

Hebrews 3:7–4:11 and the Function of Mental Time-Space Landscapes

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1. Introduction

The Epistle to the Hebrews is full of imagery of movements in space and time. “The wandering people of God” (Ernst Käsemann) are on their way to the transcendental realm, to the eschatological city (Heb 13:14). This forces us to take the dimensions of time and space seriously and to analyze the mental time-space landscapes evoked by the text. Such imaginative landscapes can, just like written texts, be seen as meta-texts with their own *semantics*: the meaning of the points in time and space; their *syntax*: the meaning of the connections between those points; and their *pragmatics*: the impact on the mind and behavior of the addressees.

It is important to know, in the analysis of such “landscapes,” that topological senses are not value-free.¹ This goes without saying in a volume about constructions of space. Nevertheless, a few words on this topic can be justified. In general above, before, right, center, and proximity are considered to be good. We call, for example, our forefathers those who are *before* us, although they are *behind* us; thus, we hold them in high esteem. On the contrary, bottom, left, behind, and so on are usually deemed bad; cf. “outsider.”

The time aspect, however, is also of great importance. In the example mentioned above, the forefathers can be seen both under the aspect of space and of time. The mental spaces evoked by texts can also be memory spaces or future, prospective spaces. The fascinating aspect is that the person in whose mind those spaces emerge can merge those timely different landscapes into a mental time-space landscape with four dimensions: height, length, width, and time. Within these four dimensions there is always a “here and now.” But this “here and now” is pregnant with meaning by virtue of its four-dimensionality and thus comprises | a powerful aid for the positioning and orientation of an individual or a group.² With regard to the orientation, an even more important consideration is the sacred space, which is always in the center. Sacred space and, equally, holy time create a cosmic order and a feeling of social security. It enables individuals and groups to locate themselves within the cosmos.³

By an exemplary exegesis of Heb 3:7–4:11, I would like to demonstrate the

¹ See, among others, Gehlen 1995 and 1998. |

² See Baudy 1998; Pezzoli-Olgiati 2003.

³ Bäumer 2003, here 690.

depth of the “here and now” of the pericope by placing it on a time and space axis and relating it to “the sacred.” Interestingly, time and space before the “here and now” as well as time and space after the “here and now” mingle with or, better, “curve into” the actual “here and now” and confer its dynamics of admonition and comfort. In our pericope, the addressees have not yet reached their “homeland.” The voyage to this eschatological “homeland” is dangerous, as the past will instruct; however, it is possible to reach as the future has promised.

By the way, we hardly know anything about the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, nor about his addressees. I surmise that he had lived in Rome and that he wrote to his fellow believers in Rome. Although, at the time he wrote his letter, he no longer lived in Rome.⁴ While we do not know the real author, we do know the voice of the implicit author of Hebrews.⁵ He presents himself as a teacher and preacher who directly addresses and admonishes his listeners. In this respect, the implicit author is even more vigorous than the real author; his strength is his anonymity. The narrative addressees and the implicit addressees are probably the same, as the author speaks to them in the second person plural continuously.⁶ The aim of his letter was probably to admonish those Christians who had come from Judaism but were on the verge of relapsing into Judaism: “recidivists,” so to speak, that he wanted to move back again towards Christianity. |

Let us return to our pericope. Hebrews 3:7–4:11 is a kind of Christian homiletic midrash⁷ of Ps 95:7b–11 in the Septuagint version (Ps 94:7b–11 LXX) which the author connects with Gen 2:2.⁸ It can be divided into three parts:

- (1) introduction of the Old Testament text: 3:7–11;
- (2) interpretation: 3:12–19;
- (3) consequence: 4:1–11.⁹

⁴ Cf. Heb 13:24 and 2:16.

⁵ Whether something like an implicit author exists is a matter of debate. An implicit author is a kind of text-immanent second self of the real author. Although the concept of such a “second self” is hardly manifest, in the exegesis of the Letter to the Hebrews it works very well.

