

THE NATURE OF YESHUA IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES AND HEBREWS

outweighed by future restoration in God's Kingdom is a common one seen throughout the Apostolic Scriptures.²⁵³ Yeshua endured *unbelievable suffering* for fallen humanity, most of which only a few of Hebrews' audience had to even partially experience. Yeshua's tenacity in enduring hardships is the perfect embodiment of Isaiah 40:28-31:

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to *him who* lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up *with* wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."

While Yeshua the Messiah is represented as Divine as depicted in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 1:3-4, 6, 8-11), we need not limit our approach of the Messiah to exclusively this. While Yeshua is God, He is also the ultimate human being, being the example for redeemed men and women to follow. If we are able to truly count the cost of believing in Him, He will share His authority as the reigning King with us.

HEBREWS 12:22-24

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and [assembly] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, and to Yeshua, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the* blood of Abel."

The message, that is to be learned from Mount Sinai, is that God is holy and that He requires respect from His people.²⁵⁴ But faith is also about communing with God and with the generations of others who have committed themselves to Him. If people have faith in Yeshua, they are to definitely understand that we "have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering" (Hebrews 12:22, ESV). Our author's previous comparison of Mount Sinai, to now the Heavenly Mount Zion, actually shows how highly he regards Mount Sinai. What Yeshua has now brought about, for the redeemed in Him, should eliminate any of the dread that the Ancient Israelites would have had. While born again Believers are to surely fear and respect God, they are to nevertheless rejoice in His presence.

There are two important ways that we can view the verb form *proselēluthate* (προσεληλύθατε), appearing in the second person plural perfect tense, meaning "you have come." What we must first note is that it indicates a kind of realized eschatology that our author is communicating to his readers. In other words, what Heavenly Mount Zion represents can be experienced now in the lives of the redeemed. Secondly, some have likened this vocabulary to proselytizing language. If we were to stretch the meaning of the verb *proserchomai* (προσέρχομαι), "to approach, draw nigh" (LS),²⁵⁵ then we could render it as "you have converted over." This is because, as Bruce observes, "by virtue of their accepting the gospel, the readers of this epistle had come to that spiritual realm some of whose realities are detailed in the following clauses."²⁵⁶

In a way, the author of Hebrews may be asking his readers why some of them are thinking of going back to a Messiah-less Judaism, when in fact they have converted to the "true faith"

²⁵³ Matthew 5:10-12; Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 4:13; 5:1, 10.

²⁵⁴ This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

²⁵⁵ LS, 690.

²⁵⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 355.

where one can experience the good things of the Heavenly Jerusalem. This is not to be construed as a Messiah-less Judaism contrasted against a Messiah-full Christianity—but that the redeemed in Messiah are to view themselves as citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which is hardly something without strong overtones and undertones of being a part of Ancient Israelite religion and/or Second Temple Judaism. Much of this goes back to some of the author’s previous arguments about redeemed humanity being subject only to God Himself (Hebrews 2:5-8). Not only will the redeemed in Yeshua get to experience a Heavenly Mount Zion in the future—but **they actually get to partake of it right now**. Why would anyone who has truly experienced the grace of the gospel want to give up on it?

Others, such as Ellingworth, have compared our author’s language as being contrasted to “a military scope”²⁵⁷ seen by the Qumran community, as we can see some distinct parallels between Hebrews 12:22 and what is written in the War Scroll:

HEBREWS 12:22	THE WAR SCROLL
<p>But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering (ESV).</p>	<p>For the multitude of the Holy Ones [is with Thee] in heaven, and the host of the Angels is Thy holy abode, praising Thy Name. And thou hast established in [a community] for Thyself the elect of Thy holy people. [The list] of the names of all their host is with Thee in the abode of Thy holiness; [the reckoning of the saints] is in Thy glorious dwelling-place (1QM 12:1-4).²⁵⁸</p>

It is very possible that some members of Hebrews’ audience were being persuaded against believing in Yeshua by Essenic-type beliefs, and thought that God’s angels were “standing by” to assist them in establishing a messianic kingdom on Earth. The contrast to what our writer is telling them is quite noticeable; he considers “the city of the living God” to be Heavenly Jerusalem, and locates the “thousands upon thousands of angels” (Hebrews 12:22, NIV) in this city rejoicing before God. The city mentioned previously (Hebrews 11:10, 13-15) is now given a specific name.

We certainly see Heavenly Jerusalem present in the Book of Revelation (21:10-14, 19-20), as it will be an integral part of the New Creation and Eternal State. The theme of a city founded by God is seen throughout the Biblical canon (Psalm 48:8; 87:1-7; Isaiah 14:32; cf. Isaiah 28:16) and Deuterocanon (Tobit 13:7-18; 4 Ezra 7:26; 8:52; 10:60). Extra-Biblical writing such as 2 *Baruch* 32:5 specifically attests “it will be renewed in glory and it will be perfected into eternity.”²⁵⁹ The Talmud likewise speaks of “[the heavenly] Jerusalem [where] and the Temple and the Altar are built” (b.*Chagigah* 12b).²⁶⁰ Our author referring to the Heavenly Jerusalem was quite a common theme within the theology of Second Temple Judaism, and in Jewish theology thereafter.

