

A Thesis

**A Rhetorical Exegetical Study of the Warning Passage in Hebrews Chapter 6 in
the light of its Old Testament Background**

by

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The opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African Theological Seminary.

DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Alice Nyirenda Simutowe

June 2013

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ABSTRACT

Of the difficult warning passages of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Heb 6:4-6 remains one of its most challenging. The debates on the passage range from resolving its exegetical difficulties; disagreement over its inter-textual links, uncertainties over its theological implications, and much more recently, challenges with identification of the rhetorical strategies of the author. While many useful suggestions have been recently made on these issues, few scholars have explored how the author, as a Diaspora Jewish Christian, fused ideas from his Jewish and Greco-Roman rhetorical background to generate his argumentation which sought to persuade his hearers to remain faithful to the Christian faith.

This study is a rhetorical exegetical examination of the warning passage of Hebrew 6 in the light of its OT background. The interest is to identify the rhetorical strategies that the author used in his exhortation. The study also aims to identify the OT citations, echoes and allusions, if any, that the author employed in Heb 6:4-6 and how these can help in the exegesis of the passage. The study therefore investigates how rhetorical criticism and inter-textuality contribute to the interpretation of the passage. The other objective is to highlight the benefits and limitations of the applications of Classical Greco-Roman conventions to the Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews.

The thesis identifies that underlying the whole passage was the Kadesh Barnea incident recorded in Numbers. The study also finds that the author skillfully combines ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical tropes with traditional Jewish Rhetorical manouvres to achieve his overall pastoral strategy. Theologically, the exegesis identifies that the passage is addressed to a Christian audience that have eternal security guaranteed. Yet they were in a danger of slackening to a level of failing to grow into maturity of their faith due to some challenges they were facing. The purpose of the author of Hebrews was to spur them to maturity. This has great importance to today's Christians who think the journey of faith should be taken lightly.

The outcome of this study should contribute in the Bible study of the book of Hebrews to a Christian in a local church where the researcher helps in leading Bible study groups.

Table of Contents

<i>Chapter 1</i>	8
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	8
1.2. Objectives	19
1.3. Statement of the Problem	20
1.4. Problem Questions	21
1.5. Design and Methodology	21
1.6. Rationale	24
1.7. Hypothesis	25
1.8. Delimitation	25
1.9. Limitations	25
1.10. Presupposition	25
1.11. Chapter Overview	26
<i>Chapter 2</i>	28
<i>REVIEW OF SECONDARY LITERATURE PERTINENT TO HEBREWS 6:4-6</i>	28
2.1. Review of Literature on Key Introductory Questions to Hebrews 6:4-6	28
6:4-6	28
2.2. A Review on Scholarly Arguments Specific to Hebrews 6:4-6	39
2.3. A Summary of the Review of Secondary Literature on Hebrews 6:4-6	53
2.4. A Summary Table of Review of Secondary Literature on Hebrews 6:4-6	56
<i>Chapter 3</i>	62
<i>METHODOLOGY</i>	62

3.1. Defining Rhetorical Criticism _____	62
3.2. A Brief History of Application of Rhetorical Criticism to the New Testament _____	64
3.3. Rhetorical Criticism and Hebrews _____	69
3.4. Inter-textuality and Biblical Studies _____	75
3.5. The Approach to Jewish Exegetical Methods by the Author of Hebrews and Rhetorical Criticism _____	81
3.6. Overall Summary of Method of Rhetorical Exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 with Attention to its OT Background _____	86
<i>Chapter 4</i> _____	<i>89</i>
<i>EXEGETICAL STUDY OF HEBREWS 6:4-6 IN RELATION TO ITS OT BACKGROUND</i> _____	<i>89</i>
4.1. The Immediate Literary Context of the Passage _____	90
4.2. The Structure of the Warning Passage in Heb 6:4-6 _____	92
4.3. Exegesis of each of the clauses of the passage _____	93
4.4. Summary of Exegesis of Hebrew 6:4-6 _____	118
4.5. The OT Examples in the Warning Passage of Hebrews 6:4-6 _____	119
4.6. Summary and Conclusion _____	129
<i>Chapter 5</i> _____	<i>131</i>
<i>RHETORICAL EXEGETICAL EXAMINATION OF HEBREWS 6:4-6</i> _____	<i>131</i>
5.1. Rhetorical Analysis of Heb 6:4-6 using Kennedy's Modified Steps _____	131
5.2. Summary of Rhetorical Exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 _____	144
5.3. Jewish Rhetorical Tools and How They are Evident in Heb 6:4-6 _____	145
5.4. A Summary of the Rhetorical Analysis and the Jewish Rhetorical Exegesis of the Passage _____	150
5.5. Conclusion of the Rhetorical Exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 in the Light of its OT Background. _____	151
<i>Chapter 6</i> _____	<i>153</i>

<i>A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF HEBREWS 6:4-6</i>	153
6.1. A Summary of the Findings on the Warning Passage	155
6.2. Implications of the findings on a Christian in a Local Church	162
7.0. <i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	168

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The Epistle to the Hebrews has raised a number of challenging scholarly questions, giving rise to arguments including the difficulty of interpreting the warning passages. Theologians, preachers, teachers, and laymen acknowledge the interpretive difficulties that come with relaying the message in Hebrews to their audiences. Interestingly, Lane (1991:xlvi) describes the book as, "... a delight for the person who enjoys puzzles. Its form is unusual, its setting in life is uncertain, and its argument is unfamiliar. It invites engagement in the task of defining the undefined". Stott (1982:20) warns that, "If the Epistle is read hastily or superficially, one might be tempted to imagine that its themes are antiquated, irrelevant, or even esoteric." This is because Hebrews seems to recollect some ceremonial and sacrificial religious customs recorded in the Old Testament (OT).

The Epistle stands out as an enigma because the author is unknown and interpreters are divided on who wrote it and whether external or textual evidence will provide his identity. Scott (1923:1) refers to the Epistle as "the riddle of the New Testament." Many scholars have settled with the fact that the author is not known (Ladd 1993:617). Coupled with authorship question is uncertainty regarding its audience, date of authorship and its geographical setting at the time of writing. To add to the mystery of Hebrews is the fact that the information on the circumstances in which it was written is not very clear from external evidence (Allen 2010:24; DeSilva 2004:776; Ellingworth 1993:3; Lane 1991:xlvi; Koester 2005:231-251; Aune 2010:614).

Kent (1974:22) doubts the accuracy of scholars' assertions that the geographical location and nationality of the first readers can be determined. He states that the address, "To the Hebrews," dates back to the second century and that internal evidence does not explicitly unveil the readers as Jews or Gentiles (1974:22). Ladd (1993:618) highlights the fact that the title, "To the Hebrews," is traditionally accepted though it is not original and came into use at an early date and that the Epistle was written to a community of Jewish Christians, probably in Rome.

DeSilva (1999:34-57) believes that the audience was made of Christians of different ethnic backgrounds rather than the Jewish Christians only. DeSilva further argues that,

Reading Hebrews as if it addressed a primarily Jewish Christian audience, moreover, has tended to prevent readers from perceiving how the sustained comparison of Jesus with the mediators of access to God under the Torah and Levitical cult contributed positively to the formation of Christian identity, rather than merely serving as a series of polemics against alleged "reversion" to Judaism (2004:778).

Nicklas (2003:1-2) argues that defining the intended audience as Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians would be excluding other Christians who were available at that time. He further states that the social status of the audience had a more complex interwoven background other than that commonly acclaimed by other scholars like Guthrie (1990:1191). Nicklas admits that the audience's subculture is enshrined in the Jewish and the dominant Greco-Roman culture.

Nonetheless the challenges and difficulties attached to Hebrews seem not to have deterred scholars from deeply engaging with the book. They have endeavoured to wrestle with its interpretive concerns. The book still remains a source of inspiration as scholars continue to engage into its detailed investigations.

The discourses referred to as the "Warning Passages" in Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:9 or 12; 10:19-39; 12:14, 29) have been labeled as having significant and yet perplexing features which dot the book's literary landscape (Mathewson 1999:209). For example,

Lane alludes to the fact that Hebrews 5:11-6:20 forms a literary unit within the structure of Hebrews though there has been no general agreement concerning its character or logical scheme (1991:133). The warning passages in some places also constitute important sections of “The Exhortations” (Asumang and Domeris 2008:11-27; Koester 2005:231). A number of articles over decades have been written on the warning passages to indicate their enduring theological significance (Gleason 1998:62; cf. Mugridge 1987:74-82; Oberholtzer 1988:83-97; 1988:185-196; 1988:319-328; 1988:410-419; 1989:67-75; McKnight 1992:21-59; Schmidt 1992:167-173; Peterson 1993:17-31).

Hebrews 6:4-6 in particular is rated among the passages that have been a source of more confusion and argumentation than other biblical passages among writers (Davis 2008:753). Allen states that the passage is also considered by many to be the most difficult interpretive passage in all the book of Hebrews (2010:344). Mathewson highlights this warning passage as one that has elicited a wide variety of commentary and discussion. He further states that it has attracted most of the scholarly attention and remains one of the most puzzling and enigmatic passages for interpreters (1999:209). The following passage reveals some challenging contentions which have made writers to apply different approaches of interpretation;

4. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,
5. And have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come,
6. And then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the son of God and put him to open shame.¹

Hebrews 6:4-6 also raises socio-historical, theological, exegetical and literary questions:

¹All English quotations are from the NASB translation in this thesis except in few places where it is indicated otherwise.

Socio-historical issues: Is the audience truly representative of genuine members of the faith community or non-believers? Is the audience made up of Jewish, Gentile or mixed ethnicities? What were the circumstances surrounding the first audience that the author was trying to address with these harsh sounding words?

Theological issues: Does the author imply that the audience would subsequently lose their salvation or their rewards as a result of failing to persevere in their faith? What is the nature of the sin which may be described as ‘crucifying Christ all over again’?

Exegetical and literary issues: Whose *impossibility* does the passage refer to, the church’s, God’s or the believer who falls away? What could possibly be the meaning of *falling away* so described?

Rhetorical issues: What did the author aim to achieve with his readers and hearers with this warning?

Writers have applied different approaches to answer the above questions. Davis (2008:753-754) cites some of them; e.g., McKnight has applied a synthetic approach while Guthrie has employed a discourse analysis of the passage. Mathewson and Gleason have investigated the passage by engaging its OT backgrounds. Nongbri uses the Jewish apocalyptic approach, and DeSilva in a modified Greco-Roman Rhetorical approach compares the passage to ideas from the Greco-Roman patron-client relationships. Emmrich uses the pneumatological approach.

A summary of some of their insights may help to elucidate the issues that this thesis will seek to address. Mathewson (1999:209-225) for example, uses the OT background approach to investigate the OT allusions and echoes in the passage. He is convinced that the incident at Kadesh-Barnea depicted in Numbers 14 and alluded to in Hebrews 3:7-4:13 provides a compelling background to Hebrews 6:4-6. He states that,

Heb 6:4-6 provides a (*sic*) intriguing test-case and example of how uncovering OT allusions and echoes can shed valuable interpretive light on a problematic text. While an OT background to this section has gone unnoticed (probably due to lack of explicit citations), it has been argued on

contextual and linguistic grounds that the Old Testament depiction of the wilderness generation and the incident at Kadesh-Barnea, which has “bled over” from its use in 3:7-4:13, provides a compelling background (through allusions and echoes) to Heb 6:4-6 and yields valuable semantic results. It also has profound implications for dealing with a sticky theological difficulty.” (1999:225)

Mathewson is convinced that in an analogy to the old covenant community, the Hebrew audience also experienced the blessings related to the new covenant. However, they recapitulated the error of their old covenant predecessors by failing to believe and rejecting what they had experienced. In trying to argue for OT allusions and echoes in the passage, Mathewson (1999:215) strikes several parallels to the OT in the passage. For example, “those enlightened” in Hebrews 6:4 is paralleled to the “light” that God provided for the wilderness generation in the desert, an account recorded in Exodus 13:21-22.

DeSilva (2004:130-137) on the other hand is convinced that the purpose of the author of Hebrews goes beyond warning the audience against reverting back to Judaism. He believes that other Christians of different ethnic backgrounds were beneficiaries of this warning passage. DeSilva’s view could be beneficial in the sense that this warning passage may have addressed a wider audience who desired to follow Jesus from different walks of life other than from Jewish background only. DeSilva creates a picture essential for every Christian, whether of Jewish background or not, to realize that everyone could be a victim of falling back into old habits (evil or unproductive behavior) when not checked.

Furthermore, DeSilva (2004:130-137), draws from the ancient Greco-Roman ideas in the patron-client relationship. He is of the view that the warning was aimed at drawing the attention of the believers to the danger of losing their access to Christ. The believers are portrayed as the clients and Jesus as their patron. This approach highlights the issue of relationship which is important in Christianity. Relationship is the reason Christ came to save our lives in order to reconnect us to his Father. However, DeSilva’s description of this relationship can be limited when it is viewed at the level of patron and client only.

DeSilva's view can overshadow the benefits of Christians being co-heirs and brothers with Christ (Heb 2:17). No wonder DeSilva labors to explain and qualify further how this relationship worked at different levels in the Greco-Roman era (2004:130-137).

Nongbri (2003:265-273) believes that the warnings belong to the stock of Jewish apocalyptic teachings of the time where such threats are not uncommon. The statements were designed to instill fear in believers regarding the condemnation they faced if they fell away. Nongbri suggests that it is therefore appropriate to allow the threats to stand in the passage. This kind of approach can be appreciated by those who are familiar with the wrath of God that He demonstrated in the OT Scriptures. However, the NT highlights the authority of Jesus Christ echoed in the opening remarks of Hebrews 1:1-3,

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (NIV).

In the passage above, the author emphasizes a time in the past and how God communicated to humankind through the prophets and in various ways. It is important to note that the prophets might not necessarily refer to the renowned ones. All those who contributed to the bringing forth the Word of God in the OT were God's channels. The author then, draws the audience to a place where Christ takes a superior position in their relationship with the same God who existed in the times of their forefathers. Therefore, the history of the audience and their immediate state at the time of authorship of Hebrews cannot be overlooked in interpreting the warning passages. This implies that the wrath of God experienced in the past and His grace revealed through Christ must play some part in interpreting the warning passages.

Koester (2005:231-251) has pointed out that the contents of the warning passages are arranged in a certain pattern where a positive part is counter-balanced by a negative part. He believes that the audience's faith is tied to their experiences just as much as their gain is tied to their suffering.

Gleason (1998:63-64) on the other hand, has this to say concerning the warning passage in Hebrews 6:4-8;

One area that needs more attention is the use of the Old Testament themes, particularly in Hebrews 6:4-8. The purpose ... is to move the discussion back to an Old Testament perspective, which seems appropriate because of the Hebrew audience and distinctly Jewish ethos of the Epistle.

Gleason has examined the possible OT background as a way of establishing the nature of the warnings in relation to the doctrine of perseverance. He believes that the author was directing the message to the Hebrew audience because the Epistle contains a distinctive Jewish ethos. Like Mathewson, he feels that the central motif behind the warning passage is the Exodus experience at Kadesh-Barnea.

Kempson (1994:567- 573) argues that the audience was Christians. In his approach, he focuses his questions on the nature of salvation and the nature of the God who saves. Kempson is convinced that Hebrews is an exhortation to the audience who should have reached maturity, but have not, and the author has a duty to encourage them.

Asumang and Domeris (2007:6) have evaluated the socio-historical situation of the first audience. They have observed a common spiritual human migratory factor in the audience which they have termed as *liminality* (Asumang and Domeris 2007:6). *Liminality* is a state of disorientation for one migrating from one state to the other. This definition is attributed to the first audience of Hebrews on the belief that the addressees of this Epistle were in danger of defecting to Judaism due to fierce persecution (Brown 1988:13; Kent 1974:25; Ladd 2004:618; Koester 2005:231-251). Lane describes the audience as follows;

The social and religious roots of this community are almost certainly to be traced to the Jewish quarters and to participation in the life of a hellenistic synagogue...Their source of authority is the Bible in an old Greek version. They have an easy familiarity with the stories of the Bible, to which the

writer can refer without elaboration (cf. 12:17, “For you know...,” (Lane 1991:liv).

Home churches were common at that time. The writer was probably addressing a small community of believers in home churches (Lane 1991:lv) based in an urban setting. The suggestions on the location of this community range from Jerusalem to Spain. Lane (1991:lv-lxii) settles for Rome as the location for the audience and he gives his reason for this argument. He also concludes that the writer had close association with his audience and an intimate knowledge of their past experiences. The writer of Hebrews seems to constantly express his concerns on the response of his audience to the Word of God. Lane acknowledges the fact that the audience is undergoing some crisis (Lane 1991:lv-lxii).

This study appreciates the various approaches writers have adopted to interpret the warning passage in Hebrew 6:4-6. However, the intention here is to examine the implications of the OT background of the passage towards establishing the rhetorical intentions and strategies of the author in addressing the situation of the audience. The study does not hope to answer all the questions that the passage raises, but hopes to establish it in its OT intertextual backgrounds in relation to ideas in rhetorical criticism.

One of the most important developments in recent approaches to the warning passages has been the appreciation of their rhetorical designs. Rhetorical criticism of the NT is important to the Epistle because the method acknowledges that the Scripture was written to persuade and dissuade its hearers. Lanes states that, “Hebrews has a rhetorical and literary flavour that distinguishes it from any other document in the NT canon.” Rhetorical examination seeks for the strategies by which this persuasion or dissuasion was done (Watson 2010:166). This study values the fact that rhetorical criticism of Hebrews is important because the book itself stresses its rhetorical pedigree by frequently underlying what the writer (4:1-2; 1:1-4; 2:1-4; 6:1-3), the Spirit (3:7; 9:8; 10:15) and the Father (1:5, 8; 5:5) are saying.

Scholars have recently appreciated the rhetorical style adopted by the author. Lane states in his introduction that, “An attempt has been made in the *Form/Structure/Setting*,

Comment, and Explanation sections ... on each of the periscopes of Hebrews to recognize these dimensions and to be sensitive to the rhetorical strategies employed by the writer” (1991: lxxvii).

The more recent application of rhetorical criticism to the NT goes far beyond appreciating the forms and structure of the texts. Specifically interpreters apply insights from the classical rhetorical canons and ancient Greco-Roman society to the NT texts. The interpretation of this passage can be appreciated when normal exegetical method of considering the text in its context of exhortation is applied (Ellingworth 1993:318) Ellingworth admits that the rhetorical structure of the verses in the passage adds to the severity of the warning (1993:318). This importance of rhetorical analysis of the book of Hebrews is also seen in the tone of the letter especially the pastoral anxiety in the warning passages.

DeSilva believes that the rules of exegesis employed in Hebrews are not strictly rabbinic and that the Greco-Roman rhetoric is the basis of interpretation (2004:778). He points out the values of classical Greco-Roman rhetoric which has greatly added to the interpretive rules in scholarly studies. A number of authors also applied insights from Greco-Roman rhetorical criticism to the NT (E.g. Lundbom 1997:xx; Olbricht 1993:375-387; Wuellner 1991; Siegert 1985:9; Kennedy 1984). One approach of Rhetorical criticism which has been championed by Robbins (1996) engages five central textures of the text namely inner texture, intertext texture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture (Aune 2010:193). The inner texture and intertext texture criticism plays an important role in the exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6 in this study. Koester has the following to say on the inter-textuality of Hebrews;

The author of Hebrews develops his argument by engaging many texts from Israel’s scriptures. Much of the material comes from books that are included in all Jewish and Christian bibles, but the author also knows the stories of the martyrs that appear in the deuterio-canonical books of the Maccabees (11:35-8) and probably the tradition that Isaiah was killed by being sawn in two, which is

found in various non-canonical writings (11:37). Hebrews relies on the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (2010:620-621).

Koester's remarks show how complex the inter-texture of Hebrews can prove to be than meets the eye. I therefore understand that there are other determining inter-textual factors in exegeting Hebrews 6:4-6 other than the OT.

Watson notices that what is referred to as Classical Rhetoric criticism has almost always pertained to stylistic matters. These stylistic matters include figures of speech and thought, and matters of genre and form. For example, Augustine analyzed the rhetorical style of the biblical writers. Paul, in Book IV of his work *On Christian Doctrine*, and the Venerable Bede in his *De schematibus et tropis* analyzed figures and tropes in both Testaments. These arguments prove that Classical Rhetoric criticism has been used frequently in comparison to traditional Jewish rhetorical and exegetical categories (2010:166).

Watson further acknowledges that, "Melanchthon...wrote rhetorical commentaries on Romans and Galatians utilizing classical conventions of invention, arrangement, and style, as well as more modern conceptions of these while Erasmus provided rhetorical analyses of 1 and 2 Corinthians" (2010:166). Watson (2010:166) goes on to cite Calvin the theologian of the 16th Century who besides noting rhetorical features (particularly stylistic) throughout his commentaries on the New Testament gives a rhetorical analysis of Romans.

Wilhelm Wuellner (1991:173) notes that the focus was on stylistics. Rhetoric continued to play a crucial role in the interpretation of the Bible, whether as part of the traditional *lectio divina*, or as part of the *via moderna* cultivated by the emerging European universities beginning in the 12th century.

In the Middle Ages, for example, "rhetoricians amassed lengthy lists of stylistic devices...which led to a view of rhetoric as chiefly ornamental" (Morrison 2004:4). "One of the developments that affected sacred and secular hermeneutics was the virtual identification of poetics and rhetoric in the Renaissance."

The gap that probably remains with this approach is to link its achievements to interpreting this warning passage in the light of its OT background. Hebrews is rich with OT citations, allusions and echoes. It has several citations from Psalms (Hebrews 1:5, 2:5, 5:5 and 7 gives references to Psalms 2:7, 8:4-6, 110) to prove Jesus as God's promised Son. Other citations from the OT include Jer 31:31-34 which is quoted in Heb 10:16-17; Isa 8:18 in Heb 2:13b; Gen 2:2 in Heb 2:4; Exo 25:40 in Heb 8:5; Prov 3:11,12 in Heb 12:6; Haggai 2:6 in Heb 12:26; Deut 31:6 in Heb 13:6. Hebrews also alludes to and echoes many more OT passages (Asumang 2007:26-28; Mathewson 1999:209-225; Gleason 1998:62-91).

Asumang (2007:26) agrees that Hebrews uses Christological reading of the OT that involves typology, limited allegory, citations, allusions, and echoes to apply to the unstable pastoral circumstances of his congregation. He further states that Hebrews' interpretive style goes beyond typology to encompass various other Jewish methods of exegesis, some of which are similar to allegorical interpretation.

Asumang (2005:119-120) has tabulated the allusions and echoes that are imbedded in the style of the author's writing of the warning passages. He has alluded to the fact that the OT is fundamental as a backdrop to the author of Hebrews.

Accordingly, studies of Hebrews which are not grounded in the OT are likely to be deficient because almost every verse appears to be closely dependent on the OT. Moreover, the author begins the letter in its prologue with a comparison between the old and the new dispensation (Heb 1:1-4). Since this comparison is continued in several other places of the Epistle, it is very likely that one of the keys for interpreting each of the blocks of passages, especially the warning passages, is through investigating their OT backgrounds.

Mathewson (1999:209-225) extensively examines the probable OT background of the passage. Yet, he seems to have omitted to investigate how the OT background reflects on the rhetorical strategy adopted by the author for addressing the pastoral situation of the first readers. This omission is very glaring, given the fact that the author of Hebrews appears to have employed the OT as a grid for his readers to interpret their present

situation. In other words, the OT backgrounds of the warning passages were designed to be a major contributor to the author's pastoral strategy for restoring the faith and vigor of his congregation. I therefore propose to engage the rhetorical exegetical study of Hebrews 6:4-6 in the light of its OT background.

Those who have considered the rhetorical strategies, for example, DeSilva (2004:130-137), have not advanced convincing relationships between the OT background and the rhetorical strategy. Ellingworth (1993:321) has suggested that the passage is not based on any OT passage and he concludes that the writer is appealing to his readers in his own words (Asumang 2007:137).

I believe that setting out clear criteria for identifying the OT background will shed more light on the passage. The other step will be to take due consideration of the rhetorical strategies of the author of Hebrews in addressing the problems of his congregation.

1.2. Objectives

I propose to examine the rhetorical intent and strategy of the passage of Hebrews 6:4-6 in the light of its OT background. The other objective is to highlight the limitations of the applications of Classical Greco-Roman conventions only to the Rhetorical criticism of Hebrews. The key purpose therefore is to demonstrate the benefits of serious consideration of the OT background of the warning passage in understanding the rhetorical intent and strategies of the author of Hebrews. The other objective is to examine the salvation earned in Christ Jesus in the new covenant while appreciating the promises grounded in the OT background.

Firstly, the argument hinges on the interpretation of the following statement; "one who has been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift" (6:4) and so on. Would this refer to one who has received the Word of God and repented of one's sins? It further goes to suggest that if such a person "falls away", it is impossible to restore to repentance. The challenge would be to clearly understand the interpretive meaning of "falling away".

Secondly, the complexity created by scholarly and theological debates on the perspective of losing salvation in relation to the passage is of great interest to this thesis. The different

scholarly interpretations of what happens to one's salvation in as far as this passage is concerned will be examined from the OT viewpoint (Mathewson 1999:209; Kempson 1994:567-572).

Thirdly, the warning passage introduces the difficulty phrase of "Christ being crucified again". This is practically enigmatic because Christ died once and His death is viewed as final. I therefore will exegete the passage in order to ascertain how the first readers would have understood such a phrase and relate it to the OT motifs. I will also seek to extrapolate its relevance to the contemporary Christian.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Hebrews 6 starts by referring to issues of elementary teachings on Christ. It proceeds in 6:4 to immediately bring in the issue of "impossibility." The warning passage is enigmatic as it raises a number of puzzling exegetical and theological questions. Hebrews 6:4-6 is capable of instilling some sense of fear and concern to a reader or believer who takes it on its face value. It might even carry negative connotations where it says that "it is impossible to be brought back to repentance" when one who knows the truth falls into sin.

Ellingworth (1993:317) in referring to the passage notices that, "These difficult verses have from early times (Bleek 3.172ff.; Telfer; Goppelt 1976, 594f.) been distorted by undue assimilation to other texts (notably Mk. 3:27// and 1 Jn. 5:16), and still more by doctrinal speculation and the requirements of the church discipline."

The problem of the thesis may therefore be stated as follows. How does a critical understanding of the OT background of the warning passage in Heb 6:4-6 shed light on the rhetorical intentions and strategies of the author of Hebrews in addressing the situation of his readers? I therefore, explore how the author, as a Diaspora Jewish Christian, fused ideas from his Jewish and Greco-Roman rhetorical background to generate his argumentation. The author's argument sought to persuade his hearers to remain faithful to the Christian faith.

1.4. Problem Questions

I will therefore focus on the following exegetical, theological, socio-historical, literary and rhetorical questions;

- a. Based on appropriate interpretive criteria, what are the best exegetical interpretations of the ten clauses within the passage?
- b. What was the author of Hebrews seeking to achieve from his audience by using the statements found in Hebrews 6:4-6?
- c. Is it correct to assume that the author was threatening his audience in his rhetorical approach as Nongbri (2003:265-273) concludes or was the author trying to make the covenant community to continue with their patronage to the Lord Jesus as suggested by DeSilva (1999:34-57)?
- d. Was the author afraid that the audience would lose their salvation as suggested by DeSilva (1999:34-57) or was the author trying to get them to refocus on what they had believed?
- e. In what way does the OT background of the passage affect our interpretation of the same?

1.5. Design and Methodology

This study is a rhetorical exegetical examination of the warning passage of Hebrew 6 in the light of its OT background. I will critically analyze the passage and its rhetorical strategies from the angle of its OT background. According to German (1985:86), "A methodology is a tool which allows the critic to better understand rhetoric and communicate this understanding to others." I wish to lay out the steps that this thesis intends to use for the rhetorical exegesis and later discuss the theoretical foundations of the methodology.

Authors agree to the rhetorical forms in Hebrews, but they debate as to whether Hebrews can be classified as deliberative or epideictic (Lane 1991:lxix). The methodology that I will engage is to enable us to understand the rhetorical dynamics between the author and

the audience. The Jewish tradition acknowledges poetry, legalism, morality and allegories in Scripture. However, Scripture is not only a rhetorical fashion, but it is the source for strong model of communication between God and His people. Scripture is the model that shapes the future community of faith later to be found in Christ (Edelman 2003:115).

Watson (2010:166) defines Rhetoric as, “the art of using spoken and written discourse according to accepted rules and techniques to inform, persuade, or motivate an audience according to the agenda of the speaker or writer.” He further states that Rhetorical criticism of the NT is “the analysis of the biblical books, in part or in whole, for conformity to or modification of rhetorical conventions for speaking and writing in the Greco-Roman period in which they were written and/or according to more modern conceptions of rhetoric and its functions” (2010:166).

Asumang and Domeris (2005:8) employ the definition of Rhetoric as “the art of persuasion” which, they state is based on Aristotle’s rhetorical handbook (*The Art of Rhetoric*). In terms of the intentions of the author or speaker, ancient rhetoric attempted to delineate the strategy by identifying the genre of the speech or writing. The genre were classified into judicial, deliberative and epideictic (Asumang and Domeris 2005:8). In persuasion the author can encourage his audience towards good work while dissuasion would help the author to move the audience away from bad habits. When the author employs the juridical or forensic genre of rhetorical argumentation, his aim is to accuse, defend or exonerate the audience. In the epideictic genre, the author’s aim is to praise or blame his audience. And in the deliberative piece of writing, the author seeks to dissuade the audience from taking or continuing to take a particular course of action. Likewise, I will examine the passage and identify the style, arrangement and proofs employed by the author.

The OT background is not only important to the understanding of the passage, which has been the focus of previous studies. It must also be viewed as the basis of pastoral formation of the community of faith because true meaning of Scripture is made manifest in the transformed lives of the community of faith (Hays 1989: xii-xiii). Hays further mentions that the fulfillment of Scripture is not only Christocentric, but ecclesiocentric

(1989: xiii). The contribution of this thesis is to construct the rhetorical strategy based on the OT background.

I will also attempt to analyze the invention, arrangement and style of the pericope. The contents of the warning passages are arranged in a certain pattern, a positive part counterbalanced by a negative part. Each is also related to the OT. By examining the arrangement and style of these parts, the study will be showing how the author intended to persuade the first readers to act in the way he wished them to act.

Through rhetorical analysis, I will attempt to present the argumentations by the ethos, pathos and logos. This will help to identify the culture, the mood and the words used in the passage. The style will identify the language applied to the argumentation such as metaphorical language (Watson and Hauser 1994:109-110). Furthermore, I will put into consideration the fact that the warning passages themselves are made up of five components namely; audience, sin, exhortations, consequences and OT example (Mathewson 1999:210).

I will proceed with the argument in four stages. Firstly, I will summarize the literary style of the warning passages in which the OT is employed in an allusive manner in relation to Heb 6:4-6. I will also use the style to construct the criteria by which the OT background of passages in Hebrews will be identified.

Secondly, I will identify relevant themes from the OT background and subsequent interpretations of the OT prophets applied as a contribution to the NT interpretation. The OT was a sacred text to the authors of the NT as it must be to us in understanding the NT. The passage will be viewed as literary text shaped by complex inter-textual relations with Scripture. The inner texture and intertexture criticism will be employed in the exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6. In the inner-texture criticism, I will try and look for clues within the text of Hebrews in its rhetorical and literary analysis of the passage. In inter-texture criticism, I will be able to examine how the author weaved the words of older, existing texts like the OT into the warning passage. In a more complex manner, the words might not necessarily be quoted exactly, but an interpreter must be aware of allusions and echoes of other texts (DeSilva 1999:36-38).

The Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible in preference to the Masoretic Hebrew Text (MT) will be used to help in identifying echoes in the NT because that is what Hebrews used (Gaebelien 1981:1-158).

Thirdly, echoes and allusions in the passage will be described and examined to see the intention of the author in relation to Hebrews 6:4-6. And finally the implications of this interpretation in relation to the problems laid out previously will be enumerated.

1.6. Rationale

The book of Hebrews seems like an excerpt of the OT in its method of establishing the superiority of Christ. This is of great interest for anyone who, like me, comes from the background that emphasized more on the NT Scriptures than the OT. The warning passage in Hebrews 6:4-6 is challenging and one wonders whether it affects one's theology and doctrine or whether the interpretation of this passage is what is affected by one's theology and doctrine. Scholars (E.g., DeSilva 2004:781-787; Nongbri 2003:265-273; Rhee 2000:83-96) have tended to apply the Greco-Roman Classical approach to Rhetorical Criticism to examine the book while ignoring how the OT background of Hebrews influences the rhetorical effects of the passages on its readers. The purpose of this thesis is to exegete the warning passage to the appreciation of an ordinary Christian who desires to gain spiritual understanding from it. I hope to establish the probable impact the passage might have had on the first readers. The findings must have some implications for the contemporary Zambian Christian. It is also important to identify certain limitation of employing the Greco-Roman approach to Rhetorical Criticism which many scholars have widely appreciated.

Importantly, there is need to guard against the persistent dangers in biblical interpretation of allowing one's personal presuppositions to significantly skew the interpretation which is referred to as 'significance' (Crabtree and Crabtree 2001:45-49). Rodney alludes to the difficulty one finds with interpreting the warning passages of Hebrews whether one's approach is from the Calvinist's angle or Arminian (2001: 5-27).

It requires careful attention to details and employing set testable criteria to achieve the

intended interpretation of the warning passages This thesis appreciates that the whole purpose of exegesis is to labour to find the intended meaning of the author. It also appreciates that the OT background greatly reinforces the NT interpretation (Fee 2003:23-31). I seek to be grounded in the interpretation of the warning passage as I pursue to study its OT background. In other words, the OT background will hopefully provide a more objective way of establishing the answers to some of the interpretive challenges of the passage that this thesis has encountered. The outcome will help in the Bible study of the book of Hebrews in the Zambian Evangelical local church where I help in leading women's Bible study groups. I hope to also get enriched spiritually in my daily walk with Christ. I appreciate the power of inspiration found in the book of Hebrews.

1.7. Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that the OT background is vital to the rhetorical interpretation of Heb 6:4-6. The OT background will shed light on the author's intent of the warning passage. Jewish traditional rhetoric strategies will be identified and bring clarity to the passage. In addition, the findings will enrich the spiritual perception of a contemporary Christian in the Zambian context on the book of Hebrews.

1.8. Delimitation

This thesis seeks to examine the effectiveness of rhetorically exegeting Heb 6:4-6 in the light of its OT background. Reference will be made to the Kadesh- Barnea incident in the OT. The study is basically supplemented by secondary pertinent literature review on Heb 6:4-6.

