Allowing the Final Form Full-Voice: Inductive Bible Study Method

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Abstract: The Inductive Bible Study method is a hermeneutical approach and process for studying the Bible. Focusing on the final form of the text and trying to minimize or eliminate presuppositions, it takes into consideration all relevant sources of evidence, observing and examining the text, asking questions from the observations, and answering them, primarily from the text itself, but with the flexibility to incorporate other types of evidence from outside the text if the text itself demands it for clearer understanding. The inductive method (IBS), as described and demonstrated in this article, emphasizes both the form and content of the text, focusing on the various contexts of the text. Matthew 16:13–28 is used to illustrate certain aspects of the method, and the telic benediction in Hebrews 13:20–21 serves as the main example of a text to which the IBS method is applied to yield text-centered results over against an emphasis on foreground or background matters. The results are often profound and always come straight from the context of the text being studied.

Keywords: Traina; Bauer; hermeneutics; interpretation; inductive; Bible; IBS; Hebrews

1. Introduction

The field of biblical studies is replete with hermeneutical methods, as anyone who has ever attempted to seriously study the Bible quickly finds out. Some of the methods focus on background issues, some focus on foreground issues, and some simply focus on matters of the text as received; but, all of the approaches have two aspects in common: they must deal with the text as it currently exists, and they seek to determine the best way to understand the text. Proper interpretation is the goal of the various hermeneutical methods. The method referred to and utilized in this article as Inductive Bible Study method, or IBS, can be described as follows: “Inductive Bible study is essentially a comprehensive, holistic study of the Bible that takes into account every aspect of the existence of the biblical text that is intentional in allowing the Bible in its final canonical shape to speak to us on its own terms, thus leading to accurate, original, compelling, and profound interpretation and contemporary appropriation”. The focus of IBS is the final form of the text, specifically the literary arrangement of the material content, although other critical methods are considered and incorporated when relevant and necessary. This essay will briefly describe the IBS method, utilizing Matthew 16:13–28 as an example to illustrate certain aspects of the method; then, it will be applied to Hebrews 13:20–21, a passage which serves as the climax of Hebrews and as a telic benediction.

2. Inductive Bible Study: The Method

IBS, as a hermeneutical method to study the Bible, seeks to approach and study a text of Scripture as a work of literature by focusing on the final form of a given text within the specific biblical book in which it is located. For instance, if someone wants to interpret Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity in the Gospel of Matthew, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), the IBS method would direct the interpreter to study the statement within the immediate literary context, but also within the structure of the book as a whole. How does Peter’s confession fit into the Gospel as written by Matthew?
Peter’s confession in Matthew, unique among the Gospels in terms of its range of Jesus’ identity, plays an important role in the unfolding of Matthew’s story of Jesus. The study of Matthew’s account of Peter’s confession would direct the interpreter to focus on the text of Matthew as it exists today over against any pre-final form of the confession or any editing that might have taken place to arrive at the final form. Interpretation, utilizing the IBS method, emphasizes the text as it exists in the best manuscripts we presently have. It does not focus on proposed forms that may or may not have led to the final form; Although, if there are significant text-critical matters in the final form, text-criticism and incorporation are part of the interpretation process. Additionally, comparisons with parallel passages in other books (Mark 8:29, in which Peter declares “You are the Christ” and Luke 9:20, in which Peter declares “You are the Christ of God”) may have value and play an important part in the understanding of the individual books, but, in this example, the emphasis of IBS is on Matthew’s account first and foremost; parallel accounts are considered secondarily. The focus in IBS is on the declaration of Peter in 16:16 and its function within the Gospel as a whole in the entirety of the presentation within the book of Matthew. The IBS practitioner would attempt to understand, within the context of the Gospel of Matthew, how 16:16 fits into the broader message of the paragraph, chapter, and book as we presently have it. IBS is primarily book-centric.

2.1. Step One: Observation and Questions

IBS stresses the evidence in the book gathered from observation of the text, both in the content and the arrangement. The IBS student initially studies the structure of the book as a whole through broadly observing divisions and the literary relationships the author appears to use in order to develop the message of the book in a particular way (e.g., comparison, contrast, causation, substantiation, particularization, recurrence, chiasm, etc.). The student is looking for those relationships that control most of the material and, at the book-level, those that control most of the book. The perceived structure of the book and structural relationships controlling the book would then lead to questions pertaining to the relationships (e.g., causation would lead to questions about how the cause produces the effect and contrast would generate questions pertaining to the differences that the author is emphasizing in the contrast). In this way, the observation of the text is raising questions about the text itself. Answering the questions which the observation of the text generates leads to text-centered answers and interpretation.