⁶ See in Hebrews the many occurrences of the verbs ἀκούω and λέγω with their derivatives and composites: ἀκούω; εἰσακούω; ὑπακούω; ἀκοή; παρακοή; ὑπακοή; λόγος; λόγιον; λογίζομαι; ἀναλογίζομαι; ὁμολογέω; ὁμολογία; εὐλογέω; εὐλογία; ἀντιλογία. Therefore I will hereafter use the term “addressees” indiscriminately. |

⁷ Kraus 2008. For an overview of questions concerning midrash, see Neusner and Avery-Peck 2004. Enns (1997, 352) labels the text a pesher. However, in a pesher each element of a text gets one specific meaning in a linear way. The exegesis of Heb 3:7–4:11 is clearly different.

⁸ And he alludes to Deut 12:9 as well as to Num 14, 20:1–13, and Exod 17:1–7. See Hossfeld and Zenger 1999, 664–65.

⁹ And (4) “The power of the word of God”: 4:12–13. However, it is highly debated whether vv. 12–13 belong to the pericope. Most exegetes consider 3:7–4:11 to be a pericope; a few, such as, for example, Vanhoye (1989) and Gräber (1990), extend it to v. 13.

The author cites Ps 94 LXX almost verbatim,¹⁰ from v. 7 up to v. 11, in which God swears to the Israelite people in the wilderness: “They shall not enter my rest” (Ps 95 [94]:11 = Heb 3:11) – a proposition with spatial and time aspects. This rather uncomfoting sentence seems to be important for the author since he repeats it three times within Heb 3:7–4:11 (3:11; 4:3, 5), and also refers to it at one time (3:18).¹¹ The addressees will not have missed this.¹²

From the sentence, “They shall not enter my rest,” the author picks out the word “rest,” *κατάπαυσις* in Greek, as a keyword for his homily.¹³ Consequently *κατάπαυσις* occurs eight times explicitly in our pericope | and is also referred to three times implicitly.¹⁴ In addition, the verb *καταπαύω*, “to rest,” occurs thrice.¹⁵ In comparison to the rest of the New Testament, this is a respectable number, because beyond Heb 3:7–4:11 both *κατάπαυσις* and *καταπαύω* each occur only once.¹⁶ *Κατάπαυσις* shares with *החנח*, its Hebrew counterpart, two basic meanings: first, rest as resting place; and, second, rest as a state of physical/psychological rest. To be more precise, four meanings of *κατάπαυσις* can be distinguished in the Greek Bible:¹⁷ “rest” as:

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10 Most differences between the two texts are of minor importance: Ps 94:7b–11 lxx :: Heb 3:7–11: *ἐδοκίμασαν* (94:9) :: *ἐν δοκιμασία* (3:9); *εἶδον* (94:9) :: *εἶδον* (3:9); *τῆ γενεᾶ ἐκεῖνη* (v 94:10) :: *τῆ γενεᾶ ταύτῃ* (3:10); *εἶπα* (94:10) :: *εἶπον* (3:10); *καὶ αὐτοὶ* (94:10) :: *αὐτοὶ δὲ* (3:10). Only the place of *τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη* is significant. In Ps 94 lxx, God is angry with the wilderness generation for forty years (94:10); in Hebrews the forefathers have seen the works of God for forty years (3:9–10). The author connects this by the addition of the conjunction *διό* with the statement about the anger of God (3:10). So the meaning of Heb 3:9b becomes concessive.

11 Erich Gräber designates Ps 95, and even more the Septuagint version of it a “Paradigma des Unglaubens” (Gräber 1990, 179).

12 This is stressed by DeSilva (2000).

13 A large number of studies have been published about the theme of “rest” in the New Testament and in Gnosis. To mention some examples: von Ras 1958; Hofius | 1970; Helderman 1984; Laansma 1997; Wray 1998; Gleason 2000; Bénétreau 2003.

14 *Κατάπαυσις* occurs explicitly in Heb 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3 (2x), 5, 10, 11; and implicitly in Heb 3:19; 4:6 (2x).

15 *Καταπαύω* occurs in Heb 4:4, 8, 10.

