

**“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
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THESIS

ABSTRACT

**THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF
THE WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS**

Scientific coordinators:

PROF. UNIV. DR. MOLNÁR JÁNOS

CONF. UNIV. DR. LÉSZAI LEHEL

**PhD student:
VERES ERNŐ**

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KEY WORDS

warning, Old Testament, sabbath, angel, salvation, intertextual, punishment, death, participium, allusion, echo,

INTRODUCTION

Our research focuses on the extent to which the warnings of Hebrews and its Old Testament background influence our knowledge of salvation and our practical theology.

Critical commentaries on the warnings in Hebrews over the last decades have led to a number of scholarly studies that have approached the issue using synthetic, historical-critical, social-scientific, socio-theoretical, oral-critical and intertextual methods, in addition to the traditional mainstream theological approaches of Calvinism and Arminianism. The textual research of Radu Gheorghita has also become significant in the study of the background of Hebrews, as he has made an in-depth study of the influence of the Septuagint in the background to the writing of Hebrews, particularly in the way it shaped the final form of the letter.

We believe that the intertextual method can be used to place the warning passages of Hebrews in a perspective in which we can observe the encounter and reception of texts of different origins in a new textual context. At the same time, this kind of textual research offers a unique opportunity to compare and structurally analyse different texts and to draw theological or critical conclusions from them.

It is believed that a more thorough examination of Old Testament quotations, allusions and echoes will yield significant results in the interpretation of the warning passages. Yet, in practice, one of the most difficult challenges is to "bring the conclusions to life", especially in pastoral ministry where biblical knowledge and student

reception play a major role in understanding.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The goals of our research has been mainly achieved by using the intertextual method as we tried to search for Old Testament textual references that establish the linguistic, historical, and dogmatic background of the letter due to the popular use of the Septuagint. An essential principle of intertextuality in theology is that it is not directed against the authenticity of biblical texts, but simply sees the possibility of attributing a new interpretation to an earlier text or passage by the work of the same Spirit who once made the original statement.

By exploring the Old Testament background and by applying the methods used by the author, we have come closer to the main purposes of the warning passages in the letter and to the possibility to prove that the hypotheses are true. In order to achieve these, we have sought to interpret the text with theological objectivism, so that the exegesis is not based on preconceptions of Calvinism and Arminianism, but on the conclusions drawn from Old Testament examples and through the understanding of the author's hermeneutical method.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH

Our main hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Hebrews was addressed to converted Jewish Christians.

H2: Salvation in Christ cannot be lost.

H3: The Old Testament references in the warnings have a preventive effect.

H4: Renewal to repentance is not impossible for the fallen believer.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In the first chapter of our research, we describe the field of research, research methods, intertextual text analysis, and clarification of relevant concepts.

The subject of our research is the warning passages of the letter, with special attention to its text, the Old Testament background, the recipients, the message and its theological implications. The warning passages are as follows: Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29.

In the second chapter of the research, the most probable date of the writing of the letter is placed between 65 and 70 AD, based on the external and internal evidence of the letter. With regard to authorship, we concluded that the traditional Pauline authorship cannot be maintained, since the author belonged to the second generation of Christians. The question of the identity of the addressees was also addressed in the introductory chapter, but the proof of hypothesis H1 - The letter was addressed to converted Jewish Christians - was provided by a specific examination of the warning passages. The main source material for the letter was found to be the Greek text of the Septuagint, as supported by common language, quotations, allusions and other references.

The author's hermeneutics also reveals the allegorical interpretation of Philo, the typology of the first Christians and the catalytic role of the Mishnah. We also point out that the interpretative practices of the first century show different methods: Philo of Alexandria favoured allegory, while the Christians of the first century drew on typology.

In the hermeneutic part of our research, we have also taken into account the conclusions of Daube, who not only showed that the rule of *qal wahomer* was one of the popular methods of literary interpretation in the time of Jesus, but also demonstrated that tradition had already become equivalent to the Bible in that period.

Concerning the hermeneutical method, we find that freedom, as interpreted by the New Testament writers in the New Testament, was unique and inimitable. The authority of the authors of the apostolic age, inspired by the Holy Spirit, served as an authentic reinterpretation and Christotelian hermeneutics of the Old Testament pretext.

