angels when they pass into the divine realm, apocalyptic texts like 2 *Enoch* imagine an ongoing distinction between angels and humans—even in heaven humans continue to have bodies. This understanding of humans in heaven does not seem to pose a dualism between the realm of the material and the

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realm of the spiritual, but between the realm of sin, corruption, and impurity and the realm of life, purity, and God’s presence.

With this in mind, a related point can also be noted: the idea that heaven has a spatial dimension is a correlate to the belief that human beings can be embodied in heaven. Additionally, such a notion implies that heaven need not be an immaterial place. The idea in some apocalyptic texts that a temple structure exists in heaven further corroborates these suspicions. Before turning to examine them further, however, it is worth noting a few points concerning Hebrews.

The distinction between humans and the angels in Heb 1–2 coheres well with the notion of embodied humans in heaven. In Hebrews angels are plainly identified as “spirits” while the Son, by way of contrast, has become a blood and flesh human being. The fact that Jesus was invited to sit at God’s right hand, a place that no angel has ever been invited to occupy, further implies that it is Jesus’ humanity—something he continues to be even in heaven—that qualified him to accept this invitation. The argument for Jesus’ elevation above the angels in Heb 1–2, in other words, appears to presuppose an embodied Jesus in heaven. As has been shown, such a notion is well within the purview of Jewish apocalyptic speculation regarding human existence in heaven. If this is so, then the conception of heaven in Hebrews is not likely to be oriented around a material-earthly/spiritual-heavenly dualism, but around an impure-earthly/pure-heavenly dualism. The latter coheres well with Jewish speculation regarding a temple in heaven.

IV. The Temple in Heaven

In his recent book *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, Jonathan Klawans points out that ancient Judaism has at least two distinct models for relating the Jerusalem temple to the heavenly realms. One model takes the
Jerusalem temple as a representation of the cosmos (i.e., heaven and earth). The other views the Jerusalem temple as the earthly model of an actual temple located in heaven.\textsuperscript{14} He notes that while these two notions are not necessarily incompatible, scholars often conflate them in spite of the fact that Second Temple and early Common Era texts typically attest one conception or the other, but not both together. Klawans also makes the insightful observations that 1) belief in a heavenly temple correlates with the assumption that the fullness of God’s presence dwells in that heavenly space, and 2) angels are the priests in that heavenly temple. On this last point he notes, “In all cases, where we find a belief of a temple in heaven, we will also find a developed angelology. On the other hand, in the absence of a developed angelology, we are more likely to find evidence for the notion of the temple as cosmos, as opposed to the temple in the cosmos [i.e., in heaven]. … A well-developed angelology … is an absolute prerequisite for the notion of a heavenly temple.”\textsuperscript{15}

Klawans also notes that in cases where the Jerusalem temple is taken to be a microcosm of the cosmos, heaven itself is viewed as coextensive with the inner or most holy place of the temple. The entire universe is God’s temple. The earth is likened to the forecourt, while heaven is God’s sanctuary. On the other model the temple structure on earth is a copy or analogue of the structure that stands in heaven. Thus the earth is not the forecourt, nor is heaven itself the inner sanctum. Rather, just as there is an especially sacred space on earth that is divided into various sancta that grow progressively more sacred until one comes to the place where God’s presence dwells on earth most fully, so also in heaven there is an especially sacred space divided into various sancta that grow progressively more holy until one reaches that place where God’s presence dwells most fully. The ground for this model is a particular interpretation of God’s

\textsuperscript{14} Klawans, \textit{Purity}, 111–44.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 112 (emphasis original).
admonishment to Moses in Exod 25:9 to make the earthly tabernacle an exact replica of the pattern God showed him on the mountain.

It remains, then, to ask which of these models Hebrews is likely to embrace. As with so many other elements one finds in the narrated heavenly journeys of Apocalypses, Hebrews does not present a well-developed angelology. Nevertheless, the notion that angels are priests in heaven appears to be presupposed. The angels are made spirits and ministers (leitourgoi) according to 1:7. That the writer takes this point seriously is shown by his repetition of the term in 1:14—all angels are “ministering spirits” (leitourgika_pneuma). Given that every other use of the leitourg- root in Hebrews connotes priestly ministry, it follows that when angels in Hebrews are described as “ministering” spirits the point is that they are “priestly” spirits. I and several others have argued that the priest Melchizedek is assumed to be an angelic being in Hebrews.\(^{16}\) All of this coheres well with the temple in heaven model.

Additionally, in 4:14 the writer describes Jesus ascending through the heavens, and again in 8:1 he describes Jesus being seated on the throne at the right hand of the Most High in the heavens. This plurality of heavenly space and the corresponding implication that there are multiple spaces or levels to the heavenly realm should be taken seriously. Jesus did not leave the forecourt of earth and enter the holy of holies when he entered heaven. He passed through the heavens and then entered into the true tabernacle, the one built by the Lord, not by humans (8:2). There he presented his offering. This heavenly tabernacle is further said to be the very one that Moses saw on the mountain and then used as the model for the earthly structure. Again, all of this indicates that Hebrews works with a temple in heaven model, not a heaven as temple model.

\(^{16}\) Moffitt, Atonement, ??
Finally, one should note that when the author speaks in Heb 9–10 about Jesus entering the tabernacle in heaven, he describes Jesus moving through its sancta into the place where God dwells. This concrete depiction of a heavenly structure where God dwells most fully in its inner sanctum aligns perfectly with the temple in heaven model.

All of this evidence suggests that Hebrews does not imagine the heavenly tabernacle or its inner sanctum to be coextensive with heaven. Rather, the author thinks of a temple/tabernacle in heaven. Heaven is depicted as a sacred space consisting of more progressively sacred precincts. The highest or most holy sacred space in heaven is the inner sanctum of the true tabernacle that God made. This is the place where Jesus serves as the great high priest.