From the broad, book-level structure, the student then locates a particular portion of the text of interest or significance and narrows the observations and subsequent questions to a segment of text. Both structural divisions and literary relationships are once again the main elements being observed, but the interpreter already has an idea of where the segment fits into the larger structure of the book at this point. This level of observation (segment-level) then leads to detailed observations of yet smaller portions of the book. Observations at this level involve a variety of aspects that might be relevant to the study of the text (e.g., inflection of verbs, relationships between one sentence and the next, logical and contextual aspects of the sentences, the use of specific conjunctions and prepositions, etc.); with every observation comes a litany of questions concerning that which was observed, ranging from basic questions regarding definition (What is the meaning and significance of Peter’s statement, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”? What is the exact relationship between ‘Christ’ and ‘Son of the living God’? What are the major differences being emphasized by the author between Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity (16:16) and the perception of the people (16:13–14)); to rational questions (Why did the author include the two-fold confession of Jesus’ identity by Peter?, etc.); to a broad but invaluable question that can be added to any of the definitional or rational questions (What are the implications?). This careful process of asking progressively more detailed questions as the focus of the observation narrows down to smaller portions of text helps to guard against imposing questions on the text which the text was not written to address nor is the text prepared to answer. The IBS process allows for the text in its final form (cutting down on speculative
emphases) to raise the proper questions to be answered; the answering of these questions amounts to interpretation of the text from the literary context. This type of study, focused on the text in front of the student, enables the text itself to lead the student to the meaning of the passage by simply following the evidence in the text.

However, this does not mean that comparative work cannot or should not be performed. Returning to our example from Matthew, specifically the differences between the account of the confession in the three Synoptic Gospels (see above), considering the differences can be very helpful, such as the emphasis in Matthew on being a ‘disciple’. But matters such as comparative studies are not the immediate concern of the IBS student in answering questions from observing Matthew 16:16. The IBS student focuses on Matthew’s account within the context of 16:13–20, as well as the larger context of chapter 16, and the consideration and incorporation of the entire book. This is especially so in the brief example of Matthew 16:16 which involves the confession of Peter, as a representative voice of the disciples, over against all others. Within Matthew, that confession sets disciples apart from other ‘people’ (the term ‘people,’ οἱ ἄνθρωποι, in 16:13, is also found in 16:23, which is also significant, especially in the light of Peter’s attempt to prevent the crucifixion of Jesus and Jesus’ response to Peter), and that acts as a major theme throughout the Gospel. The confession in 16:16 takes on greater gravity when the confession is viewed in the context of 16:13–28, especially as the student considers the author’s emphasis on disciples in Matthew over all other ‘people’ (οἱ ἄνθρωποι). In Matthew, a person is either a disciple or that person is not. There is nothing in between those two relational positions.

2.2. Step Two: Interpretation (Answering Questions)

The answering of the questions raised by the text, which constitutes interpretation, once again involves a priority given to evidence from within the book being studied, specifically that which has contextual relevance. Evidence from within Matthew, referred to in IBS as ‘literary context,’ is much more significant than evidence imported from another book or even a secondary source. Certainly, historical information is necessary, but the main emphasis in IBS is the textual evidence from the context of the specific book which raised the specific question being answered. Any question raised by making observations in Matthew should be answered within Matthew as much as possible. To the extent that other evidence from other biblical books or secondary sources are essential, those should be incorporated in the process of interpretation, but in the proper way and at the proper time. This also goes for other critical methods such as form criticism, text criticism, or redaction criticism, among others. But the filter through which all evidence must pass is the final form of the book being studied. All evidence must align with the text as we have it.

The interpretation step in an IBS study involves examining evidence in the text, typically that which was observed in the preceding levels of observation, and drawing inferences which directly aim to answer the question. Through the process of citing evidence and drawing inferences from the cumulative and growing evidence, the interpretation begins to take shape and becomes clearer. In this way, IBS interpretation progresses on the basis of evidence, mainly from the book being studied, and because IBS is evidential, the developing answer to the question at hand becomes more and more firmly grounded in the text as it is built on evidence from the text.

