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## Senses of οὐρανός, Hebrews 12.25–29, and the Destiny of the Cosmos

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### Abstract

Hebrews scholarship regularly includes claims that the author used the word οὐρανός in either two or three distinct senses. Most basically, it is argued that the word can refer to created parts of the cosmos or to the uncreated place where God dwells, and that authors who use the word have one of these two distinct referents in mind. This is particularly important in Hebrews 12.25–9, where the οὐρανός is shaken. It is often argued that this must be the created οὐρανός in distinction to the divine or eternal οὐρανός. This article critiques this common understanding of οὐρανός and its application to Hebrews 12.25–9. First, it surveys some early Jewish and Christian texts that discuss humans ascending into heaven, illustrating that these texts do not indicate any ontological divisions between various entities named ‘heaven’. Second, it briefly examines the ten occurrences of οὐρανός in Hebrews against this background, and it becomes clear that the author of Hebrews was more interested in contrasting heaven and earth (and perhaps the highest from the lower heavens) than in separating ‘heaven’ into distinct realms based on ontology. Third, the article outlines the significance of this conclusion for understanding what Hebrews 12.25–9 says about the shaking of heaven and earth. The author of Hebrews does not mean that some uncreated οὐρανός will ‘remain’ while the created heavens and earth are shaken. Instead, all of the heavenly and earthly space will be shaken.

**Keywords:** οὐρανός; Hebrews 12.25–9; heaven; shaking; eschatology; destiny of the cosmos

### 1 Introduction

It is often stated that New Testament authors, including the author of Hebrews, used the word οὐρανός to communicate various distinct senses. Such a claim, while relatively banal in itself, gains significance in Hebrews 12.25–9, where it often plays a major role in understanding what the ‘shaking of heaven’ means. In this article, I respond in three steps to how these senses of οὐρανός are often used to justify a specific reading of Hebrews 12.25–9. First, I present and then problematise this common understanding of οὐρανός, focusing particularly on early Jewish and Christian ascent texts. Second, I examine οὐρανός in Hebrews against this background. Third, I critique a common understanding of Hebrews 12.25–9 and then present another way to understand the eschatology of the passage.

### 2 Proposed Senses of οὐρανός

First, then, I will present and then critique the proposed senses of οὐρανός. In Hebrews scholarship specifically, usually two or three senses of the word are listed. Otto Michel provides an excellent example of three senses in his commentary: ‘Eigentlich müsste man im Hb

auch einen dreifachen Sprachgebrauch vom “Himmel” unterscheiden: 1. die Himmel, die zu dieser Schöpfung gehören und deshalb vergänglich sind (1.10–12); 2. die Himmel, durch die Christus hindurchschreitet (4.14; 9.10–12); 3. den Himmel als den eigentlichen Wohnort der Gottheit (9.24).<sup>1</sup> Michel goes on to say that the singular and plural can be used in all three senses.<sup>2</sup>

Aelred Cody provides another example of three senses: ‘the cosmological, the axiologic-al, and the eschatological’.<sup>3</sup> The cosmological heaven is ‘the upper part of the universe as distinguished from the lower region, the earth. The axiological heaven is a heaven whose perfection is distinguished against the relative imperfection of the earth, and the eschatological heaven is that which will remain after the cosmological heaven and earth disappear at the end of history’.<sup>4</sup> Cody’s scheme differs from Michel’s, particularly in its inclusion of temporal elements.

Most commonly, however, Hebrews scholars distinguish between two primary senses of οὐρανός. David DeSilva provides an explanation that is often quoted in English scholarship: ‘Reality is divided into two distinct realms. First, the author speaks of the hearers’ (and his own) actions in this world, the visible material realm of everyday experience.’ For DeSilva, this ‘visible realm consists of the earth and the “heavens”. We must distinguish carefully here between the two uses to which the author puts the term “heaven”. There are, on the one hand, the “heavens” (always plural) that are part of the changing temporary creation.’<sup>5</sup> Then, DeSilva goes on to define the second realm: ‘Beyond the visible “earth” and “heavens” stands another realm that is superior, even if now it is unseen. This is the realm where God dwells, where God’s full and unmediated presence is enjoyed by the angelic hosts and the glorified Christ.’<sup>6</sup>

Philip Church states it even more simply: ‘In Hebrews, as elsewhere in the NT, οὐρανός has two senses: it refers either to the upper part of the created universe (i.e. the sky) or the transcendent dwelling place of God.’<sup>7</sup>

German scholarship has generally adopted a two-sense approach as well. For example, Otfried Hofius summarises in this way: ‘Über der Erde und den zur vergänglichen Schöpfung gehörenden “Himmeln” (1,10ff.; 11,12; 12,26) liegen die οὐρανοί, die Himmelswelt (4,14; 7,26; 8,1; 9,23; 12,23.25).’<sup>8</sup> Mathias Rissi similarly states, “Die Himmel” bezeichnen im Hebr nicht nur das Firmament, sondern auch den Himmel Gottes, d. h. Gottes Wohnung jenseits alles Kosmischen.’<sup>9</sup>

Support for these senses is often drawn from Hebrews’ background, especially in what is often called ‘apocalyptic’. For example, DeSilva calls what he sketches ‘the cosmos of apocalypticism’.<sup>10</sup> Rissi states that the author’s ‘Gedankenwelt wurzelt im Alten Testament und zum Teil in frühjüdischen Konzeptionen.’<sup>11</sup> Hofius argues that the picture of the heavenly

<sup>1</sup> O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960<sup>11</sup>) 203.

