

# INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERPRETATION OF HEB 1:10-12

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**Abstract — Hebrews 1:10-12 is a quotation from Psalms 102:25-27 that appears in a catena of seven Old Testament quotations to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus over angels. According to the contextual framework of chapters 1-2 and through literary analysis, the author of Hebrews applies the psalm to Christ in a figurative way similar to personified Wisdom in the Old Testament in order to show how Christ embodies God’s creative power and wisdom and has become God’s vice regent, ruling as the exalted, everlasting Lord over all of creation at God’s right hand.**

*General Research Topic(s)* — **Intertextuality, Letter to the Hebrews, Christology, Wisdom Tradition, Literary Analysis, Hermeneutics, NT Greek.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Hebrews chapter 1 has often been thought of as a preface to the epistle, being perceived as a distinct section from the rest of the book. Viewing chapter 1 in this isolated context has led to a majority of scholars interpreting it as a prima facie text espousing the personal preexistence of Christ. This has led to the predominant interpretation of Heb 1:10-12 as promoting the deity of Christ through ontological equivocation with God.

Most traditional interpretations of this passage commonly use the idea of Christ’s personal preexistence as a priori knowledge that is then used to explain the author’s argument. If verses 10-12 are interpreted in vacuo, the traditional interpretation would seem to be the likely meaning which the author intended when quoting from Ps 102:25-27 and then applying it to Christ. But when the context of the section is given full consideration, other factors emerge that make interpreting 1:10-12 as indicating Christ’s personal preexistence unlikely to be the correct view.

The meaning that the author is giving to Ps 102:25-27 in Heb 1:10-12 is only found by adhering to the native context of the section in which the author has placed it. As will be argued, the author’s context must primarily be constructed from:

1. The placement and logic of Ps 102:25-27 as it functions within the overall structure of vv. 5-13.
2. The implicit connection between chs. 1 and 2 and how the author includes Ps 8:4-6 as the culmination of his<sup>1</sup> argument in ch. 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the use of the masculine participle in Heb 11:32 (διηγούμενον), it seems likely that the author of Hebrews was male.

3. The coherence of ch. 1 with the background and arguments that are developed in the remainder of the epistle.

Therefore, the proper interpretation of 1:10-12 must be derived from faithfully adhering to the author's implied framework and viewing the meaning and application of Ps 102:25-27 from within that native environment. By doing this, we will endeavor to listen faithfully to the author from within his own interpretive context and work to understand the purpose and reason for the author's use of Ps 102:25-27 in this difficult section of Scripture.

In this paper, I will argue that the author's use of Ps 102:25-27 as applied to Christ is best understood from within the context of Wisdom Christology where Christ's unique identity as the enthroned Son and the complete embodiment of God's creative wisdom affords the author the connection to speak of Christ in protological terms as being the creator. The author's intention is not to imply Christ's personal preexistence but to assert Christ's superiority over the angels by way of his preeminence in attaining the status of everlasting cosmic Lord

## II. STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE OF 1:5-13

Following upon the assertion that Christ is the one who has "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3) and who has "become so much better than the angels" in dignity and status (1:4), the author lists seven quotations from the OT in 1:5-13 to support this affirmation. As is a common exegetical technique by the writers of the NT, the author takes OT passages and then re-interprets them as having a Christological reference, even if no messianic overtones can be perceived in the original context. However, with nearly no supplemental comments by the author, the reader is left with great difficulty to ascertain the reason and meaning for the

appearance of the various texts. An important part of interpreting this section is to understand the way the structure of the section functions to support the initial premise: Christ, as God's exalted Son, has now become superior to the angels. This will greatly enhance the reader's ability to properly interpret the meaning of the passages in the catena.

Through an allusion to Ps 110:1 in 1:3, the author implicitly operates with the assumption that Christ has been exalted, and on account of that exaltation, has now "become so much better than the angels" (v. 4). Ps 110:1 is a critical passage alluded to several times throughout the epistle to establish Christ's heavenly existence (cf. 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).<sup>2</sup> And so, the interpretation of the quotations must be conditioned according to the author's argument in 1:3-4 as well as by the background and arguments developed in the epistle as a whole.

Further reasons for seeing the catena as entirely dependent upon the premise of Christ's heavenly exaltation and the inheritance of a name that is far above the angels is the repetition of the rhetorical questions in 1:5 and 1:13 ("...to which of the angels did he ever say..."), which start and end the catena. The repetition of the question forms an *inclusio*,<sup>3</sup> suggesting that the author has a unified objective for this section.

Moreover, an additional structural clue supporting the unity of the catena can be found by the occurrence of the explicit quotation of Ps 110:1 in 1:13. The appearance of Ps 110:1 forms a direct link with 1:3 to indicate that Christ's exaltation remains the main focus of the section. "It serves to recapitulate all that has been argued in the previous verses: angels are inferior to the exalted Son and

<sup>2</sup> James W. Thompson, "The Structure and Purpose of the Catena in Heb 1:5-13," *CBQ* 38, no. 3 (1976): 353.

