JESUS, THE GOOD \textit{WASTA}?
READING THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS IN LIGHT OF A MIDDLE-EASTERN SOCIAL PHENOMENON

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

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prof.dr. L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte
Intervention by third parties is always commendable.

–Richard T. Antoun, Institutionalized Deconfrontation
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## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>ALQ</td>
<td>Arab Law Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Anthropological Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BES</td>
<td>The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJS</td>
<td>British Journal of Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDS</td>
<td>The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSSH</td>
<td>Comparative Studies in Society and History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDT</td>
<td>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EvQ</td>
<td>Evangelical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUCWP</td>
<td>German University of Cairo Working Paper Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>IJMES</td>
<td>International Journal of Middle East Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRAI</td>
<td>The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Modern Churchman</td>
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<tr>
<td>MELG</td>
<td>Middle East Law and Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>MERIA</td>
<td>Middle East Review of International Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIDNTT</td>
<td>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>QR</td>
<td>Quarterly Review</td>
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<td>RNBC</td>
<td>Readings: A New Biblical Commentary</td>
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<td>SNT</td>
<td>Studien zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>VD</td>
<td>Verbum Domini</td>
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<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Biblical Commentary</td>
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1. Understanding Jesus as Mediator by using Wasta as a Reading Environment – Research Rationale

1.1. Introduction

Moving to live in the Arab Middle East as a Western European is usually accompanied by a bouquet of intercultural experiences, many of which are shared and discussed over and over by other Western Expatriates living in the region. Having lived in the Middle East for several years myself, I noticed that experiences evolving around mediation have a firm place within the unofficial canon of those intercultural occurrences.

An example is the observation that Arabs are quick to use themselves or suggest to others the use of connections for daily-life transactions such as signing up for a gym, finding an apartment or getting a local driver's license. For many things one could want or need to get done it seems standard procedure to approach a friend or relative who can help by maybe arranging a discount in a shop, speed up the process in a public office or help in another way.

Another case in point is the typical scene of a car accident. The default way of dealing with such a situation in many Western cultures appears to be informed by the conviction that it is best left to professionals and the persons immediately concerned to deal with it. Police are called in and secure the scene. People are encouraged to keep distance and pass by quickly and if they do otherwise they quickly attract pejorative designations like the German “Schaulustiger”, an onlooker of accidents or disasters out of interest or for entertainment. In Arab Middle Eastern cities, by contrast, it can often be observed that several people witnessing a car accident rush to the scene not just for first aid but to engage in lively debates, mediating between the different parties involved in the crash. The car drivers themselves will often call friends and family to come and mediate on their behalf. This way a group of ad-hoc mediators will be present, debating who is responsible long before police arrive and do their work.
In the Middle East, relatives and friends are regularly found to play the role of a mediator. They either arbitrate in a conflict or help to access a certain service, good, benefit or favour. A recurring word for this sort of mediation - which is quickly picked up by Expatriates even without formal knowledge of Arabic - is *wasta*. It can mean mediator and mediation alike (see discussion in chapter 2) and describes family and friends acting as middle-men in the ways just described.

For me, as a biblical scholar, it did not take long until this part of Middle Eastern culture started to resonate with my thinking about the New Testament's assertions that Jesus mediates on man's behalf. The exposure to Arabs mediating for their friends and family in conflicts or for certain benefits started impinging on my view of Jesus as mediator. A picture began to form of Jesus as a brother and friend to humans, the supplicants in need of mediation, and a Son to God, who is the source of all benefits or the adversary in the great conflict of human sin, ready for reconciliation. This fostered an appreciation for the relevance of Jesus' unique position between man and God and the cultural overtones of his mediating ministry.

The Arab culture of mediation seemed to let Jesus' mediating ministry appear in a new light. This begged the question if specific parts of the New Testament that deal with Jesus as mediator could be re-read in an enhanced way when the Middle Eastern culture of mediation was used as a reading environment. This is the question to which this study is dedicated.

1.2. **Aim of Research and Textual Basis**
This research aims to understand Jesus' role as mediator between man and God in a deeper way by reconsidering the mediating role of Jesus in the context of *wasta*, a form or Middle Eastern mediation. The Epistle to the Hebrews is chosen as a textual basis for this study. Hebrews commends itself to the purpose of this research because Jesus' role as mediator is discussed here in a more explicit and poignant way than elsewhere in the New Testament. Jesus is presented as a mediating high priest before God who bridges the gap between sinful man and holy God in a new
and distinct way. The author's contention that Jesus is the prime mediator between man and God finds its ultimate expression in the notion of Jesus' being the “mediator of the new covenant” (8:6, 9:15; 12:24), an expression only found in here. Looking more closely, it becomes evident that the author of Hebrews wants to present Jesus to his readers as a mediator in a much more comprehensive way, infusing his mediatorship with notions of superiority and ultimacy. The mediatorship of Christ as high priest is related to his role as Son and demands a response of faith from those on whose behalf he mediates.

1.3. **Research Background and Necessity of Study**

This study is indebted to recent scholarship on the interpretation of the New Testament in the context of Mediterranean culture. Insights from cultural anthropology have brought into sharper focus salient principles undergirding the New Testament texts, e.g. honour, shame, kinship, patronage and brokerage. The existing studies mentioned utilise the ancient greco-roman patronage system as a reading environment to interpret the role of Jesus as mediator between man and God. Patronage is an important aspect of the social environment of the New Testament. Studies using this framework rely on insights from cultural anthropology on the one hand and classical sources on the other. This research brings a contemporary phenomenon to the text, the Arab Middle Eastern practice of mediation: wasta. The wasta approach adds a new dimension. Wasta is not a phenomenon of antiquity only accessible through classical sources or an abstract cultural anthropological concept; rather, it is an ubiquitously present social phenomenon throughout the Arab Middle East. It will be seen that wasta can in several aspects be related to the patronage system in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. This suggests that wasta, despite being a modern phenomenon, can be viewed as a reading environment relevant to an ancient first-century

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text such as the Epistle to the Hebrews. Wasta has featured in cultural anthropological studies,\(^2\) it is also the object of political scientific research,\(^3\) economics\(^4\) and law.\(^5\) So while wasta connects with and builds on the existing and fruitful research mentioned above, it brings new data to the research and touches upon a wide scope of social life in the contemporary Middle East. It also opens up the research of the mediating role of Jesus to intercultural discussion. Being a contemporary phenomenon, wasta may influence not just the analysis of the ancient text, but also the ongoing discourse about a theology of Jesus as mediator, particularly as it is conducted in the Arab Middle East.

### 1.4. **Research Question and Relevance**

The over-all research question of this study can thus be formulated: Can Jesus the mediator as presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews be understood in a deeper and enhanced way when the document is read in the environment of wasta; and if so, how? Concerning the former part of the research question, this study finds that this question can be answered in the affirmative. Concerning the latter part, the present research will show that the relational dimensions and implications of the mediatorship of Jesus come out in greater detail and are recognised in an enhanced way. Knowledge of the logic of wasta brings out in greater detail and clarity how Christ the mediator in Hebrews relates to God as the source of benefits and second party in reconciliation and humans as clients and beneficiaries of the mediating efforts.

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Since wasta is a well known social phenomenon throughout the Arab Middle-East with its predominantly Muslim population, the question arises if the hermeneutical potential it holds can also be made useful for Christian-Muslim dialogue. By way of an application of the present research, it will be asked in 5.3 if the wasta reading environment can contribute to aspects of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The God-Sonship of Jesus, a contentious issue in Christian-Muslim dialogue, is used as a test-case. It is found that the wasta sensitive reading of Hebrews is not able to answer Quran-based Muslim objections to the God-Sonship of Christ comprehensively, yet adds a helpful perspective to the discussion: within the thought-world of God-Sonship, the focus is shifted away from notions of begetting towards notions of mediation, which can create common ground and enhance understanding.

1.5. Method and Data
In the second chapter, data from cultural anthropological studies on wasta, as well as political scientific and other social scientific studies on the subject will be evaluated in order to paint a comprehensive picture of the wasta phenomenon. Wasta will be explained by 1) viewing it within its social context, 2) analysing its internal logic of intercession and mediation and 3) characterising its main players, the wasta, the wasta client and the source or target of the transaction. Wasta will then be related to the ancient practice of patronage, a practice relevant to the first century Greco-Roman Mediterranean context of the New Testament. It will be seen here that wasta is distinct yet related to ancient patronage. This firstly indicates that wasta is a reading environment that is relevant to the Epistle to the Hebrews in its original context due to similarities between wasta and patronage in antiquity. It secondly shows that wasta has the potential to bring about new and different interpretations since it is not identical with ancient patronage.

In the third chapter, exegetical studies on Hebrews will be used to paint a picture of Jesus the mediator in Hebrews. Existing studies on Hebrews which are specifically sensitive to cultural-anthropological, social-scientific and socio-rhetorical dimensions will play a crucial role. The
structure of Hebrews and the sequence of arguments are recognised as important for the overall
argument of the author. The text is therefore studied synchronically in this chapter. The concept of
mediation in Hebrews does not feature prominently in commentaries and to date and to the
knowledge of this author no comprehensive study on the topic has been presented. Much greater
awareness and several dedicated studies exist however, on the metaphors and topoi through which
the idea of mediation is conveyed, namely Jesus the Son and Jesus the High Priest like
Melchizedek. These studies will be used to outline the particular argument for Jesus as the supreme
mediator as it is found in Hebrews.

In the fourth chapter, the findings of chapter three will be viewed in light of the logic of Hebrews as
presented in chapter two. Specific parallels and similarities between mediation in Hebrews and the
logic of wasta will emerge from the text. This time the text is viewed diachronically since the
findings are most logically clustered around the main characteristics of wasta as they were found in
the second chapter. Discontinuities between the logic of Hebrews and the wasta logic will also be
noted.

In chapter five, the findings of the previous chapter will be analysed and evaluated. It will be seen
that the wasta reading environment brings out a distinct relational dimension in the argument for
Jesus as the supreme mediator between man and God. It brings out in greater clarity the way in
which Jesus in his role as mediator relates to God as the source of favour and reconciliation and
humanity as his clients that are in need of what God has to offer. It will also be seen that not just the
analogies and similarities between mediation in Hebrews and the logic of wasta are informative, but
also the discontinuities. Multiple times it will be found that the breaks with the wasta logic have
great power to bring out central arguments of the Epistle and point to solemn theological truths.
2. The Wasta Phenomenon in its Context

2.1. What is Wasta?

2.1.1. Meaning and Context

The Arabic word “wasta” derives from the root w s t (middle) and is translated in studies on the subject “mediator”, “intermediary” or “go-between”. The word in this form is found in spoken levantine dialect. Relevant derivatives in written modern standard Arabic are وسيط, wasīṭ, meaning “mediator, intercessor; intermediary; agent, go-between, broker, middle-man” and وساطة, wisāṭa, “mediation, intervention; good offices, recommendation, intercession.” It can be observed that at times “wasta” in spoken Arabic is perceived by native speakers to have stronger overtones of corruption, i.e. gaining personal advantages through intervention of a mediator, circumventing existing rules to the disadvantage of others lacking such mediation. وساطة (wisāṭa), which is used in written and spoken Arabic alike, is then quoted as having more overtones of noble mediation in order to solve a conflict or help a person in need. Spoken Arabic is not reflected in standard dictionaries and it is difficult to define certain semantics as more valid than others. For the purpose of this study, therefore, Cunningham and Sarayrah's systematic will be followed, who define wasta as a broader notion comprising both intercession and mediation.

Intercession: As a Westerner one usually encounters this phenomenon sooner rather than later during a stay in the Middle East, first because it is paramount in Middle Eastern culture and second because it is particularly relevant during the first weeks in the new environment when one might have to set up a rental agreement, residency permit, car registration and other bureaucratic procedures. Middle Easterners will frequently offer their own help or make connections with someone they know who can help with a particular transaction. Wasta can denote the act or the

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person facilitating or mediating a specific service or making a certain benefit available to another
person; this aspect of wasta can be called intercessory wasta.⁹

Mediation: Another typical scene that presents itself soon when spending time in the Middle East is
a group of people gathering around two individuals who have a disagreement. The bystanders are
vividly taking part in the dispute supporting one of the conflicting parties. The role of mediators in
conflicts has a long tradition in the Middle East and is ingrained into the Middle Eastern psyche so
deeply that it can be observed even in random quarrels in the street. If two individuals have a
serious conflict, they will not solve it among themselves but a wasta will step in, typically an elder
or another respectable person, and initiate or lead the reconciliation process. This aspect of wasta
can be called mediational wasta.¹⁰

Wasta is a mechanism ubiquitously present in the Arab Middle East today¹¹ and is related to
traditional practices of patronage.¹² Many studies are at hand from the realms of classics
(patronage), politics, economy and sociology and it will be seen that the logic of wasta as described
in those studies will connect with the description of Christ as mediator of the New Covenant in the
letter to the Hebrews.

2.1.2. A Part of Middle Eastern Civil Society

Wasta is a paramount practice in the Middle East. Anthropologist Dale Eickelmann states that
“[a]nyone interested in understanding Middle Eastern and Central Asian life should follow 'native'

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⁹ Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 1,9–10.
¹⁰ Cf. Ibid., 1, 8f.
¹¹ Layne states: “In Jordan one of the best-known aspects of the established means for exchanging goods and services
is wasta - literally, go-between. The basic principle of the system is that an individual who has better connections
and influence helps someone with less (at least in that domain) to attain his or her goal.” Layne, Home and
Homeland, 119.Barnett et al begin their recent paper on the subject saying that “[f]or those who work and live in
Middle Eastern societies, ‘wasta,’ which may be thought of as special influence enjoyed by members of the same
group or tribe, is an ever-present part of life.” Barnett, Yandle, and Naufal, Regulation, Trust, and Cronyism in
¹² Wasta has been called the “lubricant of the patronage system.” Hisham Sharabi, Neopatriarchy: A Theory of
Distorted Change in Arab Society (Oxford University Press, 1988), 45. Sharabi continues to explain how patronage
is central to patriarchy. While the Arab Middle East has seen different types of political organisation, tribal
patriarchalism has continuously been a “basic constitutive structure.” Ibid., 50.
constructs and logic as thoroughly as possible.”13 Wasta is such a “native construct” which can illuminate Middle Eastern life.

“Civil society” usually refers to the part of society which is not shaped by the state (and by implication a degree of force), but by the civil public (and by implication a degree of freedom).14 Anthropologist Richard Antoun argues that in the Middle East everyday practices such as wasta, personal mediation and patronage take a place comparable to institutions of civil society in Western countries.15 Speaking about Jordanian society he states that civil society in Jordan is not found in formal associations and movements “but at the grass-roots level in the variety of processes, understandings, and everyday practices that foster trust and cooperation. We know very little about how these formal processes and implicit understandings operate at different levels of Jordanian and Middle Eastern society, and they must be on our next agenda for research.”16

In Western countries civil society is comprised of formal associations, foundations, political parties, religious and other groups. These have a potential voice in every major societal debate. They contribute to the knowledge of social, political, religious, cultural matters. If informal processes such as wasta have a similar function and significance, studying those processes can be expected to yield similar insights. Antoun, following Hann, suggests that the “different versions” of civil society – formal associations and informal processes – should be compared and analysed.17 Wasta will be looked at as a central informal process in Arab Middle Eastern civil society. As such it will also later unfold its power as an interpretative tool.

2.1.3. Jordan as an Example of a Wasta Society

Although wasta can be found throughout the Arabic speaking Middle East, there can be slight

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17 Ibid., 445.
differences in how this multi-faceted phenomenon plays out in different regions, as will now be seen. Information from throughout the Middle East will be considered in this thesis unless it is too particular to a certain Middle Eastern country or subregion. While the whole Arabic speaking Middle East is in view, many of the studies cited come from or refer to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This is not just coincidence, but Jordan lends itself to the research of wasta more readily than other countries for the following reasons.

Wasta, as will be discussed in 2.2, is imbedded in Middle Eastern societies in particular as far as they are characterised by collectivism, kinship and tribalism. In Jordan, these aspects come to the fore more readily than elsewhere. Antoun (inspired by R.S. Humphreys) observes that “[i]n Jordan, indigenous patterns of cooperation and conflict resolution do not have to resist the assault of centralized state power as they do in Iraq and Syria. On the contrary, they are protected and even co-opted by a weak monarchy that needs all the allies it can find.”\(^{18}\)

Antoun's statement points us to the particular history of the modern state of Jordan. Alon and Al-Ramahi fill in the background to Antoun's statement: The founder of the modern Jordanian state, the Emir Abdullah of the Hashemites, “maintained a chieftaincy-like political system based on close personal relations, an open-door policy, mediation (wasta) and, much to the chagrin of the government and the British, a show of leniency when possible.”\(^{19}\) As he had to secure the loyalty of the tribal shaykhs “[w]asta was a central dimension in the formation of the Kingdom”\(^{20}\) because “Abdullah used the payment of subsidies in order to guarantee the shaykhs’ loyalty.”\(^{21}\) These subsidies were handed down via the shaykhs to the tribespeople and “in the course of this process, tribal people developed a clear stake in the survival of the Jordanian state… It also allowed tribes to

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 460. This obviously reflects the state of affairs at Antoun's time of writing. For the more recent past, however, see Lawrence Kaplan, “Home Thoughts From Abroad,” *Slate*, December 26, 2007, 1, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2007/12/home_thoughts_from_abroad.html. Kaplan states that wasta plays a big enough role in war-time Iraq of the recent years that U.S. soldiers import it as a loan-word back into their Washington pentagon offices.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 40.
carve out a political role for themselves within the framework of the modern state.”

Also today there is much room in Jordan for the mechanism of wasta to play out. Lust-Okar analyses the history of the modern state of Jordan and present-day political practices that Jordanian politics remain wasta friendly, despite attempts to root it out in its corrupted variant.

Stability in the Hashemite monarchy depends on the palace’s ability to manage the distribution of state resources to competing societal forces. Jordan is an arid land with a small population of approximately five million, both blessed and cursed to border Israel. The monarchy has received strategic rents in return for maintaining a moderate, pro-Western stance, and it has distributed these resources, mainly to tribal elites, to obtain political support. … The palace uses resources provided by the West to alleviate popular dissatisfaction and, more importantly, to distribute them to regime supporters.

This way of resource allocation, woven into the fabric of the modern state of Jordan, entails wasta links from top government levels down to the grassroots of society.

Parliament is a primary market place for wasta services, especially the allocation of resources, development money and contracts: “[M]any members of parliament (MPs) primarily understand themselves as a wasta for their family and friends.” Lust-Okar adds that “[p]eople go to the polls when they believe that their candidates will be able to deliver wasta.” Thus, then and now, the political system in Jordan has been (for better or for worse) a favourable surrounding for wasta.

Lastly, Jordan is an instructive example for our purposes because of its close ties with the West. As mentioned above, since the formation of the modern state of Jordan, wasta has been a crucial link between the king and the population. The king would pay subsidies and give other benefits to the tribal shaykhs in return for loyalty. Likewise, the shaykhs could hand the favours down to their

22 Alon, Making of Jordan, 43.
23 Ellen Lust-Okar, “Reinforcing Informal Institutions through Authoritarian Elections: Insights from Jordan,” MELG 1 (2009): 6f. Cf. also the sharp increase in population in Jordan in recent years through refugee influx from Iraq and Syria. Jordan’s capability of hosting such a great number of refugees compared to its own population can be interpreted as a sign of the efficiency of said mechanism: to acquire resources from international donors and distribute them strategically for relative social stability.
24 Markus Loewe et al., The Impact of Favouritism on the Business Climate: A Study on Wasta in Jordan (Bonn: German Development Institute, 2007), 44, as quoted in Lust-Okar, “Reinforcing Informal Institutions,” 17.
people and expect loyalty from them. This constellation is mirrored on the international level. During the early days of the Jordanian state, the British gave funds to the young ruler Abdullah in exchange for stability in their mandate region. In a very similar way the North American and European states give grants and development funds to Jordan today in exchange for a reliable, pro-Western presence in the volatile Middle-Eastern region. Just as money and other benefits were dealt from the British to the king to the shaykhs to the people, they are dealt today from the Western community to the government and then via parliament to the people. Each intermediary instance can be understood as a wasta-layer and with the flow of resources comes expectancy for loyalty from the recipients.

Many goods and funds enter Jordan from the West and are then distributed along wasta lines of favouritism, family and clan connections. In Jordan, this it is a structural component of society and politics. Additionally, the strong Western ties with Jordan and the volume of flowing aid-money leads to a lively discourse about wasta. Several studies exist which usually criticise wasta for its perceived incompatibility with Western standards of meritocracy, efficiency and fairness.

Thus Jordan is a better example than other Arab states for showing, first, how wasta dynamics work in a paradigmatic way, historically and in the present and, second, how the Western world interacts with the wasta mentality. However, the principal findings can be legitimately transferred to the wider Middle East because “[w]hile the [Middle Eastern, E.S.] region exhibits as much internal diversity in attitudes, behavior, and systems of government and administration as Europe, there is a clear sense that the Arab nations are culturally homogeneous.” The principles and mechanisms of wasta will emerge in greater clarity when looking at Jordanian culture but for the most part are valid

26 Cf. Ibid., 6–7.
27 Cf. e.g. Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta; Loewe et al., The Impact of Favouritism on the Business Climate: A Study on Wasta in Jordan; Basem Sakijha and Sa’eda Kilani, eds., Towards Transparency in Jordan (Amman: Arab Archives Institute, 2002); Basem Sakijha and Sa’eda Kilani, Wasta: The Declared Secret (Amman: Arab Archives Institute, 2002); Ahmad A. Mohamed and Hadia Hamdy, The Stigma of Wasta: The Effect of Wasta on Perceived Competence and Morality, German University of Cairo Working Paper Series 5 (Cairo, 2008).
and instructive for a wider Middle Eastern context.

2.2. **The Social Context of Wasta**

2.2.1. **Introduction**

Wasta is deeply ingrained in Middle Eastern culture. Mohamed and Hamdi quote proverbs pointing to the practice: “Lucky is the person who the governor is his uncle.” “Seek who you know, so that your needs will be fulfilled.” “No one can escalate except those who have a ladder.”

Wasta has to be viewed against its cultural and societal backdrop. Irani states:

> There is a need to fathom the deep cultural, social, and religious roots that underlie the way Arabs behave when it comes to conflict reduction and reconciliation. [...] Issues such as the importance of patrilineal families; [...] the nature of tribal and clan solidarity; the key role of patron-client relationships; and the salience of norms concerning honor and shame need to be explored in their geographical and socio-cultural context.

In order to describe wasta most accurately, one has to understand its traditional-formal variant: tribal mediation. Yet one has to go even deeper and understand how wasta is not just a formal custom among tribal leaders but also an everyday means to achieve one's ends, practised by the whole population, consciously or subconsciously. Layne observes:

> As in the case of honor, scholarship on waṣṭa has focused on the male/formal manifestations of the system. Discussions of waṣṭa in Jordanian villages by Āmina Farrag (1977) and Richard Antoun (1972; 1979) focus on the roles of pashas (elders of the largest clans chosen by Turkish authorities), clan elders, muktars, and since 1965 mayors and other elected members of the village councils. But as Lawrence Rosen has pointed out for Morocco, 'Every relationship implies an obligation. To be related in a particular degree of kinship, to be another’s neighbor, to be the client of a merchant in the bazar carries with it certain expectations of potential recompense' (1984:68). So too, in Jordan, it is not just leaders who participate in such exchanges but ordinary tribespeople, men and women alike.

Thus, while an understanding of the traditional-formal manifestation of wasta is essential, it is also important to understand how Middle Eastern culture is inseparably intertwined with the wasta

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phenomenon and interspersed with the different components of the wasta complex. Only then will it become clear that just as “[e]very relationship implies an obligation,” so there is also the potential for wasta or aspects of wasta in every relationship.

In order to understand the wasta phenomenon it is thus necessary to understand the society in which it can be found. It appears useful to look at Arab culture considering the characteristics of collectivism, tribalism and Islam. As major subheadings, shame-orientation will be discussed under collectivism and kinship orientation under tribalism.

Collectivism is relevant to wasta because it is its sociological breeding ground. While forms of mediation similar to wasta might also exist in individualist societies, it will be seen that it is the social dimension of collectivism which makes it a driving force and structuring element of society.

Tribalism is helpful to understand because wasta exchanges are traditionally carried out along tribal lines. As will be seen, the ideology of kinship reinforces wasta behaviour.

Islam is not as such a helpful context to understand wasta since the phenomenon is sometimes seen as compatible, sometimes as incompatible to Islamic teaching. However, since in this study the Middle Eastern practice of wasta will be related to Christian teaching, the question arises how Islam as the dominant religion of the wasta region relates to the phenomenon. Understanding the relation between Islam and wasta is a prerequisite to attempting the application of this study to an interfaith reading of Hebrews in 5.3

2.2.2. Collectivism

This passage is based on the research of social psychologist Geert Hofstede, who developed the concept of cultural dimensions. Hofstede analysed survey data from IBM branches in over 50

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32 See above.
countries. He identified “dimensions” of culture, a cultural dimension being defined as “aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures.” 34 The survey data was analysed for national tendencies in certain answers and questions. The questions and answers that showed the same national specific tendencies were then grouped and eventually allowed Hofstede to discern four dimensions of cultural values. They were power distance (pertaining to aspects of authority and power), individualism versus collectivism (pertaining to value ascribed to the group or the individual), femininity versus masculinity (describing aspects of assertiveness and competitiveness on the one side vs. valuing relationships on the other) and uncertainty avoidance (describing the [in]tolerance to ambiguity). 35

Research points to the fact that Western society has long been individualised in most places. Geert Hofstede describes the “cultural dimension” of collectivism as opposed to individualism. Individualism means that “the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group.” 36 Values such as self-expression and individual rights are held in high esteem and also laid down in law and institutions. Difference from the mainstream and originality are highly regarded.

Worldwide, however, individualism is the exception, collectivism is the rule. 37 A collectivist society is structured around its members' affiliation and identification with groups or networks of different kinds. Group interest comes before individual interest. 38

35 Ibid.
The collectivism-individualism-spectrum also says something about how societies are structured. Hofstede states:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.  

The Arab countries reach an average 38 points on Hofstede's individualism scale of 76 countries. The first rank (and thus the most individualised society) are the United States at an index of 91, followed by Australia (90) and Great Britain (89). The bottom ranks are Colombia (13), Venezuela (12), Panama (11), Ecuador (8) and Guatemala (6), which are thus the most collectivist. The Arab countries have differences among them, e.g. Saudi-Arabia scores higher than Lebanon and Egypt; altogether the Arab countries rank 41-42 and index around 38. They can thus be called collectivist albeit there being several even more strongly collectivist countries.

2.2.3. Shame-Orientation

It is important for our purposes to bring in another societal factor at this point, which is related to collectivism. Middle Eastern cultures have been known to be shame-cultures, as opposed to the guilt cultures of North America and Western Europe. The relevance of honour and shame for Middle Eastern societies is difficult to overemphasise. Adkins discusses honour and shame as Greek values. It has been argued that they are universal cultural anthropological denominators throughout the Mediterranean basin. Roland Muller describes how he found Levantine Arabs living their everyday lives on the basis of an honour versus shame paradigm so that he eventually

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39 Ibid., pt. II, chap. 4, location 1087, under “Measuring the Degree of Individualism in Society.”
41 Ibid., pt. II, chap. 4, location 1118–1124, under “Measuring the Degree of Individualism in Society.”
realised: “Every part of the Muslim culture I lived in was based on honor and shame.”

By contrast, in guilt-based cultures people hold a worldview that is structured around the question what is right and what is wrong. As an illustration of this, Muller points to childhood education. Children in guilt-oriented societies are conditioned to distinguish between right and wrong. A feeling of guilt is evoked as the right reaction to having done wrong.

In a shame-based culture people's worldview is influenced by the question what is honourable or shameful. Thus children will be conditioned to feel ashamed if they fail to act honourably. However, as Muller points out, shame culture goes beyond feelings:

Shame and honor are positions in society, just as being right (and justified) is a position in our western culture. Consequently, while young people from guilt cultures are free to express themselves however extravagantly as long as they do not harm anyone, young people in a shame-based culture “are different. Wherever they go, they represent their families and tribes. Young people are not free to act as they want. They must always act honorably, so that the honor of their family and tribe is upheld.

It needs to be added at this point that shame cultures (and guilt cultures respectively) do not exist in pure form. The dimensions of honour and shame are aspects of complex cultural patterns. For our purposes they are useful because they help distinguish different cultural mechanisms at work in different contexts. This is important to maintain in the face of sweeping statements such as Muller's aforementioned quote (“Every part of the Muslim culture I lived in was based on honor and shame [emphasis added].” Hofstede claims a relation between shame vs. guilt orientation and collectivism vs. individualism, arguing that “[s]hame is social in nature, whereas guilt is individual; whether shame is felt depends on whether the infringement has become known by others. This becoming known is more of a source of shame than the infringement itself. Such is not the case for

44 Roland Muller, Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door (Bloomington, Ind.: Xlibris.com, 2005), 47.
45 Cf. Ibid., 48.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 47.
guilt, which is felt whether or not the misdeed is known by others." This interrelation between shame and collectivism suggests that a society can be expected to be shame-oriented to a degree proportional to its ranking on the collectivism scale.

2.2.3.1. Shame-orientation is connected to collectivism.

The interrelation between shame-orientation and collectivism needs further refinement. Jackson Wu states that “[h]onor and shame are inherently public.” The connection between shame-orientation of culture and collectivism lies in the fact that honor is usually tied to something bigger than the individual, e.g. the family, tribe or even nation, i.e. the group. Al-Ramahi states:

The Bedouin have traditionally placed great importance on the concept of honour (ird). Slight or injury to a member of a tribal group is an injury to all members of that group; likewise, all members are responsible for the actions of a fellow tribal member. Honour rests in the family or tribe and in the individual as the representative of the family or tribe. Slights are to be erased by appropriate revenge, unless a third-party mediated to facilitate reconciliation based on adequate recompense.

The group is related to the honor or shame of the individual in a twofold way. First, the group upholds the definition of what is honourable or not, imposes its standards and sanctions the behaviour of its members. Families keep alive in their midst the standards of their society and will respond to perpetration with a wide spectrum of sanctions, at the far end of which shunning, rejection from the family or even the infamous “honour-killings” can be found. In this sense, the in-group constitutes a “court of reputation” with powers to bestow and withdraw honour and even execute sanctions. DeSilva describes this mechanism for antiquity. Roland Muller describes the same effect without calling it by the same name for contemporary Arab society. Referring to Arabs when they are removed from their in-group and thus court of reputation he states that Muslim men

49 Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, Cultures, pt. II, chap. 4, location 1265, under “Individualism and Collectivism in the Family.”
53 deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 55.
feel they “can partake in drinking alcohol and sexual escapades, because the society they are living in doesn’t define this as shameful. Something may be shameful at home, but when in different circumstances, the Arab may react differently. There is a proverb that states, 'Where you are not known do what ever you like.'”

Second, the group identifies with the concrete honour and shame of the individual: shameful behaviour of an individual shames his or her group, honourable behaviour honours the group. This in turn will keep up the group's determination to define and police honourable standards. As honour and shame are reflected back on the group, the group will be encouraged to maintain or even increase its reinforcement activity.

As was seen, collectivist societies are often found to be shame-oriented cultures. By contrast, individualist societies often work on the opposite paradigm: guilt-orientation. While in the case of collectivism/shame-orientation the group is closely related to or even identified with the concrete shameful or honourable deeds of its members, in individualist/guilt-oriented societies there is a deliberate abstraction of the individual from the group. In individualist/guilt-oriented cultures, while the group does discuss and decide what is right and wrong in societal discourse and democratic decision-making, the results are then purposefully abstracted from the group. Laws and rules are formulated and declared universal. The sanctioning is outsourced (e.g. to the police). This abstraction serves to enable the individual to live on his or her own, without constant close ties to the group. The wrong behaviour of an individual does not affect the righteousness (nor the honor) of his or her family or in-group.

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54 Muller, Honor and Shame, 81.
55 “In most Middle Eastern cultures, honor is wrapped up with one’s tribe. Everyone grows up within a tribal concept. If someone is from the Beni Hassan tribe, he thinks and acts, and dresses as a Beni Hassan. His actions reflect on the honor of the Beni Hassan tribe. If he acts honorably, the Beni Hassan tribe is honored. If he acts shamefully, the whole tribe is shamed. If the act is vile enough, the Beni Hassan tribe will react, and execute the offender, even though he is a member of their own tribe, and perhaps even their immediate family. Thus the honor of the tribe is restored.” Ibid., 50.
56 The concept of high-context versus low-context communication illustrates the difference between individualism/guilt and collectivism/shame culture further. Referring to Edward T. Hall, Hofstede explains that high-context communication (often found in collectivist cultures) puts a lot of the communication in the unwritten context while low-context communication (often associated with individualist cultures) relies on (written) code.
For the purpose of this study it is important to note that collectivism and shame-orientation are reflected in 1) everyday decisions and behaviour and 2) the structure of society.

1) Everyday behaviour and decision-making is informed by the question of what increases the honor balance. As mentioned above, the individual and the group are inseparably connected here: honourable for the individual is what brings honor to the family or tribe.

Many different acts and personal characteristics are honour-relevant. A general overview suffices for our purposes. Hospitality is a highly relevant act of honour. The guest is honoured by the service offered to him as much as the host is honoured by the guest's presence. Flattery, giving of gifts, wisdom, education, respect for elders are honourable as well as physical strength, heritage, wealth. While these might not seem too different from concepts of honour and reputation held in many Western societies, marriage and the family are carriers of honour which have a particular prominence in Arab culture over Western culture. A man or woman's honour grows when he marries and starts a family. A man's honour is henceforth closely tied to that of the members of his household, particularly the female ones.

In the pursuit of being an honourable member of society by doing the deeds mentioned above and acquiring the mentioned characteristics, the immediate and continuous connectedness with the group is essential. Behaviour might change when an individual leaves his or her family even just for a limited time.

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57 Hofstede sums up: “American business contracts are much longer than Japanese business contracts.” Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, Cultures, pt. 2, chap. 4, locations 1262, 1266 under “Individualism and Collectivism in the Family.”
59 Cf. Muller, Honor and Shame, 88ff. See also Nyrop, Jordan, 69 and 74.
60 Cf. Muller, Honor and Shame, 90f. Muller quotes the Arab proverb “A man's wife is his honor.”; Abou-Zeid explains that in Bedouin culture a woman “is always regarded as something sacred and to be protected from desecration. In fact, much of the honour of the beit and the lineage depends on observing this sanctity and in this sense a woman plays a vital and unique role in preserving the honour of her people.” Ahmed Abou-Zeid, “Honour and Shame Among the Bedouins of Egypt,” in Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 253.
61 Cf. the aforementioned description by Muller. Muller, Honor and Shame, 81; cf. also appendix 5.3.
It is important to be aware of how honour and shame can influence everyday acts and behaviour because, as we shall see later, honour and shame can also become the ruling principles in a wasta transaction. If wasta is employed for the purpose of mediation in a conflict, the wasta transactions will often not be in line with right and wrong or even reflect the preferred outcomes of either of the conflicting parties. Rather, a wasta will work in such a way that the honour balance is restored and the balance of the community is stabilised. Antoun speaks of “social organization.” The essential principle is the “trading of moral condemnation and symbolic goods in return for substantive concessions” in order to reconstitute the balance of honor.

2) In collectivist societies such as most Arab Middle-Eastern ones, people perceive the world according to their “in-group” and “out-group” attitudes. Services and resources are often distributed along the lines of groups and networks. In Jordan, this is true on a national level (see above: foreign money is distributed via the king, the tribes, parliament) and filters through to the level of households. Intercessory wasta is the act of shifting around services and resources inside a given in-group (e.g. an elected MP [or in the past a tribal shaykh] will serve as wasta to his in-group, which is usually in large parts identical with his geographical, familial or religious group of origin.)

The stronger the collectivist dimension is in a given society, the more likely it is that people maintain extended networks of family and friends through whom they access services and resources. Much time and energy flows into the care for such networks. It is a common thing to call a friend or acquaintance just to say hallo and maintain the contact. Family events are prioritised

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63 Cf. Raphael Patai, Kingdom of Jordan (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1984), 78.
64 Nyrop speaks of the family’s “purse… [which] is disbursed solely by the oldest male adult who is the head of the family.” Nyrop, Jordan, 83.
highly, family gatherings are essential to attend.

The stronger the individualist dimension is in a given society, services and resources are made accessible wherever possible without the need for connection to a group. The law regulates who accesses what service or resource as well as the procedures (e.g. how much time it takes to receive unemployment benefits) and the prerequisites (e.g. that the applicant must have worked for a certain amount of time before he qualifies for unemployment benefits). The role of the law is to regulate the access to the resources or services. In a collectivist society this is done through networks. Resources flow along the lines of clan and family networks, services can be sped up through networking, thus collectivist societies will organise and align themselves along the lines of informal networks.

2.2.4. Tribalism

The relevance of family, clan and tribe in the Middle East has started to become apparent during our discussion of collectivism. In the following, tribalism will be looked at in more detail, as it constitutes the formal cultural background for wasta. Jordanian culture is once again useful as an instructive example for the whole region. However, in other countries the tribal principles might be in the process of fading in the shadow of stronger state power. Kinship will then be discussed as the ideology at work in tribalism.

There are many definitions for the concept of “tribe” and “tribal” as it is found in the Arab world. For the purpose of understanding the sociological background of wasta we need not go into detailed discussion of these definitions.\(^65\) It will suffice to stick to a widely agreed-on two-fold definition that describes tribes and tribalism “as corporate (legal-like) groups [or] as non-corporate genealogical units.”\(^66\) According to this definition, the phenomenon of tribe has two main aspects.

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\(^{65}\) For an overview see Antoun, “Civil Society, Tribal Process, Change,” 445–6. Antoun points out that tribalism has often been wrongly identified with nomadism, which for example in Jordan would pertain to a mere three percent of the population. In reality tribalism describes a cultural phenomenon relevant to the majority of rural as well as urban Jordanians. Cf. Ibid., 446.

On the one hand, it is a unit of social organisation with (close-to or real) legal implications. On the other hand, it is also a genealogical unit. The genealogical link is usually constituted by “patrilineal ties between men.” But, as we will see later, genealogical concepts and language can also be virtualised in order to integrate people who are neither related to the tribe by descent nor marriage.

Many of the Middle Eastern countries are influenced by bedouin tribalism. Fathi states that “[t]ribal organization on the basis of collective interest or for mutual protection presents a persistent sociopolitical factor in the social structure of many Middle Eastern states.” Tribal custom is relevant to conflict resolution and therefore to wasta in its mediational variant. Again, the Kingdom of Jordan can be considered an instructive case-study as Al-Ramahi points out: “Tribal values shape much of Jordanian culture, but in particular conflict resolution.” Tribalism influences law and conflict resolution as well as the distribution of goods, services and favours even (albeit to a lesser degree) in urban settings in contemporary Jordan. Mediational wasta is rooted in tribal custom:

“Wasta is rooted in family loyalty and tribal dispute resolution. […] The traditional shaykh serves as a mediator internally and a protagonist for the tribe externally. When conflicts or difficulties arise, all eyes are on the shaykh for addressing the situation.”

### 2.2.4.1. Kinship Orientation: The Ideology Behind Tribalism

Tribalism is linked with a strong awareness for genealogical heritage and familial ties in the present. Eickelman speaks of the bedouin “ideology of kinship.” For our purposes it is useful to think of tribalism as a concrete form of social organisation as defined earlier and kinship-orientation as the worldview or philosophy found within it. This can be described as the “ideology of natural,

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67 Nyrop (referring to a rural Jordanian context) describes how the kin units interact: “Social control and politics in the village environment traditionally grow out of the interactions of kin groups at various levels. … In cases of conflict, leaders of the appropriate kin sections, or persons in intermediate positions between them, attempt to mediate the problem through kinship ties.” Nyrop, *Jordan*, 68.

68 Ibid., 66.


71 Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta*, 33.

positive, and unbreakable bonds of blood.”

Practically, the “[o]bligation to family overrides other obligations.” In connection with wasa this means that between family and clan members it is perceived an obligation to render wasa services, the only reciprocation expected being expressions of thanks, loyalty and the spread of the wasa's fame.

Loyalty-structures, however, can be flexible. Nyrop explains how loyalty binds together family groups against the outside but might separate the group between closer and more distant parts of the family: “The tribal social structure is based on the ramifications of patrilineal ties between men. … For example, the grandsons of brothers form two groups in opposition to each other, but they form one unit in opposition to the descendants of the brother of their common great-grandfather.” Fathi quotes a proverb illustrating the same fact: “[M]e against my brothers, my brothers and me against our cousins, my cousins, my brothers and me against the rest of the world.”

Eickelman points out that the ideology of kinship is “not limited to” blood relationships: the ideology of bonds of blood can also be abstracted to include outsiders as if they were related by blood. Kinship can be a way of perceiving and defining relationships that are in fact not familial in the biological sense.

According to Eickelman, kinship has been misunderstood by anthropologists for a long time. Researchers used to apply their own categories of kinship, i.e. mainly categories of blood-relationships, to local notions of kinship. In reality kinship ties are often claimed but cannot be proven. The concept of qarāba (closeness) as researched in Morocco (but also found elsewhere in

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74 Nyrop, *Jordan*, 82.
77 Fathi, *Jordan*, 53. Cf. also Nyrop who notes that “the grandsons of brothers form two groups in opposition to each other, but they form one unit in opposition to the descendants of the brother of their common great-grandfather.” Nyrop, *Jordan*, 66.
78 “Kinship’ is a theoretical, anthropological term here and thus an 'experience-distant concept - formulated for analytically inclined participants in a society or its observers to comprehend or compare social phenomena, either typologically or through 'family resemblances.'” Eickelman, *The Middle East*, 110.
the Middle-East) is instructive here: “Closeness is constituted by compelling ties of obligations. Often closeness is expressed as a 'blood' tie, even when no demonstrable lineal ties exist, because however such ties are valued in practice, they are considered permanent and cannot be broken.”

This shows that language of putative kinship serves to express a strong sense of unchangeable closeness.

This practice shows that kinship orientation has an ideological component which feeds into the realities of a concrete tribal structure. It is not just a way to describe facts of tribal structure but also to create, form and uphold tribal identity, solidarity and loyalty. Fathi states that “[a]ctual kinship relations that can be traced through descent and intermarriages only exist within the tribe’s smaller units - its direct, local lineages.”

Behind the kinship terminology she identifies tribal ideology:

“Tribal ideology thus serves purposes of identification and stresses the unity of the whole, as well as loyalty to it. It provides a corporate identity, whether it is based on actual or putative lineage.”

It is an old tribal mechanism to put sociopolitical ties into words of kinship:

This agnatic concept of unification does not necessarily conform with historical realities. Musil and von Oppenheim had already realized that the social organization of tribes based on one common ancestor cannot be taken at face value. Rather, the genealogies used by the Bedouin to describe their sociopolitical order should be regarded as “ideological characters for the construction of social groups.”

Even if the modernisation of public registration may diminish the significance of putative lineage over time, the rhetoric of putative lineage is present in everyday language. Sometimes Western visitors to Jordan might encounter a situation where a Jordanian wants to make a particular effort to integrate the guest into a certain group or help him or her to receive good treatment. In such cases

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79 “The bedouin term for kinship is 'closeness' (garāba), a concept much like that found in Morocco, where the same term (pronounced qarāba) is used […] The bedouin ideology of Kinship is 'dominated' by the 'ideology of natural, positive, and unbreakable bonds of blood' but, as elsewhere, is not limited to it.” Ibid., 243; quoting Abu-Lughod, Veiled Sentiments, 41,49,51.

80 Eickelman, The Middle East, 153.

81 Fathi, Jordan, 52.

82 Ibid., 53.Ibid., 53.

83 Ibid., 53. For an early description of the phenomenon see W. Robertson Smith, Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1903). According to Antoun, this is the first discovery of this sociological mechanism, cf. Antoun, Arab Village, 29:143.
they might call him or her “brother” or “sister.” Sometimes it would be added that he or she is “like” a brother or sister, but at other times this addition would be omitted, leaving the addressee of such a statement in the dark about the actual relation the speaker has to the person. For the friend in question a statement like “you are like a brother” or “you are like one of us” or signifies closeness. To the outsider it signifies that the person is to be treated like a family member and insulting him or her will be taken as an insult to one's sister or brother.

As was seen, kinship ideology (including both genealogical as well as virtual or putative kinship) is the driving force behind formal tribalism. But the relevance of kinship extends further. As Eickelman points out “a large number of Middle Eastern personal relationships are cast in the language of family relationships, and because such ties pervade government offices, understanding kinship relations and how ties of trust are forged among people is also crucial to understanding how formal institutions work.”84 This is true not only for government offices and other formal institutions (“bureaucratic and industrial settings”85), but kinship ideology and language might surface in any relationship in the Middle East. Kinship and related concepts, Eickelman claims, “must be studied in the context of complementary, locally held notions of patronage, neighborliness, friendship, and the economic and political contexts in which these are maintained and reproduced.”86 Wasta is such a complementary notion and should thus be studied with the context of kinship ideology and tribalism in mind.

2.2.5. Islam

Wasta is best understood in the context of its cultural moorings in collectivism, tribalism and kinship ideology. The question of wasta and Islam is pertinent to the question whether the wasta reading environment can enhance not just the intercultural but also inter-faith reasoning about Jesus as mediator. It will be seen that Islam does not stand unequivocally against nor for a wasta reading.

84 Eickelman, The Middle East, 150.
85 Ibid., 149.
86 Ibid., 147.
Wasta is not a Muslim or Islamic phenomenon in a theological sense. Islamic views on wasta are mixed. Some aspects of the wasta complex can be seen as compatible with Islam, others as distinctly incompatible.

The connections which are being made in literature are diverse. Mohamed and Hamdy point out that the practice of intercessory wasta can be seen to stand against Qur'anic teaching. Cunningham and Sarayrah (also referring to the intercessory variant) state that wasta is opposed by “devout Muslims who see wasta as devious and dishonest.” Khaled Al-Maeena, editor in chief at the Saudi English-language newspaper Arab News, states: “In the best Islamic society, justice and fair play should have the most prominent roles. There is no place for 'vitamin waw' [i.e. wasta, E.S.] in a society that is genuinely Islamic.”

On the other hand, Antoun cites research which has shown that patron-clientelism, discussed here as an informal mechanism of civil society akin to wasta, has increased in Iran since the formation of the Islamic Republic. Hutchings and Weir speak of “business relationships in the Arab World based on strong family networks, or wasta connections, [which are] supported by Islamic ethics and values” and state that “business practices are molded by the all-pervasive influence of Islam.” They do not explicitly say which exact values and ethical statements they have in mind here apart from mentioning the principle of consultation, shura. Shura is a term found in the Qur’an which pertains “to situations of dispute […] where a form of communal deliberation was required or recommended for the Muslim judge, a usage which continues to the modern period.”

87 Indeed Muller, *Honor and Shame* might be criticised for not always making this distinction.
89 Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta*, 15.
93 Ibid., 146.
94 Ibid., 144.
95 Ahmad M. Al-Baghdadi, “Consultation,” ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, trans. Brannon M. Wheeler, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). See also Antoun, who sees shura as one of several “indigenous patterns of cooperation and conflict resolution” just like wasta, but lists shura as “coming from the Islamic side.” Antoun,
“An Islamic Model for Political Conflict Resolution” Ahmad Moussalli outlines the great tradition of arbitration since Muhammad himself, which could be seen in parallel with mediational wasta.96

For our purposes it is important to note at this point that wasta is not an Islamic concept in a theological sense and is varyingly viewed as compatible or incompatible with Islam. Particularly the intercessory aspect of wasta is prone to corruption and unfairness and thus gets critical reception from religious Muslims. However, even outspoken critics of wasta might use it, even in a conservative Islamic society such as Iran. The mediational aspect of wasta, in turn, can be viewed as even compatible with Islam when the connection is made to the Islamic concept of shura, consultation, and the role of arbitration in classical Islam.97

2.3. The Logic of Wasta

This passage will attempt to outline the inner logic of the wasta phenomenon. This will be achieved by looking at the two variants of wasta (intercession and mediation), their historic development and interrelatedness. While wasta often follows one of the two “protocols”, mediation or intercession, it has to be observed that it goes deeper than this and can in fact be looked at as a sort of “worldview”, as will be argued in the last part of the section.

Samih Farsoun states: “The wasta procedure is complex, its rules varied depending on the sphere and nature of the activity whether it is legal, familial or economic.”98 Wasta is a multifaceted phenomenon. It can be divided into two main varieties or aspects: mediation and intercession. Mediation is a way of conflict settlement rooted in tribal custom. Intercession is a contemporary and often controversially viewed practice of gaining a benefit through personal contact.


Today wasta is more frequently discussed in its intercessory variant and in its connection with corruption. However, as Cunningham and Sarayrah point out, “[b]oth mediation and intercession have a long history - mediation in settling tribal and family disputes and intercession in dealing with Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman bureaucracies.” In contemporary spoken Arabic, mediational wasta is often called by a different term “wasata”, a difference which often goes unacknowledged in English literature. In oral discussions with Arabic speakers, often the difference is pointed out with great fervour, spurred by the desire to keep a hand's width of clear water between “corrupt” intercessional wasta and “noble” mediational wasata. However, many authors (including Arabs) follow the nomenclature first suggested by Cunningham and Sarayrah and speak of wasta as a complex including intercession as well as mediation. The same terminology shall be used in the present study but the reader needs to be aware that Arab native speakers might at times employ (and even defend with great conviction) a slightly different one.

### 2.3.1. Mediational Wasta

Mediation might today seem to be the less prominent of the two aspects of wasta. To urban dwellers in the Arab world wasta is mostly associated with intercession, i.e. obtaining a benefit through a well positioned family member, friend or acquaintance. But the wasta phenomenon remains deeply rooted in Middle Eastern tribal conflict settlement. Therefore mediational wasta will be discussed first. It is useful to begin by briefly outlining a typical course of events in traditional Middle Eastern tribal conflict settlement.