1.9. Limitations

The thesis is limited to the rhetorical study Heb 6:4-6 as a warning passage that has implication on today's Christian. The exegesis of the warning passage is limited to the consideration of its OT background.

1.10. Presupposition

The assumption is that Heb 6:4-6 is a difficult warning passage that has the potential to mislead one's interpretation if not well exegeted. We can obtain better results using the

rhetorical exegetical strategy coupled with examining the OT background of the warning passage. It is assumed that the literature review will indicate how interpreters have laboured on the passage using different strategies. However, it is assumed that the possibility of considering the Greco-Roman strategies and the Jewish rhetorical tradition would yield better results in understanding the warning passage.

1.11. Chapter Overview

Chapter one is an introduction to the study and covers the preliminary elements of the thesis. Chapter two is a review of secondary literature pertinent to Hebrews 6:4-6. It will review literature on key introductory questions to the warning passage. In this chapter, the background issues to the book of Hebrews based on the arguments concerning the authorship and the audience of the books will be discussed. The study will also focus on issues relating to the geographical location of the audience, their ethnicity and religious and social history status.

The third chapter is devoted to examining the methodological issues underlying the research. Specifically, it will describe issues related to rhetorical criticism and intertextuality, especially in their application to the Epistle to the Hebrews. A brief history of the development of rhetoric will be summarized before the methodology of exegeting the warning passage is highlighted. The chapter will also highlight the limitations of applying a purely Greco-Roman rhetorical canon for analyzing Hebrews.

Chapter four is dedicated to carrying out a critical exegetical study of Hebrews 6:4-6 in relation to its OT background. The study will shed some light on the author's intent of the warning passage in Hebrews 6. The chapter will examine Heb 6:4-6 to consider whether the wilderness experience is the OT background to the warning passage. This chapter will first look at the literary and conceptual structure of the warning passage in Heb 6:4-6 focusing on the words, clauses and phrases of the passage. The purpose is to determine how the words the author used fit into the context of Heb 6 and the whole Epistle of Hebrews. Thereafter the exegesis will focus on examining the OT background of the whole passage in relation to the entire Epistle. The findings of this chapter will highlight on the fact that the author had in mind the wilderness community as an OT example.

Chapter five will investigate Heb 6:4-6, through structural rhetorical exegesis. Specific words such as 'for', 'those', 'impossible', 'fall away' will be structurally and rhetorically exegeted to interpret the warning passage. Furthermore, the ten clauses, among them; 'once been enlightened', 'once tasted', 'once been partakers' will be analyzed in detail to understand their structural function and rhetorical emphasis in the warning passage.

Through rhetorical analysis, the genre of Heb 6:4-6 will be identified. The purpose of the warning passage will be identified. Chapter five will borrow the procedure for examining the rhetorical strategy of Heb 6:4-6 from Kennedy's (1984:3-160) five stages of rhetorical analysis. The analysis will include a careful examination of the clauses in the passage to determine the authorial purposes, the mood of the author, the mood and the social values of the audience.

Chapter six will highlight the summary of the findings from each chapter. Thereafter, the implication of Heb 6:4-6 to the church will be discussed.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF SECONDARY LITERATURE PERTINENT TO HEBREWS 6:4-6

2.1. Review of Literature on Key Introductory Questions to Hebrews

6:4-6

This chapter reviews secondary literature on key introductory questions regarding the authorship and audience of the book of Hebrews. The review's purpose is to identify possible answers to questions related to the rhetorical exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6 in the light of its OT background. The review on authorship highlights arguments hinging on whether the book of Hebrews is Pauline or non-Pauline. Furthermore literature investigating the social history, ethnicity and location of its audience is highlighted in order to help interpret the warning passage. The literature review on scholarly arguments on Heb 6:4-6 will help to identify different views that eventually will provide insight on how scholars have arrived at different conclusions and how doctrinal inclinations affect their interpretations.

2.1.1. Authorship

Many interpreters have concluded that the author of Hebrews is anonymous. Asumang (2008:1) refers to the author as unknown. DeSilva (2004:776) calls Hebrews an anonymous letter which does not provide the interpreter with either the identity of the author or that of the recipients. Ellingworth (1993:3-21) acknowledges the difficulty in giving certainty and specific answers to the questions on authorship, audience and location. Lane (1991:xlix) highlights the fact that the limits of historical knowledge preclude positive identification of the writer and that no firm tradition pointing to his

identity exists from the earliest period. Allen (2010:29) observes the efforts most interpreters have put in trying to identify the author of Hebrews and he laments on the fact that very few have been convinced by the results on the search for the author. Hence many interpreters have little to write on the authorship of Hebrews. Investigations in the book of Hebrews do not reveal the author. The information from Hebrews 2:3-4 reveals that the author did not directly receive the gospel from Jesus Christ. This alone appears to preclude Paul as the author of Hebrews.

It is in view of the aforesaid that I choose to agree with arguments for an unknown author. The decision for an unknown author might pose some difficulty in the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6. The difficulty might arise when investigating and determining the possible relationship between the author and the addressed audience. The other difficulty might arise as the warning passage is related to other texts. No wonder some interpreters believe that one of the reasons Hebrews has retained the keen interest of interpreters is as a result of not knowing its author (Koester 2010:613-14; Allen 2010:29; Ellingworth 1993:3-21; Lane 1991: xlix).

Other possible views on the authorship of Hebrews are also reviewed because of their impact on the interpretation of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews seems to provide information related to the authorship at the end in 13:23 where Timothy is mentioned. However, other interpreters have argued against the reference to Timothy which has been underpinned as a grid for the Pauline or Pauline related authorship. Koester (2010:614) on the other hand, observes that, “theologically, Hebrews is similar to Paul’s letters in its presentation of the saving work of Christ and its comments about the Jewish law, the new covenant, and faith (Heb. 8:6-13; 11:1- 40; 2 Cor. 3:1-18; Rom. 1:17-18).” Yet when considering Paul’s approach to writing his Epistles, one would notice that he always referred to his authority as an apostle or servant of Christ. This is absent in Hebrews, suggesting that he is unlikely to be the author (Guthrie 1983:20).

Asumang (2007:16) supports the view that, ‘Paul evidently did not write the Epistle, since the author was not an apostle (Heb 2:3–4), even though he may well have been a member of Paul’s team, since he was acquainted with Timothy (Heb 13:23).’ Other

interpreters in agreeing with Asumang, have argued from Heb 2:3-4 that the author of Hebrews received the gospel secondhand, whereas Paul claims to have received it from Christ (Gal. 1:11-12). They also note that Hebrews has a distinctive style. Today, few think that Paul wrote Hebrews. The belief that Hebrews was written by Paul had a universal influence in the acceptance of the book as canonical and apostolic. Guthrie mentions that, 'Origen's great influence in the Eastern Church was sufficient to ensure the continued acceptance of the letter as apostolic' (2002:18).

Alternatively, other interpreters have opted to support the proposal that is inclined towards accepting that Hebrews was written by one of Paul's companions. This view, they believe, accounts for the affinities between Paul's letters and Hebrews, while recognizing Hebrews' unique style and content. DeSilva (2004:787) states that, "... scholars such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian had to attribute the letter to one of Paul's associates (whether Apollos or Barnabas)." Paul's co-workers Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, and Priscilla have all been suggested as possible authors with some convincing arguments. Tertullian, for example, as stated by Guthrie (2002:18), regarded Barnabas as the author of Hebrews at the close of the second century. These divergent views on the debate on authorship warrant this thesis to settle for an unknown author.

This brief assessment of the secondary literature on authorship of Hebrews has important significance for the task at hand. Interpreters have usually engaged two common methods among others for identifying the authorship of a book. These methods are comparative evidence and internal evidence. In comparative evidence, the writings of a text are compared to the writings of a known author of another text. The writing styles, common vocabulary, themes and special terminologies are closely analyzed and compared to see if the text of the unknown author qualifies to be categorized under the known author of a different text (Ellingworth 1993:3).

For instance, by mentioning Timothy as earlier alluded to, the hypothetical indication is that the author was an associate of Paul's if not Paul himself. This must surely demand a comparison with Paul's letters to test if indeed he were the author. If comparative analysis with Paul or another inspired author were to suggest that the author of Hebrews has

written another book this will help the thesis immensely. It will give ideas on how the author intended to use the OT in his expositions and exhortations. For example Heb 6:6-8 has some interesting resonances with 1 Cor 10:1-12 (Allen 2012:380). If the author of Hebrews were Paul, this thesis could choose the methods of studying the OT background and rhetorical style of 1 Cor 10 and use it to explain the warning passage. However, the rationale is that the author is not Paul, and therefore Hebrews is studied on its own merit.

The second evidence is the textual or internal evidence where the author of the book can be deduced from the very text in investigation (Ellingworth 1993:3). The author is easily identified through the salutations and opening remarks of the Epistles. This is the evidence derived from the text itself. Sometimes the author would mention information within the text that easily identifies him as the author.

Interpreters such as Lane, interestingly, have dwelt more on analyzing the strong character traits of the author derived from the study of Hebrews. Adapted below are some of the characteristics of the author that Lane (1991: xlvii-li) gleaned from the study of Hebrews. These are of great help to the rhetorical exegetical study of the warning passage in Hebrews 6 in the light of its OT background.

- a. *Architectural Mind* - The author of Hebrews displays excellence in the way he architecturally weaves his words together and then develops his thesis by way of analysis. The excellent example found in the opening remarks of Hebrews 1:1-4 demonstrates how the author exhibits his intellectual abilities as he focuses on God who intervened in human history through His sovereign Word. I must therefore engage the author as one who chose his words carefully to make his audience understand him.
- b. *Rhetorical Analyst* - Lane (1991: xlvii-li) clearly suggests that the author understood speech as a means and medium of power. He appreciated speech as agonistic and used it effectively in the service of his Jewish Christian mission. The author successfully employed the power of speech to his written text as a tool of advocacy. His voice is echoed in the letter in opposition of the other voices that

seem to be distracting the community from its commitment to God and the assembly.

- c. *Intensely Religious Man* - He seemed to express Christianity as God's new cultic action and his arguments were ingrained in cultic expressions such as "blood" as a medium of purgation. His language is steeped in the LXX and his use of the LXX is also important to the interpretation of Heb 6:4-6. The author may have been a priest, perhaps one of the Jerusalem priests who migrated from Jerusalem to Rome during the early Judean persecution recorded in Acts 6 (Allen 2010:78; Lane1991:l-li). He is likely to be Jewish from the Diaspora rather than Palestinian region.
- d. *Well Educated and Trained* - The writer exhibited a high level of education according to the Hellenistic standards and he needs to be taken seriously in his choice and use of words. He has understanding of how words can be misinterpreted and he therefore should be respected in critically analyzing his message contained in the warning passages, in particular, Heb 6:4-6.
- e. *Pastoral Theologian* - He adapted early Christian traditions to help shape the community in the word of truth during their crisis. He was a gifted preacher and interpreter of salvation history for the benefit of his community. He was well equipped to admonish, correct, rebuke and encourage his community. It is therefore necessary to take heed to his warnings because he is well versed in the repercussion of taking the gospel lightly.

His erudite rhetorical skills and penchant for technical philosophical words indicates the need to take the rhetorical elements of Heb 6:4-6 seriously. This also provides the rationale to discuss Inter-textuality and rhetorical criticism of Hebrews in depth in the next chapters of this thesis. The author's skill in rhetoric, according to Lane (1991:xlvi-li), is universally recognized. For instance, Spicq has gone to the length of compiling a list of stylistic features and rhetorical devices that are found in Hebrews (1952:351-78). Lane (1991: xlvi-li) states that it is a notable fact that the author possessed a rich vocabulary and cultured diction.

The divergent views on authorship of the Epistle do not reflect the confusion the first audience had in receiving the words of the author. Lane (1991:lv) says that; “The writer knew his audience personally and expected to revisit them soon (13:19, 23)”. Cardinaly, the author was not a stranger to his audience even though he remains anonymous to us. He therefore expected them to understand what he was communicating.

2.1.2. Audience of the Book of Hebrews

The divergent information on the audience was briefly highlighted in the previous chapter (cf. Kent 1974:22; Ladd 1993:618; DeSilva 1999:34-57; 2004:778; Nicklas 2003:1-2). Unlike the authorship, one cannot afford not to take sides with at least one stand of argument on the audience. The side one takes is important because it affects the interpretation of Hebrews and chapter 6 in particular. The introductory literature gives an overview on different debates on the audience of Hebrews. Of relevance to our investigation of Heb 6:4-6 are the geographical location, ethnicity, and social history of the audience. These will now be discussed in turns.

2.1.2.1. *Geographical Location of Audience*

The proposals for the geographical location of the audience have ranged from Jerusalem in the East to Spain in the West (Guthrie 2002:696-701; Allen 2010:62-66; Ellingworth 1993:28-29, cf. Bruce 1987:xxxi). Interpreters, who believe that the first readers of Hebrews were Palestinian Jews, tend to also interpret the Epistle along certain lines related to the sacrificial practices of the Jerusalem temple. A number of interpreters in this category even relate the purpose for writing the letter to the fall of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 AD. On the other hand, those interpreters who believe that the recipients were Diaspora Jews tend to regard them as situated in Rome or Asia Minor and underline the wilderness camp sacrificial system as the key emphasis of the Epistle.

The addressed audience of the Epistle according to some interpreters was located in an urban setting. This is a notion that is supported by Heb 13:14 where the author mentions that “they do not have a permanent city” (Ratz 1990:3-4; Lane 1991:lili). The mention of ‘city’ suggests that they were in a city setup which the author used as a comparison.

Furthermore Lane alludes to the fact that the sentiments of the author in Heb 13:1-6 create a picture of those who were in an urban setup, that is, showing hospitality to Christian travelers (13:2); helping those in prison (13:3); caution against materialism (5-6). Those who have argued for Rome, such as Lane base their argument on the closing remarks of Hebrews 13:24b where it states, "...those from Italy greet you." In Acts 18:2 Italy is equally referred to as Rome (Allen 2010:631-32; Lane 1991:571). Lane (1991:lviii) is also aware that the idea can point to such instance as that of Aquila and Priscilla who were referred to as "Those from Italy" in Acts 18:2 when they were at that time in Corinth. Ellingworth (1993:735) however states that the idea that Aquila and Priscilla referred to as, "those from Italy" in Hebrews 13:24 by Montefiore is speculative.

The commentators who assume that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians in Palestine regard Jerusalem as the destination of the Epistle (Allen 2010:28). Support for the suggestion that the community was based in Palestine was originally derived from the idea that during the first few centuries of Christianity, the name "Hebrews" was closely associated with the Jerusalem Church. Proponents of this view therefore naturally link the Epistle to the Hebrews with the temple sacrifices, and suggest that the occasion for writing was related to the destruction of this temple in 70 AD.

However, the fact that the Epistle to the Hebrews is thoroughly Greek and that it employed the LXX rather than the Hebrew OT mitigates against a Judean or Palestinian congregation. The other reason is that the Judean congregation appeared to have been too poor to render the kind of support that the audience rendered (13:1-6). Many of those who choose Jerusalem also believe that the apostasy which the author feared, which of course is important for this exegesis of Heb 6:4-6, was apostasy back into Judaism. Taking this choice would greatly impact on how the clauses in Heb 6:4-6 would be interpreted.

Those who advocate for a mixed audience posit the destination of the Epistle as Antioch in Syria. This view is at the core of Allen's argument as he explains how the author addresses his audience (2010:61-78).

The audience was more likely based in Rome because, as rightly pointed out by Lane

(1991:lviii), Hebrews was first quoted by Clement, Bishop of Rome in 96 AD. The Epistle conveys the greetings of believers from Italy to its first readers (13:24). This favours the view that the readers were based in Italy or Rome in particular. The other argument is derived from the fact that Timothy, who was evidently known to the first readers, was well-known to Roman Christians as well.

Rome seemingly fits the kind of audience that was in a city and was exposed to receiving visitors. Like the Hebrews congregation (6:10), the Roman Church's generosity, as well as numerous afflictions, was renowned. Lastly, the prevalence of maritime metaphors in Hebrews would suggest a congregation living in a major harbour city (e.g. 2:1; 6:19). It is in view of the above arguments that I believe that the first readers of Hebrews were Diaspora Jews based in Rome. It will be important, therefore to investigate the OT echoes and allusions in the warning passage and the wilderness sacrificial system will play a role in interpreting the passage.

2.1.2.2. *Ethnicity of Audience*

The issue regarding the ethnicity of the audience is important for determining the rationale for seeking intertextual interpretation of the warning passage. In this regard, three proposals have been made; Jewish, Gentile or Mixed ethnicity.

The prefixed title "To the Hebrews..." has been debated by interpreters and this has led to the readership of Hebrews to be construed in different ways. It is believed that the traditional title, "To the Hebrews, " was affixed to the book by the end of the second century CE, and many have assumed that its contents show that it was originally written for Jewish or "Hebrew" Christians (cf. Clement of Alexandria quoted by Eusebius *Ecccl. Hist.* 14; Koester 2010:614; Utley 1996:3; Ladd 1993:618; Guthrie 2002:22). The author's wide appeal to the OT, the Levitical sacrificial system, and the eminent OT personalities such as Moses, Abraham, Joshua and Aaron seem to support such a view.

Kent (1974:22) is convinced that the audience was Jewish due to the content in the book of Hebrews that provides a backdrop of the Jewish history and religion. He also argues that the Epistle does not specifically refer to the Gentile society. Nicklas (2003:1-2) also

admits that the audience's subculture is enshrined in the Jewish and the dominant Greco-Roman culture. The traditional view is that the readers were Jewish Christians (Allen 2010:62, cf. Lane 1991: liii-iv; Gleason 1998:62-91).

Some have defended the fact that the addressed audience was of a mixed ethnic background or Gentile. However, the presentation of the Epistle seems to be addressing an audience that is so familiar with the cultic system in the OT. The audience also believed in the cultic system at one time and their ancestors practiced. It is not wrong to assume that the audience was Jewish and practiced the rituals of Judaism at one time or the other. It appears that the greater possibility is that a Diaspora Jewish readership of Hebrews than the Gentile audience is the best explanation for the nature of the Epistle. The use of the LXX instead of the Masoretic OT supports a Diaspora Jewish readership. The Jews in the Diaspora were conversant with the use of the Greek text. The exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 must therefore follow the approach of appreciating the LXX instead of the Masoretic.

2.1.2.3. *Religious Commitment of the Audience*

With direct regard to the nature of the spiritual problems facing the audience, Davis (2008:757; cf. Guthrie 2002:226-28; McKnight 1992:21-59) summarizes some scholarly interpretations of the audience as follows;

1. *Hypothetical audience*: there is no audience in mind because the sin involved cannot actually be committed.
2. *Pre-conversion Jews*: these are Jews who have associated themselves with the Christian community but have not made a commitment to Christ.
3. *Covenant community*: it is the community that God is rejecting, not individuals.
4. *True believers under judgment*: these are Christians who are facing God's judgment, but cannot lose their salvation.
5. *Phenomenological true believers*: the author is speaking to Christians who can lose, or have lost, their salvation.
6. *Phenomenological unbeliever*: the audience appears to be Christian but is not.

The first option that the audience is hypothetical due to the fact that it views that the sin cannot be committed seems to be in its extreme. It seems to ignore the warning all together. If the author has no audience and the sin does not exist, one would ask why the effort to write such stern warnings? Compton (1996:167) reminds us that, "In fact, it was argued from Heb 10:25–26 that some of those who had been associated with the readers had actually committed this sin." This negates the first view which argues that this sin was both hypothetical and impossible.

The author was a well-educated and trained rhetorician. His warnings should then be taken seriously in the textual and rhetorical context. Evidently, he had a pastoral heart, since his address in Heb 6:4-6 was directed to those with whom he shared the same belief. He was trying to cause them to see the danger of those who take their commitment to the faith lightly.

The belief that these are phenomenological true believers or unbelievers does not stand up well with the argument of the author who seems to affirm the assurance of the salvation (v9) of his audience. However, the author is not in the position of God to know for sure those who are saved or not. Yet he has a duty to speak to his audience as his fellow believers without ignoring elements that are registering a lack of commitment to the faith in the community. When he presents his argument in the warning passage of Heb 6:4-6, he is aware of the situation of sufferings that his audience had gone through. He is also aware of the assurance of faith, but he has to refer them to the OT examples of how all were called Israel, but others did not see the promise made to Israel due to lack of commitment and faith in the one who spoke to them.

This is true when one considers McKnight's (1992:21-59) view of synthetically looking at the warning passages. The author has a responsibility to make his audience aware of some of those who have been "enlightened" or instructed in the Word, yet deny the lifestyle of faith and their consequent lack of seriousness. The possibility therefore is that the warnings were meant to make his audience aware of the fact that denying the faith has detrimental results. As I exegete the clauses in the next chapters, details of the interpretation of the clauses will help to understand the warning passage further.

McKnight (1992:23-25; 2005:9) in his synthetic approach concludes that the audience was made up of believers. The author seemed to know that some of them would persevere in their faith hence the severity of the warnings. This can be close to the mind of the author in that his assignment was to the believers. However, he knew that others were taking this salvation lightly by neglecting to do what they were called to do. The believers were showing lack of seriousness which further led to immaturity. The author constantly urged his audience to pay attention to what they had heard (Heb 2:1); to hold fast and press on until the end (3:6; 14). This is indication enough that he wanted them to constantly respond in faith to the Word they had received. The author was showing his audience that failure to respond to the Word had grave consequences.

2.1.2.4. *Social History of the Audience*

Asumang and Domeris (2007:6) state that the socio-historical situation the first audience of Hebrews found themselves in is a common factor of human existence referred to as liminality. *Liminality* is a state of disorientation for one who is migrating from one state to the other. These Christians were facing a new lifestyle which at first seemed promising, but later posed a challenge of hardship in terms of persecution (Asumang and Domeris 2005:5).

Koester (2005:231) categorizes three stages that he is convinced the audience of Hebrews went through in their faith. Firstly the readers' community was established when the message of salvation led to conversion and was confirmed by experiencing miracles and a sense of the Spirit's presence (1:14; 2:3-4; cf. Acts 14:8-18; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; Heb. 6:1-2; 6:4; 10:32). Secondly, during a time of persecution conditions became more difficult but the community remained steadfast. However, during the third stage, conditions within the community seemed to deteriorate. The demands of mutual support within the Christian community evidently moved to the extent of reducing their commitment to the faith and to neglect the community's gatherings.

The Epistle addresses an audience that was in a dilemma of getting discouraged as a result of some crisis it was experiencing. This crisis was as a result of the disheartening experiences of sufferings (10:25; 32-34; 35-39; 12:4). However, Koester's three levels

suggest that the audience held on to their faith in the time of persecution. The question one would ask is what could have triggered this slackness in the audience? The answer to this question remains a matter of debate among interpreters.

It would suffice to point out that the audience was comprised of a wealthy city community that suffered the confiscation of their possessions. This could also mean that they were exposed to education of their time and they could understand their author well enough. The persecutions and sufferings later greatly affected their motivation to courageously hold on to the faith that they professed (Brown 1988:13; Kent 1974:25; Ladd 2004:618; Koester 2005:231-251; DeSilva 2004:778; Allen 2010:79-82).

The author was trying to dissuade his audience from 'falling away' from the salvation that they had found in believing in Christ. Those who assume that the audience was made up of Jewish Christians believe that the audience was defecting back to Judaism. Others believe that Hebrews is a pastoral letter addressing the various issues that were meant to discourage its audience from sin. It is a letter of encouragement to continue holding on to the faith in Christ (Allen 2010:79-82).

This thesis takes the view that Heb 6:4-6 is a warning passage that the author used to dissuade his audience from unwarranted misdirection in their faith. The passage is meant to show the audience who might take lightly the issue of God's judgment to begin to rethink on the gravity of the matter. The author's warning does not in any way overlook the security of one who holds firmly to the call of salvation as indicated in Heb 6:9. It creates a sense of alertness to those who think they can take lightly the life of faith and revert to any comfort zone because of their malaise. Therefore, the rhetorical impact of the passage is extremely important. As I investigate further the passage, I will uphold the fact that God does not neglect those who sincerely receive salvation in Christ, but does not take pride in those who cheapen the salvation in Christ.

2.2. A Review on Scholarly Arguments Specific to Hebrews 6:4-6

The passage in discussion seems to be short, but raises a number of scholarly and interpretive arguments that hinge on the understanding of the pericope. Scholars have

also identified the issue of apostasy in Hebrews 6:4-6 (Ellingworth 1993:27; Lane 1991:1421). Bateman (2007:24) states that, "... the warning passages clearly force us to address the issue of assurance and the doctrine of eternal security."

The commonly known schools of thought are Calvinism and Arminianism. Interpreters have also used different approaches to interpret the warning passage. For example, Nongbri (2003:265-279) examines the passage in the light of Jewish apocalyptic literature. DeSilva (1999:33-57), in a modified Greco-Roman Rhetorical approach, compares the passage to ideas from the Greco-Roman patron-client relationships. Mathewson (1999:209-225) and Gleason (1998:62-91) have investigated the passage by engaging its OT backgrounds. Emmrich (2003:83-95) uses the pneumatological approach (cf. Davis 2008:753-754). Since each of the writers makes their own nuanced contribution to understanding the passage, I shall briefly summarize and evaluate each one of them in turns. I shall then follow with a brief reflective comment on the implications of the review to the present study.

2.2.1. Compton's Analysis of Persevering and Falling Away in Heb 6:4-6

Compton (1996:135-167) has analyzed the passage to establish the relationship between the statements in v4 and v5 on the one hand with those in v6. His purpose is to survey and investigate how the four major views on apostasy in the warning passages of Hebrews, depending on whether the recipients were believers or not, are evident in the passage. These are summarized below.

1. True believer: apostasy/loss of salvation: The first view concludes that the passage refers to true believers who apostatize and lose their salvation (Brooke 1974:150, 166-67; Moffatt 1924:76-82; Wilson 1987:109-113; Attridge 1989:166-173; Lane 1991:1:141-143; McKnight 1992: 24-25, 43-48).

Compton notes that this view's strength lies in its interpretation of v4 and v5 where "enlightened" is interpreted as "instruction" or "illumination." "Tasting of the heavenly gift" is understood as a metaphor for experiencing salvation. "Falling away" in v6 is interpreted

as apostasy. And “impossible” means that the subsequent condition of those who fall away is irreversible.

However, this seems to contradict a number of passages in Scripture which argue that salvation once received cannot be lost. (John 6:38-40; 10:27-29; Eph 1:4-14; Rom 8:31-39; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:5). Compton however, argues that proponents of this view do not offer a consistent explanation on why it is impossible to restore those who fall away.

2. True believer: apostasy/loss of reward: believes that “fall away” is not the loss of salvation, but the loss of blessing and reward.

This view seems to lighten the warnings in the passage. It also interprets v4 and v5 in a similar manner as the first view. Compton asks why it is “impossible,” to bring those who are guilty to repentance” if all that matters is loss of reward (1996:140). One wonders what the author could be worried about if no one has lost out on salvation.

3. True Believer: Hypothetical Apostasy/Loss of Salvation: This view has the same interpretation of v4 and v5 with the views discussed above, but fails to acknowledge that the passage addresses a real audience. Instead it argues that the sin of apostasy is hypothetical.

The interpretation from this view is problematic because as cited by Compton, the sin has already been committed by some as stated in Heb 10:25-29 (Hewitt 1960:106, 108, 111; Kent 1972:113–114; Guthrie 1983:144–147).

4. False Believer: Apostasy/Eternal Condemnation: The view holds that the audience comprised false believers who apostatized to eternal condemnation. It takes vv. 4–5 as depicting the experience of those who had been exposed to the gospel and had been associated with the community of believers, but were not actually saved. Heb 6:6 is understood as saying that these, under pressure of persecution, rejected the faith and became hardened by this act of apostasy so that there was no possibility of bringing them again to repentance. There was only the certainty of eternal condemnation and judgment (Hughes

1973:137–155; Nicole n.d:55–364; Morris 1981:54–57; Toussaint 1982:67–80; Bruce 1990:144–145; Grudem 1994:794–802).

Compton states from the beginning that he is a proponent of eternal security (Calvinistic) and as such his conclusion is based on his doctrinal inclination. He sides more with the fourth view that suggests that the audience comprised false believers who then were damned to eternal judgment.

It is critical to mention that the author of Hebrews seemed to have been addressing the believers as earlier alluded to. However some within the audience might not have been taking their salvation faithfully or seriously. This audience was not different from today's Church where it is difficult to tell who is a genuine Christian. When preachers address the congregations, there is a tendency to assume they are addressing believers while they are aware that others are not. It is not in our human ability to discern whether people in the pews are believers or not because sometimes people have the ability to fake their behavior. Another possibility is that some people think that they are believers but are not.

Yet God cannot be deceived because he knows those that are His and He has promised the security of their faith through His Son. An interpreter is right to allow the warnings to stand because the responsibility is to encourage the perseverance in faith of all true believers despite the presence of those who might not believe. One would argue that the author had a responsibility to teach according to God's Word, which is true. It is therefore important to first strive to hear the author in his context before we can make any conclusions assumed from other passages. In the rhetorical analysis and interpretation of the clauses in the passage, it will be important to determine what the author was saying in relation to the prevailing conditions of His audience.

2.2.2. Davis' Oral Critical Perspective of Hebrews 6:4–6

Davis (2008:753–767) performs an oral critical analysis of Heb 6:4-6. He argues that Scripture is a literary entity, yet it was created in a strongly oral culture. Hence, authors structured their compositions for hearing audiences. Those who heard needed to have an author who would provide mnemonic clues, and a structure which showed the

progression of thought by aural rather than visual indicators such as sentence, paragraph and chapter markings. Even more to the point, they needed someone who could describe reality and express notions of truth in a manner that they could understand and easily remember.

Davis (2008:755) recognizes two of the many characteristics of orally based thought and expression; firstly, “redundant” or copious where the speaker returns to previously used vocabulary and ideas. This technique keeps both the speaker and the hearer on the right track while, just as importantly, indicating the internal structure of the discourse. It is referred to in oral scholarship as chiasm, ring composition, concentric structure, *inclusio*, *responsio* or parallelism. Bearing this in mind, Davis briefly reviews the other warning passages in Hebrews as a way of connecting our understanding to the passage.

Secondly, oral thought and expression is “agonistically toned.” Oral stories are based in a world of conflict and struggle while writing draws our attention more toward inner crisis. Oral composition splits the world into friends and foes and is filled with name-calling, and it is the opposite expressions of praise (2008:755).

Davis (2008:757) acknowledges that it is difficult to come to this passage with a clean slate and not allow other Scriptures and one’s theological history to dictate the interpretation. He cautions that the use of predications such as ‘true/genuine’ or ‘false’ is in itself obstinately wrong in reference to the audience and incurs suspicion of importing alien concepts into our text because this was not the intention of the author. He also agrees that the passage refers to the sin of apostasy (Davis 2008:758). He looks at the use of *inclusio* on the first person plural and the patterned positioning of three themes: warning, command, and encouragement and assurance in the warning passages (Davis 2008:761).

Davis (2008:765) thus concludes that, the “impossibility” of repentance in 6:4 does not deal with the audience’s returning to repentance, but with the author’s inability to bring them to repentance. He further concludes that the warning does not refer to salvation, but to the audience’s reliance on what the author can do for them. The audience may have felt that their association with the author and/or the community was their insurance. This

is the mindset of the Jews whom John the Baptist and Jesus condemned for relying on being “children of Abraham” (2008:765). Davis’ view that defends the assurance of salvation somehow seems to underplay the severity of the warning of the author to his audience. He also raises some questions that need to be answered in the way he interprets “impossibility”. For example, one would ask whether the onus to forgive the audience is on the author.

2.2.3. Nongbri’s Touch of Condemnation in a Word of Exhortation in Hebrews 6:4-12

The question Nongbri (2003:265-279) attempts to answer is how Heb 6:4-6 must be understood in relation to the promises and assurances of salvation in the rest of the NT. Nongbri (2003:265-273) proposes that the author of Hebrews employed threats of eternal condemnation using words and imagery from Jewish apocalyptic literature. He combined them with the convention of Greco-Roman moral exhortation, particularly from Ezra 4, to evoke a specific kind of fear in his audience (Nongbri 2003:265). The audience should, rather than fearing the reproach of society, have angst for falling away from the community, which in the author’s eyes, is an offense for which no repentance is available (2003:265). Nongbri (2003:266) believes that the threats must be real to effectively bring about such fear, contrary to the assertions of many recent commentators. These threats must concern genuine believers. However, he highlights the fact that the author of Hebrews uses this severe language in good rhetorical fashion, following his threats with words of consolation to encourage his audience to stand fast in their marginalized community (Nongbri 2003:277).

In Heb 6:4-6, the author draws on the language of the Hebrew Scriptures through the filter of apocalyptic interpretation. While the author does not ascribe to an outlook of full-blown apocalyptic, he uses language and concepts similar to those found in apocalyptic literature, where they are meant to evoke fear in the audience. This threatening language is used for the same purpose, but he molds and frames his words according to the protocols of Greco-Roman rhetorical standards, following a rule much like that of Pseudo-Cicero, who states that harsh speech should be presented with pungency, which if too severe, will be mitigated by praise (Nongbri 2003:278). Nongbri cautions that,

If, however, we still feel the need to systematize this passage with other New Testament concepts of soteriology, perhaps, rather than attempting to see "what we must do" to Heb. 6:4-8 to make it fit the rest of the New Testament, the more fruitful and stimulating exercise would be to ask instead how we can make the rest of the New Testament conform to the outlook of Heb. 6:4-8 (2003:279).

Nongbri's view is helpful because it begins with considering the context of the passage before relating it to other passages in the NT. Nongbri has done a great job in considering the Jewish rhetorical pedigree of the passage which I believe must be considered in interpreting the passage in addition to the Greco-Roman rhetorical strategies.

2.2.4. Mathewson's Study of Old Testament Background of Hebrews 6

Mathewson's (1999:209-225) purpose is to propose reading Heb 6:4-6 in light of its OT background. He contends that much misunderstanding of the passage stems from a failure to appreciate its OT matrix. Mathewson agrees with McKnight's synthetic approach which comprises four basic components that provide a basis for comparison with the other warnings. The four components are audience, sin, exhortation, and consequences. Mathewson (1999:210) is convinced that if the warning passages are to be considered synthetically, it is advisable to consider the OT examples used in other warning passages in the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 as well.

Mathewson (1999:211), however, appreciates the complexity of Heb 6:4-6 in that it is difficult to identify whether an OT illustration illuminates the passage because the passage does not explicitly indicate so. His proposal is that behind Heb 6:4-6 lies a reference to the wilderness generation and the Kadesh-Barnea incident (cf. Numbers 13-14; Psalm 95) which featured prominently in the warning in Heb 3:7-4:13.