16 *Κατάπαυσις*: Acts 7:49; *καταπαύω*: Acts 14:18. There are some more occurrences of the semantically related *ἀνάπαυσις*: Matt 11:29; 12:43; Luke 11:24; Rev 4:8; 14:11; and *ἀναπαύω*: Matt 11:28; 26:45; Mark 6:31; 14:41; Luke 12:19; 1 Cor 16:18; 2 Cor 7:13; Phlm 1:7, 20; 1 Pet 4:14; Rev 6:11; 14:13.

17 *Κατάπαυσις* occurs, surprisingly, only thirteen times in the Septuagint: Exod 35:2; Num 10:35; Deut 12:9; Judg lxx-a 20:43; 3 Kgdms 8:56; 1 Chr 6:16; 2 Chr 6:41; Jdt 9:8; 2 Macc 15:1; Pss 94:11 lxx; 131:14 lxx; Sir 5:6; Isa 66:1.

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- (1) a state of resting;¹⁸
- (2) a synonym for Sabbath;¹⁹
- (3) a resting place or inheritance of the Israelite people;²⁰
- (4) the location where God or the ark settles down or dwells.²¹

The first two meanings denote states of resting; the second two denote locations of rest. In the quoted text of Ps 95, *κατάπαυσις* has the third meaning: resting place or inheritance of the people; in other words: the Promised Land of Canaan. The fourth meaning, however, “resting place or dwelling place of God or the ark,” is typical in the Septuagint with six out of a total of 13 matches. Did the author of our pericope know all these meanings? Yes he did. More than that, he plays with the polysemes of the word, and eventually, combines all four meanings. I shall try to illustrate | that by a sort of homiletical exegesis, fitting the character of the text and focusing on images of space and time and their pragmatic functions.

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2. Exegesis

3:7a: In Ps 94 LXX (= Ps 95 MT), the quoted text, it is God who speaks; in Heb 3 it is the Holy Spirit who speaks. This connects the situation of Ps 95 directly with the contemporary presence of the hearers of Hebrews. The same God, who once spoke to the Israelites as they were going astray in the desert, is speaking now by his Holy Spirit. Please notice also the *praesens λέγει*.²² The author of Hebrews builds an imaginative bridge between present and past. He takes his audience thereby back to the desert and rebukes them by means of the words of the Holy Spirit, as God had once rebuked the Israelites.

Διό, the first word of the pericope, connects the quotation with the foregoing statement of Heb 3:6b “(...) we [the Christians] are his [Christ’s] house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.”²³ The statement is both consoling and threatening: consoling, in so far as Christians belong, as a kind of family, to the house of Christ; threatening, by the condition “if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.” As Heb 3:7 proceeds with a rebuke, the line of argument is in the first instance that of the danger of losing “the

¹⁸ Judg 20:23 LXX-A; 3 Kgdms 8:56.

¹⁹ Exod 35:2; 2 Macc 15:1.

²⁰ Deut 12:9; Ps 94:11 LXX.

²¹ Num 10:34; 1 Chr 6:16; 2 Chr 6:41; Jdt 9:8; Ps 132 [131]:14; Isa 66:1 (there as a negation of God’s dwelling on earth). Jdt 9:8, where the Temple is designated as τὸ σκήνωμα τῆς καταπαύσεως τοῦ ὀνόματος τῆς δόξης, is exemplary. See also *Jos. Apen.* 8:9; 15:7. Sir 5:6 marks an exception. There, rest is connected with the anger of God that rests on sinners. |

²² See Löhr 1994a, 229–31.

²³ Biblical quotations are from the NRSV.

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house of Christ.” The syntactical connection of διό to the following text is less clear. There are three possible explanations:²⁴

- (1) There is no connection to the following;
- (2) διό connects to v. 8: “(Therefore...) do not harden your hearts”;
- (3) it connects to v. 12: “(Therefore...) take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

The whole line of thought in the pericope speaks in favor of the third explanation. The lengthy quotation of Ps 95:7b–11, thus, prepares the admonition of v. 12 in a negative exemplary way.