Here I return to Isaacs’ conception of the theological project of Hebrews. As noted above Isaacs argues that Hebrews’ project is fundamentally hermeneutical. The author seeks to show how the sacred spaces of the Mosaic economy are metaphors for the true sacred space of heaven. Thus she thinks that in Hebrews the language of heaven “is essentially religious metaphor and, as such, defies all attempts at systemization.”\(^{17}\) She adds, “[In Hebrews] we find four different images of heaven as ‘place’. It is: (1) the throne room of the royal court, (2) a country, (3) a city or kingdom, and (4) a shrine.”\(^{18}\)

Isaacs here assumes that Hebrews works with a heaven as temple model, not a temple in heaven model. Yet the preceding analysis suggests that such an assessment of Hebrews is incorrect. This misconstrual of the likely context within which Hebrews should be located leads to a misconstrual of the theological project at the heart of this sermon. Hebrews is not engaged in a metaphorical theological project, but in an analogical one. Recognizing this distinction allows

\(^{17}\) Isaacs, *Sacred Space*, 206.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
for a reassessment of how Hebrews portrays Jesus as the high priest who makes the ultimate Yom Kippur sacrifice.

V. Hebrews and the Yom Kippur Ritual

The basic notion that Hebrews uses Yom Kippur as a metaphor that explains the heavenly or spiritual significance of Jesus’ sacrifice is not limited to Isaacs’ assessment of Hebrews, but is an interpretation commonplace in the secondary literature. This is, I suspect, partially a symptom of the problem that Klawans has put his finger on—scholarship tends to conflate or at least confuse the idea of heaven as a temple with that of a temple in heaven. But even more this misapprehension consists in the insistence that the conception of sacrifice in Hebrews is reducible to an act of slaughter. That is to say, most modern interpreters of Hebrews speak of Jesus’ sacrifice as if the word “sacrifice” were a synonym for death. When, then, the author speaks of Jesus presenting his offering to God in heaven, it is simply assumed that this is some kind of metaphor for how Jesus’ death makes atonement.

I have argued at length in my *Atonement* book and in other venues that this is a mistaken notion of how sacrifice is understood in Hebrews, and in particular that the resurrection of Jesus is the missing element in modern appraisals of Hebrews soteriology and Christology that explains how Hebrews assumes, as in the Pentateuch, that sacrifice is an irreducible ritual process that cannot be equated with the moment of the victim’s slaughter.

Here, however, I want to push a bit further on the significance of the concept of sacred space that it seems to me Hebrews assumes. If the author conceives of a temple in heaven where Jesus serves as the great high priest, then the way is opened to think of his appeal to Yom Kippur in analogical terms rather than in metaphorical ones.
That is to say, when the author points to the earthly Yom Kippur ritual process as a “parable” of the true heavenly atoning offering, he is not in the first instance attempting to unpack the spiritual significance latent in the earthly ritual. Rather, he is arguing that the earthly process is a counterpart to the supreme heavenly activity. The earthly ritual brings God and his people together on earth. What this ritual never did, however, was to bring God and his people together in heaven—where the true tabernacle stands and where God’s presence most fully dwells. This, Jesus has done.

With this kind of approach, the author is able to correlate elements of the basic story of Jesus with the sacrificial ritual of Yom Kippur in a way that does not devolve into a reduction of the heavenly Yom Kippur ritual into the one historical act of Jesus’ crucifixion. By way of analogy the author is able to identify Jesus’ death as the initial act or trigger that puts into motion a series of ritual events. In this way Jesus’ death is a sacrificial element. The narrative of Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and session can be further correlated with the ritual process by linking Jesus’ resurrection with his qualification to serve as high priest, his ascension as his entering into the holy precincts in heaven and ultimately into the true tabernacle in heaven. There he presents his offering—which is nothing less than himself (cf. 7:28) before God. Having made a purification for sins (1:3), he is then invited by God to be the first human to be elevated above the angels and sit down on the heavenly throne. In this way the story of Jesus is correlated with the ritual actions of Yom Kippur such that Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension and session can also be shown to be the events that enact the true atoning Yom Kippur ritual in the one true tabernacle that, by analogy, the earthly one is modeled upon.
VI. Conclusions

The larger point of this paper has been to explore the possibility that sacred space in Hebrews is not driven by a metaphorical theology that attempts to unpack the spiritual or heavenly significance of the sacred spaces on earth that are constitutive of Second Temple Jewish religion. The idea that there is a temple in heaven allows for a theological model that has analogy at its core, not metaphor. Hebrews, it seems to me, works along these lines. Jesus’ sacrificial death is only one element in a larger ritual process that culminates in his entry into the heavenly tabernacle where he presents himself as the offering that makes full atonement for God’s people. This is not an explanation that focuses exclusively on Jesus’ death, something that is in any case hard to square with the actual ritual process of Jewish sacrificial practice. Rather, it is a theology that takes temple ritual practice as an analogy for the way things must be in heaven and then correlates the story of Jesus with that heavenly reality.

One final point is worth exploring. If this account of Hebrews is basically sound, then the question of Hebrews’ supersessionist theology needs to be rethought. The idea that there is a temple in heaven upon which the one on earth is modeled does not easily allow for a kind of replacement theology. To attain to the heavenly temple, in other words, is not to have gained access to some new temple that replaces old one in Jerusalem. To think in terms of a temple in heaven is instead to think of that temple as the original or true temple. This obviously could be used to relativize and critique the Jerusalem temple (e.g., the Essenes at Qumran), but it is hard to see how such a critique is necessarily an expression of a supersessionist theology.