The synthesis of the warnings in the letter was divided into four groups of constituents: warning, source of danger, example, and consequence. In this, we relied on

McKnight's synthetic analysis, which we supplemented with the current subject matter of our research in relation to the "Old Testament example".

In the third chapter of the study, we examined the first warning passage (Heb 2:1-4). Here we find a strong influence of the LXX regarding the echo of the angels. Our understanding of the angelic phenomenon and its background in the Septuagint is aided by a study of Qumran literature. In this chapter, it has been shown that the background of Hebrews goes beyond the Septuagint literature, as it also includes the apocryphal literature of the intertestamental period. The Book of Jubilees sheds light on the tradition of angelic intercession on Mount Sinai, and the Book of Enoch reveals the origin of the angelic escort of the Lord on Mount Sinai (Heb 12:22). The mention of "Mount Sinai" and the "ten thousand saints" (1 En 1:4) reinforces in the reader an echo of Deut 32:2, where the theophany is seen to have been established precisely in the context of the giving of the Law. This is the image used by the writer of Hebrews in 2:2, where the intertextual echo includes the giving of the law on Mount Sinai (Deut 32:2), the place of the Lord's dwelling in heaven (Heb 12:22) and the apocalyptic theophany of Enoch (Enoch 1,9). Philo's writing also records the supernatural transmission of the Torah in the presence of angels. The consequence of the death penalties in the Old Testament (Torah) was manifested in physical death. In the context of the first warning passage, we will also examine God's just punishment in light of the teachings of the Torah. The Old Testament examples show that there were two classes of crimes: (1) religious crimes against God and (2) civil crimes.

We will also explore that the theological implication of the term σωτηρία in the warning passage clearly refers to the past, to the gospel preached by Christ. The author does not question the salvation of the recipients, but fears them from the danger of drifting away, thus proving the preventive character of hypothesis H3. He uses the means of rhetoric (comparison, question, *qal wahomer*) to influence them to pass on the speech of salvation. hypothesis H1, which refers to the identity of the recipients, is supported by the use of the first person of the plural, and the teaching on angels supports the Judeo-Christian background. The signs and wonders in both the Old Testament and the New Testament were authentic testimonies of God, by which the author reaffirms the theological weight of hypothesis H3.

In the fourth chapter of the research, we examined the context and Old Testament background of the second warning section (Heb. 3:7–4:13), showing that the author

presents the dangers and consequences of temptation by intertextual citation, metatextual interpretation, allusion, and a typological and theological redefinition of the concept of Sabbath. Theologically, the second warning section warns of the consequences of rebellion and unbelief, which the author supports with Psalm 95. The temptation of God at Kadesh Barnea was not without consequences. The disobedient people who tempted God could not escape just punishment, which was seen in the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and the death of the generation of the wilderness coming out of Egypt. The consequence of the Old Testament temptations was both physical death and the people's inability to enter the Promised Land. The point of the second warning is that the author uses Old Testament examples to point out that God's wrath will overtake those who turn their backs on divine providence. This justifies the preventive nature of the warning: Hypothesis H3.

In this chapter, we will also show that the interplay of the terms *κατάπαυσις* and *σαββατισμὸς* refers to both the intratextual and intertextual relationship between Hebrews and the LXX text. As for the *Sabbath*, we conclude that this day was not only a day of rest, but also a day of God, the religious character of which is attested to by non-Torahic literature. With regard to the *Sabbath*, we also considered it important to emphasize that the fact that the seventh day in the Old Testament preceded the practice of the cultic *Sabbath* as a divine rest suggests that, rather than reviving and practising the cultic *Sabbath*, including the question of the *Sabbath* day, we should rather shift the dogmatic questions to the soteriological plane of entering into the rest of God.

Furthermore, the semantic analysis of the two conditional sentences in the third chapter of Hebrews leads to the conclusion that the logic of the arguments is best justified by the "evidence-conclusion" method. This confirms hypothesis H1, according to which the recipients of the letter were genuine Christians whose perseverance followed precisely from the fact of evidence. The same relationship also confirms hypothesis H2, according to which the salvation that has been obtained cannot be lost. The phrases "the house of Christ" (Heb 3:6) and "partakers of Christ" (Heb 3:14) communicate a factual reality that is the basis for believers' perseverance in salvation.