3:7b: The audience will relate the quotation of Ps 95 to themselves. The σήμερον, the “today” of the quotation and the direct speech in the second | person plural, “Today, if you hear his voice,” are conducive to this transmission up to the time of the hearers, up to their “here and now.” Topologically there is an outside-inside relation: the voice of the Holy Spirit comes from outside (and from above) and pervades the audience. Illocutively, a hierarchical relation emerges; perlocutively, the advertence of the hearers is pressed.

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3:8 warns or blames the addressees for making their hearts hard. Up to the end of 3:8a, all the words so far can apply directly to the contemporary addressees of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The phrase “as in the rebellion” could, if technically read, already hint at the rebellion of the Israelites in the desert; but it is only at the end of 3:8 that the wilderness comes explicitly to the fore, and with that a period which lies before (or behind) the implicit addressees. This is marked by κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν, “at that day/ at that time.” The text of 3:8b is some sort of relief for the addressees because the rebellion took place in a past time. The time perspective is now – once. Since the Holy Spirit is still speaking the connecting topological perspective for both times is outside-inside. A so-called memory space emerges. The hearers are in the desert together with their ancestors in a mental way.

3:9a relocates, again the time of the rebellion, to the time of the ancestors. This is soothing. But at the same time the phrase οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν, “your ancestors,” links the rebellion to the present generation.

3:9b–11 plays in the past. It applies to τῆ γενεᾶ, “that generation” (3:10a). This

²⁴ Löhr 1994b, 89. |

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generation was so stubborn that God swore to them that they would not enter his rest. To repeat, *κατάπαυσις*, “rest,” in the quoted text of Ps 95 is a *terminus technicus* for the Promised Land, the Land of Canaan: the land where the Israelites will come to rest. A future in the past which had been lost: the promised, but forfeited, entrance into the Land of Canaan. I do not know whether the hearers of our text still remember that the quotation was introduced by *διό*, although they will have understood the threatening undertone: “If you are as stiff-necked as those before you, you will not enter into the *κατάπαυσις*”: a future in the present which is at stake.

In 3:12 it becomes obvious that the author targets his hearers when he quotes Ps 95. He warns his hearers against lack of faith, which consists of *ἀποστῆναι*, being distant from God. We have a new perspective here, that is, God is distant in place, he is above; and in time, he is in the future. The temptation of once (3:8b) becomes in 3:13 an admonition on and for every | day (*καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν*) “as long as it is called ‘today’ (*σήμερον*).” The author plays with *σήμερον*, “today”; it is the “today” of the past, an abhorring example; it is the “today” of the wandering, on the way to overcome distance; and it is the “today” of the promised future of being at home and of nearness. In short, at the end, it is a soteriological “today.”²⁵

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3:14 establishes, with its substantiation “for (*γὰρ*) we have become partners of Christ,” a connection with the initial *διό*, “therefore,” of 3:7 and then via *διό* with the foregoing pericope 3:1–6. Just as in 3:6, where being a house of Christ was bound to confidence, here being partners of Christ is bound to confidence to the end: a condition, which is connected with a statement in the perfect, *γεγόναμεν*. They have already become partners of Christ, but only if they remain confident on their way until the end.

In 3:15 the first part of the initial quotation is repeated. But now it is clear that solely the Christians, the *μέτοχοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, the “partners of Christ,” are addressed, not the generation which was once in the wilderness. *Σήμερον* is now the “today” of the addressees.

3:16–17 focuses back on the wilderness generation. All of those who were rebellious and had sinned had died in the wilderness.

²⁵ Cf. for this aspect of “today” Bäumer 2003, 699. In Hebrews we find the first “today” in 1:5; cf. 1:2.

This leads the author to the maxim in 3:18–19 that God lets nobody enter his rest who is disobedient, who does not believe. This is a message that applies equally to the wilderness generation and to the contemporary audience.