Mathewson (1999:225) therefore concludes that in analogy to the old covenant community, those envisioned in vv. 4-6 have experienced the blessings of the new covenant ("being enlightened," "tasting the heavenly gift," etc.), experiences common to all by virtue of belonging to the new covenant community. However, they have

recapitulated the error of their old covenant predecessors by failing to believe and rejecting what they have experienced. In doing so, they come under the covenantal curse. Mathewson believes that some members of the audience of Hebrews also had fallen away just as those in the wilderness. I beg to differ with Mathewson in that the author of Hebrews was assured of better things pertaining to his audience's salvation as indicated in Heb 6:9-12. Mathewson does not clarify whether belonging to the community of believers meant that these people referred to were saved.

Mathewson's conclusion indicates that some of the members of the audience in Hebrews did not take heed of the teachings from the Word of God and ended up losing out on their covenantal promise. He has done well to relate the passage to the OT. However he has not extensively examined the rhetorical features of the passage to try and understand the author in context. This creates a rhetorical gap that I believe must be addressed as well. The Hebrews community had not yet fallen away. The author writes to warn them about the consequences.

2.2.5. Gleason and the Old Testament Background of Hebrews 6

Gleason's (1998:62-91) purpose is to move the discussion on the meaning and implication of the warning passage of Heb 6 back to an OT perspective. This seems appropriate because of his belief in the likely Hebraic audience and distinctly Jewish ethos of the Epistle. Like Mathewson (1999:209-225), Gleason is equally convinced that the Kadesh-Barnea account illuminates Heb 6:4-8 because it is the central motif behind the warning passages (1998:64). Gleason believes that the OT perspective provides helpful insight into the spiritual state of those described in vv4-5 and the impossibility of renewed repentance in v6 (1998:64).

He explains that the criteria for determining the presence of possible OT allusions include similarities of theme, content, specific construction of words, and structure. Furthermore, when echoes are traceable to the same OT context and a reasonable explanation of authorial motive for using allusions is given, certainty about them increases (Gleason 1998:65). This sounds helpful to understand that the author and his audience had a familiar background which helped them to echo a past event. Both the author and the

audience were able to refer to an event without giving details of the whole historical happenings and yet understood each other.

Further than Mathewson (1999:209-225), Gleason manages to identify certain exegetical principles commonly found in the contemporary rabbinical practice which are also applied by Hebrews. Typological interpretation, for example, is based on the assumption that the redemptive activity of God follows basic patterns throughout history. Hence typology as a rabbinical exegetical principle is commonly defined as the use of patterns of correspondence between persons or events in earlier redemptive history and persons or events in later redemptive history (1998:65-66).

Gleason (1998:66-69) believes that the author gave many indications throughout the Epistle that his intended readers were Jewish Christians. He argues from the way the writer addressed his audience as "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" (3:1), "partakers of Christ" (3:14), and "beloved" (6:9), and his constant use of "we" (e.g., 2:1-3; 4:14-16) and "us" (e.g. 4:1, 11, 16) indicates that they were converted Christians.

The conclusion is that these Jewish Christians were retrogressing in their spiritual life and were considering a return to the rituals of Judaism to avoid persecution from the Jews. Pressure from their Jewish countrymen arose from the growing patriotism resulting in the Jewish revolt of 66 AD. The author's allusions to Kadesh-Barnea show that the sin of "falling away" refers to a final decision to return to Judaism and to remain in a state of spiritual retrogression. Once they made that choice, they, like the Exodus generation, would be beyond repentance and would face the inevitable judgment of God resulting in the forfeiture of blessings and ultimately the loss of physical life (Gleason 1998:91).

It is understandable that there could be a spiritual depreciation attached to the incident in Heb 6:4-6. However it seems that Gleason goes into the extreme of the Kadesh-Barnea account. He argues that physical death is also expected as punishment to the Hebrew audience just as it was to the Kadesh-Barnea community in case of those who fall away. The warning, as Nongbri states should stand as sternly as it is stated and it has a spiritual repercussion other than a physical one. For instance, physically, these people in the book

of Hebrews had suffered persecution and property loss, which do not in any way stand as God's judgment against them.

It is true to state that in an age of spiritual apathy and moral compromise within the church, and often among its leadership, this passage delivers a severe warning to all who take their commitment to Christ lightly. However, what must be kept in mind is the security of faith and how in His sovereignty, God has promised salvation to the end, to those who continually hold on to their faith.

2.2.6. Grudem's Perseverance of saints in Heb 6:4-6

Grudem (1995:133-182) highlights the questions raised from this passage that suggest that the audience were being confronted with the danger of losing their salvation (1995:133). He proposes that instead of engaging other scriptures first, it is necessary to consider the passage in its immediate context and in the context of the book of Hebrews. Grudem first analyses the passage in its immediate context to establish the meaning of the clauses in the passage (1995:134-147). He later, like McKnight, analyses the other warning passages in the book of Hebrews and then relates the passage to other NT texts that seem to carry a similar message as in this passage.

His argument is that the warning passage is consistent with the Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Grudem concludes that the passage is not in conflict with the belief in the perseverance of saints because the author shows that the audience must press on and endure to the end (1995:179-182). Two actors are depicted in the scenario of perseverance of saints. The one part of perseverance is dependent on God's unwavering promises and faithfulness while the other part is reflected in the human action of not giving up through constant warnings and exhortations (1995:136-139). He correctly points out that the clauses in the passage speak of the actions that are experienced by a believer. He also states that the experiences are not conclusively depicting salvation. He further argues that the conclusion as to whether one can lose his salvation is not easily derived from this passage. The other difficulty is in whether the author is warning the saved audience or indicating something else that we are failing to deduce.

Grudem's extensive analysis of the passage in its context is very helpful. He has established the fact that there is perseverance and security of the saints. However, his exegetical analysis of the clauses seems to underplay the experiences described in the warning passage of those who had fallen away. The exegetical strategy has not employed the OT background of the passage, hence the inability to fully bring out the full picture of what the author of Hebrews was portraying to his audience. Grudem's explanation of the experiences described in vv4 and 5 as unregenerative seems to be theologically driven rather than arising from the exegesis of the passage.

2.2.7. Oberholtzer's Eschatological interpretation - The Thorn Infested Ground

Oberholtzer (1988:319- 328) approaches the third warning passage from Heb 5:11 to 6:12 with the aim of proving that the passage threatens judgment to true believers (1988:319). The eschatological section of the passage, according to Oberholtzer, is found in Heb 6:7-8 where the issues of rain, soil and fruit or thistles are mentioned. He argues that the passage underlines the element of judgment where true believers are disciplined in this life and lose out on rewards in the millennium. This view equally seems to lighten the penalty of the sin of apostasy. He argues that the passage is meant to motivate Christians to live according to Scripture.

Oberholtzer believes that the understanding of Hebrew 6:4-12 must be drawn from Heb 5:11 where the author points out the immaturity of his audience despite the teachings they had so far received (1988:320). He believes the conjunction *gar* ("for") in 6v4 connects the previous section which states that the audience was slow to learn and exhibiting levels of immaturity (1988:320). The author therefore desires his audience to press on to maturity. Oberholtzer believes that the five participles indicate that regeneration had at one time taken place in the readers of Hebrews. However, they failed to partner with the Holy Spirit and failed to hold on to the Word they came to know therefore forfeiting the rewards they were to receive in the eschatological millennium. One would ask, "Is the state of forfeiting rewards not the same as backsliding or apostasy?" And how did they come to know God without partnering with the Holy Spirit? One would

ask. Oberholtzer seem to state the retrogression in a person who once believed, but fails to attach grave consequences to such an act.

In his analysis, Oberholtzer is convinced that the singular article '*rous*' ('those who') indicates that only one group was being addressed (1988:221). This is obvious in the sense that the description is referring to those who had somehow given up doing what was expected of them. However, it would not be conclusive to think that the author was referring to the same group from 5:11 because in 6:9, he reassures them that there is hope for his audience as he is convinced of better things than what he has just been describing in the previous verses.

In Heb 6:7-8, Oberholtzer's analysis rhetorically compares the thorn and thistles analogously with the dullness of the readers. He further shows that obedience parallels with fertile land while disobedience parallels with thorns and thistles (1988:325). He also cautions the fact that the burning of the thorns and thistles is not related to burning in hell. Oberholtzer (1988:327) concludes that the warning was appropriate to the regenerated individuals so that they could hold on to maturity. He further concludes that if they were to give up, it was impossible for the community to call them back to repentance. The act of giving up was equivalent to the actions of those who crucified Jesus Christ with so much hate.

Oberholtzer's analysis that the audience is Christian is understood, but where he states that the passage reveals the judgment on Christians must be reviewed critically. The other area of concern on Oberholtzer's explanation is the meaning of impossibility. He attributes impossibility to the community. The impossibility however should not be attributed to the community because the community had no saving power.

2.2.8. Allen's Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Hebrews 6:4-6.

Allen (2010:344-377) investigates the passage by considering its historical background, the meaning of the clauses and the spiritual condition of those people who "fall away". He also suggests investigating whether the OT allusion and echoes can be identified in Heb 6:4-6. Allen, like Oberholtzer believes that the passage is connected to the previous

passage as a result of the *gar* (“for”) of 6:4. He states that Heb 6:4-6 is the *crux interpretum* of Heb 5:11-6:8. Allen (2010:361) critically engages Grudem’s and McKnight’s views on the nature of the sin of falling away. He criticizes McKnight’s conclusion that the sin was apostasy and he feels that McKnight makes his conclusion without critically looking at the meaning of *parapiptō* (falling away). Allen argues that *parapiptō* can be translated as transgression which does not mean irremediable apostasy. Whether this is true to what this passage means is what needs to be cross examined.

Allen examines the five major views on the description of those who have fallen away in Heb 6:4-6, namely, 1) the loss of Salvation, 2) the Hypothetical view, 3) the Tests of Genuineness view, 4) the Means of Salvation and 5) the loss of Rewards view. Like others, he also looks at the strengths and weaknesses of each view. In his conclusion on the four views, Allen believes that the passage refers to genuine believers and he also concludes that believers cannot apostatize. There is need to understand that the author was not in any way contradicting any biblical principles.

2.2.9. DeSilva’s Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Heb 6:4-6 using the Patron-Client Relationship Paradigm

DeSilva’s (1999:33-57) socio-rhetorical approach strives to establish whether theological constructs like ‘eternal security’ are really the most text-centered ways in which to appropriate Heb 6:4-6. He is convinced that examining the inner-texture, inter-texture and socio-rhetorical interpretation of a text yields fruitful results. DeSilva’s analyzes Heb 6:4-8 by considering the Patron-Client relationship in the ancient Greco-Roman world. He is convinced that the passage sets the benefits that clients have received from their relationship with their patron Jesus at center stage. Heb 6:4-5 deliberately tabulates the benefits of being connected to their patron. The people being referred to had the privilege of getting enlightened; having tasted the heavenly gifts; and having tasted the powers of the age to come. These benefits demonstrate God’s generosity that the clients cannot easily trample upon. In return, the decent act of appreciation that the clients can show to the patron is to walk in loyalty and obedience to him.

DeSilva (1999:225) views the Heb 6:4-6 as being a fiercer warning passage than the previous warnings in the Epistle. DeSilva's view agrees with McKnight's (1992:21-59) and Mathewson's (1999:209-225) as he states that the warning passages are not unrelated texts as they have been traditionally treated. This necessitates taking the thematic context of all the warning passages into consideration when interpreting each one of them. DeSilva has done a socio-rhetorical exegesis of the passage according to the Greco-Roman approach. However, his interpretation overshadows the consideration of the OT background of the passage as proposed in this thesis.

2.2.10. Emmrich's Pneumatological Approach to Heb 6:4-6

Emmrich (2003:83-95) carries out a pneumatological inquiry that suggests that the references to *pneuma* (Spirit) in Heb 6:4-6 can best be understood against the backdrop of second-temple retributive pneumatological traditions. At the same time, Emmrich believes that the author's eschatological (or christological) agenda in the book, in particular, the notion of the impossibility of a second *metanoia* (repent) motivated him to modify received teachings about the Holy Spirit (2003:83).

Emmrich (2003:83) supports Noel Weeks' (1976:72-80) argument that the crucial phrases in 6:4-5 resonate with overtones from the LXX account of Israel's wilderness experience, which is a major reference in the two previous warning passages (2:1-4; 3:7-11). Like other interpreters who have seen "enlighten" in relation to the wilderness experience, Emmrich relates the Word to the pillar of cloud/fire that provided light to the children of Israel.

Emmrich's (2003:94) pneumatological approach convinces him to believe that the common denominator here is that possession/retention of the Spirit is contingent on obedience. If the audience refuses to stay on course, the gift of the Spirit will be irrevocably lost. The loss will include all the other blessings both realized as well as reserved for the wandering people of God. This view seems to come from Paul's warning to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:19) about being careful so that they do not quench or grieve the Spirit. However, Paul does not state at this point the consequences of quenching the Spirit.

Emmrich (2003:94) believes that it is the blending of current concepts of the Spirit with the pilgrimage motif that marks the author's pneumatology in the first three warning passages. The Spirit is the guide of the eschatological exodus and wherever and whenever the pilgrimage is terminated the work of the Spirit ceases. The author of Hebrews has thus introduced a notable innovation to the above retributive concepts.

Jewish texts that deal with the possession/retention of the Spirit do not suggest that the departure of the Spirit is definitive. After all, the gift of *pneuma* hinges on Christ's once-for-all sacrifice; without this atoning foundation the salvific work of the Spirit cannot continue for the apostate. Christ's sacrifice has been positively rejected (which sacrifice is unrepeatable), and the Christian pilgrimage has been terminated. Hence, there is no ground for the Spirit ever to resume his work in the apostate. The apostate therefore cannot be re-instituted (Emmrich 2003:94-95).

Again, provided that Emmrich's (2003:95) conclusion is correct, the author's pneumatological convictions seemingly differ in some ways, from those known from the Pauline episodes, where there is no hint of retributive nuances, let alone the irrevocable forfeiture of the Spirit's presence. This is all the more conspicuous, since the author seems to have belonged to the closer circle of the apostle's acquaintances (cf. Heb 13:23).

Emmrich's pneumatological inquiry of Heb 6:4-6 brings out the element that needs to be taken seriously in interpreting the passage. The Holy Spirit dwells in those who remain obedient to God. The whole essence of the Holy Spirit is to guide in all truths of God's Word and direction. When Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit, they then can find it possible to obey and do God's will. Without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to have the required faith that makes one to please God. However, to be a partaker of the Holy Spirit might also imply one who is found in the fellowship and community of God's people.

2.3. A Summary of the Review of Secondary Literature on Hebrews 6:4-6

The scholarly works reviewed above highlight the approaches that authors have applied to the exegesis of the warning passage. The approaches have shed light on how to

interpret Heb 6:4-6. For instance, Compton's (1996:135-167) analysis of persevering of faith and falling away in Heb 6:4-6 bases his conclusion on its doctrinal commitment to eternal security. He sides more with the view that suggests that the audience comprised false believers who were then damned to eternal judgment. However, it has been pointed out that the author of Hebrews seems to have been addressing the believers and yet gave a warning example of what happened to people who thought they could lighten the salvation that is found in Christ.

On the other hand, Davis' (2008:753-767) oral critical analysis of Hebrews 6:4-6 suggests that the "impossibility" of 6:4 does not deal with the audience's returning to repentance, but with the author's inability to bring them to repentance. Davis further concludes that the warning does not refer to salvation, but to the audience's reliance on what the author can do for them. The audience may have felt that their association with the author and/or the community was their insurance. This is the mindset of the Jews whom John the Baptist and Jesus condemned for relying on being "children of Abraham". Davis' view that defends the assurance of salvation somehow seems to underplay the severity of the warning of the author to his audience. He also raises some questions that need to be answered in the way he interprets "impossibility".

Nongbri (2003:265-273) uses the Jewish Apocalyptic Literature approach and Greco-Roman Rhetorical exegesis of Heb 6:4-6. Nongbri believes that the threats must be real to effectively bring about such fear, contrary to the assertions of many recent commentators, and these threats must concern genuine believers. Nongbri's view is helpful because it begins with considering the context of the passage before relating it to other passages in the NT. In the case of this thesis, it would be in order to critically investigate Ezra 4 to establish whether it is a possible OT background other than Num 13 and 14.

Mathewson (1999:209-225) investigates Heb 6:4-6 in light of its OT background. In analogy to the old covenant community, those envisioned in vv. 4-6 have experienced the blessings of the new covenant ("being enlightened," "tasting the heavenly gift," etc.). These experiences are common to all by virtue of belonging to the new covenant

community. However, some of the members in the audience have recapitulated the error of their old covenant predecessors by failing to believe and rejecting what they have experienced. In doing so, they come under the covenantal curse. Mathewson has done well to relate the passage to the OT, but has not extensively investigated the rhetorical dynamics of the passage to try and understand the author in context as he is communicating to his audience. Mathewson gives an impression that the author was referring to some members of the audience who had fallen away.

Gleason (1998:63-64) investigates how the passage can be interpreted in the light of the OT background. He has engaged OT themes, which seem appropriate because of the Hebrew audience and distinctly Jewish ethos of the Epistle. The Kadesh-Barnea account illuminates Heb 6:4-8 because it is the central motif behind the warning passages. The OT perspective provides helpful insight into the spiritual state of those described in vv4-5 and the impossibility of renewed repentance in v6. The conclusion is that these Jewish Christians were retrogressing in their spiritual life and were considering a return to the rituals of Judaism to avoid persecution from the Jews. Pressure from their Jewish countrymen arose from the growing patriotism resulting in the Jewish revolt of A D 66.

There is a spiritual depreciation attached to the incident in Heb 6:4-6. However, it seems that Gleason goes into the extreme of the Kadesh-Barnea account where physical death is expedient. In this case, can one say that the persecution they suffered at one point was due to disobedience? I do not think so.

Each scholar has greatly contributed to the interpretation of the warning passage. However, there is need to carry out a further rhetorical investigation to bring new insights to the passage by considering its OT background. Below is a table of the complete summary of the contributions of the scholarly review to the warning and to the enhancement of this thesis.

2.4. A Summary Table of Review of Secondary Literature on Hebrews 6:4-6

No.	Author	Research Question	Method of Exegesis	Summary of insights	Critique of the Thesis
2.4.1	Compton (1996:135-167)	How does vv4 & 5 link up with v6? Do the four major views support both the eternal security of the believer and the need for believers to persevere in the faith?	Literary and theological analysis of Persevering of faith and Falling Away	His conclusion is based on his doctrinal presupposition of eternal security of believers. He sides more with the fourth view that suggests that the audience comprised false believers who were then damned to eternal judgment	The author seems to have been addressing the believers and yet gave a warning of what happens to people who think they can lighten the salvation that is found in Christ.
2.4.2	Davis (2008:753-767)	How can Oral Critical analysis help in the exegesis of Scripture as a Literary entity? How can Oral Critical analysis help in the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6?	Oral Critical Analysis of Hebrews 6:4–6	The “impossibility” of 6:4 does not deal with the audience’s returning to repentance, but with the author’s inability to bring them to repentance. Davis further concludes that the warning does not refer to salvation, but to the audience’s reliance on what the author can do for them. The audience may have felt that their association with the author and/or the community was their insurance. This is the mindset of the Jews whom John the Baptist	Davis’ view that defends the assurance of salvation somehow seems to underplay the severity of the warning of the author to his audience. He also raises some questions that need to be answered in the way he interprets “impossibility”.

				and Jesus condemned for relying on being “children of Abraham”.	
2.4.3	Nongbri (2003:265-279)	How must Heb 6.4-6 be understood in terms of all the promises and assurances in the rest of the NT? Should the touch of condemnation in a word of exhortation stand in Hebrews 6:4-12?	Jewish Apocalyptic Literature Approach and Greco-Roman Rhetorical exegesis	Nongbri believes that the threats must be real to effectively bring about fear, which was the rhetorical goal of the author, contrary to the assertions of many recent commentators, and these threats must concern genuine believers.	Nongbri’s view is helpful because it begins with considering the context of the passage before relating it to other passages in the NT. In the case of this thesis, it would be in order to critically investigate Edzra 4 to establish whether it is a possible OT background.
2.4.4	Mathewson (1999:209-225)	How can the passage be interpreted in the light of the OT background?	Exegetically reading Heb 6:4-6 in light of an OT background.	In analogy to the OT community, those in vv. 4-6 have experienced the blessings of the new covenant (“being enlightened,” “tasting the heavenly gift,” etc.), but have recapitulated the error of their old covenant predecessors by failing to believe and rejecting what they have experienced. In doing so, they come under the covenantal curse.	He has done well to relate the passage to the OT, but has not extensively investigated the rhetorical dynamics of the passage to try and understand the author in context as he is communicating to his audience.

2.4.5	Gleason (1998:62-91)	How can the passage be interpreted in the light of the OT background?	Engages OT themes, which seems appropriate because of the Hebrew audience and distinctly Jewish ethos of the Epistle	The Kadesh-Barnea account illuminates Heb 6:4-8 as it is the central motif behind the warning passages. The OT perspective provides helpful insight into the spiritual state of those described in vv4-5 and the impossibility of renewed repentance in v6. The conclusion is that these Jewish Christians were retrogressing in their spiritual life and were considering a return to the rituals of Judaism to avoid persecution from the Jews. Pressure from their Jewish countrymen arose from the growing patriotism resulting in the Jewish revolt of A D 66.	While it is understandable that there is a spiritual depreciation attached to the incident in Heb 6:4-6, it seems that Gleason goes into the extreme of the Kadesh-Barnea account where physical loss is expedient. In this case, can one say that the persecution they suffered at one point was due to disobedience?
2.4.6	Grudem (1995:133-182)	What are the major questions raised from Heb 6:4-6? What was the audience being confronted with? What are the difficulties this passage creates for those who believe in the	Contextual and Inter-textual Analysis of Perseverance of Saints in Heb 6:4-6	The passage is not in conflict with the belief in the perseverance of saints The one part of perseverance is dependent on God's unwavering promises and faithfulness while the other is reflected in the human action of not giving up through constant warnings and exhortations. The clauses in the passage speak of the actions that are experienced	Grudem clearly indicates that the passage is a problematic one. His approach shows that different backgrounds will create difficulties in the understanding of the passage. He also points out that perseverance is a sign of eternal

		security of their faith and the perseverance of saints?		by a believer, yet the conclusion as to whether one can lose his salvation is not easily derived from this passage.	security for the saints. The difficulty is in whether the author is warning the saved audience or indicating something else that we are failing to deduce.
2.4.7	Oberholtzer (1988:319-328)	<p>How does the passage interpret the issue of rewards?</p> <p>Does it refer to the loss of salvation of believers or the loss of rewards?</p> <p>When is this loss implied, is it in the now or after this life?</p>	The eschatological interpretation of the passage is found in Heb 6:7-8 where the issues of rain, soil and fruit or thistles are mentioned.	The warning was proper in the case of the regenerated individuals so that they could hold on to maturity because if they were to give up, it was impossible for the community to call them to repentance as they would be the same as those who crucified Jesus Christ with so much hate. He argues that the passage brings out an element of judgment where true believers are disciplined in this life and lose out on rewards in the millennium.	The impossibility should not be attributed to the community because it had no saving power. Unless he is suggesting that the community felt the author was stating that the apostates were not anywhere near to qualifying for a second chance to come to repentance. He also lightens the severity of the warning by attributing the loss to rewards.

2.4.8	Allen (2010:344-377)	What was the spiritual condition of those the passage is referring to? What is the meaning of <i>parapipto</i> in the passage? Are there any OT background issues?	Historical, exegetical and theological exposition of Hebrews 6:4-6 by examining its overall structure and syntactical elements.	Heb 6:4-6 is the <i>crux interpretum</i> of Heb 5:11-6:8. Allen argues that <i>parapipto</i> can translate as transgression which does not end into irremediable apostasy. The passage refers to genuine believers. These believers cannot apostatize. Apostasy is the meaning of “falling away”	There is need to harmonize how believers can be apostates. It is important to understand the context of Heb 6:4-6 other than trying to force our theological inclination.
2.4.9	DeSilva (1999:33-57)	Is the theological constructs like ‘eternal security’ really the most text-centered ways in which to appropriate Heb 6:4-6?	Greco-Roman Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation using the Patron-Client relationship paradigm in Heb 6:4-8	DeSilva’s analyzes Heb 6:4-8 by considering the Patron-Client relationship in the Greco-Roman era. He is convinced that the passage sets a center stage in tabulating the benefits that clients have received from their relationship with their patron Jesus. DeSilva is of the view that the warning is fiercer than in previous iterations, an indication that the passage is connected to the previous warning passages.	DeSilva has done a great job in socio-rhetorically exegeting the passage and this in addition to considering the OT background will provide greater help in understanding the author.

2.4.10	<p>Emmrich (2003:83-95)</p>	<p>Did the author's eschatological (or christological) agenda in the book of Hebrews, in particular, the notion of the impossibility of a second <i>metanoia</i> (repent) motivate him to modify received teachings about the Holy Spirit?</p> <p>Do the crucial phrases in 6:4-5 resonate with overtones from the LXX account of Israel's wilderness experience, which is a major reference in the two previous warning passages (2:1-4; 3:7-11)?</p>	pneumatological approach	<p>The common denominator here is that possession/retention of the Spirit is contingent on obedience. Disobedience revokes the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is the guide of the eschatological exodus. And because Christ's sacrifice has been positively rejected and the Christian pilgrimage has been terminated, there is no ground for the Spirit ever to resume his work in the apostate.</p>	<p>This view seems to come from Paul's warning to the Thessalonians (5:19) about being careful so that they do not quench or grieve the Spirit. However, Paul does not state at this point the consequences of quenching the Spirit.</p>
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Chapter 3

Methodology

This study is a rhetorical exegetical examination of the warning passage in Hebrews 6 in the light of its OT background. The interest is to identify the rhetorical strategies that the author used in his exhortation. The study also aims to identify the OT citations, echoes and allusions, if any, that the author employed in Heb 6:4-6 and how these can help in the exegesis of the passage. The methodology therefore investigates how rhetorical criticism and inter-textuality contribute to the interpretation of the passage.

This chapter discusses the methodological issues related to the study. In the methodology, it is important to begin with defining rhetorical criticism and explaining how it helps in the exegesis of the passage. A brief background of developmental changes and advancements in rhetorical criticism are highlighted. It is also necessary to note some pitfalls inherent in using rhetorical criticism without considering the OT background of the passages. The criteria for identifying OT quotations, echoes and allusions are discussed. The major themes of Hebrews and similar phrases and words that could be tied to the warning passage must be investigated in inner-textuality. It is likely that Heb 6:4-6 might not necessarily flow with the immediate theme in discussion because it may appear as a parenthesis that seems to break the flow of discussion. However, understanding the theme of the whole chapter can also help to know what the author is driving at for the sake of his first audience.

3.1. Defining Rhetorical Criticism

Brock, Scott and Cheshebro (1999:14) define rhetoric as “the human effort to induce corporation through the use of symbols”. Watson (2010:166) on the other hand defines it as, “the art of using spoken and written discourse according to accepted rules and

techniques to inform, persuade, or motivate an audience according to the agenda of the speaker or writer". He further states that, "Rhetorical criticism of the NT is the analysis of the biblical books, ... for conformity to or modification of rhetorical conventions for speaking and writing in the Greco-Roman period in which they were written and/or according to more modern conceptions of rhetoric and its functions" (2010:166).

Watson's definition focuses on the Greco-Roman and modern conceptions of rhetoric. However, the NT owes a lot to the OT texts. The OT texts took a form of Jewish exegetical methods. The authors of the OT used rhetorical strategies to persuade their audiences. To follow Watson's definition would make one overlook the Jewish style of rhetoric which is steeped in allegorical, metaphorical and prophetic language. Identifying inter-textuality in the NT text means going back into Jewish rhetoric to some extent. Watson's definition ignores the Jewish heritage of the first Christians, the writers of the NT and the significant Jewish cultural milieu of early Christianity.

Edelman (2003:113-125) states that Rhetoric can be defined as the art or method of reconciling of individual and systemic goals and constraints. This definition realizes that speech in each era has systemic goals and constraints that need to be observed in rhetoric criticism. Edelman appreciates that the Jewish philosophy of language, Talmudic patterns of argumentation and the prophetic voice have contributed to the rhetoric of Scripture.

Asumang and Domeris (2005:8) employ the definition of Rhetoric as "the art of persuasion" which, they state is based on Aristotle's rhetorical handbook (*The Art of Rhetoric*).

Kennedy (1984:3), discovered that in order to appreciate rhetoric one needed to go beyond identifying the style of the piece He defines rhetoric as "that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purposes." He observes that "rhetoric is a historical phenomenon and differs somewhat from culture to culture, more in matter of arrangement and style than in basic devices of invention" (1984:8). Recognizing rhetoric as a 'historical phenomenon' must bring an awareness that the OT text interwoven and quoted into the NT text has elements of rhetoric as well. Kennedy

recognizes that rhetorical analysis of the text cannot be separated from the inter-textual relationships. This study would have been incomplete in the exegesis of the Heb 6:4-6 if it failed to use inter-textuality.

Kennedy (1984:5) acknowledges that, "Rhetoric originates in speech and its primary product is a speech act, not a text, but the rhetoric of historical periods can only be studied through texts." He also cautions that this tends to obscure the difference between rhetorical and literary analysis to some extent. A rhetorical critic then can do what the literary critic does. A literary critic can turn the pages back and forth to compare earlier passages with later ones which a hearer of a speech cannot possibly do.

Rhetoric criticism is therefore the ability to identify the persuasive strategies of the author in delivering the message to his audience in order to get the correct response from them. Rhetoric criticism goes further to appreciate the techniques used by the author to communicate his message to the audience and how he arranges his words to accomplish his purpose. It also identifies some constraints that might arise in communicating the message. "The interest in persuasion involves a disciplined attempt to identify the major purpose and meaning of a passage; an essential aspect of biblical studies-and the thought that went into its formulation" (Morrison 2004:8).

3.2. A Brief History of Application of Rhetorical Criticism to the New Testament

It is however important to note that in the history of the discipline of Biblical Studies there has been advancement in the stages of approach to Rhetorical Criticism in the NT. Morrison (2004:1-46) helps us to understand different stages that Rhetorical Criticism has undergone. There has been Classical, Greco-Roman, Socio-rhetorical and Modern criticism among others.

3.2.1. Era of Application of Classical Rhetoric to New Testament

Classical Rhetoric pertained to the use of style, figures of speech and categorizing literature in genre and form. Classical rhetoric refers to the use of ideas of rhetorical criticism by pre-reformation and early post reformation theologians in their commentaries,

e.g. Augustine and Calvin. This period was limited and appears to have come to an end with the European enlightenment. Though Classical Rhetoric Criticism has been employed frequently, Morrison is mindful of Watson's observation. Watson (2010:166) notices that what is referred to as Classical Rhetoric Criticism has almost always pertained to stylistic matters, especially figures of speech and thought, and matters of genre and form. He affirms his argument by giving an example where Augustine analyzed the rhetorical style of the biblical writers, especially Paul, in Book IV of his work *On Christian Doctrine*. Similarly, the Venerable Bede in his *De schematibus et tropis* analyzed figures and tropes in both Testaments.

Watson (2010:166-67) further acknowledges that, "Melanchthon...wrote rhetorical commentaries on Romans and Galatians utilizing classical conventions of invention, arrangement, and style, as well as more modern conceptions of these while Erasmus provided rhetorical analyses of 1 and 2 Corinthians." He goes on to cite the likes of Calvin who besides noting rhetorical features (particularly stylistic) throughout his commentaries on the NT gives a rhetorical analysis of Romans. Watson (2010:166) confirms that Wilhelm Wuellner noted that the focus was on stylistics as he quotes him,

Rhetoric continued to play a crucial role in the interpretation of the Bible, whether as part of the traditional *lectio divina*, or as part of *thevia moderna* cultivated by the emerging European universities beginning in the 12th century. One of the developments that affected sacred and secular hermeneutics was the virtual identification of poetics and rhetorics in the Renaissance.

3.2.2. Era of Stylistics and Interest in Jewish Literary Features

After a long period of dormancy, interest in Rhetorical criticism was revived in the early 1960s through the efforts of Muilenburg (Watson 2010:167-168). This approach used literary features, forms, structure, styles and figures of speech as a means of establishing the design of the text as a means of persuasion. Taking cue from this, interest grew on establishing how Jewish literary forms are evident in the text. Interpreters (Edelman 2003:113-125; Ellis1992:121) compared several NT text with ancient rabbinical literary

methods of persuasion and biblical interpretation (Mathewson1999:209-225; Gleason 1998:62-91). This stage did not last very long because many authors abused the Jewish interpretation pertaining to metaphors and figures of speech. Also the approach did not in any case call itself specifically as Rhetorical Criticism. All the same by focusing on how the text was designed to persuade its first hearers, we should call that approach rhetorical analysis.

3.2.3. Era of Greco-Roman Comparative and Parallel Applications

The third stage started in the 1980s with a return to interest in ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric, this time on how the Rhetorical handbooks of the time helps to illuminate the rhetorical features of the NT. Interpreters such as Kennedy (1984) and Watson (2010) employed ideas of rhetorical persuasion of the Greco-Roman era to study various NT passages. Of key importance for these interpreters was establishing the rhetorical genre, the arrangement and style of the passages concerned. In analyzing the passage using rhetorical analysis, rhetorical genres can be identified and help the interpreter to understand what the author was trying to achieve with his audience. The genres are classified into judicial, deliberative and epideictic. In persuasion the author encourages his audience towards good work while dissuasion helps the author to move the audience away from bad habits.

When the author employs the juridical or forensic genre of rhetorical argumentation, his aim is to accuse, defend or exonerate the audience. In the epideictic genre, the author's aim is to praise or blame his audience. And in the deliberative piece of writing, the author seeks to dissuade the audience from taking or continuing to take a particular course of action. Judicial rhetoric pertains to accusation and defense with regard to past action, deliberative rhetoric concerns persuasion and dissuasion of thinking or courses of future action, and epideictic applies to praise or blame based on current communal values.

Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions used invention, arrangement and style, as well as more contemporary conventions of these while modern rhetoric emphasizes rhetoric forms such as parallelism, antithesis, symmetry and repetition. Parallelism as a rhetoric device is "similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses

nouns with nouns, infinitives with infinitives, and adverb clauses with adverb clauses” (Corbett and Connors n.d.:6). The passage is examined to see the style and arrangement of words that the author used.

