7. **Summary**

This study presents a contextualised reading of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It asks the question if Jesus the mediator between humans and God as he is presented by the writer to the Hebrews can be understood in a deeper and enhanced way when the Biblical text is read in the environment of Arab Middle-Eastern mediation, in particular the phenomenon of wasta.

The study first outlines the social phenomenon of wasta mediation in the Arab Middle-East. It is an ubiquitous present practice to access goods and services (intercessory wasta) as well as solve conflicts (mediational wasta). It links in with societal principles of collectivism, shame-orientation and tribalism. Wasta is often viewed critically because it is seen as corruption or favouritism. All criticism, however, is based on unfairness in the distribution of limited goods and services. Therefore this study argues that the use of wasta in a Christian theological framework is not hindered by its critical reception since the goods and services in the logic of wasta are paralleled with God's favour and grace, which is by definition unlimited.

Wasta can be related to the ancient practice of patronage which was a hallmark of first century Greco-Roman society. This study argues that wasta therefore, albeit being a contemporary phenomenon, is not an arbitrary but rather a related and relevant reading environment for the ancient text.

In its third chapter, this study looks at the details of how Jesus is described as mediator between humans and God in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus is described as superior to known mediators (Angels and Moses) due to his status as Son of God. This is argued using imagery of kinship (he is Son and Brother) and cult (he is the High Priest of the new covenant). The new covenant of which he is the mediator is superior to the old because it is more deeply internal, personal and relational in nature, more radically based on grace and the removal of sin as an obstructive force to the human-divine relationship once for all.
The claims about Jesus' supreme mediatorship lead into the argument for the proper response to his mediation; namely an attitude of faith and loyalty of the addressees towards God, their patron, and Jesus, God's chosen mediator.

In chapter four, this study reviews the previously outlined theology of mediation in Hebrews in light of wasta. The categories and principles used to understand wasta in the first step of the analysis are now used to show how the wasta phenomenon can enhance the understanding of mediation in Hebrews. The wasta reading environment underlines the biblical author's desire to present Jesus as superior and supreme mediator. It shows that mediation is perceived as something that can be weak or strong and the analogous assertions of Hebrews come out as a main strand of the overall message of the document.

The use of wasta as a reading environment shows that the efficiency of the mediation is a function of the quality of the relationships involved. In light of this it stands out how Hebrews presents Jesus as the mediator who can work so efficiently because he relates to humans (the supplicants) as well as God (the source of the favour or harmed party in the reconciliation process) on a kinship level. Mediation between kinsmen is the most efficient form of mediation because of three factors, as wasta practice shows. First, the relationships are more intimate than relationships of friendship and thus more conducive to requests for benefits, positive answers and grateful responses. Second, wasta between family is taken for granted and no reciprocation is expected, while between friends reciprocation in kind is the rule and among strangers even money may be taken. Third, mediation in the family is free from notions of shame that could keep the mediator from mediating or the supplicant from asking. The superiority argument and the kinship imagery constitute two main pillars of Hebrews' description of mediation. Analogously to the logic of wasta, the writer to the Hebrews presents Jesus as the Son, but also Brother who relates to humans as brethren without any hint of shame (2:11).
Considerations of honour and shame play a big part in a wasta reading of mediation in Hebrews too. The author points out Jesus the mediator's honour in order to argue his great efficiency. There appears to be a break with wasta logic at first, however, because Jesus the great honourable mediator dies a shameful death on the cross. But within the wasta framework this can be interpreted as an investment of Jesus' the mediator's honour. Just like a wasta has to invest wealth and bring honour and status to the mediation process, so Jesus has to invest his honour as divine Son up to dying a shameful death.

Only through his death can Jesus become the supreme mediator who is deeply rooted in both realms between which he mediates, the human and the divine. This deep connection with both sides of a triadic mediation “chain” as an essential ingredient for successful mediation parallels wasta logic.

Another apparent discontinuity between the argument of mediation in Hebrews and wasta logic is the fact that wasta is usually initiated by the supplicant (intercessory wasta) or perpetrator (mediational wasta), never the source of the favour or the harmed party respectively. In Hebrews, however, it is God who establishes the saving kinship relationship between Jesus and his brethren (he “gives” the children, 2:13). Jesus is God's envoy (apostle, 3:1). Contrary to the typical dynamics of wasta, God is described as the one who initiates the mediation process. This study argues that this apparent discontinuity is not a mere break with the logic or categorical error, but rather occurs out of theological necessity. God himself has to act as initiator of the eschatologically final, supreme act of mediation between himself and humanity because humans could not possibly initiate their own salvation.

In chapter five this study analyses the findings of the previous chapters and attempts an application to a topic of Muslim-Christian dialogue; the debate around the God-Sonship of Jesus. Sura 112 and Hebrews 1:1-4,5+8 are read alongside each other and found to hold much of the potential for conflict inherent to the debate. The verses from Hebrews affirm Jesus as Son, seated at God's right
hand, begotten by God himself, and even name him “God” through applying the words of Psalm 45:6,7 to Jesus. Sura 112 confesses that God is “not begotten and does not beget” and has no equal. While the wasta reading of Hebrews cannot solve this conflict as such, this study argues that it can help communicate in a better way the God-Sonship of Jesus and take away certain tensions and irritations present in Muslim-Christian dialogue through a shift in perspective. When read in the light of wasta and the logic of Middle Eastern mediation, Hebrews appears as an argument for the supreme mediating power of Jesus between humans and God. The kinship aspect plays a crucial role in the argument. Only as Son and brother can Jesus mediate effectively because only kinship ties guarantee most efficient mediation. When viewed against the backdrop of the Middle Eastern culture of mediation, notions of the God-Sonship of Jesus which are very controversial between Christians and Muslims appear in the light of mended and enhanced relationships between humans and God. Wasta, a phenomenon from the Arab Middle-East and thus the heartlands of Islam, can facilitate such a reading.