With IBS, the interpretation comes from the direct study of the text, but the IBS practitioner must also engage with scholarship, usually in the form of exegetical commentaries. That is an essential part of the interpretation process, but only after the student has poured as much time and effort as available into study of the text. This final part of the interpretation step also provides the student an opportunity to investigate the history of interpretation of the given passage through commentaries. This interaction with scholarship helps prevent the student from veering away from historical orthodoxy; although, ultimately, the student determines how the input from the commentators impacts his or her own interpretation.

Scholars who utilize this method are often able to go further and make greater strides in their study of the text than the non-specialist, having access to the original languages.
beyond simply looking up words in a lexicon. However, IBS is also effective for the interested parishioner (non-professional) who reads for personal insight and comfort and learns to incorporate form along with content in the study of the Bible, taking any student much further and offering greater understanding of the Bible in every way.\(^5\)

### 2.3. Step Three: Evaluation and Appropriation\(^5\)

Once the specific question has been answered and the passage has been interpreted, the IBS student must then determine the parts of the interpretation that the student can and should appropriate in a contemporary setting. This involves evaluating the interpretation in the light of the overall biblical message in order to determine the applicability of an ancient document to a twenty-first century world. The process involves engaging other biblical texts, outside of the book studied, in order to determine the transcendence of the interpretation just completed. This step in the IBS process is vital if the student wants to apply it in some fashion to a modern situation or everyday life, something of interest to many students of the Bible who want to apply verses and passages to their life, whether from the pulpit or in conversation with others.

### 2.4. Step Four: Correlation (Synthesis)

The final step in the IBS method involves bringing various passages together from other parts of the canon which address similar or the same thematic issues as the interpretation. This synthesis of passages that are thematically related allows the student to develop a correlation of biblical passages in an attempt to create a biblical theology based on careful study of individual thematically relevant passages within the proper context of each passage engaged. It is a lengthy process, but applying the first two steps described above (observation and interpretation) to each passage of relevance should produce a contextually sound result because it would be based on careful, contextual study of each passage. This would allow for a truly biblical theology on various subjects, growing out of individual IBS studies which are brought into an exegetical convocation of passages from across the canon.

### 3. Inductive Bible Study: Hebrews 13:20–21

The book of Hebrews has become a popular subject in the world of New Testament studies for the past two to three decades. The uniqueness of the content and the intricacies of its structure have led many scholars to enter into the fray of Hebrews studies. Among the areas that have generated interest are sonship Christology,\(^7\) hermeneutics,\(^8\) and cultic matters.\(^9\) With a variety of areas from which to choose, interpreters have focused much time and effort in studying passages throughout Hebrews as they relate to their specific focus. However, the benediction (13:20–21) has not received much focused attention and would be a good place to apply the IBS method as a way to demonstrate the efficacy of this approach.\(^10\)

As with any good IBS study, we begin the initial step of observation by identifying the structure of the book as a whole and with an analysis of the author’s use of literary devices which control the development of the message of the book as a whole. What is happening book-wide in Hebrews, and how has the author organized the book? This is referred in IBS terminology as a Book Survey. See (Bauer and Traina 2011, pp. 79–142).

Applying IBS to the composition of the book, I see an overarching structure which divides the book into two primary units, namely 1:1–10:18 and 10:19–13:21, with 13:22–25 as a personal epilogue. These two main units appear to be arranged in terms of causation, with the first main unit (1:1–10:18) functioning as the cause and the second main unit (10:19–13:21) as the effect.\(^11\) Furthermore, the argument the author makes throughout the first unit (the cause) involves a general statement contrasting two dispensations of God’s revelation: the first having taken place “in many parts and many ways, long ago”, a revelation that was spoken to “the fathers in the prophets” (1:1), and the second having taken place “in these last days” and spoken to “us in a son” (1:2a). This contrast, setting
the entirety of the Old Testament (OT) revelation of God over the revelation of God in the Christ-event, is dominant throughout 1:5–10:18 as it reoccurs repeatedly, setting the former, partial revelation of God through the OT standards in contradistinction to the (implied) perfect or complete revelation or ‘speaking’ of God in a son, Jesus. This recurring contrast, which is presented as a general statement in 1:1–2a, is given particular content and controls the argument the author makes throughout the rest of that first main unit (1:5–10:18).

