

FIDES ET HUMILITAS:  
THE JOURNAL OF THE CENTER FOR ANCIENT  
CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Fall 2014      ※      Issue 1

~*editors-in-chief* ~

Coleman M. Ford  
&  
Shawn J. Wilhite

~Editorial Board ~

~*Reference Board* ~

Michael A.G. Haykin, Th.D. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;  
Louisville, KY)  
Jonathan T. Pennington, Ph.D. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;  
Louisville, KY)  
Jarvis Williams, Ph.D. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;  
Louisville, KY)

~*Sr. Fellows* ~

Brian Arnold, Ph.D. (Phoenix Seminary; Phoenix, AZ)  
Matthew Y. Emerson, Ph.D. (California Baptist University; Riverside,  
CA)  
J. Daniel McDonald, Ph.D. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;  
Louisville, KY)

~*Book Acquisition Editors* ~

Trey Moss — 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism  
Shawn J. Wilhite — New Testament and Early Christian Literature  
Coleman M. Ford — Patristic Literature and Late Antique

Review Article:  
*Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*

Shawn J. Wilhite  
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

David M. Moffitt. *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum 141. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011. Pp. xix + 338. ISBN: 978-9-004-20651-9. £129,00/\$172.00 [Hardback].

The Christology in Hebrews is layered with themes of sonship, divinity, humanity, suffering, perfection, and typological Old Testament sacrificial images. As some have noted, Hebrews weds Christology together with soteriology.<sup>1</sup> David Moffitt's 2010 revised dissertation from Duke Divinity School, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, has surely stirred up controversy among evangelical scholarship, and rightly so.<sup>2</sup> Moffitt gives a new reading of the resurrection and atonement theory in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the volume is surely inviting for thoughtful stimulation among fellow New Testament Scholars and systematicians.

---

<sup>1</sup>David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 141 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 299; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 400.

<sup>2</sup>In November 2013, the Evangelical Theological Society dedicated a study group to discuss the contents of Moffitt's thesis: ETS 2013 Letter to the Hebrews – Atonement and Resurrection, David Moffitt's Thesis. This panel invited Douglas Moo, I. Howard Marshall, and Michael Allen to engage Moffitt's work.

## Thesis and Argument

Moffitt's thesis and argument is clear and slowly massaged throughout the entirety of his work. He contends for a "substantive rereading" of Hebrews so as to give a robust proto-creedal sequence: "the heavenly Son came into the world, suffered and died, rose again, ascended into heaven, made his offering for eternal atonement, and sat down at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."<sup>3</sup> More succinctly, Moffitt argues for a logical progression of the resurrection of Jesus in Hebrews and how it necessitates an exalted high-priestly atonement event. That is, the atonement is a post-resurrection, high priestly, exalted event.

Moffitt uses three chapters to prove his thesis. Chapter 2 highlights the humanity of Jesus in Heaven (Heb 1-2). The human body of Jesus sets him apart from the angelic hosts and enables him to reign over the *οἰκουμένη* (Heb 1:6; 2:5). Chapter 3 presents Jesus' ascension into heaven with a human body. He presents many Jewish and Second Temple traditions regarding Moses ascending into heaven with a human body. Chapter 4, then, presents an atonement theory as a post-resurrection event in the exalted heavenlies. If Heb 1-2 presents Jesus in bodily form and Heb 5-7 and other Hebrews passages confer High Priestly duties after the resurrection, then the atonement was an event that happened in the exalted heavenlies.

## Assessment

This, by far, is a very intriguing and interesting book. With each turn of the page, my interests slowly followed the meticulous and thoughtful argument. Intriguing and interesting, however, are much different

---

<sup>3</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 43.

than plausible. For Pauline theologians, or for that matter, some New Testament theologians, it seems highly suspect to see the act of atonement taking place after the cross in the heavenlies.<sup>4</sup> The more pressing question, then, is whether or not Moffitt's thesis is exegetically and theologically sustainable. Prior to doing so, the tenability of such thesis about the atonement *must not* overshadow so many other valuable aspects of Moffitt's argument.