<sup>2</sup> Michel, *An die Hebräer*, 203.

<sup>3</sup> A. Cody, *Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Achievement of Salvation in the Epistle’s Perspective* (St. Meinrad: Grail Publications, 1960) 77.

<sup>4</sup> Cody, *Heavenly Sanctuary*, 79.

<sup>5</sup> D.A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 27.

<sup>6</sup> DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> P. Church, *Hebrews and the Temple: Attitudes to the Temple in Second Temple Judaism and in Hebrews* (NovTSup 171; Leiden: Brill, 2017) 372.

<sup>8</sup> O. Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6,19 f. und 10,19 f.* (WUNT 1/14; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972) 71.

<sup>9</sup> M. Rissi, *Die Theologie des Hebräerbriefs: Ihre Verankerung in der Situation des Verfassers und seiner Leser* (WUNT 1/41; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987) 36.

<sup>10</sup> DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Rissi, *Die Theologie*, 35.

world in Hebrews, including the senses of οὐρανός and the relationship between earthly and heavenly tabernacles, fits with that found in ‘apocalyptic’ and Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>12</sup> This is not an invention of Hebrews scholars: some scholarship on early Judaism does support this view, with Bietenhard and Nickelsburg, for example, suggesting that at least some early Jewish texts distinguish between astronomical and divine heavens.<sup>13</sup>

Now, it is undeniable that Hebrews and many early Jewish texts use οὐρανός and related words to refer both to the location of astronomical phenomena and to the location of God’s throne. So, the word οὐρανός is indeed used to refer to at least these two things. However, the bare fact of these references is not sufficient to prove that early Jewish and Christian authors considered the astronomical and divine locations that they referred to with οὐρανός to be distinct and separate. On the contrary, the use of one word for these locations suggests unity rather than distinction. In fact, a few Hebrews scholars have cast doubt on the accepted senses of οὐρανός. For example, George MacRae refers to Michel’s three meanings of οὐρανός, but he states, ‘I find the differences hard to substantiate.’<sup>14</sup> In his commentary, Craig Koester states, ‘Hebrews does not clearly distinguish the created heavens from a transcendent heaven,’ and he specifically points to the shaking of ‘heaven’ in 12.26 and the need for purification in heaven (9.23).<sup>15</sup> Finally, David Moffitt has more recently questioned the distinctions, even though he originally accepted them in his dissertation.<sup>16</sup>

So then, rather than supposing from the beginning that different senses of οὐρανός match distinct spheres or locations, the texts that provide the background for this idea need to be analysed to see whether they make such distinctions. Since Hebrews speaks about a human ascending into heaven, I propose that the most helpful texts to survey are early Jewish and Christian texts that speak about humans ascending into heaven. This leads to a short list of texts that includes two sections of 1 Enoch (the Watchers and the Parables), 2 Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch, Apocalypse of Abraham, Testament of Levi, Testament of Abraham, Ascension of Isaiah and Revelation. Here I will focus on what, if anything, these texts contribute to the question of whether early Jewish and Christian authors distinguished between different senses of οὐρανός and related words.

### 3 Excursus: Why Not Philo?

Noticeably absent from the above list is any work by Philo. While almost no one argues for direct Philonic influence on Hebrews, Philo is often regarded as the closest representative of the cosmology held by the author of Hebrews.<sup>17</sup> There are three main reasons why I have not included any texts by Philo in this survey.

<sup>12</sup> Hofius, *Der Vorhang*, 72.

<sup>13</sup> H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1951) 1–2; G.W.E. Nickelsburg, ‘Four Worlds that are “Other” in the Enochic Book of Parables’, *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions* (ed. T. Nicklas et al.; JSJSup 143; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 55.

<sup>14</sup> G.W. MacRae, ‘Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews’, *Semeia* 12 (1978) 187–8.

<sup>15</sup> C.R. Koester, *Hebrews* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 99.

<sup>16</sup> D.M. Moffitt, ‘Serving in the Tabernacle in Heaven: Sacred Space, Jesus’s High-Priestly Sacrifice, and Hebrews’ Analogical Theology’, *Hebrews in Contexts* (ed. G. Gelardini and H.W. Attridge; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 91; Leiden: Brill, 2016) 272 n. 35.

<sup>17</sup> For some examples, see J.L. Berquist, ‘Critical Spatiality and the Book of Hebrews’, *Hebrews in Contexts* (ed. G. Gelardini and H.W. Attridge; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 91; Leiden: Brill, 2016) 185–6; Lala Kalyan Kumar Dey, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* (SBLDS 25; Missoula: Scholars, 1975); W. Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich: Die mittelpatonische Umformung des Parusiedankens im Hebräerbrief* (BZNW 116; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003) 376–7; L.T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 17–21; Iutisone Salevao, *Legitimation in the Letter to the Hebrews: The Construction and Maintenance of a Symbolic Universe* (JSNTSup 219; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002) 355–6.

First, the author of Hebrews has already made a decision about cosmology by referring to a person ascending into heaven. While this choice by itself has no bearing on whether the ascent is presented as ‘real’ or metaphorical, it does put some distance between the author and Philo, who as far as I know does not describe an ascent into ‘heaven itself’. Texts that do describe an ascent into heaven are automatically more relevant.