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99 While mediational wasta is usually a means to restore peace and harmony and unequivocally judged as beneficial, intercessory wasta leads to favorable treatment for those who have wasta at the cost of those who do not have it. For a full discussion of wasta and corruption see 2.5. Critical Views of Wasta: Common Criticisms, Fairness, Corruption and Ideas for Improvement.
100 Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta*, 1–2.
101 Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah: “Wasata, or wasta, means the middle, …” Ibid., 1.; Makhoul and Harrison claim that wasata is the colloquial for the modern standard Arabic word waseet, mediator, Makhoul and Harrison, “Intercessory Wasta and Village Development in Lebanon,” 1.
103 A definition more deeply rooted in cultural anthropological theory describes the difference between the two aspects in greater detail. Huxley speaks of “medial, superior, political exchange status” (=intercession) and “medial, mutual, social exchange status” (=mediation). Frederick C. Huxley, *Wasita in a Lebanese Context: Social Exchange Among Villagers and Outsiders*, vol. 64, Anthropological Papers 9999, 1978, 113. This clarifies the differentiation but will be of no relevance for our purposes.
2.3.1.1. **Traditional Mediation: The Guest House**

At the beginning stands a conflict between two groups or individuals. Scenarios of discord which are quoted in literature about conflict settlement in the Arab Middle East include among other things accidents which result in damage, injury or fatality, divorce cases and disputes over land or housing space.\(^{104}\) Any such conflict will not just be perceived as a conflict between the individuals directly involved, but also between their groups, i.e. families and tribes.\(^{105}\)

The defendant's family will initiate the mediation and send a wasta or a wasta delegation (then referred to as *jaha*) to the harmed party's family. This first contact serves two purposes. First, the wasta will negotiate *utwa* (truce)\(^{106}\) which usually lasts 30 days.\(^{107}\) This is necessary because revenge for the perpetration is seen as natural. Gellner states: “The most characteristic institution of such a society is the feud. An offence perpetrated by a member of a group A against a member of group B is followed by retaliation by any member of B against any member of A.”\(^{108}\) Thus unless a truce is negotiated, the male members of the conflicting clans or families would take it on themselves to avenge the victim. During the truce period this is prohibited. In serious cases such as murder or rape the perpetrator will possibly even go to jail for his protection until a truce is negotiated.\(^{109}\) The second purpose of the first contact between the conflict parties is to ask for permission to bring in a formal peacemaking delegation.\(^{110}\) The agreed truce period thus gives the perpetrator's side time to set up a delegation and negotiate the final settlement of the conflict. The

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105 Mediation also occurs in a very similar fashion for positive purposes such as marriage. Mediation will work in a very similar or slightly less complex way, therefore we shall look at mediation for the purpose of conflict settlement here.


108 Ernest Gellner, “Tribalism and the State in the Middle East,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. P. S. Khouy and J. Kostiner (University of California Press, 1990), 109. Gellner goes on to explain: “If peace is made and compensation paid, members of A all make a contribution, and the members of the receiving group B all share it. The consequence of this kind of institutionalisation of collective responsibility is that each group has a strong incentive to police its own members. No one else can do it for them, and they will suffer if they fail to do it.” (Partly quoted in Fathi, *Jordan*, 53.)


110 Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 9; Cf. also Gellner, Patrons and Clients, 228.
wasta, often the shaykh in a traditional and rural setting, will host and manage the negotiations.

The negotiations traditionally take place in the madafa, the village's guest house: “It was in the guest house that conflict resolution and its sometime culmination, formal peace-making (sulha), took place, and the noble gestures of hospitality and generosity were allowed full play.”

The madafa is under the authority of the local shaykh and serves as “the final court of appeal and fount of generosity.”

During the negotiations, especially when there seems to be a dead end or the conflicting parties cannot seem to agree over a particular point, it is possible to have sub-negotiations between members of both delegations in addition to the main negotiations. This would occur during breaks, before or after negotiation sessions in very small groups, often one-on-one, in a separate room. This so-called mulakah has two decisive aspects, which give it its special place in the mediation process: First, they are direct (dyadic) as opposed to mediated (triadic). Second, they are “more intimate” i.e. what is said is kept secret from the wider circle of negotiators. This is particularly relevant considering society’s shame-focus, which was discussed above. In the privacy and confidentiality of a mulakah side-negotiation, negotiators might be free to say things that assist in bringing a resolution but might be seen as weaknesses or a point of shame in the plenum of negotiators.

Eventually an agreement will be reached and peace-making will be expressed through kissing, pronouncements of confession and forgiveness. The wasta or head of negotiations will proclaim peace and a meal or feast will be held in order to celebrate the reconciliation. It might fall to the wasta to organise and host this feast at the guest house.

111 Antoun, “Institutionalized Deconfrontation,” 144.
112 Antoun, Low-Key Politics, 71.
113 “Dyadic diplomacy, what the Egyptian anthropologist Hamed Ammar has termed the mulaqa, was an effective technique used at a number of points.” Antoun, “Institutionalized Deconfrontation,” 157.
114 “One of the most effective devices in Arab councils is the so-called ‘mulakah’ (a getting together), where on any dilemma in the course of argument, one or two persons from the mediators take one person or more from the disputing sides for a ‘mulakah’ to persuade him in a corner, or another room away from the general meeting, through personal and more intimate hearing to follow what mediators proposed.” Ibid., 158.
2.3.1.2. Underlying principles

A. Every conflict equals a damaged relationship.
Wasta takes place in collectivist, kinship-oriented societies as they were outlined above. Wasta is, as Farrag points out, ‘universal in village and town.’117 As mentioned, in a collectivist society people tend to define themselves by their membership in groups and the relationships they have among each other. If there is no explicit friendship or family bond to a given person, members of such societies will subconsciously still perceive themselves as being related to one another, whereas people from individualised cultures will think of themselves as independent from one another. Clan affiliation becomes apparent as soon as basic information like family name and place of birth of a person are disclosed. There is a high awareness for positive links or feuds between clans.118 Thus, while Westerners might view a conflict primarily as a disagreement over facts between independent individuals, in the collectivist, kinship oriented societies of the Middle East any conflict will primarily be viewed as a damaged relationship.

B. Conflicts are to be settled within the community; conflict settlement is obligatory.
Thus, if a conflict arises between two individuals in a village, the conflict will not just be seen as a conflict between two individuals, but between their respective families. It will accordingly not be settled between the two but by elders from each side who serve as mediators. That any conflict of some severity is to be solved on a community level is taken for granted. Antoun, describing village life of Jordanian peasants, lists in detail the rights and obligations of any “son of the village (ibn al-balad)” and tellingly conflict settlement is a right as well as an obligation:

118 Al-Ramahi, talking about business contracts, states: “Jordan, and especially Amman, is very small and is a place where everyone knows each other or knows someone that does. Whenever people meet for the first time, it is important to identify the person’s tribe of origin from his/her surname. Then the individuals will try to refer to someone from that family or tribe that he/she knows. In some way, this is the Jordanian way of establishing trust.” Al-Ramahi, “Wasta in Jordan,” 58.
If there was a thorny problem, a quarrel of some kind, he could go to the elders of the community (*shuyukh al-balad*) and ask them to intervene and help reconcile the parties. … If he committed an error, and the community through its elders of leading members publicly came to him as a delegation (*jaha*) to ask him to curb his anger and end his estrangement with the other party, he had to quickly make amends to the individual he had insulted or against whom he had acted. Failure to do so would then alienate the delegation of elders and martial community sentiment against him through gossip, and jeopardize his future social and economic relations.¹¹⁹

The right to receive mediation together with the obligation to respond to mediation attempts from others underlines the central role it plays in traditional Middle Eastern community life.

C. **Harmony is more important than victory.**
Following the obligatory character of conflict settlement, it can be assumed that both parties come to the guest house with a certain determination to be reconciled. Antoun states that an underlying assumption behind the conflict settlement in the guest house is that “...the parties involved wish to be reconciled (whatever their overt statements) or, if not, that they must be convinced that the basic value to be considered is harmony and not victory.”¹²⁰

The eventual outcome of the reconciliation might often take a form that makes it ambivalent which party has won and which has lost.¹²¹ That way both parties retain their honour, which is desirable for the stability of the community and the initial conflict ends “as a process of social control in which men are led to subordinate their interests for the sake of the wider social unit.”¹²²

D. **The nature of the resulting peace is behavioural, not emotional.**
A mediation is successful once an agreement is reached and both families can resume normal relations again. This does not mean that they emotionally forgive each other or reconstitute a heartfelt friendship. Mediation often results in what Rubin calls conflict “settlement” (conflicting parties change their behaviour), as opposed to conflict “resolution” (conflicting parties change their

¹¹⁹ Antoun, “Institutionalized Deconfrontation,” 142–143.
¹²⁰ Ibid., 162.
¹²¹ Cf. Ibid., 162.
¹²² Ibid., 162.
attitude, which makes the resurgence of the conflict less likely). Not even the celebrations at the end of the reconciliation process carry the latter meaning. The peace agreement means that honour and respect are reconstituted to the damaged family, which takes precedence over all other aspects such as emotions. Antoun notes that the peace reached is “fictive (the public demonstration that hard feelings and estrangement have disappeared), pragmatic (allowing resumption of normal social relations) and educational (as the villagers put it, ‘our guest house councils are our schools’ [al-majalis madaris]); and not psychological or ethical.” The essence of the peace-agreement lies not in change of attitudes (the antagonism might even persist afterwards), but in the normalisation of behaviour as well as in a moral reality: “You have done the right thing,’ says the community / society.”

To summarise, it is worth quoting Antoun, who uses the term “institutionalized confrontation” to capture the essence of tribal mediation:

[A]lmost all encounters and confrontations eventually wind up as encounters-by-mediation. This widespread tendency to resolve competition through go-betweens [wāṣtas] … delegations [jāhas] … and peace-making [ṣulḥas] … is called the “feedback loop.” The encounters-by-mediation are not in fact encounters; they are institutionalized deconfrontations: issues are resolved in the guest house by manipulating the idiom of blame and honor, weighing it against the nature of the breach and the social status and structural position of the parties … and balancing it against goods which are given to the aggrieved party. At the end of the process a fiction of amity is established; it is unclear who has “won” and who has “lost,” since intangible rewards (honor, respect, prestige) are balanced against tangible rewards in a skilful manner, and the parties resume social relations.

In the following, implications of these principles will be discussed.

125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., 161–162.
2.3.1.3. **Implications of These Principles**

A. **The outcome of wasṭa mediation might not conform with principles of right and wrong.**

As mentioned earlier, the outcome of the mediation process might not conform with the law. Rather, it will be geared primarily towards appeasing both parties and restitute the balance of honour, respect and prestige (which is inseparably intertwined with balancing out tangible goods, monetary payments and social position). Ambiguity about who won and who lost, which would be seen as a dissatisfying outcome in Western society, can be a crucial device for restituting the balance of honour. The outcome will be informed by the conviction that reconciliation is the higher value than accurate administration of law. Antoun states that “[i]n a multiplex community where one’s neighbours are also one’s kinsmen, one’s co-religionists, one’s recreation-mates, one’s prospective marriage allies, one’s political allies, and one’s economic insurance, it is critical to preserve the social harmony of the group rather than freedom or even justice.”

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B. **The outcome of mediation is not necessarily in line with the preferences of the conflicting individuals or parties.**

Reconciliation and the balance and harmony of the wider community have the potential to not just eclipse considerations of right and wrong but also the pleas of the individuals concerned. Antoun quotes an elaborate case where a young woman filed to the religious court a petition for confirmation of divorce after her husband had a fight with her father over the dowry. The husband had repeatedly uttered threats of divorce in confrontations with the wife as well as with her father. The court, however, could not determine whether divorce had been pronounced the obligatory three consecutive times. Thus the court failed to resolve the matter satisfactorily and tribal mediation ensued under the pasha of the area. After long negotiations and many turns of events which need not concern us here, the marriage was confirmed and the mukhtar sums up what informed the decision in this case: “The giving (in marriage) is closer to good will than divorce [emphasis

127 Ibid., 171.
128 Cf. Ibid., 146ff.
added].”

This explanation is a reflection of the principle that “abrasive encounters” and “disruptive confrontations” are to be avoided in order to protect the close-knit community in its balance – if confrontations have to be carried out, this shall only occur in the guesthouse under the auspices of the mediating council of elders.

C. There is a danger of abuse.

The emphasis on harmony in traditional mediation opens mediational wasta to a peculiar form of abuse. Victor Ayoub recounts an example of a dispute over farming land in a Lebanese village. The petitioner was laying claim again on a piece of land that had been sold years before. He tried to set wasta mediation in motion, probably thinking (as Ayoub analyses) “that sufficient ambiguity existed in the original sale to make it worth a try.” The defendant, a school teacher, surprisingly did not accept wasta mediation, but took the case to court and won. Ayoub concludes that “the former landowner may have reasoned that this mediation procedure would be operative and so he could garner something for his efforts.” When asked why he did not accept mediation but opted for the court, the teacher cited the appeasing and harmony-oriented aspect of wasta-mediation that he disliked:

Someone will come to the people who are in disagreement with one another and try to bring them together and compromise … for example, they may come to us and talk and say that we shouldn't have this kind of bad feelings between us and we should try to find some way to come to an agreement … and then maybe they will suggest that I give him a small piece of the land back to satisfy him and everything will be all right.

Therefore he opted for the court. While this case is highly unusual, it helps to understand the focus on harmony over victory and social balance over right or wrong and how traditional mediation can potentially be misused. Ayoub describes the role of the wasta-mediators in contrast to the courts:

129 Ibid., 172.
130 Ibid., 171.
131 Ayoub, “Conflict Resolution and Social Reorganization in a Lebanese Village,” 147.
132 Ibid., 149, emphasis added.
133 Ibid.
They [the mediators, E.S.], too, are neither expressly interested in determining the guilt or innocence of any party in the dispute nor the rightness or wrongness of one claim over the other. They mediate. They do not arbitrate. They do not judge. The courts can make judgments and have them enforced regardless of any disputant's objections. However, the courts reflect a principle of organization coexisting with but, in important respects, incompatible with that of the clan, and an appeal to them has not been a popular alternative.  

D. **Wasta runs parallel to the court system.**

Mediatonal wasta runs parallel to the court system. Traditionally the state and the legal system did not have much relevance for many Jordanians / Middle Easterners. On the contrary, the personal (and particularly familial) network is of great importance. Often courts will not even hear a case until the matter has been dealt with according to tribal customs. The part of a conflict pertaining to civil law will be decided first through tribal mediation, the part pertaining to penal law will only afterwards be decided by the court, once written notice has been received by the court that the personal rights matters are settled. Or cases decided in court will be mediated again following the official court proceedings. Antoun, writing on rural Jordan in the 60s, states that for most people tribal conflict resolution is “much to be preferred to the other formal alternatives available: the civil court, the Islamic court, and the sub-district officer or other local bureaucrats.” Resorting to these instances was only for the purpose of “going one up on one’s opponent and forcing him back into the guest house for a genuine resolution of the dispute.”

Furthermore, as Ayoub notes, many conflicts are more easily resolved by wasta than in the courtroom. He describes a case in Lebanon in the 50s where an accident had been witnessed by several people but

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134 Ibid., 143.
138 Ibid., 163.
[w]hen the case was brought before the magistrate however, the witnesses denied that the accident had occurred under the conditions specified. The magistrate declared his helplessness under the circumstances. The case was dropped. He recommended that the disputants resort to the clan mode of adjudication, the *waasta*. ... Litigation between villagers is often difficult to administer in the courts. Both judges and lawyers, in anticipation of an impasse when a case is brought to trial, urge resolution by means of the *waasta*.

In a case of abduction, Ayoub recounts how gendarmes who had been called to the crime scene where a door had been broken into refused to testify in court “that their investigation had revealed any evidence of the use of force.” Even lawyers, judges and police officers accept and support the role of *wasta* mediation as complementary or even superior to the rule of law.

Aseel Al-Ramahi, suggesting traditional conflict settlement practices as a useful pattern for present-day international business arbitration, even goes as far as saying that “the ritual of *wasta* in Jordanian society is necessarily [sic] to resolve disputes and foster reconciliation. It is recognised by the government as a legally acceptable tradition of Bedouin tribes that could be invoked in parallel to any official justice.”

E. **Honour and shame play a big role during negotiations.**

The negotiation process might also be heavily influenced by considerations of honour and shame. As discussed, honour is linked to what the community will know and see. Acting honourably or shamefully only becomes “real” as it is recognised by the community. Hence, when negotiations get stuck and *mulakah* is practised, the main advantage is that negotiators can speak unrestricted by honour considerations. Facts might be discussed, concessions made, compromises found in a way not possible in the plenum.

**2.3.2. Intercessory Wasta**

In intercession, the client pursues a favour, benefit or other good. The client wants to establish a link to the source of the favour (usually a powerful person or institution) but he cannot do so by himself.

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139 Ayoub, “Conflict Resolution and Social Reorganization in a Lebanese Village,” 144.
140 Ibid., 146.
He thus resorts to calling in wasta. The wasta is able to establish the link.

The link between client and source might either be too weak to carry the favour or it might be non-existent altogether. In the first case, the role of the wasta is to stand in for the client and add or improve an aspect to the weak relationship. This could be trust, security or urgency.

In the second case it is the task of the wasta to establish the relationship between client and source. This might be by simply introducing two persons to one another, forwarding a CV or other communication, granting access to events or buildings and other things.

### 2.3.2.1. Who renders it?

Traditionally, elders, shaykhs or other wasta personalities would make it their task to help their families and clans by giving them access to resources and benefits as far as they could. Wasta would be practised e.g. between an older, urbanised member of a clan and a younger member from a rural area having to deal with bureaucracy in the city, getting any paperwork sorted out, seeking admission to university or a job placement and other things. The wasta provider would be of high standing and thus able to influence relevant people to make available the benefit sought.

Today, intercessory wasta is often more specified. A person might function as a wasta giver in only one particular domain, typically in his field of work. The higher degree of specialisation also means that more wasta connections are needed for different favours. Thus, wasta services are increasingly offered outside the typical clan and family constellations.¹⁴² Wasta can be offered and exercised on the spot, between strangers, in exchange for money or in the hope that the favour will be usefully returned in the future, or to increase one's honour by helping a stranger.

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¹⁴² However, as Cunningham and Sarayrah point out, family still plays a central role in most people's wasta-networks: “Family members often open businesses related to agencies in which their relatives are prominent. If a relative is minister of health, one opens a pharmacy, or imports medicines, […] If a relative is minister of trade, one becomes a clearing agent...” Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta*, 11.
2.3.2.2. Four different degrees of legitimacy

The wasta transaction could lead to one of the following four scenarios\(^\text{143}\) that are different each in their degree of legitimacy.

A. Overcoming Unfamiliarity with a Certain Process

The wasta seeker is not able to obtain the favour or service sought on his own because he might be “unfamiliar with the process.”\(^\text{144}\) He might be from a different town or area or a foreigner altogether. Cunningham points out that this traditionally concerned rural people in Jordan who had to deal with institutions in the city.

B. Bypassing Regular Waiting Time

The wasta seeker might be denied a service he is legitimately entitled to or a service might be delayed (or might generally take an unreasonably long time even under normal circumstances). The wasta helps “to cut through red tape or to level the playing field” and the client gets the service (faster).\(^\text{145}\) As Cunningham points out, while the first two scenarios seem commendable forms of helping another individual in an underprivileged position, it is already here that unfairness can take hold: if the delay or long waiting period for the service in question concerns many or all applicants, but only few have wasta and can speed up the process, corruption and unfairness have a first foothold.\(^\text{146}\)

C. Bypassing Meritocratic Criteria

The third category is particular to benefits that are usually linked to merit: admission to university, scholarships, jobs and promotions. If wasta is used in these instances, the strength of the wasta might outweigh the merit of the applicant.\(^\text{147}\) Jobs or university places might be allotted to less suitable candidates by virtue of their influential wasta. As El-Said and Harrigan point out, this is

\(^{143}\) Cf. Ibid., 13.
\(^{144}\) Ibid.
\(^{145}\) Al-Ramahi, “Competing Rationalities,” 207.
\(^{147}\) Cf. Ibid., 13.
particularly problematic as it can decrease effectiveness on a societal level.\footnote{148 El-Said and Harrigan describe how this has been the case in the public sector in Jordan since the 70s when “...bribery, corruption, and nepotism sapped the capacity of the state, and created a wasteful and inefficient public sector that drained the treasury.” Hamed El-Said and Jane Harrigan, “‘You Reap What You Plant:’ Social Networks in the Arab World—the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,” \textit{World Development} 37, no. 7 (2009): 1242.}

\textbf{D. Bypassing Legal Constrains}
Lastly, wasta might be used in order to receive benefits or favours to which one is not legally entitled.\footnote{149 Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, \textit{Wasta}, 13.} Cunningham and Sarayrah criticise this form of wasta as one which “corrupts the distribution system, even if one's motives are honorable and the outcome is a good deed.”\footnote{150 Ibid., 13.} It is therefore akin to the third category as it can have negative consequences on a societal level and spoil the orderly principles of the distribution of goods and services beyond the question of fairness and meritocracy.

\textbf{2.3.3. The Development of Wasta}
To appreciate how wasta has been evolving in the past and might in the future, it is helpful to look at the development of tribal law, mediation, intercession and corruption.

Tribal law has long been abolished in Jordan but remains relevant. Al-Ramahi states:

The Tribal Control Laws of 1936 served as the legal basis for the Tribal Courts for forty years. In 1976, the Laws and the Courts were abolished to allow for the application of one law for all citizens. In practice, tribal law continues to regulate social relations in Jordan today. State officials, as well as the King, actively encourage it and sometimes act as mediators in conflict resolution conducted following tribal custom. Often, formal court proceedings are accompanied by an agreement for compensation arrived at between the two families through the process of \textit{wasta} and \textit{jaha}. Such successful resolution has the effect of encouraging the court to be lenient on the offender. Thus, tribal customary law remains an integral part of the Jordanian legal system.\footnote{151 Al-Ramahi, “Competing Rationalities,” 221.}

This seems logical considering the collectivist and kinship-oriented structure of Jordan. Antoun recounts the changes in Kufr al-Ma, a northern Jordanian village he researched in the early 1960s and visited again in 1979 and cites as a “shock” for him the fact that he was insistently asked what
he thought about the madafa, the guest house. Residents were questioning its very concept in a way that would have been unthinkable a mere 20 years earlier.152 While acknowledging this change, he concludes that at his time of writing (1990s) tribal custom still persisted in Kufr al-Ma and elsewhere in Jordan partly because of “the fact that they are the only cross-community pan-societal cultural and social mechanisms that emphasize personal dignity in a world increasingly released from clanship and close kinship norms and increasingly differentiated and stratified by wealth and education.”153 Subsequently one must assume that as long as Middle Eastern societies will retain their collectivist outlook and their focus on kinship, tribal values will persist.

Although wasta is viewed critically for its potentially corrupt part (intercessory wasta), it has not significantly declined in the recent past. The reason is that “many adopt the paradoxical position of condemning the practice while employing it to solve their problems.” 154

Looking into the future there is indication that wasta will not decline despite its bad reputation as a corrupt practice: Crawford and Mapstone found in their study on wasta in the United Arab Emirates that wasta is more relevant among young people than among older people. Their interpretation is that this is a reflection of the rapid modernisation of the UAE states and the fears young people have as they are facing an increasingly liberalised job market.155 Despite being an old, traditional cultural pattern, wasta does not appear to be a practice that is phasing out like other old customs do as the young, globalised generation is taking over in the Middle East. This can be explained with our earlier interpretation that wasta is a function of collectivism: it will persist along with collectivism and it will become more relevant to people when they feel their collectivistic base is under threat. The forces of modernisation and globalisation can pose precisely such a threat. Only

153 Ibid., 170.
154 Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 15; Cf. also the research of Sakijha and Kilani: Sakijha and Kilani, Towards Transparency in Jordan; Sakijha and Kilani, Wasta.
time will tell in which direction the Arab states will develop; this is particularly apparent at the time of writing with the so-called “Arab Spring” and its subsequent crises sweeping across the region. However, it can be concluded that for the time being tribal values and practices such as wasta, in its intercessional as well as mediational form, have a strong foothold throughout Arab society and there is little indication this will easily change in the near future.\(^{156}\)

### 2.3.4. Mediational and Intercessory Wasta: Distinct yet Related

The two variations of wasta (mediational and intercessory) include two aspects: a relationship and a benefit. While both variants include both aspects, they stress those aspects differently.

Both mediation and intercession include the facilitation or enhancement of a relationship. In mediation, the more traditional aspect of wasta, the relational aspect is the dominant one: restoring or mending a relationship which has been damaged. If, for example, one person damages another’s property or even health, the relationship between the two is damaged and a conflict may arise over reparations or recompense.

In a traditional or rural setting the two conflicting parties might have had an explicit relationship prior to the conflict. As seen above they will normally live in a collectivist, kinship-oriented community where a connection through ties of kinship, marriage or at least acquaintance and daily business can be made to virtually any other member of that community. In a collectivist community the settlement of any such conflict is in the public interest because society functions on networks of basic relationships between individuals, families and clans. Conflict thus threatens communal life on a basic level. Families and peer groups will urge their members not to live in sustained conflict with anyone.

\(^{156}\) Hutchings and Weir compare the development of wasta and guanxi, a similar practice in China: “In the Arab World, wasta has also effectively been used to override established laws and traditions where they existed and are used in place of relevant regulations and standards. However, whereas in China there has been a recognition in recent years that to play on the international economic stage depends upon following Western conventional legal practice, in much of the Arab World, wasta continues to be used in place of a system of international business regulations.” Hutchings and Weir, “Guanxi and Wasta: A Comparison,” 148.
In an urban setting the two conflicting parties might or might not be related in such a way. A conflict between neighbours might follow similar rules as described above. A car accident might happen between complete strangers. Still, even in that case, mediation might be employed. In an accident, for example, it is very common that both parties call a friend or family member who rush to the scene and mediate. If there were a fatality, wasta mediation would be set in motion even between unrelated families. In this case, a conflict also constitutes a relationship, namely a negatively signed one. Instinctively Arabs will seek out mediational wasta to mend the situation.

The aspect of benefit is also present in mediational wasta but in an abstract way. Functional relationships are beneficial to any member of a collectivist society as well as for the society as a whole. Consciously or subconsciously this benefit will work as a driving force behind the mediation process. The conflicting parties, their families and peers and the wasta himself will all work towards an agreement because they know that this benefits everyday community life.

In intercessory wasta, the benefit is the primary aspect. First, a certain benefit is desired, e.g. a job or admission to university. Second, a link or relationship to the source of this benefit (e.g. the company or university) must be established. The wasta seeker will consider which person in his extended network might be able to do this.

In a more rural or traditional setting a family might have only one or very few wasta-relatives who help all their relatives with a wide range of transactions. This is especially true with respect to families from the countryside who might have a few relatives in the city who regularly serve as wasta to facilitate everything which has to do with bureaucracy in the city.

In an urban context, however, wastas will only function as facilitators in a very limited field, often connected to their professional life. A wasta seeker will hence think carefully which relationship, link or connection needs to be activated in order to access the benefit sought and which wasta could facilitate such a relationship. Thus the relationship activated is subordinate to the benefit sought. It
might not even be a relationship to a family or friend, but a relationship purely geared towards wasta.

The following can be concluded: Both intercessory and mediational wasta include both the aspects of a benefit and a relationship. Both aspects are differently stressed. In intercessional wasta the relationship is a function of the benefit desired. In mediational wasta the benefit is a function of the relationship mended.

2.3.5. **Wasta as a “Worldview”**

As was seen, the two dynamics of wasta (intercession and mediation) are distinct yet related, a fact which helps analyse and understand encounters and transactions in greater detail. It needs to be added at this point that wasta is more than a protocol or set of rules for human interaction in the Arab Middle East. It is not just the sum of its behavioural rules, but rooted in a mindset which could be paraphrased in Antoun's statement that “a man’s/woman’s case is best presented by others[,]”\(^\text{157}\)

Wasta dynamics and behaviours often occur subconsciously, without even using the term and often without a real “need” for wasta. Awareness of the fact that wasta is often ingrained in the mindset and world-view of its users is necessary in order to understand the true depth of the phenomenon.

For example, in a university context, students might have a general plea or request to make from their teacher. While university is a notorious arena for intercessory wasta\(^\text{158}\) this writer has repeatedly experienced situations where wasta dynamics were at work; however these never played out in the form of intercession nor mediation. Often students might have general requests to make, e.g. information on requirements for a scholarship or a breakdown of the current term’s grades. Even though not even an attempt may be made to gain preferential treatment (and thus no implications of intercessory wasta) and there may be not a hint of conflict (and thus no implications

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\(^{157}\) Antoun, “Institutionalized Deconfrontation,” 162.

\(^{158}\) Cunningham and Sarayrah devote a whole chapter to wasta in the university. Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta*, pt. IV.
of mediational wasta), students might still often choose to come in pairs or groups *as if* bringing in wasta. The accompanying friends or fellow-students will even behave like wastas during a consultation. They make the initial request, do most of the talking, try to improve the atmosphere of the discussion, even though they will not eventually influence the outcome of the discussion in any way.

A similar observation can be made in public offices in Jordan. People may take friends or family members along when having to go through a particular administrative process, e.g. registering a car or renewing a passport. Again, the accompanying friend or relative might show behaviour of a wasta, e.g. do some of the talking, but ultimately does not influence the transaction. The public administration is an arena for intercessory wasta just as much as the university yet many cases can be observed where friends are brought in who act like wastas but do not actually possess any relevant connections, queue like anybody else and go through the required processes in full length.

Al-Ramahi points out that wasta is a “value in itself” and a “pattern of social interaction.” This is a fitting description for the situations described above. Wasta is, on the one hand, rooted in formal tribal mediation. However, it is also present as an underlying mindset that anything a person could require from another is best accessed through a third person, a mediator. Whenever possible, many Arabs will choose to have their plea presented by even the weakest of mediators, a peer who – from a Western perspective - cannot represent them any better than they could themselves. In those moments the decision to take a mediator is not a functional one, but one of culture, where mediation is a basic value and mindset.

Wasta encompasses a wide spectrum of acts and services carried out by a go-between for a client. These acts and services can be very different from each other in nature. Successful peacemaking in a fierce conflict is quite different from snitching a job off a better qualified competing applicant

159 Cunningham and Sarayrah describe the customs department and others in quite some detail, cf. Ibid., pt. II.4.
because of personal friends in high places. Underlying these and other transactions, however, is the same basic principle; namely that “intervention by third parties is always commendable.” This view, which is universally held and explicitly stated with regard to conflicts, is also at work when intercession is sought, and even where modern life has become so impersonalised that the third party has no impact at all anymore. Arabs will subconsciously gravitate to mediation and, following their collectivist instinct, drag matters into the arena of their community, i.e. the collective.

While the different economies behind mediation and intercession are important to discern, it is equally important to discover almost unrecognisable traits of mediational and intercessory wasṭa in the everyday melange of behaviours and roles of Arab society. No relationship exists in isolation. Linda Layne criticises that “[a]s in the case of honor, scholarship on wasṭa has focused on the male/formal manifestations of the system […] the roles of pashas (elders of the largest clans chosen by Turkish authorities), clan elders, muktars [chiefs of town quarters, E.S.]” when instead, as Lawrence Rosen states, “‘[e]very relationship implies an obligation [emphasis added].’” Every relationship has unspoken (and maybe even unconscious) implications of mutual support, including mediation on one another's behalf.

2.4. Wasta Actors: Characteristics and Relationships

Wasta is a triadic constellation with three main actors. 1) The wasṭa client is the person seeking mediation in a given conflict or intercession for a benefit or service. 2) The source might be a person or institution who disposes of or is the gatekeeper over the desired benefit. In mediation it might be the person or group of people holding the power to agree to a peace agreement in a conflict. 3) The wasṭa giver, or just wasṭa, is the one making the connection between 1) and 2).

161 Antoun, “Institutionalized Deconfrontation,” 162 [emphasis E.S.].
163 The triadic nature of wasṭa is implied by the etymology (w s t = middle) and confirmed by its practice. It is rarely acknowledged explicitly in literature. See however Brandstaetter's recent dissertation who discusses the implications of wasṭa's triadic nature, Brandstaetter, “Wasta.”
The wasta giver and seeker show distinct characteristics and behaviours which are related to their role in a wasta transaction. It is essential for our purposes to look at these characteristics in detail as they constitute an important interface for the later connection with the letter to the Hebrews.

2.4.1. The Wasta

In a more traditional or rural setting the wasta role is usually associated with the oldest males in the family or clan.\textsuperscript{164} They are the ones who deliver mediational wasta as well as intercessory wasta.

The role of the traditional wasta is usually associated with honour and respect. “Personal qualities that are highly respected are, for example, respect for elders, martiality, courage, generosity, kin-group loyalty and hospitality.”\textsuperscript{165} In mediation, conflicting parties will only work with a wasta who is honourable and thus respected. Peacemaking is seen as a very honourable thing. The success of the mediation process is directly linked to the honour of the wasta. If peacemaking is successful it will add to the wasta's honour and the greater his honour and reputation becomes, the more future conflicting parties will consult him and constructively work with him towards the settlement of their conflict.\textsuperscript{166} This is also true for intercession as Barnett remarks: while corruption is frowned upon, even by Middle Easterners, wasta is often seen as different and “a source of pride and prestige both for the waseet and for those who gain favorable treatment via wasta.”\textsuperscript{167} How Middle Easterners evaluate wasta is a complex question and will be discussed in greater detail below (cf. 2.5). At this point it is important to note that despite a general disregard for corruption, the wasta giver is still seen as a person of honour.

\textsuperscript{164} “Traditionally, the head of the family performed wasta services.” Cunningham and Sarayrah, \textit{Wasta}, 2.

\textsuperscript{165} Fathi, \textit{Jordan}, 56. Fathi is drawing on Wolfgang Weißleder, \textit{The Nomadic Alternative} (Mouton, 1978), 7–9.

\textsuperscript{166} Muller states: “Arab lore is full of stories of how wise and skilful men have intervened in difficult situations. In fact, many national rulers gain their fame and reputation from their skills at ending tribal strife.” Muller, \textit{Honor and Shame}, 50. Alon, speaking of tribal law in Jordan, states that “third parties stood to gain much in terms of prestige if their intervention and mediation (wasta) led to the settlement of a dispute.” Alon, \textit{Making of Jordan}, 18–19. “Faour, speaking of mediation in marriage in the arab world, points out that honour and authority are characteristics particular to mediators in the arab world (while e.g. fairness and acceptability to the conflicting parties are universal to mediators in most cultures). Cf. Muhammad Faour, “Conflict Management,” in \textit{Conflict Resolution in the Arab World: Selected Essays.}, ed. Paul Salem (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1997), 193.

The wasta's connections are another important aspect. In a tribal or rural context this means that 1) in order to mediate in conflicts he himself must be on good terms with the majority of families in his community and 2) in order to facilitate favours he has to have favour with key-holder-personalities who dispose of such favours.

Lastly, it will now be seen that the traditional wasta is a man of good standing and wealth. The mediation process requires a lot of time, thus the wasta will need to be able to free himself from work on a regular basis. Also, the mediation process usually has to do with hospitality. The wasta needs to host peace-making delegations, offer food and drink and will often also host a celebration of the peace-deal once it has been struck and thus needs financial means. Traditionally, negotiations are hosted in the village's guest house, which is run by the shaykh.168 Antoun quotes the expression that “[t]he guest house requires porridge[, i]t’s not a masquerade” as an illustration for the fact that the tribal leaders engaging in mediation need resources to fulfill their role.169 Hospitality is linked to honour170 as well as wealth and a hallmark of the traditional wasta. Faour points out that wealthy mediators sometimes even give out incentives, e.g. offering financial assistance, to get the conflicting parties to agree to the proposed deal.171

Also intercessory wasta will often require financial resources and involve offering generous hospitality. A wasta who serves as his rural family's base in the city will regularly host guests who have to come to the city for some bureaucratic process. It is a matter of course that they do not stay in a hotel but with the wasta's family.172

Cunningham and Sarayrah describe how the patriarchal wasta figures of the Sarayrah family have retired or passed away without raising a new generation of wastas to carry on their work in the

168 Cf. Antoun, Low-Key Politics, 71.
169 Ibid., 210.
170 “Hospitality was not only a virtue but a point of honor. For a visitor to offer to reimburse his hosts marked him as a boor and, probably, an enemy.” Nyrop, Jordan, 69.
172 Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 63.
traditional way. Modern day wasta is not anymore tied to the family elders as much as it used to be and thus “[a]nyone with access to resources can practice wasta.” Accordingly, values shift and characteristics change. El-Said states that “[t]oday, a wasta performer no longer seeks social recognition and respect as the main reward for his/her efforts.”

It is logical that the aspect of respect, honour and recognition declines as wasta is not anymore a prerogative of the family elders. Additionally, as wasta shifts more and more from mediation to intercession, the modern wasta is not always characterised by the integrity which is expected of a mediator, but might even be suspected to lack integrity as a person who garners favours from people in a fast-paced, increasingly complex world. However, El-Said's statement that today's wasta does not seek social recognition and respect anymore needs to be qualified. Al-Ramahi states:

The traditional tribal wasta, the sheikh, was a man of honour, whose word was his bond, who would assume responsibility for his acts. Today’s wasta is too often a middle-man, seeking fame and fortune by doing favours. This form of wasta is spreading in Jordan due to the social and economic difficulties the country faces.

The honour and respect that characterised traditional wastas does not play the same role anymore. However, the modern wasta does have a distinct set of characteristics.

A short contemporary cartoon clip of the Saudi TV Channel MBC sums up the characteristics of the modern day wasta. In the clip, a young man finds a bottle from which a genie emerges, offering him one wish. The man complains other genies normally offered three wishes, but the genie cannot be influenced to change his mind. The man thinks for a moment and then pronounces his wish: a wasta. The genie is astonished and suggests the man better rethink his wish and change it to a e.g. million riyal or a piece of land in a wealthy neighbourhood of Riad. The man declines and the genie

\[173\] Cf. Ibid., 65.
\[174\] Ibid., 2.
\[175\] El-Said and Harrigan, “You Reap What You Plant,” 1244.
\[176\] Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 68.
\[177\] Al-Ramahi, “Competing Rationalities,” 207–208.
\[178\] “Wasta” (MBC, YouTube, n.d.), http://youtu.be/OIl_JVbDqTE.
produces a wasta. The man goes on to ask the wasta for a piece of land in Riad. After a phone call by the wasta the certificate of title to a piece of land in Riad is delivered on the spot by a courier, to the great astonishment of the onlooking genie. The man goes on to ask for a million rial which are delivered at a flick of the wasta's fingers. The genie, utterly amazed, tries to ask the wasta to grant him a wish as well, but the man interrupts him with a third request: he asks the wasta to influence the genie to give him three new wishes. The genie looks at him angrily, the man sticks out his tongue at the genie. The wasta asks the genie in an authoritative voice to grant three new wishes to the man. The genie replies that the system is to only grant one wish. The wasta repeats his order to grant three new wishes, adding “أنا فوق النظام” (“I am above the system.”) - the genie grumblingly agrees.

The following characteristics of modern day wastas are implied in the clip.

A. **Power**
The main attribute in focus here is power. The wasta is more effective than the genie. By implication, if he is portrayed as more effective than a mystical, supernatural being defined by the power to grant favours. He is the most powerful and effective means to achieve one's ends which exists. This is confirmed by the punch-line: “I am above the system!”

B. **Modernity**
Another attribute is modernity. He wears sunglasses and uses a mobile phone and is the contemporary opposite of the antiquated genie. The genie is an ineffective and arbitrary mediator, the wasta is the mediator of the man's desire, powerful and efficient far beyond the expectancy of the onlooking genie.
C. **Honour**

Even if not obvious, the wasta does display attributes of honour. In the cartoon he carries a huge belly, signifying his standing and influence. Both the man and later even the genie stroke and kiss the wasta's belly, signifying reverence. Here, comedy brings out a characteristic of the modern wasta which is not captured by most scholarly literature on the topic. The modern day wasta does have respect and honour (contra El-Said and Harrington\(^{179}\)), which is implied in the cartoon by the stroking and kissing of the belly. At the same time, the honour of the modern day wasta is different from the “simplicity”, “integrity” and “straightforwardness” of the traditional wasta.\(^{180}\) Rather, the modern day wasta is respected by his clients for his services but his “perceived lack of personal integrity makes him suspect in the eyes of his clients, although they do not show him that [emphasis added].”\(^{181}\) The modern day wasta is still characterised by the honour of the traditional Arab mediator personality, but in a compromised and often corrupted form.

D. **Factors for Success**

Cunningham and Sarayrah name four factors which make the success of a wasta transaction more likely:

1. The desired outcome is cheaper, easier, and more likely if fewer people are involved. 2. The desired outcome is less likely if the situation is contested (university scholarships, jobs, import licenses.) 3. In a contested situation, the desired outcome is more likely for the individual with the higher-status wasta. 4. The more publicized the situation in the media, the less likely that wasta can be effective.\(^{182}\)

This suggests the following characteristics for an effective wasta-giver:

1. **Exclusivity**

A wasta needs exclusive access to the source of the favour sought, or at least a fairly direct connection in order to involve as few people as possible in the whole process.

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\(^{180}\) Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta*, 65.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 68.

\(^{182}\) Ibid., 12.
2. and 3. Power and Status
In line with what was seen in the wasta cartoon clip, the effective wasta needs power and high status. He needs power in order to still have weight even in contested situations and status in order to outweigh the wasta of competitors.

Power and status are often linked. An exception to this rule, however, are people who occupy a service position for a person of high status. A secretary, driver or premises manager might have limited honour and status within society but can, due to his position, have disproportionately great power as mediator in as far as he or she can grant access or help supplicants gain the attention of the master.

4. Discretion and Confidentiality
The more attention a wasta situation attracts (not just in the media), the less likely success becomes. The reason for this is easily found in the shame-orientation of wasta societies. Shame, as it was seen, is a function of what society sees or notices. The more people get to observe the dealings of the wasta in a certain transaction, the easier it gets to accuse the wasta or the client of shameful corruption and unfairness.183

5. Availability
Lastly, a rather obvious characteristic of the wasta (modern or traditional) should not go unmentioned: the wasta giver is readily available for his clients. Speaking about wastas who occupy high ranking offices in politics, academia, the military or administration, Al-Ramahi states:

Once in power the occupier of the position is expected to serve the interests of his kinship group. His effectiveness in performing this social duty then forms the main criterion for his fellow tribesmen to judge him. The predominant social norm is that this figure would be expected to be easily accessible and would be asked to help his constituency handle all sorts of bureaucratic matters. “In fact, he functions as a modern sheikh.”184

183 Mohamad and Hamdy have described in their study how using wasta might inflict an outright “stigma” on the beneficiary, e.g. and employee might be looked down upon if his colleagues know he obtained his position through wasta. Cf. Mohamed and Hamdy, The Stigma of Wasta.
Availability is a plausible characteristic for the effective wasta because poor accessibility of a wasta person could lead to the applicant trying other ways to achieve his goal, which would compromise discretion and exclusivity.

2.4.2. The Wasta Client

Wasta is often talked about in language of possession. A person is said to “have” or “get” wasta; the initial characteristic of the wasta client is thus simply that he or she disposes of wasta.\footnote{"You better get wasta’ is a very common clause in speech.” Andrew Gardner, City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain (Cornell University Press, 2010), 154; Barnett et al state that “[o]ne is said to ‘have wasta’ when those from whom one can request assistance are in positions of power that make it possible for them to grant the requested assistance.” Barnett, Yandle, and Naufal, Regulation, Trust, and Cronyism in Middle Eastern Society: The Simple Economics of “Wasta,” 7201:2.}

It is difficult to define a set of characteristics for wasta clients because anyone can in principle become a wasta supplicant at any time. Some very general characteristics can be stated by way of deduction as they are simply complementary characteristics to those of the wasta. Thus the wasta seeker will usually be a person inferior to the wasta provider in honour and status. He or she might often be younger, less wealthy, less well connected and respected. Since wasta is often a means to access vital goods or services, the client often might not have a choice whether to employ wasta or not. In conflict mediation cases, reconciliation might have been forced on the client as a consequence of the principle that reconciliation is mandatory (cf. 2.3.1.2.B).

Considering the logic of honour and shame, however, it can be extrapolated that the wasta seeker will be a person of at least some standing since he must be worthy of the wasta giver's mediation or intercession. If after a deal has been struck or an employment has started the former wasta seeker misbehaves in any serious fashion, the honour of the wasta could be stained. This is particularly relevant in work-life and academia, two main arenas for wasta. Wasta is a triadic constellation. The wasta will have an interest to remain on good terms with the source of the favour, e.g. the employer under whom the wasta seeker eventually works. If the wasta seeker proves to be disadvantageous to the source, the honour of the reputation of the wasta giver is damaged and future cooperation.
becomes less likely. This suggests that there will be pressure on the wasta client to present himself as worthy before the transaction, when applying for the wasta service, as well as afterwards, once the favour has been granted.

Apart from this basic principle, he will also try to reciprocate the favour. This depends on how he is related to the wasta giver. If they are family, the wasta's service will be a taken for granted. Otherwise, the recompense can consist of mainly two things.

First, the wasta seeker will give the wasta giver praise and loyalty and thereby increase the wasta's fame and honour in the community. This is the more traditional version, where in a relatively closed community there are a few wasta personalities. They serve as wastas for their kin and friends and are respected by the whole community for their service. With every successful mediation or intercession their honour and respect is increased.

Second, if he can, the wasta seeker will reciprocate in form of another favour later and turn from wasta seeker into wasta giver. This reflects more the modern, urban variant of wasta, where services and wastas are rather specialised and wasta works in form of a (vast) network of family, friends and even relatively remote acquaintances who exchange wasta services. Long lists will consciously or subconsciously be kept. It can be observed how a person tries to get something done for a period of time without using wasta. If this is done unsuccessfully, he or she eventually just calls a friend for wasta who solves the problem in a matter of minutes. The reason for the person to not call on their friend straight away might be that this results in a debit from the “account” of favours and the person is now indebted to the friend who came to help.

186 “At the political level, wasta is one of the forms of patron-clientship 'with the political figure securing loyalty in exchange for assistance in the form of mediation.'” (Bates and Rassam, Peoples, 245) (202) (Bates and Rassam, Peoples, 245, quoted in Al Ramahi, Arbitration, 202) Al-Ramahi, “Competing Rationalities,” 202, quoting Daniel G. Bates and Amal Rassam, Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East (Prentice Hall, 2001), 245.

187 Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 14.

188 Cf. 6.2“Accounting Aspect” of Wasta.
2.4.3. The Source
The source or target of a wasta transaction is the person or institution disposing over the benefit sought. It receives little or no attention in scholarly work on wasta which indicates that its characteristics are difficult to systematise or not central to wasta itself. It needs to be noted that the source is typically distinct from the wasta itself. Wasta is third-party intervention, as shows the meaning of the root (w-s-t = middle).189 It is also an intrinsic fact of the wasta logic that the client can reach the source only through mediation of the wasta. This seems trivial but will become relevant later when examining the logic of mediation in Hebrews in the light of wasta.

2.4.4. Relationships
As the actors in a wasta constellation have different characteristics specific to their role, there are also typical ways in which they relate to each other. Here it is also useful to distinguish between more traditional wasta constellations as they might be found in rural areas, rather closed communities or among older people on the one hand and more contemporary constellations as they can be found in urban, more individualised settings or among younger people on the other hand.

2.4.4.1. Wasta – Client
The two most important questions here for our purposes are the questions of initiation and reciprocation. It will be seen later that these two aspects are particularly relevant to our reading of Hebrews in the context of wasta. It will first be discussed who initiates the wasta transaction and subsequently in what form the wasta's service is reciprocated.

A. Initiation
Traditionally, the wasta is often an elder of the client's family or clan. Thus the client will initiate the transaction. He will seek out the wasta, present his request and ask for the wasta's help. He might even have to include people along the way up the social ladder, e.g. a son will present his case to his father and then together with him see the shaykh. Other family members might be

189 Mohamed and Hamdy even make the aspect of “third party” a part of their definition of wasta. Mohamed and Hamdy, The Stigma of Wasta, 1.
involved according to their standing. Farrag states that sons are totally dependent on their fathers for mediation.  

In present-day intercessory wasta it is possible under certain circumstances that the wasta takes the initiative and actively offers his services. Cunningham and Sarayrah state that “[i]n urban society, a skill-based prestige system has widened the access to resources, and the wasta game has many players.” Between strangers this might occur because the wasta is seeking honour or later repayment (see below, B Reciprocation) or he is just following the instinct imbedded into him by a wasta society. Among family there might be situations where the family urges a family member to use a certain wasta to whom the family has good connections.

When conflict mediation is initiated, there is no difference between traditional and modern, rural or urban: the first step towards reconciliation is to be taken by the defendant's mediator(s), who will go to the harmed party and negotiate a truce until proper peacemaking negotiations are held; this is necessary for protection against retaliation, which would otherwise be considered justified and a natural consequence (cf. above, 2.3.1 Mediational Wasta). Not only is it unthinkable that the harmed party initiate the mediation: unless the harmed party accepts the mediation initiative of the defendant, the default course of events will be retaliation.

B. Reciprocation
As mentioned above, wasta is becoming more diverse in urban, increasingly individualised settings. The focus is shifting from mediational to intercessory wasta. Wasta intercession can be rendered to 1) family, 2) friends or 3) strangers.

Wasta intercession on behalf of family is still taken as a matter of for granted. While between

190 Farrag, “The Wastah among Jordanian Villagers,” 229. She adds though that “On the other hand, through their army career and contacts with the towns, sons could in their own right act as go-betweens for kinsmen or friends who wanted jobs done in town and did not know who to got to.” Ibid., 231.
191 Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 2.
193 Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 14.
friends the expectancy is that the favour be returned later, this is not the case with mediation between family.

Between friends and acquaintances, accounts will be kept and effectively many people will have networks of contacts with whom they may occasionally exchange wasta favours and when in need consider who could deliver the service effectively and whether they are in credit or debit in his accounts. Barnett states that “[d]irect reciprocity is not a requirement for wasta. Instead, reciprocity comes in the form of an implicit obligation to provide aid when requested by other members of a specific social network, often a tribal group.”

Towards strangers, wasta could be rendered for two reasons. First, it is honourable to help a stranger as much as hospitality is honourable and taken for granted. Getting a tourist a good bargain by getting him in contact with the shop of one's cousin might result in praise and closer relationships with a foreigner and in turn recognition from one's peers. The wasta-giver might also hold hopes that contact to a foreigner might be beneficial later, maybe in form of a good contact to an international institution or an embassy.

Third, wasta intercession can also be granted for money. Hutchings and Weir state that wasta can “be a profession.” Some wastas specialise in services connected to their (former) profession. An ex-government official might later work as a lawyer or agent who offers help with exactly the processes that fall into the jurisdiction of the agency at which he used to work. Cunningham and Sarayrah quote this practice from e.g. the customs department.

2.4.4.2. **Wasta – Source**

The relationship between the wasta and the source may be grounded in the work life of the wasta. A

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194 See, however, the criticism against tarbih or tah ‘mil j’meel, the phenomenon of excessively milking a right to reciprocation. “Arab Pearls of Wisdom: 12 Untranslatable Words and Phrases,” Al Bawaba, July 31, 2014, http://www.albawaba.com/slideshow/arabic-words-idioms-translate-514902.


197 Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta,* chap. 4.
A university teacher might serve as wasta for relatives seeking admission to the university or a customs official might serve as wasta for friends who have an import business, seeking preferential treatment.

In traditional mediation the wasta might relate to another party with whom his client is in conflict (arguable “the source” of peace from the viewpoint of the defendant). In such a scenario the wasta approaches the source with the aim of achieving reconciliation, even in the form of a compromise. He will negotiate with the “source” and prioritise compromise higher than the detailed wishes of his client. If he, the source and the peacemaking delegation, find a compromise that is viable for the negotiators, the client will have to live with it.  