In 4:1 there is hope. The promise (ἐπαγγελία) to come into God's rest is still open.²⁶ The addressees should only take care not to stay behind (ὑστερηκέναι; perfect tense). Here again, now by the word ὑστερηκέναι, “to stay behind,” nearness, distance, and movement, a being on the way, are implied. This observation is not new. Ernst Käsemann had labelled the Christians of Hebrews a “wandering people of God.”²⁷ It is worthwhile to point to the fact that the noun κατάπαυσις, “rest,” never occurs without the | verb εἰσέρχομαι, “to enter.”²⁸ The pertinent question here is: To enter into what? Are the addressees just as the wilderness generation on their way to the Promised Land? Yes, they are on their way to the Promised Land but not to the Land of Canaan/Israel.

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In 4:2–3a faith is connected with having heard the good news, ἐσμὲν εὐηγγελισμένοι, again, as in 3:14, in the perfect tense.²⁹ In 4:6 the author is more explicit; there he speaks about those “who formerly (τὸ πρότερον) received the good news.” We can presume that here the author means Christians from Jewish origin, but who, by returning to Judaism, did not adhere to confidence, to faith. For such cases, the author presents three biblical texts about κατάπαυσις, about rest: the multiply quoted Ps 95 (4:3, 5); the account of God resting after creation (4:3, 4); and the successful conquest of Canaan by Joshua which, however, had not given the Israelites rest (4:8).³⁰

We can read about the creation (4:3–4) that all God's works are established before God rested on the seventh day. That means that, among others the κατάπαυσις, as one of God's works of creation, was extant as otherwise God could not have rested.³¹ The ἔργα, the works of God, occurred already in 3:9–10, with respect to the works that the wilderness generation had seen but which had not led them to obedience. The two occurrences of ἔργα in 3:9 and in 4:4 connect, by keyword connection, the history of the Israelites with the creation of the world. And in 4:10 the ἔργα pop up in relation with those who will enter God's rest in

26 For the meaning and function of ἐπαγγελία, an important theologoumenon in Hebrews, see Rose 1989.

27 Käsemann 1957; English: Käsemann 1984. |

28 Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10–11; implicitly in 4:6. See also other words in the pericope implying movement: τὰς ὁδοὺς μου (3:10), πλανᾶω (3:10), ἐξέρχομαι (3:16), σπουδάζω (4:11).

29 Cf. also σθηκερασμένους in the same verse.

30 On the relationship between Joshua and Jesus, see Whitfield 2010, de Vos 2012a, and Ounsworth 2012.

31 See, for space concepts in Antiquity, Zekl 1992; Algra 1995; Heuner 2006. |

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the future.

A similar keyword connection can be found in the occurrences of ἡμέρα, “day”: 3:8 – the day of testing in the wilderness; 3:13 – every day of the addressees; 4:4 – the seventh day of creation; 4:7 – a new day as today; 4:8 – a later day in the future. We can once more notice a connection of creation, past, today, and future.

Rest is as a work of creation principally extant, but the Israelites have, nevertheless, not yet come to rest. The proof for the author of Hebrews is that if Joshua had given real rest to the Israelites, God would not speak later, that is, in Ps 95 by David, about another day (4:7–8). But the σήμερον, the “today” of Ps 95, is still valid both now and in the future. | The keyword connection between rest after creation and rest in Ps 95 leads to a melting of the significances of the two kinds of rest. It is impossible to use the simple word κατάπαυσις for this, and therefore the author of Hebrews creates a new word, σαββατισμός;³² a word with the connotations that it is:

- (1) a constitutive work of God;
- (2) that God rested – rest is here a state of resting;
- (3) that it is some sort of place, similar to the resting place of Ps 95, that is, the Promised Land.

In Antiquity combining texts and their content by matching keywords was a valid hermeneutical rule.³³

Only after this merging of meanings, does v. 11 acquire its meaning: “For those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from his.” In other words, entering the rest means just like God entering into a realm of rest, entering into a divine realm of rest. In v. 11, this is not simply called κατάπαυσις, but ἐκείνη ἡ κατάπαυσις, “that (sc. qualified) rest,” a rest with all the above-mentioned connotations. Time, creation, past, present, and future as well as space, creation space, wilderness, the Promised Land, the dwelling place of the addressees, and the divine realm are connected with each other and even mingle. That which cannot simultaneously be formed in technical space, can be expressed by words and can be properly imagined and understood.