Second, Philo and the author of Hebrews both describe the earthly sanctuary as a shadow or replica of what God showed Moses, and both authors point to Exod 25.40.<sup>18</sup> However, Philo goes on to identify the heavenly original as either parts of the cosmos or ideas/forms. As far as I know, he never describes the heavenly original as a sanctuary in heaven.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the author of Hebrews does refer to a heavenly sanctuary. Further, he indicates that events happen in this heavenly space, something Philo would not do.<sup>20</sup> Again, then, the most relevant texts are those that speak of a sanctuary in heaven and those that have events happening in heavenly space.

Third, supposing that Hebrews does come from an Alexandrian milieu, this provenance does not require Philo as the only background. Rather, some of the texts listed above, specifically 2 Enoch, Testament of Abraham and Apocalypse of Abraham, may be from Alexandria.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, while Philo’s works should be investigated as they relate to Hebrews, they are not the most relevant texts to consider in the context of Hebrews’ descriptions of heavenly space, and in this article, I will focus only on the texts listed above.

#### 4 Early Jewish and Christian Ascent Texts

This section covers two primary questions. First, do any of the listed texts present sharp distinctions between locations named ‘heaven’? Second, do these texts separate cosmological elements from angelic and divine elements?

First, then, is an examination of barriers or divisions within heaven. Many texts contain implicit references to distinctions between multiple heavens by their references to gates or doors that connect the heavens (3 Bar. 2.2; 3.1; 4.2 S; 11.2; Apoc. Ab. 11.2–3; 12.3; T. Levi 5.1; Ascen. Isa. 6.6). Additionally, the fiery walls and doors in 1 En. 14 might also suggest distinctions within a single heaven. However, none of these gates, doors or walls restrict the movements of travellers except for the last gates in 3 Bar. In other words, heaven appears

<sup>18</sup> See for example *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 52; *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.100–03; *Concerning Noah’s Work as a Planter* 26–7; *On the Life of Moses* 2.71–6. J.W. Thompson points to these texts in ‘What Has Middle Platonism to Do with Hebrews?’, *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students* (ed. Eric F. Mason and Kevin B. McCruden; SBLRBS 66; Atlanta: SBL, 2011) 31–52.

<sup>19</sup> For agreement, see Church, *Hebrews and the Temple*, 70; G. Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie* (WUNT 2/212; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 120–5. The only possible exception I have found is a text that C. R. Koester points out in *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament* (CBQMS 22; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989) 67; there, he notes that *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 2.51 perhaps references some kind of heavenly sanctuary (although the word ‘heavenly’ does not appear). However, the text is only preserved in Armenian, and the editor suggests an emendation that does not refer to a heavenly sanctuary (Philo, *Questions on Exodus* (trans. Ralph Marcus; LCL 401; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953) 97).

<sup>20</sup> See J.A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 2/331; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 97; B.J. Ribbens, *Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult in Hebrews* (BZNW 222; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016) 92.

<sup>21</sup> For 2 Enoch, see C. Böttrich, ‘Das slavische Henochbuch’, *Apokalypsen* (JSHRZ 5.7; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1996) 811; R.H. Charles, *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (trans. William Richard Morfill; Oxford: Clarendon, 1896) xvi–xvii; N. Schmidt, ‘The Two Recensions of Slavonic Enoch’, *JAOS* 41 (1921) 310–11. For Testament of Abraham, see G.H. Box, *The Testament of Abraham* (London: SPCK, 1927) xxviii–xxix. For Apocalypse of Abraham, see M. Sommer, ‘Ein Text aus Palästina? Gedanken zur Einleitungswissenschaftlichen Verortung der Apokalypse des Abraham’, *JSJ* 47 (2016) 252.

to have its doors wide open. What this implies is that the distinctions created by doors or gates are spatial, not ontological.

However, there are two places where there could be some sort of barrier between heavens that is more than spatial. First, 3 Bar. 11–16 narrates Baruch's experience outside the fifth and highest heaven.<sup>22</sup> He and his angel guide are barred from entering this top heaven, and its gate remains shut for everyone but the angel Michael.<sup>23</sup> This might suggest that the heaven beyond the gate is the uncreated place where God dwells.<sup>24</sup> However, the fifth heaven may be a heavenly sanctuary,<sup>25</sup> and Baruch may be barred from entering for the same reason that Enoch is barred in 1 En. 14: the place is too holy for visitors to enter.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Many scholars suggest that 3 Baruch implies seven heavens; see R. Bauckham, 'Early Jewish Visions of Hell', *JTS* 41 (1990) 372–4; G.N. Bonwetsch, 'Das slavisch erhaltene Baruchbuch', *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen: Philologisch-Historische Klasse aus dem Jahre 1896* (Göttingen: Commissionsverlag der Dieterich'schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1896) 93; L. Ginsberg, 'Greek Apocalypse of Baruch', *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (ed. I. Singer; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1902) 551; D.C. Harlow, *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch) in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (SVTP; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 41–3; W. Hage, 'Die griechische Baruch-Apokalypse', *Apokalypsen* (ed. W.G. Kümmel; JSHRZ 5.1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1974) 18; H.M. Hughes, 'The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch or 3 Baruch', *APOT* 2 (ed. R.H. Charles; 2 vols; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913) 527; C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 81–2. However, Picard and others have made a convincing case that the text only includes five heavens; see especially J.C. Picard, 'Observations sur l'Apocalypse grecque de Baruch: cadre historique fictif et efficacité symbolique', *Sem* 20 (1970) 96 n. 50; see also *Testamentum Iobi; Apocalypsis Baruchi Graece* (ed. S.P. Brock and J.-C. Picard; PVTG 2; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 77; L. Carlsson, *Round Trips to Heaven: Otherworldly Travelers in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Lund Studies in the History of Religions 19; Lund: Department of History and Anthropology of Religions, Lund University, 2004) 342–3.