*The Relationship between Jesus and the Angels.* First, one of Moffitt's earlier arguments details the superiority of Jesus over the angels because of his human body. Accordingly, Moffitt claims the human body is a firm declaration of the superior role of Jesus. That is, because Jesus possessed a human body and is now in heaven with a human body, Jesus is, therefore, elevated in status. Hebrews 1, obviously, demarcates a superior status to Jesus on the basis of divine sonship (Heb 1:5, 6, 8) and positional rule (Heb 1:8–9, 13). As Moffitt expresses it, Jesus is distinct from the angels' "spiritual nature" and the Son's invitation to rule over the οἰκουμένη (Heb 1:6; 2:5).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this forthcoming οἰκουμένη was always intended to be ruled by humanity, hence, the authors interpretation of Ps 8 in Heb 2:6–9.<sup>6</sup>

Hebrews 2, then, presents Jesus taking on blood and flesh, enabling him to become human so as to rule the οἰκουμένη. The vague reference of humanity in Ps 8 leaves one to wonder whether or not the

---

<sup>4</sup>Aubrey Sequeira. 2014. "Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Review)." *Credo Magazine*, January 16, 2014. Accessed July 10, 2014. <http://www.credomag.com/2014/01/16/atonement-and-the-logic-of-resurrection-in-the-epistle-to-the-hebrews-review/>.

<sup>5</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 118.

<sup>6</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 119.

author of Hebrews is talking about humanity, in general, or is a reference to Jesus, as incarnate Messiah. Moffitt takes a middle-way approach, easing the tension, and calling it a “false dichotomy” to force one interpretation over the other.<sup>7</sup>

It can seem perplexing why the humanity of Jesus can be used as an argument to elevate the status of Jesus above the angels. Moffitt solves this tension by locating Adamic traditions in Heb 2. Using *The Life of Adam and Eve* and *The Cave of Treasures*—two Second Temple texts—Moffitt depends upon Joel Marcus saying “Hebrews 1–2...is a powerful first-century witness to the legend of Adam’s exaltation above the angels.”<sup>8</sup> Moffitt rightly locates a possible background tradition to Heb 2. These Second Temple traditions highlight angelic worship of Adam because Adam is in the “likeness” of God.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, since Jesus is the “radiance” and “exact imprint” of God (Heb 1:3) and crowned with “honor” and “glory” in the incarnation (Heb 2:9), he is emblematic of an Adamic tradition that places him above the angelic hosts.<sup>10</sup>

*Bodily Ascent into Heaven.* Second, Moffitt makes a firm case for the bodily ascent of Jesus into the heavenlies. Unlike the “no resurrection

---

<sup>7</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 128.

<sup>8</sup>Joel Marcus, “Son of Man as Son of Adam, Part I,” *Review Biblique* 110 (2003): 55; Cf. Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 133–34.

<sup>9</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 136.

<sup>10</sup>Grant Macaskill may rightly critique Moffitt’s overly dependence upon Jewish traditions that may be more Christian than Jewish. Grant Macaskill, “Review of Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34, no. 5 (Aug 2012): 104.

advocates”<sup>11</sup> or the “spiritual ascension advocates,”<sup>12</sup> Moffitt gives a strong, cogent, and logically defensible argument for the physical and bodily resurrection of Jesus in the book of Hebrews. According to Moffitt’s argument in chapter two, Jesus partakes of flesh and blood and is invited to have messianic rule. Such an argument “implies that when the Son was brought again into the heavenly οἰκουμένη, he entered that realm as a *human being*.”<sup>13</sup> So then, the body that Jesus has in heaven is a physical body, no longer subject to decaying forces.<sup>14</sup> This resurrection as a man, according to Moffitt, rightly stands as the logical-center of Hebrews Christology and high-priest motifs.