The text then shifts from the cause (the author’s argument itself) to the effect of the argument in the rest of the book (10:22–13:21). Following a transitional bridge which summarizes that God has spoken “in these last days in a son” (10:19–21), the author repeats the pattern of the first main unit. The author presents another general statement involving the new relationships the Christ-event has established, relationships between the believer and God (10:22), the believer and the ‘world’ (10:23), and the believer and other fellow believers (10:24–25). Those new relationships are then particularized in the rest of the book (10:26–13:19), leading up to the climactic, telic benediction (13:20–21) and the closing remarks (13:22–25).

From this inductive understanding of the arrangement of the book of Hebrews, it appears that the author has focused his argument in 1:1–10:18 on God’s eschatological speaking in a son (1:2a) and how that contrast (1:1–2a) is expressed by the author to his audience. The argument establishes the Christ-event as an eschatological revelation of God, with a purpose of inaugurating ‘sonship’ in the flesh, having first perfected this in Jesus (2:10; 5:8–9; 7:28) and having done so for all who are being sanctified (2:11; 10:14). The argument is then summarized (10:19–21) as the author moves from cause to effect or from the indicative to the imperative. Because God has established (10:9—ἀναρέεί το πρῶτον ἵνα το δεύτερον στήσῃ) the new relationships in the Christ-event (10:5–7) through his once-for-all offering (10:10), those new relationships function as described in 10:26–13:19, culminating in the benediction (13:20–21), the plea for the God of peace to set ‘you’ in order in every good thing to do His will, doing in ‘us’ (inclusive) what is pleasing to God through Jesus Christ.

At this point, considering the movement of the argument (1:1–10:18) and the exhortation (10:19–13:19), the benediction appears to carry significance for a better understanding of the epistle in general and, specifically, the purpose of the epistle. It naturally raises a question regarding the meaning and significance of the benediction (What is the meaning and significance of the benediction?), specifically that the God of peace would “set you in order in every good thing to do [God’s] will, doing in us (or among us) what is pleasing before [God] through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory forever and ever, amen” (See Witherington 2007, p. 365). This is the question we could attempt to answer from the text that could provide greater understanding of the book as a whole and possibly even the purpose of the epistle.

The argument (1:1–10:18) is centered on the Christ-event and God’s eschatological revelation ἐν υἱῷ (1:2a), the complete or perfect revelation spoken “to us”. According to 13:20, that revelation involves a number of elements, starting with the resurrection of Jesus (having led up from [the] dead—ἀναγεννέαται ἐκ νεκρῶν), who is referred to as the great shepherd of the sheep. This reference to Jesus as the great shepherd does not have an antecedent lexeme in 1:1–13:19, but the concept does point to the argument the author has made regarding Jesus’ care for those who are being sanctified (2:11; 10:14), specifically as Jesus goes before and leads (2:8b–10; 6:19a–20; 10:5–10, 19–21; 13:12–13) and cares for his sheep (2:18; 3:6; 4:14–16; 7:25; 10:21). Even the reference to the resurrection, which is only explicit in Hebrews in 13:20, has been previously implied, especially in Jesus’ role as high priest who gives himself as a once-for-all offering in heaven (9:23–10:14) but with ongoing ministry which continues forever (5:6; 10:6; 20:7; 7:17, 21, 24–25; 12:2; 13:8). And the reference to the blood of the eternal covenant seems to suggest Jesus’ self-offering as providing the means of establishing the new covenant (the κεφάλαιον over [all] the things being said, according to 8:1–10:18).
Just as 13:20 provides new terminology in Hebrews for the Christ-event (the God of peace; leading up from [the] dead; the great shepherd of the sheep; the blood of the eternal covenant), it also gives the reader a perspective of that which the author hopes will be the result of the letter, especially the prayer which serves as a benediction: that the God of peace would set you in order in every good thing [in order] to do His will, doing in us that which is pleasing before [God] through Jesus Christ, to whom [be] the glory forever and ever, amen (13:21)!