<sup>23</sup> For agreement that Baruch is barred from entering, see Carlsson, *Round Trips*, 341–2; H. E. Gaylord, Jr., '3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch', *OTP* 1 (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; 2 vols; New York: Doubleday, 1983) 653; A. Kulik, 'The Enigma of the Five Heavens and Early Jewish Cosmology', *JSP* 28 (2019) 248–52; Picard, 'Observations', 82–3; J.E. Wright, 'The Cosmography of the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch and Its Affinities' (Ph. D. diss., Brandeis University, 1992) 296. For Wright, Baruch does partially enter the fifth heaven, but the door is inside the fifth heaven, which has an antechamber (Wright, 'Cosmography', 331). On the other hand, some suggest that Baruch does enter (for the Greek, see Bauckham, 'Visions of Hell', 372–3). This view is particularly characteristic of Harlow, who argues that the angelic guide greets Michael in 11.5 and thus must enter the fifth heaven (Harlow, *3 Baruch*, 36). To argue this, however, Harlow has to claim that the door that closes before Baruch's exit is different than the fifth-heaven door; given that one can easily read the text as barring Baruch from the fifth heaven generally, Harlow's two doors appears the more complex and thus less convincing option.

<sup>24</sup> This seems to be the view of Picard and Kulik (Kulik, 'The Enigma', 263–4; J.C. Picard, "Je te montrerai d'autres mystères, plus grands que ceux-ci..." Deux notes sur III Baruch et quelques écrits apparentés', *Le continent apocryphe: essai sur les littératures apocryphes juive et chrétienne* (Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 36; Turnhout: Brepols, 1999) 150–1).

<sup>25</sup> For connections between the prayer liturgy in 3 Baruch and the temple as well as the Day of Atonement, see A. Kulik, *3 Baruch: Greek-Slavonic Apocalypse of Baruch* (CEJL; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010) 361–4; Kulik, 'The Enigma', 248–50. For a heavenly temple beyond Baruch, see Carlsson, *Round Trips*, 345; Gaylord, Jr., '3 Baruch', 657–9; Picard, 'Observations', 82–3. On the other hand, others suggest that a heavenly temple, if it existed, would be more clearly marked in the text (Harlow, *3 Baruch*, 34–5; K. R. Jones, *Jewish Reactions to the Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70: Apocalypses and Related Pseudepigrapha* (JSJSup 151; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 138). Harlow, in fact, thinks that there is an intentional polemic against a heavenly (and also earthly) temple in 3 Baruch (Harlow, *3 Baruch*, 64–75). The liturgical functions that appear so strongly in 3 Bar. 12–16, however, suggest that a heavenly temple or something like it is likely.

<sup>26</sup> For agreement that Enoch is barred from entering the second house, see R.A. Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation, and Judgment* (EJL 8; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 115; K.C. Baugh, 'The Heavenly Temple, the Prison in the Void and the Uninhabited Paradise: Otherworldly Sites in the Book of the Watchers', *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions* (ed. T. Nicklas et al.; JSJSup 143; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 40; M. Black, *The Book of Enoch Or I Enoch: A New English Edition* (SVTP 7; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 148; G.W.E. Nickelsburg and J.C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36, 80–108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 270; R.E. Stokes, 'The Throne Visions of Daniel 7, 1 Enoch 14 and the Qumran Book of Giants (4Q530): An Analysis of Their Literary Relationship', *DSD* 15

There is no clear indication that something uncreated or ontologically different stands behind the gate.

A second text that might suggest a division between the lower and highest heavens is the Ascension of Isaiah. When Isaiah is about to enter the seventh and highest heaven, the lead angel of the sixth heaven asks if an ‘alien’ will be allowed to continue to ascend, but the Lord allows Isaiah because his ‘robe’ is in the seventh heaven (9.1–2). This might imply a sharp division between the sixth and seventh heavens. However, the overall structure of the heavens in Ascension of Isaiah requires a different scheme, as Lautaro Lanzillotta has laid out. He suggests that there are three zones: earth and firmament, intermediate zone (heavens 1–5) and divine zone (heavens 6–7).<sup>27</sup> Thus, heavens six and seven are actually closely connected, and the transition from heaven five to heaven six does not suggest any distinction except in terms of glory and holiness.

Besides these two texts, which do not appear to have ontological distinctions in mind, no ascent texts even hint at a sharp division between divine and created heavens. Instead, when there are layers of heaven, often grouped together in different ways, all belong to the same set of ‘heavens’. Further, God’s throne is placed in this same ‘heaven’ or set of ‘heavens’ in every text surveyed, except 4 Ezra and those texts where there is no vision of God (that is, 3 Bar., which ends outside the fifth heaven, and T. Ab., which never progresses beyond the locations of judgement, punishment and reward).<sup>28</sup> If there is an uncreated heaven that can be called God’s dwelling or throne room, none of these texts refer to it.