Using Second Temple and Jewish texts, Moffitt shows common Jewish traditions permitted humans—in flesh and blood—to ascend into the heavens. These traditions aren’t necessarily influencing Hebrews, per se, but do show common traditional thought within early Christian and Jewish ideals. First, Enoch ascends to heaven in a body (Gen 5:24); Moses’ death is recorded, but he has no recognized burial place which may imply physical ascension (Deut 34:6); Elijah is also physically ascended (2 Kg 2:11). Second, the tradition from *b. Shabbath* 88b–89a conveys Moses ascending into heaven in order to receive the

---

<sup>11</sup>Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Peabody, MA: Fortress Press, 1989), 146–47, 406; Cf. Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 1.2.3.

<sup>12</sup>Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible 36 (New York: Double Day, 2001), 117–18, 305–6; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 148, 236, 332; Cf. Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 1.2.2.

<sup>13</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 145 emphasis in original.

<sup>14</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 146.

Law.<sup>15</sup> *The Life of Adam and Eve* 11:15 and 12:1 also hints at a physical ascension of Moses into the heavens. *Antiquitates Judaicae* IV.326 presents a Jewish tradition that Moses wrote his own death narrative (cf. Deut 34) in order to prevent any suspicion that he never died. This text, however, tends to favor that Moses ascended into heaven without dying. Whether or not all these traditions are true, they do provide Jewish traditions of physical bodies ascending into the heavens. The focus of Hebrews on the humanity of Jesus and the exalted state makes it plausible that Jesus is in heaven with his physical body.

Moffitt proceeds to make his convincing case for the resurrection in the book of Hebrews. He makes a textual and logical argument. First, his convincing textual argument uses two scriptural texts. Jesus offered up prayers to the one able (τὸν δυνάμενον) to save him from death (ἐκ θανάτου) in Heb 5:7. The benediction (Heb 13:20) presents Jesus as one who is brought up again from the dead (ἐκ νεκρῶν). On the basis of these two texts, the resurrection of Jesus is in Hebrews. Second, Moffitt also makes convincing logical inferences.<sup>16</sup> The inferences of “perfection” are between suffering and his high priestly role (Heb 2:9–11; 5:8–10; 7:28)—“perfection” is broader than resurrection motifs—but “perfection” does include resurrection. Moffitt’s strongest argument is explaining Heb 8:4 and Jesus’ tribal lineage. Hebrews 8:4 prohibits Jesus from being a priest if he were on earth. Because Hebrews portrays him as a priest, then Jesus is no longer on earth. Next, Jesus is from the tribe of Judah (Heb 7:13–14),

---

<sup>15</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 150.

<sup>16</sup>Moore rightly notes that Moffitt may be more logical than Hebrews. The current reviewer recognizes this valid contention. Many times, I wondered the same question. Nicholas J. Moore, “Review of Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (October 2013): 675.

which should prohibit him from being a priest. High priests are chosen from among men (Heb 5:1–2), yet Jesus learned obedience, suffered, and was made perfect (Heb 5:8–9). His perfection and humanity enables Jesus to have the title of High Priest conferred to him, a High Priest in the likeness of Melchizedek (Heb 5:10; 7:15–17). So, Jesus’ humanity enables him to be one among many to be chosen high priest. Jesus can serve as high priest despite his lineage (Heb 8:4) because he is now exalted into the heavenlies. He is now both Son and High Priest through his humanity.<sup>17</sup> This change from earthly life to exaltation implies a middle step, the resurrection.

*A Whole Vision of Atonement.* Moffitt’s work really has valuable insights to Jewish backgrounds, common traditions, and Hebrews scholarship. What readers, in my assumption, want to know is this: Is Moffitt’s thesis regarding the post-resurrection atonement tenable? I find Moffitt’s work rather convincing in the majority of places and I find other positions problematic as well. So, I say “Yes...but” to Moffitt’s final assertion about the atonement.