The main request in the benedictory prayer (13:21) utilizes a term found previously in Hebrews in 10:5 and 11:3 and is often translated “to equip” (RSV, NIV, NLT, NASB, ESV, NET): καταρτίζω.19 Considering how the two previous occurrences of the verb are used can impact how it is to be understood in 13:21. The sense of the verb in 10:5 is clearly that of the preparation of a body for the coming of Jesus, but the usage in 11:3 is much more complex.

The Greek text of 11:3 reads: Πίστει νοοῦμεν καταρτίσθαι τούς αἰῶνας ἡμέρας θεοῦ, εἰς τό μὴ ἐκ φανομένων τό βλέπομενον γεγονόντας. This is the first of eighteen verses beginning with the statement of means, “by faith”, from 11:3–31, but this occurrence is the only one which references the first-person, plural recipients instead of third-person subjects: “by faith we understand...”. However, it also connects to the other seventeen occurrences (and the verses that do not begin the same way but carry on the same subject, that by which those highlighted all lived by faith). This section of Hebrews is the time of “the elders” (11:2b—οἱ πρεσβύτεροι), those who lived in another age, very much keeping with 1:1–2a (“long ago” over against “in these last days”). And the entire list of the elders who lived “by faith” are gathered together in 11:39–40 which reads: “And all of these, having been testified through faith, did not obtain the promise, God having foreseen something better for us so that they would not be made perfect apart from us”. Again, this seems to place the focus on two different ages, that of the elders (a long time period spanning the OT times) and that of “us”, that is, those who live in the last days, in the time of the Christ-event. And yet, according to the reference to an about-to-be age (6:5b—δυνάμεις τὲ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος) and an about-to-be realm (2:5—τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν), it becomes apparent that one of the emphases of Hebrews is on the ordering of the different ages. This indicates that 11:3 might not be pointing to the creation of the worlds or universe (as many translations state) but rather the ‘setting in order’ of the ages, which clearly seems to be an interest of Hebrews.20

When it comes to the contextual usages of the previous two occurrences of καταρτίζω, ‘to set in order’ seems to be a good translation. In the quote from Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10:5, “a body you have set in order for me” makes sense, and in 11:3, “by faith, we understand the ages to have been set in order by the word of God, so that what is seen did not come to be from the things that are visible”. It points to a hope (11:1) that depends on faith, specifically a faith looking forward, something which characterizes both those in chapter 11, as well as connecting to the author’s statement in 10:39 where he contrasts “not shrinking back” to (implied) moving forward in faith, also connecting to 12:1.

To summarize at this point, the benediction (13:20–21) includes the prayer for the God of peace to “set you in order”, which seems to correspond to the other references regarding work to be done in believers: to watch out not to be carried away from the speaking of God in a son (2:1) or to reject the one from heaven speaking (12:25 with reference to 1:2a); the ongoing work of sanctification (present, passive, participles found in 2:11 and 10:14); the need for perseverance (3:6, 14; 4:11; 6:1–8, 18b; 10:22–25, 32–36; 12:1–13, 15); the need to be carried to perfection (6:1—ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα φερώμεθα); the need to pursue peace and holiness (12:14); as well as a series of individual exhortations at the close of the letter (13:1–19). Many of these statements are calls for the recipients to do something, but a few involve God and the work He does: speaking (12:25, through the use of present active participle indicating ongoing speaking, as supported by 3:7, 15; 4:7), sanctifying (2:11 and 10:14, again with both occurrences being present, passive, participles indicating ongoing action of sanctification), and the need to be “carried to perfection” (6:1, which is a present,
passive, hortatory subjunctive). These three actions which God continually performs (speaking, sanctifying, and carrying to perfection) could be understood as the ‘setting in order’ of the believers in every good thing, for the purpose to do His will, doing in the believer what is pleasing to Him (that which God desires, or better yet, that which God has declared “in a son”) through Jesus Christ.