### 2.4.4.3. Client – Source

The relationship between client and source is by definition rudimentary or non-existent.

Cunningham and Sarayrah state in their introduction that “[t]he wasta seeks to achieve that which is assumed to be otherwise unattainable by the supplicant.”  

It was seen above (2.3.5) that wasta is not just a protocol for social interaction but a distinct mindset and part of a worldview. The word “assumed” in the preceding quote hints at this subjectivity. If, as discussed, the essence of wasta as Middle Eastern mediation is that “a man's/women's case is best presented by others,” the (emotional) conviction that the source of the benefit is by default hidden beyond reach is the flip-side of the same coin.

### 2.4.4.4. Graded Efficiency

Wasta is talked about in terms of being “better” or “stronger”, which means more efficient, capable of achieving benefits of greater worth, faster, against greater odds, from sources of higher status for clients of lower status. Al-Ramahi states that “[m]any individuals, supported by their wasta backers, may be seeking the same benefit. When the seekers for a benefit are many and the opportunities are

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198 Cf. the disputed land case in 2.3.1.3.C.
200 Antoun, “Institutionalized Deconfrontation,” 162.
few, only aspirants with the strongest *wasta* are successful. Succeeding or failing depends on the power of the *wasta.*"\(^{201}\) What Al-Ramahi calls “power” will in reality be the characteristics described above under 2.4.1 in addition to the sum of the relevant relationships at the wasta’s disposal. Discussing favouritism in the telecom business in Jordan, Wils says “… Fastlink [a major mobile network provider in the Middle East now named “Zain”, E.S.] may have profited from better *wasta* (personal mediation) than its competitors” and adds in a footnote a precise description of relationships between company representatives and government officials, including the prime minister.\(^{202}\)

The two quotes by Al-Ramahi and Wils suggest that the grade of efficiency of wasta depend on the quality of the relationship between the wasta and the source. If the wasta is positioned closely to the sought benefit for example as a function of status such as a prime minister and a licensing officer in the process of licensing a telecom provider's services, success is more likely. At the same time, the preceding discussion of the relationship between client and wasta shows that this constellation also has a bearing on relative efficiency. If the relationship is one of friendship, and will thus be based on reciprocation, efficiency will depend on the “credit line” with a particular wasta. If it is one of kinship, efficiency will generally be higher because no reciprocation is necessary. It is probable (although not proven) that greater distance between wasta and client in terms of family relations also lowers the commitment of the wasta to the cause and vice versa.\(^{203}\)

So the mediation of a wasta is conceptualised as having a certain strength which is compared to the strength or efficiency of other, competing wastas. The strength of a wasta is a function of the quality

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of the relationships between client and wasta on the one hand and wasta and source of the benefit on the other.

2.5. **Critical Views of Wasta: Common Criticisms, Fairness, Corruption and Ideas for Improvement**

The wasta practice is often criticised by Arabs and non-Arabs alike. It is therefore necessary to give an overview and evaluation of common criticisms. As was seen, the wasta phenomenon is originally an honourable, highly esteemed tribal institution. With the increasing influence of globalisation on large parts of the Arab Middle East, the focus of wasta has been shifting from mediation towards intercession.\textsuperscript{204} Along with this development, wasta has become stigmatised and is now discounted by many, if not most, Jordanians as corruption.\textsuperscript{205} Criticism is almost exclusively directed against the intercession aspect of wasta where favours are sought through the use of personal contacts.\textsuperscript{206} It is viewed as standing in the way of transparency and compromising the rule of law. King Abdullah II. of Jordan has opposed it in several letters and speeches.\textsuperscript{207} The following paragraphs give an overview of the main objections against wasta and evaluate those in the context of our research.

The first main objection against wasta is the fact that it enables citizens to obtain benefits to which they are not entitled. A person might be accepted into university or land a lucrative job without possessing the required abilities or formal prerequisites. Another person might possibly fulfill the requirements but be turned down because the job or post is given to someone less qualified through

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204 The increasing influence of western values e.g. in the judiciary system and global perspectives e.g. in the marketplace diminish the role of traditional, tribal conflict mediation. At the same time these forces create bigger and more competitive markets which offer more opportunities for intercession to play out. While the logic of this development seems evident, it is difficult to put a time frame on it. Cunningham and Sarayrah, writing in the early nineties, speak of “recent years [in which] wasta as intercession has become prominent.” Cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah, *Wasta*, 1. But the degree to which this shift of focus has occurred will also depend on the specific region within the Middle East and especially its level of development.

205 “In the Arab World, however, people generally speak of wasta in negative terms and think largely of its corrupt side, negating the traditionally positive role it has played in mediation.” Hutchings and Weir, “Guanxi and Wasta: A Comparison,” 147.

206 Mediational wasta is almost exclusively viewed as righteous and honourable. The only exception in literature known to this author is the rather special case of the contested land in a Lebanese village discussed in 2.3.1.3.C, where mediation is abused to gain an unrightful benefit.

wasta. Wasta thus constitutes a new denominator in every competition: an applicant for a job, an opportunity for education or any other benefit competes not only with other applicants' abilities and the formal prerequisites, but also with their networks. “Many individuals, supported by their wasta backers, may be seeking the same benefit. When the seekers for a benefit are many and the opportunities are few, only aspirants with the strongest wasta are successful. Succeeding or failing depends on the power of the wasta.” While a person can train up required skills and work on gaining formal prerequisites such as diplomas and certificates, the necessary networks might be forever out of reach due to his social status or lack of relevant connections. In that sense, wasta has the potential to foster stark social unfairness on the job market, in the education sector and elsewhere.

A second criticism against wasta is specific to the work and education sector (two areas of life most often quoted in connection with wasta). If education and work opportunities are allocated not according to merit and ability alone but wasta is used to gain advantage over other applicants, the result will be a decrease in efficiency and performance in schools, universities and businesses and thus throughout whole societies.

Apart from decreasing efficiency and performance on a societal level, Mohamed and Hamdy in their 2008 paper argued that intercessory wasta also becomes a “stigma” for its individual users. Job-incumbents who were employed through wasta would be viewed as “lower in competency” compared to others. With wasta arguably running counter to Islam, as was seen above (2.2.5), the main influence on Middle Eastern moral values, they also try to prove that wasta takers will be “judged as less moral than applicants hired without.”

It must be noted though that wasta can also increase efficiency. From an economic point of view,

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208 Al-Ramahi, “Competing Rationalities,” 201–202 Cf. also above, 1.4.4.4.4. Graded Efficiency.
209 Mohamed and Hamdy, The Stigma of Wasta.
210 Ibid., 4.
211 Ibid.
wasta and related concepts fall under the category of “social capital.” Like capital in the form of funds, assets, machines, experience or training “…, social contacts can also affect individual and collective productivity.”

These seemingly contrasting evaluations on wasta and productivity in fact complement each other as they are statements from two different viewpoints. Wasta has indeed a negative effect on productivity when it is viewed in the context of (Western) meritocracy. Western standards of meritocracy and transparency are increasingly implemented in businesses and educational institutions in the Middle East in order to increase efficiency and the wasta mentality is one of the biggest obstacles to this.

When viewed in a different context, the assessment changes. Arab societies can be described as “high context.” This means that much of relevant information for communication is ingrained into culture and common knowledge rather than in abstract regulations and institutions. For example, in a business context “[…] people must have acquired knowledge of their business counterparts and built a trust relationship prior to engaging in business.” In such a society, social capital such as wasta mediation and intercession become crucial for productivity as it takes the place of (or strongly complements) formal institutions and regulations. As much as business and education rely on formal institutions in order to be productive in low context cultures, wasta and other forms of social capital are necessary to be productive in high context cultures.

Thus the evaluation of wasta will have to depend on the respective context. If structures of meritocracy exist and are agreed on, wasta will be a counteracting force to be viewed very critically. In the absence of such structures or when other structures and values are the social norm, however, wasta may be viewed much more favourably.

The legality objection can be seen as an extension of the fairness objection. The scenarios relevant to the fairness objection are about two applicants fulfilling formal requirements for a job or other benefit sought, but one of them adding wasta and thereby being successful over the other one. However, wasta might not just be an addition, but could also be a substitution for certain prerequisites. This could be a minor issue like an extra day added to a deadline for a term-paper for a class at university. Or it could be outright corruption such as getting a degree despite failing one or more required exams, or not even having to sit for the exams in the first place. As soon as wasta is not just adding to but making up for formal requirements which cannot be delivered, the practice becomes a legal issue. This is why Kilani and Sakijha propose “[d]rafting a code of honour in which signatories from public and private sectors stage their war on wasta and pledge not to use it.”²¹⁵

However, Schlumberger points out that wasta is, while illegal by Western standards, the social norm in Arab culture:

Acting corruptly in a Western context means to deviate from a given norm. This norm is so strong that norm violation, if known, is considered a crime that will be punished by the judiciary. Corruption is thus a term of Western origin with a strongly negative connotation that depicts criminal behavior. Quite the opposite is the case with wasta: It is a term of Arab origin that does not denote behavior against, but according to a social norm.²¹⁶

Again, the evaluation of wasta will strongly depend on the context of each individual wasta case, and the question of what legal and societal norms are at play in every case needs to be asked over and over again.

Al-Ramahi states: “Distinguishing the many dimensions of wasta is problematic. […] It is clear that wasta is a double edged sword.”²¹⁷ It is obvious that wasta users will tend to view wasta as legitimate while individuals suffering from lack of wasta connections will criticise the practice as corrupt. When judging from an outside perspective, it is essential to take the context into

²¹⁷ Al-Ramahi, “Competing Rationalities,” 207.
consideration, as was seen above. El-Said and Harrigan state: “Social networks, a crucial element of social capital, and cleavages are strongly affected by political and economic dislocations. The former include wars and civil wars, while the latter include state policies and economic conditions. Thus wasta, an old but still significant form of social capital in the Arab World, becomes helpful in good times, but destructive in bad times.”

Cunningham and Sarayrah suggest in their paper “Taming Wasta to achieve Development” that in order to counter inefficiency “wasta must be incorporated into the quality control system.” In effect this would mean that job placements, university admission and also the mediation of conflicts would continue to be in the hands of wastas (notably in a fair way, similar to small and weak tribes allying with bigger more powerful tribes in the desert), but they would continue being involved and be consulted if the student or employee under-performs or a mediated settlement is broken.

Whether this is a viable option only time can tell and it depends on whether a society will share the view that this “time-consuming and socially awkward” practice is a “[small price] compared to the long-term consequences of passing students unable to comprehend the subject matter, or ignoring shoddy work by employees.”

Al-Ramahi is in favour of Cunningham and Sarayrah's suggestion, stating that wasta should be turned “to its origins.” In a society changing as fast as Jordan in the forcefield between its Arab tradition and the Westernisation that comes with the ambition of being a global player in many fields this cannot be understood as a simple cure-all for the wasta dilemma. Informed discernment

218 El-Said and Harrigan, “You Reap What You Plant,” 1235. With the Chinese concept of guanxi a form of mediation akin to wasta, there is awareness about “‘good’ guanxi” which is guanxi excluding corrupt practices such as bribes. (Cf. Hutchings and Weir, “Guanxi and Wasta: A Comparison,” 147). As Hutchings and Weir continue to explain, this distinction has not emerged in the Arab world's reflections on wasta, where the positive aspect of mediational wasta is largely ignored. Thus a first step forward would be to raise awareness to the twofold character of wasta and only then qualify it as good or bad.


220 Cf. eg. the case of Professor Jureidat, Ibid., 37.

221 Ibid., 38. Cf. also Bellow's proposal along the same lines to make nepotism workable in western society, Adam Bellow, In Praise of Nepotism: A Natural History (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 471.

is necessary, certainly including the traditional origin of the concept, as well as the contemporary forms wasta takes.

2.6. **Greco-Roman Patronage**

It is the hypothesis of this study that wasta can help to understand the mediatorship of Jesus as it is presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In this chapter it will be argued that wasta is helpful in this way because it can be related to the original social context of Hebrews. It will be shown that the practice of patronage as it existed in the Greco-Roman Eastern Mediterranean in the first century is akin to the wasta phenomenon. Similarities and differences between the two phenomena will be discussed, which will help to appreciate the relatedness of the two and also be useful later when reading relevant texts in Hebrews. It will also be seen that patronage in antiquity had a similarly strong influence on society as does wasta throughout the present day Arab Middle East. Some studies which have recently capitalised on the hermeneutical potential of patronage as a reading environment for the New Testament will be reviewed.

2.6.1. **What is Patronage?**

The term patronage describes a system where in antiquity privileged individuals would assume the role of a patron to less privileged individuals. It was a widely spread social phenomenon in the first century Greco-Roman world. Neyrey and Steward state: “Patronage was a ubiquitous social framework in the ancient Mediterranean basin. Patrons were people with power who could provide goods and services not available to their clients. In return, clients provided loyalty and honor to the patrons.” In the following patronage will be described according to its relevance in the social world of the New Testament, its aspect of reciprocity between patrons and clients, its mostly dyadic structure and its mediational and intercessional components.

2.6.2. **Relevance within the Social World of the New Testament**

It was argued above that wasta is of central importance for accessing goods and services in the

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223 Neyrey and Stewart, *Social World NT*, 47.
Middle East. Research suggests that the same is true for patronage in antiquity and thus the social world of the New Testament. DeSilva states that “[t]he world of the authors and readers of the New Testament … was one in which personal patronage was an essential means of acquiring access to goods, protection or opportunities for employment and advancement. Not only was it essential - it was expected and publicized! The giving and receiving of favors was, according to a first-century participant, the ‘practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society’ (Seneca Ben. 1.4.2).”

Seneca describes patronage in his work “On Benefits” (De Beneficiis) and goes as far as calling it a “rule of life” (lex vitae).

2.6.3. Reciprocity

Patronage constitutes an influential and central practice within ancient societies because it is based on reciprocity, as will now be seen. Reciprocity between patron and client created a “bond” and eventually many bonds created a network of obligations.

While the benefits for the client are obvious (goods and services), the benefits for the patron were less palpable: they consisted in loyalty and honour. The client, as far as he was of lower social status, reciprocated the favour in the form of loyalty to the patron, thus “contributing to the patron's reputation and power base.” Favours would also be traded among people of the same or similar social standing. In these cases the giver of a benefit could look forward to his favours being returned in form of similar ones. The relationship was called “friendship” in this case. DeSilva points out that whether the relationship was between social equals or unequals or anything in between, it would in essence be marked by reciprocity and loyalty. The patron would stress his giving of gracious favour, thereby respecting his client's honour and often even calling him “friend”

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224 deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 96.
226 deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 116.
227 Ibid., 99. An example of how this was done is the clients' being part of the patron's morning salutatio where the crowd of clients present was deemed “a sign of honour and influence.” J. E. Lendon, Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World (Oxford University Press, 1997), 44.
228 Cf. deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 99.
even if he was not a social equal; the client would stress his loyalty and reciprocate by increasing
the patron's repute and honour, never calling him “friend” if he was not a social equal.\textsuperscript{229}
The patronage system was, ideally, marked by grace and mutuality. DeSilva illustrates this by
referring to the picture of the three dancing graces. Their dance, consisting of back-and-forth
movements symbolises grace granted which results in gratefulness returned, leading again to grace
granted and so forth.\textsuperscript{230} The motivation for patronal grace was, ideally, the giver's beneficent
feelings. The recipients' response was ideally gratitude vented through public praise for the patron.
Eventually, the “[g]iver should wholly be concerned with giving for the sake of the other, while the
recipient should be concerned wholly with showing gratitude to the giver.”\textsuperscript{231}
Crossan summarises the situation for the first century context: “In the Roman Mediterranean,
therefore, the web of patronage and clientage, with accounts that could never be exactly balanced
because they could never be precisely computed, was the dynamic morality that held society
together.”\textsuperscript{232} Cunningham and Sarayrah seem to suggest that this is different in wasta and favours
are indeed set off in a precise accounting manner (“...there is strict accounting regarding services
rendered and received”) but this is not done out of a desire for accuracy or in order to free oneself of
obligations by paying them off but because, as they assert in the same location: “[r]eputation and
status within the peer group are earned by exchanging services with friends.”\textsuperscript{233} This was confirmed
in the discussion of reciprocation between client and wasta above (cf. 1.4.4.1.B.). However accurate
or not the measuring of favours granted and received might be: both wasta and patronage further
social cohesion because they consist of continuous giving and reciprocation.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{230} Cf. Ibid., 105–106, 116–119.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{232} John D. Crossan, \textit{The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant} (HarperCollins, 2010), 64–65.
\textsuperscript{233} Cunningham and Sarayrah, \textit{Wasta}, 14.
\textsuperscript{234} See also Barnett, who suggests reviewing the reciprocity aspect of wasta as a multi-stage game. Cf. Barnett,
Yandle, and Naufal, \textit{Regulation, Trust, and Cronyism in Middle Eastern Society: The Simple Economics of
2.6.4. Dyadic vs. Triadic

Wasta, as was seen above in 2.4, is triadic in nature. It involves a supplicant for a favour, a source and a go-between. If it is employed to solve a conflict, the two conflicting parties and a broker are involved. Patronage, by contrast, is essentially dyadic. It consists typically of a patron who possesses considerable wealth and power and gives benefits to a client. The client is often lower in status and wealth and reciprocates with honour, loyalty and praise.

The typical dyadic setup of patronage needs to be qualified, however. Croix points out that not only influential men had the power to bestow favours and benefits but to an extent also people around them in gatekeeper positions: “[H]is [the patron’s] friends, who had the ear of the great man; their friends, even, at only one further remove; even the personal slaves of the great man, who often, for the humble client, could procure of withhold audience with the patron - all these satellites shone with various degrees of reflected glory and were well worth courting, in case one should ever desire to make use of their good offices.”

Croix’ remarks about personal slaves parallel what was said earlier regarding the wasta role of secretaries, chauffeurs and other subordinates (cf. 2.4.1.1.D).

Crossan states that contact to a patron might also be established through a broker. Crossan goes on to explain that “[a] broker, in this sense, is one who sustains a double dyadic alliance, one as client to a patron and another as patron to a client.” DeSilva adds: “Sometimes the most important gift a patron could give was access to (and influence with) another patron who actually had power over the benefit being sought.” In such a constellation the patron became broker, or mediator.

Crossan, Croix and deSilva quote the many examples of the letters of Cicero, Pliny the Younger and

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236 Quoting Landè, he points out that broker in this instance must essentially mean mediation through a personal (rather than institutional or other) tie: “the only element essential to the definition is that the relationship must connect two individuals with each other by a direct personal tie.” Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 59, quoting Steffen W. Schmidt et al., eds., *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism* (Berkeley, Calif, etc: University of California Press, 1977), xiii–xiv.
239 Ibid.
Fronto, which are about mediation of favours. DeSilva concludes: “Brokerage – the gift of access to another, often greater patron – was in itself a highly valued benefit.” In this sense, brokerage and patronage are two distinct roles within the same wider concept.

The aspect of brokerage brings out similarities as well as differences between wasta and ancient patronage. Both include a seeking client and a desired favour, benefit or the mending of a relationship. In ancient patronage, often the patron is at the same time the source of the favour. If one believes the judgement of John Dominic Crossan, who states that the predominant constellation in ancient patronage is the one between patron and slave, this implies that the patron is commonly the only patron a client / slave has and that he is the source of not just benefits but sustenance. The traditional intercessory wasta, as Cunningham and Sarayrah describe it, is normally not the source of the favour sought but the mediator or broker thereof. This would mostly be true for the frequently quoted scenarios where a family living far away from the city has one or several wasta inside or close to the city who serve as the point of contact for all services related to the city and its institutions and businesses and thus would help registering a car or obtaining a new passport as well as finding employment. However, the wasta might also grant benefits at his direct disposal. The university context where students receive preferential treatment from professors is the most prominent example for this in Cunningham and Sarayrah's study. In principle, a wasta can mediate a benefit owned by another key-holder person by influencing this person directly or indirectly or he can himself be the key-holder over the benefit. One can easily imagine scenarios where the limits between dyadic and triadic can blur, e.g. when employment is obtained through a wasta who is influential in a company but not technically in charge over employment questions.

It is important to recognise that patronage is predominantly dyadic in nature but does regularly play out as triadic mediation. Wasta, in turn, is in essence triadic but if the wasta is intimately close to

240 See ibid., 98 for an initial overview.
241 Ibid., 98.
the source, wasta might play out almost like a dyadic relationship.

2.6.5. **Mediation and Intercession**

As was seen, wasta consists of two main aspects: intercession (for benefits) and mediation (of conflicts), whereby mediation is the more traditional aspect. Mediating in a conflict is viewed as a highly honourable thing. Today wasta is often exclusively identified with intercession and therefore viewed critically because of the implied unfairness, as was seen in 2.5.

In ancient patronage, at first glance, matters appear to be the opposite way around. Direct conflict mediation is not a common service a patron would render to his clients. This can be seen from the scarcity of examples in literature. Indirectly, patrons did involve themselves in lawsuits concerning a client. However, this practice was viewed rather critically. Croix quotes a letter by Libanius in which he justifies himself eloquently for mediating in a legal conflict:

> I did not hesitate to send you a letter by a man who is defendant in an action, and I see no reason why I should not send one on behalf of such a man. Naturally, if he appeared to me to be in the wrong, I would have nothing to do with him. Giving a letter to a man who has a just cause to plead is no affront to the judge. If the judge can plead with himself to help a man whose cause is just, can there be anything disgraceful in his giving ear to what another has to say in the cause of justice? For he will give the judgement he would have given quite apart from the letter; and furthermore he will be credited with showing courtesy to a friend.\(^{242}\)

This apologetic attitude stands in sharp contrast with present day wasta practice, where (as was seen in 2.3.3, cf. especially Al-Ramahi’s explanations) criminal charges will not even be dealt with by a court unless the civil rights aspect of a court case is decided via the wasta system. Both wasta and patronage include the aspect of mediation in conflicts, but whereas in wasta this is the traditional of the two aspects (mediation and intercession) and very highly thought of by the conflicting parties themselves as well as outsiders, the aspect is rather rudimentary in patronage and quite critically viewed. This difference might stem from the different legal systems of the respective cultures, but this question is beyond the scope of the present study. Interesting for our purposes is to be aware

that wasta as a reading environment might help to discern aspects of Christ's mediatorship which are not reflected in the patronage concept, i.e. conflict mediation.

2.6.6. Patronage Sensitive Readings of NT Texts

2.6.6.1. The Context of Grace
Patronage has been used as a hermeneutical tool to “shed new light on the sacred Scriptures and on the ways in which they would shape disciples and communities of faith.”

David deSilva, for example, makes out that Greco-Roman patronage is the “Social Context of Grace.” The gifts and benefits granted to the believer by God through Christ are, as the terminology suggests, to be understood within the context of a benefactor-patron giving to a client who reciprocates with loyalty, spreading the fame and increasing the honour of the patron. Viewed that way, understanding ancient patronage leads to a new understanding of worship and even evangelism – it is the response to the grace (=gift) received from a gracious patron and the response should be that of a grateful client seeking the increase of the patron's fame and honour.

DeSilva points out that the practice of patronage shows the context in which to understand grace. God's grace, in principle, is similar to the grace granted by a patron, and thus the response of the believer should be that of thankfulness, advancing the fame of the benefactor.

2.6.6.2. Benefaction as Patronage without Self-interest
Reading the letter of James in light of the patronage concept, Alicia Batten has found that a differentiated view of patronage existed in antiquity and that it is probable that writer and receiving community of the letter knew a difference between a patron and a benefactor; namely that the benefactor lacked self-interest as a motivation. God would be identified as benefactor rather than patron. This is a helpful insight and will be particularly useful when thinking about the principle

243 deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 15.
244 David A. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews” (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 212.
245 Cf. deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 133–134.
of reciprocity in mediation (cf. below, 4.5).

2.6.6.3. “Mass Appeal” of the Christian Faith
John Dominic Crossan, who is comparatively critical of ancient patronage, emphasises its abusive and exploitative aspects. He is less explicit about the hermeneutical use that the concept of patronage might hold in his opinion. However, picking up on a thought of Barbara Levick, he concludes that patronage might have boosted the advance of Christianity in the Roman Empire because it reflected what would in earthly terms have been access to a good patron via a trustworthy mediator.247

2.6.7. Conclusion
It was seen that patronage and wasta are similarly influential on the societies in which they occur since they are ubiquitous modes of accessing services and goods. Both are embedded in the framework of honour and shame. They follow the basic rules of reciprocity. One main difference is that patronage is foremost dyadic, while wasta is triadic in nature. As was seen, however, the lines are not always sharp. Wasta can effectively play out as dyadic in cases of intercessory wasta where the wasta is very close to the source of a benefit (not, however, in mediational wasta). While patronage usually takes place between a wealthy and powerful patron who trades his resources for loyalty and success, cases are also known where he would afford his client access to another patron and thus becomes a third party broker. A second main difference is the role of mediation and intercession. In wasta, conflict mediation is the more traditional and more highly valued aspect of the phenomenon. Intercession for goods and services is a more recent development and can have connotations of corruption and be thus viewed critically. In patronage, access to goods and services stands in the foreground; mediation sometimes occurs in the form of a patron interceding for a client in front of a court of law, but is of secondary importance and at times viewed critically.

For this study, the patronage system of the first century Greco-Roman world will prove helpful in order to position the mediation and mediatorship of Jesus described in Hebrews within the social context of the time in chapter three. These results can then be interpreted in chapter four in the reading environment of wasta, taking into account the differences and similarities between wasta and patronage.

2.7. Conclusion – What is Wasta?
This chapter has argued that wasta is a central social phenomenon across the Arab Middle East. It comprises two elements, intercession for goods, services or preferential treatment, and mediation of conflicts. It is imbedded in the logic of a collectivist, shame-oriented society. Being triadic in nature, wasta typically takes place between a supplicant, a wasta and a source (or, in case of conflict mediation, a damaged party). From the supplicant's point of view, wasta is perceived as something that is owned or missed and can be strong or weak. Wasta is sometimes seen as un-islamic since it can have overtones of corruption and unfairness. However, it is also sometimes viewed as compatible to islamic thought for its mediating dimension which is akin to the islamic idea of “consultation.” Wasta can to a certain extent be compared to the ancient practice of patronage in the Greco-Roman world, an equally influential social mechanism for accessing goods and services in New Testament times. It can thus be said that wasta is a relevant reading environment for the Epistle to the Hebrews. Wasta as a reading environment for a New Testament text is advantageous for three reasons. First, it opens up a new body of data. While a patronage-sensitive reading relies on ancient sources, a wasta reading can draw on recent sociological studies. Second, it can help to communicate, not just analyse, the message of a New Testament text. Since wasta is still a widely known and practiced phenomenon in the Arab Middle East with its predominantly Muslim population, a wasta reading can help an interreligious and intercultural reading of NT texts such as Hebrews. Third, wasta might bring fresh readings because it is similar yet distinct from patronage in some aspects (cf. the stronger focus on mediation in wasta and the triadic vs. dyadic nature of the
two phenomena). Therefore a different chemistry between the text and the environment can be expected compared to patronage.

This chapter outlined the meaning, inner logic and wider context of wasṭa, our chosen reading environment. In the next chapter it will be seen how Jesus is described as mediator between man and God in the Letter to the Hebrews.
3. Jesus the Mediator in Hebrews

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will ask how the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as mediator between man and God and what his main argument is concerning this mediation. This question will be answered by drawing on exegetical commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews generally as well as thematic studies on the main metaphors used for talking about mediation: Son, High Priest, Melchizedek.

3.1.1. Definition of Mediator

The definition of “mediation” in this chapter derives from the notion μεσίτης (8:6, 9:15). This notion is central to the argument of Hebrews. As will be seen below, the assertion that Jesus is mediator of a better (8:6) and new (9:15) covenant comes after a long argument which builds up over the preceding chapters that Jesus is the supreme mediator between man and God. While much of the argument is made elsewhere, the notion of Jesus as μεσίτης can be regarded as its climax and culmination. The term is translated وسیط (wasīṭ) in the widely used Van Dyke Arabic translation of the New Testament and thus offers a point of connection to our chosen reading environment.

Oepke takes as a vantage point the fact that the word “denotes the one in the middle who discharges the function of a µέσος. For the most common technical use we should start with the specific meaning of µέσος as 'between contestants or parties.'” He goes on to identify as two additional meanings to the basic one; namely “'intermediary' in the general spatial sense” and “'mediator' or "negotiator" in the sense of one who establishes a relation which would not otherwise exist.” It is the purpose of this chapter to capture the concept of Jesus as mediator in Hebrews as broadly as possible. A working definition following from Oepke's basic meaning shall be “an active party in the gap between two parties.” It will be seen that this leads to recognising conflict mediation as well as intercession for benefits in Hebrews, and thus the two main dynamics of wasta. But analysing the

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248 Bible: Arabic Van Dyke Bible (United Bible Societies, 2001).
250 Ibid.
concept of mediator in Hebrews from a broad vantage point will also bring into focus Jesus' mediating function in revelation in the first chapter of Hebrews and make more room for understanding his cultic activity as mediating high priest.

3.1.2. Reason for Choosing Hebrews; Structure of Argument
The Epistle to the Hebrews was chosen because it makes the point of Jesus as mediator most explicitly and vividly within the New Testament. Jesus' mediation is explicated through two main steps of argumentation. The first step consists of comparing Jesus to other mediators. The author draws on the idea of angels being mediators and states that Jesus' mediation is far superior to theirs. He then turns to Moses, also a mediator in the readers' worldview. Jesus is also superior to him. In a second step, Jesus is compared to a high priest and given attributes of the figure of Melchizedek. This imagery turns out to be a particularly potent metaphor for the author's argument that Jesus is not just comparatively more powerful to other mediators, but the eschatologically valid and supreme mediator of the New Covenant once and for all. These metaphors will thus be guiding lines for exegesis and reconstructing the picture of mediation the author wants to convey.

They also inform the structure of this chapter in the following way. Hebrews 1:1-4 is viewed separately since it anticipates the argument beyond just the comparison with the angels. As will be seen, the priestly imagery as main metaphor is hinted at already here in the exordium and the argument for the eschatological supremacy of Jesus' mediatorship is anticipated. The Epistle is then divided into the following main parts.

1:5-4:13, Jesus the Son. The first main metaphor used by the author to speak of the mediatorship of Jesus, which subsumes the two topoi of comparison, angels and Moses.

4:14-7:28, Jesus the High Priest. This is the second main metaphor of mediation.

8:1-10:8, the New Covenant. This part describes Jesus' mediation in terms of the logic of the old
priestly cult and its abrogation through the New Covenant.

10:19-12:3, the call to faith. It will be seen that this part resonates particularly with the patronage background through notions of πιστ-.

12:3-13:25, paraenetic conclusion. The argument for the mediation of Jesus has been completed at this point.

The delimitations of the pericopes are mostly uncontroversial and in line with Lane's commentary in WBC. Lane surveys traditional and contemporary analyses of the structure of Hebrews and for our purposes his conclusions are almost entirely fitting.\footnote{Cf. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), lxxxiv – xciii.} A notable exception is 4:14, which in our context appears as the first verse of the argument evolving around the metaphor of high priest (following Ellingworth,\footnote{Cf. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993).} see below, 3.5, for a full discussion). Other exceptions are added divisions for convenience and clarity: 9:11-28 is divided after v. 15 and in order to look at the two distinct issues of mediatorial supremacy argued through the logic of the cult in vv. 11-15 and the argument for the legal actualisation evolving around the metaphor of will and testament in vv. 16-28. The pericope 10:1-18 is divided after v. 10 in order to distinguish between the argumentation in vv. 1-10 which evolves around the argument of frequency of mediation and the concluding function of vv. 11-18 for the argument for mediation. A final deviation from Lane's units is the “Glaubensparänese,” which will be viewed as a unit from 10:19 to 12:3. Lane discusses 12:1-13 as one unit under the heading “The Display of the Necessary Endurance” but in our context 12:1-3 still resonates strongly with the argument for faith as a part of the logic of patronage in ch. 11. In turn, 12:4-13:20 can for our purposes be discussed as a paraenetic conclusion, rounding off the argument for mediation without adding any new thoughts.

In addition to the main metaphors used for Jesus as mediator, the two concepts of mediation and
sacrifice need to be analysed in their respective contexts. This will be done in excurses close to the relevant passages.

In Hebrews, Jesus is presented as supreme mediator between man and God. In this chapter the logic of Jesus as mediator will be followed by outlining its development in a synchronic fashion. It will become apparent that the author is concerned to emphasise Jesus' comparative superiority over other mediators. The elements which the author uses to paint his picture of Jesus as mediator will be discussed (among others metaphors of movement, leadership and household). His paraenetic strategy will be discussed, i.e. how he uses his presentation of Jesus as mediator in order to encourage his audience in their situation and evoke a response of loyalty and faith in them.

3.2. Prolegomena
Introductory remarks will be kept brief and only made as necessary for our purpose of understanding the concept of mediation in the letter to the Hebrews and reading the findings in the light of Middle Eastern wasta logic. Two aspects in particular need to be addressed before reading the text. First, the situation of the recipients' community is necessary to briefly examine because it is the context for the author's paraenetic statements, which in turn are driven by his remarks about mediation. So the situation of the readers likely influences the special argument the author makes about Jesus the mediator between humans and God. Second, the time of writing will be discussed. There is no consensus on the question whether Hebrews was written before or after the fall of the temple (and thus the priestly cultus) in Jerusalem. Since the author of Hebrews uses notions and metaphors from the realm of the priestly cultus in order to communicate his ideas about mediation, some passages would appear in slightly different light depending on the original date of the document.

3.2.1. The Readers
The situation of the readers is the social scenario for the teaching of Hebrews as it likely answers
questions and comments on situations found in the recipient community. That being said, even some of the basic facts about the recipient community are controversially debated in literature and it is of little use for our purposes to enter into many of those debates.

Lane\textsuperscript{253} and Attridge\textsuperscript{254} give helpful overviews of the discussion of who exactly the first readers of Hebrews may have been. While ancient scholars usually assumed the readers' location to be around Palestine or Jerusalem, most modern scholars assume a house church in or around Rome to be the addressees. Attridge, while in principle agreeing, seems uneasy to decide the matter finally and remarks that the physical location is least important; he also leaves open what the exact social status of the readers was and interestingly adds that even the author might not have been absolutely sure about the details of the particular hardships the recipient community was facing, remarking that often “critics want to be able to know more than the evidence allows.”\textsuperscript{255} While the spectrum of dangers possibly in the background is broad, they can be categorised into external (persecution) and internal ones (waning faith).\textsuperscript{256} Out of the pressures from outside and within grew doctrinal misconceptions, as Vos suggests: “[T]he trouble with the original readers was in part, at least, Christological.”\textsuperscript{257}

Dahms aptly summarises: “[The readers] had become content with the most elementary level of Christian understanding. As a result they were in grave danger of succumbing to the temptation of a reprehensible avoidance of persecution.”\textsuperscript{258} Reduction of the faith to the most basic level included, in Vos' words, “[finding] something objectionable in Christ's humiliation and sufferings.”\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{253} Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, lviii.
\textsuperscript{255} Cf. Ibid., 9,10,12,13.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{257} Geerhardus Vos, The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 20.
\textsuperscript{258} John V. Dahms, “The First Readers of Hebrews,” JETS 20 (1977): 374. Note, however, that other errors on part of the readers which Dahms assumes in the same sentence will come to appear very unlikely as our study continues. Dahms assumes that the readers held that Jesus was in reality lower than the angels and had also fallen back into trust into the Levitical priesthood rather than Christ's priestly mediation. In contrast to this view, our study will find that both angels and Levitical priests are metaphors for mediation used to exalt the supreme mediatorship of Christ as Son of God the ultimate patron and source of all benefits.
\textsuperscript{259} Vos, The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 20.
Another debated issue is the ethnical and religious background of the readers. A case for Jewish, Gentile or mixed backgrounds can be made and has been by various scholars.\textsuperscript{260} On the one hand, the author bases much of his argument on Jewish culture and religious custom and assumes prior knowledge. On the other hand, Jewish custom and religion is also a big part of Paul's writings to Gentile communities. Thus, while generally Hebrews' richness in Jewish thought might indeed suggest a Jewish background of the readers, Gentile churches were aware of Jewish custom to the degree that it entered their theological reasoning and it will be difficult to estimate how many Jewish topoi in a theological argument constitute solid enough evidence for a Jewish background of the readers. This study will find that as far as the logic of mediation is concerned the Jewish topoi are mainly metaphors and images to support the argument. They could be understood by Christians of Jewish background as much as by informed Gentile background Christians.

3.2.1.1. \textit{Conclusion}

It is difficult to determine with certainty even some basic facts about the first reads of Hebrews, such as location and ethnic background. What seems certain from the text is that they were pressed in their Christian existence from inside (pressure pertaining to their faith and doctrine) and possibly the outside (pressures coming from persecution). Since the exact realities behind those pressures are difficult to determine and it is even possible that the author did not know them (cf. Attridge's remarks), it is also possible that the implied hardships are at least in part rhetorically evoked.

\textsuperscript{260} For an overview see Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 10–11.
3.2.2. Time of Writing

In Hebrews 2:3 the author states that he himself is a contemporary of eyewitnesses of the Jesus movement. Assuming an early date for the time of writing, the important question becomes whether this was before or after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in the year 70. One of the main metaphors for conveying the idea of Jesus as mediator between man and God is that of the high priest and thus the whole Temple cult and sacrificial system. It is thus pertinent to our main questions whether the Epistle to the Hebrews was written before or after the fall of the Jerusalem temple. The question is, however, controversially discussed in literature.\(^\text{261}\)

As will be seen, the author of Hebrews is strongly concerned with presenting Jesus as the fulfilment and end of the sacrificial system. He argues in a way so as to make his readers look at the sacrificial system differently; namely as one that has been overcome and abrogated by Jesus. In doing so, he sounds as if he is talking about an existing and ongoing practice (10:1-3). Furthermore, he does not mention or allude to the fall of the temple, yet the seizure of the temple cult would have helped his argument significantly so that at least a slight hint at the event of its destruction or the fact of its absence would seem likely. This would suggest a date of composition before 70.

But the argument just presented needs to be qualified. Lane convincingly argues that the present tense expressions in 10:1-3 cannot be taken to prove that the Jerusalem temple is still standing at the time of composition since other writings, most notable 1 Clement, speak of the temple in the same fashion but are commonly dated post 70.\(^\text{262}\) With this evidence invalidated, the argument remains an argument from silence. It assumes that the author would have mentioned the fall of the temple had it occurred already. As such it is only warranted by the great advantage which the absent statement would have had for the central argument of Hebrews. Attridge adds a second caveat. He points out that the argument depends on the assumption that Hebrews is “particularly interested in

\(^{261}\) See Attridge for an overview, who himself abstains from narrowing the date down any further than 60-100 a.d, Ibid., 6–9.

\(^{262}\) Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, lxii.
demonstrating the ultimate supersession of the old cultic regime,” a part of the attempt to counter judaizing tendencies in the recipient congregation.\textsuperscript{263} This, he judges, is not a valid vantage point because his later exegesis shows that “Hebrews is interested in the old cult primarily as a foundation for the christological exposition that undergirds the paraenetic program of the text.”\textsuperscript{264} Our particular reading will refute this caveat because it will find that it is indeed at the heart of the message of Hebrews to declare the old cult obsolete, but not out of the desire to rebut judaizing tendencies. Rather it is a part of the argument for Jesus as all-surpassing eschatological mediator that the end of the Levitical cult comes into focus.

But after refuting Attridge's caveat another one must be added, which is specific to our reading as it is focused on mediation. The author of Hebrews has a strongly eschatological outlook coupled with a tendency to spiritualise the mediating ministry of Christ as it is expressed through the priestly metaphor (cf. below, 3.6.1). His concern is with the once and for all, eternally valid mediation in the heavenly sanctuary. It is not unlikely that he would eclipse historic events, even if they are strongly relevant to the topic of mediation (such as the fall of the temple) for the sake of presenting a pure, spiritual argument, consciously avoiding “contamination” with earthly historic or political realities. His choice to refer to the tabernacle rather than to the temple could be interpreted that way and could also be a way of his dealing with the destruction of the temple if the date of writing was later than 70.

\textbf{3.2.2.1. \textit{Conclusion}}

It can be concluded that there is reason to consider a date of writing before 70 as slightly more likely. The likelihood is proportionate to the exegete's willingness to accept an argument from silence. One main point of Hebrews, that of the superiority of Jesus' mediation over the old priestly mediation, could have been conveyed much more efficiently by mentioning the destruction of the temple. But eventually the text eludes a decisive verdict, not least because of the author's tendency

\textsuperscript{263} Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 8.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
to spiritualise this part of his argument. 265

3.3. Hebrews 1:1-4. Introducing Three Main Strands of the Argument for Jesus as Supreme Mediator

With the opening passage of Hebrews (1:1-4) the author lays the foundation for his main message that “[t]he human family has in the presence of God an acceptable Representative.” 266

In the first four verses of the document he opens up three main strands of his upcoming argumentation for Jesus as supreme mediator between man and God.

1) Superiority and Supremacy of Jesus' Mediation

Jesus is the eschatological mediator, superior to all preceding mediation.

The author begins his argument about mediation in a discussion of revelation. Since the revelation is the revelation for salvation, as will later be seen, in the logic of Hebrews everything that is true for revelation is also true for mediation. The revelation of God through Jesus supersedes the previous revelations (“to our fathers many times and in many different ways long time ago through the prophets”, v. 1) and is eschatological in nature (“in these last days”, v. 2). The relative superiority as well as the absolute supremacy of Jesus' work will be argued in different ways throughout the document and is here stated in an anticipatory way using a bouquet of varied concepts and notions.

2) Relational and Kinship Imagery used for exposition of mediation theology.

The mediation of Jesus will be expounded using relational and familial metaphors.

Jesus is the Son and heir (v. 2), his closeness to God is circumscribed calling him “the radiance of God's glory” and “exact representation.” He is “seated at the right

265 Cf. however also Guy Stroumsa, who comes to the conclusion that the spiritualisation of the Jewish cult is a consequence of the fall of the Temple. With the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem the daily sacrifice ceases. The religious role that it played needs to be filled. Stroumsa also sees the development of Christianity in this context, where prayer takes the place of sacrifice. Cf. Guy G. Stroumsa, The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity, trans. Susan Emanuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 64. His argument is convincing on a broader history-of-religion level. Our preferred time of writing for Hebrews, however, runs counter to this view. The sacrificial cult is spiritualised not because of the destruction of the Temple, but despite its continuing operation.

hand” (v. 3), which in such close proximity to the notion of “Son” reinforces the kinship imagery: he is the royal Son and heir, invested with all power associated with this position.

3) **Cultic Imagery used for exposition of mediation theology.**

The cultic imagery of Jesus as mediating high priest, through which the mediation of Jesus will ultimately be expressed as the argument unfolds, is anticipated here in the formulation “cleansing of sins” (v. 3).

### 3.3.1. Supremacy of Revelation = Supremacy of Mediation

Right from the outset, the author argues for the supremacy of Jesus' mediatorship. In the opening section, this is first undertaken by pointing out the superiority of his revelation. These remarks on revelation are relevant to Hebrews' concept of mediation because revelation is understood as the revelation of salvation (σωτηρία, cf. the argument in 2:2-3). Salvation, in turn, is the fulfilment of the mediated God-relationship, which will be consummated upon Jesus' return (cf. 9:28) and thus revelation is almost equivalent to the mediation of the ultimate conflict and the intercession for the ultimate benefit.

Jesus' revelation is superior over the old revelation which was previously mediated by the prophets “many times and in many different ways.” Buchanan remarks that the implications of πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως probably include “visions, dreams, symbols, Urim and Thummim, angels, natural events, ecstasy, the column of smoke or fire, and occasionally [appearance] face to face.” In this sense, the statement being made is that the known and overcome revelation in its fullness is now superseded by Jesus. Bruce reads the statement to speak of the transition between “two stages of divine revelation,” pertaining to the Old and New Testament; analogous thoughts are found in 11:39-40 where the writer explains that it is not until Jesus that the faithful of the old covenant are “made perfect.”

and and translates thus “in many pieces.” The wording, then, has a taste of the author's OT hermeneutics: the revelations of the old order are fragments, which are referenced here in order to then present the sonship-christology as the unifying factor.

The superiority of the revelation in Jesus is also due to its eschatological character: it comes in “these last days,” (ἐπ᾿ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν, v. 2), a formulation used in the LXX to convey the Hebrew prophetic formulation יִתְנָה לְךַלְכָּא. It “implies an inaugurated eschatology” and anticipates the later statement that Jesus has “once and for all” (ἅπαξ) appeared at the “end of the ages” (ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων) in 9:26. Thus his superiority over the old ways of revelation is in fact a final supremacy.

Two thoughts are then added to further underscore the supremacy of Jesus as superior revealer-mediator. He is “heir of everything” (κληρονόμον πάντων). Besides introducing the idea of the firstborn Son as heir and therefore supreme mediator (cf. below, 3.3.2 and 4.4.1), this statement implies that Jesus supersedes the revelation of the past, which is implied to be partial and fragmentary (cf. above, discussion of 1:1). Second, he is referred to as pre-existent mediator of creation, the one “through whom [God] also made the universe” (δι᾿ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰώνας).

Through this remark the author expands and defines the eschatological context in which he wants to place Jesus beyond the notion of the “last days” with its chronological overtones. Jesus is for him above and beyond time, not chronologically but categorically.

3.3.2. Relational imagery
The author will use relational imagery to bolster his argument throughout the document. In these
opening verses he introduces this strand of his argument with a bouquet of different ideas. The notions *son* and *heir* are picked up again by the term *name*, most likely referring to the son-title of the Psalm quotation in v. 5. The notions of *radiance of God's glory* and *exact representation of his being* also speak about relationship. They most likely originate from Hellenistic thought and wisdom theology and are used here to stress the intimate relationship to God.  

The filial motif will unlock different aspects relevant to mediation later in the document (cf. e.g. 3:6) but in the opening passage the motif serves one main purpose: the expression of the superiority of Jesus as revealer and mediator. Lane remarks that “[t]he antithesis in the two phases of revelation lies in the distinction between the prophets who were men and the Son who enjoys a unique relationship to God.” The superiority of Jesus' revelation and mediation is grounded in the superiority of his relationship to God as Son. This will have many different ramifications, among others the honour and shame implications which deSilva mentions: “Attachment to this messenger assures one of honor and favor as those who are brought into God's own household by the Son himself. Affronting, insulting, or rejecting this messenger means experiencing the full brunt of divine satisfaction, the punishment reserved for those who fail to honor the Son for his benefits to all creation and humanity.”  

Drawing on H. Langkammer, Lane outlines the context of the notion of κληρονόμος. He takes it to be an allusion to Ps 2:8 (the Son being offered the nations as inheritance and literally akin to Gen 17:5 (Abraham's appointment and receiving of his new name). By introducing the notion of κληρονόμος “the writer, or the liturgical tradition upon which he drew, made use of the OT motif of the investiture of the heir in order to connect the beginning of redemptive history with its

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275 Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 11.

276 deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 85.

277 Cf. Jacob and Esau, Esau sells his privilege as first born son, a story the writer has in his head and will quote later, 12:16.
accomplishment in the Son.” The verse is thus pregnant with two main concerns of the author: the superiority of Jesus over the old structures (indeed those of the early beginnings of the history of Israel) and his final eschatological supremacy.

The set of terms from Hellenistic Jewish wisdom theology which the author introduces in v. 3 deserve closer analysis. Jesus is the one through whom God made the world (δι’οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας), the radiance of God's glory and the imprint of his being (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ).

The co-creatorship that was ascribed to wisdom is most probably the frame of reference for the author's remark δι’οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας. DeSilva points out how the idea that wisdom renews and orders things (cf. Wis. 1:27; 8:1) lead to a conception of Wisdom “as a mediator between God and creation” and a “conviction that God's creation was gracefully ordered and perfectly planned, and indeed that in the contemplation of the 'wisdom' of God's works one had access to a reflection of the Almighty's goodness and perfection.”

Ἀπαύγασμα is a rare term, elsewhere only appearing in Wis 7:26 and is chosen by the author “to express the relationship he believed existed between God and the Son.” DeSilva, quoting Croix, fills in detail. The members of a patron's house, family members, friends and servants, could all be viewed as potential mediators of the patron's benefits and thus as “satellites shone with various degrees of reflected glory and were well worth courting.” DeSilva analyses: “In calling the Son

278 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 12.
279 Cf. Ibid., 12.
280 Cf. also Prov. 8, Wis. 7:22,26,27, 8:1, 9:9, deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 87–88. For a fuller treatment see Perdue's recent monograph, Leo G. Perdue, Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature (Wipf and Stock, 2009).
281 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 13. Buchanan adds that obviously the semantics of closest possibly identification equally depends on the notion of glory (δόξα) as the the presence of the Lord in connection with the ark of the covenant, the pillar of fire or the smoke over the altar. Cf. Buchanan, Hebrews, 4. Attridge notes that ἀπαύγασμα can be understood in an active sense (radiance) or in the passive sense of "reflection." While this question is debated, for our purposes Attridge's conclusion is sufficient, namely that the notion of ἀπαύγασμα "serves...to affirm the intimate relationship between the Father and the pre-existent Son, through whom redemption is effected." Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 43.
the 'reflection' of God's glory, the author draws attention to the nearness of the Son to the Father such that the honor of the latter is fully reflected by the One who sits nearest to him in the household.”

Also the term χαρακτήρ is common in Hellenistic theology, most notably Philo, and the author here brings it “into the service of Christian confession […] to convey as emphatically as he could his conviction that in Jesus Christ there had been provided a perfect, visible expression of the reality of God.” Additionally, deSilva points to 4 Maccabees 15:4: “In what manner might I express the emotions of parents who love their children? We impress upon the character of a small child a wondrous likeness both of mind and of form.” DeSilva admits that the reference is “inexact” (probably referring to the subsequent statement that this is true for mothers more than for fathers), but despite this discontinuity it can go to illustrate the semantic connections of the word χαρακτήρ when used in a parent-children context such as ours: not just is the position of the Son towards the Father such close within the household that he reflects his δόχα best, also his very being is coined in its essence by the character of the Father.

The author will later contrast Jesus with the angels and among other things point out their inferiority in as far as they are changeable in nature (1:7), something which is precluded as a possibility concerning the Son as an “imprint of [God's own] being” (1:3).

The superiority over the angels will be further demonstrated in 1:5-14, but it is important for our purposes to note here that the author chooses to introduce his argument for the superiority over the angels by arguing from the “greater name” which Jesus has inherited. As Lane points out, the mention of the giving of names is common in confessional material such as this, and the name which is in view is most likely the Son title from Ps 2:7 to which the author will refer in v. 5. The
reference to the superior name “Son” thus provides the transition into the following argument for the superiority over the angels.