Moffitt’s position about the atonement is highly textual and logical. If, as previously argued, Jesus obtains a human body after the likeness of Adam (Heb 2), suffers, is made perfect, and then conferred the High Priest role (Heb 5–7), then Jesus presents himself to God as an atoning sacrifice in the heavenly temple. Jesus’ presentation of blood before God is comparable to *Yom Kippur* (Lev 16).<sup>18</sup> Thus, affirming the resurrection “unifies and drives the high-priestly Christology and the soteriology of his homily [Hebrews].”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 208.

<sup>18</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 216.

<sup>19</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 299.



I am in general agreement with Moffitt's position. First, Hebrews parallels some of the *Yom Kippur* event in Lev 16. Frequently, the details of the priest are limited and atonement is applied at the slaughtering of the animal (cf. Lev 16:6, 11). However, the more detailed narrative postpones the exacting of atonement until the high priest offers incense, sprinkles blood on the mercy seat, enters the Holy Place, or finishes the entire sacrificial process (cf. Lev 16:12–14, 15–16, 17, 18–19). So, atonement does not always correspond to the death of the animal according to Lev 16, but corresponds either to the manipulation and sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat or the accomplishing of other ceremonial acts. My central contention is: According to Lev 16, atonement is not purely accomplished at the death of the animal, but can be postponed until other actions and duties are finished. Hebrews typifies this Old Testament ritual with Jesus: he secures redemption for people by entering the Holy Places (Heb 9:11); he offers himself as the paschal lamb (Heb 9:13); he enters the Holy Place in heaven (Heb 9:24), and he presents himself “to put away” sin (Heb 9:26; cf. Heb 9:28). If the high priestly ministry is a post-resurrection event, then Hebrews atonement theology has striking parallels with *Yom Kippur* and permits atonement beyond the death of a sacrifice. Atonement is accomplished with the sprinkling and presentation of Christ's blood after the resurrection in heaven.

Moreover, this theory has partial warrant in Pauline theology. First, personal justification is connected to the resurrection. In Rom 4:25, the resurrection secures justification. The implication is that justification needs not only the cross event, but also the resurrection. As Colin Kruse says, “It was the death and resurrection of Jesus as one great salvation event that secured both our forgiveness and our

justification.”<sup>20</sup> Next, the gospel creed depends upon the resurrection to secure salvation in 1 Cor 15. *Primia facia*, the death of Jesus is on behalf of sins and secures salvation (cf. 1 Cor 15:3). However, if only the death event is needed to secure salvation, why does Paul insist on the necessity of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15:17?

Admittedly, Pauline theology focuses on the death narratives as the atonement event (Rom 3:25; 5:9; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 2:21; 3:13; Eph 1:7; Col 1:22; cf. Is 53:5; 1 Pet 3:18). This also has warrant in the *Yom Kippur* narrative whereby atonement happens at the slaughtering of an animal (cf. Lev 16:6, 11). However, what do we make of the Hebrews atonement narrative as post-resurrection? Moffitt says, “The logic of sacrifice in the biblical account is not a logic centered on slaughter, but a logic centered on the presentation of blood/life before God.”<sup>21</sup> I, at least, agree with the logic of sacrifice and atonement *in Hebrews* to be centered on the presentation of blood in the heavenlies, rather than on the crucifixion (cf. Heb 13:12). It’s my contention, then, that Hebrews coheres with Pauline theology and simultaneously with some *Yom Kippur* motifs. It’s not as if they are at odds. Rather, Hebrews provides a more holistic vision of atonement. The cross is not the only place atonement is realized. Atonement is the larger event that begins with

---

<sup>20</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 223; Also consult James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, vol. 38A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 241; According to Frank Matera, “The distinction that Paul makes between the effects of Christ’s death and resurrection is more rhetorical than real. There would be no justification without Christ’s death, just as there would be no forgiveness of transgressions without Christ’s resurrection. It is the total work of Christ—his death and resurrection—that effects the forgiveness of transgressions and the justification of sinners.” Frank J. Matera, *Romans*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 118.