The expression, “in every good thing” (13:21) appears to correspond to that which is referenced in both 9:11 and 10:1, both of which use the term “good things” and both of which refer to the coming of Christ. In 9:11, the reference is explicit, and in 10:1, it is implicit. In 9:11, the author has just continued the contrast between the former revelation of God and the eschatological revelation (1:1–2a), in this case with a reference to the insufficient sacrificial system which is unable to ‘perfect’ the consciousness of the worshipper (9:9), a system that would be in place “until a season of re-ordering” (9:10). The expression “until a season of re-ordering” (µέχρι καταρατιστήρωσεως) is contrasted with 9:11, which reads: “But Christ having come, high priest of the good things that have come about” (τῶν γενομένων ἁγιάσμων). Those ‘good things’ are in reference to the things which came “through the greater and more perfect tent, not hand-made, that is, not of this creation” (9:11b). These are good things only made available through the high priestly ministry of Jesus which cleanses the consciousness from dead works to serve a living God (9:14), something the former sacrificial system was unable to achieve (9:9). The good things apparently have to do with the cleansing and enablement of the worshipper to serve the living God (doing what is pleasing to God). The other occurrence of ‘good things’ reads: “For the law, having a shadow of the about-to-be good things...” (10:1a—τῶν µελλόντων ἁγιάσμων). As it pertains to the law, it once again suggests a contrast to the good things that have become a reality in the coming of Christ. These two passages, which involve the good things that have come with the eschatological speaking of God in a son, are now a reality and they come through the ministry of Jesus, a ministry which involves sanctification through the re-ordering of the believer. It is something that only the God of peace could accomplish: hence, the plea in the benediction for the God of peace to set the believers in order to do God’s will in every good thing, something which Jesus established in his coming (10:7, 9–10).

The final aspect of note to address in 13:20–21 involves the doing of God’s will, which is then restated as God “doing in us that which is pleasing before Him through Jesus Christ” (13:21). This appears to be the purpose of the ‘setting in order’ of the believer, and the doing of God’s will through Jesus’ sacrifice is tied directly to the sanctification of the believer (10:10) and requires the perseverance of the believer (10:36). This allows the book to come together with respect to the main message (God’s eschatological revelation in the Christ-event, specifically in terms of ‘a son,’ or more to the point, sonship), the purpose (to both exhort the believer to persevere and also to cooperate with the God of peace who is in process of sanctifying the believer), and the ultimate goal (to be carried to perfection). This benediction is more than merely a blessing spoken to the intended audience. It is a plea for God, who is faithful (10:23), to continue the work which He is doing, the work of peace or perfection of the believer, but with the absolute necessity of the believer to cooperate with the work that God is doing through His discipline as a father to a son (12:1–13). This is the means by which the healing of the ‘runner’ in the race of faith takes place (12:12–13) under the discipline of God as Father. This, as it turns out, is the main message from the opening words (1:1–2a).

4. Conclusions

The Inductive Bible Study method, as referred to throughout this article and as briefly described and demonstrated in Hebrews 13:20–21, is a flexible and comprehensive method of interpretation. It allows for the student to follow the evidence in the text and the various aspects of the text’s existence as necessary in order to answer questions which are raised by careful observation of the text. The method is clearly text-centered, focused primarily on literary features of the text, and allows the features and arrangement of the text to provide
The language and theme of perfection is found throughout Hebrews, including the following verses: 2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1, 8, 11; 7:11, 19, 25, 28; 8:5 (the term is translated variously as ‘to erect’ (NASB, ESV, RSV), ‘to make’ (KJV), and ‘to complete’ (NET), this last one carrying the sense of bringing to completion or perfection), 8; 9:6, 9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23. Note that the theme of perfection extends beyond the τελείωσις word group in Hebrews to include implied references such as the Sabbath-rest to which the author repeatedly refers (4:9; cf. 3:11, 18; 4:1–3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10–11), as well as the use of ἐπίτελεῖα, (7:27; 9:12; 10:10) and ἐπιτελεῖα, (9:28; 11:19).

As noted above, the definitive guide to this method is the book by David Bauer and Robert Traina, and the subtitle accurately describes it: *A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*. The method is quite effective and not only allows for interaction with secondary sources but requires it at the right time in the process, including the incorporation of other critical methods as appropriate, but always using the final form of the text as the determining factor.

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**Notes**

1. Among the methods which focus on issues surrounding the text are the well-established form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, socio-rhetorical criticism, and reader-response criticism, as well as the more recent focus on prosopological criticism and theological approaches to the text, among others. As Dennis R. Edwards stated with respect to the variety of approaches in the current hermeneutical environment, the arena of biblical hermeneutics suggests “. . .a virtual limitless list of approaches to biblical interpretation”. See (Edwards 2019, p. 70).