It is important that readers do consider the fact, however, that there are some distinct differences between the New Jerusalem to be seen in the Eternal State, and this Heavenly Jerusalem as would be seen right now. The scene of Hebrews 12:23 is of “the assembly of the

²⁵⁷ Ellingworth, 677.

²⁵⁸ Vermes, 175.

²⁵⁹ A.F.J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” trans., in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, 630.

²⁶⁰ *The Soncino Talmud. Judaic Classics Library II.*

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firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, [and] God who is the judge of all, [and] the spirits of righteous people made perfect” (HCSB). Bruce makes the poignant observation, “the new Jerusalem has not yet come down to mankind, but in the spiritual realm [Believers] already have access to it. They have become fellow-citizens with Abraham of that well-founded city for which he looked.”²⁶¹ This is a scene of the company of redeemed in Heaven, of which any Believer on Earth, is to be associated with via their faith in Yeshua.

The scene in Heaven is described as a *panēguris* (πανήγυρις), “**an assemblage of many pers. for a special occasion, festal gathering**” (BDAG),²⁶² rendered as “joyful gathering” in the Good News Bible. Lane connects this back to Hebrews 4:9 and the “sabbath rest” that Believers are to experience, remarking, “Heavenly Jerusalem is a place of blessing, where the redeemed can join with ‘angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven’ in celebratory worship of God.”²⁶³

The author of Hebrews is quite candid when he writes that in the Heavenly Jerusalem are God’s “firstborn...the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23). The adjective *prōtotokōn* (πρωτοτόκων) appears in the plural and thus cannot refer to Yeshua;²⁶⁴ it refers rather to the redeemed in Yeshua,²⁶⁵ but notably to the deceased saints who have passed on. Hagner specifically considers the “spirits of the righteous” (NRSV) as involving “the OT saints who are awaiting the resurrection.”²⁶⁶ In the immediate context of Hebrews, especially in view of ch. 11, our writer likely wants his audience to consider the righteous figures of the Tanach as primarily being among these spirits. However, for us today, it must by necessity include many, many more Believers who have died.

We can be certain that the author of Hebrews fully affirms the belief in a disembodied afterlife, completely consistent with the mainstream Pharisaic theology of his time. He depicts the spirits of the righteous as in a place of great rejoicing and exaltation, and not in an unconscious condition in the grave awaiting the resurrection. However, Bruce is keen to note, “Our author’s lack of reference to the coming resurrection [here] does not mean that it found no place in his creed...but it is plain that, for him, the souls of believers do not need to wait until the resurrection to be perfected. They are perfected already in the sense that they are with God in the heavenly Jerusalem.”²⁶⁷

Indeed, for the author of Hebrews, teaching on the future resurrection is considered to be something rather basic (Hebrews 6:2), and his focus here is to emphasize the present reality for those who compose the Kingdom of God, which *includes* deceased saints awaiting the resurrection. The emphasis of Hebrews 12:23 on “spirits” in the plural should be taken to refer more to individuals, as a corporate redemption of God’s people, and disbursement of specific rewards, is still to occur. The complete perfection of all saints, and the entry of the *entire company* of redeemed, necessarily can only take place at the resurrection (Hebrews 11:40) and Second Coming. And even after the Second Coming and Millennial Kingdom, the arrival of the New Heavens and New Earth is still to be anticipated (Hebrews 11:16).

In Hebrews 12:24 our writer says that the redeemed have also come “to the mediator of a new covenant, Yeshua; and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better things than that of Hevel!”

²⁶¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 357.

²⁶² BDAG, 754.

²⁶³ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47b:467.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5 where Greek employs the singular form for “firstborn” in reference to Yeshua.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27.

²⁶⁶ Hagner, in *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 2168.

²⁶⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 360.

(CJB/CJSB). We have to keep in mind here that the New Covenant status, for Believers in Yeshua, brings eternal life from Heaven, and God writing His Instruction onto their hearts via His Spirit (Jeremiah 33:31-43; Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:15-17). Our author makes an interesting comparison between the blood of Abel, the first human slain, and the blood of Yeshua. There were a significant number of Jewish traditions which advocated Abel’s blood crying out for justice. The following chart compares the Genesis narrative of Abel’s death to opinions seen in the Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha, and the Mishnah:

GENESIS 4:8-10	ABEL’S KILLING CRYING OUT FOR JUSTICE—VARIED TRADITIONS
<p>Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.”</p>	<p>And he killed him in the field, and his blood cried out from the earth to heaven, making accusation because he killed him (<i>Jubilees</i> 4:3).²⁶⁸</p> <p>I asked Rufael, the angel who was with me, and said to him, “This spirit, the voice of which is reaching (into heaven) like this and is making suit, whose (spirit) is it?” And he answered me, saying, “This is the spirit which had left Abel, whom Cain, his brother, had killed; it (continues to) sue him until all of (Cain’s) seed is exterminated from the face of the earth, and his seed has disintegrated from among the seed of the people” (<i>1 Enoch</i> 22:6-7).²⁶⁹</p> <p>...Cain was handed over by God for seven punishments, for in every hundredth year the Lord brought upon him one plague. When he was two hundred years old suffering began and in his nine hundredth year he was deprived of life. For he was condemned on account of Abel his brother as a result of all his evil deeds (<i>Testament of Benjamin</i> 7:3-4).²⁷⁰</p> <p>He read to you about Abel slain by Cain, and Isaac who was offered as a burnt offering, and of Joseph in prison (4 Maccabees 18:11).</p> <p>For so we find in the case of Cain who slew his brother, as it is said, <i>The bloods of your brother cry</i> (Gen. 4:10). It does not say, “The blood of your brother,” but, “The bloods of your brother”—his blood and all those who were destined to be born from him.” Another matter—<i>The bloods of your brother</i>—for his blood was pattered on trees and stones. Therefore man was created alone, to teach you that whoever destroys a single Israelite soul is deemed by Scripture as if he had destroyed a whole world (m.<i>Sanhedrin</i> 4:5; cf. b.<i>Sanhedrin</i> 37b).²⁷¹</p>

²⁶⁸ O.S. Wintermute, “Jubilees,” trans., in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, 61.

²⁶⁹ E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” trans., in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, 25.

²⁷⁰ H.C. Kee, “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” trans., in *Ibid.*, 827.

²⁷¹ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 591.

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Even though we see some noticeable variance among the traditions concerning Abel, they do provide a large census of Jewish opinion indicating that the death of Abel led to a downward spiral, not only inflicting considerable curses upon Cain (Genesis 4:11-12), but a considerable problem with fallen humanity. The consequences of Fall, typified by the blood of Abel crying out for justice, is only resolvable via the blood of Yeshua. Our author's placement of Abel's blood, and comparing it to "the sprinkled blood" of the Messiah, is by no coincidence. Interestingly enough, the *Targum Jonathan* on Genesis 4:3 lists Abel's death as having occurred "on the fourteenth of Nisan,"²⁷² and there are commentators who have suggested that Yeshua the Messiah sacrificed on 14 Nisan is in view here.²⁷³ Even though there are debates over the crucifixion chronology of Yeshua, the typology is certainly there.

The key in properly understanding Hebrews 12:24 is that although the blood of Abel is very important to consider, as it speaks of the first human slaughtered and the general fall of humankind—crying out for justice—it is only the blood of the Messiah Himself that can redeem mortals and bring them into the Father's presence. Lane validly writes, "The presence in the heavenly city of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant whose blood speaks more effectively than the blood of Abel, provides assurance that those who pursue peace and holiness...will be welcomed. Entrance into the city, however...calls for allegiance and obedience as the response of gratitude to the objective blessings secured by Jesus."²⁷⁴

The author of Hebrews also puts an interesting timestamp in his epistle when describing Yeshua as "the mediator of a new covenant," surely a reference to the New Covenant of Jeremiah 33:31-34 (cf. 8:8-12; 10:15-17). But he employs a different Greek word for "new" in Hebrews 12:24, *neos* (νέος). Whereas *kainos* (καινός) generally describes something that is new in character, *neos* "pert. to being in existence but a relatively short time, new, fresh" (BDAG).²⁷⁵ In the chronology of our writer, the New Covenant had only been inaugurated for Believers a very short time. This is why Stibbs refers it to "Jesus the Mediator of this recently established...covenant."²⁷⁶ Those of Hebrews' audience may be a part of the "first wave" of the New Covenant's inauguration. While this makes them extremely special in the eyes of our author, it also places an extreme responsibility on them. That is why he has just detailed all of the wonderful parts of Heavenly Jerusalem and what one gets to experience as part of God's Kingdom. Who in their right heart or mind would want to give these things up?

HEBREWS 13:8

"Yeshua the Messiah is the same yesterday and today and forever."

After stating the need for his audience to emulate their previous leaders (Hebrews 13:7), the author of Hebrews makes an interesting remark.²⁷⁷ He says, "Yeshua the Messiah is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8, CJB/CJSB). Obviously, this is a reference to Yeshua's changelessness, as he has previously stated "your years will have no end" (Hebrews 1:12, ESV). There are several important parallels to be drawn between Hebrews 13:8 and several passages in the Tanach:

²⁷² J.W. Etheridge (1862), trans. *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel On the Pentateuch With The Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum From the Chaldee*. Accessible online at <<http://www.tulane.edu/~ntcs/pj/psjon.htm>>.

²⁷³ Cf. Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp 360-361, fn 177.

²⁷⁴ Lane, *Hebrews*, 47b:474.

²⁷⁵ BDAG, 669.

²⁷⁶ Stibbs, in *NBCR*, 1215.

²⁷⁷ This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.