The fifth chapter of the study is an examination of the third warning passage (Heb 5:11-6:12), in which we find that the author encourages the recipients to reach *τελειότης* ("fullness", "maturity"). It follows that believers who were prone to backsliding and

inaction were not risking the loss of their salvation in Christ, but the opportunity and blessings of their growth in Christ.

In an essential part of the warning passage, the author expresses the danger of backsliding in a return to "the elementary doctrine of Christ (Messiah)". All this is preventive in nature, which justifies hypothesis H3. The further results of the research, especially the pretext of the intertextual allusions, confirm that the recipients of the letter were converted Jewish Christians who were enormously tempted by the idea of returning to the recognised religion of Judaism and its mature catechism.

In the first and second verses of the sixth chapter of Hebrews, the author presents six religious themes which formed the basic tenets of the Jewish catechism. The six nouns are all in genitive and belong to the same semantic field of the noun *θεμέλιος*. This is expressed by their function, since they are all used as adjectives of the noun. Hypothesis H1 is also confirmed here, according to which the recipients were converted Jewish Christians. Repentance, faith in God, ablutions, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment all attest to an Old Testament background and dogmatic practice. However, we have not found the material evidence in the Septuagint to be sufficient to justify the faith in the resurrection.

An examination of the core of the warning, especially the participial structures and the interpretation of *ἀδύνατος*, supports hypothesis H4, that the "impossible" expression of regeneration to repentance does not indicate an absolute apostasy. For the fallen believer, then, there is always the possibility of conversion, if he ceases to do what for him is the crucifixion and disgrace of Christ.

In chapter six, we examined the fourth warning passage of the letter and its Old Testament background (Heb 10:19-39). We found that the author's first exhortation in the warning passage has an encouraging purpose, which is to make believers dare to come (*προσερχώμεθα*), that is, to enter into a relationship with the living God, who who made it possible to build and maintain a personal relationship with him through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The second exhortation in the warning passage appeals to keeping our faith (*κατέχωμεν*) and being faithful to the God who promises. The third exhortation displays the idea of caring for one another (*κατανοῶμεν*). In our research we have revealed that the author encourages the recipients to persevere in order to protect them from the danger of

apostasy. In this chapter, we have also shown that apostasy was a real but exceptional source of danger for the recipients in replacing the sacrifice of Christ with the Old Testament sacrifices. This substitution was a theoretically impossible undertaking because there is no way back from the sacrifice of Christ to the Old Testament sacrifices. The religion of Judaism may have provided refuge for the increasingly intense persecution of retreating Jewish Christians, but it was only a one-way route from the Old Testament sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice.

In his theological argument, the author of the letter also sees it important to point out that in the Mosaic covenant there was no atoning sacrifice for the commission of intentional sin. This awareness made the recipients even more determined to persevere in the faith, since the Old Testament example conveyed a message that God's judgment would catch up with those who sinned intentionally. There is also a very serious warning in this important message: if believers sin willfully, judgment will catch up with them just as it did with the people of Israel in the wilderness. The warning against willful sin was not because of the potential loss of the earned aspect of salvation, but was timely because of the serious consequences of backsliding. Hypothesis H2 is justified by an interpretation of the "no more sin offering" syntagm in the Old Testament context. Here again, the Old Testament examples serve as a background of warning and are intended to help believers' spiritual development on the path of salvation towards perfection, as hypothesis H3 also claims.

In connection with the "fire" that appears in the warning, we have shown that in many cases it meant a divine response to the sin committed. In an apocalyptic and eschatological sense, fire was the instrument of final judgment in the Old Testament (Ps 50:3; Mic 1:7; Joel 3:3; Zoph 1:18; 3:8; Mal 3:2). The author's reference to judgment by fire was a reference to examples of Old Testament punishments that served as a deterrent to the recipients. We have also shown that the author intended his warnings to warn believers against the sin of backsliding and to help them reach maturity.