2. (Bauer and Traina 2011, p. 6). The Inductive Bible Study method was originally formalized by Robert A. Traina in (Traina 1952). His long-awaited successor, a further development of the method, was his collaboration with David R. Bauer, one of his former students and himself a professor of IBS studies for forty years.

3. The steps of the method are borrowed from (Bauer and Traina 2011, pp. 75–360).

4. According to Bauer and Traina, a segment is about a chapter’s worth of material. See (Bauer and Traina 2011, p. 143).

5. The term ‘student,’ as used in this article, refers to anyone who studies the Bible, whether a professional (academic scholar, pastor, etc.) or non-professional. The IBS method is accessible to any interested student because it focuses on the final form of the text over depending primarily on expertise of critical methodologies, something most Christians are simply unequipped to use. Clearly, the IBS method can take the specialist who knows languages and can engage the critical methods, as necessary, further than the average parishioner, but all who choose to utilize the IBS method and study the Bible are referred to as students in this article.

6. Due to the emphasis of this particular issue of *Religions*, with a focus on methods of biblical interpretation, I will keep this part of the article brief as these steps (Evaluation/Appropriation and Correlation) follow interpretation and fall into the category of proper use of the interpretation. For more, see (Bauer and Traina 2011, pp. 279–360).

7. Among the monographs addressing a sonship Christology in Hebrews are (Peeler 2014; Jamieson 2021; Brennan 2022).

8. Among the volumes dealing with the hermeneutics of Hebrews are (Laansma and Treier 2012; Pierce 2020; Gelardini 2021).

9. Among the monographs concerning atonement and cultic matters are (Moffitt 2011; Jamieson 2019; Bloor 2023; Urga 2023). For a more thorough listing, see (Bloor 2023, pp. 1–2).

10. For a study of the book of Hebrews using an IBS approach, see (Boyd 2012).

11. This division into two main units, controlled by causation, is a matter of emphasis over against strict, detailed taxonomy of cause and effect. The first main unit (1:1–10:18) is primarily exposition (argument, acting as cause), even though it contains some exhortation, and the second main unit (10:19–13:21) is primarily exhortation (exhortation, acting as effect), even though it contains some exposition. But the emphasis indicates an arrangement in a cause-to-effect movement. This stands separately but in relation to the structures of others, e.g., a five-part structure according to (Attridge 1989, p. 19); a four-part structure according to (Cockerill 2012, pp. 79–81); a six-part structure according to (Koester 2001, pp. 84–85); a three-part structure according to (Michel 1975, pp. 6, 26–36); another three-part structure according to (Riggenbach 1922, pp. XVI–XXXIII); and another six-part structure according to (Westcott 1980, pp. xviii–l). Needless to say, there is still no consensus regarding the structure of Hebrews.

12. The language and theme of perfection is found throughout Hebrews, including the following verses: 2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1, 8, 11; 7:11, 19, 25, 28; 8:5 (the term is translated variously as ‘to erect’ (NASB, ESV, RSV), ‘to make’ (KJV), and ‘to complete’ (NET), this last one carrying the sense of bringing to completion or perfection), 8; 9:6, 9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23. Note that the theme of perfection extends beyond the τελείωσις word group in Hebrews to include implied references such as the Sabbath-rest to which the author repeatedly refers (4:9; cf. 3:11, 18; 4:1–3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10–11), as well as the use of ἐπίτελεῖα, (7:27; 9:12; 10:10) and ἐπιτελεῖα, (9:28; 11:19).
10:2; 12:26, 27). The only contrasting complement is absent but implied in 1:1–2a—that of the complement to “many parts and many ways” which suggests ‘perfect’ or complete revelation by God. In other words, God’s eschatological word spoken “in a son” is the perfect/completion of revelation to ‘us’ over the prior revelation ‘to the fathers’ in bits and pieces.

Of note in the second half of the book, even though the contrast between the former speaking of God “in many parts and many ways” and the eschatological speaking “in a son” throughout 1:1–10:18 exists, those two time periods and dispensations of revelation are brought together through chapter 11 as those long ago are made perfect with ‘us’ (11:40) through the Christ-event. Jesus is referred to as the perfecter of “the faith” (articular) in 12:2.