3.2.4. Era of Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the NT

The fourth phase of the development of rhetorical criticism in the NT was championed by Robbins from the middle of the 1990s. Robbins (1996:3-4) has described a different methodology called ‘socio-rhetorical criticism.’ Robbins’ methodology attempts to combine insights from rhetorical criticism with those from sociological studies of the text to generate a more holistic examination of the text. Robbins’ method focuses on five aspects of the text, “(a) inner texture; (b) inter-texture; (c) social and cultural texture; (d) ideological texture; and (e) sacred texture.” Robbins (1996:3-4) explains that inner texture involves “the repetition of particular words, the creation of beginnings and endings, alternation of speech and storytelling, particular ways in which the words present arguments, and the particular ‘feel’ or aesthetic of the text” which is basically stylistic matters.

Under inter-texture, Robbins includes the rhetorical situation, the text's references to previous literature and language, cultural customs and values, and history. Social and cultural texture “concerns the capacities of the text to support social reform, withdrawal, or opposition and to evoke cultural perceptions of dominance, subordination, difference, or exclusion.” Morrison (2004:14) further notes that this would include the text's attempts to persuade or influence the audience. Ideological texture involves the way the author and readers position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups. This would overlap what Robbins calls the social texture, and would overlap as well with the sacred texture, which asks how humans relate with the divine.

Robbins presents some helpful questions for clarifying the setting and purpose of a text, but this falls short of a methodology of rhetorical criticism. Although in theory one might examine stylistic details to ascertain the purpose of a text, in actual practice we usually have a provisional translation and understanding long before we probe the details that help convey the message. It is with this preliminary understanding that we can explore the

sociological questions that Robbins highlights e.g., Is the text attempting to shape culture, ideology, and/or the readers' relationship with the divine? This question is another way of asking how the text is attempting to influence or persuade the audience, and in some cases it can shed light on the purpose of the text. Likewise, a consideration of ideology and group membership may be important in understanding the social dynamics that helped or hindered the communicative purpose.

3.2.5. Modern (or New) Rhetoric

The latest phase of the use of rhetorical criticism in Biblical Studies is often called The Modern or New Rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism using modern rhetoric is a philosophical reconceptualization of Greco-Roman rhetoric, a synchronic approach to argumentation. It is not as suited to historical concerns in interpreting NT texts as Greco-Roman rhetoric. However, modern rhetoric may go beyond historical questions without neglecting them altogether. It neither ignores the historical nature of a text nor does it solely depend upon it. It takes historical information into account, but rather than being descriptive it tries to understand the intention of the text and how values of the time are utilized in the argumentation. It is not trying to reconstruct the original situation, but rather to discover the argumentation of the text in its own right. It is looking at the social, cultural, and ideological values assumed in the premises, topics, and argumentation used.

In concurring with Morrison (2004:18), I argue that NT rhetorical criticism should not limit itself to the patterns of ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric, even though Greco-Roman rhetoric may be useful. Rather, the insights of modern as well as traditional Jewish rhetorical criticism may also be used to gain an understanding of how a text attempts to meet its rhetorical situation. Our basic question remains the same: How does this text try to persuade the audience? What is it trying to say, and how does it go about saying it? We use any tool, whether ancient or modern, to help us understand how the text functions.

Sound rhetorical criticism ensures that the actual message of the author is respected in its authenticity.

Morrison (2004:41) defines argumentation as, “an attempt to persuade; the word persuasion implies some success. Argumentation theory, although it does not leave emotion completely out of the picture, focuses on the rational part of the message. Further, argumentation is only one of several methods of attempting persuasion; others include emotion, threat, or reward.”

The above summary of the development of Rhetorical Criticism in NT Studies show how pervasive and versatile the discipline has become. This no doubt emanates from the immense benefits that rhetorical analysis of the biblical text has yielded. There has been advancement on rhetorical criticism. This creates the need to critically analyze the passage taking into account that there are modern conceptions of rhetoric. This does not mean the neglect of the old rhetorical methods such as the Jewish traditional rhetoric that are useful. In agreeing with Morrison, rhetorical criticism must allow for the probing of the text to bring out the message of the author to the audience that is being addressed at that particular instance. Rhetorical criticism therefore is important to understand how the text relates to its present hearers of the author.

3.3. Rhetorical Criticism and Hebrews

In the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6, this thesis analyzes the passage to critically examine the rhetorical conventions that they used in the Greco-Roman period which the author of Hebrews could have employed and also bearing in mind the OT background that is at play in his communication.

Since this passage is a warning passage as well as an exhortation, it is most likely to find the author using such rhetorical forms as persuasion and dissuasion in his rhetorical strategy. He is also capable of being agonistic. He can also use any style of phrasing his sentences such as parallelism or antithesis to speak to his audience. For emphasis, he can be alliterative or he can use repetition to catch the attention of his first readers or should we say his hearers? From the prologue of Hebrews, for example, the author used alliterative words in his opening remarks and positioned his words in the order of emphasis as crafted in the Greek text. The investigation of the passage determines the use of these terms and they will be further defined as need arises.

As it is with the discipline of Rhetorical Criticism in the NT in general, the application to the Epistle to the Hebrews has also gone through several stages. Hebrew's genre and literary structure is intertwined between being epistolary, an essay, homily and a speech among others (Allen 2010:24; Kennedy 1984:5). Some studies have used rhetorical criticism to specific sections of the Epistle to the Hebrews while others have applied it to the entire work. Notable dissertations among others written by Buck (2002); and Davis (1994); commentaries by DeSilva (2000); and Koester (2001); and monographs by Garuti (1995); Guthrie (1998); Nissilä (1979); and Übelacker (1989); are good examples of those who have used rhetorical criticism in their work. Other older works made some use of Greek rhetorical conventions such as Aristotle and Hermogenes (Kennedy 1984:8-9). The works cited above use rhetoric as an analytic tool throughout Hebrews.

Asumang (2005:7) notes that the rhetorical interpretation posits that the comparisons in Hebrews are part of the author's rhetorical strategy at persuading his hearers to embark on a specific action. He further highlights the fact that though the rhetorical flourish and eloquence of Hebrews had been well noted for centuries, it is only in "the last two hundred years" (Koester, 2001:80) that its genre as a homily or sermon has been more fully appreciated. This period has also coincided with increasing application of rhetorical criticism to biblical studies and several authors have investigated aspects of the Epistle using classical Greek rhetoric guidebooks.

It is important to state at this point that while authors agree on the rhetorical pedigree of Hebrews, there is a debate as to whether Hebrews can be classified as deliberative or epideictic (Lane 1991:lxix; c.f., Morrison 2004:20). Indeed, Soden (1899:11) earlier proposed that Hebrews was judicial rhetoric. Some commentators classify Hebrews as epideictic (Pfitzner 1997:21; Seid 1997; Watson 2010:195), and some as deliberative (Nissila 1979; Übelacker 1989:65; Lindars 1989: 382-406).

In addition to examining the rhetorical genre of Hebrews several interpreters have also examined aspects of the style of Hebrews and compared them with their contemporary Greco-Roman counterparts. So for example the comparisons and contrasts throughout the letter have attracted some attention by scholars. Heen and Krey (n.d:xxi-xxii) clearly

mention that the Epistle to the Hebrews has comparisons with the cult of the tabernacle which can be easily construed as denigrating Judaism. The approach of the rhetorical device of comparison known as *synkrisis* however was to begin with what was understood as noble and good and then moved the audience to accept the superiority of that which was being proposed as an alternative. Heen and Krey (n.d:xxii cf. Koester 2010:626-627) states that, "Such *synkrisis* functioned within the encomium, a genre of rhetoric that was designed to honor its object.

With regard to the various proofs that are employed in persuading readers or hearers, Rhetoricians are mindful of the three elements that affect persuasion. The interplay of the content of a speech (logos), appeals to emotion (pathos), and the character of the presenter (ethos) result in the Epistle's effective persuasion (Koester 2010:626). One advantage that biblical scholars posit is that an awareness of the rhetorical conventions of antiquity helps one understand aspects of the Epistle to Hebrews that might otherwise strike the modern reader as problematic (Heen and Krey n.d:xxi)

With such understanding, investigating the book of Hebrews shows that as Christ is being presented as superior to angels (Heb 1:5-14); as superior in the "house" as the Son and Moses as a servant in the same "house" (Heb 3:1-6); and as of a superior priesthood than that of the Levitical order (Heb 7-10); the author is not in any way denigrating the old covenant and its characters. He is simply highlighting how the angels, Moses and the levitical priesthood faithfully served in their time. There are also explicit positive OT examples such as Abraham in Heb 6, and the faithful in Heb 11, and these illustrate the positive presentation of the old covenant characters. These examples are alluded to as a direct address to the first audience of Hebrews. Asumang (2008:3) notices that,

In a number of warning passages however, the positive OT examples are presented as double entendre allusions. The phrases are couched in such a manner that while on one level, they directly address the congregation; on another level, they also generate an OT narrative background. Thus for example, in the first exhortation in Heb 2:1-4, the author depicts the

inauguration of the community in language that also echoes the “signs and wonders” of the Exodus.

Asumang further explains that the rhetorical purpose of these positive double entendre allusions is to lure the readers to identify themselves with “our forefathers” (Heb 1:1) who were being made perfect together with them (Heb 11:40).

Asumang (2008:3) also highlights Johnson’s (2003:241) description of Hebrew’s homily as the creation of a “symbolic world” within which Scripture is appropriated as the author’s own and applied to solve the pastoral problems of the community. The style is most noticeable in the warning passages where positive and negative OT examples are used in an allusive manner. The negative OT examples, which are mostly explicit, serve the functions of illustrating the author’s point regarding the consequences of apostasy (Gleason 1998, 62-91; & 2000: 281-303).

Other interpreters have looked at the exemplars of Hebrews as comparable to the Greco-Roman rhetorical style of encomiums (e.g. Cosby and Cockerill). Another group of interpreters have employed the Socio-Rhetorical method for examining Hebrews (e.g. DeSilva (2004) and Nongbri (2003)). Morrison’s approach is to use the Modern argumentation method (2008:18). All these varied methods illustrate the fact that rhetorical examination of Hebrews is fruitful in unveiling the meaning and purpose of the text.

Since rhetoric is “the art of increasing the adherence of the mind to the values and theses that the rhetorician wishes the audience to reaffirm or accept for the first time” (Watson 2010:170), this thesis labours to examine how speech, which was a part of the historical and social situation, was enacted. The study investigates how the text of Hebrews liaises with the social context of its audience. In other words, the way the author chose his words to persuade and to capture the attention of his audience to grasp the issue at hand in their social context is of utmost importance in the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6. It is therefore necessary to consider both aspects of modern and the Greco-Roman rhetoric in analyzing Heb 6:4-6.

3.3.1. The Benefit of Applying Rhetorical Criticism in Interpreting the NT

The benefits of applying rhetorical criticism to interpreting a passage or any text or speech have been well described by Lundbom's (2007:25) as four main characteristics of good rhetorical criticism. These are; 1) "It is a method for analyzing existing communication, not a technique manual for future speakers. 2) It is concerned with structure and persuasion, not just style. 3) It goes beyond a list of figures - "it wants to know how figures function in discourse." 4) It focuses on the audience, "beginning with the original audience."

Through rhetorical criticism, an interpreter can deduce the meaning of the conversation between the author and the audience and also identify critical areas that can cause misunderstanding to the interpreter. In applying rhetorical criticism, the critic is able to understand the way the author engaged himself in trying to persuade his audience to achieve his expected response from them. Identifying the rhetorical style of the Epistle enables the reader "to discern the fundamental issue in the situation addressed by the text and the principal goal of the author for the people in that situation" (DeSilva 2000:47).

Miller (2008:1-2) asserts that the benefit of rhetorical analysis is that, "when you are in the midst of a conflict, you can figure out what the conflict is really about (the 'stasis'), what the various arguments are, and how those arguments are put together." This is a benefit to NT scholars and preachers when they learn about rhetorical criticism. The other benefit is that in case of a conflict, skill in rhetorical analysis can help to present one's arguments more effectively, and even more ethically. Miller (2008:2) further warns that rhetoric does not help one to avoid disagreements which result from various factors such as different experiences, different perspectives, and different areas of expertise. In interpretation of any text, Miller acknowledges that none of us knows everything, so we can learn from one another. Rhetorical analysis will give a forum for good debate which leads to broadly informed public decisions. Miller encourages for disagreements, even highly conflicting and emotional which are beneficial other than arguing from without. Miller's point of view greatly helps in evaluating the different interpretive arguments concerning Heb 6:4-6.

3.3.2. Possible Pitfalls in Employing Rhetorical Criticism without Considering the OT Background

Edelman (2003:115) makes us aware that “Biblical narrative is rhetorical because it establishes the credibility of religious and social practices for its audience as it features a God without form, unitary and singular among social systems that worshipped pantheons of gods.” When he refers to the Bible, he is mindful of the OT as part of Scripture. He is aware that the Bible is not fictitious, but it provides practical laws and guidelines that promote good morals. Scripture acts rhetorically in proving through “metaphor and example the ascendancy of a unitary, omnipotent, God over all other gods” (Edelman 2003:115). Therefore the prophets focused on “the rhetoric of ethics and morality, in essence, setting the social boundaries of the new society being crafted under the vision of a monotheistic world” (2003:115). As observed, the Bible is not only restricted to policy, legalistic and moralistic rhetorical forms but also gives evidence of a well-developed rhetorical form of poetry as advanced as any developed by the Greeks. The Bible is also a source for strong models of oratory and general communication between people and God, people and people, and between people and their monarchs and religious leadership.

It is important to relate to the OT background and to appreciate the speeches of the patriarchs. Their statements and those of God became important models for the future development of communication in Jewish society over the centuries. We might go ahead and analyze the passage rhetorically and yet miss the value that has been carried forward into the NT from the OT.

In the case of Hebrews, there are major pitfalls of Greco-Roman or classical rhetorical analyses which do not take the OT background of the text seriously. Firstly, the author thoroughly saturates his language in the OT (Heb 1:10-12 - Ps 102:25-27; Heb 2:13 - Isa 8:17; Heb 6:14 - Gen 2:2). Thus his message cannot be accurately understood without establishing the rhetorical effects of the OT backgrounds. Secondly, the author heavily relies on Jewish and OT imageries, indicating the likelihood that most, if not all the readers themselves were Jews. Thirdly, several of the arguments of the author have

strong flavors of Jewish and OT rhetorical styles. Thus any rhetorical analysis of Hebrews which does not take the OT and Jewish elements of the argument are bound to fall short of full elucidation of the text.

Mathewson (1999:210) believes that much misunderstanding of Heb 6:4-6 stems from a failure to appreciate its OT matrix. A number of interpreters have realized the extensive engagement of the OT by the author of Hebrews and as such, it is an oversight to overlook the OT in the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6.

3.4. Inter-textuality and Biblical Studies

The other approach to exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 is to identify inter-textuality in the warning passage. It is therefore important to define inter-textuality and briefly discuss the history of the use of inter-textuality in NT studies. Furthermore, the section discusses the importance of inter-textuality in the study of Hebrews and what criteria to be used for identifying inter-textual references.

3.4.1. What is Inter-textuality?

Inter-textuality describes the literary phenomenon whereby one text is embedded into another text and so interacts with it to produce meaning. Study of inter-textuality therefore helps to identify how the author weaved the words of older, existing texts like the OT or non-scriptural text into the present text. Moyise (2005:450) states that “Intertextuality is not a method but a theory (or group of theories) concerning the production of meaning.” As a theory therefore, inter-textuality examines, how the combination of the two texts affects the separate texts, as well as how the interpreter proceeds to interpret the combined text.

3.4.2. A Brief History of the Use of Inter-textuality in NT Studies

Julia Kristeva is generally credited as the first to introduce the term *intertextualité* into literary discussion in 1969 (Moyise 2005:447). Prior to her contribution, interest in the relationship between related texts focused mainly on identifying sources of the texts and occasionally, their separate contexts. Little thought was given to establishing how the combinations of texts changed their meanings. Moving away from such pre-occupations

as agency and influence, Kristeva suggested that such relationships are more like an “intersection of textual surfaces” rather than a fixed point. No text is an island and contrary to structuralist theory, it cannot be understood in isolation. It can only be understood as part of a web or matrix of other texts, themselves only to be understood in the light of other texts. Each new text disturbs the fabric of existing texts as it jostles for a place in the canon of literature. Thus the theory of Intertextuality suggests that the meaning of a text is not fixed but open to revision as new texts come along and reposition it (Moyise 2002:418-31).

With regard to the various studies on how inter-textuality has been applied to Biblical Studies, Moyise identifies *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, by Hays as the pivotal publications which changed the landscape. Hays (1989) himself draws on Hollander (1981) and Greene (1982) to analyze Paul’s subtle use of Scripture in his letter. His key conclusion was that “the most significant elements of inter-textual correspondence between old context and new can be implicit rather than voiced, perceptible only within the silent space framed by the juncture of two texts” (Hays 1989:155). Thus identifying how Paul, and for that matter other inspired writers of the New Testament used previous texts such as the OT must involve careful attention to the implicit logic and theological assumptions, as well as of course their citations of Scripture in support of their various arguments.

Moyise further argues that “Traditional studies have used categories like prophecy and fulfillment, type and anti-type, allegory, Targum and midrash to describe this, but inter-textuality opens up a new set of possibilities” (2002:419). While accepting the validity of these traditional approaches, he reckons that Inter-textuality is concerned more with OT citations, quotations, echoes, allusions and recontextualization. In other words the range of possibilities for the OT texts to interact with NT texts such as Hebrews is very wide indeed.

There are generally five types of intertextual relationships between texts, namely echo, narrative, dialogical, exegetical and postmodern intertextuality. Intertextual echo is the tact of weaving in words from the old text. Moyise defines an echo as “a faint trace of a

text and might be quite unconscious, emerging from minds soaked in the scriptural heritage of Israel” (2002:419). Narrative intertextuality is where the author cites an old text to recall to his audience’s memory a story. The issue is not so much whether the author invites his readers to remember a particular text but to remember a particular story (2002:421). So for example, as we shall argue in the next chapter the reference to enlightenment in Heb 6:4 is not meant to bring a particular text in mind as much as the whole narrative of the pillar of light which guided Israel in the wilderness.

Exegetical intertextuality on the other hand, is where the author relies on the exegesis of the old text in their context and applies it further in his new text. “Dialogical intertextuality makes the claim that the source text is not always as malleable as traditional categories like allegory, typology and midrash suggest. Sometimes the source text is so powerful that it brings with it associations and connotations that are not easily silenced” (2002:424). Postmodern intertextuality draws attention to the fact that there is always more than one way of configuring a text which inevitably belongs to a web of other texts. It is thus less concerned with determining the meaning of a text as with describing the complex interactions that make such a single meaning impossible.

3.4.3. Hebrews and the Use of the OT

Inter-textual analysis of a passage is not easy in the sense that the author can use various old resources into a text other than the OT Scriptures. For example others have identified similarity in the authorship of Hebrews and that of Philo (Ellingworth 1993:45-48). As the exegesis of the passage is done, the exegete must be mindful of how the author imports these resources into the new text.

Interpreters have noticed that the author of Hebrews used the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible in preference to the Masoretic Hebrew Text (MT (Ellingworth 1993:37-42; Lane 1991:cxix-cxxiv; Allen 2010:161-63). The Septuagint therefore is used to help in identifying quotations, allusions and echoes of old texts in the NT (Gaebelien 1981:1-158). Hebrews is rich with OT citations, allusions and echoes. Hebrews has several citations from Psalms (Hebrews 1:5, 2:5, 5:5 and 7 gives references to Psalms 2:7, 8:4-6, 110) to prove Jesus as God’s promised Son. Other citations from

the OT include Jer 31:31–34 which is quoted in Heb 10:16–17; Isa 8:18 in Heb 2:13b; Gen 2:2 in Heb 2:4; Exo 25:40 in Heb 8:5; Prov 3:11,12 in Heb 12:6; Haggai 2:6 in Heb 12:26; Deut 31:6 in Heb 13:6. Hebrews also alludes to and echoes many more OT passages (Asumang 2007:26-28; Mathewson 1999:209-225; Gleason 1998:62-91).

Hebrews relies on the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text as is seen in quotations from “Psalm 40:7 in Hebrews 10:5 reads “a body you have prepared,” which corresponds to the Greek version of the Psalm, rather than “ears you have dug”, which is the way the passage reads in Hebrew” (Koester 2010:621). A reference to Genesis 47:31 in Hebrews 11:21 refers to “staff” rather than “bed.” The idea that the son of man was made lower than the angels “for a little while ” (2:7) depends on the Greek version of Psalm 8:5, since the Hebrew text of the psalm uses a word that means “a little lower” in degree.

In a more complex manner, the words of the OT might not necessarily be quoted exactly from the OT, but an interpreter must be aware of allusions and echoes of other texts (DeSilva 1999:36-38). It is easier to notice inter-textuality in direct quotations than in allusions and echoes. In most cases, authors of the NT have greatly helped where they have indicated phrases like, “It is written...” to show that they are quoting the OT. Yet at times the author uses recontextualization where the quotation from the old text is paraphrased and restated in a different way in the new text. DeSilva (2004:804) gives an example from Heb 10:37-39 where the author does not exactly indicate that he is quoting from the OT. The author makes the portion of the passage to sound as though God was the one directly speaking. Inter-textuality therefore is the author’s ingenuity of importing older texts into the new text to amplify the message to the audience that are aware of that old text. The author can highlight without necessarily quoting exactly from the old text. The author can allude to the old text without confusing his audience.

Koester (2010:621-23) has given a good summary of inter-textuality in the book of Hebrews. He notices that the author of Hebrews develops his argument by engaging many OT texts. The author also knows the stories of the martyrs that appear in the deuterocanonical books of the Maccabees (11:35-38) and probably the tradition that

Isaiah was killed by being sawn in two, which is found in various non-canonical writings (11:37).

The book of Hebrews is steeped in OT citations from its prologue from the first chapter to the end. Passages from the Psalms, 2 Samuel 7, and Deuteronomy 32 enable readers to hear God address the royalty of His Son. The key text is Psalm 110:1, which tells of God giving his chosen one a place at his right hand. Koester (2010:621) further enlightens us that,

This pattern of usage shows that the author understands the Old Testament in light of Christ and Christ in light of the Old Testament. The two are taken together. When read in their original contexts many of the Old Testament passages quoted refer either to God or to the king of Israel, but the author of Hebrews reads the texts retrospectively in light of Jesus' exaltation.

The warning passages from Heb 3:7 onwards borrow from the OT wilderness sacrificial system in Nehemiah 9. Hebrews recollects Exodus 24:3-8, which relates that Moses established the first covenant by means of a sacrifice at Mount Sinai. Since the Sinai covenant was inaugurated with a sacrifice, Hebrews infers that the new covenant must also involve a sacrifice (Heb. 9:18-22). Leviticus 16:1-22 tells of the high priest offering a sacrifice in the outer court of the sanctuary before entering its inner court to complete the work of atonement. Hebrews likens this to the work of Christ, who made his self-sacrifice on earth before being exalted to God's presence in heaven, where he has become the source of eternal redemption for people (Heb. 9:1-14). Hebrews has used more than thirty OT references (The NIV Topical Bible Study Bible 1998:1380-1381) in order to convince his audience on the superiority of Jesus Christ and His work of atonement. The author has also used many other citations, allusions and echoes to warn his audience and persuade them to hold on firmly to the faith. Given these wide ranging inter-textual references, it is important to investigate also if our particular passage has such backgrounds. Before then however, the crucial question of how to identify these references need addressing. It is to this question that I now turn.

3.4.4. Criteria for Identifying OT passages of Hebrews

DeSilva (2010:800-806) has explained how inter-textual references to the OT in a NT passage can be identified. He notes that the common way of identifying the presence of the OT text is the direct quotations that the author uses from OT scriptures. Sometimes, authors of a book can use phrases from the OT text which they consciously weave into the new text. DeSilva (2010:800-806) states that the audience's knowledge of the old text enables them to understand the author's message.

The inter-texture is not easily noticed when exegesis of a text is done and it therefore demands a lot of observation and accuracy. DeSilva (2010:800-806) advises that where the author is inexact in his/her citation, it is helpful to carefully examine the text and see what the author has done to the old text. There is need to account for the alterations that have been done to the old text. Investigations as to whether the author has abbreviated the text or left out problematic words must be investigated.

Sometimes the author can quote a string of words from the old text and weave them without indicating quotation marks. DeSilva (2010:801) advises that this method of seamlessly weaving old text into new text is known as recontextualization. In this case, the reader does not hear any other voice, but the author's, yet what are presented are not the author's own words.

The other way the author engages the old text is by reconfiguring a story from the old text and giving it a new meaning where it suits to appeal to his audience so that they are convinced on the theme he is addressing. DeSilva (2010:802) notes that, "The dynamics and content of the older story or text shine through the new text and inform it, but the relationship is broader and looser than recitation and recontextualization." The other criteria which I have alluded, is the examination of the text for allusions and echoes. It is important to note that they are not easy to identify.

The common way, therefore, of identifying the OT is the direct quotations. Authors can use phrases from the OT text which are consciously weaved into the new text. However, the inter-texture is not easily noticed when exegesis of a text is done and it demands a lot

of observation and accuracy. There is need to account for the alterations that could have been done to the old text in the new text. Weaving old text into new text in a seamless manner is known as recontextualization. These are some of the few criteria that an exegete can identify old text in the new text.

In his ground-breaking work, Hays (1989:29-31) suggests seven criteria for identifying inter-textual references in the New Testament. These are;

1. Was the proposed source of the reference available to the writer and/or his readers?
2. Is the reference explicit or "loud" enough; in other words does it have a degree of verbal repetition or formal prominence?
3. How frequently does the writer allude to the same OT passage?
4. Does the proposed echo fit the theme of the whole book or letter?
5. How likely is it that the author would have intended the inter-textual reference?
6. Have other interpreters identified or accepted the presence of the reference?
7. Does the proposed reference enhance understanding the passage?

The mentioned criteria will help to establish the relevance of the proposed OT Kadesh-Barnea OT background and how it will enhance understanding Heb 6:4-6.

3.5. The Approach to Jewish Exegetical Methods by the Author of Hebrews and Rhetorical Criticism

It is important at this point to discuss the Jewish exegetical methods by the author of Hebrews and how they complement Rhetorical Criticism that has already been discussed. The forth coming discussion focuses on the use of Jewish exegetical methods such as midrash, peshet, allegory and typology that the author of Hebrews engaged. This part of the discussion looks at the possibility of combining Jewish and Greco-Roman Rhetorical canons in the interpretation of Hebrews. Later, an overall summary of how this thesis

intends to employ Jewish methods to exegete Heb 6:4-6 with rhetorical criticism is highlighted.

3.5.1. A brief background on Jewish Exegetical Methods and Rhetorical Criticism

The OT background is not only important to the understanding of the warning passage, which has been the focus of some previous studies. It must also be viewed as the basis of pastoral formation of the community of faith because true meaning of Scripture is made manifest in the transformed lives of the community of faith (Hays 1989: xii-xiii). Hays further mentions that the fulfillment of Scripture is not only christocentric, but ecclesiocentric (1989: xiii). To appreciate Hays' statement, one needs to understand that the word of OT prophecies finds its culmination and fulfillment through the coming of Jesus Christ. It is also correct to say that the culmination of the Word is in bringing the believers of the faith to full maturity in Christ. Both christocentric and ecclesiocentric aspects are the direct result and purpose of the Word of God.

It is therefore essential to understand how the Jewish exegetical method contributes to the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6. Edelman (2003:113) states that Jewish rhetoric is a less studied tradition in spite of its long existence among the rhetorical tradition. It is older than the 2400-year Greek rhetorical theory based upon the works of Aristotle, Isocrates and the Sophists and it celebrates 4000 years of existence.

Edelman (2003:114) further laments that the study of Jewish texts has been left to the tender mercies of literary critics such as Meyer Waxman and Robert Alter who have made significant contributions to our understanding of Jewish texts from a poetic and literary perspective. However, the tendency has been to ignore the potential in understanding Jewish texts from a rhetorical perspective. However, the 20th century has seen an awakening of extensive pioneering work of early scholars of the Jewish rhetorical perspective. Edelman cites the more recent work by Yehoshua Gitay as having opened the door to comprehending the sweep of Jewish literary history from a rhetorical perspective (2003:114).

Jewish exegetical method therefore is a tool that is used in the interpretation of Scripture to gain full appreciation of the message of the author. To reiterate Ellis' (1992:121) sentiment, "Biblical interpretation in the New Testament church shows in a remarkable way the Jewishness of earliest Christianity. It followed exegetical methods common to Judaism and drew its perspective and presuppositions from Jewish backgrounds. Edelman (2003:114) cites Rabbi David Wolpe (1992) among others, where he states that,

The Jewish tradition is a tradition of words. What we say, how we speak, what it means to connect to another human being—these are central concerns of the Jewish tradition. Perhaps no other system, religious or secular, invests such enormous power and importance in the spoken and written word. Perhaps no other tradition is as painfully aware of the difficulty of saying what is inside of us, or so liberal with strategies and advice on how to say that which is locked inside...

Since rhetorical analysis is concerned with speech or oral presentations, Wolpe's contribution justifies the fact that if we are going to carry out any rhetorical analysis of the OT text in Hebrews, we also need to engage Jewish rhetorical exegetical methods befitting to the interpretation of the warning passages. It is important to examine the Jewish exegetical methods in order to appreciate what the interwoven texts from the OT meant before they can be applied to the audience of the author of Hebrews. However, the underlying ultimate goal is to understand how the author applied these OT texts to enhance his message to his audience.

3.5.2. The Use of Jewish Exegetical Methods by Hebrews

The key motivation for examining the Jewish exegetical traditions and their contributions to rhetorical analysis of Hebrews is the author's several uses of these methods in the Epistle. Longenecker (1975:6; cf. Cooper 1975:28) (1987:6) generally classifies Jewish exegesis of the first century under four headings: literalist, midrashic, peshet, and allegorical. Added to Longenecker's list is typology. Below is a brief discussion of these Jewish exegetical methods and how the author of Hebrews used them.

3.5.2.1. *Literalist Method*

To be literalistic is to take the Word of God at face value to the extent that what is written stands as the actual meaning of the text. The result of the natural meaning of the text is applied to the lives of the people (Longenecker 1975:6). In this manner, literal interpretation most closely resembles modern exegesis in that the text is examined for what it says, and then the results of those studies are applied to a current situation. This becomes useful in the interpretation of the text when it does not carry with it any hidden interpretation than meets the eye. A good example is Hebrews 3:7-4:13 where the word 'today' from Ps 95:7b is used in its literal sense. It is also observed that the author of Hebrews uses Jer 31:31-34 and Hag 2:6-7 in its literal sense in Heb 8:8-13 and Heb 12:26-29.

3.5.2.2. *Midrash*

Midrashic exegetes believed in the *sensus plenior*, or 'hidden meaning,' inherent to all Scripture, whether that meaning lay in a passage, phrase, or individual word (Longenecker 1975:6). Midrashic exegesis ostensibly takes its point of departure from the biblical text itself...and seeks to explicate the hidden meanings contained therein by means of agreed upon hermeneutical rules referred to as *middot* (Hays 1989:10-14). The purpose of midrashic exegesis is to contemporize the revelation of God given earlier for the people of God living later in a different situation. The purpose of this activity was to modernize and adapt Scripture so as to make the text more relevant and applicable to current situations (Ellis 1993:151). Lane (1991:cxxiv) states that Hebrews uses midrash approach in Heb 2:5-9; 3:7-4:13; 6:13-20; 7:11-25; 8:7-15; 10:5-10,15-18, 35-39; 12:5-13, 25-29). He alludes to a rhetorical strategy found in the midrash where the author introduces Ps 110:4 in Heb 5: 10-11 and 6:20 and later explains it in the subsequent chapter of Heb 7:11-25 (1991:cxxiv).

3.5.2.3. *Allegory*

Allegory is an interpretive method which assumes that the writer is attempting to communicate something other than that which he is actually saying. Seeking to go behind

the obvious to the real meaning, it treats the elements of the text as symbols (Scott 2001:132). Accordingly, the 'natural' sense of the text was to be disregarded in favour of the deeper meanings the text was thought to contain. This was accomplished by treating "the Old Testament as a body of symbols given by God for man's spiritual and moral benefit, which must be understood other than in a literal and historical fashion" (Longenecker 1975:46) and "confirmation of the secondary application" (Brewer 1992:221). Allegorical approaches also looked to a secondary level of understanding in an attempt to liberate the 'spiritual' meaning of the text from its primary understanding. There are several aspects of the author of Hebrews interpretation of the Old Testament tabernacle, for example, that are allegorical.

3.5.2.4. *Typology*

Another form of Jewish exegesis is typology. It "differs from allegory in that allegory finds a secondary meaning in a text without regard to the original meaning or context" (Brewer 1992:221), whereas "typological exegesis regards the words of Scripture not as metaphors hiding a deeper meaning but as the record of historical events out of whose literal sense the meaning of the text arises" (Ellis 1993:169). "Typological exegesis is thus not a disclosure of the *sensus plenior* of the text" but "it is rather a disclosure of ... divine activity in history" (Fishbane 1985:352). Lane however goes further than Fishbane to highlight the understanding of typology. Recently typology has been identified with "historical correspondences" retrospectively recognized within the consistent redemptive activity of God (Lane 1991:cxxiii).

Typology sees the history of the OT as the key to understanding current events in the NT. In Hebrews 3:12-19 we see a typological interpretation of Ps 95:7b-11 where the author suggests that Israel at Kadesh stood in relationship to his audience as type to antitype (Lane 1991:cxxiii). Lane further elaborates how the author of Hebrews develops the theology of 'rest' in 4:1-11 which "takes account of the pattern of archetype (God's primal rest, 4:4), type (the settlement of Canaan under Joshua, 4:8), and antitype (the Sabbath celebration of the consummation, 4:9)" (1991:cxxiii). Other typological features are

identified in Heb 8:1 to 10:18 as the author contrasts between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary.

3.5.2.5. *Pesher*

Pesher interpretation, though similar to the midrashic and allegorical acceptance of additional meanings, does differ in its point of departure. "With pesher, the starting point for understanding it is not the OT text, but a historical event or person" (Snodgrass 1991:420). In other words, a pesher approach sees the revelation of current events as the springboard for interpretation.

3.6. Overall Summary of Method of Rhetorical Exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 with Attention to its OT Background

The methodology that this thesis follows in exegeting Heb 6:4-6 is borrowed from Kennedy's five stages of rhetorical analysis while appreciating the Jewish exegesis as well as the OT background.