The second question is whether these texts clearly distinguish between locations with cosmological elements and locations with angelic or divine elements. As a matter of fact, texts often place these elements in the same locations. For example, the Parables discusses the divine throne room (39–40) and the storehouses of sun, moon, winds, lightning, stars and other elements (41–4) as if they are in the same place.<sup>29</sup> Second Enoch provides an even better example: in the first heaven are the angels who control the stars and storehouses for snow and dew (4–6), in the second are the fallen Watchers (7.1–4) and in the fourth heaven

(2008) 350. For the argument that these restrictions stem from the temple concept, see M. Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Judentum und Umwelt 8; Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1984) 49; D.W. Suter, ‘Temples and the Temple in the Early Enochic Tradition: Memory, Vision, and Expectation’, *The Early Enoch Literature* (ed. G. Boccaccini and J.J. Collins; JSJSup 121; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 214. Esler, however, suggests the restrictions mirror the distance between the court and the common people (P.F. Esler, *God’s Court and Courtiers in the Book of the Watchers: Re-interpreting Heaven in 1 Enoch 1–36* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017) 61). Both may be in mind.

<sup>27</sup> For this division, see L.R. Lanzillotta, ‘The Cosmology of the Ascension of Isaiah: Analysis and Re-Assessment of the Text’s Cosmological Framework’, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (ed. J.N. Bremmer, T.R. Karmann and T. Nicklas; Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 11; Leuven: Peeters, 2016) 264–6. He further subdivides each of these three sections into equal halves, and suggests that this cosmological model is an attempt to integrate a seven-heaven model onto a tripartite cosmology (Lanzillotta, ‘Cosmology’, 268–9, 287–8). See also E. Norelli, *Ascension du prophète Isaïe* (Apocryphes: Collection de poche de l’AELAC; Turnhout: Brepols, 1993) 45–6, who also argues that the angels of heavens 1–5 are imperfect, while those of 6–7 share divine perfection.

<sup>28</sup> Ascen. Isa. does not explicitly mention God’s throne, but it is implied by Christ’s ‘sitting’ in 11.32. The lack of throne in 4 Ezra may simply be due to the terse and general nature of the description. For agreement that this is a consistent feature of this kind of text, see E. F. Mason, ‘“Sit at My Right Hand”: Enthronement and the Heavenly Sanctuary in Hebrews’, *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. Vanderkam* (ed. E.F. Mason et al.; 2 vols; JSJSup 153; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 2:903.

<sup>29</sup> Despite this, Nickelsburg does divide between a heaven as God’s dwelling and meteorological heaven; see G.W.E. Nickelsburg, ‘Discerning the Structure(s) of the Enochic Book of Parables’, *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables* (ed. G. Boccaccini; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 27–37; Nickelsburg, ‘Four Worlds’. However, refusing to divide a ‘cosmological’ heaven from God’s heaven would fit with Nickelsburg’s own suggestion that there are two primary ‘cosmic’ dualisms in 1 Enoch: heaven and earth, and inhabited and uninhabited earth (see G.W.E. Nickelsburg, ‘The Apocalyptic Construction of Reality in 1 Enoch’, *George W.E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning* (ed. J. Neusner and A.J. Avery-Peck; 2 vols; JSJSup 80; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 1:37).



are the sun and moon (11–16). Third Baruch similarly has places for punishment in the first two heavens (2–3) but puts the sun and moon in the third heaven (6–9).

What this brief survey illustrates is that these texts do not follow the divisions of heaven suggested by the scholars surveyed at the beginning of this paper. Negatively, they do not present ontological divisions between various heavens. Positively, if they number multiple heavens, they include them all together as a group, and they often mix together places of judgement, cosmological functions and locations of worship. While οὐρανός and related words can clearly refer to all these locations, and thus they do have various senses, these senses do not map onto distinct and separate locations. What this means is that one cannot claim that the ‘apocalyptic’ background of Hebrews proves that Hebrews itself presents two distinct places that can be called ‘heaven’. Of course, just because the ‘apocalyptic’ background does not justify this view does not mean that Hebrews itself cannot have this view. What it does mean, however, is that the burden of proof is shifted to those who think that Hebrews has several distinct senses of οὐρανός in mind. I will now move on to Hebrews itself, then.

## 5 What About Hebrews?

The word οὐρανός occurs ten times in Hebrews. As Table 1 illustrates, those who distinguish between referents of οὐρανός tend to agree that the occurrences in 1.10; 11.12; and 12.26 refer to visible or created heavens, while the occurrences in 8.1; 9.23–4; 12.23; and 12.25 refer to divine or uncreated heavens. There is debate about the occurrences in 4.14 and 7.26, which are variously identified as intermediate heavens, created heavens or uncreated heavens. What this common scheme obscures, however, is the simplicity of Hebrews’ use of οὐρανός. The word is always in the plural except for three places: 12.26 (a quotation from the LXX); 11.12 (almost certainly an allusion to the promise to Abraham, referenced by the same phrase τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in LXX Exod 32.13; Deut 1.10; 10.22; 28.62); and 9.24. The only singular without LXX origin, then, is 9.24, where Christ enters ‘heaven itself’. Given that early Jewish and Christian ascent texts show more interest in numbers and layers of heaven than ontological distinctions, it is likely that the singular of οὐρανός in 9.24 refers to the highest heaven, and the plurals elsewhere refer to the entire heavenly realm.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, the distinctions that the author cares about are not created heavens versus uncreated ones or a cosmological heaven versus a divine heaven; rather, he is interested in heaven versus earth and the highest heaven versus the rest of the heavens. In fact, there are no indications in the text that cosmological heavens are separate from the heavens where God’s throne sits. One can only arrive at these distinctions by identifying the content and function of ‘heaven’ at each reference, and then assuming that different content

