

An investigation for possible parallels of the Roman imperial cult (Caesar-Nero) in the New Testament book of Hebrews

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Chivington, Ryan D

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Abstract:

This thesis is an investigation of possible significant parallels of the Roman imperial cult (Caesar-Nero) in the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews was no doubt greatly impacted by Jewish influence, context, and background. Yet there may be other significant influences that have formed the New Testament book of Hebrews. One such possible influence to the book of Hebrews is the Roman Empire, and more specifically, the Roman imperial cult, the worship of living Roman emperors in god-like terms and the deification of dead emperors. The writer of Hebrews may have used language, forms, and images of the Roman ruler cult to contrast, compare, or clarify their theology and interpretation of Jesus and God. There is the possibility of correspondences between worship of the Roman emperors and the book of Hebrews. Are there significant parallels of the worship of the Caesars to God in the book of Hebrews? Did the writer of Hebrews use illusions, motifs, and images of the Roman emperor cult in parallel to Jesus Christ? Is the Roman imperial cult influence portrayed in the book of Hebrews? If yes, how and to what degree are they portrayed? If no, what are some of the divergences? This thesis attempts to answer these questions in an investigation for possible parallels of the Roman imperial cult (Caesar-Nero) in the New Testament book of Hebrews. I hypothesize there are significant parallels of the Roman imperial cult (Caesar-Nero) in the book of Hebrews. Through my findings I conclude that parallels with words and images on a broad level do exist, but discovery of significant parallels of direct influence were lacking. The parallels between Hebrews and the Roman imperial cult were more likely due to common sources, cultural settings, or universal ideas. The three strongest parallels of the emperor cult (Caesar-Nero) in the book of Hebrews were: divine sonship, enthronement after death, and benefaction. These parallels in combination with the weaker ones do not constitute significant parallelism. The Roman emperor cult does not appear to be a major influence which produced significant parallel for material contained in the book of Hebrews.

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