Firstly Heb 6:4-6 must be identified in its rhetorical unit as these three verses are transitional from the preceding and proceeding verses. The warning passage should be understood within its context of the paragraph or periscope where it is drawn from. As earlier stated, it is a warning passage and must be interpreted as such. The important aspect to bear in mind is the components of what qualifies a passage as a warning passage which are cited earlier.

Secondly the warning passage must be examined to understand its rhetorical situation. This brings us to the task of understanding the author's reason for sending such a message to his audience for them to respond according to his expectations. Further than that, it is also important to understand the audience that the author was addressing. Kennedy proposes that the mood of the audience and that of the author are equally important at this stage. The other important task in rhetorical situation is to investigate the social values of the audience. Kennedy (1984:35) warns that rhetoric situation,

is subjective, speculative, and complex, but crucial for understanding the rhetoric. The "situation" includes other explanations of the same events,

other answers to the same questions, etc. This roughly corresponds to the *Sitz im Leben* of form criticism.... The critic needs to ask of what this audience consists, what the audience expects in the situation, and how the speaker or writer manipulates these expectations.... Plato asserts that a true philosophical orator must know the souls of his audience" Kennedy (1984:34-35).

Thirdly, the assignment is to investigate any rhetorical problem. In the case of the author of Hebrews, his audience is not prejudiced against him and should not have any problem listening to him.

The fourth step in the method is to describe the structure of the passage as a strategy for the communicative purpose. According to Kennedy (1984:37) this stage includes the consideration of the way the material is arranged in the text. He rightly puts it this way,

Consider the arrangement of material in the text: what subdivisions it falls into, what the persuasive effect of these parts seems to be, and how they work together--or fail to do so--to some unified purpose in meeting the rhetorical situation. In order to do this he will need to engage in line-by-line analysis of the argument, including its assumptions, its topics, and its formal features, such as enthymemes, and of the devices of style, seeking to define their function in context.

This stage must also include identification of any Jewish Rhetorical tools that the author used to persuade his audience. Could it be that there are some analogies or typology to the old text such as the OT? Are there any citations, allusions or echoes in the passage? Are there any figures of speech used or metaphorical language? These questions can be answered at this stage. This thesis is of the view that both Greco-Roman and Jewish Rhetorical methods are important to the exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6 since Hebrews quotes extensively from the Septuagint (LXX).

At this stage, words like 'impossible', 'for', 'fall away' are examined to appreciate their meaning in the passage. In addition, all the clauses in the warning passage are analyzed

to see how the author wanted them to persuade his audience/ readers. Both inter-textuality and rhetoric criticism happen at this stage.

The fifth step is ensuring that the above steps have worked out to bring out the interpretation of the passage according to the situation and purpose. This step also serves to put the pieces into a cohesive whole, rather than leaving them as fragments or disconnected steps of a methodology. For example, at this stage questions must be asked; 'have I explained how the structure supports the message?' 'How do the words and the style work together to affect the audience in their situation?' As Kennedy (1984:38) acknowledges, "this may entail a revision of earlier steps: "These stages are set forth...as a sequence, but it is better to view them as a circular process, for the detailed analysis of later stages may in fact reveal aspects of the rhetorical problem or a definition of the species or stasis which was not obvious on first approaching a passage" This means the above stages are constantly used back and forth until the desired results are obtained. No wonder they are not linear approaches, but a circular process.

This chapter has discussed the methodological issues related to the study. It has defined rhetorical criticism and explained how it helps in the exegesis of the passage. The chapter has highlighted a brief background of developmental changes and advancements in rhetorical criticism. It has also identified some pitfalls inherent in using rhetorical criticism only. The criteria for identifying OT quotations, echoes and allusions have also been discussed. The major themes of Hebrews and similar phrases and words that are tied to the warning passage are investigated in inner-textuality.

The next chapter is an exegetical study of Heb 6:4-6 in relation to its OT background. The exegesis looks at the literary and conceptual structure of the warning passage in Heb 6:4-6 focusing on the words, clauses and phrases of the passage. Thereafter the chapter will focus on examining the OT background of the whole passage in relation to the entire Epistle.

Chapter 4

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF HEBREWS 6:4-6 IN RELATION TO ITS OT BACKGROUND

My argument is that the OT background is vital to the rhetorical interpretation of Heb 6:4-6 and it sheds light on the author's strategy in the warning passage in Hebrews 6. The argument is that Heb 6:4-6 is better understood when we consider the wilderness experience as the OT background to the warning passage. The warning passage directly describes and addresses its audience while it resonates with specific OT narratives.

This chapter is an exegetical study of Heb 6:4-6 in relation to its OT background. The exegesis first looks at the literary and conceptual structure of the warning passage in Heb 6:4-6 focusing on the words, clauses and phrases of the passage. It is important to determine how the words the author used fit into the context of the chapter and the whole Epistle of Hebrews. Thereafter the exegesis focuses on examining the OT background of the whole passage in relation to the entire Epistle. There is need to consider whether the author had in mind any OT examples and relevant themes he was referring to, which can help in the interpretation of the warning passage. This chapter also investigates the warning passage to identify some OT quotations, allusions and echoes. The passage states,

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, And then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance,

since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put him to open shame.

4.1. The Immediate Literary Context of the Passage

It is beneficial to consider the surrounding passages in order to evaluate their connectivity to Heb 6:4-6 (Ellingworth 1993:317). Hebrews 5 and 6 contain the author's continued exhortation towards faithfulness. This exhortation or hortatory section begins in Heb 3 where the author urges the audience, "to fix your thoughts on Jesus..." (v1). Later the author goes into the exposition of the faithfulness of Moses as a servant in God's house and Jesus as the faithful Son in the same house (v2-5). Hebrews 3:6 continues to exhort the audience to hold on to their courage and hope of which they boast.

In terms of genre, Hebrews 6:4-6 is the fourth warning passage. The passage is a warning against falling away. This passage comes immediately after the exposition on the relevance of the humanity of Christ in Heb 5:1-10. Here, the author begins to lay the foundations of describing the nature of the ministry of Jesus. The author describes Jesus as the merciful High Priest by comparing and contrasting Him with Aaron. It also announces the idea of Jesus as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, an idea which will then occupy the author in Heb 7 for more extensive exposition.

Hebrews 6:4-6 is an extract from the exhortation passage in Heb 5:11-6:20. This larger exhortation is made up of the five components; (a) pay attention to God's Word (5:11-14), (b) warning against the consequences of regression in the faith (6:4-8), (c) encouragement to hold fast and persevere (6:1-3; 6:12-20), (d) reminder of the past history of the congregation (5:12-14 and 6:9-11) and (e) use of positive (Abraham) and negative (wilderness community) analogous examples from the OT to exhort the first readers. Hebrews 5:11-6:12 is therefore an exhortation that provides a premise from which Heb 6:4-6 can be interpreted.

Hebrews 6:7-8 employs an agricultural metaphor of the ground (land) and what happens to it when the rains fall on it. Again it is evident with the use of '*gar*' in 6:7 that Heb 6:7-8 is connected to Heb 6:4-6 (Grudem 1995:33-39; Ellingworth 1993:325-328; Witherington 2007:218). The discussion in Heb 6:4-6 correlates to what is said in Heb 6:7-8. The

agricultural metaphor presents two scenarios of what happens to land when the rains fall on it. The author gives his audience a view of fruitful and flourishing land that receives rain and brings forth vegetation useful to the ones who cultivate it. The author shows that such land receives blessings from God.

Ellingworth (1993:325-326) highlights the way the author uses the metaphorical comparison of the imageries with the reality in Heb 6:4-6 and 7-8. In vv 4-6, the picture is that of a negative reality of those who reject God after experiencing His good blessings. Heb 6:7 is a positive imagery of land that receives rain from God and bears vegetation and receives God's blessing. In 6:8, however, a negative imagery of land that bears thorns and thistles after receiving rain is portrayed. This is juxtaposed with the reality of the author's audience who are living a life of hope.

The author's agricultural metaphor does not end with a positive allusion, but he further portrays to his audience a negative picture of what happens if the same land receives rain, yet it yields thorns and thistles as a result of not being well tendered. He carefully concludes that such land is worthless and close to being cursed. He raises the issue of land being cursed in correlation with Numbers 14 where the disobedient Israelites were forgiven by God, yet they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Emmrich 2003:83-84; Compton 1993:153). The author seemed to emphasize the point he made in Heb 6:4-6 on how one can see the manifestation of God's goodness, yet fails to respond in faith to it (cf. Heb 4:2).

The rains in this case probably represent the heavenly blessings and gifts mentioned in vv4-6. The land is symbolic of those who experience God's blessings. What is interesting is that the land will definitely produce something. The difference is that the tendered land will produce vegetation beneficial to those who cultivate it. The unkempt land will bear thorns and thistles upon receiving the rains. This pictorial presentation presents those who hear the Word of God and experience His goodness and those who do not respond faithfully respectively.

This description not only relates to Heb 6:4-6, but also to what happened to the wilderness community. Some members of the wilderness community responded with

rebellion and arrogance after God showered them with every good gift. The rebellious act displeased God (Num 14:1-35) while obedience led the others to the Promised Land. “The allusion to the wilderness generation proposed above extends beyond Heb 6:4-6 to 7-8” (Mathewson 1999:221). Asumang (2007:137) equally shares the views of Gleason and Mathewson. He states that “the migration of Israel and the whole wilderness motif, Numbers 11–14 and Neh 9 (in addition to Deut 11) in particular, provide the Old Testament background to this exhortation.”

If the reference to the agricultural metaphor in 6:7-8 is in direct correlation to the wilderness community, then it is reasonable to also assume that 6:4-6, also alludes to Num 14. The idea of flourishing vegetation verses parched vegetation was often used in coded fashion to signal the blessings and curses of faith or faithlessness in relation to the Promised Land (e.g., Lev 26; Deut 11; Deut 28). Indeed, it was this idea which led Attridge (1989:169) to argue that the background of our passage is Deuteronomy 11.

In Heb 6:9-20, the author calmed the audience by reassuring them that he was convinced of better things concerning them and the things that accompany salvation. The author further admonished his audience to be diligent (cf. 2 Pet 1:10) and continue in the faith because of God’s faithfulness that cannot be disputed (Heb 6:10-18). God’s faithfulness is traced back to Abraham with whom he made a promise that is sure and unchangeable (Heb 6:13-18). Jesus still remains as a continuity of God’s faithfulness and he comes as high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6:19-20).

Given what precedes Heb 6:4-6, it is clear that the aim of the author is to instill loyalty, spiritual growth, faithfulness and perseverance in his readers. What immediately follows Heb 6:4-6 in vv7 and 8 indicates that there may well be some links with the prior references to the wilderness community in Heb 3-4. It is therefore important to bear this literary context in mind when exegeting our warning passage.

4.2. The Structure of the Warning Passage in Heb 6:4-6

It is necessary to highlight what McKnight (1992:21-59) enumerates about the warning passages. He identified four components of the passages namely; audience, sin, exhortation and consequences comprise the warning passages. Bateman (2007:28) also

states that, “Naturally, all the warning passages share a similar structure. They exhort via the Son, lest some sort of divine judgment befall them.”

The description of the past experiences of this congregation in 5:12-14 and 6:9-11 is extremely helpful for constructing the history of the congregation in Hebrews, especially when added to the description in 2:1-4. It indicates that they were subjected to a rigorous discipleship programme after their conversion, as described in 2:1-4. There is no doubt that the earliest believers and leaders, like any true believer, deliberately committed themselves to disciple new converts and confirm them in the faith.

Hebrews 6:4-6 also has positive elements which are conceptually balanced by negative elements. In the positive elements, the author provides a conditional list of positive experiences of God’s goodness and grace in 6:4-5. This is then counterbalanced in 6:6 by warnings of dire consequences if the recipients of God’s graces “fall away.” Since the author describes the positive history of the recipients in 6:9-10, it is clear that the author wished his hearers to see the positive experiences described in 6:4-5 as corresponding to them. In other words, the conceptual structure of our passage underlines the author’s rhetorical strategy. I shall shortly show that this is amplified by our author employing terminologies associated with the positive experiences of the wilderness congregation.

4.3. Exegesis of each of the clauses of the passage

This section is dedicated to the examination of each clause or phrase in Heb 6:4-6. The purpose of the exegesis is to critically focus on understanding the meaning of the words that the author used before we can draw any theological or historical implications from the passage.

One of the difficulties in the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 comes in harmonizing the description in vv. 4–5 with the statement in v. 6. Heb 6:4-5 is about those who have “once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.” Heb 6:6 describes them as those who “having fallen away” and not being able to be brought back to repentance. The harmonization of these verses raises a number of interpretive concerns which need to be critically examined. It is important therefore to

carry out a detailed exegesis of the passage as this leads to a better theological and historical understanding.

Conceptually, Heb 6:4-6 uses ten clauses to move in four steps, presented as follows;

(a) There is a description of the spiritual experiences of the readers using the five clauses in Heb 6:4-5 which state that,

(i) “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened;

(ii) and have tasted of the heavenly gift,

(iii) and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

(iv) and have tasted the good Word of God

(v) and (have tasted) the powers of the age to come.”

(b) In Heb 6:6a there is a conditional clause describing a catastrophic departure from that experience as,

(vi) “And then have fallen away”

(c) There is the statement of “impossibility” describing the consequence of the catastrophe in Heb 6:6b

(vii) “it is impossible

(viii) to renew them again to repentance.”

(d) There are two explanatory clauses which give the reasons why it is impossible. The impossibility is as a result of what is stated in Heb 6:6c,

(ix) “since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God”

(x) and put him to open shame.

Each clause will now be examined in detail.

4.3.1. Description of the Spiritual Experiences of the Readers Using the Five Clauses

It is important at this stage to exegete what the author presents as a description of the spiritual experiences of the readers.

4.3.1.1. *For in the case of those who have once been enlightened* (6:4a)

This clause raises exegetical questions on the words the author used that must be examined. Firstly, the opening word, ‘for’, plays an important role in understanding the connectivity of the clause with the previous verses. Secondly, the pronoun plural ‘those’ determines the ones the author is referring to. And thirdly, the phrase ‘once been enlightened’ has the first past participle needing examination. These are examined in detail below.

4.3.1.1.1. *‘For’ (gar)*

The opening word ‘for’ in itself is a conjunctive suggesting that the author has previously made some statements that he further desires to qualify, explain, motivate or emphasize. It is therefore important to back track to his earlier statements and see how Heb 6:4-6 fits in his message. Allen (2010:345) states that “Heb 6:4-6 is the *crux interpretum* of Heb 5:11-6:8, and really for the entire book.” What he suggests is that if an exegete can cross over this passage with a good exegesis, then one is assured of understanding the passage and indeed the whole Epistle. He further qualifies Heb 6:4-6 as a sub-paragraph that is closely connected to Heb 6:1-3 by the use of ‘*gar*’, a subordinating conjunction translated ‘for’ (2010:345 cf. Lane 1991:141).

There are several disputing views on how the conjunctive is functioning in its connectivity. There are five different interpretations that arise. When we consider Heb 6:1-3, the following views arise, namely; 1. Is this word indicating the grounds for; “let us press on to maturity?” 2. Is it referring to; “not laying again a foundation of repentance?” 3. Is it attached to the grounds of the statement; “We will do so?” 4. Can it be tied to the phrase “God permitting?” 5. Or does it apply to the entire Heb 6:1-3? (Allen 2010:345).

The author has indicated in 6:1 that there is need to move on from elementary issues to pressing on to maturity where there is no need to lay again foundations of repentance. In Heb 6:2 he tabulates the elementary issues and further indicates that, “And this we will do, if God permits” in v3. The impression is that there is need to pursue maturity and leave elementary issues. Thereafter the previous statement is connected to 6:4. In this case, the author is approaching 6:4 with a full consciousness of what he had said in the whole of explanatory in 6:1-3. It is therefore appropriate to conclude that “for” applies to the entire passage of 6:1-3 as stated in option 5.

The difficulty in determining the state of the participles has also led to differences in the Bible translations of v6. Some versions use a supposition in stating the falling away while others use a definitive verb of falling away. For example, the New International Version (NIV) gives the clause a suppositional translation; “if they fall away.” The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) give a definitive or temporal translation of; “then they fall away” (Allen 2010:346).

Considering what Allen says, it is consistent to interpret the clauses in Heb 6:1-3 as substantive adverbs considering that the first four participles are governed by the article ‘*tous*’ (‘the’) which is accusative. This therefore, is aimed at motivating the readers to increased spiritual growth and maturity, warning them of the consequences if they failed to do so.

4.3.1.1.2. ‘*Those*’ (*tous*)

Even though the author of Hebrews was focused on the Christian community that he was addressing, it is early to conclude that “those” refers to his hearers. The pronoun plural ‘those’ can mean (a) the very audience the author has been addressing or (b) another category of the audience known to his readers, or (c) others apart from his audience. This further raises theological debate as to whether the author was addressing believers or he was referring to non-believers. It also relates to whether one can construe the warning passage as a hypothetical proposition. Interpreters who have dealt with Heb 6:4-6 such as Allen 2010:344-393; Davies 2008:757; Nongbri 2003:265-273; Guthrie 2002:226-28; Gleason 1998:63-64; Compton 1996:135-167; McKnight 1992:21-59 arrive at different

conclusions as a result of their perception on this pronoun plural 'those'.

The changes in the author's use of the pronouns in Heb 6:1-12 should be observed. In Heb 6:1-3 the author uses personal pronouns 'we' and 'us'. In 6:4-6 he uses second person pronouns 'those' and 'them'. And in 6:7-12 he uses 'you' and 'your'. Some interpreters believe these changes in pronouns indicate that *tous* in our passage refers to other people who are not believers (Compton 1996:167; Mathewson 1999:224).

'Those' in Heb 6:4-6 can have one of four possible referents, namely, (a) any hypothetical group of people who have experienced the graces that the author described as he used the word *tous* for example in Heb 1:14, (b) the first readers of Hebrews, whether believers or unbelievers, (c), the wilderness community, as the author used *tous* in Heb 2:3, or (d) the author used the *tous* in a *double entendre* fashion thus combining (b) and (c) together.

If the conclusion is that the author is referring to a hypothetical group, then the issue of apostasy of believers does not occur in the interpretation of this text. However, the author seems to be reminding the audience of some experience that has occurred in the past from which they must draw a lesson of being faithful. The second viewpoint that suggests that the author was speaking to both believers and non-believers defeats the purpose of the warning to believers who need not to fear of apostasy. It is appropriate to heed the warning of Emmrich (2003:88), "Certainly the warning passages in Hebrews were never designed to investigate the 'can-true-believers-fall-away?' kind of inquiry. Our use of predications such as 'true/genuine' or 'false' is itself obstinately wrong and incurs suspicion of importing alien concepts into our text."

The idea that the author uses *tous* as a *double entendre* where he reminds his first readers of the wilderness community at the same time referring to them is most preferred. This is because it demonstrates the author's frequent association of the first readers with the wilderness community. It also supports the hypothesis of this thesis that the author uses the OT background in a rhetorical fashion to shape the first readers' understanding of their experiences. As will be shown in the next chapter, this *double entendre* use of *tous* is a feature of the Peshier/Midrash type of rhetorical move.

Mathewson has correctly pointed out that the Kadesh-Barnea incident is at play in this warning passage, yet he does not agree that the author was addressing believers. Interpreters such as Emmrich 2003:83-95; Nongbri 2003:265-273; DeSilva1999:33-57; Allen 2010:344-377 and Oberholtzer 1988:319-328 believe that ‘those’ represents believers that the author was warning. McKnight (1992:21-59) describes the people as genuine believers who forfeit their eternal salvation due to apostasy.

According to this thesis, the author was addressing the believers while at the same time citing an example of those who were deemed as part of the wilderness community, and yet failed to endure to the end. In this case, the author was referring to the Kadesh-Barnea incident where some of the community of believers who experienced God’s gracious miracles and providence failed to enter the Promised Land. Analogically, the author was addressing his audience who were believers while showing them the result of failing to persevere in faith. ‘Those’ therefore refers to the ones in the community of believers who refused to walk into maturity and bear fruit of faith to the extent of entering the Promised Land.

The plural pronoun ‘those’ must be dealt with in light of the phrases that describe the state of ‘those’. It is prudent for the mean time to tentatively conclude that the particles are attributes of a believer who has come to the light of the teaching of the gospel.

Two key words covered by this clause need exploring, namely, ‘enlightened’ and ‘once’. These are now examined.

4.3.1.1.3. ‘Enlightened’

The word ‘enlightened’ (*photisthentas*) simply means exposure to light in its literal sense. It means to bring to light, to shed light upon or to cause light to shine upon some object, in the sense of illuminating it. Figuratively, *photizo* means to give guidance or understanding, to make clear or to cause something to be known by revealing clearly. It may mean to make known in reference to the inner life or transcendent matters.

However, biblically, the word has been used both literally (Num 4:9; 1Sam 29:10; Neh 9:12; 19) and figuratively (Ps 13:3; 18:28; Eccl 8:1). Figuratively, *photizo* appears to

describe an experience of a spiritual nature (Eph. 1:18). It can also mean giving insight or information or instruction as in Isa 39:14 where it says, “Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?” Other supportive LXX reference to mean instruction is in 2Kings 12:2 where it is rendered as instruction in spiritual matters thus, “Jehoash did right in the sight of the Lord all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him.”

Enlightenment is used metaphorically to describe people who have been exposed to some information to gain knowledge or spiritual insight. This illumination can be symbolic of one who has been exposed to the light of the gospel as a result of the continued teaching of the Word of God (Allen 2010:348). It can also refer to those who have received the truth of the gospel even though they have not yet been grounded into further teachings of the Word of God. John 1:9 describes Jesus as the light which comes into the world to enlighten every man. The connection of light to the gospel is evident, but the question lies in whether this enlightenment denotes salvation or just exposure to the gospel.

The other interesting interpretation of ‘enlightened’ is highlighted by Ellingworth (1993:320) who acknowledges “the Peshitta paraphrases to include an explicit reference to baptism; cf. Justin, Apol. 61:2f; 65:1.” Lane (1991:141) explains that, “a reference to baptism has been recognized in the term *photisthentas*, (brought to the light).” He further brings insight in the way the Syriac Peshitta and Justin popularly translated *photisthentas* to mean baptism. Lane (1991:141) hints that prior to the middle of the second century there is no clear evidence of the translation as baptism.

Though this seems not to be the author’s focus in this context, it can qualify only when one considers that baptism was a symbol of what had happened to a person who received salvation. The symbol of baptism always came later as a sign of one who had received Jesus Christ. The other place the author used the similar word meaning illumination is in Heb 10:32 where his focus was on the audience’s response to the

gospel. It would be extreme to think at this point that the author was referring to water baptism other than the receiving of the gospel or God's Word.

However, the wilderness community encountered experiences of going through the Red Sea as a symbol of deliverance from Egypt. Mathewson (1999:215) notices some similarity in the language used concerning the illumination. He compares the illumination provided to the wilderness community through the pillar of fire alluded to in Neh 9 to the illumination of the gospel. Emmrich (2003:84) states that, "the term *photisein* ("to enlighten," 6:4) constitutes an allusion to the pillar of cloud/fire, Israel's luminous guide on the wilderness trek. The LXX texts that rehearse the wilderness journeys draw attention to the pillar's light-giving purpose by using the very same verb." Both incidences show God's providence of the light (Exo.13:21) necessary to walk in the path of righteousness. Emmrich (2003:57) notes that prior to Mathewson's (1999:209-225) and Gleason's (1998:62-91) work, Noel Weeks (1976) did a groundbreaking work where he made reference to the LXX wilderness community. In his work, Weeks observed that the language in Heb 6:4-5 resonates with what the wilderness community experienced.

It is therefore prudent to conclude that this 'enlightenment' is metaphorically used to refer to conversion (Heb10:32). It can also mean intellectual understanding or even illumination of spiritual truth without an accompanied transformational experience (Heb10:26). This is evident in the wilderness community where all were exposed to God's leading through the cloud by day and through the pillar of fire by night. Yet only a few were led into the Promised Land.

4.3.1.1.4. 'Once' (*hapax*)

It is important also to consider the meaning and extent of the word '*hapax*' ('once'). This means an act done at one time and does not need to be repeated. This word applies to all the other participles in vv4-5 (Witherington 2007:212) even though Ellingworth (1993:319) is convinced that it only applies to 'enlightened.' The author uses it to create a picture in the mind of his audience of a people who at one time received the gospel or God's teachings.

The word '*hapax*' is also used in Heb 9:7 where reference is made to the yearly entry of the high priest in the holy of holies for the atonement of sin. The understanding of 'once' in this regard is debated in the sense that year after year the ritual of atonement was practiced (Heb 10:1-3). Thus this 'once' can also be understood as having a repetitive nature on yearly basis. However, it is important to see the other verse that looks at once (*hapax*) in Heb 10:10 where it is stressed that Christ became a sacrifice once and for all. This denotes that Christ is not expected to die again. In the same manner the once every year meant that the sacrifice could not be repeated in any given year. In this case *hapax* describes a 'once' for all event. *Hapax* in 6:4 therefore could also qualify the other experiences described in our passage.

However, such a decision can only be made on theological, not exegetical grounds. Clearly given the general use of '*hapax*' in Hebrews, it would appear that its use here identifies an important unrepeatable spiritual experience by the ('*tous*'). Theologically, the author in a *double entendre* fashion is most likely combining the readers' conversion experience with the Exodus generation passing through the Red Sea. A firm decision on how correct this interpretation is can only be affirmed after the OT backgrounds of the five spiritual experiences are ascertained.

4.3.1.2. *have tasted of the heavenly gift*, and (6:4b)

This clause raises two questions. What is the meaning of tasting and what is this heavenly gift that 'those' people tasted? Regarding the first question, it is evident that tasting is used in a figurative manner to describe a spiritual experience. However, the Bible records an encounter concerning the wilderness community where they had a rare privilege of receiving manna from heaven. God rained this bread which the Israelites tasted and ate. (Exod. 16:4; 31; Num. 11:8). The reference to the wilderness community brings out the literal meaning of the word 'taste' (*geuomai*) (Emmrich 2003:84).

This word '*geuomai*' is also used figuratively in passages such as Job 27:2 where Job laments that, "God has made me taste the bitterness of soul" when he was referring to his sufferings that he went through. Elsewhere in Psalm 34:8 the word 'taste' is used figuratively to mean that one can experience and see that the Lord is good. In Matt. 16:28

the word is used metaphorically to mean that others will not taste (experience) death before they can see the kingdom of God. (cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). The first Epistle of Peter gives a closer meaning to what the author of Hebrews possibly meant. "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice... Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (1Pet 2:1-5).

Like 1Peter, Hebrews uses tasting to represent a spiritual experience which signifies a people who have been exposed to the gospel. Like 'enlightened,' tasted can also carry two spiritual connotations to either mean conversion or receiving the teaching of the gospel without necessarily converting.

With regard to the second question, Hebrews states that the believers have tasted 'the heavenly gift.' The heavenly gift one receives and the enlightenment is the forgiveness of sins, which is salvation. This far, it is not wrong to allude to the fact that the heavenly gift is salvation through Christ who came from heaven. It is an established fact that the free gift that God gave to mankind is Jesus Christ. One would argue and say that the Holy Spirit also came from heaven. However, the author subsequently mentions about the Holy Spirit, suggesting that the preceding clause may well refer to Christ, rather than the Holy Spirit. At this stage, it is appropriate to conclude that the heavenly gift is Christ who brings salvation. Allen suggests that, "the 'heavenly gift' is a euphemism for salvation" (201:349). Attridge (1989:170) notes that the descriptor 'heavenly' denotes its source and goal. This means that the gift is received from God for the purpose of connecting us back to God. Other interpreters such as Hohenstein (1956:439) identified the 'heavenly gift' as the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17).

4.3.1.3. *Have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit- 6:4c,*

'Those' people have not only experienced the attributes of salvation from afar, but they have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit. The word '*metochous*' which means partaker or a companion indicates a close relationship with the Holy Ghost. It describes a communal share as if they are partners in business (as used in Lk 5:7; Heb 1:9; Heb 2:14, 3:1; 14; 12:10).

In fact the word “partake” has a very interesting usage in Hebrews. In Hebrews 2:14, we see the author explaining on how Christ partook of flesh and blood as a sign of identifying Himself with man. The word partake in this context brings out the aspect of being one identity in nature, since ‘flesh and blood’ means that Christ and man carry the same biological identity. Later in Heb 3:1, the author further shows the depth of this oneness by indicating that by virtue of His coming, Jesus made it possible for the ‘holy brethren’ to also be ‘shareholders’ of a heavenly calling.

The partnership is not only with Christ, but with everyone who is born of His Spirit. The term ‘holy brethren’ (Heb 3:1) indicates the oneness and partnership of people of faith who are jointed together by the blood of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Thus the partnership is primarily with others as the Holy Spirit serves as the sphere of this partnership. The idea is similar to the “in Christ” language in Paul. It is in this sense that we say the grace (2 Cor 13:14). The Holy Spirit enables the ‘holy brethren’ to enjoy the unity of faith as He binds them together in the secured partnership with God. The Holy Spirit is the guiding power on the earthly pilgrimage (Emmrich 2003:58).

Hughes (1979:210) believes that ‘partakers of the Holy Spirit’ alludes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit as described in 1 Cor 12:4-11 (i.e., works of power, healings, wisdom, prophecy). It is prudent to hear the author communicating to his audience that they had partaken of the Holy Spirit in terms of sharing in the unity they have in Christ through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Unless one further qualifies that the Holy Spirit comes with the blessings of different gifts that are essential for the growth of the body of Christ, it is difficult to conclude that the author was highlighting the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Rhee (2003:89) argues that the Holy Spirit was considered to be the mark of the Christian community which leads to speculations that the individuals were closely associated with the believing community when in the actual sense they were not. Rhee further argues that the ‘partakers’ were partakers in the sense that they had witnessed the confirmation of the gospel which was accompanied by the distribution of the Holy Spirit. “Moreover, the phrase “partakers of the Holy Spirit” may also refer to the benefits they had received from

the ministry of the apostles which were accompanied by signs and wonders and various miracles” (Rhee 2000:89).

DeSilva (1999:46) points out that,

Becoming sharers of the Holy Spirit’ refers to one of the principal benefactions of God for the early church. Reception of the Holy Spirit as part of the experience of conversion was prominent in early Christian culture (Gal. 3:1-5; 4:1-7; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Jn. 14:15-17; 16:13-15; Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18). It could signify God’s adoption of the believer (Gal. 4:1-7), God’s consecration of the Gentile sinner while he was still a Gentile (Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18; Gal. 3:1-5), and God’s assurance of the future benefit of eschatological salvation (2 Cor.1:22; 5:5).

However, it is practical at this stage to conclude that the author was referring to the unity of faith that brethren in Christ enjoy through the companionship of the Holy Spirit. The implication is more of belonging to the community of believers rather than the meaning that implies ‘one nature’ with the Holy Spirit. The author was giving a scenario of ‘those’ who had a close and intimate relation in the unity of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit’s guidance. This relation could possibly have been due to their acquaintance with believers in the faith or to the powers demonstrated through the Holy Spirit. It can either mean they had allowed the Holy Spirit to work in their lives or they had seen Him work in other lives and they stood as true witnesses of what He had done. The earlier word “once enlightened” gives a picture of those who have received the gospel of Christ in the positive sense.

It is prudent to conclude that this intimacy is as a result of the gospel they have heard and the life they have enjoyed with fellow believers as the Holy Spirit unites them. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment and helps to guide the faithful in paths of righteousness (John 14:16-18; 16:7-11).

4.3.1.4. *And have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

In this clause, the particle 'have tasted' applies to both 'the good Word of God' and 'the powers of the age to come'. It carries the same meaning of the '*geuomai*' (taste) described earlier in v4b. The people referred to have had the privilege to experience the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come.

Tasting the good Word of God can be described in two ways; firstly, the Word is appreciated when it is heard (Rom 10:14-15) and secondly, when it is believed to the level of bringing transformation (Rom 10:8-13). Tasting the Word in the sense of Hebrews can mean both descriptions. They tasted (experienced) the good Word through hearing what had been preached.

The word 'taste' is used in Heb 2:9 to refer to how Jesus was made a little lower so that he could taste death. This tasting is not referring to just partially sampling death, but it has a deeper meaning of experiencing the very pain, anguish and ugliness of death. First Peter 2:3 uses it to state that his audience has tasted the goodness of God. This 'taste' is earlier used in Psalm 34:8 where the Psalmist encourages his hearers to taste and see that the Lord is good. The tasting, as earlier explained, gives an impression of experiencing in this case, the Word of God that shows His goodness. The tasting leads to appreciating God's goodness, not tasting as a result of trying to make a choice as to whether God is good or not. Jesus did not taste death to find out whether it was good or evil, but he tasted it as a way of defeating it. In the same way, we taste God's Word to appreciate its goodness.

Grudem (1995:133-182) has extensively defined the positive terms used in Heb 6:4-5 and has concluded that the tasting does not mean one has fully experienced the good Word of God or the power to come. He borrows his understanding from Josephus' *Jewish War* (2.158) where the Essenes seemed to attract those 'who had tasted' their philosophy, but had not yet made it theirs (Grudem 1995:145-146). However, the way the author of Hebrews used 'taste' in Heb 2:9, can comfortably make one interpret it as fully experienced the transforming purpose of the word of God. When one identifies the overtones of the wilderness community in Heb 6:4-5, 'taste' will stand well with the experiencing of God's providence, protection and divine guidance to the Israelites.

These people have in other words experienced and witnessed the demonstrated powers of God which are also to come in another age. It is difficult to understand this phrase if we fail to back track to what the author began to say in his opening remarks of Hebrews. He began by establishing the progressive dispensations that started in the OT and later culminated in the coming of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1:1-4, 2:5, etc). 'Those' people have not only tasted (experienced) the Word that has been preached to them, but have also tasted (experienced) 'the power of the age to come'.

How have they experienced this 'power'? Is it by seeing the miracles performed by apostles and the disciples of Christ? Is it by witnessing the transforming power of God in their lives or in other people's lives? The power can be experienced through being the beneficiary of receiving God's miracles such as healing, receiving sight for the blind and any other supernatural performance. It can mean God's divine interventions of protection and providence. Mathewson states that, "It is the reference to the "signs and wonders" which accompanied God's activity in Egypt and beyond which grounds the writer's articulation of the experience of the powers of the age to come in the new covenant community in Heb 6:5b" (1999:220). This relates to how the wilderness community experienced God's continued protection and providence as recorded in books such as Exodus and Numbers, I and II Chronicles and Deuteronomy. The author of Hebrews, again engages a *double entendre* to refer both to the wilderness community while relating to his audience who also had the opportunity to experience this power of God through miracles and the transformation power of God's Word.