DeSilva agrees that the designation “Son” is meant by the “better name” and that the designation “carries a message that Jesus' honor and worth derives from the honor of the father, God himself. In the Greco-Roman world, one's honor or standing depended largely on one's parentage - whether one was born into low or high status." Hans-Friedrich Weiß agrees at first that the greater name of v. 4 is the designation “Son” and the honour (“Würde”) which comes with it, but insightfully points out how in the following paragraph (1:5-14) a progression can be observed leading to Jesus being ascribed “Tätigkeiten […] , die nach biblischer Überlieferung Gott vorbehalten sind (1:10ff)” and the exalted one is explicitly referred to as θεός (v. 8-9) and κύριος (v. 10). He senses similarities to a distinct “Namens-Theologie bzw. -Christologie” where the Father's name is explicitly given to the Son. Examples of such a christology include the coptic-agnostic writings from Nag-Hammadi, but also e.g. John 17:11. Weiß' conclusion from this insight is that this is a statement towards the superiority of the revelation: “Eindeutiger und entschiedener als auf diese Weise kann jedenfalls der eschatologisch-endgültige Charakter von Gottes Rede ‘im Sohn’ (V.2) kaum zur Aussage gebracht werden: In Gottes Rede ‘im Sohn’ kommt niemand anders als Gott selbst zur Sprache.” By deduction, for our purposes, a closeness and intimacy of relationship between Father and Son is stated in a way which presents the mediating qualities of the Son as categorically superior to those of all other mediators.

Following on from the co-creatorship attributed to the Son earlier, the author now goes on to speak of his sustaining activity (φέρων τε τὰ πάντα) within creation. The thought again is inspired by

288 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 91.
289 Ibid., 85.
290 Weiß, Hebräer, 153.
291 Ibid., 154.
292 Cf. Ibid. for references.
293 Ibid.
wisdom theology. The author stays in the realm of wisdom theology when he goes on to note that Jesus “mak[es] cleansing of sins” (καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος). This is on the one hand in line with the thought of wisdom’s activity as “reconciler of others to God” but more than this it becomes a stepping stone and gives the listeners a preview of the high priest typology which will carry the main argument throughout the document.

The author then further bolsters his argument for the final supremacy of Jesus' mediation by affirming that his mediational, redemptive efforts were successful. The proof is his exaltation to the position of ultimate honour and dignity “at the right of the Majesty on high” (ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς).

3.3.3. Priestly Imagery
DeSilva states that the author's use of wisdom theology is in order to “refine” his presentation of the closeness between Father and Son. Some additional insight on the connection between wisdom theology and Hebrews' concept of mediation can also be drawn from 1 Clement 36, where a reworked version of Hebrews 1:1-4 is found, calling Jesus the ἀπαύγασμα τῆς μεγαλωσύνης (1 Cl 36:2). Here, however, it starts with a reference to Jesus as “high priest of our offerings” (τὸν ἀρχιερέα τῶν προσφορῶν ἡμῶν). Without going into the debate over an underlying common source (and the question whether this is reproduced more originally in 1 Clem. or Heb), it is important to note how in 1 Clem. the “entire statement has been made subservient to Jesus’ divine priesthood.” It goes to show how closely the thought of ἀπαύγασμα (and the identification of Jesus with God expressed in the term) is related to the topic of mediation, the high priest motif and thus “[a]n understanding that the mediatorial functions of divine Wisdom were priestly in character

294 Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 12.
295 Ibid., 13.
296 “Heb 1:3 does not designate Jesus as ‘priest.’ But in this pregnant clause the writer strongly implies that God’s unique Son is also a priest.” Ibid., 15.
297 “In the ancient world, seating order was based on the appraisal of relative worth or honor.” deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 101–102. DeSilva in the following refers to Esther 3.1 and Lk 14.8-10 for illustration.
298 Ibid., 87.
299 Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 13.
300 Ibid.
may have been widespread in the hellenistic church.”

3.3.4. Conclusion
The exordium 1:1-4 lays the foundation for the author's argument for Jesus as supreme eschatological mediator between man and God. It introduces some of the thoughts and imagery which will later be used as the argument unfolds and sets the tone for the eschatological urgency which the author wishes to stress. The passage is a combination of colourful metaphors describing Jesus. When reading with a sensitivity for what Hebrews is saying about mediation, it becomes apparent that the commonality of these metaphors is that they express or emphasise relational closeness. The kinship metaphor, Jesus as “Son”, will emerge as prominent in the following, especially when the logic of wasṭa is considered as a reading environment.

3.4. Hebrews 1:5-4:13. Jesus the Son
The first main part of the document evolves around the sonship of Jesus. The claim for his superiority is established and argued through comparison of the Son with the angels and Moses, both traditionally viewed as potent mediators. The expositional material is interwoven with passages of exhortation.

3.4.1. 1:5-14. Greater than the Angels
The following unit (vv. 5-14) is a catena of biblical quotations which the author uses to undergird his affirmation of Jesus' superiority as mediator over the angels. It is divided into three parts consisting of contrasting quotations about the Son and the angels: 5-6, 7-12, 13-14. The idea of the superior name provides the transition from the exordium into the first argument: the name is now identified as the designation “Son” (v. 5 quoting LXX Ps 2:7, the Name-Christology mentioned by Weiß might be in the background, see above). The argumentation in this passage (as throughout large parts of the document in general) hinges on the concept of the God-Sonship of

301 Ibid., 18.
302 Cf. Ibid., 22.
303 Cf. Ibid., 25.
Jesus. This is also the guiding motif in the choice of citations in the catena: In v. 5, Lane (drawing on Kistemaker) argues that the term υἱός functioned as a “magnet.” Its occurrence in the messianic passage Ps 2:7 attracted the quotation of 2 Sam 7:14 in v. 5. The two quotations are poetically arranged in a chiasm (A B B' A') so that A and A' speak of sonship, bracketing notions of fatherhood in B and B'. As mentioned above, the OT hermeneutics of the author might have been such that he thought of the overcome revelation as a jigsaw puzzle that now, in the light of Jesus the Son, is being put together; the magnet-word theory would be consistent with such a view.

So the opening set of quotations emphasises the close relationship between the Father and the Son not just through its content but also through its poetic arrangement. This intimate closeness of this relationship is the basis for the superiority of Jesus as mediator.

The angels will be the point of comparison throughout the rest of the chapter. The angels as mediators of second choice feature very prominently in the opening chapter of the document, but the comparison appears to have hardly any relevance for the remainder of the document. DeSilva's explanation for this is helpful: the angels are the first in a row of mediator figures that will be discussed in sequence; angels, Moses and finally the Levitical priesthood. A sometimes assumed angelolatry of the recipients is unlikely. As deSilva points out, it would be bad rhetorical form to confront such false teaching so directly so early on in the document; furthermore the paraenesis throughout the rest of the document is not directed at such false doctrine, but at issues of faith and loyalty (πίστις).

V. 6 states that the angels worship the Son. Interestingly, the Son is now the πρωτότοκος, the

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304 Ibid.
305 Cf. Ibid.
306 Cf. Ibid.
307 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 94.
309 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 95, for a fuller treatment see David A. deSilva, Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Scholars Press, 1995), 238.
firstborn. The notion of firstborn picks up the motif of Jesus as heir in v. 2. The firstborn was the default heir of the father's wealth and had the “birthright”, the earliest example of this being Esau and Jacob (Gen 25). Buchanan explains that in Assyrian inheritance law, to which the Jewish customs were probably similar, the firstborn had a double right. He first got to freely choose a part of the inheritance and afterwards was allotted a standard share like all other sons in addition. He was also the heir to the throne. So the statement is that Jesus is worshipped at his institution as hereditary heir over the οἰκουμένη, which Lane identifies as the eschatological heavenly realm at the exaltation, not the natural world at the parousia.

As Lane points out, the next contrast (vv. 7-12) is marked by the brevity of the note about the angels in v. 7 and the “fullness” of remarks about the son vv. 8-12. Within vv. 5-14 this portion appears as the christocentric centerpiece. Its main focus is the permanence and unchangeable existence of the Son in contrast with the changeable nature of the angels. The question of duration of mediation or mediator will later prove relevant in the wasa environment.

The first quote from LXX Ps 103:4 (MT Ps 104:4) is a statement about the changeable nature of the angels, but only so in the LXX: in the MT the verse states that God makes winds and flames his messengers and servants, i.e. it speaks about God using nature as a means to revelation. In the LXX, however, the statement is that “angels and ministers” are made into “spirits” and “fire”, i.e. God transforming the nature of those beings at will.

So it appears that, when quoting Ps 104:4, the author has the aspect of duration in view: Jesus, the eternal and unchangeable co-creator-Son, is superior to the angels who by contrast belong to the realm of creation and are used by God at will for his purposes, even to the extent of changing their

311 Cf. Ibid.
312 Following Vanhoye and others, cf. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 27.
313 Ibid., 28.
314 Cf. Ibid., 28f.
315 Cf. Ibid., 28, note also the references from Targum and Exod. Rab.
appearance and nature.

This statement of mutability of the angels is then contrasted with a quote from Ps 45:6-7. As Lane points out, the quote is not elaborated on anywhere in the address (as might be expected considering the ascription “God” made to Jesus) and might have been taken from liturgical material.\(^{316}\) The choice to include v.7 appears guided by the superiority agenda of the author: Jesus is anointed above the μέτοχοι, i.e. the angels.\(^{317}\)

Also the next quotation, Ps 102:25-27 is to the effect of the permanence of the Son since he is the creator who laid the foundations and precedes the beginning of creation and surpasses it eschatologically. This is also a statement claiming the superiority over the angels who were thought of as agents of creation.\(^{318}\)

The concluding quotation, Ps 110:1 presented as a rhetorical question about the angels, brackets the present passage together with its counterpart v. 5, also a rhetorical question about the angels.\(^{319}\) V. 14 then supports what had been said earlier: the angels are ministering forces in God's economy but even though they are very relevant as ministers to the readers (those who inherit salvation), they are much inferior to the Son who is seated at the right hand of God.\(^{320}\) They are merely ministers and helping agents (λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα), in comparison to the Son over the house. The mention of inheritance of salvation provides a transition to what follows: an admonition to embrace just this salvation (2:3).

As mentioned, the author draws on the angels as representatives of the circle of established mediators, known to and appreciated by the readers, just as Moses and the Levitical priesthood, who the author will discuss later. The fact that the author chooses the angels to begin his argument

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\(^{316}\) Cf. Ibid., 29.
\(^{317}\) Cf. Ibid., 30.
\(^{318}\) Cf. Ibid.
\(^{319}\) Cf. Ibid., 31.
\(^{320}\) Cf. Ibid., 32.
is consistent with two major aspects of his argument. Angels were thought to stand in the presence of God himself, even fulfilling priestly duties in the heavenly tabernacle. First, as will become clear throughout the document and especially when the Melchizedek metaphor is introduced in ch. 7, the author focusses on heavenly/spiritual things. Starting his argument with any other of the chosen group of mediators would have put the focus closer to earth. Second, the author wishes to emphasise not just Jesus' relative superiority over some other mediators but indeed the final, eschatological supremacy over all other mediators. Starting with the angels and establishing Jesus' superiority to even those elusive, spiritual beings (Jesus being higher as the one who “sat down at the right of the Majesty on high”, 1:3) and then going on to human mediators of flesh and blood, steeped in history (Moses) and even politics (Levitical priests) might be more convincing than starting at the other end.

3.4.1.1. Conclusion
Jesus is compared to the angels because they are known and appreciated as mediators of God by the recipients. Their spiritual nature and the immediate closeness to God as members of the heavenly hosts make the author start his series of comparisons with the angels. He will then proceed to Moses and the Levitical priesthood. He argues Jesus' superiority over these spiritual mediators first, which will prove a good vantage point for his later argument for the spiritual superiority of Jesus' mediation. Jesus' supremacy is underlined by talking about his acknowledgement in front of the heavenly assembly, the emphasis of his name (Son), his being seated at God's right hand, and an emphasis on his permanence as mediator.

3.4.2. 2:1-4. Exhortation 1
The first four verses of chapter two constitute the first of several passages of exhortation which

321 Cf. Rev. 15:6. See also Margaret Barker's fascinating study of the relevant biblical and extra-canonical sources. Cf. Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 105–115. Barker concludes by finding significant overlaps and eventually even claiming congruence of main concepts. “For [early Christian writers], the LORD, the Son of God Most High, who had been incarnate in Jesus, was the God of Israel. He was the Great Angel who had 'been' the Davidic king and high priest.” Ibid., 114–115.
interlace the whole document. The readers appear to be in danger to “drift away” from “what [they] have heard” (2:1). What has been heard is then identified as the “salvation … announced by the Lord” and confirmed by eyewitnesses (v.3) as well as by God himself “through signs and wonders and many different acts of power and distributions / outpourings of the Holy Spirit (v.4).”

The author uses his typical logic of arguing “from-the-lesser-to-the-greater.” This a fortiori way of argumentation is a common hermeneutical device of the time. Its logic of “if A, then how much more B” is found in several instances throughout Hebrews, as will be seen. In this fashion the author now states that the salvation revealed by the Son is far superior to the message spoken by the angels (v. 2): Already the message mediated through angels was “firm/ reliable”, and all negligence towards it was punished, so negligence of this new – “such great” (τηλικοῦτος) – salvation, mediated through the Son, will render all hopes to escape futile.

It becomes apparent here that the revelation mentioned in the first chapter is revelation for the purpose of salvation. This is important within the author's argument. It is this salvific revelation mediated by Jesus to which the author wants to call back his audience. He wants to urge his audience to trust in the final salvific revelation through Jesus and he chooses to do so by stressing the superior mediation by which this revelation is given. The thrust of his argument comes from the statement that the “great salvation” was mediated by the Lord, one who supersedes the angels in rank as mediators, and the following assertion that this is attested to by eyewitnesses, and finally also confirmed by God himself through supernatural signs (v. 4). The ultimacy and supremacy of the salvation to which the readers are called can be seen, the author argues, in the way it was mediated, i.e. transmitted, made available. This includes, most notably, the

322 It is the first of the seven rules of the influential Rabbi Hillel the Elder from Jerusalem who died 10 BC. “Ḳal (ḳol) wa-ḥomer: ‘Argumentum a minori ad majus’ or ‘a majoris ad minus’; corresponding to the scholastic proof a fortiori.” The rule is one among other basic hermeneutical rules such as the argument from analogy (rule 2) or deduction from context (rule 7). “Rules of Hillel, the Seven,” JewishEncyclopedia.com: The Unedited Full-Text of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12936-rules-of-hillel-the-seven.

323 See also deSilva's discussion of “forgetting” the benefits of the patron and the associations of shame with such behaviour in Greco-Roman patronage: deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 105.
approval of the mediation process by the source of the benefit himself: God.

3.4.2.1. Conclusion
This first paraenetic passage reveals the author's adherence to sociological principles of Middle Eastern Mediation. As he calls his audience back to full loyalty to their Christian commitment (effectively synonymous with what is here called “what we heard”, and elsewhere “hope” [3:6, 6:18, 10:23], “confidence” [3:14], “faith” [4:14]), he does not draw exhortative thrust from the content of that commitment. Rather, he presents it as a benefit that comes from a noble source and is made accessible by a trustworthy mediator, vouched for by trustworthy members of the wider community. So the chain of mediation is what should bring about the readers' commitment and loyalty.

3.4.3. 2:5-9. “The Way and the Work”
Hebrews 2:5-18 is relevant to the concept of mediation in Hebrews in as far as it describes the salvific mediating activity of Jesus in a vivid re-interpretation of Ps 8. Weiβ aptly entitles the passage as “way and work” (“Weg und Werk des Sohnes”324). The idea is that Jesus, on a path through humiliation, reached the exalted position that God had intended for humanity in general. Having procured this position for himself, he also makes it accessible to his clients whom he leads.

Coming out of the paraenetic interlude of 2:1-4, the author quickly picks up the motif of the angels again in v. 5, but only in order to indicate that he now wants to move on from it to the next part of his argument. The world to come which he is concerned with is not theirs, but, as he will go on to prove from v. 6 (note the adversative δὲ there), the inheritance of the exalted Son and his brethren.

As mentioned above (cf. above the discussion of 1:1), the author reads the OT as fragmentary witness that is now consummated and completed in the new and final word of God in the Son. So he quotes it in his typical way using the indefinite form instead of a particular reference or author:

324 Weiβ, Hebräer, 202.
In his mind, the old order bears witness to the new and it does so in and of itself, apart from the original context, book, authors and protagonists of a given OT quote: the magnificence of the new order of which Jesus is the mediator eclipses all those considerations. This hermeneutic confirms the superiority concept of the author regarding Jesus' mediation.

In its original setting, the chosen text from Ps 8 is a statement of the unheard-of highness for which God has destined humans. But the author of Hebrews leaves out LXX 8:7a, where it is said about man: “You made him ruler over the works of your hands”. Only 7b remains: “you have put everything under his feet.” He wants to argue that the exaltation of man is not realised until it is effected by Jesus through his humiliation and exaltation, and only then handed on as a benefit as from a mediator to his clients as they follow him to his elevated position in loyalty and gratefulness.

It is likely that he leaves out καὶ κατέστησας αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου for this reason: the exaltation of man over the works of God's hands that is stated here is, in the eyes of the author, conditioned by Jesus' “way and work” of mediation and his clients' grateful response and loyal allegiance, as he will go on to explain. What had been destined for humans since the beginning, is only given to them through the mediation of Jesus. This is the author's contention and he is also prepared to force it on the OT text.

To further his argument, the author now focuses on the remark that πάντα ὑπέταξας ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ in the chosen Psalm text (LXX 8:7b) and asks why the subjection of everything (taking πάντα literally) is not a reality yet seen.

He goes on to answer the question himself: the subjection of all things under man's feet is not a reality, but Jesus can be seen δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφανωμένον; he has reached the position of glory and honour and rulership over all things. He has reached this exalted position as a consequence of

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326 As Lane points out, Psalm 8 and 110 are often cited closely together like in our case, cf. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 46.
327 The author can now rely on the picture of Jesus being enthroned over enemies subjected under his feet, which he had evoked through the quote of Psalm 110 in 1:13.
his way through subjugation (being made lower than the angels) and the work constituted by his death.

His subjugation was temporal: Jesus is seen as the βραχύ τι παρ᾿ ἀγγέλους ἠλαττωμένον; the LXX leaves it open to read βραχύ as a duration (the corresponding expression in the MT is restricted to the spacial sense), which suits our author's agenda. The subjugation of Jesus is a necessary but temporal step along his way as mediator of the heavenly benefits. And his death is, through the grace of God (in the sense of “by his graceful providence for humans”), a vicarious death for all, through which Jesus will mediate the same benefit which he has just achieved (his exalted position) to his clients as they follow him.

NIB and most English translations do not reproduce the consecutive logic well that Jesus was subjected so as to die for the benefit of the community. NIB translates “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” Luther solves the problem by translating ὅπως differently: “Den aber, der 'eine kleine Zeit niedriger gewesen ist als die Engel', Jesus, sehen wir durch das Leiden des Todes 'gekrönt mit Preis und Ehre'; denn durch Gottes Gnade sollte er für alle den Tod schmecken.” Lane re-arranges the sub-clauses of the sentence: “But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and splendor.”

### 3.4.3.1. Conclusion

In this passage, like in 2:1-4, the author still stresses the person of Jesus the mediator over the benefit which he mediates. At the same, however, he now goes into more detail of the mediation at

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328 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 109.
331 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 42.
hand and its content. The result is surprising: the benefit in question had been destined for humans since the beginning by its source, God. The readers could rightly have been disappointed (2:8: “we do not see...”), but this would only be because they are unaware of the process of how the benefit would be mediated to them. Here the author wants to provide detail: it was through the mediating efforts of Jesus the mediator who at great cost for himself claimed the benefit for his clients.

3.4.4. 2:10-18. Archegos and Brother

The necessity of Jesus' submission is now further explicated and defended. Jesus is called ἀρχηγός.

This is a metaphor connecting three sets of ideas, that of a military leader, that of a military substitutionary champion, and that of a divine hero. Jesus shows solidarity with his clients in a family-like fashion. Also, through what Jesus suffered, he is in the position to feel with and help his brothers and sisters in their present suffering. He has identified with his brethren so closely, that he is now their merciful and compassionate high priest, a metaphor for ultimate, personal, relational mediation between man and God. All this is happening in full accordance with God's plan and will.

The re-interpretation of Ps 8 just presented – Jesus, through suffering and death, affording to his followers the benefit of salvation – is potentially so counter-intuitive or offensive to the readers that the author feels the need to undergird his argument. He uses language of theodicy (ἔπρεπεν - it was fitting to God) and circumscribes God δι᾿ ὃν τὰ πάντα καὶ δι᾿ οὗ τὰ πάντα to close every space for second guessing his presentation: yes, it was God in his sovereignty as creator and sustainer of the world who devised and carried out a plan according to which the mediator of his salvation would be made fit for his work through submission into suffering and death.

Jesus is now called ἀρχηγός, a metaphor the author will use another time in 12:2. The idea behind

332 Michel adds more detail: ἔπρεπεν is not the language of theodicy as such (this would rather be true for δεῖ in hellenistic judaism) but denotes a “Notwendigkeit des theologischen Gedankens und das Gesetz seiner theologischen Richtigkeit.” Otto Michel, Der Brief an Die Hebräer, 12th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 146.

333 Lane adds that this wording (δι᾿ ὃν τὰ πάντα …) which only appears here in the entire Greek Bible gives the process of Jesus leading humans to salvation and exaltation the authority of “the fulfilment of the divine intention for humanity at creation.” Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 55.
the term as it is used here can shed light on Hebrews’ concept of mediation and will thus be looked at in some detail.

Lane points out that “[t]he Greek term ἀρχηγός is a vehicle for a broad range of nuances, both in Jewish and in secular sources.”334 Following W.L. Knox, he sees the term in the context of the divine hero in Greek mythology who descends from heaven to earth in order to rescue humankind, the most famous example for such a figure being Hercules. 335 As the paragraph unfolds, he argues, the notion of Jesus as ἀρχηγός would have clearly been seen in this context by contemporary readers, vv.14-16 strongly resonating with Hercules' battle with death. 336 He therefore translates ἀρχηγός “champion.”

The notion of “champion” also contains the thought of representation and identification since champions in a military context were single soldiers representing their army through fighting vicariously against a champion from the other side, David and Goliath being a famous example. Through the aspect of representation it connects with the main motif of the text, Jesus as high priest.337

These ideas associated with the concept of “champion” are fitting for the paragraph as it unfolds (as said, especially vv. 14-16). However, they do not reflect the ideas in the preceding paragraph very well (vv. 5-9, plus v. 10 itself) because the core idea here is a leader who is followed (which is not the case for the mythological nor the military champion). Simply “leader” would seem more appropriate in this regard. In the LXX a predominant use of the word ἀρχηγός is for speaking of a leader in military or political contexts. 338 This reflects better the soteriological statements in 2:5-10. There, the author used spacial and dynamic ideas of Jesus moving from his exalted position to be

334 Ibid., 56.
335 Cf. Ibid.
336 Cf. Ibid.
337 Lane: “Common to the concepts both of champion and of high priest are the elements of representation and solidarity with a particular people.” Ibid., 67.
made lower than the angels. At the lowest point of his subjugation he experiences even death, but vicariously so for everyone. Thus Jesus has walked this path from high to low and back to high as an ἀρχηγός in the sense of “leader”, leading his followers to salvation. V. 10 states that God is “leading” (ἀγαγόντα) the sons and daughters to glory and his agent is thus more likely to be a leader in the sense of leading a group, rather than a champion like Hercules. Later, in Hebrews 12:2 the author seems to pick up and to round off the picture of Jesus as leader, stating that he is a leader who leads from beginning to the end (ἀρχηγός καὶ τελειωτής).

Each option of translating the word (champion and leader) seem to slightly resonate more with either the preceding or the following part of the paragraph. It is the power of metaphor to connect to several different sets of ideas simultaneously and ἀρχηγός in 2:10 might be a case in point. Looking at Hebrews from the vantage point of the concept of mediation, it is assumed that the author has as a goal in mind to talk about the unheard-of supreme mediating power of Jesus and that he uses a select set of topoi to transport this meaning, ἀρχηγός being one of them. The champion might be a topos that is indeed implied with the rest of the chapter in view, as Lane suggests. But equally conclusive is that of a leader, one who leads the distinct path described earlier, i.e. being made lower than the angels for a little while, tasting death for everyone, bringing many sons to glory, and being then crowned with glory and honour, with his clients following his way.

For our purpose of determining the author's concept of mediation, there is no need to rule out one translation, even if for now “leader” is chosen for its connection to the more immediate, i.e. the preceding, context. The author associates Jesus with notions of 1) a general leader, 2) a military leader and 3) a vicariously fighting champion of an army and a divine hero like Hercules who descends to conquer death. He draws on several different sets of ideas in order to convey the

339 Gray insightfully says about the author of Hebrews' use of metaphor: “The author of Hebrews, it may be said, offends against rhetorical conventions by mixing metaphors, but the fault is pardonable when one allows for the novelty of the religious experience giving rise to a common confession of faith, the urgent situation facing his readers, and the relative dearth of literary and pastoral precedents for describing the Christian vision and responding to the challenges it posed.” Patrick Gray, “Brotherly Love and the High Priest Christology of Hebrews,” JBL 122, no. 2 (2003): 350–351.
message of the unheard-of mediation of Jesus the Son of God.

It is not improbable that the author uses a metaphor that connects with a known concept in contemporary culture (champion like Hercules) as well as a more general meaning, leader, which has military overtones. The author can support 1) his upcoming statement about Jesus' conquering death (Hercules), 2) his later presentation of Jesus as mediating domestic leader or head of the household (3:1-6, leader in a more general sense) and 3) back his description of the way and work of Jesus as a path to be followed (leader of troops in a military sense).

Another important formulation in v. 10 is τελειῶσαι. It anticipates the later motif of high priestly mediation: according to Lane the notion of τελειῶσαι, making perfect, draws on overtones of priestly consecration in the semantic range of the verb; it points forward to the remarks of the ἅγιαζων καὶ οἱ ἁγιαζόμενοι in v. 11, all this being a build-up to the first mention of Jesus as ἀρχιερεύς in v. 17.

Having described the mediation process in this way, the author now speaks about the relationship of mediator and clients. Both are “of one” in the sense of “from the same family.” Related to this, Jesus is not ashamed of them. This is proven from scripture through three quotations in vv. 12 and 13.

Weiß holds that here ἐπαισχύνεσθαι in negated form stands for a “positives 'Sich-Bekennen” analogous to Mk 8:38 and Rom 1:16.340 The author will pick up the shame motif again: in 3:6 the readers are called to hold on to the καύχημα; in 12:2 Jesus' own overcoming of shame of the cross is stated; in 11:13-16 the celebration of the faith of the patriarchs culminates in the statement that God is not shamed being called their God (cf. Ex 3).341

V. 14 states that Jesus shared in his followers’ circumstances, i.e. in their humanity. He took part in

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340 Weiß, Hebräer, 214.
their nature up until its bitter end, death, so that he could overcome the enemy threatening the human nature: the devil, holder of the power of death. In this sense v. 14 completes the picture of vv. 9-10, Jesus tasting death for everyone and by this suffering leading God's children to glory. The first part of the verse is a parallelism: the children have or share in blood and flesh (κεκοινώνηκεν) and so Christ likewise shared in the same things (μετέσχεν). The two verbs are synonymous, the only difference is the verb form. Lane, following Bruce, points out that the perfect form of κεκοινώνηκεν denotes the “original and natural” state of humanity' whereas the aorist of μετέσχεν points out that Jesus took on the human nature “at a fixed point in time, by his own choice.” Thus the author wants to emphasise both the likeness and identification (cf. also the emphatic παραπλησίως, which foreshadows the central notion κατὰ πάντα in v. 17) while maintaining the distinction between Jesus and humans. Thus the verse is central to the picture of mediation drawn in Hebrews because it expresses the essential mechanism necessary for Jesus' salvific mediational activity; despite (or because of) his highness, he had to actively share in the lowly reality in which his clients existed by nature.

The benefit mediated by Jesus through his death is freedom from the fear of death, an enslaving, antagonistic force directed against his clients in their entire existence, i.e. who “throughout their whole life were held enslaved by their fear of death.” DeSilva points out that liberty and freedom were high values in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century. As discussed above (2.6) a lot of patronage took place between patrons and (former) slaves. This is different however in wasta where slavery and liberty are not prominent considerations. This is one of the main differences between the two concepts and will be evaluated below (ch. 4).

342 Bruce cited in Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 60.
343 Cf. Ibid., 60.
344 Weiß helpfully notes that it is a specific characteristic of the Christology of Hebrews to closely combine the superiority and distinctness of Jesus rooted in his high priestly office with his likeness and closeness to humankind based on his brotherhood with them. Weiß, Hebräer, 215.
345 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 118.
In v. 16, closing his argument, the author again comes back to the reference to the angels, reiterating that the grand mediation he has just described is for the benefit of humans (Abraham's seed), not angels. This way he appeals to his readers to appropriate for themselves, in an existential way, the mediation of the greatest benefit as it was just presented and implicitly to respond accordingly. V. 16 thus logically brackets the treatise which started in v. 5.346

In v. 17 the motif of identification of the mediator with the clients is picked up another time, amplified and connected to what will be the main metaphor for the remainder of the argument: Jesus had to be made like humans in every way (κατὰ πᾶντα stands in the emphatic position here347) so he could become the merciful high priest. The author wraps up his preceding argument (as shows the ὅθεν – therefore, and so...) and then, by tying it to the high priest motif which he mentions here for the first time, packages the results of his treatise, as it were, for later use, especially from 4.14 onwards.348

V. 18 ends the paragraph, as Lane puts it, “on the note of pastoral encouragement” derived from Jesus' identification with his clients.349 This encouragement follows from the presented logic: Jesus the high priest can help and be compassionate with humans who are being tempted because he himself was tempted.

3.4.4.1. Conclusion
The author draws his audience into his argument further. He has highlighted Jesus' supremacy (1:5-14), the relevance of his person for the benefit which the readers are called (2:1-4) and has begun to talk about the details of the mediation process (2:5-9). In 2:10-18 Jesus is then presented

346 It also concludes the angels motif, by which the first two chapters were “superficially” held together, as Attridge remarks. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 94, n.172.
347 Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 64.
348 It needs to be noted that expressly included in this pre-emptively tied up parcel of the high priest motif the characteristics of mercifulness and faithfullness (ἐλεήμων καὶ πιστὸς) of the high priest are included. These will be discussed in more detail later when analysing 4.1-13 but already here speaks to the prominence of these character traits and raises awareness to how they are connected to the fraternal relationship of Jesus to his followers. Cf. Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 335.
349 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 66.
as leader-mediator, using the rich metaphor of ἄρχηγός to evoke ideas of leadership, substitutional fighting and heavenly mediation. More importantly, Jesus is now described in strong terms of kinship. He is brother to his clients so they can enjoy a relationship free of any notions of shame. It will later be discussed what powerful implications the kinship imagery used here has for the mediatorship of Jesus and the encouragement of the readers. The High Priest metaphor is introduced here even though it is not discussed in any detail until ch. 5; the reason for the brief anticipatory mentioning at this point is that the High Priest metaphor is intrinsically connected to Jesus' Sonship, as will be seen in greater detail later from ch. 4 onwards.

3.4.5. 3:1-6. Son over the House of God, more Honourable than Moses

In this passage the author develops his argument for the supreme mediatorship of Jesus further by comparing Jesus to Moses, the prominent mediator of the old covenant. The metaphor he uses as a vehicle for this comparison is the οἶκος. Moses was the faithful servant in the house, but Jesus is the Son over the house and thus the better mediator. The hearers, finally, are reminded of their part in this household and admonished to keep up their loyalty in light of this.

V. 1 picks up directly from the preceding unit (ὅθεν, therefore) and then addresses the readers directly for the first time in the document. The address refers back to the preceding unit, as Weiβ points out: the readers are “brothers” of Jesus because he was made like them in every way (2:17) and they are “holy” because he made them holy (2:11). “Partners in the heavenly calling” appears reminiscent of the idea of Jesus' leading his followers from his place of degradation and subjugation to (exalted, heavenly) salvation (2:10). Casting these aspects of the previous chapter into the vocative here is part of the author's pastoral strategy. He is trying to existentially draw his readers into the comforting truth about Jesus being their mediator. These introductory words then flow into an imperative to think of Jesus in his role as apostle and high priest (v. 1). The notion “high priest” is the freshly introduced metaphor which will carry the main part of the argument in the remainder

350 Cf. Ibid., 74.
351 Weiβ, Hebräer, 241.
of the letter.352

The designation of Jesus as ἀπόστολος in 3:1 is unique in the NT. It is likely that it is inspired by the following comparison with Moses, who was thought of as a mediator sent from God.353

Moses is used as a comparison because his own mediating qualities make the comparison all the more effective. Moses was thought to stand in closer relationship to God than other prophets. God spoke through visions and dreams to most prophets, but to Moses “mouth to mouth, in sight and not through enigmas” (cf. Numbers 12:6-8).354 Oepke points out that Moses is one of the main mediators of OT theology in the function as “commissioned spokesman.”355 Discussing the background of the word mediator (μεσίτης) he states: “Though the word is not used, mediatorship is at the heart of OT religion. The theologically significant point is that God cannot be approached at our pleasure, but only when He offers Himself for fellowship. The basis of fellowship with Him is His unconditional moral demand both on the community and on each member individually, and the two in indissoluble combination.”356

The metaphor works by presenting Jesus as the Son over the house of God and at the same time contrasting him with Moses as servant in God's house. The picture is effective through the different contrasts it uses. Jesus' relationship to God is close like that of a son, closer than that of Moses as a servant. He is Son over the house, implying that he shares in the authority of God the patron over the house. Moses is servant in the house, implying his subjugation under this authority.

But Moses' mediating ministry is not quoted for its insignificance, but on the contrary for its greatness. The readers will understand Jesus' ultimate supremacy as mediator when they picture it

352 “The recognition that the oracle of the royal priest stands behind 3:1–6 indicates that the theme of Jesus’ priesthood is not held in abeyance in 3:1–4:14 but is taken up immediately following its announcement in 2:17–18.” Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 79.
353 Cf. Weiß, Hebräer, 244–245.
354 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 135.
355 Oepke, “Μεσίτης.”
356 Ibid.
as superior to that of Moses, whom they held in great esteem as mediator with the most intimate relationship to God they knew. The author employs his typical lesser-to-greater logic again. He does not cast it into the typical wording “if A… then how much more B…”, but by drawing on the thought-world of Moses, who as archetypical mediator of ancient Israel stirs analogous emotions in his readers. He refers to Moses the faithful servant and evokes the reverence and honour the hearers would typically have had for him in order to then establish that Jesus has been found worthy of even greater honour than Moses (v. 3a).

Jesus is not just relatively superior to Moses as mediator, but categorically so. Again, the house metaphor helps arguing this point. Jesus' honour is greater than Moses' in the same way as the builder of a house has more honour than the house (v. 3b). The author wants to point out that Jesus is rooted in the realm of the creator, Moses in the realm of creation. He continues the argument stating that just as every house is built by someone (v. 4a), God is the creator of everything (v. 4b), and by implication this is where Jesus' identity as co-creator (cf. 1:2) rests. Moses', albeit honourable, place lies within creation, where he testified to the future mediation by the co-creator Son (v. 5).

The author then identifies the readers as being the house (v. 6). Attridge states that “[t]his metaphorical identification is not deployed for apologetic or polemical purposes, but rather to introduce the following paraenesis. 'We' are God's house only if we maintain our boldness and hopeful boast.” The οἶκος motif would have been recognised as an allusion to the traditional self-designation of Israel as the house of God. The traditional designation of the people of Israel is likely to have come into the readers' conscience as a side note from tradition.

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357 An argument from general logic. Weiβ calls it a “Allgemeinen Erfahrungssatz”. Weiβ, Hebräer, 247.
359 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 111.
360 Note also Aalen's interesting theory that “[t]he Kingdom of God is a house”, Sverre Aalen, “‘Reign’ and ‘House’ in the Kingdom of God in the Gospels,” NTS 8, no. 03 (1962): 229.
purpose of enforcing the paraenesis on loyalty and faith, the author can also use the topos to summon loyalty and honour usually held for the identification with Moses as mediator of the old covenant, and transfer it to Jesus, the new mediator of the new covenant.

3.4.5.1. Conclusion
The author stays with the idea of kinship-mediation and brings in a second mediator for comparison: Moses. The two thoughts, Moses and kinship, come together in the metaphor of the “house.” The house is the house of God. Here, Moses is only a servant, belonging to the side of the human clients of God the patron. But Jesus is the Son, who is brother to the readers as discussed in 2:10-18, but also (or even more) belongs to God's side and is thus a superior mediator. In this passage the speaking about Jesus the supreme Son-mediator finds its preliminary climax. The rest of the first main part will be spent with paraenetic implications of what has been argued so far. The kinship aspect of the argument presented here will come into sharper focus when the passage is reviewed in the context of wasta with its distinct kinship ideology.

3.4.6. 3:7-19. Exhortation 2. Faith and Unbelief of the Wilderness Generation
This pericope evolves around a quote of Ps 95:7-11, a call against a “hardening of the hearts” like that of the wilderness generation and thereby forfeit their entry into the “rest” of God. The author directs this warning at his readers in a way quite true to the original meaning, but presents it under the key aspect of unbelief / distrust, ἀπιστία: after presenting the Psalm text in vv. 7-11, the author's exposition is framed with the word in vv. 12+19. The pericope at first appears to be less relevant to mediation, the focus of this study, than others. But as deSilva points out “the word group sharing the root πιστ- belongs to the sphere of patronage, friendship and reciprocity.”361 It is under this aspect that the passage has a bearing on mediation: mediation generally requires reciprocation. This reciprocation the author is calling his readers to give in the form of loyalty and “faith.” Failure to reciprocate would amount to shaming the patron.

361 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 144.
In order to address the ἀπιστία of the recipient congregation the author chooses Ps 95:7b-11 as a vantage point. Lane analyses that the original context for this Psalm was the upheaval of the elders at Massah and Meribah.\(^\text{362}\) But the LXX translated the two toponyms into παραπικρασμός (rebellion) and πειρασμός (testing). The author thus takes the liberty to read the Psalm as referring to the episode about rebellion and testing described in Numbers 14, the Israelites refusing to enter the Promised Land after hearing the report of the spies.\(^\text{363}\)

The passage is a call to faith today coupled with a fierce judgement over the lack of faith of the ancestors in the past. When the passage is understood from the notions of trust and distrust (πίστις and ἀπιστία), pointing to the thought-world of patronage, the force of the passage becomes a warning to not keep on insulting the patron by refusing to give him the loyalty and honour he is due.

The second prominent motif in this passage and the next (4:1-13) is the motif of God's “rest”, κατάπαυσις. It is a matter of debate what exactly the author of Hebrews means by it. The first option is that he is referring to “rest” in the geographical land of Canaan in the either in the history of Israel at the moment of the taking of the land. Secondly, it has been argued that he is thinking of the future rest during the “millennial reign” of Jesus on earth in the future in Jerusalem.\(^\text{364}\) It is unlikely that the author of Hebrews has in view either option because both are earthly and transitory, but the persistent focus of Hebrews is the spiritual, heavenly and eternal.

Instead, when reading the passage in the context of mediation and using πίστις as an interpretative lens, the “rest” equals the benefit mediated by the patron, which has to be grasped. It has been offered in the past, but was forfeited by the ancestors in a disastrous way. The author underlines this in vv. 15-19 with three rhetorical questions and the final assertion that indeed the wilderness

\(^{362}\) Cf. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 85.


\(^{364}\) Cf. deSilva's summary of the positions of Walter Kaiser and Stanley Touissant, deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 157.
generation did not enter the rest.

3.4.6.1. Conclusion
After extensive discussion focused on the person of the mediator (1:1-3:6), the author now switches to paraenetic mode again and focuses more on the benefit, here identified with the “rest” in the story of the taking of Canaan. The author uses this part of the history of Israel as an illustrated warning against not responding appropriately to the offering of a great benefit and the risk of losing it. For our question of what picture Hebrews paints of the mediation of Jesus, this passage appears as an illustration of the importance of reciprocation and loyalty and will be discussed more below in 4.5

3.4.7. 4:1-13. Possibility to Still Enter the “Sabbath”-Rest
The main intention of 4:1-13 is announced straight away in the first verse. The author wants to assert to his readers that the promise of entering God’s rest still stands and the hearers are called to grasp it.

The author now connects the previously used Ps 95 with Gen 2:2. He does this following the rabbinic hermeneutical principle which assumes a relation between two texts which share common terms, such as κατάπαυσις in this case.\(^{365}\) The true rest is thus defined as the sabbath rest, as the “Endziel der Verheißung Gottes für sein Volk.”\(^{366}\) As seen above, the “rest” is a spiritual one. Connecting it to the creation account, the author now reveals the “primordial status” it has in his eyes, being a “symbol of eschatological salvation”, as Attridge puts it.\(^{367}\)

Entry into this rest is still possible. The author states this conviction in 4:1 and then “proves” it exegetically in the following (see esp. vv:8-9) by arguing that the mention of another day (σήμερον) in the Psalm, long after the exodus, proves that God has ordained another time to receive the benefit of the “rest.” The consequence is that the readers should “fearfully avoid”\(^{368}\) to “appear to have

\(^{367}\) Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 129.
\(^{368}\) Note the exhortative use of the subjunctive φοβηθῶμεν.
fallen short of it.”

Πίστις is the central aspect in appropriation of the benefit. In v. 2 the author makes the role of trust explicit: it is the decisive criterion without which the benefit cannot be grasped (cf. also v. 6).

It is important to note what the author implies regarding his readers and their entry into the “rest.” First, he states that they have been given the same message which their forefathers received but rejected (v. 2). Second, he implies that his recipients are in a much better place for grasping the promised benefit this time. “We”, in fact have believed and subsequently are entering the promised rest. The time forms chosen here sound as if the appropriation of the rest were already accomplished. In v. 11, however, the author switches again to the exhortative tone of 4:1: “Let us work hard…”

The author frames the paragraph with strong words of warning and exhortation to grasp the rest (vv. 1,11), but in v. 3 chooses language suggesting that this has already been achieved. This tension seems to suggest that in the author's view two things are equally true and relevant. On the one hand, his readers have trusted/believed and are on the brink to, or even already in the process of, entering the rest. On the other hand, it is vital that they keep the faith and strive to indeed actively enter, or complete the process of entering, which they have not completely done yet. The aspect of being on the brink to entering, which is represented by v. 3, is also found in the picture of the Israelites in Numbers 14 which the author had evoked in 3:7-19 as a historical-geographical metaphor for standing on the verge to success. It is also found, albeit in a somewhat toned-down way, in the author's talk about the high priestly mediator Jesus, allowing his clients to approach the benefits of the patron with παρρησία – a word pregnant with the unshakeable confidence that comes with Greek citizenship. The exhortative aspect resonates with numerous warnings and judgements

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369 “We” means the readers including the author, cf. v.1, subjunctive used in cohortative sense “let us…”
370 Note the use of the aorist (εἰσερχόμεθα) and perfect (πιστεύσαντες).
371 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 147.
372 Cf. Ibid., 139.
such as in 5:11-6:12.

3.4.7.1. **Conclusion**
For the overall picture of mediation painted in Hebrews, this means that the author views his audience as clients in a mediation process which stands on the brink of completion, but still requires loyal and faithful perseverance and trust in the mediator. This trust is urgently needed and despite the immanent consummation of the mediation and full appropriation of the benefit, there is still a serious immanent danger of falling short of this requirement.

The author has now introduced and discussed the person of Jesus the son-mediator (1:1-3:6) and called his readers to loyalty and succession. He now moves into the second part of his overall argument: presenting Jesus as the mediating high priest like Melchizedek.

3.5. **Hebrews 4:14-7:28. Jesus, the High Priest**
The second main part evolves around the high priest imagery. Among others, the author brings out the aspects of permanence, superiority and relational intimacy using the logic of priestly mediation. Before beginning our analysis it is important to gain an overview over the background behind Hebrews' use of cultic imagery.

3.5.1. **Excursus: Cult and Sacrifice in Hebrews**
Cult and sacrifice are central to the argument for Jesus as mediator in Hebrews and come into sharper focus now from 4:14 onwards. Nelson states that “Hebrews drew on the sacrificial system of the Old Testament to develop an effective, Christocentric soteriology to meet the needs of those it addressed.”

Nelson's overview begins with the remark that on the one hand Hebrews criticises the Levitical cult, yet on the other recognises the logic of sacrifice as such for the sake of its argument. The cult is criticised as “ineffective” (7:11, 18-19; 10:4), “repetitious” and “impermanent” (7:23; 8:13; 9:9-10; 10:1). It will be seen below how this criticism is part of the author's program to

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374 Ibid.
present Jesus’ high priestly activity as the superior mediation. The sacrificial cult is acknowledged in its basic efficiency, however, because it offers the metaphor for Jesus’ mediating activity as high priest. Nelson points out how the author outlines the logic by speaking of the “‘better’ sacrifice [9:23] that enacts a ‘better covenant’ [7:22] based on ‘better promises’ [8:26] made by Christ as the superior priest [7:11, 15, 26-27].”375

Jay, who is concerned with the social scientific research of sacrifice, points out that it is difficult to “identify ‘sacrifice’ invariantly across different traditions” since its meaning will always be relative to the participants' interpretations.376 In a similar way, while rooted in the Old Testament tradition of sacrifice, the author of Hebrews is also selective about the meaning that he gives to sacrifice in the document. As Nelson points out, the matrix for the cultic imagery in Hebrews is derived from the cult around the wilderness tabernacle as described in the LXX, the ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) and the confirmation of the covenant with blood (Ex 24:3-8).377

John Stott highlights the aspect of so-called penal substitution in Hebrews.378 This teaching assumes that sin can only be atoned through blood in sacrifice, which substitutes for the sacrificer's own blood, which would have been the adequate penalty for his sinfulness. Stott derives from Lev. 17:11 the three statements that 1) blood symbolises life, 2) therefore its sacrificial shedding atones for sin and 3) it was ordained that way by God himself. From this basis he goes on to interpret Hebrews 9:22, the assertion that there is no forgiveness without shedding of blood, and 10:4, the statement that the blood of animals was not fully sufficient:

375 Ibid.
No forgiveness without blood meant no atonement without substitution. There had to be life for life or blood for blood. But the Old Testament blood sacrifices were only shadows; the substance was Christ. For a substitute to be effective, it must be an appropriate equivalent. Animal sacrifices could not atone for human beings, because a human being is “much more valuable...than a sheep,” as Jesus himself said (Matt. 12:12).

Stephen Motyer has offered an addition to that view. His argumentation focusses on chaps. 2-5 from which he claims “we are given the fundamental perspective from which to view the sacrifice of Jesus.” Jesus' death is part and climax of his journey as leader (ἀρχηγός) into the realm of death, from which he rescues his own by sharing in their condition. Jesus “nullified the power of death by sharing in it.” Motyer interprets that “[a]tonement thus arises fundamentally out of the incarnation, rather than just out of Jesus' death and resurrection. In Hebrews, atonement proceeds from relationship.” This is consistent, as will be seen, with the findings of this study: the theology of Jesus as mediator, which he is in the person of the high priest and Son, is one of deepened and restored relationship.

Motyer's interpretation goes in part against Stott's reading of 9:22 and 10:4 since he excludes the possibility of finding penal substitution in Hebrews, saying “This is not penal substitution [...]. We do not find any notion of bearing punishment in our place. These ideas are completely foreign to Hebrews.” This discrepancy centres around the notion of “punishment,” which seems indeed absent from Hebrews and Stott derives it from his broader systematic look at atonement. Motyer sees in Hebrews something “more compelling and vigorous” than penal substitution. Even the warnings of judgement such as 10:31 and 12:29 are not a sign of God's wrath which has to be appeased by the penal substitutionary sacrifice of the Son; instead they are a warning of the

379 Ibid., chap. 6, location 2439, under “Sacrifice in the Old Testament.”
381 Ibid., 143.
382 Ibid.
383 Ibid., 144.
384 Ibid., 145.
385 He categorises Hebrews as closest to a representative view within the systematics of atonement, Ibid., 146.
consequence of the essential problem and sin which Hebrews addresses, namely the falling away from the relationship with the Father through the mediation of the Son.\textsuperscript{386} Again, this is consistent with our interpretation which sees the mediational work of Jesus (as it is presented in cultic metaphor of his priestly action) as focussed on the aspect of \textit{relationship}, namely between man and God and also man and his mediator, Jesus the son and high priest.

For our purposes Stott's remarks and Motyer's analyses can be reconciled by saying, with Stott, that the penal aspect was certainly part of the theology of atonement of the Hebrew Bible and therefore quite likely part of the background of the originals readers of the Letter to the Hebrews. Yet, with Motyer, explicit notions of substitutionary punishment are absent from Hebrews. The atonement described in Hebrews reaches beyond the scope of penal substitution into a further reaching act of atonement which atones for sin at a deeper level, namely by repairing the relationship which is incomplete and flawed without the mediation of the New Covenant. In this way the two views seem to add to one another rather than being mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, it is important for our purposes to think of sacrifice as a combination of actions or a “ritual script” rather than just the death of a victim.\textsuperscript{387} The author of Hebrews draws on the cultic imagery in all its breadth, as it is reflected in the script of the \textit{Yom Kippur} and the covenantal ritual. Nelson goes on to analyse:

\begin{quote}
Hebrews reflects the complexity of Israelite sacrifice by describing the sacrificial act of Jesus as a ritual script that entailed three episodes: the death of the victim, passage by the priest onto the realm of the holy and the use of blood to effect purification and to create a covenantal relationship. All three of these actions were part of the Day of Atonement ritual (slaughter in Lev 16:11, 15a; entrance in vv. 12-13, 15a; sprinkling blood in vv. 14, 15b, 18-19). The first and last steps appear in the covenant ceremony of Exod 24:5, 6-8.\textsuperscript{388}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{386} “The author has already said that Jesus comes to ‘make purification for sins’ (1:30. But nowhere does he hint that the problem with sin is essentially that God does not like it, so that we are helplessly under god's condemnation/ The essence of the problem lies elsewhere. The essence of our human problem, for the author of hebrews, is that we inhabit a world that cannot sustain a permanent relationship with God, our Creator.”\textit{Ibid.}, 146–147.

\textsuperscript{387} Nelson, “‘He Offered Himself’: Sacrifice in Hebrews,” 252.

\textsuperscript{388} \textit{Ibid.}
Nelson points out that Hebrews puts a focus on Jesus' entry into the heavenly tabernacle by his own blood, assuming the role of priest and victim at once (9:7-12, 24-25), but shies away from descriptive language for the blood ritual, focussing instead of “effective language” concerning the blood – it “speaks a better word” (12:24). The author is concerned with the superiority of Jesus' priestly service. The redemption and purification afforded by his blood is “interior and eternal rather than external and impermanent (9:12-14; cf. 10:1-4).