3. *Striving to Be at Home*

In order to understand what is expressed by means of words, these words are to be translated into a mental time-space landscape. The mind brings together what

³² See the excursus in Gräßer 1990, 218–20.

³³ In the later rabbinical hermeneutics, this was called “gezera shawa”. See Gräßer 1990, 209–11 and Bénétreau 2003. Regarding the term “gezera shawa” itself see Stemberger 1992, 28–29, and in particular Basta 2006.

written and heard texts cannot achieve on their own. The mind goes beyond borders of actual time and space. Memory spaces become actual spaces as well as future spaces and vice versa.³⁴ With respect to the Epistle to the Hebrews: a “today” from the past situated in the wilderness is a “today” in the contemporary “wilderness” of the addressees of Hebrews; and it is a “today” of the future, because the “Hebrews” are going astray and have not yet reached their destination. | The wilderness is the wilderness of once before, it is the “dry spell” of now and it can be the “runway” to the promised space of divine proximity. Only on one occasion, in Heb 7:19, is this divine proximity stated explicitly; it says: “there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God.” The author of Hebrews admonishes his hearers in many places to stay on the right path. To where does this path lead? It leads to the divine realm, considered to be spatial. The people of Hebrews are on their way to God himself – he is their “homeland” in some way.³⁵

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The “homeland” has a couple of imageries in Hebrews of which I would like to highlight that of the “house” and that of the “city.” I have already touched a few times on the subject of “the house.” The house is the space *par excellence* which belongs to the private sphere of an individual or group. The inhabitants of a house belong together by real or fictive family bonds. It is no coincidence that the metaphor of the “house” (οἶκος, οἰκησις, οἰκία³⁶) occurs so often in the New Testament. Just before our pericope, in Heb 3:6, the addressees of the Epistle to the Hebrews are referred to as “house of Christ.” Just as in 3:7–4:11, in 3:6 the space of this “house” is not given, but is conditioned: “We are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope” (3:6; cf. 3:14). Only if the conditions are fulfilled does a “house” emerge, which symbolizes the familiar nearness to Christ. This space does not exist *per se*, it is constructed.

Emmanuel Lévinas has worked out in his *Totalité et infini* (1961) that the house, *le demeure, l'habitation*, as symbol of “the own” does not only guarantee a feeling of security, but also figures the world:

Concretely speaking, the dwelling is not situated in the objective world, but the objective world is situated by relation to my dwelling. The idealist subject which constitutes a priori its object and even the site at which it is found does not strictly speaking constitute them a priori but precisely after the event, after having dwelt in them as a concrete being. The event of dwelling exceeds the | knowing, the thought, and the idea in which, after the event, the subject

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34 See the contribution of Bieberstein in this volume. |

35 Many other texts in Hebrews can substantiate this. Compare the occurrences of ἐπουράνιος, κληρονόμος, κληρονομέω, κληρονομία, κοσμικός, κόσμος, οὐρανός, πάροικος, παροικέω, πόλις, πολίτης. Samuel Bénétreau points to the fact that the verb εἰσερχομαι in Hebrews goes, with two exceptions, always together with a coming into the realm of God (2003, 213). Exceptions are to be found in 10:1 and 12:18.

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36 In Hebrews of the three words οἶκος occurs: 3:2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (2x); 8:8, 10, 21; 11:7. |

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will want to contain what is incommensurable with a knowing.³⁷

Lévinas concentrates on the individual. However, what applies for the individual also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, for the group, and in this case for the family. To expand on this, a house and a family belong more closely together than a house and an individual. The individual can be connected to τὰ ἴδια, “the own,” at the most; the house is more comprehensive.³⁸

This constructed house leads to a feeling of security, a feeling of being at home, a feeling of intimacy. Those who live within one house are mostly akin, and if they are not directly akin, they are close to each other. Those who live in one house belong to a family in the broad sense of the word.