<sup>30</sup> For agreement that this is the highest out of multiple heavens, see P. Andriessen, ‘Das grössere und vollkommener Zelt (Hebr 9:11)’, *BZ* 15 (1971) 88; DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 27–8; Hofius, *Der Vorhang*, 70–1; W.L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (WBC 47B; Dallas: Word, 1991) 248; R.J. McKelvey, *Pioneer and Priest: Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013) 47; J. McRay, ‘Atonement and Apocalyptic in the Book of Hebrews’, *ResQ* 23 (1980) 5; Moffitt, ‘Serving in the Tabernacle’, 272–3. For no significant difference between singular and plural of οὐρανός, see K. Backhaus, *Der Hebräerbrief* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 2009) 181–2; G. L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 224 n. 10; P. Ellingworth, ‘Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews’, *EvQ* 58 (1986) 341 n. 6; K. Son, *Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18–24 as a Hermeneutical Key to the Epistle* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2005) 193–4; G. E. Tymeson, ‘The Material World in Gnosticism and the Epistle to the Hebrews’ (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1975) 154–5. For the idea that the plurals simply represent שמים, see Backhaus, *Der Hebräerbrief*, 182; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. edn 1990) 115; P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000) 103.

**Table 1.** Occurrences of οὐρανός in Hebrews

Ref	Text	Translation	Cody	Michel	De Silva (also Rissi)	Church (also Eisele)	Hofius
1.10	καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ <b>οὐρανοί</b>	And the <b>heavens</b> are the work of your hands	Cosmological	Part of the cosmos	Visible	Created	Created
4.14	ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς <b>οὐρανούς</b>	A great high priest who has passed through the <b>heavens</b>	?	Intermediate sphere	Visible	Transcendent	Heavenly world
7.26	ὑψηλότερος τῶν <b>οὐρανῶν</b> γενόμενος	[a priest] becoming higher than the <b>heavens</b>	?	Intermediate sphere	Visible	Transcendent	Heavenly world
8.1	ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν τοῖς <b>οὐρανοῖς</b>	At the right of the throne of the Majesty in the <b>heavens</b>	Axiological?	Dwelling of God	Divine	Transcendent	Heavenly world
9.23	τὰ μὲν ὑποδείγματα τῶν ἐν τοῖς <b>οὐρανοῖς</b>	The copies of the things in the <b>heavens</b>	Axiological?	Dwelling of God?	Divine	Transcendent	Heavenly world
9.24	εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν <b>οὐρανόν</b>	[Christ entered] into <b>heaven</b> itself	Axiological	Dwelling of God	Divine	Transcendent	Highest heaven
11.12	τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ <b>οὐρανοῦ</b>	The stars of the <b>heaven</b>	Cosmological	Part of the cosmos?	Visible	Created	Created
12.23	ἐκκλησίᾳ πρωτοτόκων ἀπογεγραμμένων ἐν <b>οὐρανοῖς</b>	Church of firstborns registered in the <b>heavens</b>	Axiological	Dwelling of God?	Divine	Transcendent	Heavenly world
12.25	οἱ τὸν ἀπ' <b>οὐρανῶν</b> ἀποστρεφόμενοι	The ones turning back from the one [warning] from the <b>heavens</b>	Axiological	Dwelling of God?	Divine	Transcendent	Heavenly world
12.26	οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν <b>οὐρανόν</b>	Not only the earth but also the <b>heaven</b>	Cosmological	Part of the cosmos	Visible	Created	Created



and function require different location and ontology. However, other ascent texts do not have separate locations for these separate functions, and Hebrews also shows no indications of such a separation. So, neither Hebrews nor other early Jewish and Christian ascent texts divide ‘heaven’ up into various spheres separated by function and ontology. How then does that affect our understanding of the eschatology of Hebrews 12.25–9?

## 6 Implications for the Eschatology of Hebrews 12.25–9

As previously noted, a common understanding of Heb 12.25–9 distinguishes between created heavens, which are shaken and removed along with the earth, and uncreated or eternal heavens that ‘remain’.<sup>31</sup> James Thompson is particularly clear on this: Hebrews ‘knows two worlds already possessing full reality, one of which is material, and therefore shakable; the other is not material, and is unshakable’.<sup>32</sup> Paul Ellingworth expresses a similar sentiment: the quotation from Haggai ‘implies, although the author does not labour the point, that οὐρανός here, as probably in 1.10; 4.14; 7.26; 11.12, refers to the higher part of the created universe, rather than, as probably in 9.24 (αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανόν), and even in 12.23, 25, to the immediate presence of God’.<sup>33</sup> Finally, Alexander Stewart, citing DeSilva on the meanings of οὐρανός, states it succinctly: “‘Heaven itself’ is clearly distinguished from the physical, created heavens that will be removed (1.10–12, 12.27).”<sup>34</sup>

As I have argued, however, no such division between senses of οὐρανός is evident in early Jewish and Christian ascent texts, including Hebrews. Further, when the author quotes Hag 2.6 to introduce the ‘shaking’, he adds an οὐ μόνον ... ἀλλὰ καὶ construction that emphasises οὐρανός.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the author gives no indication that he distinguishes between types of ‘heaven’, and in fact emphasises οὐρανός in the quote. So, all of heavenly space, as well as earthly space, will be ‘shaken’.<sup>36</sup> Before I address what I think this might mean, I need to deal with two objections to the inclusion of all heavenly and earthly space in the ‘shaking’.