In chapter seven, we analysed the final warning passage in Hebrews (Heb 12:14-29). Here again, the warning passage contains Old Testament examples that appear as metaphors: the ungodly life of Esau (12:16-17), the theophany on Mount Sinai (12:18-21), and the blood of Abel (12:24). In this chapter, the author brings an Old Testament example of warning to life for the recipients through an onomastic allusion. In our research, we have

shown that the author of Hebrews not only recalls but also reinterprets the tradition concerning the character of Esau. The research pays particular attention to the meanings of the terms fornication (πόρνος) and ungodly (βέβηλος), with which the author depicts Esau's character. The author identifies the consequence of Esau's misguided action as rejection. Here it is important to point out that the text does not imply that with the loss of the blessing of the firstborn, Esau lost everything else in his life.

In comparing Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, we should point out that the writer of the letter uses the method of comparison in verses 18-24 of chapter 12 to convince the recipients that Mount Zion means more and is more valuable to them than Mount Sinai. The accompanying phenomena of theophany on Mount Sinai serve as intertextual allusions, creating a past-based basis of comparison in the minds of the recipients. In the book of Micah, the prophet places the equivalence mark between four concepts through poetic parallelism: 'the mountain of the Lord', 'the house of the God of Jacob', 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem' (Mic 4:2). These become interchangeable concepts, just as in Heb 12:22 'Mount Zion', 'the city of the living God' and 'the heavenly Jerusalem'. On the semantic level, it is also apparent that, while the author of the Pretext addresses the need for a pilgrimage to Mount Zion to the Gentiles in order to hear the word of the Lord, the writer of Hebrews makes the call to the Judeo-Christian church, but its significance is revealed precisely in the reference back to what has already happened for them. However, the call is not to go to Mount Zion, which has already been established in the relationship between the Christians and Jesus, but to listen to the Word and abide in it.

From the last warning passage we also show that the allusion to Abel's blood is present both intratextually and intertextually in the text. The former is found in Heb 11:4, the latter in Gen 4:10. The two bloods in themselves, in their relationship to each other, convey a symbolic message. However, there is a significant difference between the two messages and speeches: the blood of Jesus, unlike the blood of Abel, achieved atonement. The author of the letter thus confirms the fact of redemption and the privileged status of the hearers.

The onomastic allusion supports hypothesis H3, according to which Old Testament references (Esau) in warnings have a preventive effect. The perfect tense of the verbs 'you have come' (12:22) and 'you have been recorded' (12:23) and the semantic meaning of the participles support hypotheses H1 and H2. In the fifth warning, hypothesis H2 is also

confirmed by the author's conviction ("we have obtained an unshakable kingdom"), which proves that salvation that has already been "obtained" cannot be lost. So the possibility of losing salvation is not even mentioned in this warning, but the metaphor of the "consuming fire" of God confirms Calvin's conclusion and hypothesis H3: "God is working by every means to draw us close to Himself."

The eighth chapter presents the final conclusions of the thesis and its practical usefulness.

At the end of the research is the bibliography and appendix. In the appendix you will find our translation of the warning passages along with the necessary footnotes.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn throughout the thesis:

1. Hypothesis H3 is confirmed from each of the warning passages, thereby establishing the primary purpose of the warnings in the preventive effect. The author's primary purpose in writing the letter is revealed in the pastoral intent, which was mainly to protect his addressees from the sin of backsliding.

2. The proof for hypothesis H1, that the recipients of the letter were converted Jewish Christians, is also very strong. The theological message of this is that it is not nominal Christians but genuine Christians who need the warnings expressed in the letter.

3. The H2 hypothesis that salvation cannot be lost is also strongly supported by evidence in the warning passages. However, in this hypothesis, it is important to note that due to the limitations of the textual framework, we were only able to provide partial evidence. In our opinion, this hypothesis can only be satisfactorily addressed in a complete synthesis of the New Testament.

4. The weak point of our argument is the confirmation of hypothesis H4. The internal evidence seems hardly sufficient, and therefore the examples of renewal to repentance should certainly be supported by more Old and New Testament examples. This leaves the door open for further research, which could be interesting intertextually even in the context of the New Testament writings.

The subjectivity of the research in proving the theses is reflected in the fact that we have tried to avoid the dogmatic influences of the preconceptions of Calvinism and Arminianism, which in turn has led to a growing affirmation in our textual research of God's electing grace, of our awareness of salvation in Christ, and of our ecclesial and social vocation to Christian maturity.

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