This transitional passage, 10:19–21, is helpful in understanding that the reference to God speaking eschatologically “in a son” (12:2) does not merely take place in Jesus’ words. It involves what God has accomplished in the work of Jesus through his atoning sacrifice (10:19), his inauguration of a “new and living way” (10:20), and the appointment of Jesus as great priest over the house of God (10:21), all of which come under the heading of God speaking to us “in these last days in a son”.

Although the expression ‘the world’ is not used by the author of Hebrews as it is in John or even Paul’s writings, it seems most appropriate as a specific entity is not consistently found throughout Hebrews. Various references are found, such as the generation that hardened their hearts in rebellion against God (3:7–4:11), those that fall away (6:6), and especially the ones characterized by imposing afflictions and sufferings (10:32–36; 11:4, 23–27, 29–38; 12:3–4; 13:6, 12–13). ‘The world,’ as used in this article, is a general characterization of those outside of the family of God, according to Hebrews.

The term used in 10:24 is “one another” (ἀλλήλους), clearly suggesting a relationship between believers, those of the same family (1:14; 2:10–13; 3:1, 6, 12; 4:3; 6:12; 10:19, 39; 12:5–9, 23; 13:22).

The reference to the author as a male comes from the masculine form of the participle in the author’s self-reference in 11:32 (ὁγιαζόµενον). Regarding the contrast of 1:1–2a which is particularized in 1:5–10:18, the finite verb which controls the statement of contrast occurs in 1:2a, which indicates the emphasis of the text to follow is on the eschatological speaking of God εν νῷ̱ο̱ over against the prior speaking “in the prophets”.

The reference at the beginning of the benediction to “the God of peace” might be significant to a degree, but it is recognized by virtually all Hebrews scholars as found in numerous other passages, in particular with Paul’s writings (Rom 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor 14:33; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23).

Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey, the editors of the Hebrews volume in the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS—New Testament, vol. X) refer to Chrysostom and note his thoughts, including a translation of 13:21a of, “make you perfect in every good work to do his will”, adding, “that is made ‘perfect’ which, having a beginning, is afterwards completed” (239). It appears Chrysostom is indicating that perfection is being accomplished in the believer through the process of doing God’s will (13:21), as the Son established (10:5–10, esp. 9). Considering 10:14 and the statement that Jesus has forever perfected (τετελέωκεν), those ones being sanctified (τοιας ὅγιαζοµένους). It appears that the process in 13:21 is the sanctification process: the God of peace setting you in order, or “making you complete” to do [God’s] will. See (Heen and Krey 2005, p. 239).

Among the different versions that translate τοιας καίωνας as world, worlds, or universe in the creation of them, are the KJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, and NLT. The NET, however, translates the expression, “the worlds were set in order at God’s command”, which is closer to the concept that reaches back to 1:1–2a and God speaking in two different times or, possibly, ‘ages’. The text is not declaring ‘worlds’ but ‘ages’ as being set in order, supported by the immediately preceding verse and the reference to the ‘elders’ or ‘older ones’.

Once again, most versions translate this expression as ‘going on to perfection’ or maturity, deciding to treat the verb as active (KJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NET, and NLT). However, the NIV (2011) reads: “let us . . . be taken forward to maturity”, which properly places the emphasis here on what God does, but always with the cooperation of the believer.

A number of scholars acknowledge that the benediction recalls themes already addressed in greater detail in the book. See (Attridge 405; Cockerill 714; Lane 1991, p. 560). Lane states that “the prayer-wish”, the benediction, “takes up again central themes from the homily . . .[and] is organically related to the development of the sermon”.

If we were to take this beyond the step of interpretation to include evaluation and appropriation, we would study the heart of this interpretation, the sanctifying work of God the Father in the ‘race’ of the believer, making him or her whole (the plea to the God of peace), and identify other passages that might deal with this same concept (such as Ezekiel 36:23–32 or 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24) in order to determine how we might appropriate this passage today. Likewise, if we were to carry this through to begin a correlation, it might involve focusing on the sanctification process throughout Scripture, specifically that which God does in “setting [His people] in order”.

References


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