Nelson states that the essence of sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible is “atonement” in the sense of “removal of obstacles that threaten the relationship between God and God's people.” This study will find that such a view is consistent with the role which sacrifice plays in the overall argument of Hebrews. Jesus' mediating activity, largely expressed through cultic imagery and allusions to the Day of Atonement rite and the covenant celebration, is to the ultimate effect of a reconstruction of the family relationship between God and his children through Jesus, the mediating Son and brother.

3.5.2. 4:14-5:10. Jesus as the Great High Priest

We are now in a position to enter the discussion of Jesus as High Priest. The preceding passage (3:6-4:13) was marked by the urgency of the exhortation to recognise the great mediation which is underway in Jesus and not fail to grasp it. In 4:14-5:10 the tone changes. In a much more comforting fashion, the author draws out how Jesus as High Priest is full of sympathy for his people and can be approached in confidence. He implicitly debuts the anticipated objection that Jesus cannot be compared with the Levitical priesthood because of his lineage: he introduces into his argument the thought of the “order” of Melchizedek, the archetypical mythical priest, and puts Jesus' legitimacy on a spiritual basis. The idea that Jesus is superior to the known priesthood is furthered. Eventually the author asserts that Jesus is made perfectly fit to minister to humanity as it is steeped in sinfulness because of his own experience of weakness.

389 Ibid., 256.
390 Ibid., 255.
391 Ibid., 258–259. He points to Gen 32:20; Deut 21:8 and 2 Sam 21:3 for examples of this meaning of sacrifice and the root kpr (to atone).
The passage introduces the high priest motif in much greater depth and marks thus the third main part of the treatise. Vanhoye recognises the mediating role of Jesus as high priest and states: “The priest is in effect a man who bares the community’s responsibility of relating to God. He is called to serve the group as a whole (and consequently each member of the group regarding everything which touches relationship [sic] with God). In other words, he is a mediator.” Desilva explains it in greater detail, using the term broker:

Relationships between deities and human beings were conceptualized in similar terms [to brokerage, E.S.]. The High Priest served as a broker of the benefits of God, the Patron sans pareil. Offering sacrifices as satisfaction for the affronts to the authority of God, he secured the Benefactor's favorable disposition (χάρις) and thus restored the nation's confidence in the hope of God's continued beneficence in God's dealings with the people.

This is what the author will argue in the following verses: Jesus is the source of confidence and hope.

Hebrews is the only NT book to make this imagery of Jesus as mediating High Priest explicit. Vos speculates why the motif might be absent elsewhere: “[W]e may say that there was less need for it, since the sacrificial character of Christ’s work was universally recognized.” It is probable that the high priestly Christology of Hebrews owes its initial idea to the author's concern with mediation. Parson states: “These two characteristics - that Jesus takes up God’s cause and at the same time shows solidarity with mankind and defends their cause - makes the author of Hebrews realize that what the apostolic Christian experience calls salvation from God in Jesus can equally well be

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394 However, Bruce suggests that the idea is widely present throughout the NT in an implicit way. “While no other New Testament document expressly calls Jesus a high priest, his high-priestly character is implied in several, and his intercessory service is more than implied. In words apparently borrowed from a primitive confession of faith, for example, Paul speaks of ‘Christ Jesus, who died,... who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us’ (Rom. 8:34).” Frederick F. Bruce, “The Kerygma of Hebrews,” Int 23, no. 1 (1969): 8.
395 Vos, The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 92 Note also Vos’ interesting suggestion that, given that all believers are priests, Jesus must be one too.
expressed in priestly terms.”

The author sets out by stating that Jesus stands as a high priest who has gone through the heavens and therefore the readers should hold fast their profession. It has been suggested that the “profession” mentioned was a liturgical statement of faith that the audience would have ritually embraced in the past. Attridge remarks, however, that it “cannot be limited to that”. A particular liturgical confession might have been in view (possibly one around the christological statement of Jesus as Son of God, which the author might be hinting at here) but the statement also shines in the loyalty-for-mediation logic which was at work in 3:6-4:13 and is still lingering.

The formulation “great” high priest is pregnant with one main concern of the author, the superiority and supremacy of Jesus as mediator. Attridge remarks that while “great” high priest could be an expression from tradition referring to the Levitical high priest, for the author of Hebrews it means “one who belongs to an entirely different order of priesthood from that of the descendants of Aaron,” one who has a special “heavenly status” as will be seen in ch. 7. But the special-ness that Attridge detects actually goes beyond the aspect of difference; it is part of the author's great claim of the eschatologically ultimate supremacy of the mediatorship of Jesus.

The writer goes on to argue why Jesus is the supreme mediator, now expanding on another one of his main arguments: Jesus' identification with humans, “an important element in Hebrews' paraenetic program.” Now expanding on ἐλεήμων γένηται καὶ πιστός from 2:17, he argues that Jesus is the one who sympathises with human weakness. This ability to sympathise comes from his having been tested and confronted with all things his clients could be confronted with.

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397 Cf. e.g. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 140.
398 Ibid.
399 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 104.
400 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 139.
401 Ibid., 141.
V. 16 is a focus point for the comforting exhortation that the author wants to give to his readers. He calls them to draw near in confidence and assures that they will find mercy, grace and timely help.

The language of movement in v. 14, and here v. 16, deserves special attention. Jesus is said to go through (διέρχομαι) the heavens, his followers are encouraged to approach (προσέρχομαι) God, the patron himself (v. 16). The notion of going through the heavens has overtones of the Day of Atonement rite when the high priest went through the curtain into the Holy of Holies. Further, as Vos argues, there is a close identification of the priest with the people he represents and thus the priest cannot be thought to just send the people but rather bring them, which implies that he himself has to approach God first. Vos goes on to explain that “in the priest, the nearness to God is not merely counted as having taken place for the believers, as a mere imputation. Rather, so close is the connection between the priest and the believers that a contact with God on his part at once involves also a contact with God for them [and thus] there must be a close identification between the priest and his followers.”

The image of the mediating high priest causes the recipients to picture themselves as bound to Jesus who moves and takes them with him along the path towards the goal of the mediation process.

In the argument of Hebrews, approaching God is not just possible in Jesus but the possibility is also categorically widened and secured as the present tense of προσερχόμεθα expresses. Lane translates “let us again and again draw near...” It was only possible to approach God on the Day of Atonement, once a year, according to the rules laid down in Lev 16. But now, approaching God is continuously possible by virtue of Jesus' high priestly ministry, in an immediacy which “Israel never enjoyed.”

The aim of the approach is mercy and favour (ἔλεος καὶ χάριν). This is a common collocation, with

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402 Cf. Vos, The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 94.
403 Ibid., 95.
404 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 115.
405 Ibid., 215.
the two words meaning almost the same but ἔλεος possibly pertaining to sins past while χάρις refers to sins of the future.\textsuperscript{406} In our environment, however, the importance of the word χάρις within the economy of patronage stands out. As was seen above (2.6.6.1), grace (χάρις) is the currency, as it were, in patronal relationships. What is central in common social mediation of the time is, as per Hebrews, also central in Christ's cultic mediation as high priest. In deSilva's words: “The relationship between God and the addressees is defined as 'favor' (χάρις), which is a term of central importance for discourse about patronage in the Jewish and Greco-Roman environments of early Christianity... as well as a prominent term in Hebrews itself.”\textsuperscript{407}

In 5:1-5 the author draws out some few and select comparisons with the Levitical priesthood. Attridge rightly observes that “[t]he following verses do not provide an exhaustive list of the characteristics of biblical high priests, but focus on attributes particularly relevant to the theme of Christ as High Priest.”\textsuperscript{408} The main focus, as Lane comments, is on the identification of the high priestly Jesus with his people and this is what the writer wishes to emphasise.\textsuperscript{409} Thus the high priest is for the author of Hebrews appointed ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων, whereas in the original quote from Exodus it is stressed that the priesthood is instated for God (Ex 28:1,3; 29:1, “serve me” (ἐρατεύειν μοι), LXX). The writer slightly bends those ideas in order to “establish a parallel between the Levitical high priest and Jesus.”\textsuperscript{410} The alteration of the OT quote reveals the paraenetic and comforting agenda of the author.

The author's discussion of the Levitical priesthood concentrates on the high-priestly ministry on the Day of Atonement.\textsuperscript{411} On this day, the high priest brought sacrifices for sin and entered the Holy of Holies. This offers the best metaphor for what the writer wants to convey: Jesus' self-sacrificial death, which mediates a mended relationship towards God.

\textsuperscript{406} Cf. Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 142.
\textsuperscript{407} deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 182.
\textsuperscript{408} Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 142.
\textsuperscript{409} Cf. Lane, \textit{Hebrews 1-8}, 123.
\textsuperscript{410} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{411} Cf. Ibid., 116.
The central thought of v. 2 is the compassion of the high priest as a consequence of his own weakness. It is a statement parallel to but distinct from 4:15. There, speaking of Jesus, the verb used was συμπαθῆσαι, to sympathise. Here, in turn, the Levitical high priest is in view. It is he who is able to “have compassion” or “deal gently” (μετριοπαθεῖν) with his clients. The semantic focus of μετριοπαθεῖν is the moderation of one's anger, resulting in a gentleness which lies half-way between the stoic indifference (ἀπάθεια) and emotional indulgence.\footnote{See Lane's explanations, who follows Yarnold. Cf. Edward J. Yarnold, “Metriopathein apud Heb 5,2,” \textit{VD} 38 (1960): 149–55, as quoted in Lane, \textit{Hebrews 1-8}, 108, 116.}

The Levitical high priest knows weakness and sin from his own experience, so he feels with his clients in an existential way and restricts his own anger over his clients' sins because he would not wish such anger be directed against himself. Attridge points out how the two remarks in 4:15 and 5:2 seem to be making the point of Christ's superiority to the Levitical priesthood. The earthly priesthood is marked by weakness and thus the best he can do is to restrict his anger (which is, however, positive) Jesus, on the other hand, having been tested but found sinless can in his strength, “actively sympathiz[e]” (which is much superior).\footnote{Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 144.} The cultic mediation which the author promotes for his readers is marked by sympathy: first sympathy as absence of righteous anger, which flows from a mediator-priest who himself knows weakness and is compassionate and lenient, and now the superior form of that priestly sympathy, the same attitude of sympathy but flowing from Jesus as sinless, holy high priest, who can dispense a purer form of feeling with his people.

V. 3, the statement that the Levitical priest had to bring sin offerings for his own sins first, is part of the bigger picture of Jesus' superiority as mediating high priest which the author is painting throughout the document. He has already pointed out how Jesus' sinlessness results in the purer sympathy. He will later in 9:14-15, which are climactic verses within the whole document, draw out more fully how the self-sacrifice of Jesus, who is a holy and sinless high priest and unblemished offering in one, constitutes his ultimate supremacy as mediator. This thought, engrained in the
economy of priestly sacrifice, is anticipated in this remark in 5:3.

Vv. 4-5 states that the calling and legitimacy of high priests rest with God and accordingly also Jesus' priestly ministry is ordained by God. As seen above (cf. discussion of Hebrews 2:10) the author is careful to point out that the unheard-of mediation in Jesus, which he is promoting, is firmly rooted in God's sovereign plans. Vv. 4-5 serves this same part of his argument.

Interestingly, the author quotes again Psalm 2:7 to prove this legitimisation. Dahms observes: “But our author has made it clear that sonship, at least as incarnate (cf. 2:17), implies priesthood. This is the clear implication of his exegesis of Psalm 2, 110 in 5:5-6, even though his primary interest in that passage is to show that ‘Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest.’”\textsuperscript{414} In his mind, the office of priest is linked with, or even originates in, Jesus' status as Son. This logic is only apprehensible if a high priest is viewed as mediator and a son is viewed as an ideal typical mediator and both of those views are present in the collective mind of the recipients and require not much further explanation.

Parson states:

In summary, the writer stressed the Sonship of Jesus and expressed it in a three-stage christology of pre-existence, humanity, and exaltation. This interfacing of humanity with deity allowed for further expression in sacerdotal terminology. … While it would be fruitless to try and claim that this emphasis on both the humanity and deity of Jesus necessarily resulted in use of priestly imagery, it is helpful to notice that the Son and High Priest are complementary terms which produce a full-orbed christology.\textsuperscript{415}

Loader holds that the high priest idea comes from a common understanding of the time that the heavenly realm was best described in cultic terms, a cultic realm in which Jesus was a main minister in the fashion of Revelation 1:13.\textsuperscript{416} Subsequently, “[i]m Dienst seiner Bemühungen, den

Lesern in ihrer Situation durch Ermutigung und Ermahnung zu helfen, hat der Vf the

\textsuperscript{414} Dahms, “The First Readers of Hebrews,” 373.
\textsuperscript{415} Parsons, “Son and High Priest,” 208.
\textsuperscript{416} Loader, \textit{Sohn und Hoherpriester}, 238.
V. 6 introduces the motif of Melchizedek. Still in the context of discussing Jesus' legitimacy and institution as high priestly mediator, the author quotes Psalm 110:4, the first verse of which he had already quoted in 1:13. Jesus is priest κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδεκ. Lane, following Ellingsworth, translates “like Melchizedek,” arguing that τάχις cannot mean order in the sense of succession since just two priests would hardly warrant this language. Neither is the writer using the term for its second meaning rank (following Moffatt). Lane thus translates in the spirit of 7.3 (ἀφωμοιωμένος) or 7.15 (κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα), “just like Melchizedek.”

As will be seen below when discussing ch. 7, the author uses Melchizedek as a metaphor, i.e. in order to transfer meanings and connotations from the metaphor, Melchizedek, a figure of Scripture and wider tradition, to Jesus as the Son and priest as whom he wants to describe him. This is reflected well in Lane's (Ellingsworth's) translation. It is also partly suitable in our context because the Melchizedek metaphor has a bearing on the description of Jesus as mediator. However, had the author wanted to express the same likeness as in 7:3 and 15, he might have chosen one of those wordings.

The choice of the word τάχις could also reflect a public awareness that Jesus was neither of the “order” - i.e. descent - of Aaron nor Zadok. Buchanan argues that it could thus be an apologetic move, anticipating objections against calling Jesus “priest” when it was known that he did not have a priestly lineage. At the time the document was written, similar criticism was commonly held against the Hasmoneans, who assumed royal and priestly functions although being non-Zadokite Levites and non-Davidians, and their positions would be defended with similar literary moves.

417 Ibid., 250.
418 Cf. Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 109.
419 Cf. Buchanan, Hebrews, 95–97. Buchanan explains: “The author wanted to interpret Jesus' role in terms of a priesthood and his death as a priestly sacrifice. Therefore he had to support his position rather defensively on the basis of scripture. He used two enthronement Psalms, one which called its hero 'messiah' and 'son,' and the other that called him a priest. On the basis of these, he could offer an interpretation that was not traditional for Jesus, but one that was patterned somewhat according to the leadership of the Hasmoneans, who assumed both priestly and
Again (as was the case with the translation of ἀρχηγός) the discussion over the right translation bears the danger of obscuring the power of the metaphor to evoke multiple associations at the same time. Κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδεκ might have served to subtly direct the listeners away from thinking about Jesus' un-priestly lineage and move them towards a more spiritual concept of his high priesthood. Melchizedek, the archetypical, mythical priest without lineage is just the right image to achieve this. Just as much, however, it carries the sense of a plain comparison (“just like”). The first comparison between Melchizedek and Christ is already made in the same verse. Jesus' priesthood is “forever” / εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα simply by way of comparison, not a cultic affiliation (being of the same “order”) between Jesus and the mythological Melchizedek. It is the first of many comparisons that will follow.

3.5.2.1. Conclusion
The passage 4:14-5:10 sees the proper introduction and first discussion of the High Priest motif, the second of two prime motifs after sonship, through which the author paints the picture of Jesus as the supreme mediator between man and God. This rich picture lets the author communicate several aspects and qualities of Jesus' mediatorship. He has part in both worlds (God's and humanity's) and he identifies and sympathises with his people, he is gentle and emotionally involved. The work of a High Priest evokes the picture of movement towards God, analogous to the High Priest's movement towards the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. This aspect will emerge as more prominent when viewed in the light of wasta below in 4.7 The duration of the mediation is permanent (we can approach “again and again”) which suggests that the mediation is superior to other acts of mediation. The High Priest motif also answers the implied question about Jesus' legitimacy as mediator: he is designated by God. All these ideas are attached to the topic of Jesus as high priest and to various degrees will be picked up end expanded later.

Ibid., 97.

royal functions.”
3.5.3. 5:11-6:12. Exhortation

The passage 5:11-6:20 is a last insertion of exhortation before the long discussion of Jesus as high priest like Melchizedek starting in 7:1. The author expresses serious disappointment with the recipients in the opening verse (“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.”) and in the following discusses how they have fallen out of touch with Jesus their mediator.

The verses 5:11-14 introduce the exhortative layer with the author’s expression of ashamedness of his congregation. This stark expression of disappointment appears as the introduction to the exhortation, attempting to grasp the listeners’ attention through its direct and slightly aggressive address. Vv. 6:1-3 speak of how the addressees should move beyond the basics of the faith. The following statements in 6:4-8 infamously warn that there is no way back to repentance after falling away once. The paragraph 6:9-12 expresses confidence that the listeners have in fact not yet fallen away.

The logic of the exhortation is cast in a form of alternating criticism and judgement with encouragement and even commendation (v. 10). The author seems keen to balance out his relatively fierce criticisms and warnings with statements of encouragement and hope about his addressees.

The flow of the argument can thus be outlined and paraphrased as follows:

5:11-14, criticism: How shameful is your immaturity!

6:1-3, encouragement: But you should - and God-willing you will - move beyond this immaturity.

6:4-8, warning: It is impossible to come back to repentance if one has once fallen away!

6:9-11, encouragement: But this shall not be your fate.

The author criticises here what he perceives as shameful underperformance on the part of his
readers concerning the response to their patron. The basic statement of 5:11-14 is that the listeners are not tapping into the full potential of their religion, cf. 5:11. There is a lot more to say about the preceding topic of Jesus as the supreme mediator of the great benefits of God the patron, but the addressees are missing out on this due to their laziness). DeSilva points out that “'[h]earing' denotes the person's complete response to the message of God, and it is sluggishness with regard to this wholehearted response that is in view throughout 5:11-6:12.” This implies that their very basic attitude or course of life is in view, as will become clear below.

The imagery used to draw out this criticism comes from the realm of education: though the hearers can be expected to be teachers of the faith, they need to be taught the basics again (v. 12). The milk / solid food imagery is a second set of ideas the author employs to assist the education image.

This statement does not strictly describe the state of the hearers but rather is made in order to evoke a feeling of shame and move (cf. 6:1) the listeners forward into a less shameful attitude and towards maturity.

Indeed the text leaves in the dark what the precise ethical flaw of the recipients is or what practical change the author wishes to see happen in them. Even without explicit knowledge of patronage or wasa, notions of shame are easy to discern in this paragraph. This suggests that it is the attitude of the hearers which is at fault and needs to be corrected.

This is confirmed by the chosen imagery. The imagery of both teacher-student and milk-solid-food speak of very basic aspects of life (education and physical growth). Both images describe a digression on the honour-shame scale. In their essentiality they aim at the basic attitude of the addressees.

420 DeSilva, Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective, 560.
421 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 201 n.1.
422 “‘The word 'maturity' (τελειότης) is polyvalent, meaning also 'completion' and 'perfection' (in the sense of having arrived at the final state proper to one's being or calling.)” deSilva, Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective, 215. Cf. also “A Closer Look: Perfection in Hebrews,” 194-204.
The passage 6:1-3 is a layer of encouragement between the rebuke of 5:11-14 and the warning of 6:4-8. The author expresses the hope (v. 1) and conviction (v. 3 – note the frame with climax) that his listeners will move beyond the basics of the faith and prove themselves as mature.

The call to move beyond the ἀρχή in 6:1 stands, together with 5:12, in the context of moving forward towards maturity, a hallmark of the God-relationship of the faithful, eventually leading to the perfected state of knowing God which requires no further teaching (8:11). The author calls the readers to move beyond the basic teachings he quotes in vv. 1-2 with the intention of pushing them forward on a path which will eventually lead them beyond teaching as such in the New Covenant. Below (4.6 Collectivism) it will be discussed how aware the author is of the connection between teaching and its role for social cohesion, now and eschatologically.

The list of doctrines in 6:1-2 at first appears untypical for Hebrews as the author is usually not concerned with concrete doctrinal items but rather the higher spiritual truths of the faith. At a second glance, however, the verses fall in line since the doctrines are viewed under the premise to “move beyond” them. This connects with the later reference to Jeremiah 31 (cf. 8:11) and the thought that in the community under the eschatological new covenant teaching will no longer be necessary. The author is aware that teaching and admonition is necessary now (5:12), but the eschatological new covenant being fulfilled means progression beyond teaching.

In 6:4-8 the author appears to argue that restoration of believers who have fallen away is impossible. DeSilva fills in important background, using his socio-rhetorical interpretation. He shows that it was understood in ancient patronage that clients can spoil their relationship to the patron by being ungrateful. Asking then if a once ungrateful client can change his response and restore the relationship to the patron, he finds contradicting evidence studying texts from Dio and Seneca: Dio, in line with Hebrews, denies the possibility of the ingrate being restored to favour with

423 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 241–244.
their patrons, but Seneca calls for precisely such a restoration. The contradiction is explained by the “different audience and rhetorical situation”: Dio, just as Hebrews, addresses clients, Seneca benefactors.424

The warning that there is no restoration for the ones who have fallen away is thus not a systematic statement about the eternal destiny of backslidden believers. It is rather a precisely aimed pastoral and rhetorical move in order to coerce the addressees back into conforming with their roles as clients of the big patron, adopting the right attitude and, being a minority group in danger of gravitating back towards the mainstream, choosing the course of loyalty.

The semantics of παραπίπτω support this interpretation. Michaelis suggests that “[a]lthough the sense seems to be ‘fallen away’ along the lines of ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζῶντος in 3:12, παραπίπτω does not mean ‘to fall away,’ but ‘to offend,’ ‘to fall,’ ‘to sin,’ as in the LXX. In elucidation one may adduce ἑκουσίως ἁµαρτάνειν in the related Hb.10:26, especially as the reference in both cases is not to specific offences as such, but to these as the expression of a total attitude.”425 In view is a conscious turning away from a relationship which markedly offends the other party and is the result of faulty attitude rather than a form of “falling away,” a term which implies not active choice and action but rather a partly passive occurrence.

The severity of the offence to the patron is underlined through the list of benefits vv. 4-5. The author reminds his readers of details of the χάρις which they have received. The ἀδύνατος of restoration to the patron should be self-evident when the received benefits are considered in their extravagance and generosity (enlightenment, tasting of the heavenly gift, share in the Holy Spirit, taste of the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age...). The author then bolsters the statement through two further additions. First, neglecting such great gifts is impossible and shameful to such a degree that it equals crucifying the mediator again and shaming him (v. 6).

424 Ibid., 242.
In synopsis with 10:26 again, the idea behind the πάλιν might be that the crucifixion of Jesus was an event of shame for outsiders but salvific sacrifice for believers and a rejection of this sacrifice practically constitutes a second crucifixion in which the believers agree with the world in heaping shame on Jesus.\(^{426}\) Secondly, the impossibility of repentance is declared to be as stringently logical and natural as fruitful land is blessed and fruitless land is cursed and burned (v. 8). Speaking like this the author closes every possible middle ground between curse and blessing, obedience and disobedience, in order to wake up his readers who are being “sluggish” (νωθρός, 5:11 and 6:12) and motivate them to go back on the track of full commitment and loyalty.

The paragraph vv. 9-12 constitutes the final stratum of the 4-layer exhortation with alternating positive encouragement and negative exhortations and warnings. The author finishes on a positive note. Almost as if to tone down or put into perspective the preceding warning about the impossibility of restoration the author starts “although” (adversative δέ): despite the preceding speech, he is convinced (πεπείσμεθα) that his addressees are actually still on track for salvation.

The things that the author now underlines, to the credit of his addressees, are love towards God (implying some basic existing loyalty to the patron) and help towards fellow-believers. These are the things that further and foster community – adopting an honouring, grateful stance towards the patron and passing along χάρις to others by becoming a mediator oneself. So the recipients are in fact still sufficiently connected members of the mediation-economy.

Vv. 11+12 wrap up the argument to the effect that this love - expressed by loyalty to the patron and help to others and thus constituting the active membership in the patronal community - requires effort (hence the admonition ἵνα μὴ νωθροὶ γένησθε, v. 12) and perseverance (μιμηταὶ δὲ τῶν διὰ

\(^{426}\) Lane remarks that in the logic of Hebrews “there is no other repentance than that provided by God through Jesus Christ.” He comes to this conclusion drawing on a parallelism between the remarks about the impossibility of repentance and the “foundation of repentance” in v.1, the fact that in the ITP grace was emphatically perceived as a gift from God. Conclusion: “The ἀδύνατον, which is used absolutely and without qualification in v 4, expresses an impossibility because the apostate repudiates the only basis upon which repentance can be extended . . .” Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 142.
πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας) and is a non-negotiable milestone on the path to inheritance of the hope.

3.5.3.1. Conclusion
In sum, the author addresses his readers here as clients of God the patron and warns them that discounting great benefits given by God will result in severe damage of the relationship with him and ultimately separation from him. He points out the benefits that have been granted in the past in order to urge the clients back into a loyal and grateful attitude towards their patron. This message is infused with overtones of disappointment in the immaturity of the clients. Shame is evoked in them to urge them to change their attitude. It will be seen in 4.3.4 that it is consistent with the logic of Middle Eastern mediation to use shame to move others to comply with mediation. The shame message is transported by the education metaphor and notions of infant food and food for adults connected to it. In 4.6.2 it will be shown that notions of “teaching” can be connected to mediation and have a bearing on collectivist structures. The author uses the imagery in full awareness of this connection. At the same time he is convinced, however, that the eschatological significance of the mediation which he addresses will mean that teaching all together will cease because of the perfected relationships between man and God under the mediational paradigm of the new covenant.

3.5.4. 6:13-20. God’s Oath and Reliability – Promises of the Relationship with the Patron
At this point in the document, the author is concerned with the relationship of his audience, the clients, with their mediator, Jesus, and by extension God, the source of the benefit. He already shamed his audience for their immature and shameful attitude, urged them towards an honourable response to the beneficence of the patron and expressed his confidence that they can still attain a good relationship with God the patron (6:9-12). Now the author wants to add another note of encouragement to tip the scale to full commitment to a grateful and loyal submission of the clients to the patron.
In the preceding paragraph the author worked on making his readers change their ways through exhortation and encouragement. Now he switches to encouragement through the form of paraenetic midrash. This time he utilises God swearing by himself to bless Abraham in Gen 22 as a vantage point to explain the certainty of the promises of God as seen from his oath.

Wenham interprets:

“By myself I swear.” This is the first and only divine oath in the patriarchal stories [and the only time God swears in his own name427], though it is frequently harked back to (24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Exod 13:5; often in Deuteronomy). Note the preceding “by myself,” which gives the oath a special solemnity and weight (Jer 22:5; 49:13; Amos 4:2; 6:8; Heb 6:13–18).428

The motif of oath features prominently here and in ch. 7. An oath is a final guaranty which is personal in nature. This means that it can only be made by a natural person, not an institution, and is attached to the person making the oath and rhetorically might even be attached to another person or moral authority, e.g. one might swear by one's mother's grave. The author points out how God personalises his guaranty made to Abraham by attaching it to himself (“he swore by himself,” 6:13). It will later be seen that God also attaches his guaranty to the person of his mediator, who becomes thus the guarantor, ἔγγυος, of the content of the mediation, the new covenant (7:22).

Lane observes that “oath” here is “compared to the universal practice of regarding an oath as final for confirmation”.429 The author wants to emphasise the ultimate reliability of the promised benefits. The two unchangeable things referred to in v. 18 are not explicated but are commonly agreed to

428 Ibid., 111.
429 “The fact that God swore an oath to Abraham is compared to the universal human practice of regarding an oath as final for confirmation (cf. Cicero, *Topica* 20.77; Philo, On Noah’s Work as a Planter 82). By common definition, an oath is a definitive and binding confirmation of the spoken word and invalidates any contradiction of the statement made. In the OT it was prescribed that oaths should be taken in Yahweh’s name (Deut 6:13; 10:20), and lying under oath was condemned as a violation of the Third Commandment (Exod 20:7; Deut 5:11; Zech p 152 5:3–4; Wis 14:29–31; cf. Trites, Witness, 28–29, 219; Horst, “Der Eid im Alten Testament,” EvT 17 [1957] 366–71). In practice, an oath involved the solemn calling upon God to ratify the unequivocal truthfulness of what was asserted or promised. Philo declares, ‘an oath is nothing else than to call God to bear witness in a disputed matter’ (On the Special Laws 2.10). The writer may have had in mind the fact that Abraham himself swore by God and required others to do so (Gen 14:22; 21:23–24; 24:3).” Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 151–152.
mean 1) the promise and 2) the oath.\textsuperscript{430} They are drawn out for the encouragement (v. 18) of the believers. The discussion of the swearing of an oath here is thus a means to building trust in the patron.\textsuperscript{431}

3.5.4.1. Conclusion

The author refers to Gen 22 in order to evoke trust to the patron (and by extension Jesus the mediator, 6:20) in his readers. This trust evolves around the notion of oath, which effectively ties the certainty of a particular promise to the very person of the oath. The wasa context will later show (see below, 4.6) that trust building is a mechanism inherent to Middle Eastern mediation and the trust-building function which the oath fulfils here, is in a wasa society fulfilled by the wasa himself.

3.5.5. 7:1-10. Introducing the Melchizedek-Metaphor: Emphasising Spiritualisation, Messianic Aspects, Discussing Lineage, Emphasising Greatness

In 7:1-10 the author focuses in on the priest-like-Melchizedek motif. The christological application is probably his own move.\textsuperscript{432} Comparing Jesus according to his priestly office with the figure of Melchizedek helps him, as Theissen remarks aptly, to interpret Jesus' priesthood in such a way “daß neben ihr jede irdische Entsprechung Bedeutung und Berechtigung verliert.”\textsuperscript{433} In this sense, his treatise on Jesus' Melchizedek-ian high priesthood serves the purpose of spiritualisation.\textsuperscript{434} In 7:1-10 this comes to the fore in two ways: the discussion of the etymology and genealogy of Melchizedek.

\textsuperscript{430} Cf. Ibid., 152.

\textsuperscript{431} “The cardinal point of this paragraph is to impress upon the audience the reliability of the message they have received and of the mediator in whom they have placed their trust. Not only God’s promise but God's oath stands behind that mediator and guarantees the efficacy of Jesus' priesthood to secure God's favor and benefactions for the clients.” deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 248.


\textsuperscript{433} Gerd Theissen, Untersuchungen Zum Hebräerbrief, Studien zum Neuen Testament 2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1969), 33.

\textsuperscript{434} The term “spiritual” is not meant here as the opposite of “material.” As far as Jesus' self-sacrifice constitutes his atonement offering, his priestly activity is markedly “material.” The term is rather used to discuss how the author ascribes to Jesus' priestly ministry a strong significance in the heavenly / unseen world.
Mealand observes that on the surface (i.e. discussing christological titles), “[t]he question of Messiahship does not come to the fore in this Epistle.”435 However, the explanations on the etymology of the name Melchizedek do carry connotations of messiahship as they highlight the “strong messianic overtones as the 'king of righteousness' and 'king of peace’”, as deSilva observes, included by the author “in order to build toward the point he makes in 7:3, that Melchizedek was 'made to resemble the Son of God.' He wants to show how Melchizedek provides the type, or even prototype, of Jesus, the Messiah-Priest who would succeed Melchizedek in his priestly office.”436 As was observed earlier, the author is interested to keep a spiritual outlook as he argues the case for Jesus as supreme mediator. Highlighting the implicit messianic aspects of Melchizedek helps him to that end.

The discussion of the genealogy of Melchizedek, or rather lack thereof, helps the author to preemptively counter a particular challenge to his high priest christology. Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi and thus did not have a priestly lineage. Melchizedek however, according to the rabbinical hermeneutical principle that what is not in the Tora is not existent in the world, did not have any lineage at all.437 This, by the logic of vv. 4-10,438 made Melchizedek greater than even Levi himself, because Levi's ancestor Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, carrying the seed of Levi still in him. The fact that Melchizedek has no lineage that contradicts later regulations about priesthood together with the creative explanation via Abraham's tithing solves the anticipated (and obvious) criticism of the author's Christology that Jesus cannot be priest since he descends from Judah. It also amplifies the magnificence of Melchizedek and by extension of Jesus himself as priest, as the enthusiastic imperative “Θεωρεῖτε δὲ πηλίκος οὗτος” in v. 4 shows.

438 As deSilva aptly comments, such a logic stems from the “group-oriented and collective notion of 'personality' in the ancient world.” DdeSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 268.
3.5.5.1. Conclusion
In using Melchizedek as a vehicle for his high priest theology the author has one main interests which shows in these 10 verses of introduction to the Melchizedek exposition: to portray Jesus as a great, spiritual mediator who does not fulfil earthly prerequisites (lineage for a priest) but categorically stands elevated above earthly considerations of qualification. The argument is partly carried by the inventive interpretation of the Melchizedek story in Genesis, by striking messianic chords, and the emotional tone of presentation (cf. v. 4). The Melchizedek metaphor is thus an essential add-on to the cultic imagery of the mediating High Priest.

3.5.6. 7:11–28. Jesus' Superiority Explained through Melchizedek
The Melchizedek metaphor now leads the author into the argument for the superiority over against the Levitical priesthood. It furthers the justification of Jesus' un-priestly lineage and helps the author to save his main metaphor for mediation, Jesus the high priest, from obvious criticism. But it does more than that. It feeds directly into his superiority agenda. The author now explains in more detail how exactly Jesus-like-Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

His superiority rests on two pillars: his indestructible life and God's oath by which he was appointed. The author replaces the legitimacy standard for priesthood coming from ancestry with the category of duration, drawing on Psalm 110:4 (7:17) with its statement as to the eternity of the Melchizedekian priesthood. Loader summarises: “Daß Jesus als Priester bleibt, wird mit dem Hinweis auf sein unzerstörbares Leben gewonnen, denn er ist Gottes Sohn. Die Ähnlichkeit Melchisedeks mit dem Gottessohn besteht darin, daß beide als Priester 'bleiben' (7,3 und vgl S. 144ff.212ff oben) [emphases added].”

This shift in legitimisation stems first from the duration aspect, i.e. the eternity of the priesthood,

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440 Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 253.
and is then further backed by the assertion that this shift was initiated and validated by God through his oath (7:20). Eternity and oath go hand in hand in their role to replace the legitimisation rules of the old order. Oath is later in v. 28 juxtaposed with the law. The law is gradually deconstructed in its legitimacy (cf. also 7:11).

The motif of “oath” had featured in 6:13-20 and is picked up again here prominently in ch. 7. God personalised his guaranty to himself before (in swearing “by himself,” 6:13) and this time to his mediator, who becomes thus the guarantor ἔγγυος (7:22).

The oath of God himself replaces the law (and the principle of priestly lineage included in it) as basis for priesthood (7:28). The oath is emphasised: the author devotes the thought its own repetition of Ps 110:4, preceded by explanatory words (v. 20). In v. 28, law and oath are juxtaposed, the former leads to weak mediators, the latter to a perfected one forever – this is the pinnacle of the perfection motif and a high point of the argumentative strand of superiority.

In 7:22, Jesus is called ἔγγυος, guarantor, of the new covenant. Nash, reading Hebrews against notions of mediation in Alexandrian Judaism, observes that contrary to what is said about the new covenant here, the old covenant did not have a guarantor.

Jesus, the guarantor (eggus) is not simply a go-between; he is personally responsible for that which he guarantees. The old covenant lacked anyone who could guarantee it. But Jesus guarantees the new covenant on both sides, God’s and man’s. Jesus is not simply a mesitēs who happens to bring two opposed parties together. In Jesus, God and man are conjoined. As God’s Son, Jesus ensures God’s side of the contract. He fulfils the human side of the covenant as the perfect representative of the entire race. As mesitēs, Jesus is superior to the mediators of the Alexandrians. But Jesus is superior in an even greater sense inasmuch as he performs a function unlike that of any Alexandrian mediator. Only one who is both God and man can perfectly guarantee the new covenant. 442

In this sense, the notion of ἔγγυος also feeds into the superiority argument of the author. It also bears overtones of trust and mediation which will be analysed later in ch. 3 in light of our wasta

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3.5.6.1. Conclusion
The author achieves several ends with the Melchizedek motif. The sum of these argumentative moves is that he can portray Jesus as spiritual High Priestly mediator, elevated above considerations of lineage and formal cult. The author can thus leave the old priestly mediational system behind and steer towards a new, spiritualised concept of mediation, which is removed from the practicalities of the Levitical cult and traditions. This concept has Jesus the mediator at its centre and its content will in the following be identified as the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 in ch. 8.


3.6.1. 8:1-13. New, Spiritual, Superior
The chapter starts with the emphatic announcement of the κεφάλαιον, “the main point of what we are saying.” Ellingworth interprets this to refer to what was said in 7:26, the remark that this high priest “suited to our need” has come.\(^443\) Weiβ reads it to be more than that; namely the main point of all of Hebrews (“Hauptsache…des Hebr.”).\(^444\) Attridge emphasises that κεφάλαιον means 'main point' as opposed to 'summary' and the remark consequently does not “simply summarise the previous remarks … but focuses them as well.”\(^445\) The focus is governed first by the wording “such a high priest” (τοιοῦτον ἀρχιερέα) and secondly the notion that Christ “sat” (ἐκάθισεν) at God's right hand in heaven.\(^446\) Indeed the focus of 8:1-13 is threefold: the new mediator and his covenant are 1) completely new, 2) spiritual in nature in the sense of validated in the heavenly realm, and hence 3) superior, rendering the old covenant obsolete.

In 8:1 the author introduces the “heart of the christological exposition of Hebrews (8:1-10:18).”\(^447\) In this sense the notion of κεφάλαιον in 8:1 is a key verse, although it does not constitute a

\(^{443}\) Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 63.

\(^{444}\) Weiβ, *Hebräer*, 428.

\(^{445}\) Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 217 emphasis E.S.

\(^{446}\) Cf. Ibid., 217.

\(^{447}\) See Ibid., 216. He criticises Vanhoye and Michel who split up the unit at 9:28.
one-sentence summary for the argument of the whole treatise in one verse. It is a key verse in the way that it funnels what the author has been saying (Jesus is the high priest like Melchizedek), gives it pastoral edge (“we do have such a high priest”), and focuses it in on the energy-centre of the argument; namely that Jesus' mediatorship – while rooted in his incarnate existence, death and resurrection – is actualised in a spiritual way in the heavenly realm and is consequently superior to the old covenant. The first verse of ch. 8 may indeed be called the main point (“Hauptsache”) of Hebrews, especially as it marks the beginning of the climactic construction that leads to 9:11-14. This passage, in turn, Weiß calls “Mitte”\textsuperscript{448} of Hebrews, structurally as well as in content. V. 2 continues to underline the emphasis that Jesus is now, after his earthly ministry has been completed, a heavenly and spiritual mediator. The tabernacle in which he serves is in heaven, set up by God and not men. The statement might also serve to play on the house-motif again, reminding the listeners that Jesus mediates in the house of God himself (cf. 3:1-6). The focus of the hearers is directed towards spiritual mediation and spiritual benefits, away from earthly consideration such as their wrong sense of entitlement to earthly wealth and successful participation in the majority society (see above, 3.5.3 the discussion of 6:4-8).

In v. 3 the author argues that every priest brings offerings and sacrifices and thus Jesus also needs to have an offering to make. DeSilva holds that this is a “postponed topic” in the rhetoric structure of 8:1-13, which anticipates the later discussion of Jesus' sacrifice in ch. 9,\textsuperscript{449} but it also serves as introduction and prerequisite to v. 4. In this verse the author argues “from the contrary, with a rationale”, as deSilva calls the rhetorical device which resembles the structure of the rhetorical training in the progymnasmata,\textsuperscript{450} that Jesus indeed must be a spiritual priest-mediator since a worldly priesthood is already existent.

In v. 5 the author explains in the platonic terms of shadow and copy (ὑπόδειγμα and σκιά) that

\textsuperscript{448} Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 430.
\textsuperscript{449} Cf. deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 280.
\textsuperscript{450} Cf. Ibid.
Jesus' priestly office takes place in the ideal and original, heavenly version of the tabernacle. This thought is held until ch. 9 because first it leads the author to make explicit another conclusion from his remarks so far; namely that the superiority of the new mediatorship and covenant which is presented in Jesus (v. 6), reveals the inferiority and eventuates the obsolescence of the old covenant (vv.7-13).

The author now connects the new covenant he is presenting with the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34. As Attridge remarks, the new covenant first appears to be used by the author in a negative function: the framing verses (vv. 7-8a and 13) speak of the old covenant being flawed (“not blameless”, ἄμεμπτος, v. 7), and God finding fault (μέμφομαι) with the people of the old covenant (v. 8), and God pronouncing the old covenant old/obsolete (παλαιόω, v. 13). Despite the negative use at first, the Covenant ultimately has a positive purpose since it makes concrete the superiority of the New Covenant (what has been called κρείτονες ἐπαγγελίαι in v. 6).

The superiority of the New Covenant is then spelled out using Jeremiah 31. This text allows the author to present the New Covenant as having the following certain characteristics.

1. It is *eschatological* (‘see, the days are coming” [ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται], v. 8b; “after these days”, [μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας ἔκεινας], v. 10).

2. It is *new*, v. 8b.

3. It is *different* from (“not like,” [οὐ κατὰ] v. 9a) the Sinai covenant.

4. The new covenant has become *necessary* because the people did not remain faithful (ἐμμένω, v. 9b) and consequently God rejected them (ἀμελέω, v. 9c).

5. It is *internal* and *personal* in nature (“I will give my laws in their minds and I will engrave

452 Cf. Ibid.
them on their hearts,” [διδοὺς νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν ἐπιγράψω αὐτούς], v. 10b), as opposed to institutional and formal.

6. Connected to 5, the new covenant is essentially relational in nature (“I will be their God and they will be my people,” ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονταί μοι εἰς λαόν) and a matter of mutual identification.

7. Connected to 5 and 6, it is internal and relational to the degree that it requires no further teaching, i.e. no further measures of active implementation (“And no longer will a man teach his neighbour or a man his brother and say: know the Lord, because they will all know me, from the small to the great,” [καὶ οὐ μὴ διδάξωσιν ἐκατοστὸς τὸν πολίτην αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκατοστὸς τὸν ἄδελφον αὐτοῦ λέγων· γνῶθι τὸν κύριον, ὅτι πάντες εἰδήσουσίν με ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου αὐτῶν], v.11)\textsuperscript{453}

8. In addition to 7, this mechanism of intimate closeness to God will transcend all strata of society as the pairs neighbour-brother and small-great suggest.

9. The New Covenant is based on grace and forgiveness and the overcoming of human sin for good (“For I will be merciful concerning their wrongdoing and not remember their sins,” [ὅτι ἵλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι.] v. 12).

As observed, the new-ness of the covenant renders the former covenant obsolete and marks it for immanently close obsolescence (ἄφανσις, v. 13).

3.6.1.1. Conclusion

The author presents the content of the supreme mediation in terms of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. The characteristics of this New Covenant can be summarised as follows. The New

\textsuperscript{453} It has to be assumed that this conviction is not coincidental and unrelated (or even contradictory) to the teaching imagery used for rebuke in 5:12. Indeed the author's worldview is such that the imperative to teach and gain maturity now is all the more urgent in light of the age to come when teaching will cease, but cease in the sense of coming to fulfillment. This will come out even more clearly when viewed in light of the wasta reading environment.
Covenant is new and different to a degree that it supersedes and abrogates the Old Covenant. This is so because it is internal, personal and relational in nature. The superior relational quality of the New Covenant anticipates one of the main conclusions of this study. As will be seen below in 5.1, the superiority of Jesus' mediation pertains mainly to the superior relationship which it establishes between God and humanity. This line of argumentation is pursued further in the following paragraph. Here, the earthly cult is judged as relationally deficient.

3.6.2. 9:1-10. Earthly Cult Judged as Relationally Deficient Mediation
Following his discussion of the new covenant and its superior, spiritual priesthood in the heavenly sanctuary, the author now in 9:1-10 turns to the old covenant and a brief description of the tabernacle as the sanctuary of this covenant. In vv. 2-5 he describes the two rooms of the tabernacle, the holy place and the most holy place, with its basic furnishings: the lampstand, table with consecrated bread, curtain, golden altar, incense, ark with content (jar of manna, Aaron's staff, tablets of the covenant), cherubim, atonement cover. The listing closes with the author's cutting himself off with the words περὶ ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν νῦν λέγειν κατὰ μέρος, “of those [things] we cannot speak in detail now”, 9:5b.

He continues with similar brevity stating that the outer room was the place of normal priestly ministry (v. 6), but the Holy of Holies was entered only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, by the High Priest, accompanied by an offering of blood for his own sins and the sins of the people (v. 7).

Vv. 8-10 then offer the interpretation of the foregoing statements. The Holy Spirit made it clear (δήλοω) through “this” (the Day of Atonement rite) that the path (ὁδός) to the sanctuary (ἅγιος) is not yet revealed (μήπω πεφανερῶσθαι) as long as the tabernacle stands (v. 8). This is a symbol for the present time (παραβολὴ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα), showing that the sacrificial system described cannot make perfect (τελειόω) the conscience of the worshipper (v. 9). As will be seen
now, the author's criticism of the old order is based on a criticism of its relational impotence.

DeSilva interprets that the short but surprisingly detailed description of the tabernacle in vv. 2-5 is “drawing attention to the significance of the separation of the first chamber from the second, and the progressive limitations on access to God that these chambers and their regulations enforce (9:6-7).” Assuming this interpretation as a vantage point, the author's remark that “we cannot speak about these things in detail now” (v. 5) would mean that the author does not want to speak about the furnishings of the tabernacle concerning their historical meaning within the logic of the old covenant (=in detail). Rather, he invokes the picture of the two-part sanctuary with its different ceremonial items to visualise the distance to and separation from God. Lane holds that “[i]n vv 2–5 [the author's] attention is attracted by the division of the Mosaic tabernacle into two compartments, which is simply accentuated by the enumeration of the furnishings, [but] does not intend to give a typological exposition of the cultic objects he has briefly enumerated [emphasis added].”

The fact that general priests can only minister in the outer sanctuary and only the high priest can enter into the holy of holies once a year through sin-offerings underlines the separation between man and God. The hinderances between man and God are suggested to be fundamental and principally unsurmountable. The author comes to the conclusion that the difference in access to God under the new and old covenant is not one of relative immediacy or mediacy. Rather, under the old covenant the access to God was “not yet revealed” and the sacrifice “could not clean the conscience” (vv. 8-9). Compared to the new covenant, “access to God” under the old covenant barely merits its name.

This judgment of the old order in its plain negative terms seems to categorically deny any mediational efficacy whatsoever. The strict logic of such a view would render all OT theology futile. But the intent of the author is probably to evoke the “aura of taboo” which the priestly- and

454 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 297.
455 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 221.
sacrificial system constituted: although it facilitated access to God, it also stood for the limitedness of that access at the same time.\textsuperscript{456}

\subsection*{3.6.2.1. Conclusion}
The passage 9:1-10 intensifies the foregone message of the superiority of the New Covenant by talking in more detail about the Old Covenant and its cult. The Old Covenant was inferior in the same way the New is superior. The relationship with God that it provided was only incomplete, inhibited and unsteady. The author has now made the superiority of the new mediation clear in two contrastive passages about the Old and New Covenant. He now moves on to what can be regarded as the structural and argumentative centre of Hebrews, where the superiority of the new mediation is attached to the atoning self offering of Jesus the High Priest.

\subsection*{3.6.3. 9:11-15. Mediatorial Supremacy Based on Cultic Superiority}
\textsuperscript{457}Weiß calls attention to the chiastic structure of the argument in 8:1-9:28. The centre-piece of this, and arguably the centre of the whole document (“Mitte des Hebr.”), is 9:1-14, and more poignantly the conclusion of that paragraph, 9:11-14.\textsuperscript{457} The author is now ready to speak about the central priestly act of “Christ” (called by title now, one of six occurrences until the end of ch. 9 instead of the name, “Jesus”, the predominant designation in Hebrews up until now). The argument for the superiority of the mediating / priestly ministry of Jesus Christ, which is supported and built up in many different ways from different sides throughout the document, finds its most direct expression in these verses.

In detail, the author now states how in contrast to the limited priestly in the earthly sanctuary as described in the preceding paragraph, Christ's is superior. Most of these thoughts are known already and have been or will be discussed in greater detail elsewhere. The passage 9:11-14 owes its gravity not to the introduction of new ideas, but to the condensed presentation of the most central ideas

\textsuperscript{456} deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 298.
\textsuperscript{457} Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 430.
about Jesus as ultimate mediator-priest in just four verses. Those ideas are as follows:

- The eschatological relevance of Christ's mediatorship; he is high priest of the “good things” that have come / are to come (v. 11). The benefits of which Christ is the mediator are the benefits of the in-breaking new age.

- The superiority of the sanctuary in which the mediation takes place; the sanctuary in which he ministered is “greater”, “more perfect”, “not man made” and “not part of this creation” (v. 11). Christ's superiority is based on his superior cultic service, in the superior cultic place.

- The superiority of his offering; Christ entered not through the blood of animal sacrifice as the high priest on the Day of Atonement (v. 7) but through his own blood (v. 12). The difference between the two, the author states without further explanation, results in Christ's priestly act of becoming a “once for all” event with “eternal” redemptive efficacy (v. 12). Here the author introduces what Neyrey calls the argument of “frequency,”

With a typical a fortiori argument, the passage concludes in vv. 13-14 with the statement that if the earthly sacrifices made clean according to the flesh, the sacrifice of Christ himself, whose offering was through “the eternal spirit,” will all the more cleanse the conscience from dead works (i.e. everything outside the new covenant) and make ready to serve the living God (i.e. life inside the new covenant).

V. 15 is a hinge-verse, rightly offset in the Today's International Version. It serves as a summary of the priestly argument as it has just been formulated in vv. 11-14. Jesus is mediator of the New

458 Neyrey, “Jesus the Broker,” 164.
Covenant “for this reason” (διὰ τοῦτο), referring back to the a fortiori argument just made. His mediation affords his followers the “eternal inheritance” and sets them free from the sins committed under the first covenant, i.e. dead works. All this is achieved through Christ's death (θάνατος), which works the deliverance (ἀπολύτρωσις) from the transgressions (παράβασις) of the first covenant (διαθήκη). These last remarks summarise the preceding argument as well as leading over the next paragraph which will deal with the validation and actualisation of the New Covenant. This is done using the double meaning of διαθήκη, will and testament.