Asumang (2008:4) states that the warning passage of Heb 6:4-8 identifies the positive experiences of Israel's wilderness sojourn found in Neh 9 where "the Prayer of the Levites" recounts God's blessings throughout the wilderness years. Asumang (2008:4) observes that parts of the prayer are echoed in Heb 6:4-6. He cites Nehemiah exclamation that God gave Israel His "good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold [His] manna from their mouths" (Neh 9:20; cf. Num 11:25). In a similar manner, Hebrews reminds the congregation that they "have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit".

4.3.2. Conditional clause describing a Catastrophic Departure from Positive experience

In Heb 6:6a there is a conditional clause describing a catastrophic departure for those who have experienced the positive attributes of walking with God. The clause, “And then has fallen away” presents a catastrophic departure from positive experiences. The clause must be examined in depth to understand the meaning of “falling away.”

4.3.2.1. And *then have fallen away*

Before we can discuss what ‘fallen away’ means, the phrase ‘and then’ must be explained to understand its implications. Clearly the author was talking of an experience chronologically subsequent to the previous experience. Thus the “falling away” is a negative experience which is counter to previous positive experiences. The author has highlighted all the positive attributes (enlightened, partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good Word and tasted the power of the age to come). The attributes discussed relate to what accompanies a life of one who belongs to the Christian community. The phrase ‘and then’, changes the mood of his speech the positive are negated by whatever follows in his discussion. ‘And then’ is a conjunctive word that works to negate whatever positive elements have previously been highlighted. It would have been a good positive ending if the author decided to end with v5. However he needed to qualify what he was saying to his audience by showing the consequences of not maintaining the positive attributes mentioned earlier.

There is need at this stage to understand what exactly the author means by ‘falling away’ and who this is referring to. The Greek word *parapiptō*, (aorist participle-*parapesóntas*-‘*have fallen away*’) according to Witherington (2007:214) is not encountered anywhere else in the NT. Allen (2010:359) notes that the word *parapiptō* appears about eight times in the LXX. It appears once in the book of Esther, five times in Ezekiel and twice in the Apocrypha (Wisdom 6:9 and 12:2. Allen (2010:360) has also observed that the word *parapiptō* seemed linguistically not to mean anything near to apostasy in the LXX, Classical Greek or Koine Greek.

However, in the context of Hebrews, the word can apply to mean apostasy. Allen is also aware that the word is used five times in Ezekiel in the general sense of “to sin” (2010:360). This word gives an impression of “deliberately stepping into a black hole” (Witherington 2007:214). The word, according to Witherington is not used in a case where one falls accidentally or carelessly (2007:214). He further highlights the fact that the word is used in the LXX as “acting faithlessly or treacherously”.

In relating it to Heb 6:6, the ‘falling away’ is connected to failing to continue in the positive attributes stated in Heb 6:4-5. Witherington (2007:214) observes that “the act of falling away is not so much against the dogma as against a person, at 3:12 against God, at 6:6 against the Son of God”. This may simply mean one who gives up walking in the light that comes as a result of the gospel of Jesus Christ and decides to grope in darkness and deliberately refuses to be led in God’s ways by the Holy Spirit.

The debate among interpreters hinges on the state of “those who have fallen away.” Some believe that the author is addressing believers who have fallen away while other interpreters believe that the author is referring to those who did not belong to the faith or unbelievers. In Heb 6:4 and 5, we have established that the picture the author gives is of those; a) who have heard the teaching of the gospel, b) who have received salvation through the teaching of God’s Word, c) have experienced the Holy Spirit and have enjoyed a close relationship with Him in the unity of faith, d) and have also experienced the power of God, not only in their present state, but also of the power to come. The important task is to understand how v6, “And then have fallen away,” connects to all the positive experiences which signify attributes of salvation that these people have enjoyed.

The author created a scenario that signified a retrogressive state in v6 of those described in v4 and v5. The author managed to show that they had fallen away and we must hear him saying exactly that. The KJV and NIV, for example, translate v6 as circumstantial; “if ... fall away” while the NASB translates it as substantive; “and then have fallen away”. Many interpreters have argued from the point of the first article *tous* (the) which is in the accusative indicating its direct use on the object.

Lane (1991:142) states that, “In the LXX, the term *paraptíptein* has reference to the expression of a total attitude reflecting deliberate and calculated renunciation of God (Ezek 20:27; 22:4; Wis. 6:9; 12:2; cf. Michaelis, TDNT 6:171; Hughes, 1973:146-50).” Falling away in the OT was as a result of the people of God disobeying the Law of God. The difference with the outcome of such disobedience is that it attracted the immediate wrath of God. The other difference that can be noted is that the Israelites were a chosen people of God with the promise to a specific land God had chosen for them. Those who disobeyed died along the way to the Promised Land or ended up in exile. The falling away as recorded in Ezek 20:24-27 had to do with idol worship and God dealt with them in His wrath.

The encounter in Num 14 reflects a scenario where the wilderness community complained against Moses and God to the extent of wanting to stone Moses. These people experienced all the miracles from God, yet they rebelled against him. The author of Hebrews is reminding his Christian audience what happened in the wilderness with the Israelites. The falling away therefore is to abandon the life of continuing to walk in obedience with the calling, which in turn has consequences. In the wilderness, the rebellious group failed to enter the Promised Land and suffered physical death.

In the context of Hebrews, it is difficult to conclude that those who fall away lose out on salvation because the wilderness community received forgiveness. It could mean the deliberate behavior of leaving a life of faith to follow one's own lifestyle without considering what Christ has done. Such a person is fully aware of God's way of life, but chooses to neglect the life of faith. This is 'apostasy' a deliberate move to rebel against God like the wilderness community.

At this stage it is imperative to exegete the next consequential clauses in order to hear the author further and then try and understand what he is saying.

4.3.3. The Consequential Clause of the Catastrophic Departure

The conditional clauses describing a catastrophic departure from positive experience are followed by the statements of “impossibility” describing the consequence of the

catastrophe in Heb 6:6b; “it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.”

4.3.3.1. *It is impossible to renew them again to repentance*

The clause indicates the consequences of those who have fallen away. The consequence is that those who have experienced all the positive attributes of salvation and then they have fallen away; there is no possibility whatsoever to restore them to repentance. In order to exegete this clause, it is important to first of all examine the word ‘impossible’ (*Adúnaton*). Thereafter, there is need to determine the meaning of ‘*renew to repentance*.’”

4.3.3.1.1. *Impossible*

The major source of contention in this passage is the use of the word ‘impossible’ (*Adúnaton*) which has been attributed to God, the Church or the believer by different interpreters (Lane 1991:141-142, Witherington 2007:211-212, Allen 2010:344-393). “Impossible” shows that the action is not only difficult, but cannot be done with any imaginable effort. “It can mean unable, without power to accomplish the end in view” (Witherington 2007:211). Impossible does not mean probable or difficult, but it means something that cannot be done.

In this case, ‘impossible to renew to repentance’ creates the first difficulty in interpretation because the subject of the clause is unstated. Questions arise as to whom this impossibility does apply. Does it apply to God where it is impossible for God to restore the apostate or impossible for the one who has fallen away to seek repentance? Or could there be other factors engaged in making the one who has fallen away to fail to come to repentance?

Before attempting to answer these questions, it is advisable to see how the word ‘impossible’ (*Adúnaton*) is used in Hebrews. “...it is Impossible for God to lie” (Heb 6:18); “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4); “It is impossible to please God without faith” (Heb 11:6). In these verses, the impossibility can easily be defined because the author has also identified the subject of the discussion. God, the blood of bulls and goats, and the one who lacks faith are the subjects in the respective mentioned verses where impossibility is applied.

Interpreters approach this difficulty with regard to the passage from different angles. Some insinuate that the impossibility is from the human perspective alone (Oberholtzer 1988:323) whereas others believe it applied to God (Koester 2001:313). Oberholtzer's (1988:323) argument is based on the fact that the infinitive 'to renew' is without a subject. It is therefore logical to improvise a subject in reference to Heb 3:13. In Heb 3:13, the author of Hebrews was urging his audience to encourage one another so that none of them would be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Oberholtzer further justifies that it is appropriate to have '*numa*' (us) or '*tina*' (anyone) as the subject. In other words, it is impossible for man, but not for God, to restore those who have fallen away. One would however argue against Oberholtzer's view and ask whether the prerogative of renewing one to repentance lies with man in as much as one man can encourage another?

Lane (1991:142) observes that repentance was deemed as a gift from God in the Jewish intertestamental and later literature (Wis12:10; "You gave them chance to repent"; Pr Man 8: "You have given me a sinner, repentance"; cf. Acts 5:31; 11:18). Repentance (*Metanoia*) can mean change of heart or to turn from one's sins. It can also mean changing one's ways (Aland, Aland, Karavidopoulos, Martini and Metzger 2001:115).

In this case "impossible" is the word that is used to emphasize the point that follows in rhetorical speech. The word "Impossible" is therefore used to indicate its rhetorical function at the beginning of a clause or sentence. It is used to indicate that the action is irreversible or unachievable, humanly speaking. Though the subject of impossibility is not mentioned, it could mean that a person cannot come to repentance unless God helps them through the Holy Spirit.

4.3.3.1.2. *Renew to Repentance*

Repentance is a sign of one who has realized that the direction one has taken needs to be changed and that person changes it. In the same way a sinner realizes that the former ways were inappropriate and decides to change and walk according to God's Word. The decision to change is granted and initiated by two factors; the first one is that there is conviction through the Spirit of God who demands that man must repent (Jer 18:11, Acts 17:30; Mk 1:14-15; 2Pet 3:9). This conviction comes through hearing the Word of God (Lk

5:32). Secondly, the person to whom the Word is preached and to whom God grants the ability to change must acknowledge their sins and ask for forgiveness (Acts 2:37-38; 2Cor 7:8-10; Heb 2:1-12; Eph 1:3-5; 3:14-19).

Repentance is therefore an act that comes from a convicted heart. This comes as a result of some enlightenment one receives on his or her condition of the heart. When one is brought to a point where they realize they have sinned, yet refuse to change then repentance has not taken effect. There are two parties at play for repentance to take place. God shows us our sins and it is up to us to desire to be restored to the place where repentance positively affects our actions.

4.3.3.1.3. *Impossible to Renew to Repentance*

In the past, it was taught by some that the passage implies that it was impossible for the church to restore such a person. Accordingly, some churches barred believers from seeking to restore an apostate, even if the apostate repented and wanted to return to the faith. Considering the author's frequent exhortations that believers should watch over each other, this interpretation does not appeal to most of today's interpreters. Heen and Krey (n.d:xvii) states that,

A rigorist interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6, Hebrews 10:26-31 and Hebrews 12:17 claimed the impossibility of repentance for certain sins after baptism. This concern can be noted as early as the Shepherd of Hermas (120-140). It is also apparent in Tertullian's (c. 160-c. 225) defence of Hebrews. After the Decian persecution of 249-50, the rigorist Novatians used Hebrews to argue that those who had recanted the faith could not be forgiven and readmitted to the church. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (fl. 248-258), himself a disciplined defender of the faith, declared that the lapsed could be reconciled with the church after rigorous penance while others interpret it to mean that it is impossible for the apostate to seek repentance once fallen away.

Interpreters such as Koester (2001:313) who believe that the impossibility is related to God argue that once a person crosses a certain point of apostasy, God cannot restore

them again to faith. The author's depiction of Esau in Heb 12:15-17 is usually cited in support of this view. However, throughout the Epistle the author stresses that God is able to do anything even as far as shaking the heavens (12:26). What could prevent God from restoring a repentant apostate?

A variation of this interpretation says that impossibility refers to the refusal of God to grant the apostate true repentance. Koester (2001:313) explains that it isn't because God would not forgive the repentant apostate, but that God would not grant the apostate the grace, or the chance to repent in the first place. Esau in Heb 12:15-17 is cited as an example of one who could not get repentance, though he sought for that with tears. Though this approach underlines the sovereignty of God, it also implies that God is able to change His mind and that He is vindictive.

The impossibility could relate to the psychological incapability of an apostate to repent and turn back to God, in his own strength (Witherington 2007:211). This interpretation resonates well with much of NT theology on apostasy and relies on a rigorous definition of the term, apostate. An apostate in this sense is not just one who has fallen into sin, but one who by his consistent life, belief, attitude and speech rejects the central truths of the Gospel (Lane 1991:141). However, it is important to note that no one can be saved except God grants such a person salvation.

After analyzing the different views on impossibility, the conclusion is that first of all the author of Hebrews has a responsibility to encourage and to warn his audience so that they mature as they persevere in faith. In doing so, he gives a picture of how taking lightly the Christian lifestyle can cause one to fall away. An example is given as the author alludes to the falling away of the wilderness community. When one falls away it is impossible for the person to see the need to repent. This means a person's failure to be renewed to repentance is as a result of that person's inability to see the seriousness of falling away. This falling away is where one ends up in a lifestyle of disobedience to God.

The impossibility can also mean taking lightly the act of repentance so as to have a restored relationship with God. It could also mean failure to see that one needs to repent when they sin. This can happen to people who feel they are already saved and their sinful

attitude does not matter anymore, but continue to refuse to mature in their faith. I believe it is to such the author of Hebrews was referring to as having fallen away and hence the impossibility to renew them.

The case of the wilderness community was in the mind of the author. The rebellious group failed to enter the Promised Land, yet God forgave them. In a similar manner the author was aware that there is security of eternal life, but God punishes sin at all times when we fail to walk in humility of confessing our sins. Since salvation is guaranteed to those who are saved, there is a call to righteous living. Constant prayer and submission to God renews our minds (Rom 12:1-2). Repentance is a daily practice of a Christian who continually confesses sins to God (1John 1:9-10). The moment one fails to confess one's sins and fails to ask God's constant guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to remain a Christian of stunted growth who cannot discern between good and evil. However, impossibility can only come in when the person deliberately refuses to walk a life of repentance. No one can restore such a person to confess or repent of their short comings if they have rejected the only way of repentance.

In the next chapters, an interpretation of what the author could have meant is discussed in the rhetorical exegesis of the passage and its theological implications. In the rhetorical exegesis, the metaphors such as 'enlightened' and 'tasting' will be examined. For now, it is adequate to hear the author stating that it is impossible for those who have shown all the positive attributes of salvation, to renew them to repentance when such people have fallen away. This falling away simply means detaching oneself from living a life in line with the gospel that has been taught through Christ. The significance of this passage is that the author is encouraging the audience to press on to maturity and to warn them of what happens to "those" who have demonstrated the good qualities of salvation.

When such people fall away the consequence is the inability to be restored back to repentance. It does not mean that the Church cannot return them to Christian fellowship. It does not mean God refuses to forgive those who come to Him in repentance, neither does it mean God cannot grant them repentance, but it is more to do with their attitude towards sin and what Christ has done on the cross.

4.3.4. The Two Explanatory Clauses

The consequential clause of the catastrophic departure is then followed by the two explanatory clauses which give the reasons why “it is impossible to restore to repentance” “since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God” and “have put him to open shame”. The explanatory clauses are therefore examined to understand the author.

4.3.4.1. *since they again crucify to themselves the son of God*

In this clause, the author further clarified what happened to ‘those’ who showed good standing with Christ and then “have fallen away”. Since we all know that it is an impossible act to crucify Jesus Christ again, it is necessary to closely examine the passage. Does the author mean that the very act of falling away is equated to crucifying the Son of God?

One would argue and state that the author was not equating two scenarios because he did not use any simile in this clause. Unless he explicitly said that their act was ‘like crucifying to themselves...’ or ‘as crucifying to themselves...’ This clause indicates the reason it is ‘impossible to renew to repentance’. Allen (2010:364) correctly highlights ‘crucifying’ and ‘exposing’ as the two participial clauses.

Allen further hints on the debate surrounding the word ‘*Anastauroō*’ (crucify). He states that “the compound verb bears the prefix ‘ana-’ which would be interpreted “again”. Allen explains that the word is interpreted as ‘up’ by others (2010:364). Lane (1991:142) interprets crucifying again as repudiating the only basis upon which repentance can be extended. Lane’s interpretation is opposed by Allen. Allen (2010:365) believes that the issue is more on one’s internal contradiction between the confession and commitment by choosing to sin. It is important to note that both Lane’s and Allen’s views bring out the issue of sinning against God. Whether the sinning is publicly or internal contradiction, the author of Hebrews was showing how dreadful the action of falling away was.

In the NT times, if a Hebrew decided to renounce Christianity and aspired to get back to the synagogue, there was need to fulfill some conditions. One of the conditions hinged on calling down a curse upon Jesus as an impostor. This was viewed in effect as having to

crucify to oneself "the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame" (Anonymous: 2012).

However, the author used some metaphorical language in analyzing the state of "those who have fallen way". In as much as we know that Christ was crucified "once and for all" (Heb 9-10), it is practically impossible to even imagine him crucified again. Even the historical information behind crucifying Christ to oneself again by cursing His name does not practically take Christ to the cross the second time. The author therefore was stating the impossibility of renewing one who had fallen away to the impossibility of crucifying Christ again. This is as good as equating the two scenarios analogically.

It is therefore in order to conclude that the author was showing what happened to people who once confessed, but failed to live to their level of confession. Their contradicting actions were both repudiating the work Christ did on the cross and proving them unable to match to their confession. This defeated the very confession that they publicly made to receive Jesus Christ.

4.3.4.2. *and put him to open shame*

The death on the cross was the kind of death those found guilty of criminal offence were subjected to as punishment. Many criminals convicted by the Roman Empire died in condemnation and shame for the crime they committed. This crucifixion was done outside the city in full view of witnesses. It was a shameful death. In view of the aforesaid, we need to examine the clause to understand what the author was saying to his audience in addition to the exegesis of "*since they again crucify to themselves the son of God*".

The word '*aischyne*' means 'shame' or 'shameful' or 'shamefulness' or humiliated. This word is used in Heb 12:2 where the author of Hebrews was encouraging his audience to get rid of the sin that easily entangled them. He referred to the way Christ endured the cross, despising the shame. A similar word is used in Heb 2:11 and 11:16. The word ashamed '*epaischynnoma*' is used in both places. In Heb 2:11, Jesus is not ashamed to call the sanctified brothers and in Heb 11:16, God is not ashamed to be called the God of those who were counted faithful in Heb 11. God and Jesus Christ are not ashamed to be

associated with repentant sinners who believe. Yet those who have fallen away were actually putting Christ to shame.

In historical terms, death on the cross was not a hero's death, but a condemned person's death. Criminals and those who antagonized the Roman Empire were sentenced to hang on the cross till death. The author in this case recreated the scene of death at the cross and referred to how shameful it was for anyone to die such a death, especially Jesus who was without any crime. Those who rejected Christianity to go back to their old ways also openly humiliated the name of Jesus by cursing it (Anonymous 2012:3-4). The author then showed that 'those' who "have fallen away" were repeating the shameful death of Christ. The author was dramatizing something humanly and theologically impossible. This was to emphasize how serious it is to fall away from the only hope of salvation.

However in theological terms, God turned Jesus' death into glorious heroism. So Hebrews describes Jesus' death in triumphant victorious terms in Heb 2. The NT elsewhere uses "holy war" language to characterize His death. John in fact sees His death as Jesus' glorification (for example, John 12:23). So the shameful death in the eyes of the world became really the glorious death in the eyes of the saved. His ways are not our ways indeed.

DeSilva (2004:792-795) explains the issue of shame in relation to the Greco-Roman social context where there was a patron-client relationship. In this relationship, both the benefactor and beneficiary related with an understanding. The benefactor provided rare privileges to the beneficiary such as provision and protection. In return, the beneficiary reciprocated the gesture with loyalty, honor and obedience. The people who failed to meet their obligation to their patron when the cost of such witness and loyalty became too high were charged in Hebrews with bringing public shame on the Patron. The failure to honor their patrons was deemed as making a mockery of the covenant.

In the same way, DeSilva feels that those who fell away made a mockery of Jesus beneficial death as they cut themselves off from him. DeSilva notes that the author of Hebrews has spent considerable space developing the honor and authority of the Son (Heb. 1:1-14; 2:5-9), he therefore "considers it a dangerous course of action to offer an

affront to the Son” (DeSilva 199:55).

4.4. Summary of Exegesis of Hebrew 6:4-6

The passage is a warning aimed to motivate spiritual growth to maturity. Firstly, the author began by referring to the immaturity of his audience in 5:11-14. He then urged them to press forward to maturity in 6:1-3. This maturity is the ability to discern good and evil. The maturity is the ability to have the eyes of the heart enlightened (Eph1:18).

Secondly, he created a picture in 6:4-5 of those who have shown signs of having faith in Christ because they have “once been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, and have tasted the good Word of God and have been partakers of the Holy Spirit...” These attributes seem to reflect the experience of a genuine Christian. The argument of whether such people are saved or not is an ongoing debate that has raised five views on the status of those who have fallen away. The incident at Kadesh-Barnea where the rebellious were forgiven, but did not enter the Promised Land can be used to argue for the loss of rewards and not salvation. However, one needs to be cautious in that there is some difference between the old covenant and the new covenant.

Thirdly, in v6 the author countered the positive descriptions described in vv4-5 with the act of falling away. This falling away means apostasy. Apostasy is the deliberate rejection of God. Fourthly, he further meted out the crucial reality and the outcome of such a people who have fallen away. He showed that for such people it was impossible to restore them back to repentance. This is interpreted as the denial of a person to take seriously what Christ did on the cross and failure to walk in repentance. It does not mean God cannot save them when they repent neither does it mean that the church cannot restore such people to fellowship. Fifthly, he gave the reason for their impossibility to be restored to repentance. Their action of falling away was as bad as crucifying to themselves Jesus Christ again to the cross. Lastly, he showed in strongest terms that the act of crucifying Christ was equivalent to exposing Him to open shame. This implies that the action of falling away was equivalent to renouncing what Christ did on the cross.

The exegesis has shown that the author's background to this severe warning attests to echoes in the OT concerning the wilderness community in Num 14. The use of words such as "enlightened, tasting the heavenly gift, and made partakers of the Holy Spirit..." resonate well with the experiences of the Israelites who walked with God in the OT, especially during their journey through the wilderness into the Promised Land. The incidences that were happening in the OT seem to be alluded to by the author of Hebrews as he addressed his audience. The opening remarks of Heb 1:1-4 brings out how he connected the old dispensation of the forefathers to the new dispensation which culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ.

The rhetorical exegesis in the next chapter will shed more light on such words as 'enlightened', 'tasting' and 'partaker'. The author has used some of his rhetorical skills in order to persuade his audience so that they can picture the severity of his warning against falling away. The next important task before analyzing the rhetorical strategies of the passage is to examine its OT background in detail.

4.5. The OT Examples in the Warning Passage of Hebrews 6:4-6

Hebrews has about thirty eight quotations from the OT and approximately fifty five allusions and echoes. Eleven of these quotations come from the Pentateuch, seven from the prophets, eighteen from Psalms, one from the historical books and one from proverbs (Allen 2010:84). Gleason (1998:65) notes that, "The explicit Old Testament quotations used by the author indicate his preference for the Septuagint and his extensive knowledge of the Pentateuch and the Psalms."

The other reason for considering the OT perspective of Hebrews is because of the audience that the author was addressing and the distinctly Jewish ethos of the Epistle. The author's use of the Old Testament reflects several exegetical principles such as typology commonly found in contemporary rabbinical practice. It is also unlikely that Heb 6:4-6 can be void of any OT background when other warning passages have the OT background (Mathewson 1999:210). Also, Heb 1:1-4 suggests the authors' aim to associate and dissociate his readers with the "forefathers". It is therefore reasonable to assume that there is some OT background material behind Heb 6:4-6.

Ellingworth (1993: 321) observes that Heb 5:11-6:12 seems remarkable for what it does not say. He therefore concludes that it is not based on any OT passage since the author was appealing to his readers in his own words. On the other hand, Hughes (1977:216) admits that “the calamitous history of the Israelites of old is repeatedly set before the readers as a warning against the imitation of their evil example (2:1f; 3:12ff.; 4:1f., 11; 10:28ff.; 12:25ff.)...,” but he fails to find any OT reference to the warning in 5:11-6:12.

McKnight (1992:21-59) has critically analyzed the warning passages in Hebrews. He has also shown how each warning passage is connected to the OT passage. Yet, he does not mention any OT illustration in 6:4-6. The discussion of the OT background to Hebrews by France (1996:245-76) proposes that an exposition of Psalm 110 more broadly underlies Heb 5:5-7:28. However, France does not help us arrive at an answer as to the question of whether an OT illustration illuminates 6:46 in particular.

The reason for failing to identify any OT background in the warning passage is that there is no explicit reference to any. However, the proposal is that Heb 6:4-6 must have some OT allusions and echoes. One needs to note that allusions or echoes are not easily and explicitly identified when used.

4.5.1. Relevant themes from the OT examples, allusions and echoes

Bateman (2007:26) highlights the fact that some warning passages provide positive affirmations. However, they also reveal unattractive and dire consequences of negative actions. Bateman further observes that the warning passages depict Jewish ancestors as “less-than-exemplary models” to the audience who might be contemplating to disobey God.

Asumang (2008:3) suggests that the passage “identifies the positive experiences of Israel’s wilderness sojourn as enumerated in Nehemiah (Neh.) 9.” Neh 9 contains ‘the Prayer of the Levites’ in which the faithful recount God’s blessings throughout the wilderness years.

A careful study of the passage helps to identify OT allusions and echoes. Moyise (2002:419) defines an echo as “a faint trace of a text and might be quite unconscious,

emerging from minds soaked in the scriptural heritage of Israel” such as the audience of Hebrews. So for example, the reference to enlightenment in Heb 6:4 is not meant to bring a particular text in mind as much as it is meant to reflect on the whole narrative of the pillar of light which guided Israel in the wilderness. This enlightenment is further contextualized to mean exposure to the gospel. In a similar manner, the author refers to the “tasting of heavenly gift” that also echoes what happened to the children of Israel. They had the privilege of tasting manna as a gift from heaven. The author of Hebrews did not directly refer to the wilderness narrative yet he alluded to the disobedience of the wilderness community as he referred to ‘those who have fallen away’. As he was addressing his audience, the author connected the OT theme of disobedience to his immediate audience. He then further related the disobedience to “crucifying Christ again and exposing Him to open shame.”

Thus the author tactfully weaved OT text into the new while carrying forward the message of disobedience of the OT wilderness community. The author engaged the old text by reconfiguring a story from the old text and gave it a new meaning where it suited the appeal to his audience so that they were convinced on the theme he was addressing. The disobedience of the wilderness community must serve as a warning to his immediate audience. DeSilva (2010:800-806) states that the audience’s knowledge of the old text enables them to understand the author’s message.

When considering the seven criteria for identifying inter-textual references in the New Testament proposed by Hays (1989:29-31), it is evident that the OT was available to both the author of Hebrews and his first readers. In examining Heb 6:4-6, the reference to the OT is not explicit or "loud" enough, but the use of some clauses echoes what happened with the wilderness community in the OT. It is evident that the author of Hebrews frequently referred to the wilderness community. For example, Heb 3:12-19 refers to the disobedience of some Israelites who came out of Egypt. In Heb 4:1-11, the author in spurring his audience to hold fast to the faith, reminded them of the wilderness community who were promised rest. The author further referred to the Israelites and their deliverance from Egypt as he emphasized the need for the New Covenant in Heb 8. In several instances, the author reminded his audience about the first people God had chosen as

beneficiaries and custodians of the Old Covenant in reference to them who needed to uphold the New Covenant. It is therefore fair to propose that Heb 6:4-6, is one of the warnings that have some echoes of the wilderness community because it fits within the many other themes of the whole book of Hebrews.

It is the task of an interpreter to be mindful of allusions and echoes of other texts (DeSilva 1999:36-38).

4.5.2. Interpretations of OT implied in Hebrews 6:4-6

The author of Hebrews used the Septuagint (LXX), in preference to the Masoretic Hebrew Text (MT) (Ellingworth 1993:37-42; Lane 1991:cxix-cxxiv; Allen 2010:161-63). The Septuagint therefore is used to help in identifying quotations, allusions and echoes of old texts in the NT (Gaebelien 1981:1-158).

4.5.2.1. *For in the case of those who have once been enlightened*

In this clause, the word 'enlightened' (*photizo*) is used in the OT. The LXX in particular uses the word in 38 places. *Photizo* means to bring to light, to shed light upon or to cause light to shine upon some object, in the sense of illuminating it. Figuratively, *photizo* means to give guidance or understanding, to make clear or to cause something to be known by revealing it clearly. It may mean to make known in reference to the inner life or transcendent matters. In the earlier exegesis of the word 'enlightened', we have established that the author of Hebrews seemed to have used a typology with the wilderness community. This enlightenment from the wilderness camp was a literal experience of fire and cloud that illuminated the way, (Neh 9:12; Ps 105:39) but the author uses it to show that those who were 'once enlightened' fell away (Heb 6:6; cf. Num 14).

God illuminated the way of the wilderness community physically while His presence was a spiritual illumination which the Israelites enjoyed. Since the author of Hebrews had his focus to encourage his audience to hold on to the faith, he referred to the literal enlightenment of the Israelites in comparison to the enlightenment of the gospel of the NT. The audience had to hear the author in their present time while taking into account

what happened to the wilderness community in the OT. In this case, the author is alluding to the wilderness community while he has in mind a people who had come into the community of believers through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4.5.2.2. *And have tasted of the heavenly gift*

The word 'Tasted' (*geuomai*) literally means to taste with the mouth. When used figuratively, it means to "to learn by experience" (Gleason 1998:78). It can also mean "to experience, prove, partake of or come to know. It is used in idiomatic expressions like "taste death" which is another way to say "to die" (Anonymous 2012). This second clause also resonates with overtones from the wilderness incident. According to Exodus 16:4, God showered manna down from heaven for the Israelites in the time they cried for food (Exod 16:31, 33, 35; Num 11:7-9; Deut 8:3, 16). "This provision of "heavenly bread" became important for subsequent articulations of God's intervention on behalf of his covenant people, and is explicitly recalled in the historical recital of Ps 105:40" (Mathewson 1999:216). The warning passage resonates with Nehemiah's recital of the incident at Sinai. As Mathewson (1999:216) observes, "In rehearsing the events following the incident at Sinai, Neh 9 also draws on this description of heavenly bread which God gave to his covenant people (9:15; cf. v. 20)." In Exod 16:15 and Ps 78:24 the bread is described as something which the Lord gave to his people as a divine gift or providence. The "tasting" in Hebrews echoes the OT wilderness experience of eating manna from heaven.

4.5.2.3. *have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit*

This clause sustains the continuous allusion to the experience of God's people in the wilderness. According to Neh 9:20, part of the experience of the people as they wandered in the wilderness was the reception of the gift of God's Spirit to instruct them (Mathewson 1999:217). Thus, when read against the background of the pilgrimage motif, the phrase "partakers of the Holy Spirit" corresponds to God's placing of "the spirit that was upon Moses" on the seventy elders to instruct their contemporaries during the wilderness trek (Num 11-16:30; cf. Gleason 1998:77; Mathewson 1999:217; Emmrich 2003:85)

In a similar manner, the audience of Hebrews has experienced the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their midst. Numbers 11:16-29, a text which contains several references to God's Spirit coming to rest upon certain members of the covenant people is also likely echoed in Heb 6:4-6. It is therefore probable that the author was still using the wilderness community as an implied negative example in his warning to the audience.

4.5.2.4. *And have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come*

The good Word of God refers to the Word of God that the audience heard through the preaching of the Word. The author was relating to the gospel that had come to the audience of Hebrews. However, the author reference would ring back in the ears of the audience the statements found also in the book of Joshua. Joshua makes reference to the divine promise of the land of Canaan. Joshua 21:45 draws attention to the fulfillment of the covenantal (land) promise in terms of ("Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass"). Again, 23:15 reiterates this idea by using the same phrase that translates "good Word of God".

Emmrich (2003:86-87) connects the "good word" with the demonstrated power during the time of exodus from Egypt. Emmrich states that,

Exodus 4:28-30 introduces a paradigm that informs virtually the entire record of the exodus, namely, that word and sign (miracle) form a certain unity, similar to the roles of Moses and Aaron: "... Moses announced to Aaron all the words of the Lord... and all the signs. ... Moses and Aaron went and Aaron spoke all these words... and Moses performed the signs before the people." Word and sign together also confront Pharaoh (Exod 3:18-20), and throughout the record of the subsequent desert trek the presence of the divine Word accompanied by miracles characterizes Israel's experience (Neh 9:10-17; Ps 78:10-11, 32; 105:27-28; 106:7-12, 21-25).

The experiences that the children of Israel had in the wilderness with God as He performed miracles seem to be echoed in Hebrews as the author refers to "the power of the age to come". God's presence was reflected in His continued communion with them in

terms of providing guidance through His Word. The Israelites heard the Word of God mostly through Moses. The author of Hebrews was probably reminding his audience on how the people who walked with God missed the promise because they did not combine what they heard with faith (Heb 4:2).

4.5.2.5. *And then have fallen away*

“Fallen away” (*parapiptō*) as earlier defined gives an idea of one who sidetracks from the path of the right direction deliberately. It means to fall aside or fall away from the right course of direction which one is aware of. Figuratively it means to apostatize or to fall away from adherence to realities and facts of the true faith. This falling away resonates well with the wilderness community who from time to time failed to walk in the ways of God’s counsel. The LXX uses the word *parapiptō* in Ezek 20:27 to describe the rebellious actions of the Israelites. The author of Hebrews kept on encouraging his audience to hold fast (Heb 3:6, 14, 4:14, 10:23) to the faith. He highlighted the faithfulness of Christ in comparison to the faithfulness of Moses (Hebrews 3:5-6). At the same time, he encouraged them to understand how they had become partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14; 10:23) who is the High Priest (Heb 4:14).

Allen (2010:359) observes that the word *parapiptō* appears about eight times in the LXX. It appears once in the book of Esther, five times in Ezekiel and two in the Apocrypha (Wisdom 6:9 and 12:2). The meaning refers more to one who acts treacherously and unfaithfully as in Ezek 20:27. This is true with the wilderness community who experienced God’s goodness and were led by God and yet decided to choose their evil ways. The author of Hebrews was reminding his audience of the danger of experiencing the goodness of God and at the same time walking or acting treacherously against Him like the Israelites. Gleason (1998:72-73) argues that,

In Hebrews 3 the author warned his readers against having "an evil, unbelieving heart" (3:12) similar to the Exodus generation referred to in 3:7-11. They must "take care" lest they fall away from the living God (3:12) the same way the Israelites did when they "provoked" the Lord in the wilderness (3:8, 16). The quotation of Psalm 95:7b-11 refers to Israel's rebellion in the

wilderness, beginning at Meribah and Massah (Exod. 17: 1-7) and climaxing at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 13-14). Their hearts were hardened (Heb. 3:13, 15); they did not believe God would fulfill His promises.