It is asserted by many sociological and socio-psychological studies that space creates shared identity, and this identity in tu creates shared space. This shared space does not have to be real, it can also be mental. However, when a socio-religious group positions itself in a space which is not concrete, the same group can orient itself better within the real space. In this manner, a Christian group can be at home within a non-Christian society. Identity emerges both by separation and acculturation: Divine space as orientation binds the people of Hebrews together.

The Christians have defined themselves from the beginning as a family with God as father and Christ as brother. We can find examples of this perspective in the Epistle to the Hebrews as well. I would like to point to two occurrences:

2:11: For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters...

2:13: And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Here am I and the children whom God has given me.” |

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The early Christians needed a “house” for their “family.” Since they did not really have such a center, they constructed a “house” with God as the father of the “house.” But because one cannot have God at one's disposal, the utterances about God's dwelling in the house are all conditional. So the conditional statements are in fact declarations of faith and hope that God will in future dwell together with the Christians in their “house.” The κατάπαυσις, “the rest,” of the pericope Heb

37 Lévinas 1991, 153. Translation of the original French: « *Concrètement, la demeure ne situe pas dans le monde objectif, mais le monde objectif se situe par rapport à ma demeure. Le sujet idéaliste qui constitue a priori son objet et même le lieu où il se trouve, ne les constitue pas, à parler rigoureusement, a priori, mais précisément après coup, après avoir demeuré, comme être concret, en lui, débordant le savoir; la pensée et l'idée où le sujet voudra, après coup, enfermer l'événement de demeurer qui est sans commune mesure avec un savoir* » (Levinas 1961, 126).

38 Cf. the well-known phrase from John 14:2: “In my Father's house there are many *μοναί*.” For the topological image of John 14 see de Vos 2012b, 175–82. |

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3:7–4:11 is, to my opinion, a kind of heavenly house.

On the other hand, we have the imagery of the heavenly city. The well-known passage from Heb 13:14, “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come,” tells that the perspective of the early Christians addressed to in Hebrews is a future city. Many verses in Heb 11 and 12:28–29 let us assume that the future city is the city of God. Abraham, in ch. 11, “looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10). And the following quotation from Heb 11:13–16 may substantiate my assumption:

They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland (πατρίδα). If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country (κρείττονος), that is, a heavenly one (ἐπουπανίου). Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city (πόλιν) for them.³⁹

In Heb 12:22, the Mountain of Zion is equated with the city of the living God and the heavenly Jerusalem, thus becoming some sort of “runway” for its own transcendence of being the heavenly Zion.

The imageries of the house, the homeland, and the city all share the familiarity of the “partners of Christ” (3:6) with each other and with God and the proximity to God. That is why they can mingle under the heading of “being at home” or, better, “being at the real home.”

4. Conclusions

In Heb 3:7–4:11 the Old Testament topic of the “rest,” there connected with the Promised Land, is taken up, but it is modified into a rest that has, first, a cosmological foundation in creation, because it was one of the works of God, and that has, second, a theological foundation in God himself, since God rested on the seventh day after the completion of the | creation. So if the people of Hebrews are on their way to “this rest” (εις ἐκείνην τὴν κατάπαυσιν, 4:11), they are in fact on their way to God/his realm. That is their real, albeit eschatological home.⁴⁰ Nevertheless the way and the destination are clear.

“Rest” in Heb 3 :7–4: 11 is the keyword that binds together past, present, and future. It creates a cosmological, divine, and eschatological space that marks the orientation of the addressees of Hebrews. It admonishes and it comforts them. It

39 A convincing study on the “real homeland” of the addressees of Hebrews, especially in Heb 11, is Backhaus 2001. |

40 See also Enns 1997. I do not understand why Judith Hoch Wray concludes “that REST remains an undeveloped and unsustainable theological metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews because ENTERING INTO THE REST has not become a part of the Christology of the writer of Hebrews” (Wray 1998, 91). Is that necessary? |

gives them a position, a feeling of security in their socio-religious “today.” In short, it gives them rest and a resting place: at once actual, transitional, and eschatological.

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