3.6.3.1. Conclusion
The passage emphasises the superiority of Christ's mediation in terms of 1) its eschatological relevance, 2) the superiority of the sanctuary in which it is achieved and 3) the superiority of the offering itself. This is a summary and concretisation which the author had been building towards. After establishing the superiority of the new mediation the author will now argue the validity of this superior New Covenant.

3.6.4. 9:16-28. Legal Actualisation and Validation of the New Covenant
In 9:16-28, the author speaks of the actualisation of the cultic mediation, i.e. the covenant, by mixing cultic and legal imagery together. The legal actualisation necessitates the blood of Jesus, the shedding of which is presented as the inauguration of the new covenant. The blood is thereby also a token for the promise on which the readers are supposed to set their confident hope.

In vv.16-17 the author speaks of διαθήκη in the sense of will and states the obvious fact that a will only comes into effect when the person who made it has died. In vv. 18-19 he projects this truism from the realm of inheritance law on the Mosaic “old” covenant as an explanation why it had to be actualised with sacrificial blood.

The fact that διαθήκη comprises the semantics of “testament” in the sense of “covenant” as well as “will” can be seen as a problem of either one of the other. Thus Bruce decides on the meaning
“testament” and rejects “will.”\footnote{Cf. e.g. Bruce, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}.}
Lindars, however, suggests that the author uses the double semantics deliberately. DeSilva states that “...it [the double-meaning] suggests to him [the author] a useful comparison. It is no more than that. Just as the death of a person brings that person’s testament into effect, so the ratification of a covenant by means of a sacrifice brings the covenant into force.”\footnote{Barnabas Lindars, \textit{The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 96. See DeSilva interprets in the same fashion that the double meaning of \textit{διαθήκη} “serves the author’s goal of making Jesus’ death a sort of surety or proof of the addressees’ future inheritance, so as to provide yet another prop for their continued confidence and perseverance in that hope.” deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 308. See also Hagner, \textit{Hebrews}., for a similar interpretation.}
He “wants to link the shedding of blood and death of a victim with a covenant inauguration, and the conceit of testamentary law helps him make this point. [...] Christ’s death accomplishes the inauguration of the covenant spoken of in the Jeremiah quotation (Heb. 8:8-12).”\footnote{deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 309. Lane's insistence that the death of the ratifier (v. 16) refers to the death of the sacrificial animals in covenant making seems unnecessarily complicated. Cf. Lane, \textit{Hebrews 1-8}, 242.}

The author wants to stress the mandatory necessity of death and more specifically blood, for the inauguration (and ratification) of the new covenant. The necessary \textit{death} is essentially the superordinate term for \textit{blood}, which is in turn the central motif of covenant inauguration and actualisation for the author. Lane sums up the different modes of action ascribed to blood:

The climactic character of the statement in v. 22b requires that attention be given to the particular nuance in the term \textit{ἀφεσις}. Throughout this section the writer has stressed the religious potency of blood: blood provides access (v. 7); blood purges the conscience (v. 14); blood inaugurates (v. 18); blood consecrates the people (v. 19); blood cleanses cultic implements (v. 21); blood purges almost everything under the old law (v. 22a). In light of the emphasis in the context Johnsson suggests that \textit{ἀφεσις} is a comprehensive term covering both the “subjective” and “objective” benefits of Christ’s blood.\footnote{Lane, \textit{Hebrews 1-8}, 246–247, quoting William G. Johnsson, “Defilement and Purgation in the Book of Hebrews” (Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1973).}

The bottom line of the author's use of the \textit{διαθήκη} with its dual meaning is to point to the necessity and the potency of Jesus’ superior self-sacrifice in his death. The gravity of this is attached to the notion of blood. As was seen above in 3.5.1, blood is at the centre of the cultic imagery to describe the superior mediating ministry of Jesus. It was seen that in Hebrews the concept of atonement by...
blood goes beyond the idea of penal substitution. Rather than substitutional punishment, the achievement of the self sacrifice of Jesus as High Priest consists in the restoration of the relationship between man and God. This is consistent with the current passage. Blood seals the covenant of which Jesus is the mediator. This is the covenant that consists of restored relationships, as was seen in 3.6.1

**3.6.4.1. Conclusion**
The author continues to bolster his argument for the superiority of the mediation through Jesus. The New Covenant, superior in the ways described earlier, is validated by Jesus' blood. The author uses the double meaning of διαθήκη as will and covenant to state the necessity and potency of Jesus' self-sacrifice. It stands out that this is stated only subsequent to the author's repeated explanations of and hints at the restorative power of Jesus' mediation for the relationship between man and God. This is the benefit of the mediation and the content of the New Covenant; a restored, family-like relationship between God and his people.

**3.6.5. 10:1-18. Christ's Singular Sacrifice Valid for all Times**
The passage 10:1-18 is the last paragraph of the second main part of the epistle (10:19-39 introduces the “Glaubensparaklesese”). It is, however, not a part of the chiastic, central, structure of 8:1-9:28 anymore. Some of the statements seem repetitive of the preceding unit. Attridge argues, however, that it is not a “recapitulation, but […] a completion” of the preceding argument.

What does the pericope add to the argument? It recapitulates the assertion that Christ's self-offering is supremely valuable and sufficient once and for all. That much is indeed recapitulation of known argument, but then the author adds a new aspect of Jesus' cultic activity: his obedience, especially in connection with the physical reality of his self-sacrifice, coupled with the emphasis that this all happened in obedience to God's will.

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465 Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 268. He refers, strictly speaking, only to 10:1-10.
466 Cf. Ibid., 519.
In this passage the author emphasises mostly the supremacy of Christ's cultic activity and its once-for-all validity. He also adds a time dimension; an eschatological one, saying that the law came first and the new mediation came second (v. 1). Attridge says this spins the dichotomy of earth vs. heaven which governed chs. 8 and 9 from vertical to horizontal.\textsuperscript{467} While up until now Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly tabernacle was talked about like a spiritual parallel reality to the earthly cult, i.e. “vertically”, it now comes into view as a time-related reality, a temporal progression from the earthly cult, which is a thing of the past. It is thus envisioned “horizontally.” This is relevant for our purpose of understanding mediation in Hebrews. It means that the author envisions the superiority of Jesus' spiritual mediation not only as a superiority like that of the spiritual/heavenly over the temporal/earthly, like in the platonic dichotomy between ideas and shadows. Rather, he now underlines that the superiority of Jesus' mediation is also rooted in and tied up with time and history. This will become more evident now, as the temporal overtones of the text will be discussed in detail.

\textbf{3.6.5.1. 10:1-10 Frequency of Mediation: Once for all; God's will, Christ's obedience}

The paragraph at first appears to be a reiteration of the preceding statement that Christ's sacrifice was made once for all instead of repeatedly and is therefore superior to the Levitical sacrificial system. It is preceded by 8:1-9:28, the chiastic, central structure identified earlier as the central part of the whole document. It is followed by the so-called “Glaubensparaklese”\textsuperscript{468} which begins in 10:19 and opens the third main part of the document. But while at first it neither seems to add to the preceding part nor lead over to the following section, Attridge argues that it follows on from the preceding paragraph, forming not a “recapitulation, but […] a completion”.\textsuperscript{469}

The author has been repeatedly talking about the dichotomy of earthly and heavenly cultic mediation, arguing that Jesus' mediation is superior because it takes place in the heavenly sanctuary.

\textsuperscript{467} Cf. Ibid., 269.  
\textsuperscript{468} Weiβ, \textit{Hebräer}, 518.  
\textsuperscript{469} Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 268. He refers, strictly speaking, only to 10:1-10.
as opposed to the earthly “shadow” of it (cf. beginning of ch. 8). While the terminology of shadow” and “reality” in 10:1 is still reminiscent of Platonic thought, in these verses it becomes apparent that this antithesis also has a temporal implication.\(^{470}\) Attridge says that the notion of shadow now moves its focus from its spacial/vertical connotation of chs. 8 and 9 (cf. esp beginning of ch. 8) to temporal/horizontal as it anticipates the “coming” things.\(^{471}\) But in fact the temporal aspect has never been far from the dichotomy of earthly and heavenly cult (cf. the second part of ch. 8 and the language of “coming days” in the Jeremiah 31 quote, as well as v. 13 “new” and “soon” as temporal terms). However, at this point the author draws the two aspects closer together and focuses on the temporal-eschatological one. The cultic mediation according to the law only foreshadows the “good things that are coming.”

The temporal, sequential view which the author now adopts helps him to argue the inferiority of the old cult more concisely and bring his argument, as Attridge rightly points out, to “completion.” The old mediation consists of annually repeated sacrifices (v. 1, the Day of Atonement ceremony); the repetitiveness itself allows the deduction that it can “never … make perfect” (v. 1) the worshippers. “Make perfect” is used in the sense of “achieving final perfection,” rather than “going through a process of gradually moving towards perfection.” The old cultic mediation is not entirely ineffective, but categorically inferior to the new mediation which is that of final perfection. This perfection consists of the “taking away of sins” (v. 4) in a permanent sense, not just a temporal cleansing, and this can, as a matter of principle, not be achieved by the “blood of goats and bulls”, i.e. the old sacrificial system. V. 4 draws this conclusion. What follows is a “proof” from Scripture through the words of LXX Ps 40:6-8 put into Jesus' mouth. By contrast, the new mediation is the one that follows the rules of the new covenant laid out in Jeremiah 31. The author has drawn this out before, as seen above in 3.6.1

\(^{470}\) DeSilva states: The author of Hebrews departs from Platonic thinking, however, in his temporal frame: the Law is the shadow of the real things that are, in respect to Torah, future – the “good things about to come” and that “have come” in the high priesthood of Jesus (see 9:11, where Jesus is described as “high priest of the good things that came into being”). deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 317.

\(^{471}\) Cf. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 269.
The remarks of Psalm 40 are often seen in a cultus-critical context, but Craigie convincingly interprets that the royal liturgy is the better context for interpretation. The remarks, then, rather refer to the king after having offered all required sacrifices, now understanding that there is more demanded of him than those: the statements then do not actually dismiss the cult but point beyond it.\footnote{Cf. Peter C. Craigie, \textit{Psalms 1-50}, WBC 19 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 315. In the christological light which the author of Hebrews shines on those verses, they are invested with salvation-historical meaning: God did not desire the sacrifices of the Law but prepared the course of Jesus for the new superior act of cultic mediation; this was his \textit{will}, which Jesus \textit{obediently} acted out.

In Vv. 8 and 9 the author makes his interpretation clear: although the old sacrificial cultic mediation was sanctioned by the law, it was temporal and can be considered outside of God's desire. His will, by contrast (note the temporal keywords “first” and “then” at the emphatic position in vv. 8 and 9), was the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. It is this that has achieved holiness for humanity (v. 10).

\textbf{3.6.5.2. 10:11-18. The Mediational Ministry Completed}

V.10 constitutes a break in the chapter because the argument evolving around the topic of God's \textit{will} ends here. Nonetheless the author stays concerned with completing and rounding off his argument for the superior once-and-for-all aspect of the mediation of Jesus.

He adds three aspects to what he has said already.

1) Standing priest, seated Jesus: an illustration of the completeness / finality of Jesus' mediational ministry (v. 11f.)

2) Elevated session of Jesus: this implies the closing of all middle ground and includes a re-iteration of the “Enemies made footstools” thought (v. 13, cf. 1:13, Ps 110:1)

3) Jeremiah 31 is cited again, this time with explications focusing on the new covenant's being
“written on heart”, i.e. its individual, relational dimension.

V.18 is a major break in the whole document because it markedly rounds off / finishes off the “once for all” thought and v.19 begins a hortatory passage leading into the “Glaubensparänese”, the third and final part of the document.

In vv.11 and 12 the author paints the picture of the Levitical priests on duty, sacrificing while standing. The author then states in antithesis (every priest... this one priest) that this priest (Jesus) had offered once for all a sacrifice for sin and then sat down. The antithesis between every priest standing everyday offering and this priest offering for all time one offering and then sitting down rounds off the explications about Jesus' cultic mediation being once for all with a vivid picture.

DeSilva summarises the relational implications of this mediation:

The author can therefore read the psalm as envisioning a priesthood that would not engage in repeated cultic activity, an activity that would require “standing,” but a completed priestly act, after which the incumbent could “sit down permanently.” Since he does not need to rise repeatedly to perform this sacrifice, it must have achieved decisive effects for the relationship of human beings and the holy God.473

Connected to Christ's being seated at God's hand is the thought of “enemies to footstools”, known from ch. 1 and picked up again in 10:13. In this context, the remark is to the effect of closing all thinkable middle ground between commitment to and rejection of the Son.474 Jay, who looks at sacrifice in several cultures and traditions from a sociological point of view, states that it is an intrinsic characteristic of most forms of sacrifice to create an “in vs. out”/“A vs. not A” dichotomy among those who sacrifice together.475 Our author uses just this logic here in order to push his commitment/loyalty agenda. Making the point within the context of sacrifice gives the argument an emotional undergirding. The commitment to Jesus as high priest and mediator implies the commitment to God the patron and by implication also the belonging to or exclusion from the

473 deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 323.
474 Cf. Ibid. for implications.
in-group of clients, which is indeed a kin-group, as was seen in ch. 2 (cf. above 3.4.4, 2:10-18. Archegos and Brother).

In vv.15-17 the author offers a selective re-statement of the Jeremiah 31 quote first introduced in ch. 8. In its choice of verses it focuses on the internal character of the new covenant (laws put in the hearts and written on the mind, v. 16) and the once for all ultimate nature of the atonement achieved in the new covenant (their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more, v. 17). The finality of the new covenant is also the notion on which the author choses to end the paragraph (...sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary).

The aspect of mutual teaching (cf. 8.11) is absent from this second reference to Jeremiah 31. The author does not pick up the thought anywhere, possibly because he encourages his readers to 'teach' each other (5:11-14), i.e. do exactly what Jeremiah 31 pronounces an overcome practice in the new covenant. At first it might seem that the mutual teaching is an aspect he quotes rather unwillingly in ch.8 for the sake of completeness but leaves it out here because it does not really fit his over-all agenda (he will speak about meeting and encouraging one another in 10:25). This is not likely, however, because the author is not reluctant elsewhere to clip texts he quotes to suit his agenda.477

As ch. 4 showed, the author envisions the readers as followers of Jesus who are on the verge of entering into the eschatological new covenant, standing with their two feet inside and outside of fulfilment simultaneously. Teaching and the social cohesion which it creates (this will be detailed more fully when viewed in the context of wasta later) are a part of this side of the eschaton, hence 5:11-14, but it will cease soon and knowledge and community will be complete. The author is concerned with this cessation. Neither mentioning the cessation of teaching earlier, nor its omission here are unnatural to the worldview and outlook of the author, nor to his exegesis.

As was seen above in 3.6.1, the author's focus in the second quoting of Jeremiah 31 is the internal

476 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 325.
477 Cf. above the discussion of Hebrews 2:6-8.
nature of the covenant. Adding to this, it is important to observe that at this point in the document the author is focussing more on the futuristic eschatological manifestation of the New Covenant, a time when teaching will not be necessary anymore, and hence he does not mention it. He is conscious that mutual teaching has its place on the way towards the consummation of the new order but will eventually be obsolete when the new covenant is actualised in the hearts and minds of the people of God.

3.6.5.3. Conclusion
The author now completes his argument for the superior mediation of Jesus in the New Covenant. This completion consists first of the emphasis and further unpacking of the claim that Jesus' mediation is once for all. Second, the argument is rounded off by the declaration that the mediational ministry of Jesus as mediator of the New Covenant is completed. This can be seen from his being seated at God's right hand and his enemies being subjected.

3.7. Hebrews 10:19-12:3. Call to Faith
The fifth part evolves around a call to faith as an ultimate consequence of the supreme mediatorship of Jesus. Faith (πίστις) relates to the thought world of patronage. It described the ideal character of the good patron as well as the client. DeSilva states:

[F]aith (Lat fides; Gk pistis) is a term also very much at home in patron-client and friendship relations, and had, like grace, a variety of meanings as the context shifted from the patron’s faith to the client’s faith. In one sense, faith meant “dependability.” The patron needed to prove reliable in providing the assistance he or she promised to grant. The client needed to “keep faith” as well, in the sense of showing loyalty and commitment to the patron and to his or her obligations of gratitude.\(^{478}\)

It is in this light that the passage is relevant for our purpose of understanding the logic of mediation in Hebrews.

\(^{478}\) deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 53.
3.7.1. 10:19-39. Transitional Paraenesis: No Middle Ground, Eschatological Urgency

The passage 10:19-39 is paraenetic material throughout and therefore clearly set-off against the preceding unit. The author has now finished laying out the logic of mediation as he sees it. The remainder of the document he is concerned with the application of the message in the community of the addressees. The passage 10:19-39 is wedged in between the conclusion of the main argument and the long and rich paraenesis on faith in 11:1-12-3. It is, however, not strictly a lead-in to the “Glaubensparaenese,” but rather a lead-over. Attridge aptly observes how 10:19-25 serve as “transitional paraenesis,” featuring “allusions both backward and forward.”

The author is concerned to let the argument just made sink in and link it to the pastoral exhortation which follows. Vv. 19-24 constitutes a “complex mosaic of phrases and motifs from earlier sections of the text” and a “complex mélange repeating and focusing familiar, metaphorically applied cultic language.” V. 21 picks up the notion of the 'high priest over the house' again, known from ch. 3. Attridge remarks that the same ecclesiological implications of the house motif at work in ch. 3 are also lingering here. This is not coincidental because the author's vision for the group comes into focus in the following verses: his congregation is supposed to be a group firmly rooted in and actively holding on to hope (v. 23) and encouraging each other (v. 24), a vision which is under threat if group members neglect regular group meetings (v. 25).

At this point the argument is more easily accessible because it comes after the long explanations of the mediation of Jesus in cultic / sacrificial terms in the preceding chapters. The mediation is based on the sacrifice of Jesus, which is superior and ultimately supreme over the old covenant and has accordingly surpassed it. Thus, since the old sacrifice / mediation is obsolete, it is logical that if this new mediation is rejected, there is no sacrifice (viz. mediation) left which could have the same mediating effect and secure the same benefits, namely a relationship with God (v. 26). There is

479 Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 283.
480 Ibid., 288.
481 Cf. Ibid., 287.
pointedly no middle-ground between accepting and rejecting the mediation of Jesus, a fact that is connected to the logic of sacrifice as was seen above (cf. 3.6.5, 10:1-18. Christ's Singular Sacrifice Valid for all Times) and now spelled out once more against the backdrop of the discussion of sacrifice which the author has just finished.

The argument is also now connected explicitly with eschatological judgement. The author makes this point with an “if A then how much more B” argument from the law (vv. 28-29); he then speaks of desecration of the covenant blood and insult to the Spirit of Grace, speech that raises overtones of greek “hybris,” the object of which is the Spirit.\textsuperscript{482} As Attridge proves in several single points throughout the paragraph, the sin in view here is not negligence but wilful turning away from Jesus as only mediator to God the patron.

Vv. 32-35 bring up a new topic, the history of persecution which the readers appear to have endured. The author recalls his addressees' own suffering as well as their brave support for others' suffering oppression. The exact occasion or kind of persecution is not spelled out and probably hard to determine,\textsuperscript{483} but the function of the verses is clear. The mention of past persecution serves a twofold purpose: 1) reminding the readers of the benefit of the mediation: the hope and promise which they access through Jesus is the source of their strength and perseverance in the face of opposition. 2) Consequently, the addressees must at all cost persevere and keep loyalty to the patron. This is so because the benefit does not just consist in strength for present hardships, but also includes future benefits not yet paid out, which must be redeemed by loyal and steadfast perseverance until the eschatological settling of accounts.

This is explicated in the remainder of the chapter. Vv. 36-39 call directly for the perseverance of the readers, undergird the imperative with two quotations and round the exhortation off with a typical “pithy summary”\textsuperscript{484} as the author frequently does. The essence of perseverant loyalty is doing the

\textsuperscript{482} Cf. Ibid., 294–295.
\textsuperscript{483} Cf. Ibid., 299.
\textsuperscript{484} Ibid., 304.
will of God (v. 36) which does not refer to observance of the law but radical commitment to and following of Christ, particularly in his suffering.\footnote{Cf. Attridge's analysis, connecting it with the use of the Hab citation, Ibid., 303.}

With these remarks the scene is completely set to fully enter into the encomium on faith (Attridge) or Glaubensparaenese (Weiß) which begins in 11:1.

**3.7.2. 11:1-12:3. A History of Faith and a Plea for Faith as Attitude, Worldview and Culture**

To determine what this paragraph has to say about mediation, it is first necessary to determine the relationship between faith and mediation.

Attridge gives an overview of the different strands of meaning which come together in Hebrews' concept of *faith*. Although the OT examples quoted in Hebrews 11 are not connected to faith in their original OT context, the OT set of ideas can still be assumed to be part of Hebrews' concept of faith, bringing in “affective and behavioral” concepts, ideas of “fidelity, trust, and obedience, … summariz[ing] the total relationship between human beings and Yahweh.”\footnote{Ibid., 311.}

Faith is a logical and necessary response to successful mediation:

Life in the new covenant, which provides true and vital access to God (10:19-21), is characterized by hope and love (10:22-25), but above all by faith. What this means to Hebrews emerges in the famous catalogue of chapter eleven. Faith has its intellectual or cognitive component (“belief”), but, more importantly, it is the fidelity to God which permits endurance of trials and tribulations in the hope that the divine promises will be realized.\footnote{Harold W. Attridge, “New Covenant Christology in an Early Christian Homily,” QR 8 (1988): 91.}

Greek ideas influencing the complex concept of “faith” additionally bring in notions of “confidence” and “trust.”\footnote{Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 312.}

Tellingly, the antithesis of *faith* in Hebrews is “rejection of God's promises.”\footnote{Ibid., 313.} The promise, in turn, is part of the benefit granted by the patron to his clients. In this sense, deSilva's interpretation of
faith as trust towards the patron, which constitutes the response attitude to what the patron gives, is very helpful.\textsuperscript{490} In collocation with the complex of perseverance as it is stressed here in 10:36-12:3, amounts to an all-over picture of faith in the sense of a permanent attitude of loyal and steadfast trust even in the face of 1) persecution and 2) temporal invisibility of the benefit in its fulness.

The passage 11:1-12:3 begins with a definition of faith which seems to focus on the aspect of faith=”holding an invisible thing for true or existent” (11:1). But this does not mean that the relational aspect of faith=reciprocation of benefits is excluded, as v. 6 shows, where the objects of believing are 1) God's existence and 2) his nature as rewarder (μισθαποδότης). These have strong connotations of “benefactor.”

Bultmann outlines the concept of faith and reward in Hebrews from the vantage point of its contrast with Pauline theology:

The clear distinction from Paul may be seen in the concept of faith found in Hb. Faith is strongly emphasised, but it is not, as in Pl., a protest against the righteousness of works, nor the presupposition of being in Christ with all that this means in terms of the pneuma. On the contrary, faith and recompense belong together. He who believes fulfils the condition of entry into the time of consummation, the prerequisite of recompense by God (11:6, 26, 33f.). Faith is faithfulness which is rewarded, hope which becomes fulfilment.\textsuperscript{491}

This assessment correctly notes the relatedness of “faith and recompense” but fails to put in sharp focus the sequence. The logic of mediation, patronage and wasta adds this detail: faith is the reciprocation of the benefit flowing from the patron through the mediator to the client. The logic is not one of “fulfilling a condition” or “prerequisite” but rather one of mutuality and reciprocation in a circular motion like that of a dance.\textsuperscript{492}

DeSilva differs: Faith is connected to trust and trust is all the client has when he has submitted his request to the patron.

\textsuperscript{490} Cf. deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 439.
\textsuperscript{492} This does not, however, imply eye-level between patron and client.
In this reading, πίστις in Hebrews is being understood very much within the context of patronage or friendship. After a client receives the patron’s promise that a certain benefaction will be given to him or her, or entrusts a request or need to a patron, “trust” is all the client has. If the patron is honorable and reliable, however, having “trust” is as good as having the promised item itself.\footnote{Bultmann in his formulation seems still a bit at pains to separate the logic at work in Hebrews from the Jewish concept of \textit{merit} for works which Paul opposes. The logic of patronage and mediation could help him: the meritocratic overtones of trust and reward vanish if the complex is viewed in light of wasta/patronage/mediation, where faith and reward are completely relational terms, free of meritocratic overtones.}

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\textbf{3.7.2.1. Commending, Sojourning and Proliferation: Topical Clusters from Israel's History Relating to Honour and Faith}

Reading the paraenesis on faith for our purposes, it stands out that some of the historic persons and stories cited can be grouped together under the topics of \textit{commending, sojourning} and \textit{proliferation}.

\textit{Commending:} A recurring topic in this passage is the commendation of people by God. These statements revolve around μαρτυρέω in the sense of “giving a good report.”\footnote{A few examples pertain to the theme of \textit{commending} more directly than others. Abel was commended by God (11:4), so was Enoch (11:5), who was also taken up into heaven, which in the context of Hebrews with its focus on the path and process of going into the heavenly realm can be interpreted as a statement on Abel's close relationship to God the patron. So the statement being made is that close relationship with God is based on faith. Faith is reason for commendation and thus honour.}

\textit{Sojourning:} Several verses evolve around or touch upon the motif of sojourning in a foreign land (vv. 8-11, 13-16, 27). DeSilva points out the social implications of living away from one's home country: shame.\footnote{As was seen above, the dynamics of honour and shame play out differently in a
foreign country than from home because they are determined by the *court of reputation* (cf. 2.2.3). Honour, shame, mediation and patronage are connected. The sojourner is in less danger of being shamed, but by the same token has less opportunity to gain honour. His natural patrons and mediators will be far away, and he has less honour to weigh into the scales for making himself an attractive client to local patrons. In this sense, the statements about the fathers being sojourners in foreign lands and yet putting their faith in God their patron are extraordinary 1) because they keep the hope and the trust (in the new city, v. 10, a home with consummated connectedness, mediation and honour) and 2) because the implication is that God is a patron worthy of trust who transcends the dimension of locale. “The mind-set that this world is not our home is central to early Christian self-definition.”

Proliferation: Faith is also stated to be the basis for Abraham's proliferation and by implication the coming into existence of the family / house of God (v. 11) to which the addressees should relate through Jesus the son and supreme mediator (cf. ch. 3). The discussion of the Sarah's barrenness and how it is overcome also connects to the remarks on Abel and Enoch “overcoming death” and the resurrection interpretation of Abraham and Isaac the underlying theme being “God's life-restoring power”. The idea is that “[n]ot even death is sufficient to hinder God's delivery of his promised benefits to those who trust him.” The related idea of house and kin is also fostered with the remarks about the passing on of blessing (vv. 20+21).

Faith is also connected to miracles, power, justice, gain, rescue, military success, resurrection, others martyrdom/persecution for better resurrection (v. 35, cf. also vv. 17-19 for a resurrection reading of Abraham and Isaac story) and persecution (vv. 33-37) and thus a combination of extraordinary benefits and support in the face of oppression. In Hebrews 12:1-3 the author skillfully integrates the addressees into the narrative of these benefits and rescue stories by presenting them as

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496 Ibid., 402. 497 Cf. Ibid., 398. 498 Ibid.
open stories that will only now reach their fulfilment in the time of the listeners through Jesus, their mediator and perfecter of the faith (viz. the one who consummates the open stories).

The author presents faith as an attitude and exercise which induces and conditions the dispensing of benefits through the patron in a mutually complementary way, reminiscent of the three graces dancing and thus is an integral part of the relationship to the mediator.

3.7.3. Conclusion
The encomium on faith is best understood in the context of loyalty and reciprocation for received benefits. It is the proper response and attitude of the recipient in the mediation process. Having outlined the new and superior mediation of Jesus in the preceding chapters, the author now describes the response he wishes to see in his readers. This is a faith, trust and loyalty to God their patron as the heroes of Israel's history had.

The final two chapters of the document consist mainly of exhortation. The author is now finished with his theological treatise. Based upon what he has developed up until here he can now address several issues in his recipient community directly. Nothing new is stated about Jesus as mediator in these verses, but the following few remarks are still worthwhile to make for our purpose.

3.8.1. 12:4-13. Hardships are Discipline and Sign of Status as Children
The author has painted in detail the picture of the divine family consisting of God the Father of the house, Jesus the mediating Son and brother to humanity. He can now draw on this picture a last time for exhortative purposes. The hardships the congregation of the recipients are experiencing are to be seen as discipline from God towards his children. As such, they constitute proof of the legitimate membership in the family of God.

It stands out that in the closing verses of the new covenant is called eternal (αἰώνιος) for the first
time in the document. This is consistent with the writer's eschatology: the new covenant is the covenant of Jeremiah 31 and constitutes the final step of mediation between man and God.

3.9. Conclusion: Jesus the Mediator in Hebrews

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus is presented as mediator between humanity and God. He is superior to known mediators of the old order. He has supreme status as mediator because he is the Son of God, who is the patron and source of benefits. As Son, Jesus is the cultic mediator, the high priest of the new covenant. His mediatorial work is his priestly offering of himself for reconciliation of his clients with the patron. This cultic mediation is once for all eternally efficient. All this demands loyalty and grateful following from the clients, particularly in the face of pressures as a social minority and persecution.

It was seen that the author of Hebrews puts a strong emphasis on the superiority of Jesus' mediating ministry. The New Covenant of which he is the mediator is superior to the Old. Not only is it relatively superior, but eschatologically supreme and therefore abrogates the Old Covenant. This claim is stated implicitly already in the exordium of the document and then developed further until 10:18. The remainder of the letter spells out the appropriate response to this great New Covenant which has been mediated to humans by Jesus; namely an attitude of faith in the sense of grateful loyalty towards God the patron and Jesus his mediator.

In this chapter, it was the aim to see how the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as mediator between man and God and what his main argument is concerning this mediation. The author uses two main metaphors to advance his argument, the kinship imagery evolving around the notions of Jesus as Son and brother and the cultic imagery evolving around Jesus as High Priest like Melchizedek. It was seen that the concept of mediation in Hebrews hinges on the meaning that the author derives from these two metaphors and the sets of ideas surrounding them. While the network of ideas around Jesus the mediating Son and High Priest are vast, a common denominator has begun
to emerge. Both the kinship and cultic imagery are used to suggest to the readers that the mediation of Jesus is about a new and better relationship with God. As Son, Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant is in closer relationship to God the patron than any other mediators. As High Priest, he is mediator of a radically new and different covenant that is internal, personal and relational, based on grace and the once for all overcoming of human sin which obstructs the way to God, as was seen in 3.6.1 These results will be confirmed in the following chapter. In chapter four the findings from chapter three will be reviewed in the light of the wasta phenomenon. The logic of wasta mediation will confirm the impression that the better relationship to God is at the heart of the message of Hebrews and thus shed more light on the concept of mediation in Hebrews.
4. Mediation in Hebrews in Light of Wasta

4.1. Introduction

The Epistle to the Hebrews describes the mediating role of Jesus in a more poignant, explicit and colourful way than other New Testament writings. It was seen in the previous chapter that the author's argument is constructed around the metaphors of Jesus as Son and high priest like Melchizedek. The author's argument resonates with the logic of ancient patronage, which was ubiquitous in first century Greco-Roman Mediterranean culture.

Some of the interpretations in this chapter can be based on the concept of patronage as well as of wasta. Such interpretations a) serve to make patronage interpretations more probable and credible and b) indicate that findings based on patronage are applicable to modern day societies in the Middle East as well.

In other instances, the wasta reading environment will suggest a certain logic which can neither be proven nor disproven for ancient patronage. This may occur when facts about wasta are available which are not described for the world of patronage. In this case, the wasta reading adds new data and context for the interpretation of Jesus as mediator in Hebrews. The insights from wasta are immediately relevant to the ancient context of Hebrews because wasta is in many ways similar to ancient patronage, as was seen in 2.6 However, wasta is also a hermeneutical tool in its own right. As was seen in 2 The Wasta Phenomenon in its Context, mediation is rooted deeply in the sociology of the Middle East today, which is influenced by the concepts of honour, shame, collectivism and tribalism. It thus offers its own way into the thought world of Hebrews. At the same time it offers a stage for present day application; namely a Middle Eastern cultural understanding of Jesus as mediator, which is able to speak into Christian-Muslim discussions on Christology. An example of this is shown in 5.3

499 The logic from patronage is deducted from ancient literature whereas wasta is researched using empirical, social scientific methods. This results in two different pools of data.
500 For such a case cf. e.g. readings based on the phenomenon of overblown entitlement (4.4.4).
The aim of this chapter is to review the theology of mediation as it was outlined in ch. 2 in light of the sociology of wasta. Concepts intrinsic to the logic of wasta as found in ch. 2 will serve as a matrix. The interpretations from ch. 3 will be clustered around these concepts and re-interpreted. In this way, the light of wasta will let mediation in Hebrews appear in a new way and bring out underpinnings otherwise invisible. While ch. 2 offered a synchronic analysis of the mediation in Hebrews, reviewing the text guided by the aspects of wasta means a diachronic approach. The subheadings of this chapter are based on the structure used to understand wasta in ch. 1. They are adapted, however, as the text develops an interplay with the categories. They are also adapted because several aspects used for clustering and analysing the different passages overlap with each other. These overlaps will be acknowledged and cross-referenced. It is helpful to imagine the following interpretation as a web of interconnected ideas.

### 4.2. Graded Efficiency of Mediation: Expressions of Strength, Relative Superiority and Absolute Supremacy

As was seen above in 2.4.4.4 wasta shows that mediation is perceived as something that can be stronger or weaker. This depends on the quality of relationship between the client and the wasta and between the wasta and the source of the favour. The wasta environment sensitises for Hebrews' claims of strength, relative superiority and absolute supremacy for the mediation Jesus provides. This adds to the picture which Neyrey paints of Jesus as broker: Jesus is not successful only because he “belongs to both worlds”\(^{501}\) but he belongs to both worlds in a special and specified way, which the author of Hebrews discusses extensively in order to argue Jesus' ultimate positioning for efficiency as mediator.

#### 4.2.1. 1:1-4. Introducing the Argument

In 1:1-4\(^{502}\) the author laid the foundation for the claim to relative superiority and absolute

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501 Neyrey, “Jesus the Broker,” 159.
502 As said above (cf. 3.4.2 the discussion of 2:1-4), mediation is addressed here in an implicit sense as far as the revelation discussed is revelation for the aim of salvation. The revelator of salvation is thus the mediator of salvation.
supremacy of Jesus' mediation. As discussed, this was achieved with a plethora of notions suggesting relational closeness and thus suggesting mediational efficiency. This matches the findings of 2.4.4.4 that strength of mediation is determined by the immediacy of the relationship between mediator and source.

In light of wasta logic, the son-motif’s central role in the argument of 1:1-4 comes to the fore and the following logic emerges:

1) The relationship between source of the benefit and mediator is one of *kinship*, which implies greater mediational efficiency than friendship or anything other relationship. The idea of kinship expressed through the notion “Son” here constitutes the antithesis to the “various ways” of earlier revelation/mediation, as noted a comprehensive notion for all traditional forms of revelation, none of which had been mediated by a mediator of kinship status. The difference and superiority is thus not gradual but categorical.

2) The kinship relation is further qualified as *father-son* and thus the closest possible family relationship. As it was seen that the mediation is more efficient the closer the proximity is between mediator and source, this statement underlines the potency of the Son as mediator.

3) The father-son relationship is further specified and set apart from other first-degree family relationships by a remark of status: Jesus is the *designated heir*. This implies comprehensive disposition over all benefits the father as source could possibly distribute. Jesus’ status as heir is part of his status as firstborn (v. 6). As firstborn and heir, Jesus is the one with the closest relationship to God the Father. 503

With this threefold set of implications, the notion “Son” in v. 2 becomes the centre for all other notions of relational intimacy in the paragraph. They all serve to support this central claim to

503 Cf. below, 4.4.1, for a fuller discussion.
relational intimacy and subsequent boosted efficiency as mediator:

- The radiance (or reflection) and character (imprint of the Father on the Son = the source on the mediator) back up the claim to ultimate intimacy in the logic of Hellenistic wisdom theology.\textsuperscript{504}

- The “name”, i.e. the title “Son,” signifies as a concise label the comprehensive superiority in all its parts to the outside world in a formal way.

- The eschatological relevance and validity is based on the categorical superiority of the mediation.

Jesus' high priestly function, which will later be discussed in detail, is hinted at in v. 3 (“After he had provided purification for sins...”) together with a statement as to his success (“...he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”)

The wasṭa environment brings into focus a logic of argument in 1:1-4 which presents Jesus as a strong mediator on the basis of his being Son and heir.\textsuperscript{505} This implies a categorically superior position for mediation. Once the sonship is identified as the base for the claim, the other notions of strength and superiority become apparent as support statements of this claim. Jesus is set apart against the old forms of mediation (the “various ways” of the past), his superiority is in fact a final supremacy (“in these last days”), his strength described by mystical terms of identification, closeness and honour titles. It was seen above in 2.4.1.1.D that power and status are factors for the success of mediation. Consistent with this logic, the exordium of Hebrews puts the greatest possible

\textsuperscript{504} Nash points out how the Hellenistic imagery around ἀπαύγασμα and χαρακτήρ in itself carry the thought of superiority. He argues that Hebrews is to be seen in the context of Hellenistic Jewish thought but that the message of Hebrews is that Jesus is different from the mediators in this thought world in several ways. His hypothesis is “that one purpose, if not the major purpose, of the writer of Hebrews was to expose the inadequacy of the Alexandrian beliefs about mediators.” In this sense, the notions of χαρακτήρ and ἀπαύγασμα, alluding to wisdom and logos, make a logical addition to the Son imagery, efficient for advancing the superiority agenda. Nash, “Mediator,” 101.

\textsuperscript{505} See below, 4.4.1 Chapter 1. Son and Heir for a full treatment of the kinship imagery and its implications.
emphasis on these factors.

4.2.2. 1:5-14. Comparison 1. The Angels
In the light of our wasta reading environment, it stands out that the long passage about the comparison of Jesus with the angels is introduced by contrasting the status of the former with the latter: v. 5 emphasises that Jesus is Son, a category and status which does not apply to the angels. If wasta flows along the lines of kinship, it has a different and categorically superior quality. This seems to be suggested here too, with an urgency that makes the author choose the first verse of the paragraph for this assertion.

The penultimate verse of the treatise of the angels (v. 13) addresses the status of the Son and reminds the readers of his being seated at God's right hand, awaiting the submission of his enemies. The ideas of Sonship (viz. kinship) and status (viz. the supremacy of the Son) frame the exposition about Jesus and the angels. This stands out in a wasta environment because mediation is competitive and different mediators might have different statuses. In the logic of wasta it is consistent that the supremacy of the Son-mediator is assured at the end of the argument before moving on to the next thought. This is achieved by the Psalm quotation picturing Jesus in the princely position at God the King's right hand. All competition is eliminated. His enemies become his footstool. This remark is consistent with what was found about wasta above in 2.4.1.1.D The efficiency of the mediation is increased when there is less competition. In our wasta context it becomes apparent that the singularity of Jesus' mediation that the author claims and stresses throughout the document implies more powerful mediation.

4.2.3. 3:1-6. Comparison 2. Moses
It was seen in 3.3 that the author undertakes the comparison of Jesus with Moses for the same reason as with the angels: in order to point out the superiority of Jesus as mediator by comparing him with other mediators whose efficiency is out of the question for the readers. When looking at
3:1-6 with this in mind, it stands out that also the reference behind 3:5 (Numbers 12) bears within it the discussion of the relative efficiency of Moses as mediator: he enjoys a more intimate relationship with God than all the prophets (Numbers 12:6-8).

But the author does not just bolster his argument for superior mediation through intimacy between source and mediator. He also employs rhetoric similar to that of putative lineage by saying “but we are his house...” (cf. below, 4.4.3). It thus becomes apparent that the house metaphor in 3:1-6 for the author serves as a tool to strengthen the argument for the efficiency of the mediation in two places: at the interface source-mediator using the comparison with Moses, and at the mediator-client joint using the putative lineage paraenesis of v. 6. Both messages are attached to the house metaphor in order to make it easier for the readers to appropriate its content: Israel being God's house as a formula of self-identification is known from tradition and thus a good carrier for the message about strength of mediation.

4.2.4. 4:14-5:10. Comparison 3. Levitical Priesthood, Better Sympathy

In 4:15 and 5:2 the sympathy of Jesus, which is better than that of the earthly high priests, was underlined. As was seen in 3.5.2, the argument is made that Jesus as high priest sympathises in an active way, surpassing the sympathy a human high priest could give since he himself is steeped in human weakness and can only restrict his anger. This aspect resonates with the wasta logic in as far as it bolsters the claim of superiority of the mediation. But it also diverges from wasta logic since “sympathy” is not a known motivation for Middle Eastern mediators. Thus, when the author claims Jesus' mediatorial superiority on grounds of better sympathy, this statement is seemingly at odds with our wasta reading environment and constitutes a discontinuity.

The notions of sympathy, both as absence of anger and as active sympathy are presented as if logical characteristics of a good mediator. As such, it is curious that sympathetic feelings towards

506 The better sympathy is discussed here in light of the difference between συμπαθέω in 4:15 and μετριοπαθέω in 5:2, see also the discussion of συμπαθέω in the context of the principle of identification, 4.8
507 “High priests in general are, so the author avers, sympathetic and patient towards the 'wayward and ignorant' (5:2).
the client do not feature much in descriptions of wasṭa personalities.

The double statement in 4:15 and 5:2 about sympathy is firstly made in order to further the author's superiority agenda. Secondly, it also serves the purpose of encouraging and comforting the readers. They should take courage because the mediation at hand is just the help they need (cf. 4:16). To understand why this mediation is of such high quality and should thus be estimated as such great encouragement, they should consider and compare the general sympathy of a high priest who is rooted in his own weakness and the even better, special, active, purer sympathy of Jesus from a place of sinlessness.

Wasta mediators, by comparison, are considered high quality mediators if they perform. They have to be the “strongest” among the wastas of all competitors; success depends on their “power”. Faour states that “Arab mediators share similar qualities with mediators from other parts of the world, such as fairness, acceptability, reliability, and knowledge. Yet, they also possess a few distinct qualities that relate to the specificity of their culture: notably, high status, honor, and authority.”

The sympathy stressed here by the author of Hebrews could be related to the benevolent attitude of ancient patrons, but only in a limited sense. DeSilva points out how the giver's beneficent feelings and the recipient's gratitude ideally complemented each other. Motives for patronal beneficence could be very noble, as deSilva finds out studying Seneca: “He who gives benefits imitates the gods, he who seeks return, money-lenders” or “I choose a person who will be grateful, not one who is likely to make a return...” (Ben 4.10.4). The limitation to this parallel is that, different from

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This is not a quality possessed by Jesus only (2:17), but common to all who serve as mediators between God and humanity.” deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 187.
508 Al-Ramahi, “Competing Rationalities,” 201. Cf. also above 4.2
509 Faour, “Conflict Management,” 193; see also Malina, who highlights the “social entrepreneur” characteristics of a broker, such as willingness to take risks, manipulate relationships and compete with other brokers. Bruce J. Malina, The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels (London: Routledge, 1996), 150–151.
510 Cf. deSilva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, 105.
511 Ben 3.15.4 and Ben 4.10.4 as quoted in deSilva, Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective, 114.
what is said of Jesus in Hebrews 5:2, the sympathy of the Greco-Roman patron did not come out of the experience of the client's weakness (ἀσθένεια). Jesus' sympathy is superior due to his existential identification with the clients' condition as he, the heavenly heir of all things, is subjected to life and death on earth, which leads to his perfection and designation as high priestly mediator (cf. 5:7-10).

The author of Hebrews postulates sympathy as a main characteristic of Jesus as high priestly mediator of the new covenant. This is tellingly different not just from main characteristics of wastas in the Middle East, but as well as from patrons in antiquity. The mediation of Christ as high priest is not rooted in strength and honour first as with the wasta mediator. Neither is it rooted in the ideal of beneficence which couples with gratitude to provide a social network as in ancient patronage. Instead, the first aspect of superiority which the author spells out is the fact that Jesus' mediation flows from a feeling with humans in their sinful weakness based on a comprehensive experience of that same weakness in which Jesus shares through his incarnation, but at the same time freedom from sin and thus total mastery of the weak condition. This discontinuity of Hebrews with Middle Eastern mediation (ancient as well as contemporary) thus appears to be a purposeful move, designed to underline the divine compassion of Jesus by contrasting it with the power-oriented social entrepreneurship of Middle Eastern brokers.

**4.2.5. Absolute Supremacy and Finality in Wasta**

The passages 1:1-4 and 3:1-6 are strongly suggestive of not just a relative superiority but in fact eschatological, absolute supremacy of the mediation of Jesus. While a logic of relative strength and superiority of one wasta compared to another is very common, claims to absolute, supreme and ultimately final mediation seem absent from wasta practice. Thus the absolute supremacy and finality stands in apparent discontinuity with wasta logic.

As noted, it was not the aim in patronage and wasta societies to settle accounts and become outspokenly even so that the passing back and forth of benefits, favours, gratitude and praise would
stop, but the contrary: this back and forth of favours and returns is the “lubricant” (to use Sharabi’s terminology\textsuperscript{512}) of the system and holds networks and societies together. The same is true for ancient patronage. When Hebrews departs from this logic and claims an ultimate and eschatological mediational act after which no further mediation will be required, this is a discontinuity for the sake of the theological statement.

In the logic of Middle Eastern mediation as an intrinsically reciprocal exercise, the solemnity of Hebrews’ portrayal of Jesus as ultimate mediator becomes clear. He mediates the one-sided peace which is based on the harmed party’s pronouncing: “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” in the Jeremiah 31 quote in 8:11. This forgiveness is final (“remember … no more”) and only possible because the atoning mediation was “once and for all” (10:1-8).

This portrayal contrasts with Middle Eastern conflict mediation practice in as far as it is a one-sided peace of a one-sided conflict where one-sided guilt meets one-sided forgiveness and the mediation is once for all concluded by a supreme mediator. This is emphatically different from the explicit and intentional obscurity of who won and who lost that was discussed in 2.3.1.2.C There it was seen that harmony is more important than victory and blurred lines between guilt and forgiveness are often welcome because they support harmony in the community. Here, by contrast, the mercy and grace on God’s part as essence of the New Covenant is highlighted.

The eternal superiority and one-sided favour can most closely be compared to wasta in traditional family mediation. Here the wasta will usually be an elder of the tribe and family members are entitled to his mediation and owe him nothing more than gratitude and praise. The proximity of Hebrews to this thought also points to theological truths, much in line with the already mentioned logic of mediation as the “Social Context of Grace” as described by deSilva.\textsuperscript{513} This is confirmed by

\textsuperscript{513} deSilva, \textit{Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity}, 104–06.
Hebrews' heavy reliance on family imagery.

Lastly, it should be noted that the idea of supreme and final mediation may not be entirely alien to wasta reality after all. While it is true that the idea of absolute supreme mediation is foreign to wasta logic, this does not mean that it would not resonate with wasta culture in any way. A worthwhile question for future empirical research would be to ask if members of wasta societies desire ultimate wasta which ends all reciprocation, e.g. if Jordanians phantasise about being a member of the royal family or similar. Even if absent from real life wasta culture, it is not unlikely that absolute and final mediation is present as an, albeit unrealistic, ideal conception.

4.2.6. Conclusion

The centrality of the topic of mediation is easy to discern in the letter to the Hebrews. Reading the document with the insights from wasta in mind, more details emerge. It becomes apparent how strongly Hebrews is concerned with comparative efficiency of the mediation of Jesus. In wasta, any given mediation constellation can be assessed as more or less effective depending on how close the relationship between supplicant and mediator is. Also in Hebrews, mediation is viewed as something that can be more or less efficient. This can be seen from the statement that mediation in Jesus is superior to the known forms of mediation and indeed supreme among them all.

The fact that mediation is not just a question of have or not have, but natively also includes a strong question of quality is something that is not self-evident to the western reader of the New Testament. It can, as was argued, be learned from the sociology of wasta and then be recognised implicitly in the argument of Hebrews.

The discussion of better sympathy does not have a parallel in the logic of wasta. This discontinuity is telling because the better sympathy of Jesus as a driving force for his mediation is rooted in genuine loving compassion of the mediator who knows the weakness of his clients intimately without being affected by it himself. The one-sidedness of the conflict as well as the mediation and
the reciprocation in the form of gratitude evokes the picture of family mediation.

As was argued, wasta knows no absolute supremacy and finality. This discontinuity, however, unfolds a contrastive power and thus benefit for the interpretation of Hebrews. It brings out the singularity of the mediation of Jesus, which is once for all.

4.3. **Honour, Shame and the Court of Reputation**

The wasta logic makes more sensitive to the fact that mediation is connected with honour and shame. As seen in 2.2.3, rendering mediation services increases the honour balance of the mediator. The client has to be honourable to be eligible for mediation. From the opening verses of the document, the author stresses Jesus' position of honour as a mediator. He is seated at the position of honour (1:3). He is given honour by the heavenly court of reputation (1:6), i.e. the angels, as renowned representatives of the trade, give honour to Jesus, the supreme mediator. In the following, the crucial passages for the aspect of honour in Hebrews' argument for Jesus as supreme mediator will be discussed.

4.3.1. **2:1-4. The Honour of the Mediator as Paraenetic Argument**

Honour of the mediator demands loyalty of the client. This is a mechanism known from wasta as well as patronage. It is employed in the paraenetic passage 2:1-5. The author argues “we must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” The reason for the loyalty that this verse demands lies in what was stated in ch.1 (διὰ τοῦτο), Jesus as mediator is superior to the angels, and is confirmed and emphasised by the following lesser-to-greater argument: if the old salvation demanded undivided loyalty, how much more will negligence of the superior one ensue disaster.

It is also striking how the transaction (the giving of the benefit, salvation) is personified (see below, 4.10.1 Personal Mediation and Trust) and focus is taken away from the content and instead shifted to the mediator. The ins and outs of the salvation of the new covenant are not discussed in
detail until ch. 8. Even though the benefit (viz. salvation) is called “such great” here, its content is not the prime consideration. Instead the mediation of salvation, more precisely the status of the mediator who mediated it, is the starting point for the paraenesis. The salvation here is called “such great” on no other basis than the magnificence of Jesus as Son-Mediator, who is greater than the angel-mediators of the old covenant, as was just demonstrated.

It stands out how the author of Hebrews in 2:1-4 builds momentum for his paraenesis: His argument does not flow from the content nor the conclusiveness or applicability of the profession of the congregation to their lives or their particular situation. Rather, it is solely based on the person of the mediator, Jesus. Accordingly, Jesus is called by his honorary title “Lord” in 2:3, which is un-typical in Hebrews. The court of reputation is convened, members of the jury including “those who heard him” (2:3) as well as God himself who testifies (συνεπιμαρτυρέω) to the honour and hence credibility and authority of his Son as mediator. The force of God's testimony is underlined by the plethora of “signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit” (2:4). God's varied ways of speaking were summed up in the formulation πολυτρόπως in 1:1 when the focus was on their succession through the Son. Now in 2:4, however, the variety of God's speaking is spelled out because each form of divine revelation becomes an individual witness in the court of reputation which testifies to the supreme mediator's honour.