I acknowledge that since the author was addressing his audience, the picture of the wilderness community was likely visible in the mind of the author. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that there are some allusions to the OT wilderness community in this warning passage.

4.5.2.6. *it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*

In Hebrews 3 the author warned his audience against having an evil, unbelieving heart (3:12) similar to the Exodus generation referred to in 3:7-11. They had to take care lest they fell away from the living God (3:12) the same way the Israelites did when they "provoked" the Lord in the wilderness (3:8, 16). The quotation of Psalm 95:7b-11 refers to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness, beginning at Meribah and Massah (Exod.17: 1-7) and climaxing at Kadesh-barnea (Num.13-14). Their hearts were hardened (Heb. 3:13, 15); they did not believe God would fulfill His promises to them. Thus the author alludes to the disobedience of the wilderness community while he was encouraging his audience to hold fast to the faith.

The word 'impossible' ('*adunaton*') is used 26 times in the Septuagint (LXX) (Job 5:15, 16; 20:19; 24:4, 6, 22; 29:16; 30:25; 31:16, 20, 34; 34:20; 36:15, 19; Pr 30:18; Joel 3:10) and 10 times in the NT. In all these verses, the word '*adunaton*' portrays impossible situations though in English the word 'impossible' does not literally come out in the mentioned OT LXX references. In a similar manner, when the children of Israel sinned at Kadesh Barnea, though God forgave them of their sin of grumbling, it became impossible for them to enter the Promised Land. God's refusal to allow them to continue the journey into the Promised Land made it impossible for them to enter.

Gleason (1998:83) states that, "The events of Kadesh-Barnea parallel the warning here to the Hebrew Christians. In the context 'repentance' allows one to return to a place of blessing and rest. To be unable to repent is to be denied God's blessing." The incident at

Kadesh-Barnea has an element of what seemed like repentance (Num 14:39-40). When the wilderness community saw that the people who brought the bad report were struck to death, they mourned and acted as though they were repentant people.

Yet they thought they could go ahead and enter the Promised Land because they presumptuously believed God was with them. Even if they “mourned bitterly” and realized that they had sinned (Num 14:39-40), their attempt to continue to go into the Promised Land did not receive God’s blessing. The Israelites’ persistence to go ahead led to their defeat in the battle with the Amalekites and Canaanites (Num 14:45). This incidence correlates with the warning passage where those who have fallen away find it impossible to be renewed to repentance.

The wilderness community thought their tears like Esau’s (Heb 12:17) could return them back to the place where they were with God before their rebellion. Esau sought for repentance with tears, yet was denied “the blessing” (12:17). If Esau had been faithful, he would have received the blessing of the first born. Gleason (1998:83) observes that, “in each case rebellion resulted in God’s withdrawing temporal blessings. Therefore believers who “fall away” by refusing to press on to maturity will be denied the blessings that come with faithful obedience.” It is important to note that the gravity of losing out on God’s favor or blessing should not be taken lightly as loss of “temporal blessings”. It must be emphasized that what they lost could not be regained.

4.5.2.7. *since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame*

The word ‘crucify’ is used in the LXX in Num 25:4 to describe a public execution that took place as a result of the Israelites’ rebellious act of worshiping the idols of the Moabites. The author of Hebrews pointed his audience to the repercussions of falling away by paralleling their act to crucifying the Son of God again. The author must have been arguing from two positions; from the punishment of crucifixion of Jesus Christ and His suffering on the cross while bearing in mind the OT crucifixion in Num 25:4. The author of Hebrews used the comparison to the OT example to emphasize on the gravity of the danger of falling away.

The consequence of falling away was as evil as bringing shame to Jesus Christ. This can be related to the encounter in Num 13-14 where Moses pleaded with God to forgive the wilderness community. He pleaded with God not to forsake them because the act would make people ridicule God because He had failed to maintain His covenant with the Israelites, and thus abandoned them in the wilderness (Num 14:13-19). In a similar manner, falling away would be like indirectly showing that Jesus was not the Savior and He did not complete the work on the cross. The expression "put Him to open shame" does not mean that in order to "fall away" one must publicly speak out blasphemously and irreverently about Jesus Christ. Falling away was enough to suggest that they viewed Christ's crucifixion as having no value beyond a criminal's death.

In conclusion, the allusions and echoes of the spiritual experiences described in the warning passage refer to the wilderness experiences of the Israelites. It is reasonable therefore to take the falling away to also resonate with the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. At Kadesh Barnea, the wilderness community complained against God when they could not stand up to the report of those who spied the land that God had promised to them (Num 13-14). This angered God to the point that He wanted to forsake them. Moses pleaded with God and God promised to forgive them and yet refused to allow them to enter the Promised Land. As a result, many died in the wilderness without the pleasure of entering the Promised Land (Num 14: 20-35). My argument in this thesis is that the Kadesh Barnea experience sheds significant light on understanding the warning passage.

4.5.3. Meaning of Heb 6:4-6 in relation to the LXX Background

In the Septuagint falling away (*parapiptō*) describes acting faithlessly or treacherously, especially in regard to the covenant (Ezek 14:13; 20:27; Wisdom of Solomon 6:9; 12:2) (Witherington 2007:214). The term has reference to the expression of a total attitude reflecting deliberate and calculated renunciation of God (Lane 1991:142). Every time the children of Israel disobeyed God by violating the covenant, God punished them (Num 11-14, Ps 95; 78). The punishment became an example to others and helped to put them back on track with God. The OT demonstrates how God chose the children of Israel as His people, yet He never spared any disobedience or rebellion against His commands,

especially where people refused to repent. Hebrews uses many of the OT examples from the LXX to remind His audience that they needed to be mindful of what happened to disobedience in the OT. Allen (2010:369) clarifies by stating that, “Given the usage of the word (*parapiptō*) in the LXX combined with the author’s dependence upon the Kadesh-Barnea incident here and elsewhere in the Epistle, the word means to transgress against the Lord in a way that parallels what happened in Numbers 14 when Israel rebelled against God”. It is therefore appropriate to believe that Heb 6:4-6 echoes and alludes to the incidences of disobedience and unfaithfulness in the OT which the author uses as examples to his audience.

4.6. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, a detailed exegetical study of Heb 6:4-6 in relation to its OT background has been done. The study has shed some light on the author’s intent of the warning passage in Hebrews 6. The argument that Heb 6:4-6 is better understood when we consider the wilderness experience as the OT background to the warning passage has been proven. The warning passage directly describes and addresses its audience while it resonates with specific OT narratives.

The chapter has first looked at the literary and conceptual structure of the warning passage in Heb 6:4-6 focusing on the words and clauses of the passage. It has determined how the words fit into the context of Heb 6 and the whole Epistle of Hebrews. Thereafter the exegesis focused on examining the OT background of the whole passage in relation to the entire Epistle. The findings have highlighted on the fact that the author had in mind the wilderness community. The OT themes of disobedience and rebellion at the Kadesh-Barnea are resounded in Heb 6:4-6. The identification of OT allusions and echoes has greatly contributed to the interpretation of the warning passage.

When the author of Hebrews alluded to those who had tasted the heavenly gift and had become partakers of the Holy Spirit, he could also have been juxtaposing two scenarios of those in the wilderness and the Christians. Though he was assured of better things in the case of his audience (Heb 6:9), he felt it necessary to send the stern warning so that they understood the repercussions of disobedience and unfaithfulness.

The metaphor of crucifying Christ again was meant to make the audience of Hebrews see the gravity of falling away. The death of Jesus Christ was the only means of human redemption. Rejecting Christ was the same as rejecting their way of salvation.

The exegetical study has created a background on which the rhetorical exegesis can be done. It is going to be possible to identify the Jewish rhetorical tools which are evident in the warning passage. The potent combination of the Greco-Roman and Jewish rhetorical elements accounts for the powerful effects of understanding the warning passage.

Chapter 5

RHETORICAL EXEGETICAL EXAMINATION OF HEBREWS 6:4-6

In the previous chapter, the focus was on the exegetical investigation of Heb 6:4-6 in relation to its OT background. Specifically, it was suggested that the experiences of the OT wilderness community, especially the Kadesh-Barnea incident as recorded in Num 14, formed the narrative background of the warning passage of Heb 6:4-6. This conclusion raises the question as to the nature of the rhetorical dynamics of the passage. In other words, given the influence of the OT in the warning passage of Heb 6:4-6, how exactly did the writer of Hebrews shape his words in order to fulfill his rhetorical objectives? The present chapter will seek to address this question.

The focus is to exegete Heb 6:4-6 to highlight the rhetorical strategies at play. In order to adequately tackle the task at hand, firstly there is need to perform a rhetorical analysis of Heb 6:4-6 using some of Kennedy's steps with modifications. This will largely demonstrate the Greco-Roman rhetorical elements of the passage. Secondly, I shall seek to identify the Jewish Rhetorical tools the author employed in the passage. As will be seen, this potent combination of the Greco-Roman and Jewish rhetorical elements accounts for the powerful effects of the passage. Thereafter, the findings are summarized and synthesized to see how they help our understanding of the passage in relation to its OT background.

5.1. Rhetorical Analysis of Heb 6:4-6 using Kennedy's Modified Steps

The procedure for examining the rhetorical strategy of Heb 6:4-6 is borrowed from Kennedy's (1984:3-160) five stages of rhetorical analysis. This includes the analysis of

the clauses in the passage to determine authorial purposes, the mood of the author, the mood of the audience, and their social values. It is important to identify the overall genre of Hebrews before specifically addressing the unit of Heb 6:4-6.

5.1.1. *Rhetorical Genre of Hebrews 6:4-6*

The passage is simply categorized as a “warning passage”. However, one may ask, when a writer or speaker of the first century uttered a warning, what exactly was he aiming to achieve with his readers/hearers? Largely, it may be taken that the author was aiming to dissuade his audience from taking wrong actions.

This raises the question of the rhetorical genre of the passage. Most interpreters agree that the overall genre of the book of Hebrews straddles epideictic and deliberative rhetoric with a few judicial elements (Lane 1991: lxxix, Morrison 2004:20). For example Soden (1899:11) proposed that Hebrews was judicial rhetoric. Some commentators classify Hebrews as epideictic (Pfitzner 1997:21; Seid 1997; Watson 2010:195), and some as deliberative (Nissila 1979; Übelacker 1989:65; Lindars 1989:382-406). Judicial rhetoric pertains to accusation and defense with regard to past action. Deliberative rhetoric concerns persuasion and dissuasion from taking future action. Epideictic rhetoric applies to praise or blame based on current communal values in order to encourage the readers/hearers.

In other words in terms of genre, Hebrews is a combination of deliberative, judicial and epideictic. The deliberative aspects is shown in the balance between the negative and positive sections, the positive explaining the past good state of the audience (Heb 4 and 5), and the negative pointing out the consequences of falling away (Heb 6:4-6). The epideictic component is implied in the author’s pastoral appeal and urge to the congregation to progress in their faith (Heb 6:1, 9). The judicial is expressed in pronouncing repercussions for disobedience (Heb 6:6).

It may be argued that since our passage is largely made up of a warning, it is more in the realm of epideictic than in deliberative rhetoric. Even so, by reminding the readers of their past positive experiences, the element of deliberative rhetoric remain in our warning

passage. Thus it is safe to conclude that the genre of the passage, in its Greco-Roman rhetorical elements is a combination of both deliberative and epideictic

One of the consistent rhetorical features of Hebrews is the comparisons. And when taking these comparisons into consideration, they resemble the Greco-Roman rhetorical genre of *synkrisis* and encomium. This feature appears to support the view that the overall genre of Hebrews is deliberative. *Synkrisis* is a tool in which the author compares prominent characters in the OT to the NT audience. Heen and Krey (n.d:xxii cf. Koester 2010:626-627) state that, “Such *synkrisis* functioned within the encomium; a genre of rhetoric that was designed to honor its object”.

Asumang (2005:7) on the other hand, notes that the rhetorical interpretation posits that the comparisons in Hebrews are part of the author’s rhetorical strategy at persuading his hearers to embark on a specific action. This underlines the comparisons as part of a deliberative rhetoric.

In terms of rhetorical genre, interpreters have rightly pointed out that Hebrews was a paranaetic homily. The rhetorical flourish and eloquence of Hebrews had been well noted for centuries. Yet it is only in “the last two hundred years” (Koester, 2001:80) that its genre as a homily or sermon has been more fully appreciated. How does this affect the manner in which the genre of our passage is evaluated?

The author himself asserts that he wrote a *logos tes paraklesos* (13:22, a word of exhortation). This definitely suggests that our author wrote with the intention that the paranaesis would be read in the setting of corporate worship. In that regard, it is important also to examine whether in some way the author of Hebrews felt inspired in writing the letter. This is even more so given that the first recipient treasured the homily to the extent as to preserve it into the present canon.

If the author saw himself to be in some way inspired by the Holy Spirit, then it may well be that the warning passages of Hebrews could be compared with the warnings or woes by the OT prophets. Certainly, the author of Hebrews may have viewed his letter as performing some sacred functions at the gathering of the saints. In that regard, and as a homily, it will be reasonable to compare the warning passage, in rhetorical terms with the prophetic warnings of the OT as we discuss Jewish rhetoric.

In the case of the warnings in the Epistle, the author used the negative ones to dissuade the hearers from slackening in their faith not so much as prophetic woes of doom that were about to befall them. Rather, the author was concerned with the progression of the faith of his audience, hence the stern warnings. The warning passages in Hebrews were designed to warn of future consequences of present action.

5.1.2. *The Rhetorical Unit of Hebrews 6:4-6*

The warning passage in Heb 6:4-6 must be identified in relation to its rhetorical unit. As earlier stated, it is a warning passage placed within a large unit of exhortation extending from 5:11 to 6:20 and must be interpreted as such. The important aspect to bear in mind is the components of what qualifies a pericope as a warning passage. In this case Heb 6:4-6 states that,

4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 And have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 And then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the son of God and put him to open shame.

There are basically five components that enable interpreters to qualify a passage as a warning passage. These components are audience, sin, exhortations, consequences and OT example (Mathewson 1999:210). Hebrews 6:4-6 falls under a warning passage in that it is addressing an audience and highlighting the sin of apostasy. The passage also mentions the consequences of apostasy. The author highlights the fact that those who have fallen away cannot be restored back to repentance, which is a consequence of apostasy.

In order to interpret Heb 6:4-6 rhetorically, one must understand how it fits in the immediate context of the entire passage or pericope. A close examination of the excerpt indicates that it fits within the preceding and proceeding statements. The passage is within the unit of the paragraph that begins at Heb 5:11 and ends at 6:12 (Bateman

2007:27; Lane 1991:128, Witherington 2007:203). Allen suggests that the warning passage ends at 6:8 (2010:345) while others conclude that it ends in 6:20.

The author begins in Heb 5:1-10 to lay the foundations of describing the nature of the ministry of Jesus as the merciful High Priest by comparing and contrasting Him with Aaron. The passage also announces the idea of Jesus as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, an idea which will then occupy the author in Heb 7 for more extensive exposition. Later, the author continues in 5:11 to give his impression on the state of his audience. Hebrews 6:4-6 must be connected to the portion where the author was admonishing his audience's slowness to learn and their state of immaturity in 5:11-6:3.

Then later on, the warning passage must be connected to Heb 6:9 where the author gave the assurance to the audience of better things that accompany salvation. He reassured them of God's faithfulness to remember their good deeds and further urged them to remain faithful (6:10-12). The author further showed God's faithfulness which goes as far back as the time of the patriarch Abraham in the OT (6:13-16). The author further shows that the promises of old are carried forward into the new covenant as a result of God's faithfulness that has been revealed in the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ which runs in the order of Melchizedek (6:17-20).

5.1.3. *The Rhetorical Situation*

In Kennedy's steps of rhetorical analysis, the warning passage must now be examined to understand its rhetorical situation. This brings us to the task of understanding the author's reasons for sending such a message to his audience for them to respond according to his expectations. As the first step indicates, the passage is a warning whose purpose is to caution, encourage and give positive or negative OT examples where necessary. Furthermore, there is need also to understand the audience that the author was addressing. The mood of the audience and that of the author are equally important in determining the situation. Rhetoricians are mindful of the three rhetorical elements that effect persuasion which set the mood of both the author and the audience. The interplay of the content of a speech (*logos*), appeals to emotion (*pathos*), and the character of the presenter (*ethos*) result in effective persuasion in the Book of Hebrews (Koester

2010:626). Highlighted below is a brief explanation of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*.

- a. *Logos* – appeals to the intellectual plausibility or, in the case of Heb 6:4-6, implausibility of the threatened consequence. The logic of the whole verse hinges on this fact that it stands to reason that if after one has tasted so amazing a salvation this person nevertheless falls away, then really it is impossible to restore such a one to repentance.
- b. *Ethos* – Again this underlines the passage because the author is suggesting that it would not be unfair that a person who treats God's grace in the manner as is described to face the consequences of falling away. He was in other words appealing to the ethical dimensions of the readers. DeSilva (2004:130-137) uses the Patron-Client paradigm in this fashion, not as successfully, but it all points to the ethos of the argument.
- c. *Pathos*- the several devices in the passage were aimed at rousing the emotions of the readers. The sensory metaphors play this function as rhetorical proofs aimed at persuading. Those on the positive side experience positive sensations such as eating, drinking communing etc. Those on the negative side of the passage experience the negative emotions such as shame, falling away, disgrace, and rejection. These rouse the emotions of the hearers to choose the positive and reject the negative.

Koester (2005:231-251) states that the audience was in a state of malaise and the author was spurring them to continue in their faith. It is also vital at this point to consider how the author laments the slowness in the audience's ability to learn (5:11). Besides that, Koester's (2005:231-251) analysis of the members of the audience should be born in mind. They had suffered some persecution and endured, but along the way, they began to neglect the habit of meeting together and holding firmly to the faith (Heb 10:25). The warning passages have a tone of anxiety by the author who desperately desired the audience to respond appropriately.

One would ask, was the author anxious that his audience would lose their salvation? Or

was he anxious that his audience was not making progress towards maturity? From our exegetical analysis in the previous chapter, we have concluded that the author used the metaphor of the wilderness community at Kadesh-Barnea to dissuade his audience. He used it as an example of those who fell away in that they rebelled against God and did not enter the Promised Land. As the author was addressing his audience, he was at the same time confident of their salvation and he was also sending a stern warning so that they could live to the standard of their faith that they had confessed without slackening. What was making him anxious was the rate at which they were progressing towards maturity. As a leader, he had the responsibility to persuade them to progression and dissuade them from slackening.

The other important task in a rhetorical analysis is to investigate the social values of the audience. Kennedy (1984:35) warns that Rhetoric situation is "subjective, speculative, and complex, but crucial for understanding the rhetoric. The "situation" includes other explanations of the same events, other answers to the same questions, etc." Kennedy (1984:34-35) further states that, "This roughly corresponds to the *Sitz im Leben* of form criticism.... The critic needs to ask of what this audience consists, what the audience expects in the situation, and how the speaker or writer manipulates these expectations.... Plato asserts that a true philosophical orator must know the souls of his audience."

In this case the author understood the state of his audience and he was aware of their commitment to the faith (Heb 2:1-4; 3:1, 12; 6:9; 10:23) and their struggles in their walk (5:11-14; 10:25; 12:1-12). The author was well aware of the persecution they had suffered and he knew the mood of his audience. The author of Hebrews was able to identify himself with his audience. From this analysis, we can confidently say that the rhetorical situation was that of mutual understanding between the author and the audience. He was able to identify with the audience and at the same time the audience trusted him with God's Word which they more likely accepted and appreciated. He stood in a place of authority to deliver God's Word to the acceptance and appreciation of his audience. He understood their struggles as well as their commitment, hence the need to send an encouragement and a warning at the same time.

The implication of the fact that Hebrews was a homily sent as a letter to his audience meant that the author expected the passage to be read in a solemn gathering of the church perhaps after or before celebrating the Lord's Supper. The rhetorical situation would therefore be a solemn one, and these warnings would therefore be received as if it was God's oracle, designed to warn and dissuade the believers from disaster. The author had chosen the words of warning as means of rousing the hearers.

5.1.4. *The Rhetorical Problem*

Now, I must investigate any rhetorical problem that might be prominent in the passage. This is where one notices the problems that can possibly hinder the author to communicate with the audience. A Rhetorical problem is where the author could face obstacles to relay the message to the audience due to some flaws in his character. This could also be due to the way the audience views the author or it could be that there is no relationship between the author and the audience. This is where the audience evaluates both the authority and competence of the author. The audience must trust and believe that the author has authority over them and is trustworthy to deliver a message to them.

In the case of the author of Hebrews, his audience is not prejudiced against him and should not have any problem listening to him. The author begins by amplifying God's voice rather than his own in his opening remarks. He states how God spoke in the past through the prophets and now by His Son, and instead of offering his own reflections on these points he focuses the attention of his readers to OT quotations in which God is identified as the speaker (1:1-4).

The author's own character also plays a role even though the author's name is unknown. The author identified himself with his audience by using the first person plural, so that his readers knew that he too was addressed by the Word of God (1:2; 2:3; 4:2) and shared their confession of faith (3:1; 4:14; 10:23). The audience knew him as having authority to advance the claims he wished to make because he was part of their leadership (Heb 5:11). The author started with what was familiar (OT) to his audience in the prologue and he seemed to make his point clear in the entire book about the authenticity of the Word

he was bringing to their attention. Koester (2010:628) affirms that the author was conversant with the OT as he states that,

The author demonstrates his familiarity with scripture by frequent citation of texts, so that readers can be confident that he knows the tradition. Finally, he is bold in his confession (1:1 – 4) and direct in his exhortations, so that when he urges his readers to be bold in their confession (3:6; 4:16; 10:19; 10:35) and to exhort one another (3:13; 10:24), his directives have integrity, since they are to do what he is already doing.

This stage also aims at clarifying the relationship between the author and his audience and identifying possible conflicts that might block the message. The analysis so far shows that the audience had every reason to listen to the author. He was reminding them of the promise that ran through the OT to the NT. He desired to encourage them to hold on to the faith and teachings they had received. The author was also persuaded that they needed the encouragement that would achieve his aim. The audience needed the author's encouragement to journey through their faith to the end. The relation that the author had with his audience was mutual. As much as he seemed to unleash stern warnings, his intentions were positive to persuade his hearers to hold firmly to the faith they were professing.

5.1.5. *The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews 6:4-6*

Now we proceed to describe the structure of the passage as a strategy for its communicative purpose. According to Kennedy (1984:37) this stage includes the consideration of the way the material is arranged in the text. He rightly puts it this way,

Consider the *arrangement of material* in the text: what subdivisions it falls into, what the persuasive effect of these parts seems to be, and how they work together--or fail to do so--to some unified purpose in meeting the rhetorical situation. In order to do this he will need to engage in line-by-line analysis of the argument, including its assumptions, its topics, and its formal features, such as enthymemes, and of the *devices of style*, seeking to

define their function in context.

According to DeSilva (2000:47), identifying the rhetorical style of the Epistle enables the reader “to discern the fundamental issue in the situation addressed by the text and the principal goal of the author for the people in that situation”.

5.1.5.1. *Rhetorical Devices Employed in Hebrews 6:4-6*

In order to consider the rhetorical structure of Heb 6:4-6, there is need to examine the rhetorical devices and appeals that the author used in his choice of words. Regarding the devices and words of appeal, there are those identified in the warning passage as playing very important role in delivering the author’s message as he intended. The first words that need to be examined are ‘for’ (*gar*) and ‘impossible’ (*adunaton*) because of the major role they play in understanding the warning passage. Thereafter, the repetitions of participial clauses are discussed to understand their purpose in conveying the message to the audience. The warning clause in v6 is equally analyzed to see how it rouses in the audience a sense of remorse, shame, disgrace, rejection as those who have fallen away are compared to those crucifying Jesus again.

5.1.5.1.1. *The use of ‘For’ (Gar) in the opening of Hebrews 6:4-6*

One of the important words to consider in the structure of the passage is ‘for’ (*gar*). This conjunctive word has a function to contrast Heb 6:4-6 with the previous account on spiritual maturity. Rhetorically, *gar* serves as an enthymeme which is very important in the understanding of the warning passage. The enthymematic nature of the *gar* means we must read our passage with the preceding account of spiritual progress in mind (DeSilva 2005:218-219). The beginning of Heb 6:4-6 with *gar* entails that one cannot delve into the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 without considering what the author had earlier been saying in the preceding verses.

5.1.5.1.2. *The Use of Impossible (adunaton)*

The use of 'impossible' must be appreciated as an important rhetorical device. The word 'impossible' (*adunaton*) belongs to a special category of the Greco-Roman rhetorical categories (DeSilva 1999:41; cf. Aristotle, Rh.2.19) where words were used for emphatic reasons. In the Greek style, *adunaton* comes at the beginning of the sentence. In other words, this stresses the rhetorically absolute emphasis on impossibility. When the Greco-Roman speakers of the first century asserted that something was impossible, it was an indication of emphasis that something was not within humanly imaginable parameters to be achieved or changed. It is unlikely that the distinction was on what God cannot do. The author used 'impossible' in order to provide a rationale to support the course of action proposed in 6:1-3

The word 'impossible' (*Adúnaton*) is similarly applied in these verses; "...it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb 6:18); "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4); "It is impossible to please God without faith" (Heb 11:6). In these verses, the impossibility is contrasting the positive that is expected. Everyone knows that God is righteousness and truth, but the author reverses the statement by stating that "It is impossible for God to lie." Again, everyone knows that God desires us to walk by faith. So anyone who thinks God can be pleased in any other way does not know God. In the similar manner, apostasy is not a way to go for a Christian, but security of faith. Therefore impossibility is structurally used as emphasis. It was as if the author wanted to make it blazingly and blatantly clear so that the audience did not miss the point emphasized.

5.1.5.1.3. *The Repetitions of the Participial Clauses*

In Hebrews 6:4 and 5, the author used participial clauses or phrases such as 'once been enlightened'; 'have tasted of the heavenly gift'; 'partakers of the Holy Spirit'; have 'tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come.' The participial clauses the author used in the warning passage were meant to serve a certain rhetorical purpose. The author used the participial clauses again for cumulative emphasis to his audience. He probably intended to overwhelm and confirm his audience in the great benefits of salvation that they had graciously enjoyed in contrast to the negative sanctions that would follow falling away.

He could have simply said that they had experienced God's goodness. However, the author repeated the clauses as a way of rubbing it into his audience that the people he was referring to were greatly blessed and favored by God. The author's aim was to send a wakeup call to his audience who were in a similar situation of enjoying the benefits of their faith. His intention could have been to send a strong message to his audience that those referred to in vv4 and 5 took God's grace for granted; a thing he did not expect his audience to do.

The repetition of participial clauses is a rhetorical device of the author of Hebrews. The author used repetition in Hebrews to communicate to his audience. A good example of such repetition is Heb 11. The author used repetitions to show that the sum of the participial clauses exceeded their additions. In other words the rhetorical device of repetitions was meant to positively overwhelm his audience with the enormity of God's benevolence and grace towards them (DeSilva 1999:47).

5.1.5.1.4. *Rhetorical Appeals employed in Heb 6:4-6*

The author used rhetorical appeals to put his audience in a particular emotional frame of mind (DeSilva 2004:784). Later in Heb 6:6 the author changed the mood of the message from positivity to negativity. This change was not meant to demoralize his audience. The author dramatically changed course to contrast the goodness of God with the unfair act of falling away from God's righteous mercies and grace. The author established in the hearing of his audience the state of the enormity of God's grace. He deliberately emphasized God's grace so that by the time he was turning to discuss the state of those who had fallen away, the audience could see the ugliness of the action of falling away.

Nongbri (2003:265-273) believes that the warnings belonged to the stock of Jewish apocalyptic teachings of the time where such threats were not uncommon. The statements were designed to instill fear in believers regarding the condemnation they faced if they fell away. Nongbri (2003:265-273) suggests that it is therefore appropriate to allow the threats to stand in the passage. It would not be wrong to conclude that the author appealed to his audience by rousing fear in them. This fear was not meant to destroy them, but spur them to godly living.

DeSilva (2004:130-137) in a modified Greco-Roman Rhetorical approach uses the Roman patron-client relationships to examine the passage. In the Greco-Roman culture, loyalty was encouraged between the patron and the client. A client was to walk in shame in case of failure to show gratitude and loyalty to the patron. The author of Hebrews wanted to show the gravity of defecting back to old ways once one had made a decision to follow Christ. This rhetorical strategy was meant to create shame in those who might have had such ideas of defecting back to old ways. The author accomplished his goal by employing to the OT background of the Kadesh-Barnea in an allusive manner.

The aim of rousing shame in his audience was to give them an opportunity to reexamine their immature attitude, their slackness in meeting together for fellowship, and their tendency to give up on doing good. He wanted to create in them a sense of shame that they were not progressing at a sensible rate (Heb 5:11-14). He wanted the audience to fear for their salvation even though he knew that God had assured them of better things concerning salvation (Heb 6:9). The author wanted them to reconsider their state of immaturity and lack of commitment. He roused the sense of disgrace when he compared falling away to crucifying Christ again and dramatically enhanced the feeling of rejection as he stated the impossibility of repentance for those who had fallen away.

The author used both the positive and negative in a holistic sense. His intention was not to impress them with the immensely positive clauses and discourage them with the immensely negative warning clauses. The whole essence was to dissuade them from any actions that were not in line with their confession of faith. DeSilva (2004:781-782) states that, "The study of how to put an audience in a particular strategically chosen emotional state was an essential component of the art of rhetoric."

The author of Hebrews therefore selectively chose his words to create an emotion of shame in case of Heb 6:1-3 and fear and rejection in Heb 6:6 (DeSilva 2004:781-784). "The shame is a pain in regard to misdeeds that tend to bring dishonor" (Witherington 2007:203); cf. Aristotle *Rhetoric* 2.6.2). In doing so, the author intensified his argument by using a hyperbole in v6 where he referred to those who had fallen away as crucifying Christ again. The practical interpretation is that their action of falling away was the one

that repudiates the crucifixion of Christ. If they rejected Christ, they were equally rejecting his salvific power.

5.2. Summary of Rhetorical Exegesis of Heb 6:4-6

From the rhetorical exegesis using the modified steps of Kennedy, a number of lessons have been drawn from the book of Hebrews and the warning passage of Heb 6:4-6. The rhetorical genre of the book of Hebrews is argued to overlap epideictic, judicial and deliberative forms. The rhetorical interpretation posits that the comparisons in Hebrews are part of the author's rhetorical strategy at persuading his hearers to embark on a specific action. The warning passages in Hebrews were designed to warn of future consequences of present action and to dissuade the audience. In order to interpret Heb 6:4-6, the rhetorical unit from which the warning passage is derived is Heb 5:11-Heb 6:20.

Hebrews 6:4-6 qualifies rhetorically as a warning passage because it addresses an audience whose sin of apostasy is highlighted. The author states that those who have fallen away cannot be restored back to repentance, which is a consequence of apostasy. Heb 6:4-6 has echoes and allusions to the OT background, in this case, the Kadesh-Barnea incident as an example to the first audience of Hebrews.

Rhetoricians are mindful of the three appeals of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* that effect persuasion which sets the mood of both the author and the audience in the rhetorical situation. The author's own character also plays a role in reducing the rhetorical problem. The rhetorical problem can hinder the message to be communicated so that the audience responds to it according to the expectation of the author. In the case of Hebrews, there was no rhetorical problem that could block the message of the author to his audience. The relationship between the author and his audience was mutual and that of respect.

In order to consider the rhetorical structure of Heb 6:4-6, rhetorical devices in terms of choice of words that the author used for emphasis have been studied. In the warning passage of Heb 6:4-6, 'for' (*gar*) and 'impossible' (*adunaton*) are identified as key. The words of appeal to create a sense of remorse, shame and fear have been examined. The author used both the positive and negative phrases in a holistic sense. The whole

essence of the warning passage was to dissuade the audience from any actions that were not in line with their confession of faith.

5.3. Jewish Rhetorical Tools and How They are Evident in Heb 6:4-6

Jewish rhetoric, which includes allegorical, metaphorical and prophetic language, must be investigated in order to understand its impact on Heb 6:4-6. This is because both our author and his readers were Jews. It is reasonable therefore to examine this area. Identifying inter-textuality in the NT text means going back into Jewish rhetoric. This stage identifies any Jewish Rhetorical tools the author used to persuade his audience. Could it be that there are some analogies or typology to the old text such as the OT? Are there any citations, allusions or echoes in the passage? Are there any figures of speech used or metaphorical language? Was the author using Midrashic strategy in communicating to the audience? Was the warning part of the woes of the prophets? The answers to these questions determine the extent of the Jewish rhetorical tools used.

5.3.1. The Rhetorical Tools of Typology, Allusions and Echoes

In Hebrews 3:12-19 we see a typological interpretation of Ps 95:7b-11 where the author recalls that Israel at Kadesh-Barnea stood in relationship to his audience as type to antitype (Lane 1991:cxxiii). Similarly, in Heb 6:4-6, the author allowed those who had fallen away at Kadesh-Barnea to stand as the antitype to his audience. This is not explicitly indicated in the warning passage, but the description of what is happening to those who had fallen away after experiencing God's great mercies and presence alludes to the failure of the wilderness community of Kadesh-Barnea (Mathewson 1999:209-25).

Mathewson (1999:209-25) agrees with McKnight (1992:21-59) on this synthetic approach to this warning passage. In observing the other four warning passages, they do have explicit inference to the OT examples. According to Mathewson (1999:209-25) Heb 2:1-4 2:2 draws from the disobedience to the Mosaic law; Heb 3:7-4:13; 3:16-19; 4:2 refers to the failure at Kadesh-Barnea; Heb 10:19-39; 10:28 goes back to the disobedience to the Mosaic law; Heb 12:14-29; 12:16-17 gives an example of the failure of Esau and Heb 12:25-26 borrows from the failure to listen to God's voice at Sinai.

It is strange that Heb 5:11-6:12 does not seem to explicitly draw any teaching from any OT examples or stories. It is from this argument that I believe that the possibility is that the stern warning of falling away can only allude to the OT example of the children of Israel where they also fell away. The practical connection arises from the OT example given in the second warning (Heb 3:7-4:13). Since the author was warning against unfaithfulness and disobedience in the second warning, it is possible that he now brings it out in comparison to what could happen to the NT audience. If God did not spare those who sinned and they so failed to enter the Promised Land, the same is the consequence for those the author was addressing.