<sup>21</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 299.

the sacrifice, dependant upon the resurrection, and finalized with the priestly, personal offering of Jesus in the heavenlies. Atonement is an event with sequential actions that are all mutually dependant upon one another.

I do have one major contention with Moffitt's thesis: he affirms that a sacrifice is not the place where atonement is realized. He says, "The argument of this study is that a sacrificial death is not the point at which atonement is obtained."<sup>22</sup> This statement overlooks far too much evidence for atonement, redemption, and other soteriological language at the death event of Jesus. For example, Heb 13:12 portrays Jesus being crucified "outside the camp" to sanctify people through his blood. Sanctification is accomplished through the shedding of Jesus' blood at the crucifixion, not in the exalted state. Pauline atonement theology also champions the sacrificial death of Jesus as the foci of atonement and other soteriological themes (Rom 3:25; 5:9; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 2:21; 3:13; Eph 1:7; Col 1:22; cf. Is 53:5; 1 Pet 3:18). Moffitt is correct to point to the entire atonement event, but fails to observe the efficacy at Jesus' death.

### **So...what's next?**

First, I highly recommend scholars and theologians to read this text. New Testament scholars would greatly benefit reading this text and wrestling with its implications. Theologians would do well to read this text in order to bolster current theological expressions of Hebrews Christology, Jesus' relationship to the angels (Heb 1-2), bodily ascension of Jesus and surrounding Jewish traditions, Adamic and Moses typology, atonement theory, and more.

---

<sup>22</sup>Moffitt, *Logic of Resurrection*, 292.

Second, future doctoral students and scholars should continue to test Moffitt's theory through the history of interpretation by asking two questions: (1) Does the history of interpretation reveal that Jesus' High Priestly duties ever extended to his humanity or only to his exalted status, as Moffitt contends? (2) Does the history of theology ever reveal atonement extending beyond the cross event? History of interpretation won't necessarily prove or overturn Moffitt's thesis, but finding historical corroboration will make it more palatable, or assist in dismissing it. For example Theodoret of Cyrus (b. 393) says, "For if He were High Priest as God, He would be so before the Incarnation."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, John Chrysostom (d. 407) says that when the author of Hebrews speaks of the High Priestly roles of Jesus "he is not speaking at all in this passage [Heb 3:1] of His essence or of His divinity, but rather of human honors."<sup>24</sup> According to Gregory of Nyssa (b. 335–340), Jesus is High Priest during his incarnation and exaltation.<sup>25</sup> Here are three church fathers attributing the High Priestly roles to Jesus' incarnation, not solely to his exaltation. Origen (d. 250), however, offers a tradition more on par with Moffitt's thesis. In his homily on Leviticus 16, Jesus is called High Priest and he makes atonement not at the cross event, but when "he penetrates the heavens and goes to the

---

<sup>23</sup>Theodoret, *Commentary of Hebrews*, PG82.697. Consult Rowan A. Greer, *The Captain of Our Salvation: A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Hebrews*, Beiträge Zur Geschichte Der Biblischen Exegese 15 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1973), 298–99.

<sup>24</sup>John Chrysostom, *Hebrews*, PG63.49. Consult Greer, *Captain of Our Salvation*, 284–86.

<sup>25</sup>Greer, *Captain of Our Salvation*, 120–21. Cf. Nyssa, *4 Theological Orations*, found in Gregor von Nazianz, *Die fund Theologischen Reden*, edited by J. Barbel, (Düsseldorf, 1963).

Father to make atonement for the human race.”<sup>26</sup> So, even some in the Patristic tradition offer two different interpretive traditions of Jesus assuming the High Priestly role and when atonement was accomplished.

---

<sup>26</sup>Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus*, 9.5.8.