The subliminal logic of 2:1-4 is reminiscent of what Cunningham and Sarayrah describe as a trait of traditional wasta and suggest as a means to taming wasta; namely that the mediator vouches by his honour for compliant and appropriate behaviour of the wasta client. The obligation is on the client to not shame the wasta with unfitting (viz. disloyal) behaviour. A cited example describes a university professor who accepts wasta requests in matters of conflict between a student and a

514 Jesus is referred to as κυριος independent of LXX quotes only here, in 12:14 and 13:20.
515 “The wasta must be a guarantor who assumes responsibility for the client's performance. The traditional tribal wasta, the shaykh, was a man of honor, whose word was his bond, who would assume responsibility for his acts. Today's wasta is too often a middle-man, seeking fame and fortune by doing favors. Penalties for misrepresentation do not exist. The Western scourge of caveat emptor (let the buyer beware!) has crept into an honor-based system. Truth tees before expediency.” Cunningham and Sarayrah, “Taming Wasta to Achieve Development.,” 39.
teacher, but then convenes a meeting between the two, himself and the father of the student in order to work out a plan to solve the issues. This must be done in a manner fulfilling the requirements of the teacher. All parties agree to the deal and the student will receive the benefit in return for fulfilling his obligations. Failure to achieve the agreed requirements will result in bad marks, which might lead to complaints by the family and pressure for preferential treatment without achievement but with such an agreement, which honours the cultural logic of mediation “the sting is taken out of the family's complaint.”

The communication happening in 2:1-4 begins a line of argument which calls clients to adhere to a mediation deal such as the one outlined. The theme will be picked up throughout the document, but 2:1-4 constitutes the basis for this thought. The tremendous honour of the mediator is outlined. He implicitly stands – with his honour – for the compliant behaviour of the clients, so they should understand the pressure on them to show a loyal attitude and faithful stance towards God their patron.

Possibly the author sees himself as a mediator in the process, similar to an elder at the mediation table or the father in the office hour of the professor. His task is to shame the client into a response that honours the patron, other party of a conflict or source of a favour.

4.3.2. 2:5-9. Pointing out the Success
In v. 9 the author speaks of Jesus in his position of honour “now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” It is the author's aim at this point to show that Jesus the mediator's death was not shameful as it might momentarily seem, but honourable in the grand scheme of things. The expressions evolving around Jesus' coronation and being seated at the position at the right hand of God are always connected with the idea of mediational success, i.e. the salvific sin offering in Jesus' death (cf. 1:3, 1:13, 2:9; 8:1 may be considered an exception, but since it speaks about “the main point” of the whole

516 Ibid., ??
document it arguably points to success as well; 10.12; 12.2).

4.3.3. **Discontinuity: the Mediator Does Get shamed**

As was seen, one of the readers' main problems was probably the shame they felt for the dishonourable death of their mediator. The wasta reading environment alerts us to the fact that a mediator needs honour and integrity in order to be effective. Capital punishment after a guilty sentence does constitute utmost shame in Middle Eastern eyes, so adhering to Jesus as supreme mediator while he is subject to this shame doubtlessly posed a great challenge to the recipients' faith and to the author's theology.

The author solves this problem by shifting the focus to another court of reputation, away from earthly standards of the majority culture. As was seen (cf. 3.4.4) in 2:10 the author uses language of theodicy to counter the assumed resistance of the hearers to the idea that their honourable mediator be shamed through suffering and death on the cross. The author has to appeal to the highest possible authority, God's own will, and therefore casts his defence in language of theodicy.

The shame of Jesus as mediator is a result of his death on the cross (12:2). The cross, however, is also the place and moment of the atoning self sacrifice which accomplished the mediation. As was seen in 3.5.1 the atonement sacrifice consists in Jesus' willing self-offering. The blood and life he gives at the cross are a purposeful investment on his part. The perceived loss of honour can be seen as a part of this investment. Wasta mediation also knows the aspect of investment, as was seen above in 2.4.1 the wasta is often a person of wealth and invests his or her resources in the mediation process, receiving social recognition, i.e. honour, in return. Jesus' being shamed therefore does not stand entirely in discontinuity with the wasta logic. If the earthly honour he loses in the shameful death on the cross is seen as an investment for greater honour as the eschatological mediator of all, this is in line the wasta logic.  

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517 In addition to the investments the wasta needs to make in terms of time, money for hosting delegations, keeping a house close to the city etc., wasta appears to have another aspect of financial investment. In informal interviews conducted with three pastors from two protestant churches in Jordan on 26. July 2010 and 18. April 2011, this
4.3.4. 5:11-6:12. Shaming the Readers into Proper Response
When reading the passage 5:11-6:12 in our wasta environment it stands out what a predominant role shame plays in these verses. As was observed, the author tries to shame his listeners into a proper attitude towards the patron. The image of a teacher and small children as well as drinking milk instead of solid food is pregnant with aspects of shame and honour. Teachers are honoured members of the community. Children, on the other hand, whilst bringing honour to the family, embody the absence of that honour which comes from maturity, learnedness, wisdom, age and social standing. Comparing his readers to children, even infants that are not yet weened amounts to a substantial attack on their honour. By shaming the addressees in this way, the passage appears as an appeal to the readers for an honourable response instead of the immature, disloyal and dishonourable one into which they have probably fallen.

It was seen above in 2.3.1.2.B that conflict settlement is an obligation in Middle Eastern societies. The right to receive mediation is coupled with the obligation to respond to it. This is proper in-group behaviour. Failure to comply is shameful. Group cohesion emerges as an underlying principle. Consistent with this principle, the author of Hebrews puts pressure on his readers by evoking shame in them. His aim is group cohesion. The education imagery of this passage supports this. As will be shown below in 4.6.2, the notion of teaching implies the permeation and cohesion of the group for the author of Hebrews.

4.3.5. Conclusion
Notions of honour and shame play a crucial part in the argument of Hebrews. The role they play fit

518 “Hebrews 5:13-14 introduces a distribution, a rhetorical device that assigns roles and qualities to different groups (here, the infants and the mature; see Rhet. Her. 4.35.47)” deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 212.
the logic of Middle Eastern mediation. The mediator is honourable to begin with and his honour increases with every successful mediation he undertakes. The client's honourable role consists in loyalty and thanks and it is to the client's shame to neglect this role. The author purposefully and carefully directs the spotlight of shame and honour to serve his purposes. But the honour and shame of the clients as well as the mediator run counter to traditional values. The mediator's apparently shameful death in reality constitutes his most honourable mediational act. The clients' honour will be found not in the court of reputation of the majority culture around them but their judges of honour are the invisible heavenly hosts and the heroes of the faith in history. It is logical that the author should dwell on honour and shame to make these counterintuitive points.

The talk about honour and shame has a double impetus, aiming at comfort for the readers on the one side and exhortation on the other. Both sides of the logic reinforce each other: 1) if the readers feel ashamed for their own present or past disloyalty the message is that they need not feel that way because such shame will be covered by family honour, held up by the exalted, brotherly mediator; 2) they need to recognise that shameful behaviour has to be stopped because it shames the mediator in an unacceptable way; the quality and degree of this shame are equal to shaming a family member. The outward perspective is the curing and covering of shame (2:11-18: Jesus vouches for his clients vis-a-vis the outside world without any notion of shame). The inside perspective is pressuring the clients into honourable behaviour like that within the in-group/family (cf. 5:11-6:12).

4.4. **Sonship, Brotherhood: Kinship Imagery**

The logic of kinship is closely linked with the principles of honour and shame. The wasa context has shown that mediation among relatives is categorically different from mediation among non-family. Hebrews' logic of mediation as presented by the author is pregnant with both kinship and honour imagery and both thought-worlds are skilfully combined by the author in order to achieve his goals.
4.4.1. **Chapter 1. Son and Heir**

From the outset, Hebrews' presentation of Jesus as mediator rests on kinship imagery: the Son. He is the Son and heir (ch. 1). This helps to draw out the closeness to the source of benefits, God. It is stated solemnly and prominently in 1:1-4 and “proven” from Scripture throughout ch. 1.

Ken Bailey analyses the role of the firstborn son and heir in the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. He analyses that the initial request by the prodigal to be paid his part of the inheritance constitutes a grave affront to the father. The older son would have to serve as mediator between his brother and father because of his status and role as first born.

At this point the Oriental listener/reader also expects the older son to enter the story verbally and take up the traditional role of reconciler. Breaks in relationships are always healed through a third party among Middle Easterners. The third party is selected on the basis of the closeness of the relationship to each side. In this case, the role of reconciler is thrust upon the older son by all the pressures of custom and community. His silence means refusal.\(^{519}\)

The superior mediating qualities of a first born son compared to the other siblings are not explicitly mentioned in studies on wasta to the knowledge of this author. The reason for this is likely the fact that the correlation between the status of a firstborn son and his efficiency as mediator is a function of another rule; namely that the efficiency of wasta depends on the quality of the relationship between wasta and source, as was seen in 2.4.4.4 Most naturally, in Middle Eastern societies which are patriarchally structured, it will usually be the oldest son who has the best relationship to his father since he is the legal heir of the father's wealth and by extension likely his successor in his role in the community. The firstborn son will thus be the most promising source of a benefit for a given third person. The presentation of Jesus as firstborn and heir is thus consistent with wasta logic. The emphatic presentation of Jesus as the firstborn Son and Heir implies ultimate efficiency in the mediation chain as far as the relationship between mediator and source is concerned. Having established that, the author moves on to argue ultimate efficiency for the relationship mediator and

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supplicant as well, also using family imagery.

4.4.2. Chapter 2. Brother

He is brother to his clients, ch.2. This statement claims closeness and therefore efficient mediation and is also carefully argued from scripture (2:12-13).

In ancient patronage as well as modern day wasta, the worth of mediation is reciprocated by the ascribing of honour and fame to the mediator. Failure to respond in such a grateful manner is equal to shaming the mediator.

Wasta specifically shows the special relevance of family relationships. As seen above in 2.3.2, wasta intercession is rendered to strangers for money, to friends for favours in return, but to family for free. Mediating favours to family members is taken for granted and a question of honour. Withholding a benefit that would help a family member puts shame on the wasta. Interpreting 2:11-13 in the wasta reading environment brings out a specific encouragement for the readers. The benefits given to them by God through Jesus his mediator come to them free of charge. No expectancy of reciprocation in kind is attached because the mediation takes place in a kinship context. The only reciprocation that is implicitly expected is loyalty and gratefulness. This is an encouragement to the readers and helps the paraenetic mission of the author.

Additionally, the notions of brotherhood between Jesus and humans in chapter two unfold a second aspect of encouragement. If the mediation takes place in a family context, this implies the complete absence of shame. The argument in 2:11 is phrased as a logical statement: The mediator and clients are “from one” and “for this reason” (δι᾿ ἣν αἰτίαν) Jesus calls them brethren without a notion of shame. The verse is not attempting to give a logical reason or an apologetic to answer the question why Jesus calls his followers family. The sequence is rather an amplification or concretion of the general statement that God's mediator and humans are “from one” (ἐξ ἑνὸς), meaning that they share a common family identity. The author wants to bring this abstract idea to life. He presents a
“logical argument” from the abstract precondition (Jesus and his clients are ἐξ ἑνὸς) to the concrete implication (Jesus calls them [implying “looks at or treats as”] brethren). The fact that humans receive the benefits which he mediates as family members means that they receive the honour of the designation “brother” explicated by the mediator himself (ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοὺς καλεῖν). The remark that the mediator is not ashamed (οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται) is not made because he might as well have called them brethren but ashamedly so. Rather, as was seen in 2.2.3.1, the intact family status is culturally tied to honour and therefore implies in itself the absence of shame.

The implicit danger of the hearers, who are faltering in their commitment, is to shame the patron through their ἀπιστία. But the author wants to completely remove this notion from the minds and hearts of the hearers by saying: you are family; accordingly there is categorically no place for shame in your relationship to the mediator.

At this point in the document, after the first exhortation in 2:1-4, the readers will be in the process of grasping and processing the two problems that the author is addressing. First, they realise that they are shaming Jesus their mediator with their disloyal and ungrateful attitude. Second, this will ultimately result in shame on themselves. No mediator of any self-respect will accept ungrateful and disloyal behaviour on the part of his clients. Realising that their mediator is unsurpassed in worth and greatness as per ch. 1, the readers now have every reason to fear great shame on themselves because they realise that their ἀπιστία towards the mediator of such great a salvation cannot end well.

When reading 2:11 in a wasta environment, it appears that the author in a unique way is trying to call his readers into the only safe haven from their guilt and fear by evoking the picture of an intact family. The power of the kinship imagery lies in the fact that it can most effectively counter the shame and honour misbalance overshadowing the community’s relationship with Jesus, their mediator. E. Peterson's translation captures the comforting aspect of the image best: “Since the One
who saves and those who are saved have a common origin, Jesus doesn’t hesitate to *treat them as family* [emphasis added]." The connection through family bonds is the only status for a client that means freedom from every hinderance in the mediation, especially honour and shame issues.\(^{521}\)

The familial bond is proven from scripture in 2:12. As seen earlier, the author reads the OT christocentrically and does not mind taking texts out of their contexts and changing reference points to suit his christology. In 2:12, Jesus acknowledges his clients as brethren “in the middle of the congregation”. As seen above, shame and honour are functions of the so-called “court of reputation”, the public judgement of a collectivist society, and especially the opinion of one's in-group. The readers are assured that Jesus as their gracious mediator acknowledges them in a favourable way in this context.

In 2:13 the author quotes Isa 8:17 and 18. The separation of the two verses by καὶ πάλιν shows the importance given to 8:17.\(^{522}\) Jesus, speaking in the words of the prophet, puts his trust in God. This πίστις is a hallmark of a mediation relationship. Lack of trust results in shame, the pastoral issue which the document wants to address, but from Jesus' side there is not a hint of shame as was just seen in v. 11. To the contrary, his πίστις is underlined, as it is pronounced by himself here. In v. 13b then the author places the clients (= the children) at Jesus' side before God, and by implication they are urged to reciprocate by investing the same πίστις as their mediator.

In Hebrews 2:13 the author paints the picture of a tripartite relationship between God as source of the favour, Jesus as mediator, and his children. This is not, as Lane interprets,\(^{523}\) an encouragement

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521 For the significance of the family metaphor see also Joseph Hellerman's treatment of the topic, Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Fortress Press, 2001). Hellerman argues that the family metaphor is the most significant metaphor for the early Jesus movement (cf. p. 70) and encapsulates the individual's honour (cf. p. 54). It is also used in Jesus' own teaching “to engender a specific kind of behavior” (p. 70) and to substantiate the call to ultimate loyalty to the church (cf. the call to denial of one's natural family in the Gospels, p. 23-25).
523 “…served to stress that Jesus identifies himself with the community of faith in his absolute trust and dependence upon God. The citation had immediate relevance for the hearers. The fact that Jesus’ confidence was fully vindicated after he had experienced suffering and affliction assured them that they could also trust God in difficult circumstances…” Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 60.
to the effect that Jesus trusts God and thus the readers should do the same. Rather, it claims close relationship in the essential three-step chain of mediation (source, mediator, client). It has just been argued that the relationship of Jesus to his clients is one of kinship quality. Since Middle Eastern mediation is tripartite, this needs to be complemented with a statement on the relationship between the source and the mediator. This is one of trust, 2:13a.\textsuperscript{524}

4.4.3. 3:1-6. Son Over the House

In the house metaphor, the kinship strategy is joined with the superiority strand of the argument. Jesus, being Son over the house, is superior to Moses, the renowned mediator who is, however, only servant in the house. Jesus will be able to sway the patron because he is more than a friend or servant, more than a second son.

The house imagery helps the author to express Jesus' superior mediatorship. Speaking of the Greco-Roman household, deSilva says “[t]he close relatives of the emperor, especially his sons, were sought after as mediators of the emperor’s favor: their close, familial relationship to the patron of the empire gave great hope of success.”\textsuperscript{525} Presenting Jesus as “Son over the house” means to present him as broker of the favour of a patron. As first-born son and heir, he will be in a supreme position for mediation. This is underlined through comparing him with Moses, who is a mere servant in the house, yet has been known to be a very efficient mediator: Jesus' efficiency will be categorically greater than his. The wasta reading environment sheds a distinct light on how this paraenesis can work. It is not just a rhetorical way of drawing the hearers into the argument. It can also evoke an emotional response and association based on the sociological implications of the “house” imagery.

As was seen above in 2.2.4.1, in wasta culture relational closeness is expressed through kinship language. People will informally say “he is like a brother” or even “he is a brother,” meaning that

\textsuperscript{524} See, however, the discontinuity that the tripartite relationship closes in form of a triangle since there is also a relationship source-client. Error: Reference source not found.

\textsuperscript{525} deSilva, \textit{Perseverance in Gratitude}, 88.
they feel close to this person or that they wish to be thought of as closely related and feeling responsible for each other. This type of language has its firm place in the talk about wasta favours. Asking someone to do a favour for a friend, one might say “would you do this and that for my brother here?” Being thanked for a favour, the benefactor might graciously say “you're (like) a brother” to modestly put off the thanks: as family, no reciprocation is expected and intercession is taken for granted, so the reply amounts to “it's nothing” or “don't mention it.”

Putative lineage is a way of informally “adopting” people of groups into bigger units. As was seen above in 2.2.4.1, there is agreement that the mechanism existed and possibly still does and the rhetoric can even be observed in present day Middle Eastern societies. Middle Eastern cultures have means to incorporate tribes and families into other tribes and families by way of developing a putative lineage.

Malina describes the cultural-anthropological mechanism at work:

Such relations “kin-ify” and suffuse the persons involved with the aura of kinship, albeit fictive or pseudo-kinship (see Pitt-Rivers 1968). And since the hallmark of kinship as social institution is the quality of commitment, solidarity or loyalty realized in terms of generalized reciprocity, patron-client relations take on these kinship dimensions. Thus economic, political and religious interactions now take place between individuals bound together by mutual commitment, solidarity and loyalty in terms of generalised reciprocity, rather than the balanced reciprocity of unconnected equals or the negative reciprocity typical of superiors to their subordinates.

The phenomena of kinship language and putative lineage bring out the paraenetic and existential

526 Antiquity knew the practice of adoption. Cf. Peter Conn, Adoption: A Brief Social and Cultural History (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 30–37. As Conn describes, in the Roman influenced culture this was also used for political reasons and to forge strategic alliances between. However, adoption in antiquity focussed on the individual adoptee first, whereas in the studies on the phenomenon of tribal Middle Eastern putative kinship mentioned in 2.2.4.1 individual adoptions are never mentioned, probably because they are rarely or never traced. The ethos of putative lineage appears to be more collectivist and tribally focussed than ancient Roman adoption. For the Jewish tradition, Conn suggests that adoption was relatively insignificant due to Israel's “[t]ribal consciousness” (Ibid., 30.). This seems to suggest that in antiquity tribal mechanisms, possibly like the building of putative lineages, were already at work as informal ways of adoption. But a comprehensive study of adoption in antiquity and its relation to tribal custom is beyond the scope of this study. Further research in this direction could, however, also shed light on possible similarities between Jewish and Islamic culture, asking the question if possibly in both Jewish and Islamic cultures the need for adoption is met by tribal ways of integrating weaker elements into stronger tribes. The lack of a developed culture of adoption in many Islamic cultures until today would suggest that much.

edge in the statement of 3:6b. The readers are promised to be able to share in the household of Jesus, mediator-son of the greatest patron. The promise amounts to full participation in the status and privileges of a most honourable family or tribe. Viewed in this light, the remark is the picture of something which is real-yet-extraordinary, which would impact practical lives like a win in the lottery in present-day Western culture. The full force of this argument is then utilised for exhortation. As Gordon notes “the addressees' membership of the household is not taken for granted; by their persistence in faith they are expected to provide the evidence of membership (v. 6b.).”

4.4.4. 4:1-14 and 6:4-5. Wrong sense of Entitlement

4.4.4.1. 4:1-14 Problem of Attitude
As was seen in the exegesis of the passage 4:1-14, the line of argument is that the audience is in the process of attaining the mediated benefit and indeed on the brink of completion of the transaction, yet it is required that they hold onto the trust and loyalty that their role as clients demands of them, otherwise there is a danger of the transaction still failing. In the following, this will be read in light of the phenomenon of undue sense of entitlement in clients which leads to the loss of their grateful and loyal attitude.

Cunningham and Sarayrah present a selection of wasta case studies under the heading “Wasta and the Close Family.” In all cases, supplicants are described who derive an unreasonably high sense of entitlement to benefits from the fact that they are family with the wasta. They pressure the wasta illegitimately or even outrightly shame him. Examples come from the realms of work and education. Some wasta clients drastically undercut minimum requirements for a specific benefit, e.g. a student wants his professor to pass him in a course he did not even attend. He expects his professor to grant the favour since he is a cousin. Others shame the wasta as he is not achieving

529 Cunningham and Sarayrah, Wasta, 107.
530 Cf. Ibid., 109.
the requested favour, e.g. an army instructor badmouthing a relative who was unsuccessful to
mediate a transfer for him.\textsuperscript{531}

The wasta examples help to estimate the criticism against the readers of Hebrews as clients who
illegitimately pressure or shame their mediator and undercut minimum standards of reciprocation in
loyalty and honour. Like the student wanting his uncle-professor to pass him without even attending
the class (i.e. doing his part of the deal), the Israelites fail to accept the challenge of the
investigating and conquering the land. Instead they give in to the “bad report” spread by some of
the spies (Numbers 14:36). In our reading environment, it appears as if the author of Hebrews is
criticising this behaviour on part of the clients, similar to Cunningham and Sarayrah criticising the
behaviour of certain wasta supplicants: “The system is set up to ensure failure. The supplicant puts
forth little individual effort to achieve the desired goal.”\textsuperscript{532}

The essential common issue in Numbers 14 / Hebrews and those cited wasta situations is πίστις.

Cunningham and Sarayrah analyse thus:

It almost seems that the lack of effort is intentional, that the family member serving as wasta is
being subjected to a loyalty test. From the protagonist's perspective, loyalty to the family [on part
of the wasta, E.S.] is not an important consideration, it is the only consideration. Whether the
supplicant achieves the outcome may be less important than that the family member serving as
wasta pass the loyalty test of trying to help. Any issue of individual merit is disregarded. The
wasta's support for the individual is the litmus test of loyalty to family.\textsuperscript{533}

In a situation where favour should be met with grateful loyalty, instead the favour is claimed as a
due service and becomes itself the test for the patron's loyalty. Such misled clients have to be
warned: they have to “avoid fearfully” to “fall short” of the offered favour (4:1) and “work hard” to
obtain it.

It is not a problem of how much a supplicant can expect from the patron and vice versa.

\textsuperscript{531} Cf. Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{532} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{533} Ibid.
Numbers 14 does not explicate how big the military risk objectively was, whether it was reasonable, nor what the nature of the trust-eroding rumour was. Instead, it is squarely stated that the Israelites sinned by not upholding the faithful loyalty that is appropriate. In a similar way, Cunningham and Sarayrah do not offer an assessment of which expectations are legitimate and which ones are not. Instead, they criticise that the family relations are supercharged with unjust expectations that corrupt an entire system.

The problem is one of attitude and is addressed as such in Hebrews 4:12 – the word of God cuts down and judges attitudes (ἔννοια). Likewise, the overall judgement of what is fair between client and patron is situated with God before whom no creature is hidden and everything is uncovered and exposed (4:13) and also the accountability is before him (4:13). All this should suffice to urge the clients to correct their attitude towards the patron.

Numbers 14 shows signs of an exaggerated sense of entitlement which shames God as the patron. Despite the benefits which God the patron gave them and which should have resulted in obedience and respectful loyalty (show glory and perform signs 14:22), the clients treated the patron with contempt and refused to believe (14:11), disobeyed and tested him (14:22 – cf. Cunningham and Sarayrah's speaking of the “loyalty test” above). Moses, mediating as it were in the conflict between clients and patron, does what is logical in the situation and appeals to the patron's honour (14:13-19).

4.4.4.2. 6:4-5. List of Benefits Might Be Part of Countering Exaggerated Entitlement
In the passage of shaming the clients into proper behaviour, the author lists benefits already received (6:4-5). This might be a building block in his argument against an exaggerated sense of entitlement.

Wasta-rhetoric shows a proportional connection between benefits successfully rendered and loyalty to the wasata expressed by the client. If the expectations of the supplicant are belied, this might result
in the client (at least in his rhetoric) denouncing his relationship to the wasta. Cunningham and Sarayrah recount a situation where a wasta named Shtayan could not deliver the benefit a relative had asked for. The disappointed client named Bashir reacted as follows: “A week later Bashir called again, this time shouting and yelling, complaining that he came into this world from a tree with no parents, brothers, or family. Shtayan's great wasta had not worked, and he demanded that nobody talk to him from then on.”534

Cunningham and Sarayrah's evaluation of this case and other similar ones is that in the wasta system there is a false sense of entitlement of benefits from family: “These stories describe intense family situations, where family ties are perceived to imply mandatory obligations for help. … The wasta who fails to produce is blamed by the supplicant.”535

It is possible to speculate on that basis that similar mechanisms may have been at work in the community addressed in Hebrews. If that were the case, the lack of loyalty and gratefulness in the community might be the consequence of belied expectations, such as earthly benefits, prosperity and easy living (as opposed to the hardships which are implied in 12:4-12). The recipient community clearly thought of Jesus as their mediator in metaphors of family (if this were not so the author would not use them as extensively as he does or introduce them more carefully).536 If their attitude was similar to that of clients in wasta societies, they might have derived from this perceived family-relationship a similarly exaggerated sense of entitlement towards God, their fatherly patron and Jesus, their brotherly broker. If that were the case, the author's emphasising in vv. 4-5 the spiritual benefits received by the addressees in the past would be an effective means to correct this attitude: the benefits which the clients feel are missing have actually been given to them since they were first “enlightened”, in the form of “heavenly gifts”, “sharing in the Holy Spirit”, “tasting of the goodness of the word of God” and “powers of the coming age” (6:4-5). They are thus under full

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534 Ibid., 111.
535 Ibid., 114.
536 See also Gray who judges that Jesus' “identity as brother of the faithful is the familiar and serves as the key to understanding the nature of his distinctive priesthood.” Gray, “Brotherly Love,” 351.
obligation to reciprocate in gratitude and loyalty. The kinship from which they think they can derive entitlement to great benefits actually puts an obligation to gratefulness and maturity on them because of the spiritual benefits which they have already been given but might have forgotten.

4.4.5. 5:5-6. Sonship and Priesthood
Sonship and priesthood are the two lead metaphors for the Christology of Hebrews in general and the logic of mediation in particular. The author puts them into close relation in 5:5-6. How does their relationship appear in the light of wasta mediation?

Speaking about the motif of “brother” in relation to the motif “high priest”, Gray speculates that “after reflecting upon the full significance of the two roles, [the author] concluded that they were not so disparate after all.”

The same might be said about the role of son and priest. The focus is slightly different though: the brother-imagery speaks of the nearness between mediator and client whereas the son-image first pertains to the relationship between source and mediator. Only in the light of Middle Eastern mediation, in the bigger picture the two images line up more closely as two images from the realm of kinship.

From a history-of-tradition viewpoint, Loader assumes that the lines of the two concepts Son and High Priest converge where the traditions of exaltation (Erhöhungstradition), of Sonship and of intercession meet. Lane agrees, noting that “Ps 2:7 (‘You are my Son; today I have become your father’) and Ps 110:4 (‘You are a priest forever, just like Melchizedek’) are understood as parallel declarations of appointment.” This connection is unique to Hebrews within the NT.

This logic of fusing together notions of God-Sonship and priesthood in order to express Jesus' role as mediator is only apprehensible if a high priest is viewed as mediator and a son is viewed as an ideal typical mediator and both of those views are present in the collective mind of the recipients.

537 Ibid., 350.
538 Cf. Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 251–254.
539 Lane, Hebrews 1-8, cxli.
and require not much further explanation.

The choice to connect the thought-worlds of sonship and priesthood together also makes sense if the intention of the author was to talk about the mediational ministry of Jesus in the highest possible terms. Middle Eastern mediation is, as the wasa logic shows, a two-part compound of mediation in conflicts and intercession for benefits. The Son imagery supports the idea of intercession: the Son is close to the Father who is the source of all benefits, he is close to the brethren who are the clients, thus the benefits can flow freely from source to clients. The high priest imagery supports the idea of mediation in conflicts: the high priest atones for the transgressions of his human clients towards God. While he is also a mediator (cf. Loader's remarks on that point\textsuperscript{540}), the focus in Hebrews lies on the Day of Atonement rite and thus on the mediational qualities of the priesthood in the primordial conflict between man and God constituted by sin. The two sets of ideas, sonship and priesthood, each express mediation and intercession. They converge in two places; namely, first, where Jesus the high priest's offering receives its distinct quality from the fact that he is also the eternal Son and his offering is thus once for all and, second, where the salvation mediated by the high priest and the solution of the primordial conflict becomes the ultimate benefit and gift (χάρις).

The christological reading of Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 and their choice for his distinct christology enable the author to speak to the topic of mediation in its basic sociological dynamics (conflict mediation and intercession for benefits). Additionally, he can claim ultimate efficiency and validity for this particular mediation: the firstborn son and the heavenly high priest provide the notions that state the ultimacy in an indisputable and urgent way. This choice of imagery adds colour to the

palette which the author needs to convey the most convincing picture possible of Jesus as mediator, from a sociological point of view. The imagery is the best way to make an existential impact on his readers and increase the probability of them appropriating the message to their lives.

Parson argues that the collocation of motifs of kinship and priesthood has to do with the author's focus on the divine and human in Jesus and concludes: “While it would be fruitless to try and claim that this emphasis on both the humanity and deity of Jesus necessarily resulted in use of priestly imagery, it is helpful to notice that the Son and High Priest are complementary terms which produce a full-orbed christology.”

541 This is true in an even more comprehensive way than what Parson has in mind. Reading Hebrews against the backdrop of the wasta practice shows that the ideas of sonship and priesthood develop the christology into a coherent big picture and increase its credibility and convincing power in the realm of social interaction.

4.4.6. Ch.7. High Priest like Melchizedek - Putative Lineage as Apologetics

The author's move to call Jesus High Priest like / in the order of Melchizedek appears in light of the logic of putative lineage. Rhetoric of kinship and genealogy is employed in order to manipulate genealogical realities to meet cultural/sociological requirements (here: all priests be descendants of Levi).

The author of Hebrews' use is slightly different from putative lineage in wasta societies, where individuals are grafted into a bigger, more powerful tribe or family. Here, Jesus is implicitly removed from his tribe (Judah) since it is not the suitable tribe for a priestly position. This is not substituted by membership in a superior tribe. Rather, a logical-mythical connection is implied between absence of lineage and eternal life (Hebrews 7:3). The authority, status and designation is removed from the institution of tribe and instead re-located to lie within the oath of God himself (7:20-21, 28). This thought is first argued with a witty and creative hermeneutical move (Abraham's

541 Parsons, “Son and High Priest,” 208.
tithing to Melchizedek, 7:1-10) and then consolidated by way of spiritualisation in the discussion of God's oath (7:11-28).

The wasta environment reveals that the author of Hebrews uses a logic analogous to that of putative lineage. The discontinuity lies in the fact that the adjustment of the lineage does not take the form of an upgrade into a higher tribe but rather it removes Jesus from the known tribal taxonomy and spiritualises the question of his legitimacy. The terminology τάξις (order) is helpful for achieving the author's ends because semantically it includes an aspect of formality (order), which speaks to the question of formal legitimacy, while at the same time being useful for the spiritualisation – κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ expressing simply Jesus' likeness to the spiritual priest figure.542

4.4.7. Conclusion
The wasta reading environment shows that the kinship imagery used in Hebrews is highly effective in order to portray Jesus as the supreme mediator between man and God. Right at the outset in chapter one the author emphasises Jesus' role as firstborn Son and heir. In a Middle Eastern context this suggests the closest possible relationship to the Father and thus the best possible relationship between the mediator and the source or target of the mediation. In chapter two Jesus is presented as Brother to his people. Read against the backdrop of wasta logic, this implies the best possible relationship between the mediator and the supplicants. A kinship connection between supplicant and mediator implies that the mediation is taken for granted and does not need to be reciprocated in kind, but in loyalty and gratefulness. Both segments of the tripartite mediation relationship are described as kinship ties. Thus the whole mediation implicitly takes place within a family context. The family context, as was seen, is seen as a realm where shame has no place. The addressees of Hebrews are assured of their membership in the divine family. This relieves them of all fears of shame. It also takes off them the pressure to reciprocate the benefits granted to them by God.

542 These correlations are made clear by the phenomenon of putative lineage with its greater focus on tribal structures, cf. 4.4.3; adoption in antiquity, with its vantage point from the individual adoptee, is less potent as a hermeneutical background.
through Jesus in any other form than gratefulness and loyalty.

4.5. **Reciprocation and Sacrifice**

It was seen that in wasta as well as patronage the benefits mediated usually call for reciprocation on part of the client. The analysis of kinship imagery in ch. 2 in 4.4.2 using the wasta reading environment showed that the obligation to reciprocate is drastically changed in Hebrews; namely to reciprocation not in kind but in loyalty and reciprocation. Apart from this, the basic idea of reciprocation for mediation also connects with the logic of sacrifice, as will now be seen.

Sacrifice includes at a basic level the idea of reciprocation. Ghiaioni states:

Moreover, in the history of theories there is a constant intertwining of themes such as the idea of *reciprocality* between the human world and the supernatural one; offer and gift; debt and credit between humankind and deity; self-sacrifice and abnegation; and, finally, the themes of the scapegoat, the symbolic replacement of the sacrifier with the victim, violence, consecration, and desacralization. (Emphasis added.)

Hebrews, however, stresses that Jesus' sacrifice was once for all. So while God's favour and forgiveness continues, no future sacrifices will be made to reciprocate this. The reciprocation made does not originate with the clients materially so that they would provide the sacrificial object which the priest then offers up. Rather, it originates with the mediator-priest himself who offers up his own body as a sacrifice. Neither does the intention and initiation of the reciprocation originate with the clients in the sense that they would have asked the priest for this offering. On the contrary, the self-sacrifice of Jesus the high priest is spoken of in an active voice. Additionally, the thought of Jesus the high priest's self sacrifice was so alien and shameful a concept to the readers that the author goes to great pains to identify the perceived shameful death as the glorious sacrificial act, which it is.

Breaking with the reciprocation modes of the old order, reciprocation will now take the form of

gratitude, faith and loyalty instead. In the light of wasta logic, this paradigmatic shift appears in
organic connection with the notion of Jesus as familial, brotherly Son-mediator.\textsuperscript{544}

4.6. \textit{Collectivism}

4.6.1. 2:1-4. Minority Position and Court of Reputation

Reading in a wasta environment also means to look at this passage from a collectivist point of view.
The remarks about the confirmation of the message (by the Lord, eyewitnesses, and God's own
miraculous acts) are addressed to a congregation whose problem is most likely that they are a
minority in danger of drifting back towards the non-christian mainstream again. The mediation
which the author is promoting does not conform with the mediation system of the majority culture.
The readers are in the difficult situation of having to loyally hold on to a patron who is not endorsed
and vouched for by the majority around them. The author's strategy for encouragement here is to try
and convince the readers that they are not in fact a weak minority but to invoke 1) the fame of the
mediator, Jesus, 2) his first followers and promoters, the evangelists (“those who heard him”), and
3) the big patron himself, who has given the message communally valid credibility through signs
and wonders.

Bringing in the threefold confirmation of the message is not just a move to prove the message's
reliability, but also to put on social pressure - or compensate opposing pressure from the majority
culture / religion respectively - and point out why the new confession ultimately requires all loyalty
even though it lacks the approval of the majority.\textsuperscript{545}

By way of conclusion, vv. 2:1-4 read in a wasta environment suggests that the audience of Hebrews
was in a minority situation and exposed to pressure from the majority community around them. It
also exposes the strategy of the author to remedy this situation: employ rhetoric that a) emphasises
the honour of the mediator and b) underlines the reliability of the content that causes the alienation

\textsuperscript{544} Cf. also the discussion of sacrifice from the vantage point of collectivism below, 4.6.3
\textsuperscript{545} Cf. also the discussion of 2:1-4 from the vantage point of honour and shame, 4.3.1
but demands loyal adherence and c) convene a different court of reputation, basically consisting of
the elders (who first heard...) and spiritual entities (angels, Jesus himself, God...).

4.6.2. 5:11-6:12. Social Cohesion
The teacher-student-imagery in 5:11-6:12 links in with the principle of collectivism. When the
author admonishes that “by this time [the congregation] ought to be teachers”, the content of the
teaching has to be the ways of Jesus, the mediator, and loyal and faithful adherence to him.

DeSilva observes that the hope that the audience be teachers implies that they perpetuate the
religion and thus stabilise the minority community.546 The active teaching of the religion would
result in a proper attitude towards the mediator, Jesus, and the patron, God, and thus harmony,
stability and prosperity (i.e. the free flow of the benefits of the patronal relationship). In wasta
contexts, a similar connection between mediation and education is known. The proverbial
expression “al-majalis madaris: our guesthouse councils are our schools”547 expresses the same
hope, namely that the process of mediation, properly conducted, in the centre of the community (the
guest house council), visible to anyone, will perpetuate the knowledge of how to maintain social
cohesion and prosperity of the community.

Social cohesion is also the primary concern in wasta-mediation as it is found in the collectivist
societies of the Middle-East. When evaluating the contemporary wasta system, often considerations
of economic inefficiency and lack of meritocracy lead to fierce criticism of wasta and eclipse the
aspect of social cohesion.548 In the context of Hebrews, however, where the exchanged goods are of

546 Cf. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 214.
547 Antoun, “Institutionalized Deconfrontation,” 163.
548 Cunningham and Sarayrah describe the case of a customs official was looked at who wanted to break through
wasta practice and hire typists for his department based on a skill-test instead of family-wasta. His superior, who
was also his uncle, rebuked him and stated he had to find jobs for ever increasing numbers of college graduates
from the family and went on to employ relatives regardless of their skill. Efficiency will obviously suffer as a
consequence. The uncle's ways will be viewed critically if efficiency and meritocracy are the standards. If
efficiency is taken out of the equation, however, the uncle represents maturity and wisdom as a mediator by acting
in order to preserve social cohesion and prosperity of the community, i.e. the family or tribe. If he did not give his
young relatives jobs this would result in waning loyalty to him, the possibility that they have to find jobs far away,
possibly abroad, or none at all. All criticism of his behaviour is based on a meritocratic viewpoint. Cf. Cunningham
and Sarayrah, Wasta, 54.
a spiritual nature with no economic value and the cohesion is that of a religious community, membership in which is based on grace, the efficiency-meritocracy complex plays virtually no role.

The author will later quote from Jeremiah 31 (Hebrews 8:8-12), stating that in the days of the new covenant there will be no more teaching because God's people will all know him. The author sees beyond the state of social cohesion through mature, mutually teaching and encouraging members. Social cohesion through teaching and mutual encouragement is but a stepping stone on the way to the eschatological promise of the intimate knowledge of God, given into the hearts of his people and requiring no further teaching. This is the goal of the way of maturity, which the author is proposing in 5:11-6:3. Reinforcing each other's faith like teachers is only an in-between state on the way to perfection of the relationship of the clients and the heavenly patron. The author's frustration with his congregation is that they do not move towards this eschatological goal but indeed away from it.

4.6.3. 10:10-18. Changing the Sacrificial System = Changing the Mediational System

Jay explains how sacrifice upholds and sustains community. It is an element of cohesion for collectivist societies and serves as a distinction for in-groups against the outside world. If this assessment is correct, the transition from the old cult with repeated sacrifice to the new covenant with its once for all sacrifice through Jesus' death should also be viewed under this aspect.

The cohesion of the group is important to the author and his pastoral concern in writing to the recipients. The recipients are probably second generation Christians and the idea of atonement through Jesus singular death instead of regular sacrifices should not be entirely new to them. Nonetheless, through exposure to the majority culture surrounding them, they might be in danger of faltering and regressing into building their hope on physical, regular sacrificing. If sacrifice is a matter of social cohesion, there is likely a considerable gravitational pull towards the sacrificial practices of either the Jewish past (even assuming the addressees are second-generation Christians)
or the majority religion in a Gentile context.

Accordingly, when talking about the sacrifice of Christ the way he does in 10:1-10, the author is trying to (re-)establish the community of his recipients on the sacrifice of Christ. Three things are important to note about his concept:

1) It constitutes a still relatively recent departure from the centuries old sacrificial practices of Judaism.

2) It is conceptually new and different because of its once-for-all character and claim to absolute supremacy and finality.

3) It is, apart from Christ's death as a this-worldly shadowy reflection, spiritual in nature.

The explications in 10:1-10 emphasise the once for all aspect and consequent superior efficacy. It adds the notion of God's “will” according to which this paradigm-shift in sacrificial practice has occurred. In this sense, it finalises the argument: using Psalm 40, it legitimises the radical shift by “proving” from scripture that it was God's “will” to move past regular physical sacrifice of bulls and goats to the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus. This is the significance of the “obedience” of Jesus: Jesus' obedience is a pointer to the will of God, which is the legitimisation for the radical change in the sacrificial system.

All this is so important because sacrifice is, as Jay's statements show, a structural support of the community. The writer of Hebrews has to make sure that the “new sacrificial system,” Jesus' once and for all self sacrifice, fully (since it fully supersedes the old system) carries the load of holding together the community in the way in which sacrifice typically does. Compared to the old sacrifice, the new sacrifice of Jesus is weakened because it is more abstract than the old sacrificial system. The old sacrifice consisted in an annual, physical, solemn ritual and feast. The new sacrifice begins with a single, controversial and shameful event (the cross), which only gains it positive meaning
through its effect in the unseen heavenly realm. It can be assumed that his made it difficult for the addressees to wholeheartedly embrace the new system.

4.7. **Mediation and Language of Movement**

With his exposition of Psalm 8:4-6 in ch. 2, the author paves the way here for later statements such as Jesus being the forerunner into heaven, who leads the way with his clients following suit (cf. 6:20). The main motif of the document, the High Priest, already contains the implied idea of a mediator-leader who leads the way and his clients follow him in order to reach the benefit or relationship they desire.⁵⁴⁹

In Middle Eastern culture, the “way and work,” i.e. the practical forms and formalities of the mediation are essential. Roland Muller states: “Arab lore is full of stories of how wise and skilful men have intervened in difficult situations. In fact, many national rulers gain their fame and reputation from their skills at ending tribal strife.”⁵⁵⁰ Using the Psalm as a starting point, our author here begins a colourful description of the *way*; namely Jesus being made lower than the angels (2:9), being perfected through suffering and death (2:10) and being exalted and crowned (2:9). This is followed by the *work*; namely Jesus' tasting death for everyone, (2:9) of Jesus as mediator.

The thought that the mediator moves towards the goal of mediation, taking his supplicants with him, resonates with wasta practice. The wasta, or the jaha (the delegation of wastas), physically approaches the other party. It is essential that this be a *physical* approach (and not a petition on paper signed by every member of the jaha, a phone call or other form of communication via distance) because meaningful mediation takes place face-to-face. Whether for mediation or intercession, the other party will *host* the mediator(s), which constitutes the first step of the mediation process. Also, the physical approach is visible to everyone and thus a statement to the

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⁵⁴⁹ This will be seen in more detail below, but the main idea is that the high priest is so strongly identified with his people that in his mediator function he cannot be imagined to *send* people, but always *go himself* and *bring* with him his clients so they reach their goal. Cf. Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 94.

⁵⁵⁰ Muller, *Honor and Shame*, 50.
community. For example, Arab Middle Eastern weddings begin with the jaha picking up the bride from her family's house. The groom's company will gather outside the bride's house in traditional attire, playing and singing traditional music.\textsuperscript{551} This is practiced even today in urban settings.\textsuperscript{552}

Language of movement was also seen in 4:14 and 16, cf. above, 3.5.2 In these two verses Jesus in his high priestly role is said to go through the heavens (v. 14) and humans are called to consequently approach God in confidence, relying on the success of their high priest. It was seen that there are strong underlying notions of identification between the priest and the people on those behalf he mediates. His movement towards God is envisioned as bringing his people with him. Attridge comments further that “‘[a]pproaching' God is used as a more encompassing image for entering into a covenantal relationship with God. (Emphasis added.)”\textsuperscript{553} If this is a correct assessment, it strikes familiar chords in a wasi environment. The approach for favour is infused with the entering into a close, beneficial relationship. Similarly, the formalised, physical act of approach of the jaha coming to the house of the bride's or the victim's family can be seen as a symbolic foreshadow of the relationship about to be established or restored. This mechanism is tied in with the collectivist nature of the society: the mediators publicly moving towards the house of the other party will be a clear sign to the public as the “court of reputation” that mediation is taking place and communal balance is about to be restored.

4.8. Identification

In several instances in Hebrews, Jesus’ identification with his followers is expressed. This resonates with the basic logic of wasi that the wasi identifies with both the supplicant and the source of the favour or the opposite party in a conflict. In particular, the following passages are relevant.

\textsuperscript{551} In contemporary urban contexts the groom's company might wear western style formal clothing and professional musicians in traditional attire may be hired.
\textsuperscript{552} In the context of a wedding, the jaha picking up the bride obviously does not function as a delegation for mediation. Rather, the statement to the community has been isolated and coupled with the expressions of joy and celebration.
\textsuperscript{553} Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 141.
The temporal immersion in the clients' realm which is explicated in Hebrews 2.5-9 resonates with wasta mediators who spend a part of their working life in a certain field of profession and later go on to become wastas in this same area in which they have been immersed for some time. At the same time, however, the notion of suffering (2:9) is also a pastoral connection point for the readers in their own hardships. As they follow their leader, they too will suffer, as is their experience even now. But Jesus has suffered more, which means that he will always be a suitable helper for those in need (as will be stated in v. 18). The thought of suffering for his followers is reminiscent of the investments a wasta sometimes has to make in order to mediate successfully, as was seen above in 2.4.1 These investments can sometimes be substantial.

The wasta reading environment also sheds light on a debate evolving around the Psalm quotation. It is widely held that the author sees in the formulation υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου of the Psalm the formal title of Jesus as the Son. However, the title is used here without the article. This is different to the predominant use of the title elsewhere in the NT. Lane thus contends that the author does not see a formal title in the formulation but takes it to express identification of Jesus as mediator with his clients. Our reading environment supports this analysis because the identification of the mediator with the supplicants is an intrinsic part of the logic of Middle Eastern mediation. In addition to that it can be speculated that the author sees the title in the Psalm also. Jesus Sonship is the basis for his mediational role. An intrinsic part of this role is the identification with followers. The author might have chosen the Psalm quotation with the ambiguous formulation υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου for this double meaning. Following the logic of mediation, the highness of the solemn title of the Son and the lowly human part of his nature are inseparably intertwined. The formulation υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου might seem useful to our author because it alludes to the title as well as the general human condition which he, the supreme mediator, has adopted as part of his role.

554 See Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 4–7 for references.
555 Cf. Ibid., 47.
Also the notion that Jesus was immersed in the lowly realm of his clients only for a short time (βραχύ) is reminiscent of basic wasta dynamics. Only in Greek can the term used refer to time; the MT equivalent is restricted to a spatial meaning. The author chooses the wording consciously in order to express the time limitation on Jesus' identification with the earthly realm, the sphere of his clients. After that time, Jesus moves on towards the pinnacle of his mediating work, his ministry in the heavenly tabernacle which will be discussed in various places in chs. 7-10. This is reminiscent of a wasta's immersion in a field of work, e.g. the customs department, and his subsequent service as mediator based on this time of identification, for example when he opens a clearance agency. The temporal immersion in a certain realm enables one to later serve as mediator.

The remark that Jesus was tested in everything just like his clients (πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ᾽ ομοιότητα) resonates with wasta in the way that the experience of a wasta increases his efficiency. As seen above, wastas often serve in the field of their former profession (e.g. a former customs officer might work as a clearing agent after retirement). Their grounding in the field puts them in a position to successfully mediate in challenging scenarios where their clients would fail if they were on their own. The remark that yet Jesus was without sin (χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας) then seems to translate into the assertion that he was ultimately successful as mediator. The challenge of the supplicants is the “struggle against sin” (πρὸς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι, 12:4); their main problem – their lack of πιστὲς – is closely connected to this struggle, which they have not yet fought μέχρις αἵματος. Jesus can mediate a breakthrough in this regard because he suffered death (viz. fought to the point of shedding his blood) yet was without sin. So, being fully acquainted with the challenge of the matter, he was ultimately successful as a mediator.

4.9. Intercession and Mediation

It was seen in 2.3 that wasta consists of two basic dynamics, intercession and mediation. These two aspects can also be discerned in Hebrews.
The statements in 2:17-18 encompass two dimensions of Jesus' high priestly activity – his sacrificial death and his continuous intercession as Attridge most relevantly notes: “Both dimensions of Christ's priestly office, expiation and intercession, are highlighted in this and the following verse. They are complementary but distinct.”\textsuperscript{556} In the context of wasta this resounds with the two categories of wasta activity: conflict mediation and intercession for benefits.

The author is not interested in describing the two dynamics as separate or discussing them individually. Also in wasta this is rather a development of recent decades since it has been particularly useful in order to describe the transition from traditional mediation to modern (urban) intercession. But intercession and mediation also describe the two basic dynamics of what Middle Eastern mediation comprises, and as such they emerge here in a “complementary but distinct” way.

How is the mediating activity of Jesus in Hebrews to be viewed between mediation and intercession? Most importantly, Jesus is mediator of the New Covenant. This covenant consists in a restored relationship between God and man, as was seen in 3.6.1. Hebrews 7:25 explains that Jesus “intercedes” (ἐντυγχάνω) before God with the result of “saving completely” (σῴζειν εἰς τὸ παντελές) those who make use of his mediation. Despite the fact that ἐντυγχάνω is frequently translated “to intercede” or “make intercession” (NIV, NRS, ESV, KJV), what is in view here matches the mediation aspect of the wasta logic better than the intercession aspect. While Jesus' activity should be seen as analogous to the mediation aspect of wasta, it is worth keeping in mind however that intercession and mediation are closely related since a mended relationship also constitutes a benefit, as was seen in 2.3.4

Mediational wasta restores relationships which existed before. This restoration, as was seen in 2.3.1.2, is pragmatic in nature. It restores the previous relationship to its original quality or if this is impossible to an inferior form which, however, creates working relations and restores harmony in

\textsuperscript{556} Attridge, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 96.
the community. The New Covenant of which Jesus is the mediator is markedly more than that, as was seen in 3.6.1. It does not restore the relationship to the status quo ante or less. Instead, the relationship between God and humanity is elevated and based upon a new foundation; namely the better hope, (7:19), better covenant (7:22) and blood which speaks a better word (12:24). Hence Jesus is the perfecter of the faith, who after his mediational act of enduring the cross proceeded to sit down on the right hand of the throne of God, as the solemn verse 12:2 declares by way of concluding the paraenesis of faith (10:19-12:3).