When considering the incident at Kadesh-Barnea, one notices some similarities to what is portrayed in Heb 6:4-6. The children of Israel were already delivered from Egypt and in transit to the Promised Land. In comparison to the Hebrews audience, they were also delivered from the slavery of sin and they were on a journey to inherit an eternal promise. In both cases, there is some 'enlightenment' which is illumination or instructions that bring light in a dark situation. In both scenarios there is the 'tasting of God's good Word' (Heb 4:5). In the process, the wilderness community rebelled against God. In a way of comparison the author of Hebrews is warning his audience of the danger of falling away.

Concerning the wilderness community, Moses pleaded with God to forgive them. God categorically stated in Num 14:20-23, that he had forgiven them, but He swore that, "not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times-not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers (14:23). No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it." The author of Hebrews was also pleading with his audience to take heed to his warnings lest they found themselves in a similar situation as the wilderness community. "It is impossible..., if they fall away to be brought back to repentance" (6:6). The verse stands as a rhetorical strategy to send a stern warning to the audience.

5.3.2. *The Jewish Rhetorical tool of Metaphorical Language*

The description of those addressed in Heb 6:4-5 and the warning in v6 is the example of

the negative outcome of remaining immature after tasting the Word of God. The author uses shame as a rhetorical device to spur the audience to maturity. The author's use of the sensory metaphors in vv4 and 5 of sight, taste and eating (partaking) underline the real living experience of salvation. These metaphors are used in the Bible to denote the experience of spiritual encounters such as salvation, miracles and any divine intervention through the teaching of God's Word. Salvation in the end is a social reality wrought through the spiritual miracle.

The author was assured of the path of faith his audience had undertaken as a journey of perseverance. He used the metaphorical language in the book of Hebrews to relate to the physical experience that the wilderness community experienced. The author of Hebrews was communicating the spiritual aspect of salvation and at the same time connecting his audience to the physical benefits that the children of Israel enjoyed in God's presence. They moved under a physical cover of the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. They experienced God's presence and daily providence as He physically fed them with manna and quails in the wilderness. When they were thirsty, He miraculously provided water to quench their thirst. All these were privileges of being with God in the OT. The author of the book of Hebrews was addressing an audience that was at a different dimension in that their benefits of walking with God were more spiritual than the physical eye could see. The author used rhetorical strategies that are reflected in Heb 6:4-6.

The agricultural metaphor of 6:7-8 illustrates rather than demonstrates the argument from the contrary. It presents an analogy which helps guide the hearer to an understanding of why restoration of the one who falls away (instead of accepting the author's advice and maintaining commitment to the group) should be impossible.

5.3.3. The Jewish Rhetorical Tool of OT Example and Choice of Words From the Prophetic Woes

The OT example that the passage alludes to was that of wilderness community. The author also used some Jewish rhetorical strategies that resonate from the warning passage. In Heb 6:6, the author used the verb 'fall away' (*paraptō*), the verb that Witherington (2007:214) says is not found anywhere else in the NT. The word does not

imply accidentally falling down. In the LXX, the word is used to describe faithless action of deliberately stepping into the black hole (Witherington 2007:214).

The stern warning in Heb 6:6, where the author insisted that it was impossible for those who had fallen away to be restored to repentance, resonates with the prophetic woes. The prophetic woes significantly warned the hearer of the message of God's displeasure and His judgment. Though the warning passage is not a prophetic woe in its entirety, the tone of judgment for the present action of falling away is deduced. Toussaint's (n.d:74) eschatological analysis of the warnings concludes that the warning in Heb 6:4-6 has little to say eschatologically. His argument is that the only prophetic statement is made by illustration and implication in vv 7-8 of the agricultural metaphor.

The author used metaphorical language as he set a comparison of those who had fallen away (v6) to those who were crucifying Jesus Christ again and exposing him to open shame (v6). The statement comes out as though those who had fallen away were involved in crucifying Christ again. The practical interpretation of this rhetorical strategy is that their action of falling away was the one that repudiates the crucifixion of Christ. If they rejected Christ, they were equally rejecting his salvific power. This statement is a hyperbole that tries to show the severity of apostasy of those who had once been enlightened in the wilderness. The author showed how horrific it was to abandon Christ.

5.3.4. *The Jewish Rhetorical Tool of Midrashic Strategy*

The author modernized and adapted Scripture so as to make the text more relevant and applicable to current situation (Ellis 1993:151). Lane (1991:cxxiv) states that Hebrews uses midrash approach in Heb 2:5-9; 3:7-4:13; 6:13-20; 7:11-25; 8:7-15; 10:5-10,15-18, 35-39; 12:5-13, 25-29). He alludes to a rhetorical strategy found in the midrash where the author introduces Ps 110:4 in Heb 5: 10-11 and 6:20 and later explains it in the subsequent chapter of Heb 7:11-25 (1991:cxxiv). It is reasonable to therefore investigate if our passage also employs Midrash.

In a midrashic sense the author of Hebrews recalled the Kadesh-Barnea incident without recounting the wilderness experience. The warning passage shows some Midrashic

sensus plenior, or 'hidden meaning' (Longenecker 1975:6). The author, without explicitly referring to the OT wilderness community, inferred the falling away to crucifying Christ again. The author contemporized the falling away earlier mentioned at Kadesh-Barnea for his audience in a different situation.

5.3.5. *The Warning as a Woe of the Prophets*

Comparatively, the warning passages in Hebrews are similar, even though they are not exactly the same as the prophetic woes found in both the OT. One could argue that they are similar because all Scripture is inspired by God. Therefore, the author of Hebrews was also prophetic in his warnings. The argument is that the woes were direct warnings as God directed the prophets to utter them as though He was the one speaking to the audience. The warning passage does not indicate that the author was writing woes to his audience.

However, the warning passage has certain features of the woes of the prophets. Gerstenberger (1962:250) observes that, "among the forms of speech the Hebrew prophets employed to express their indictments the woe-cry recurs with marked emphasis in several prophetic books". Gerstenberger (1962:251) further explains that the words following the introductory woe have, with few exceptions, the purpose to seek to describe the people in relation to their actions. The deeds necessitate the woe-cry. In this regard, Heb 6:4-6 carries some judgmental elements when the author uses stern warnings.

Examples of the woe oracles are Jer 13:27,48:46; Ezek 13:3; 16:23; 24:6-9; Isa 3:9-11; 29 1; 10 5; Zeph 2 5; Num 21:29; Hos 7:1. The woes unveil the full dimensions of God's judgment and displeasure with sin. God is "the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 1:4; 6:1) who must punish his rebellious people (1:2) but will afterward redeem them (41:14, 16). The woes are recorded as though God was addressing the children of Israel. Therefore, the prophetic woes are God's judgment and warning to Israel.

The warnings in Hebrews similarly, are warnings that came from the author who possessed the knowledge of God and who was inspired by the Word of God. Though these warnings appear in an Epistle, God was equally communicating to the audience

through the author. The author of Hebrews used the Word of God that was already recorded in the OT as God's Word. He used the Word to communicate to his audience in his capacity as a leader and follower of God's Word. However, his audience could have possibly received the warnings as the woes of prophetic utterance in a somber atmosphere as they gathered to listen to the homily. There are ways in which the first readers could have understood the warning passages of Hebrews in similar terms as the prophetic woes of the OT.

In line with Nongbri's (2003:265-273) analysis, the warnings in Hebrews belonged to the stock of Jewish apocalyptic teachings of the time where such threats were not uncommon. The warnings were designed to instill fear in believers regarding the condemnation they faced if they fell away. This is exactly what the author of Hebrews was aiming to accomplish.

The NT offers an example of prophetic woes. In the gospel of Matthew, there are a number of woes that are recorded as Jesus uttered them (Matthew 23:13, 16-22). Jesus uttered the woes under the influence of the Holy Spirit as judgment and warning to the Pharisees and other traditional leaders (Dunn n.d.:1-2). It is presumably right to think that the audience of Hebrews could have perceived the warnings to have been written by the author under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

5.4. A Summary of the Rhetorical Analysis and the Jewish Rhetorical Exegesis of the Passage

Greco-Roman and Jewish Rhetorical methods are both important to the exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6, since Hebrews uses rhetorical persuasions and extensive quotations from the LXX. The author used some Greco-Roman rhetorical strategies to persuade his audience.

The Greco-Roman rhetorical exegesis enhances the understanding of the genre, unit and structure of the passage. It also helps to understand the tone and mood of both the audience and the author in the sending and reception of the message. The character of the author and the situation of the audience are highlighted in this regard to help the

reader of the warning passage to understand why such a warning was inevitable. The choice of words that the author used is analyzed to see how they helped in enhancing his message.

On the other hand, Jewish rhetorical tools are equally essential to understanding the OT examples and background at play in the warning passage. In doing so, Jewish rhetorical tools such as metaphors, analogies, typology, Midrash and hyperbole are identified and examined to understand their meaning in regard to the OT backgrounds. It is interesting to learn that a verb like *parapiptō* translated as 'fall away' is not used anywhere else in the NT. Even in the OT, it is not a common phrase. Bearing this in mind helps one to go deeper than just carrying a literal exegesis of every word.

5.5. Conclusion of the Rhetorical Exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 in the Light of its OT Background.

In conclusion, the author had in mind the migratory story of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land as well as perseverance of faith. The motive of the author was to encourage his audience not to give up, but to hold on to the end. The journey is not worth if it is not accomplished. His argument was directed at spurring his audience to faith and not condemning them to failure. Yet he found it prudent to emphasize what happened to those who refused to continue in their journey. This he achieved with the aid of a rhetorical strategy of comparison.

The Kadesh-Barnea incident resonates in the background of Heb 6:4-6. One thing that must strike the reader about the incident at Kadesh-Barnea is the fact that God assured that he had forgiven the rebellious people in Num 14: 20, but He denied them entrance into the Promised Land. One wonders what theological implication this had on the children of Israel and how it affects the interpretation of Heb 6:4-6. The issue at Kadesh-Barnea is a picture of how God dealt with His chosen people. However, the NT is giving us a picture of how again God deals with those who respond to the teaching of the gospel. The Word of God is there to teach, correct, rebuke and train those who have come to the light of the gospel. The author of Hebrews was equally implementing both exhortation as well as rebukes in his warnings. He warned his audience not to fall prey to

disillusionment because those who were disillusioned faced the consequences that were undesirable.

The author skillfully used rhetorical strategies from both the Jewish and Greco-Roman stock of the era to present his message to his audience. His choice of words and intertextual weaving of OT examples was all meant to accomplish one purpose of exhorting his audience while sending stern warnings to dissuade them. The interpretation of Heb 6:4-6 is incomplete when one ignores the other aspects of rhetorical exegesis and the OT background.

Chapter 6

A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF HEBREWS 6:4-6

This thesis has critically engaged with Hebrews 6 which starts by referring to issues of elementary teachings on Christ. Hebrews proceeds in 6:4 to bring in the issue of “impossibility” which is enigmatic as it raises a number of puzzling exegetical and theological questions. The passage which is capable of instilling fear and concern to a reader or believer who takes it on its face value has been exegeted. I recognize the serious implication of the passage. If not well exegeted, the warning passage has the potential to carry negative connotations when misinterpreted. For example, a phrase such as “it is impossible to be brought back to repentance,” might be misinterpreted to mean that there is no hope of repentance when one who knows the truth falls into sin.

This passage can create anxiety and confusion to someone who understands the fallen nature of man and the struggle he has with sin. It is a fact that we are bound to fall into sin as long as we remain in these mortal bodies that await the full redemption when Christ is fully revealed. The passage can also imply that a Christian never sins because when he or she does sin, it shows that he or she is crucifying Christ once again. I have therefore, explored how the author, as a Diaspora Jewish Christian, fused ideas from his Jewish and Greco-Roman rhetorical background to generate his argument, seeking to persuade his hearers to remain faithful to the Christian faith. Summarized in this chapter are the findings of the exegetical rhetorical study of Heb 6:4-6 in light of its OT background.

I have examined the rhetorical intent and strategy of the passage of Hebrews 6:4-6 in the light of its OT background. I have highlighted the limitations of only applying Classical Greco-Roman conventions to the Rhetorical criticism of Hebrews. Therefore, the key

purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate the benefits of serious consideration of the OT background of the warning passage to understand the rhetorical intent and strategies of the author.

Firstly, the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 hinged on the interpretation of the following statement; “one who has been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift” (6:4) and “tasted the good word of God” and “the powers of the age to come”. I have carefully examined the passage and concluded that the author was addressing Christians. Hebrews 6:4-6 further states that when such people “fall away”, it is impossible to restore them to repentance. To conclude, the “falling away” can be better understood in relation to the apostasy experienced at Kadesh Barnea in the OT.

Secondly, the warning passage introduces the difficult phrase; “Christ being crucified again.” This is practically enigmatic because Christ died once and His death is viewed as final. After exegeting the passage, I conclude that the author of Hebrews applied his rhetorical ingenuity to intensify the warning by using such a phrase. The first readers of Hebrews understood and related the warning to the OT motifs. I realize that such a phrase indicates the finality of what Christ did on the cross as the only means of salvation. Anyone who repudiates the death on the cross fails to acknowledge the very power and only power to save mankind.

Thirdly, the complexity created by scholarly and theological debates on the perspective of losing salvation in relation to the passage has been critically examined in relation to the OT Jewish rhetorical traditions. The different scholarly interpretations have equally been highlighted while taking note of their interpretive strengths and weaknesses.

The findings affirm the importance of carrying out a structured rhetorical exegesis and taking consideration of the OT background to Heb 6:4-6. The OT background provides added insight into the spiritual state of those described in Heb 6:4-5 and the meaning of ‘falling away’ and the ‘impossibility of renewing to repentance’ in Heb 6:6. Furthermore, the implications of the warning passage are tabulated and some reflections are made to see how the findings contribute to an evangelical local church in Ndola Zambia.

6.1. A Summary of the Findings on the Warning Passage

Hebrews 6:4-6 is one of the five warning passages found in the book of Hebrews. The five warning passages (Heb 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 6:4-12 or 20; 10:26-39; 12:25-29) are important to the interpretation and understanding of Heb 6:4-6. The warning passages are basically meant to warn, exhort and challenge the audience to continue in their faith. The warnings were meant as precautions to the first audience so that they avoided falling into the bad examples of those who failed to walk in obedience to God's guidance. The author, in some cases, cited good examples he thought commendable to his audience to emulate. Usually the examples are derived from the OT encounters of God's chosen people.

A critical structural rhetorical exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 has been done in consideration of its OT background. Before the findings of the structural exegesis and OT consideration are summarized, it is essential to give a brief summary of the background issues relevant for the interpretation of the book of Hebrews, and to give a review of scholarly arguments specific to Heb 6:4-6 in summary. Finally, the methodology is briefly discussed.

6.1.1. A Summary of Chapter Two

The argument on authorship of Hebrews hinges on whether the book is Pauline or Pauline related or non-Pauline. Many interpreters have settled with the fact that the author of Hebrews is anonymous. I argue that the impasse between those who believe that the author was Paul and those who believe otherwise remain unresolved. However, given the nature of the research questions, the exact answer to the issue is not that relevant. It therefore, remains adequate to regard the author as anonymous.

The proposals for the audience's geographical location have ranged from Jerusalem in the East to Spain in the West I believe that the audience was in Rome because Hebrews was first quoted by Clement, Bishop of Rome in 96 AD. The other reason is that Timothy is mentioned, and he was well known to the first readers and to Roman Christians as well. Rome fits the kind of audience that was in a city and was exposed to receiving visitors. I conclude that the first readers of Hebrews were Diaspora Jews based in Rome.

The findings regarding the issue of ethnicity of the audience present three proposals. These findings are important for determining the rationale for seeking the interpretation of the warning passage. The three proposals are Jewish, Gentile or mixed ethnicity. The presentation of the book of Hebrews seemingly addresses an audience familiar with the cultic system in the OT. I conclude that the audience had a Jewish background and probably practiced Jewish rituals at one time or another. The possibility is that a Diaspora Jewish readership of Hebrews is the best explanation for the nature of the Epistle because of the use of the LXX instead of the Masoretic OT. The exegesis of Heb 6:4-6 therefore followed the approach of appreciating the LXX instead of the Masoretic.

Regarding the situational context of the readers, I adopted Koester's account as the most likely description. Three stages that the audience of Hebrews went through in their faith. Firstly the readers' community was established when the message of salvation led to conversion and was confirmed by experiencing miracles and a sense of the Spirit's presence (1:14; 2:3 – 4; cf. Acts 14:8 –18; 16:16 –18; 19:11–12; Heb. 6:1 – 2; 6:4; 10:32). Secondly, during a time of persecution, conditions became more difficult but the community remained steadfast. However, during the third stage, conditions within the community seemed to deteriorate. The demands of mutual support within the Christian community evidently moved to the extent of reducing their commitment to the faith and to neglect the community's gatherings. This is probably what prompted the author to send such seemingly stern warnings to dissuade them.

The findings reveal that the issue of apostasy in Hebrews 6:4-6 is unavoidable. Interpreters have engaged the warning passages also in addressing the issue of assurance and the doctrine of eternal security. The commonly known schools of thought are the Calvinism and Arminianism.

The review examines the diverse approaches that different Interpreters have used to interpret the warning passage such as the Jewish apocalypticism, Greco-Roman Rhetorical approach and pneumatological approach among others. Each of the writers makes their own nuanced contribution to understanding the passage immensely important to this study.

My conclusion from the study of the different interpreters is that Heb 6:4-6 addressed the believers in Rome with a warning of what happens to people who think they can take lightly the salvation that is found in Christ. I believe that the stern warning must stand. I acknowledge the success of interpreters who have related the passage to the OT. However, I have appreciated the rhetorical investigation of Heb 6:4-6. I understand that there is a spiritual depreciation attached to the state of the audience in Heb 6:4-6.

This study also appreciates that as long as we are coming from different backgrounds, we will encounter difficulties in the understanding of the passage. However, my understanding is that the passage reflects on perseverance as a sign of eternal security for the saints.

6.1.2. A Summary of Chapter Three

The third chapter is devoted to examining the methodological issues underlying the research. Specifically, it describes issues related to rhetorical criticism and intertextuality, especially in their application to the Epistle to the Hebrews. A brief history of development of rhetoric is summarized before the methodology of exegeting the warning passage is highlighted.

Rhetorical criticism involves identifying the persuasive strategies of the author in delivering the message to his audience in order to get the correct response from them. Rhetoric criticism is not only limited to identifying style and the genre; it goes further to appreciate the techniques used by the author to communicate his message to the audience and how he arranges his words to accomplish his purpose. It also identifies some constraints that might arise in communicating the message.

It is however important to note that in the history of the discipline of Biblical Studies there has been stages of advancement in the approaches to Rhetorical Criticism in the NT. These stages include Classical, Modern, Greco-Roman and Socio-Rhetorical criticism among others.

Through rhetorical criticism, an interpreter can deduce the meaning of the conversation between the author and the audience and also identify critical areas that can cause

misunderstanding to the interpreter. In applying rhetoric criticism, the critic is able to understand the way the author engaged himself in trying to persuade his audience to achieve his expected response from them. Biblical narrative is rhetorical. Scripture acts rhetorically in proving through metaphor and example the ascendancy of a unitary, omnipotent, God.

The chapter also highlights the limitations of applying a purely Greco-Roman rhetorical canon for analyzing Hebrews. Given the author's commitment to the OT and its sacrificial system, it is most likely that Jewish rhetorical canons are also reflected in the Epistle. Much misunderstanding of Heb 6:4-6 probably stems from a failure to appreciate its OT matrix. It is an oversight not to consider its OT background in the exegesis of Heb 6:4-6.

6.1.3. Summary of Chapter Four

In this chapter, a critical exegetical study of Heb 6:4-6 in relation to its OT background has been done. The argument that Heb 6:4-6 is better understood when we consider the wilderness experience as the OT background to the warning passage has been proven. The warning passage directly describes and addresses its audience while it resonates with specific OT narratives. The chapter has first looked at the literary and conceptual structure of the warning passage in Heb 6:4-6 focusing on the words, clauses and phrases of the passage. It has determined how the words the author used fit into the context of Heb 6 and the whole Epistle of Hebrews. Thereafter the exegesis focused on examining the OT background of the whole passage in relation to the entire Epistle. The findings of this chapter have highlighted on the fact that the author had in mind the wilderness community as an OT example. The OT themes of disobedience and rebellion at the Kadesh-Barnea resound in Heb 6:4-6.

When the author of Hebrews was alluding to those who had tasted the heavenly gift and had become partakers of the Holy Spirit, he could also have been juxtaposing two scenarios of those in the wilderness and the Christians. He was recreating a picture in the minds of his audience of those who fell away and what happened to their disobedience. Though he was assured of better things in the case of his audience (Heb 6:9), he felt it

necessary to send the stern warning so that they understood the repercussion of disobedience and unfaithfulness. The OT background sheds light on the seemingly complex passage.

The author of Hebrews realized that his audience could be in danger of taking salvation lightly and refuse to grow into maturity as is the desire of God over those who come to Christ. It is therefore important to note that he was addressing Christians even though he was aware of their eternal security. The picture he gave them of those who had fallen away is a picture of those who stop living according to the faith they professed and how impossible it is to restore them back on track. The extreme of the warning is indicative of how God forgave the wilderness community and yet refused them to enter the Promised Land. They were with God, but they failed to inherit the promise. In the same way, the author wanted his audience to be aware of those who chose to repudiate Christ and the punishment that awaited them of failure to be restored back to repentance.

The warning was to awaken them from a state of slumber and make them realize that the same God who had saved them has it in His power to punish disobedience and unfaithfulness (Num 14:18). The metaphor of crucifying Christ again was meant to create a picture in the mind of the audience of Hebrews the gravity of falling away. The death of Jesus Christ at the cross was the only means of human redemption. Rejecting Christ was the same as rejecting their way of salvation.

The exegetical study created a background on which the rhetorical exegesis in chapter five was done. It was possible to identify the Jewish rhetorical tools which are evident in the warning passage. The potent combination of the Greco-Roman and Jewish rhetorical elements accounts for the powerful effects of understanding the warning passage.

6.1.4. A Summary of Chapter Five

In regard to Heb 6:4-6, through structural rhetorical exegesis, specific words such as 'for', 'those', 'impossible', 'fall away' have been structurally and rhetorically exegeted to interpret the warning passage. Furthermore, the ten clauses, among them; 'once been

enlightened', 'once tasted', 'once been partakers' have been critically analyzed to understand their structural function and rhetorical emphasis in the passage.

Through rhetorical analysis, Heb 6:4-6 is identified as a warning passage whose purpose is to dissuade the first audience from remaining stagnant in their faith. The procedure for examining the rhetorical strategy of Heb 6:4-6 is borrowed from Kennedy's (1984:3-160) five stages of rhetorical analysis. This includes the analysis of the clauses in the passage to determine the authorial purposes, the mood of the author, the mood and the social values of the audience.

It may be argued that since our passage is largely made up of a warning, it is more in the realm of epideictic than in deliberative rhetoric. Even so, by reminding the readers of their past positive experiences, the element of deliberative rhetoric remains in our passage. Thus it is safe to conclude that the genre of the passage, in its Greco-Roman rhetorical elements is a combination of both deliberative and epideictic strategies. The deliberative aspect is shown in the balance between negative and positive sections and the positive explaining the past good (Heb 4 and 5), and the negative consequences of falling away (Heb 6:4-6). The epideictic component is implied in the author's pastoral appeal and urge to the congregation to progress in their faith.

The rhetorical analysis of Heb 6:4-6 avails an interpreter the privilege of understanding the mood of the audience and the situation that prompted the author to communicate in the way he did to his audience. The audience was in a crisis of sufferings that it withstood for a period of time. Later on, the audience showed signs of slackening in the faith. The author's relation with his audience has been examined to determine whether there could have been any rhetorical problems that could have jeopardized the message of the author to his audience. The finding reveals the credibility of the author of the book of Hebrews and the audience's high regard for him. The audience therefore, evidently received the warning message with the seriousness it deserved.

The warning passage was exegeted to highlight the rhetorical strategies at play. Firstly, in order to adequately tackle the task at hand, a rhetorical analysis of Heb 6:4-6 using some

of Kennedy's steps with modifications has been done. This largely demonstrates the Greco-Roman rhetorical elements of the passage. Secondly, the Jewish Rhetorical tools which are evident in the passage are identified. This potent combination of the Greco-Roman and Jewish rhetorical elements accounts for the powerful effects of the passage on the first audience. Thirdly, the findings are summarized and synthesized to show how they help our understanding of the passage in relation to its OT background.

6.1.5. Conclusion on the findings

In conclusion, Heb 6:4-6 must be understood as a warning. A warning works as an alert to the danger that lies ahead. When one is cautioned and given examples of those who were caught in the same dilemma as one might encounter, that does not mean that person will fall in the same trap. In this case, Heb 6:4-6, resounds the warning by giving the wilderness experience at Kadesh-Barnea of those that walked with God, but fell away due to disobedience and unfaithfulness.

The author was aware that those people were forgiven, but God did not allow them to enter the Promised Land. He was well vested in the OT. When he was alluding to those who had tasted the heavenly gift and had become partakers of the Holy Spirit, he could also have been juxtaposing two scenarios of those in the wilderness and the Christians. He was recreating a picture for his audience of those who fell away and what happened as a result of their disobedience. Though he was assured of better things in the case of his audience (Heb 6:9), he felt it necessary to send the stern warning so that they understood the repercussion of disobedience and unfaithfulness. He realized that they could be in danger of taking salvation lightly and refuse to grow into maturity as is the desire of God over those who come to Christ.

It is therefore important to note that he was addressing Christians even though he was aware of their eternal security (Heb 6:9). The picture he gave them of those who had fallen away is a picture of those who stop living according to the faith they professed and how impossible it is to restore them back on track. The extreme of the warning is indicative of how God forgave the wilderness community and yet refused them to enter the Promised Land. They were with God, but they failed to inherit the promise. In the

same way, the author wanted his audience to be aware of those who chose to repudiate Christ and the punishment that awaited them of failure to be restored back to repentance. The warning was to awaken them from a state of slumber and make them realize that the same God who had saved them has it in His power to punish disobedience and unfaithfulness (Num 14:18). The metaphor of crucifying Christ again was meant to create a picture in the mind of the audience of Hebrews the gravity of falling away. The death of Jesus Christ at the cross was the only means of human redemption. Rejecting Christ was the same as rejecting their way of salvation.

6.2. Implications of the findings on a Christian in a Local Church

The warning passage must still be a warning to today's church and an exhortation. The implication of Hebrews 6:4-6 on today's church is that it is a reminder that God is faithful and does not change; He is true to His promises. However, God punishes sin and rebellion today as He did in the OT. The passage must make us realize that God is not man that He must repent. Hebrews 6:4-6 is equally relevant to the appreciation of the book of Hebrews as part of God's inspired Word. A Christian today must equally understand that the passage is not independent from the entire book of Hebrews. The genre of the portion from which the passage is derived is that of a warning and an exhortation and it must be understood as such.

6.2.1. The Implication of Hebrews 6:4-6 as a Warning and an Exhortation

The passage must be appreciated and interpreted as a warning and an exhortation to today's church as it was to the first audience. What it means is that there is need to identify what the author was warning his audience against and see how the warning can be applied to suit the present church. Firstly, the lesson is drawn from the rhetorical exegesis of the word *parapiptō* (apostasy) described in the passage in the light of its OT background. Secondly, the lesson is drawn from the interpretation of the clause which states the impossibility of renewing to repentance those who have fallen away.

6.2.1.1. *“Those who have fallen away”*

The first lesson is drawn from the exegesis of the phrase “those who have fallen away.” ‘Falling away’ stands as a negative example to those Christians who are standing in the faith. From the exegesis of the warning passage, the author identifies an extreme reality of apostasy (*parapiptō*- ‘deliberately rejecting God’). The author shows that those who have fallen away experienced the benefits of fellowshiping with the community of faith; they were once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come. They were not outside the community of the saved.

The implication of this warning to a local church today is that familiarity with the Christian life might not necessarily mean one is walking right with God. Some members of a local Church might think sharing in the fellowship at a denominational level means sharing with Christ. This passage must be a wakeup call to today’s church members. Some church members feel comfortable to subscribe their membership and allegiance to the denomination and a church leader rather than to the Lord Jesus Christ. The passage as we already have discussed is a warning not to slumber to any comfort zone, but to persevere in the faith.

Today’s church must take heed that the Word of God is still speaking in our modernity and technological advancement. The demand of righteousness and endurance that the author required from his first audience is the same demand that is on today’s church. In the midst of all confusion of what the church is all about and who a Christian is; a true and genuine Christian must take an example from the passage of not taking Christianity casually.

6.2.1.2. *“Impossible to Renew to Repentance”*

Secondly, the author warns the Christians that for those who have fallen away, “it is impossible to renew them to repentance”. The major source of contention in this passage is the use of the word ‘impossible’ (*Adúnaton*) which has been attributed to God, the Church or the believer by different interpreters. Impossible underlines the fact that the

action is not only difficult, but cannot be done with any imaginable effort. Impossible does not mean probable or difficult, but it means something that cannot be done.

The lesson therefore is that the experience of apostasy is beyond the ability to be renewed to repentance. We need to understand that repentance leads to forgiveness of sins (1John1:9). This means that if one is unable to be brought to a place of repentance, they might have had their hearts hardened (Heb 3:8) and hence fail to come to a place of repentance. This reminds me of a general scenario where one commits an offence and finds the conscience condemning that person and causing a sense of remorse. However, as days go by, for some reasons, a person commits the same offence and finds that there is no remorse any more. This can be as a result of suppressing the truth, as Roman 1:18 rightly puts it. The impossibility can also mean taking lightly the act of repentance so as not to have a restored relationship with God. It could also mean failure to see that one needs to repent when they sin. This can happen to people who feel they are already saved and their sinful attitude does not matter anymore, but continue to refuse to mature in their faith.

In as much as there is security of salvation, the author uses a stern negative example to show that as Christians, there is need to be committed to the obedience of God's commands. It is paramount that every Christian learns to persevere in the faith that he/she professes. Security of salvation does not give permission to careless living. A Christian enjoying the benefits of living in the community of faith; experiencing miracles and enjoying the grace of God is also vulnerable to temptations and dangers that can derail one's faith, hence the relevance of Heb 6:4-6..

6.2.2. The Implications of the Christian's Responsibility to One Another in Regard to Heb 6:4-6

One might ask, "If it is impossible to restore to faith those who have fallen away, is there need to encourage those who are showing signs of giving up?" The issue of salvation becomes complicated when we begin to interpret salvation in relation to actions only forgetting God's mystery attached to it. There are people who are good at pretending to the point of convincing one that they are believers. There are also those who seem to be

struggling in their walk of faith and yet they are candidates of God's salvation. At this point, it is the duty of every Christian to encourage (Heb 10:24) and provoke one another to the life of faith because no one knows those to whom God has granted salvation. As an individual, one does have a witness within that convinces one of being a child of God. However, Christians might not be very sure about the next person's salvation though they must treat him or her as part of the body of Christ when such a person confesses Christ as one's personal savior. It is important therefore to learn that the passage in discussion is not meant for passing judgment on one another or shunning others as not belonging to the body when they declare so. The passage must be used to warn Christians to persevere in any form of hardship for the sake of the Kingdom.

It is important to note that some evangelicals use the warning passage to teach that one can lose salvation. The implication of this warning passage is that it is difficult to use this warning to argue the security of salvation. It also implies that the warning passage practically means well for those who are in Christ.

6.2.3. Implications of Hebrews 6:4-6 on the Reminder that God Punishes Sin and Rebellion

The implications of the OT background of the passage towards establishing the rhetorical intentions and strategies of the author in addressing the situation of the audience have been examined. A link has been created between the Jewish rhetorical exegesis and the Greco-Roman exegesis in the interpretation of the warning passage in the light of its OT background.

Hebrews is rich with OT citations, allusions and echoes. Hebrews has several citations.. This thesis therefore engaged the rhetorical exegetical study of Hebrews 6:4-6 in the light of its OT background. The passage becomes easy to understand when we consider that it has some echoes and allusions of OT background. Heb 6:4-6 has the OT background of the Kadesh-Barnea experience of the wilderness community as a reminder that God punishes rebellion and disobedience. Whether one holds a Calvinist or Arminianist view, one must hold true God's Word.

Hebrews 6:18 states that God does not lie and He does honor His Word. Since God was able to promise Abraham and fulfilled His promise, He is faithful to the end. Today's Christian must understand that the God with whom he or she has entered into covenant with is the same God who did not spare those who rebelled against Him. Hebrews 6:4-6 stands as a reminder of what happened to the people who once experienced the goodness of God and later rebelled against Him. God punished them by refusing them to enter the Promised Land. This must send a warning to every believer today who might take salvation for granted.

Hebrews 6:4-6 reminds us that the new covenant is made with the same God of the old covenant who was true to His Word. In the same way God kept His promise to Abraham, He is able to do so even now. At the same time God does not delight in disobedience and rebellion. No one is exceptional to God's punishment when it comes to disobedience and rebellion even though salvation is already granted to every Christian.

6.2.4. Implication of God's faithfulness to Keep His Promises to those who believe

A genuine Christian must be made secure to understand that God is not man that He must repent. God is true to His Word and whatever He has promised He will bring it to accomplishment. He is not a kind of God who promises salvation and fails to fulfill His promise. God is a faithful God who has granted every Christian with salvation through Jesus Christ. It is not wrong to conclude that a Christian is secure in God's faithfulness to keep him/her in the salvation that He has called him/her into (Heb 6:9). Today's Christian must persevere to labour in faith just as the author encouraged his audience to do so. God is not unrighteous to forget the labour of one's faith as such a Christian serves in God's Kingdom (Heb 6:10). Hebrews 6:4-6 must serve as an encouragement even to those who could be contemplating to relax and take Christianity for granted (Heb 6:11-12).

6.2.5. Conclusion on the Implications to the Church

In conclusion, the passage is still as beneficial to a Christian today as it was to the first audience though circumstances might be different. Christians at any given time must be

warned of the dangers of failing to commit themselves to the walk of faith. Christians must appreciate the faithfulness of God despite the challenges they are confronted with. Christians today are caught up in a difficult web trying to discern who is a genuine Christian, and yet that is not an excuse in failing to encourage others towards commitment and faithfulness.

Hebrews 6:4-6 still stands as a warning and an encouragement to today's Christian. A Christian must be reminded of God's faithfulness to keep His promise today as He kept it from the time of Abraham. God is faithful to keep His promise from the first audience of Hebrews to date. It is also important to understand that God desires every Christian to grow into maturity. And every Christian must understand that God punishes disobedience and rebellion.

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