First, the parenthetical qualification ὡς πεποιημένων could indicate either the definition of or the grounds for what is shaken. In other words, the shaken things are the created

<sup>31</sup> See e.g., E. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 188; H.W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 381; D.A. De Silva, ‘Entering God’s Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews’, *TJ* 21 (2000) 26–7; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 687; Hofius, *Der Vorhang*, 71; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 335; K. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice* (SNTSMS 143; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 122–3; A. Stewart, ‘Cosmology, Eschatology, and Soteriology in Hebrews: A Synthetic Analysis’, *BBR* 20 (2010) 550–1; J. W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (CBQMS 13; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982) 49–50. Such a distinction between heavens does not require this conclusion, however, as is illustrated by D.J. Moo, *Hebrews* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming) on 12:26–7; Rissi, *Die Theologie*, 129.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, *Beginnings*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 687.

<sup>34</sup> Stewart, ‘Cosmology’, 550.

<sup>35</sup> For agreement about the emphasis on οὐρανός, see e.g., F.H. Cortez, ‘Creation in Hebrews’, *AUSS* 53 (2015) 312; Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13, 480; P. Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of Its Background in Jewish Tradition* (WUNT 2/129; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 262. While one could argue that the singular of οὐρανός here indicates more precisely the highest heaven, as it does in 9.24, the fact that the author is quoting from the LXX should make us hesitant to base any significant claim upon the singular form.

<sup>36</sup> For a similar critique of different meanings of οὐρανός, including the implication that here all of heavenly space is shaken, see Koester, *Hebrews*, 547. For general agreement that even God’s heavenly ‘dwelling place’ is shaken, see Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 667; Cortez, ‘Creation’, 311; J. Lee, ‘The Unshakable Kingdom through the Shaking of Heaven and Earth in Heb 12:26–29’, *NovT* 62 (2020) 258. For further agreement that the shakable/unshakable contrast does not line up on the earth/heaven contrast, see G. Theissen, *Untersuchungen zum Hebräerbrief* (SNT 2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1969) 92 n. 11.

things, or things are shaken because they are created.<sup>37</sup> For many scholars, this indicates that only created things are shaken, in opposition to some class of uncreated things.<sup>38</sup> If what I have argued is correct, however, all things in heavenly and earthly space are created and thus subject to shaking. In fact, the only ‘uncreated’ thing is God himself. So, even if ὡς πεποιημένων does identify the shaken things as ‘created’, that still requires the shaking of everything in earthly and heavenly space.

On the other hand, it is possible that ὡς πεποιημένων provides a comparison to the ‘creation’ of all these things. In other words, God shakes heaven and earth ‘in the same way’ (ὡς) that he created them: with his voice. Such a claim requires two complementary claims. First, the author must be implying that God uses his voice in the final shaking, just like he did at the initial shaking at Sinai (12.26). Such an inference seems likely given the author’s focus on God speaking here and throughout Hebrews. Second, the author must have known and alluded to the account of creation by ‘word’ in Genesis 1. The author clearly knows stories found in Genesis, since he refers to Abel just a few verses earlier (12.24). Further, when the author earlier speaks about how God created the world (11.3), it is God’s ῥῆμα that does the work. The strong link with speech and the implication that the author knows the creation story from Genesis 1 suggests that ὡς πεποιημένων has this story in mind: in the same way that God created everything, he will shake everything one final time – with his voice. If this is true, the phrase identifies the manner of shaking, not the identity of what is shaken. However, even if this theory is incorrect, the phrase ὡς πεποιημένων still does not divide what exists into created (and thus shaken) things and uncreated (and thus unshaken) things.

A second objection could come from the ‘shaking’ terms. Do the participles of σαλεύω and the adjective ἀσάλευτος indicate result (‘shaken’ and ‘unshaken’) or nature (‘shakable’ and ‘unshakable’)?<sup>39</sup> A survey of several other uses sheds some light on the connotation of these words. First, in Luke 6.48b, the author is referring to possibility and uses the verb ἰσχύω to indicate this: ‘But a flood coming, the river burst upon that house, and it was not able to shake it because it had been constructed well.’<sup>40</sup> This verb would be redundant if the term already indicated possibility or nature. Second, an occurrence of ἀσάλευτος in Josephus clearly describes something that could possibly be shaken: water. Josephus writes (translation from Loeb), ‘at the base of the cliff is an opening into an overgrown cavern; within this, plunging down to an immeasurable depth, is a yawning chasm, enclosing a volume of still water, the bottom of which no sounding-line has been found long enough to reach’.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the terms do not need to indicate nature, and in Hebrews 12, it is likely that the author simply intends result: ‘shaken’ and ‘unshaken’.<sup>42</sup>

What all this means is that Hebrews does not picture the destruction of cosmic things and the continuation of an uncreated heaven. Rather, everything, both heaven and earth,

<sup>37</sup> E.g., W. Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich*, 118; Moo, *Hebrews*, on 12.27; Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 128; Thompson, *Beginnings*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> See Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich*, 119.

<sup>39</sup> For ‘shakable’, see Adams, *Stars Will Fall*, 192; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 667; Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich*, 124–5; P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 558; Koester, *Hebrews*, 552; Thompson, *Beginnings*, 50; see also many of the major English versions, including NASB, NIV. Some versions translate only some of the words with nature or ability language; see ESV, HCSB, KJV, NLT. For ‘shaken’, see O. J. Filtvedt, ‘Creation and Salvation in Hebrews’, *ZNW* 106 (2015) 298; Moo, *Hebrews*, on 12.27; see also the ASV and NET.

<sup>40</sup> My translation. Greek: πλημύρης δὲ γενομένης προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμὸς τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν σαλεῦσαι αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομῆσθαι αὐτήν.