The restored relationship is superior and different from the old to the degree that transcends the conflict mediation in wasta. In this sense, it is also a benefit, like one mediated by a wasta who practices intercessory wasta. The mediation of Jesus described in Hebrews contains both the aspect of mediation as well as intercession; this is so because of the unique nature of the New Covenant, which is the content of the mediation.

**4.10. Mediation and Sustenance, Motivation, Consolation and Security**

In wasta societies, goods and services are accessed through mediation. Therefore, lacking efficient mediation usually equals economic deprivation due to limited access to goods and services. Lacking a mediator also heightens the danger of being drawn into a conflict and getting the bad end in the resolution process due to bad mediation, and subsequently suffer even more, not just economically but also socially. The efficiency of one's mediator is proportional to one's economic well-being, social integration and security. This correlation is also present in the paraenetic strategy of the author of Hebrews.

**4.10.1. Personal Mediation and Trust**

**4.10.1.1. 2.1-5 Personality of Mediator Outweighing Content of the Benefit Mediated**

Middle Eastern mediation is inherently personal. Hofstede recounts the case of a negotiation.

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557 Cf. 3.6 for a fuller discussion of the superiority of the New Covenant.
between a Swedish and a Saudi Company. After it was practically finished, the Swedish side withdrew the negotiator, assuming he had done his job and promoted him to manage a totally different account. A new manager was put in charge of the Saudi project. The Saudi side, however, suddenly threatened to call off the deal unless the original negotiator came back. Trust for the business cooperation in this particular project from their perspective did not lie in contracts or in authority, responsibility and privileges of any manager assigned to the post from distant Sweden. It was solely attached to the original intermediary as a person.\footnote{Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, Cultures, pt. II, chap. 3, location 1055–1067 under “The Future of Power Distance Differences.”}

In an analogous fashion, Hebrews reflects the reality of mediation being personal in the Middle East. In 2:1-5, adherence to the Christian confession is urged not because of the content of the faith. Neither are the readers held responsible to an earlier agreement to particular terms of conduct. Instead, as was seen above in 3.4.2, the person of the mediator is focused on. In the logic of Middle Eastern mediation the reason for trust and commitment lies here.

A similar mechanism is at work in 6:13-20: as was seen the notion of “oath” means the attachment of a promise to an individual person of honour and accountability. This logic is taken to the absolute extreme with God swearing by himself. Following the same logic, the trust that is contained in the notion of oath is later transferred to the person of Jesus the mediating high priest. Through the oath, as a function of the personal authority of God, which is present in the oath, he is the “guarantor (ἔγγυος) of a better covenant” (7:22).

4.10.1.2. 6.13-20 Oath and Wasta are Both Trust-Building Mechanisms

When asking if the remarks about “oath” in Hebrews 6:13-20 resonate with the wasta reading environment, it stands out that cases of wasta mediation prominently featuring the swearing of oaths as trust building mechanisms are suspiciously absent from literature on wasta. The reason might be that wasta itself is a “trust building mechanism”, as Thomas Brandstaetter's recent study indicates,
and therefore oath and wasta fulfil the same function.\textsuperscript{559}

Brandstaetter researches business relations and trust building in the Middle East. He shows that wasta has a basic underlying principle which is the building of trust through personalisation of relationships. In the absence of a strong legal framework to provide security for business transactions, trust between business partners is built up through personalisation of the business relationships. Having a wasta connection to a business partner provides security because such a personalised connection is infused with honour (as was seen above in 2.4.1.1.C) and is thus less easily broken. The swearing of an oath fulfils just this purpose in the patronage-informed concept of mediation in Hebrews. That way, when reading Hebrews in a wasta environment, the oath can be interpreted as a personalised trust building move which is a natural component of mediation. The notion of “oath” then clearly fulfils the purpose of trust building through personalisation in Hebrews.

Through the oath, the finality of the confirmation is attached to a person. This happens in a two-fold way. First, it is attached to the person swearing. While a “guarantee” could also be based on an institution or law, an oath, by contrast, is always based on an individual person. Secondly, it is attached to an outside reference person, a person of higher standing, purity and / or intimate closeness. This person is called upon in his or her capacity as a self-evidently precious, honoured and ultimately important pledge or token. Thus one swears by one's mother's life or similar.

Both wasta and oaths are trust-building mechanisms and answer the implicit question of partners in a given deal: why should I participate in a deal? What should I base my trust on that the deal will succeed? So while at first Hebrews' remarks about “oath” in 6:13-20 do not seem to resonate with the wasta reading environment, the resonance is actually present but hardly visible because the logic of oath and wasta overlap in the area of trust.

\textsuperscript{559} Brandstaetter, “Wasta.”
4.10.2. Mediation and Possessive Language
In language about wasta, expressions of possession like “get”, “have” or “not have” in collocation with the word “wasta” are very common. The wasta context shows the intrinsic encouragement in the possession of or disposition over mediation which is existential in collectivist societies, cf. 2.4.1.1.D where availability was one of five prime criteria for the efficiency of wasta mediation.

This basic dynamic is reflected in the language of Hebrews in ch. 8. The first verse of ch. 8, as seen a programmatic verse for the overall argument of Hebrews, asserts that “we have” such a High Priest (viz. a potent mediator).

Equally noteworthy is the notion of having confidence in 10:19 and having (depending on the ἔχοντες of v. 19) a great high priest (v. 21). Attridge remarks the similarity with 4:14 (‘have a high priest also ἔχοντες) which is also pronouncedly paraenetic material. The author relies on the comforting and encouraging power produced by the renewed awareness of what his readers have. The disposition or ownership of mediation is directly related to encouragement: mediation and hope are coupled in these occurrences here, vv. 19, 21.

4.10.2.1. Conclusion
The terminology of possession is a specific feature of wasta mediation. It implies efficiency and success of the mediation and therefore sustenance and security. In this sense it directly leads to encouragement. Language of possession is featured in typical speech about wasta but is mostly absent from typical speech about ancient patronage. Its use in Hebrews, especially in the programmatic 8:1, suggests however that the same logic is present here too.

560 “‘You better get wasta’ is a very common clause in speech.” Andrew Gardner, City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain (Cornell University Press, 2010), 154; Barnett et al state that “[o]ne is said to ‘have wasta’ when those from whom one can request assistance are in positions of power that make it possible for them to grant the requested assistance.” Barnett, Yandle, and Naufal, Regulation, Trust, and Cronyism in Middle Eastern Society: The Simple Economics of “Wasta,” 7201:2.
561 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 284.
4.10.3. Discontinuity with the Wasta Logic

4.10.3.1. Initiative to the Mediation Process: Client, Mediator or Source?
Against the background of wasta and Middle Eastern mediation it seems illogical to imagine the initiative for mediation to rest with the source of the favour (or the damaged party in conflict-mediation respectively). Mediation is exclusively initiated by the supplicant (or the perpetrator's family respectively), as was seen in 2.4.4.1.A

In Hebrews, however, it is boldly stated that God himself is the initiator of the mediation process for salvation. In 2:13b the author states that God himself has proactively instated the family relationship between humans and their mediator. This statement parallels v. 10 with its assertion that the unheard-of mediation is in full accordance with God's plans. This seems to be a fact the author feels the need to reiterate in v. 13, only three verses after stating it for the first time. It is not just a re-iteration however, but the remark in v. 13b can also be seen as deepening the earlier one: the children are Jesus' brothers and sisters not just as a function of their human nature but because God has given (ἔδωκεν) them to him, implying a conscious and active decision on God's part.⁵⁶² The initiative for mediation of salvation, even as it is described in the logic of sonship and inheritance, lies unmistakably with God.

In 2:5-9, the benefit is said to be destined and designated for the clients from the beginning by God the patron. Yet the mediator has to win the benefit back first on a way of suffering and only then can he give it to his clients as they follow him. This thought does not translate into wasta logic which suggests that it is incompatible with Middle Eastern logic of mediation and instead stems from theological necessity. The essence of Middle Eastern mediation is to make accessible benefits and relationships which are pointedly not available or intended for the supplicant. The author of Hebrews wants to talk about Jesus in terms of mediation, however, he has to modulate the theological truths of God, the creator of all things, who had destined humans for glory and

⁵⁶² Cf. Ibid., 91.
wholeness, onto the mediation logic.\textsuperscript{563}

God's initiative in the mediation process is arguably also present, although less clearly, in the designation of Jesus as ἀπόστολος in 3:1. Jesus the mediator is the messenger or envoy sent by God to humans, not vice versa.

Lastly, God's swearing of an oath, which was interpreted as a trust building through personalisation of a relationship (see above, 4.10.1.2), also reflects the active role of God as initiator of the mediation process. It was seen that the swearing of an oath and the establishment of wasta-mediation share as a common characteristic the building of trust through the personalisation of a relationship. In Hebrews, God is the initiator of mediation by sending Jesus as mediator and he is the source of trust as he personalises his relationship to humans through an oath sworn by his own name.\textsuperscript{564}

\textsuperscript{563} Wasta cases where the benefit is something that was previously owned by the supplicant but subsequently lost, similar to humanity's privileges at creation which were lost in the Fall, could be possible but are to the knowledge of this author absent from literature.

\textsuperscript{564} Cf. also the possibility to view the notion of God's “begetting” the Son as his initiative in the mediation process, 5.3.2, footnote 578.
4.10.3.2. Triangle Relationship Instead of Linear Relationship

It was discussed above in 4.4.2 that 2:13 speaks of the quality of the “supply chain”, as it were, of the benefit: The relationship source-mediator (parallel to the relationship God-Jesus) is a relationship of trust; the relationship mediator-clients (parallel to Jesus-humans) is a relationship of kinship-like intimacy. This matches the three-step chain common in wasta. Here, however, in 2:13b, the three-step chain becomes a triangle: the children, with whom the addressees are to identify were given to him by God. This is partly anticipated in 2:11: both clients and mediator are ἐξ ἑνὸς. So there is a contrast between wasta logic and the mediation logic of Hebrews. As was seen in 2.4.4.3, the source and the clients are not normally expected to have a relationship at all. The primary purpose of the mediation commonly is establishing (in intercession) or restoring (in mediation) a relationship that is otherwise unthinkable. In Hebrews, however, the source and the suppliants are said to be related, even in kinship terms. The relationship between clients and mediator is established by the source.

The same can be seen in ch. 3. The designation of Jesus as ἀπόστολος in 3:1 is unique in the NT. It is likely that it is inspired by the following comparison with Moses, who was thought of as one sent
from God.\textsuperscript{565} This notion can be interpreted in light of the just mentioned discontinuity with Middle Eastern logic of mediation. Jesus is depicted as the one sent by and from God. Again, this idea poses a problem in our reading environment because it is unheard-of that the patron sends the wasta.

The discontinuity of the initiative of mediation lying with the patron and the triangle relationship between patron, mediator and clients is out of theological necessity, and the deviation from the rule does not diminish but confirms the parallels between the mediational concepts found in Hebrews and in Middle Eastern sociology.\textsuperscript{566}

Theologically speaking, it is obvious why the initiative for mediation must lie with God. The subject matter of the mediation is ultimately atonement and salvation. If the initiative for mediation between man and God were on man's part, this would amount to the statement that humans would take partial responsibility for their own salvation.

It is best to accept this discontinuity with the sociology of wasta as a theological necessity. Donald Guthrie remarks aptly:

Since a covenant involves two contracting parties, the mediator is a go-between whose task is to keep the parties in fellowship with one another. In a case where God is one of the parties and man is the other, the covenant idea is inevitably one-sided. Defection is always on man’s side and hence the mediator’s task is mainly to act on man’s behalf before God, although he has also to act for God before men.\textsuperscript{567}

A mediator can be from man's side, in which case he is from the side where the defection lies and cannot propose (or send) himself but has to rely on God accepting (or sending, activating) him as

\textsuperscript{565} Weiß, \textit{Hebräer}, 244f.

\textsuperscript{566} One could argue that the patrons initiating mediation is not a true discontinuity. In ancient patronage, such behaviour could theoretically be compared with the proactivity of a patron, who would sometimes choose his own clients according to which were most likely to afford him honour. But within the logic of Hebrews, such selectiveness would be inconsistent with the assertion that God's mediation is for many (2:10). Additionally, the initiative for the mediation of salvation axiomatically lies with God alone. He sent the mediators of the old covenant and he sent Jesus as mediator of the new (1:1-2, 2:10 et al).

\textsuperscript{567} Donald Guthrie, \textit{The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary} (Leicster, UK: InterVarsity, 1983), 174.
mediator.

In Hebrews 5:4 the author states that Jesus did not elevate himself into the position of honour as a mediating high priest. The wasṭa reading environment makes one sensitive to the fact that honour in general cannot be taken upon oneself. The words of v. 4a (καὶ οὐχ ἐαυτῶ τις λαμβάνει τὴν τιμὴν) ring as a truism in a wasṭa framework: honour cannot be “taken upon oneself” but is a function of what the community, the court of reputation, sees in and judges over an individual. The honour of the wasṭa role is ascribed by the clients: whoever is in a position to mediate will be called upon for mediation and subsequently reap the honour that comes with it. Here, however, God himself dispenses honour and calling, as v. 5 asserts. The logic is analogous to what was seen above: God is initiator of the mediation. Thus he is also the source of the mediator's honour, status and ultimately legitimisation.

4.10.3.3. Frequency: Permanent Investment in the Wasta Network vs. the Once for All Mediation of Jesus

The access to wasṭa is essential for many people in the present day Arab Middle East because it equals access to much needed resources as well as taking the place of parts of the justice system. At the same time, wasṭa is a fleeting commodity.

It was seen above (viz. in Jordan, cf. 2.1.3) that wasṭa is often exercised by political representatives for their constituencies in exchange for votes and support. Parliament has a much quicker turnover than in Western democracies, however, and thus it is an almost constant battle for a mediator to be in an effective position.568

Wasta through friends, as was also seen, underlies entropic pressures because it is based on reciprocity. If contacts are not maintained and goods and services are not swapped, the flow of

568 Lust-Okar states: “Electoral competitions are largely struggles among proregime candidates, representing competing kinship networks and regional groups, over state resources. In general, leaders from Jordan’s major tribes have not seriously sought to change the regime, but they have instead attempted to strengthen their relative access to the monarchy, at the expense of other groups.” Lust-Okar, “Reinforcing Informal Institutions,” 14. In the following, she adds that this can also be observed in Egypt, cf. ibid. 15.
wasta will dwindle down and cease eventually. Additionally, no individual has ultimate influence over whether a friend will maintain a position suitable for wasta services: if a wasta loses his influence, he or she cannot offer wasta mediation or intercession anymore.

Also in ancient patronage a broker was, in Malina's words, a “social entrepreneur … who, in some discernible form, initiates the manipulation of other persons and resources in the pursuit of personal benefits.” The underlying principle, then, appears to be that mediation channels need active work and maintenance. This is evidently true in wasta, and likely for ancient patronage as well. It is also the case for the realm of cultic mediation, as was seen above.

This gives new depth to the assurance of Jesus' mediation being once and for all. The pronouncement of such mediation will console and motivate readers distressed by fear that they cannot do the active work and maintenance vital for the mediation networks that they need or that no one is doing the work for them. Being a minority group and probably suffering persecution, it is likely that they feel cut off from the “social capital” of mediation, capital which has to be earned, taken care of and re-invested.

The bold declaration that Jesus' work as mediating high priest was once for all (10:1-18) breaks through the concept of a laborious cycle of gaining, maintaining, losing and re-gaining access to mediation, which had probably lately down-spiralled for the readers as a persecuted minority. The true paraenetic force of these assertions as to the permanence of Jesus' mediation lies in their interaction with the social context of the readers.

4.11. Conclusion
In this chapter, the theology of mediation in Hebrews was reviewed in light of the sociology of wasta. The categories previously used to understand wasta were also used (partly in adapted form) to understand how the wasta environment enhances the understanding of mediation in Hebrews. It

has been found that the mediation of Jesus as described in Hebrews resonates with the wasta logic in many ways.

The wasta reading environment has underlined the author's desire to present Jesus as the *superior and supreme* mediator. Wasta shows that mediation is perceived as something that can be weaker or stronger. The argument for the supreme efficiency of Jesus' mediation has come out as a main strand of the overall message of Hebrews.

The efficiency of the mediation is a function of the strength of the relationships involved. With this knowledge, it stands out how Hebrews describes the relationships between humanity and Jesus and Jesus and God. They are relationships of kinship. Wasta shows that mediation within the family realm has three advantages. 1) It is very efficient due to the intimacy of the relationships. 2) It is free of charge and taken for granted, unlike mediation for friends or strangers which require reciprocation in kind. 3) It is free from notions of shame that could make the mediator shy away from mediating on behalf of a kinsman. The superiority argument and the kinship imagery constitute the two main ingredients of Hebrews' picture of mediation. They overlap and reinforce each other.

Considerations of honour and shame, which play a big role in the economy of wasta, have been found to play a significant role in Hebrews. The author uses the argument of Jesus the mediator's honour to point out his success. Hebrews appears to break with the logic of wasta when the mediator gets shamed through the shameful death on the cross. But in the light of wasta, the shame falling on Jesus can be interpreted as an investment of his honour. As a wasta has to invest his own wealth and honour, so Jesus invests his divine status and humbles himself as he dies the shameful death on the cross. This is an investment into the mediation process. Through his humiliation until death he identifies himself with his clients' condition. Only through this does he become the superior and supreme mediator which Hebrews makes him out to be. Additionally, shame is also
used in Hebrews to put pressure on the readers. Like clients in antiquity owe loyalty and
gratefulness to their patron, so the readers owe the same to Jesus. Failure to reciprocate in this way
is shameful.

The three interpretational strands of graded efficiency, shame and kinship imagery constitute major
pillars of the argument. They interlock with each other and connect to or undergird the remaining
interpretations. For example, the findings described in 4.6 concerning the principle of collectivism
are connected to the logic of shame and the court of reputation. Further, most of the arguments
presented funnel into the overall statement that the mediation of Jesus is superior. But there are also
other findings that result from particular features of the wasta phenomenon. For example, it was
seen in 4.7 and 4.10.2 that mediation is described in Hebrews using language of movement and
possessive language. The identification of the mediator with the reality of the supplicant, which is a
feature of wasta, was detected in Hebrews (cf. 4.8). It was seen that mediation in Hebrews also
features the two partial aspects of wasta, intercession and mediation, albeit in an overlapping form
(cf. 4.9).

All findings can more or less directly be connected to one common idea. They all serve the purpose
of presenting Jesus as mediator who brings about a radically new, different and better relationship
between humans and God. The findings related to graded efficiency imply that Jesus as mediator
bridges the relational gap between humanity and God most efficiently. The findings related to
shame and kinship are to the effect that the new relationship between humans and God is one of
kinship quality, taking place in the realm of the family and thus in the only realm that offers safety
from shame. The possessive language discussed offers the consolation that the new relationship is
really available and at the disposition of humans now. Language of movement paints a picture of
the relational gap being bridged through the mediator's active movement from one party to the
other. Identification speaks of the mediator's presence in both the supplicants' and the source's world
and therefore his implied ability to mediate between them.

In the final chapter the idea of a radically improved relationship between God and humanity as the ultimate outcome of Jesus' mediation will be further discussed. It will also be seen, that the wasta reading of mediation in Hebrews can have a positive impact on the discussion of a controversial topic of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the God-sonship of Christ.
5. Evaluation, Application and Conclusion

It was the hypothesis of this study that the knowledge of wasta mediation in the Middle East helps to understand Jesus the mediator in the Epistle to the Hebrews in an enhanced way. The different aspects and related concepts of wasta have been found to resonate with Hebrews' concept of mediation in several ways. In conclusion, they can deepen an understanding of Jesus as mediator in so far as they bring out a deeply relational dimension of Jesus' mediatorship. This relational dimension will first be discussed according to the different relational constellations source-mediator, clients-mediator and also clients-source (5.1).

In a second step, a number of parallels will be discussed which eventually develop from parallel to discontinuity (5.2). The fact that they are aspects of mediation in Hebrews which break with the logic of Middle Eastern wasta mediation does not diminish but on the contrary increase their hermeneutical relevance. They show where and how the divinely ordained and implemented mediation goes beyond all earthly notions of mediation.

Finally, the results of this study will be tested on a concrete topic of Muslim-Christian dialogue. It will be seen that the wasta reading of Jesus as mediator in Hebrews can be used as a hermeneutical tool in the Christian-Muslim dialogue on the contentious subject of the God-sonship of Christ (5.3).

5.1. Relational Dimension of Meaning

The author of Hebrews emphasises Jesus' role as mediator. Our reading of Hebrews in the context of Middle Eastern mediation, drawing on the particular context of wasta as a single, defined sociological phenomenon, and ancient Greco-Roman patronage as a related phenomenon contemporary with the document, has let the argument of Hebrews appear in a new light in several instances. In particular, and by way of a summary, it has brought out the relational dimension of the mediation.
5.1.1. **Relationship Source-Mediator**

This relationship is presented as one of maximum intimate closeness and intimacy. The prime vehicle for expressing this is by highlighting Jesus' role as Son. In the logic of Middle Eastern mediation this implies closeness, access to the patron, legitimacy as mediator and therefore ultimate potency in the mediating role.

It is the aim of the author to comfort and exhort his readers through presentation of Jesus as their superior and supreme mediator. Much of this argument for the supreme quality of Jesus' mediation lies in the description of the relationship between God the source of benefits and Jesus his mediator. Jesus is the first born son and heir, mythical reflection and imprint of God the patron's being.

In his portrayal, the author shifts focus back and forth between relative superiority (contrasting Jesus with the angels, Moses and the Levitical priests) and absolute supremacy (foremost by spiritualising his priestly ministry by paralleling Jesus with Melchizedek).

Once sensitised by the wasa environment the reality that mediation can be of graded quality and efficiency, the author's argument appears as a logical progression from relative superiority to absolute supremacy. Comparison with the angels on the one hand and Moses on the other gives the readers opportunity to realise Jesus' superiority in the unseen world (of angels) and the seen world (of Moses). The comparison with the Levitical priesthood adds to the claim of Jesus' superiority in the realm of practiced religion and serves as a stepping stone to a) the spiritualisation of Jesus' mediating ministry and b) the argument for its ultimate supremacy. Jesus' priesthood (viz. his mediational ministry) is superior because it is spiritual, taking place in the heavenly, true sanctuary. The eschatological finality of his ministry is a consequence of its priestly character. Since the priesthood is different, so the covenant must be also. The covenant of which Jesus is the priest and mediator is the covenant of Jeremiah 31 and thus the covenant of the last days.

This progression of argument is based on Jesus the mediator's unique relationship with God, the
source of all benefit. In contrast to Middle Eastern mediation practices, God assumes a validator's role: he publicly puts Jesus in his role and personally vouches for his legitimacy. This contrasts with the logic of wasta and Middle Eastern mediation, where mediators become active and act as social entrepreneurs, creating and manipulating relationships completely for their own interests. As was seen however, discontinuities with Middle Eastern mediation logic often point to theological statements: since the close relationship between God and Jesus is the basis for the salvific mediation, it is necessary that the relationship be initiated and shaped by God, who dispenses the grace of salvation according to his own will and initiative.

### 5.1.2. Relationship Clients-Mediator

This relationship is problematic in the case of the recipient community of Hebrews and Jesus. There is a need for correction because the readers – under pressure as a minority group possibly facing persecution – do not relate to Jesus as the powerful mediator that he is. This correction drives the author's paraenesis. At the same time, the relationship of Jesus the mediator with his clients is full of potential. Painting this potential in the most attractive colours thus becomes the main tool of the author's paraenesis, as it is ultimately geared towards the encouragement and support of the recipients.

The wasta logic alerts the reader to the fact that any act of mediation has a whole different quality if it concerns family or tribal members. Reading Hebrews in this light highlights how the author uses kinship imagery. Jesus' sonship firstly expresses his superior relationship to God the patron. Secondly, the metaphor's other aspect is Jesus' brotherhood with his clients.

The kinship imagery conveys the idea of the mediation being powerful and effective. The wasta logic shows how this is so: through the presence of unstained honour and the absence of shame. The mediator, supplicants and even the patron himself are of the same family, “from one.” The family is the place of unstained honour and absence of shame. Thus Jesus is said to be “unashamed” to
intercede for his brethren and God is said to “give” the children to the mediator. By describing mediation in this way, the author most probably addresses the shame which his readers felt over the disgraceful death of their mediator. He calls them into a different court of reputation, out of the majority culture around them which by its standards pronounces shame over them, into the spiritual court of the heavenly hosts (ch.1) and the faithful saints (ch.11), who encourage the readers to a life of loyalty and faith, honoured by their membership in the family which is headed by the mediating Son and the gracious Father-patron, who confirms and upholds the family honour by his oath and the revelation of his will.

The recipients have to understand at the same time however, that in light of such a great relationship to their supreme mediator (and by extension the great patron), they are under obligation to reciprocate. The wasta logic shows that reciprocation of mediation takes different shapes depending on whether it happens inside or outside the family. If Jesus' mediation were taught using only friendship imagery, a reading in the context of wasta would suggest that the favour he mediates is to be reciprocated in kind by the clients, which would be inconsistent with a theology of salvation through grace. Hebrews however, spells out mediation in terms of family. The wasta background suggests that mediation on behalf of a family member is a matter of course and has to be granted in any case free of charge or of any reciprocation in kind. The only obligation the supplicant is under is to reciprocate in the form of loyalty, thanks and praise. This is consistent with the argument of Hebrews, where the author tries to shame his readers into a grateful response to their brotherly mediator. Only if the requirements of honour and reciprocation are met will their relationship to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant be complete.

5.1.3. Relationship Clients-Source
This is a mediated relationship and benefits flow from source to clients via the mediator. But, in contrast to most mediated relationships, the source is not out of sight but quite on the contrary Hebrews speaks about God as a patron who institutes the relationship between mediator and clients,
vouches for the mediator and heads up the family of which mediator and supplicants are both members.

This is in discontinuity with the logic of Middle Eastern mediation which, as was noted above, points to a theological statement of the mediated salvation springing from God's own will and initiative. Following on from this thought, it could even be said that this takes mediation to a whole new level. The Letter to the Hebrews suggests a certain awareness on part of the author that he is writing in an already-not-yet moment in time. The earthly act of mediation has been finished and the rest (κατάπαυσις) of the new covenant is now being entered into: the author addresses his audience as people finding themselves on an eschatological threshold. It is also partly in light of this situation that a relationship between clients and patron comes into view and the normal 3-point line of mediation (patron-mediator-supplicant) becomes a triangle where the supplicant is also addressed by the patron directly. Once the new covenant is fulfilled and in accordance with Jeremiah 31 sins are remembered no more and mediation will be taken to a new level. Mediation will then exist not because the source would otherwise be unreachable. Rather, mediation will become a reality where God the source makes himself accessible through Jesus because he is his chosen representative. He chooses to do so even without the urgency of atonement, which will then have already been achieved. He chooses to reveal himself in that way because patron, mediator and clients are a family and their triangular relationship has now become an end in itself and an expression of redeemed and restored community.

5.1.4. **Conclusion**

Viewing Hebrews' concept of mediation in light of Middle Eastern mediation reveals an underlying attempt to bring closer all three strands of relationships (source-mediator, clients-mediator, clients-source) and integrate them into a relational construct driven by family imagery, characterised by intimacy and honour.
The critique of the old order (particularly in 9:1-10) also appears in this light. The relationships in the old order are imperfect, the mediation has to be repeated endlessly. It is for this reason that the old system has to cease.

5.2. **Discontinuities**

John Dunnill contends that “[t]he Letter to the Hebrews positively rejoices in whatever is anomalous or strange: it is a rich meditation on the glorious oddness of God's dealings with humanity.”\(^{570}\) In the process of reading the document in the light of wasta mediation logic in ch. 3 several breaks with the wasta logic were discovered, which however by virtue of their discontinuity with wasta logic pointed to theological statements. In their totality, these discontinuities can be read as a summary of the theology of mediation in Hebrews.

5.2.1. **Eschatological Supremacy**

The author of Hebrews claims not just Jesus' superiority over other forms of mediation but final eschatological supremacy. Such claims are unknown to wasta culture and seem illogical to Middle Eastern mediation in general. Middle Eastern mediation ancient and modern has always been a force sustaining society because of its relative fluidity and flexibility. While claims to relative superiority of one mediator over another keep the system going and spur it on by way of competition, a claim to mediational power which surpasses and abrogates all other paths of mediation is not absent from Middle Eastern mediation culture by chance. It would nullify the cohesive force of give and take of mediation in society.

The message of Hebrews about Jesus the mediator is full of points of real life interface with the message in order for the readers to grasp the message in an existential way. Parallels between the claims of Hebrews and the basic realities of the readers' lives help them to appropriate the message. At the same time however, this also sharpens the contrast where the claims of Hebrews begin to

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diverge from the reality of the readers: an absolute, all-surpassing final mediation stands out as a solemn theological claim. Implicitly, it bears a strong eschatological statement: the author is drawing his readers' attention to the fact that the mediation of Jesus' means that they are on the threshold of the last days when mediation as such will cease and will be replaced by the unmediated community of patron, mediator and clients.

5.2.2. Putative Lineage

What the author does with the logic of putative lineage in ch. 7 is a departure from the logic of mediation. He does not, as is common with putative lineage, graft Jesus into a different, more powerful tribe to elevate his status, which in this case would have meant to somehow establish a putative descent from Levi to invest Jesus with credibility for his priestly mediating role. The genealogical re-configuration which he undertakes in order to raise Jesus' status as mediator does not merely upgrade him to be equal with the Levites but leads to a radical break with the concept of lineage-based priesthood altogether: Jesus is of the order of Melchizedek which in the author's interpretation means that Jesus is without lineage (as is said of Melchizedek) and above lineage (since Melchizedek is above Abraham, who is father of all tribes and yet he tithed to Melchizedek). Into this power-vacuum the author inserts the notion of the oath of God himself. This is the new basis for the new priestly mediator of the new covenant. As such, it cannot coexist with the old order but must replace the old system based on lineage, i.e. the Levitical priesthood and the law which it served.

5.2.3. Qualitative Change in the Ways of Reciprocation

The wasta logic has highlighted that reciprocation of mediation rendered is crucial between friends, where benefits and services are returned in kind and subconscious lists are kept of who owes what and to whom. This parallels the idea present in ancient patronage that a benefit gives birth to a benefit and mediation generates a living network of members of a society all receiving and giving benefits and services, resembling the beauty of dance with its constant back and forth movements.
As the author of Hebrews presents Jesus' mediation of the new covenant, he implicitly claims a paradigmatic shift in mediation between man and God. The mediational activity of the old priesthood had to be repeated regularly again and again. This need for constant reciprocation is consistent with the logic of Middle Eastern mediation, as the wasta logic specifically shows, between friends. Now, however, the priestly mediation activity has been put in the hands of a new priest, Jesus, who executed the sacrifice once and for all. Now the only reciprocation left for humans to give is loyalty and honour, thanks and praise towards the patron and his mediator. Within the wasta logic, mediation has been moved from the friend-to-friend paradigm to the superior kinsman-to-kinsman paradigm. Considering how the author of Hebrews stresses family imagery, the same logic present in wasta appears to be present in Hebrews.

5.2.4. Conclusion
Thus, the different discontinuities with Middle Eastern mediation practices found in the text of Hebrews come close to making a theology of mediation in themselves. The fundamental roles for access to God the great patron have been changed to the benefit of his human clients. They have been given a mediator eternally stronger and more effective than any other, they have been elevated from the status of friend to that of a family member. This is based on no other family than the patron's own, of which also their broker is a member, who now calls them brethren. The eternal cycle of reciprocation is now replaced with a life in community which requires not mediation nor reciprocation, but will consist in family unity marked by honour, safety and gratitude.

5.3. The Sonship of Jesus in Christian-Muslim Dialogue as a Test Case
5.3.1. The Problem
In this section, some findings of this study are used to offer a way forward concerning a classical problem in Christian-Muslim dialogue.\textsuperscript{571} The notion of Jesus as Son of God has been offensive to

\textsuperscript{571} The following is taken and adapted from a previously presented paper, cf. Ekkardt A. Sonntag, “Jesus, the Good Wästa? The Sociology of Middle-Eastern Mediation as a Key to Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” in The European Conference on the Social Sciences 2013 (presented at the The European Conference on the Social Sciences 2013,
Muslims. The Son, together with the Holy Spirit, makes up the Trinity of God in Christian theology, which seemingly stands against the monotheistic confession of God being one. The idea of “begetting a son” and “being begotten” is explicitly ruled out as a characteristic of God in the Qur'an, as Sura 112 affirms:

"Say: 'He is God, One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one.'"\(^{572}\) This is deeply engrained in Muslim piety and is brought up regularly in Muslim-Christian dialogue, formally or informally. The sociology of wasta, used as a reading environment for texts on the God-sonship of Jesus, might help to improve Christian Muslim dialogue by offering a new tool for communicating this essential part of Christian doctrine.

### 5.3.2. The Wasta Environment as a Way Forward

There are different aspects to a “sonship christology” and accordingly different problems emerge when it is discussed between Muslims and Christians. It is not the hypothesis of the present study that the wasta-reading-environment solves all problems that could arise in the debate. Rather, it will add a new angle of looking at the person of Jesus as God's Son that will foster understanding.

As an example, the exordium of the document (Hebrews 1:1-4) will be looked at, as well as verses 5 and 8 of the second paragraph of the first chapter.\(^{573}\) These verses are chosen because they appear

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\(^{572}\) Translation Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*.

\(^{573}\) It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the main topic of Hebrews 1.5-14, the comparison of Jesus with the
particularly very problematic for reading in a Muslim-Christian dialogue setting. There are five main reasons for this:

1. Muslims affirm Jesus as a prophet, a fact that is sometimes put forward by Muslims as a supposed bridge or commonality between the two faiths. The writer to the Hebrews, however, starts his document by insisting that Jesus is indeed *more*. He is “Son” (v2), and as such he *supersedes* the prophets of the past. He has come “in these last days”, so his superiority as mediator of God's revelation is said to be in fact an eschatological *final supremacy*, making him categorically different from the prophets of old.

2. Verse 3 emphasises the identification of Jesus with God by calling Jesus the “reflection of God's glory” and “exact imprint of God’s very being”. These expressions are reminiscent of Hellenistic wisdom theology. The closeness they express between God and Jesus in almost mythical terms seems to blur the boundaries and violate the borders between the divine and the human realm.

3. Verse 3 also states that Jesus has made purification of sins and now sits at the place of honour at God's right hand. Both of these assertions seem to undercut the minimum space theologically required between the side of God who gives forgiveness of sin and is seated in a position of unparalleled highness and worthiness, and the side of sinful humanity, situated in the created realm below, in need of God's grace and forgiveness.

4. The excellency and highness ascribed to Jesus is then, in verses 4 and 5, anchored in the name or designation “Son”. The author choses Psalm 2:7 as the first of two proof-texts. This Psalm, originally a coronation Psalm, has God saying to the new King “You are my son.” He then goes on with one of the most contentious notions in Muslim-Christian discourse:

   “today I have begotten you.” The greek verb for “beget” (γεννάω) renders the Hebrew צל, angels. Verses 5 and 8 are singled out from the passage as examples for the God-sonship christology of Hebrews.
which is the same root as the Arabic ﺪﱢ ﻢ in the above cited Sura 112:3, the objection to the
thought that God begets or is begotten. The notions of “son” and “to beget” are used
metaphorically in the original Psalm, unlike in other ancient cultures where the king, as a
son of god, was thought to be an actual divine being and not human. The author of the
Epistle to the Hebrews does not use the notions of sonship and begetting in any physical
sense. Still, by his choosing the metaphors of Ps 2:7 and boldly applying them to Jesus, the
he ascribes divinity in a very real sense to Jesus, which – especially in this particular
terminology as it overlaps with Sura 112:3 – has to be offensive in Muslim eyes.

5. This suggestion of divinity is reinforced further by an even more explicit Psalm quotation in
verse 8. Jesus the Son's highness and identity with God is such that the author now applies
Psalm 45:6,7 to him, applying the word “God” to him: “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne,
O God (emphasis added), is for ever and ever, and the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of
your kingdom.’” Viewed together, verses 1-5 and 8 strongly suggest that the author assumes
Jesus the Son to be divine in nature.

As mentioned above, it is not the hypothesis of this study that the difficulties will disappear when
wasta is applied as a reading and dialogue-environment. The intent is to show that even these
seemingly very contentious statements in the opening chapter of Hebrews might appear in a
different light in this environment.

Reading Hebrews as a whole in the context of wasta, this study has argued that the author of the
document tries to encourage his readers by portraying Jesus as their supreme “mediator of a new

575 Cf. Stephen W. Need's study of metaphor and Christology. Need argues conclusively that metaphor generates
original meaning that cannot otherwise be reached. Metaphor draws on notions from two different realms. Its
epistemological power lies in the meaning that emerges in the tension between those realms of meaning. This
analysis is helpful for our purposes. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews uses metaphor to point to a deep
theological truth; namely that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. This truth is, however, different from the
meaning of the metaphor in its original realm – the realm of physical parenthood and sonship. It also cannot easily
be translated into face-value speech in the target context – the realm of the divine. It is rather in the tension
between the two realms that meaning emerges. Cf. Stephen W. Need, Human Language and Knowledge in the
covenant”, cf. 9:15 and 12:24. The idea of a “new covenant” implies, firstly, reconciliation and thus, as with mediational wasta, overcoming conflict and re-establishing peaceful relations. Secondly, it implies access to God as the giver of great favours and gifts, analogous to intercessory wasta.

Over the course of the 13 chapters of the document, the author of Hebrews developed his argument that Jesus is the ultimate mediator between man and God. He does this by drawing on the Son motif as mentioned but he also brings in other imagery and metaphors, the prime one being that of a mediating high priest. The second chapter of the document was instructive in that regard, particularly 2:11, 14, 16 and 17. Here the author was working towards first introducing his main metaphor, Jesus as mediating high priest (v. 17). Within our chosen reading environment, it stood out how the familial imagery is used to express the identification of the mediator with both parties in the mediation process, the human and the divine.

So, as was seen in 4.4.2, the mediator and the clients of the mediation have to be “of one”, or “of the same family”, as the New International Version translates. And Jesus, the mediator, “had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest”, or, in other words, in order that he might become a successful mediator.

The familial imagery is taken a step further in 3:2,3 and 6. Reading these verses in our chosen reading environment, and also having in view the related context of first-century patronage, we can appreciate the God-Son Christology of the author in the following way.

First, the argument in Hebrews now appears very familiar to the world of Middle Eastern mediation. A mediator has to participate in the two realms between which he is mediating. A wasta-person participates in the client's world by being a friend or family member. He or she also participates in the world in which the client seeks a favour or advantage, e.g. the customs department, by being a (former) senior official there.

So, without yet having the intricate Christology of the creeds of the early church at hand, the writer of Hebrews is laying out his Sonship Christology in a way which is very conclusive by standards of Middle Eastern mediation: the mediator between man and God has to participate in the reality of the Godhead, thus he is the Son, positioned intimately close to God in his highness, sharing in his divine nature; yet at the same time he also has to “become like his brothers and sisters”, meaning that he participates in the reality of humanity, the clients on behalf of which he is to mediate.

The notion of Jesus' being “faithful over God's house as a son” in 3:6 illustrates the point further. In Hebrews, reflecting the patronage system of the time, the Son is portrayed as the broker of the Father's favour. In this sense the God-sonship attributed to Jesus, which is often discussed so contentiously in Muslim-Christian dialogue, is an intrinsic part of the logic of Middle Eastern mediation.

The familial imagery of Hebrews expresses the mediational relationship that is needed in the context of wasta- or patronage-societies. The fact that Jesus calls humanity “brothers and sisters” in 2:11 serves as an assurance to the listeners that the mediator participates in the human side. The high Sonship-Christology of chapter one, in turn, makes sense as the assurance that also the link to the divine patron is reliably provided.

The familial imagery might also bring out another reassurance, particularly as it shines in the light of present-day wasta. As was seen, reciprocation for rendered wasta services is obligatory among friends. Between family, however, there is no need for reciprocation. It is expected and taken for granted that between family members the mediation is given freely; shame is put on the one who does not help as mediator when he could have and is being asked by family.

In that sense it is logical and even necessary that Jesus the divine mediator be “made like the brothers and sisters” because every relational metaphor other than “family” would, in a wasta context, suggest that humans have to pay back in kind God himself for the favour granted. This
would be incongruent with Christian as well as Muslim belief. Instead, however, because the mediation is happening between family and is thus free, the reciprocation takes the shape of *loyalty* and *praise* for God the patron – both values very much at the heart of Muslim and Christian piety.\textsuperscript{577}

The letter to the Hebrews expresses the God-sonship of Jesus, which is at the heart of Christian belief, in a particularly pointed manner. It is therefore particularly contentious in Muslim-Christian dialogue. As was seen, re-reading parts of it in the light of the sociology of wasta (and the related context of ancient patronage) can add an interpretative layer which eases the tension and helps mutual understanding.

Christian-Muslim theological dialogue, especially on the contentious topic of the person of Jesus, will be influenced by the environment in which it takes place and the presuppositions that go with it. One might default to discussing the matter starting from the presuppositions of the creeds of the early church and ask in how far Jesus is Son, divine, human according to his nature or person. But the sociology of Middle Eastern mediation can be an alternative framework for the same topic. Dialogue in one environment might not answer questions which have come out of dialogue in the other. Dialogue partners should not have wrong expectations here. But shifting to a different reading-environment might let traditional interpretations shine in a new light and even help breaking old deadlocks.\textsuperscript{578}

Imagining Jesus as the wasta between man and God when reading the Letter to the Hebrews evokes associations and ideas from the relational logic of Middle Eastern mediation in the family network and shifts focus away from more contentious notions of the God-sonship of Jesus. While not providing a framework for a full-orbed Christology, the context is appropriate to the text, as the similarity with ancient patronage shows. It is therefore a helpful reading-tool for putting Muslims and Christians in a better place for dialogue on the God-sonship of Jesus.

\textsuperscript{577} deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, 141–148.\textsuperscript{578} In addition to the aspects mentioned here, a less obvious but viable interpretation could be to view the notion of God’s “begetting” the Son in the light of his proactivity and initiative within the mediation process, cf. 4.10.3.1.
5.4. **Conclusion**

In this thesis it has been attempted to read the Epistle to the Hebrews in the light of the sociology of wasta. This reading has produced a fresh understanding of Jesus as Middle Eastern mediator. The wasta reading environment has proven to be a stimulating background for the exegesis of Hebrews. It overlaps with ancient concepts of patronage and brokerage and thus proves itself as a relevant hermeneutical environment. At the same time it makes cultural anthropological insights into the logic of Middle Eastern mediation relevant to the NT text.

While the wasta reading environment has inspired a broad range of fresh nuances in the exegesis of mainly chs. 1-11 of the document, its main power as a hermeneutical framework lies in its capability to bring out the relational dimension of the theology of Jesus as mediator of the new covenant in greater clarity. In the context of a wasta society, the paraenetic power of the notion of Jesus as mediating high priest, brother and Son can be sensed with greater clarity and intensity. In the same way, the subsequent eschatological urgency and absolute supremacy of this new covenant are underlined powerfully.

The social phenomenon of wasta has served as a hermeneutical catalyst in two different ways. As far as aspects of wasta have paralleled implicit or explicit aspects of mediation in Hebrews, the wasta environment has lead to a more comprehensive understanding of mediation in Hebrews by connecting the dots in a new way and adding sociological depth to the overall picture of Jesus as mediator. Where aspects have broken with the logic of Middle Eastern mediation, the wasta reading environment has unfolded a contrastive hermeneutical force: knowledge of the logic of wasta has helped to identify behind these discontinuities deep theological statements concerning the special quality of the divine mediation manifested in Jesus. It is the new way of mediation, abrogating the old ways with eschatological ultimacy, moving forward in such a profound way as to even transcend the very categories of lineage and tribe and thus leading to a new way of relating to God the patron and source of benefits through Jesus the mediator.
6. Appendices

6.1. Graded Strength and Efficiency of Wasta

The following incident took place in February 2010 in Amman, Jordan.

Wasta might be referred to as good or bad as well as strong or weak. A Jordanian friend looking to work in a certain company was describing his plans to apply and was estimating his chances of success, thinking out loud: “I have some wasta in this company, but it's weak wasta, it's not strong.”

I was reminded of this classification sometime later when my wife and I were caught up in a wasta situation ourselves. We had bought an electric piano outside of the country during a home visit. It constituted quite an investment for us. We brought it into the country on our regular flight back to Jordan, not knowing what customs charges we would eventually be asked to pay. I was imagining the amount would range around what we had paid in VAT back home and that I would be able to claim it back by virtue of exporting the piano straight after the purchase. On the plane I happened to talk about the purchase to a businessman sitting next to me. He offered to help getting the customs formalities sorted as he said he knew people in the department. I gladly took him up on the offer and was put in touch with his friend in the department, who however did not do more for me than greet me at the entrance to the customs office and take me to the correct office. My estimation of the customs due turned out to be naïve and it soon became apparent that the customs on the item would be around two thirds of its price, which I could not afford. I then explored if my tax-free status as an employee at an international university at the time would extend to this case, trying to get help from the business man, but to no avail. His “wasta” had hardly done any more than greeting me and the businessman himself soon stopped answering my phone calls. Contrary to what his speech had suggested when we spoke on the plane, his was a weak wasta.

I then asked a neighbour of ours who worked for the government for his opinion on what I should do. Simultaneously, I also asked the person responsible for official paperwork at my work place what he thought could be done. As I thought it best that the two would be able to coordinate their
efforts, I gave the neighbour the number of my colleague at my work place. The latter called me a moment later, furious for reasons totally unclear to me in this moment, imploring me I should never again get my neighbour involved but always talk to him directly and exclusively instead. Two days later the piano was brought through customs, I was indeed legally eligible for importing it tax free, my colleague had arranged everything with outstanding speed and attention. Only little by little did it become clear to me how strong a wasta my neighbour was. He was at that time head of a government office that was almost a ministry and widely known in public. His calling my work colleague (albeit himself a strong wasta in his domain) constituted so much pressure and potential shame through the immanent suggestion that the institution does not take care of the needs of their overseas staff, that my colleague fell into a state of extreme nervousness and eventually outdid himself to facilitate the process. He had felt the full force of what made my neighbour the strong wasta that he was: his honour and reputation and connected to that his power to potentially shame others. My colleague's furious anger with me was the result of the assault on his and the institution’s honour which I had unconsciously launched.

In hindsight it became clear to me that in the whole process I had encountered wasta persons of three different degrees: the businessman was trying to be polite much more than helpful and I mistook this polite offer of a little help, which was most probably a function of the general value of hospitality, as an offer for real help to solve the issue at stake and was disappointed. My colleague at the university was a much stronger wasta with just the right profile and degree of influence at the relevant offices and had I only involved him this would have been the way most appropriate to the situation. My neighbour, at last, whom I had asked for advice and general, turned out to be a wasta so strong that he could cause an outright explosion when set in motion. Due to his position it was evident to an informed person like my colleague that he was likely to have a direct relationship to the head of customs as well as the president of my institution and was therefore much too powerful to get involved in this petty transaction directly; instead his wasta-strength alone could scare
relevant lower-ranking wasta persons like my colleague into doubling his speed of working. The ingredients of his great power – honour, the power to shame, and connectedness – became clearly manifest in the process.

6.2. “Accounting Aspect” of Wasta
The following incident took place in October 2009 in Amman, Jordan.

As my wife changed her job from an international position with a humanitarian NGO to a local position with the regional office of a multinational company, her salary was not paid into a European bank account anymore but into a Jordanian bank account. I had had a local bank account for a year and so the salary was transferred into this account. After two months of receiving the salary in time, the funds did not get credited to the account on time in the third month. The bank, when we enquired what was wrong, explained that my wife's salary could not be credited to the account because the account was only in my name. This had been the case all along, but for unknown reasons it was only now that the bank had noticed that a rule had been violated and blocked the transaction. Apologising for the inconvenience, the clerk at the bank outlined the steps necessary to release the funds. All steps were completed. Once everything was done, the bank promised that the money would be credited to the account within three days. This deadline was not met however, and for three additional days the money still was not available. The money was urgently needed at this specific moment, so I checked back every day. Each day the clerk at the bank was apologetic and put me off another day. I was uncertain how such conflicts were carried out in Arab Middle Eastern culture and made a conscious decision to show my disapproval gradually more insistently every day. When after five days the clerk again asked me to come back the next day, I angrily declared with a loud voice that I would not leave the branch until I had proof that the money had been credited to my account. The clerk, after a moment of hesitation, picked up her mobile phone and called a friend, presumably in the headquarters of the bank or another relevant department. After a few moments of small talk, she told her friend about my situation,
passed on the necessary details and hung up. She told me to wait for ten minutes and then check the account's balance at the ATM. Indeed the money was credited to my account within minutes.

My Western, individualist point of view, in which I assumed that the best and most efficient service to every individual customer should be the driving principle behind every clerk's conduct, led me to wonder why she had not made this phone call five days earlier. The accounting aspect of wasta means that between friends, the principle of reciprocation takes the shape of subconscious account keeping. A favour given means a favour to be returned later. If this logic was at work in the described situation, it is likely that the clerk carefully weighed the my increasing anger against the cost of calling a colleague-friend who had it in his power to speed up the process. Doing so would mean drawing on credit which needed to be paid back one way or the other. A foreign customer however, who is outside the system and will never reciprocate a favour, is a dead loss. Drawing on the friend's favour did not constitute a worthwhile investment as long as the only thing a stake was a single case of vaguely suboptimal customer satisfaction. Only the more substantial threat of the customer shouting and refusing to leave the bank warranted calling in a wasta favour.

6.3. **Wearing the Headscarf**

The following incident took place in Amman and Beirut in Spring 2011.

A female intern of German nationality spent several months in Amman for work experience and language study. For part of her stay she was able to live with a Jordanian family consisting of husband, wife and two children under five. On one occasion, the host family went on a short trip to Lebanon and invited the intern to come along. The intern was invited to come along.

The intern described the family as religious and conservative. The mother of the family had been wearing the headscarf everyday without exception during the time the intern had spent with the family in Amman, carefully avoiding the shame of an outsider seeing her uncovered. Upon arrival in Lebanon, however, the intern was baffled to witness the following scene. The wife said in
passing that she was feeling a little warm. Without hesitation the husband took her headscarf off, saying in an almost cheerful way that “here in Lebanon” she did not need it after all. No other explanation was given as to why the headscarf was suddenly unnecessary apart from the fact that “here in Lebanon” there was no need to wear it.

Being “here in Lebanon” is a sufficient reason to change even deeply personal habits like wearing the headscarf. Being on holiday means being away from home and thus removed from the community which constitutes the court of reputation, judging over honourable and shameful behaviour.
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 ubiquitously 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 suppliants) 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 or 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.
8. Bibliography


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