<sup>41</sup> Josephus, *BJ* 1.21.3 §405 (LCL 203 (Thackeray), 191). Greek: παρὰ δὲ τὴν ὑπὸρειον λαγόναν συνηρέφες ἄντρον ὑπανοίγει, δι’ οὗ βαρυσώδους κρημνὸς εἰς ἀμέτρητον ἀπορροῶγα βαθύνεται, πλήθει τε ὕδατος ἀσαλεύτου καὶ τοῖς καθιμῶσιν τι πρὸς ἔρευναν γῆς οὐδὲν μῆκος ἔξαρκεί.

<sup>42</sup> For the verbal form in a context where it clearly means result and not nature, see also Acts 2.25/Ps 15.8 LXX. For some ambiguous references, see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 7.11; Eunapius, *Lives*, 504; Philo, *Eternity* 22 §116.

is involved. This leaves two primary possibilities: destruction (perhaps followed by recreation) or some kind of renewal or purification. I will briefly present my own conclusions on this issue. The two key terms to deal with are μεταθεις and μένω. The verb μένω is relatively straightforward in Hebrews: it refers to what does not end or cease (see Heb 7.3, 24; 10.34; 13.14).

The noun μεταθεις is much more complicated, and there are two primary options for its meaning: 'removal' and 'change'. Many translate the term as 'removal', although some grant that this does not require annihilation.<sup>43</sup> The two other occurrences of the term in Hebrews, however, refer to Enoch's 'removal' to heaven from earth (11.5: a change in location) and the 'removal' of the law when the priesthood 'changes' (μετατιθεμένης; 7.12: a change in content, given the parallel verb). The related verb appears five times in the NT, and it refers to changing something, either in location (Acts 7.16; Heb 11.5), cognitive content (Gal 1.6; Jude 1.4) or physical content (Heb 7.12). Importantly, none of these occurrences describes absolute removal but rather a move from one thing (whether location or content) to another.<sup>44</sup> Thus, while 'removal' may work as a translation, it should not imply annihilation but rather a move from one place/thing to another, like Enoch's 'removal'.

From all of this, I conclude that God will 'shake' with his voice all heavenly and earthly space. This introduces a 'change' (μεταθεις) in content or nature, such that the things that God chooses not to shake are the ones that 'remain'.<sup>45</sup> Exactly how much continuity is involved in this 'change' is not clear, at least to me. However, what is clear is that, without strict distinctions between senses of οὐρανός, Hebrews does not depict a final removal of 'material' things so that 'spiritual' things can remain. When the distinctions between the senses of οὐρανός are removed, it is clear that Heb 12.25–9 must include all of heavenly space in the 'shaking' and 'change'.

To summarise, I have noted that a common interpretation of Hebrews 12.25–9 depends upon distinguishing between various senses of the word οὐρανός. I have shown that early Jewish and Christian texts about ascents into heaven, including Hebrews, do not make such distinctions. So, my primary claim is that how these texts discuss heavenly space invalidates the claim that Hebrews has an eschatology that is focused on an enduring, uncreated heaven. Secondly, I have suggested that Hebrews' eschatology is instead focused on how God, with his voice, will shake all created space, both heaven and earth, causing change and enabling certain things to remain.

What purpose might such an eschatology have in the rhetorical aims of Hebrews? How does a cosmological claim about the future help the audience now? First, it is important to realise the significance that space/place has for understanding the world and our place within it. The budding discipline of critical spatiality illustrates this point very clearly.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> For the basic translation, see Adams, *Stars Will Fall*, 190; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 667; Filtvedt, 'Creation', 301; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 482. For good representatives of an annihilation view, see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 381; Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich*, 119; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 688; G. Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie*, 469–70; E. Grässer, *An die Hebräer (Hebr 10,19–13,25)* (EKKNT 17/3; Zürich: Benziger Verlag/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997) 128; Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 128. For representatives of 'removal' without annihilation, see Adams, *Stars Will Fall*, 182–96; J. C. Laansma, *The Letter to the Hebrews: A Commentary for Preaching, Teaching, and Bible Study* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017) 315–6.

<sup>44</sup> For a similar conclusion, see S. Schapdick, 'Die Metathesis der erschütterbaren Dinge, "damit das Unerschütterbare bleibe" (Hebr 12,27): Verwandlung—Vernichtung—Wandelbarkeit? Zum Verständnis des Begriffs μεταθεις im Kontext von Hebr 12,1–29 (Teil II)', *BZ* 57 (2013) 46–50. For agreement that destruction is not in view here, see Lee, *New Jerusalem*, 260; Moo, *Hebrews*, on 12.18–29; Rissi, *Die Theologie*, 129.

<sup>45</sup> For a similar focus on God's purposes instead of inherent 'unshakableness', see Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 668–9; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 482; Tymeson, 'Material World', 272.

<sup>46</sup> For some applications of critical spatiality to Hebrews, see Berquist, 'Critical Spatiality', 181–93; G. Gelardini, 'Charting "Outside the Camp" with Edward W. Soja: Critical Spatiality and Hebrews 13', *Hebrews in Contexts* (ed. G. Gelardini and H.W. Attridge; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 91; Leiden: Brill, 2016) 210–37; G. Gelardini,

For an audience who is being exhorted to endure suffering (even if they have not yet been exposed to the worst), the expectation of a future change in space, where power no longer belongs to those who are making them suffer, is significant and encouraging. The author of Hebrews wants his audience to endure, and he motivates their endurance by picturing a time when their lived space will no longer be dominated by oppressors. For the author, a proper understanding of cosmology leads to endurance and faithfulness.

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