<sup>3</sup> Dana M. Harris, *Hebrews*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 32.

can never share in his position or glory.”<sup>4</sup> Because of Christ’s exaltation to God’s right hand, his position and status have become higher than that of any angel. Thus, the catena of 1:5-13 serves as the author’s way of providing scriptural proof that this corollary is indeed true.

### III. CONTEXTUAL CONTINUITY IN HEBREWS 1-2

A close connection exists between the motif of the superiority of Christ as the Son and the inferiority of the angels and the parenesis at the beginning of ch. 2. The introductory phrase διὰ τοῦτο (“for this reason”) bridges the subsequent warning section (2:1-4) with the theological arguments of 1:5-13, making the catena serve as a presupposition for the parenesis.<sup>5</sup> Thus, one of the major keys to properly understanding the context of the catena in ch. 1 is to see how the author does not separate ch. 1 as a sort of preface to the epistle but that his argument in ch. 1 connects logically and contextually with ch. 2.

Even more important is how the author’s main point throughout the catena in ch. 1 finds its climax in the quotation of Ps 8:4-6 in 2:6-8, thereby directly linking 2:1-8 with the entire discourse of 1:5-13. This important observation was initially proposed by George Caird as a key principle for interpreting the catena in ch. 1.

“The Psalm [Ps 8:4-6] is quoted only at 2:6-8, but it controls the argument of the preceding chapter, for from the first mention of angels at 1:5 throughout the formidable catena of texts in ch. 1 the author’s one aim is to illustrate the theme of the psalm that man has been destined by God to a glory exceeding that of the angels and that this destiny has been achieved by Christ, both

individually and representatively, as the pioneer of man’s salvation who came to lead many sons into their destined glory.”<sup>6</sup>

What Caird is suggesting is that the quotation of Ps 8:4-6 plays a critical role in explaining the author’s contrast between the angels and Christ in ch. 1. This connection is observed in the parenetic section (2:1-4) which presents a *qal wahomer*<sup>7</sup> argument based on the contrast between the angels, who are viewed as mediators of the Old Covenant, and Christ (cf. 2:3, “Lord”), who has spoken God’s most recent revelation about “salvation,” referring to the New Covenant.

This contrast between the angels and Christ is the focus of the catena in ch. 1, for the author’s purpose of using the extended series of Old Testament quotations is to substantiate his claim in v. 4 that Christ has “become so much better than the angels just as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” Therefore, the catena of scriptures in ch. 1 should be read and interpreted in light of the overall argument of Christ “becoming” better than the angels, and thus, the message he has spoken is superior to the revelation that was previously given through them.

The superiority of Christ over the angels is brought directly into view with the quotation of Ps 8:4-6 where the author uses it to explain how Christ was made lower than the angels “for a little while” but has now been exalted and crowned with “glory and honor” (2:5). And so, it is the exaltation of Christ to a place of unrivaled prestige and dignity that proves to be the nexus point between Christ being beneath the angels for a time, but now having inherited a name that is superior to theirs and

<sup>4</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, vol. 47A, Word Biblical Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, “Structure and Purpose,” 363.

<sup>6</sup> George B. Caird, “Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *CTJ* 5, no. 1 (1959): 49.

<sup>7</sup> A *qal wahomer* (lit. “heavy to light”) is an inferential argument that consists of a minor premise and a major premise where the argument posits what is true of the lesser (i.e., lighter) premise must also then be true of the greater (i.e., heavier) premise. A *qal wahomer* also goes by the more common English designation of a “lesser-to-greater” argument.

being seated at the right hand of God, to now be far above the angels

#### IV. EXALTATION AND ENTHRONEMENT OF THE SON

A main thrust of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to present Christ as the greater high priest and the New Covenant he enacted through his death and resurrection as a superior revelation to that of the Old Covenant at Sinai with the sacrificial system and Levitical priesthood. The author even identifies this as the main point of what he has been saying in 8:1-2, "Now the main point of what is being said is this: We have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man" (CSB).

It has been proposed that the proper way to understand the context of ch. 1 is to see it painting a picture of "Christ's cosmic enthronement as royal Son with the angels offering obeisance to their king."<sup>8</sup> This temporal perspective correlates better with the timing of the two covenant contrast in the letter, particularly with the establishment of the New Covenant with Christ as the enthroned king, rather than attempting to divide up and assign portions of the catena to various stages of Christ's existence (e.g., preexistence, incarnation, exaltation).<sup>9</sup> Rather, the focus of the catena is couched in terms of Christ's exaltation as he has now *become* greater than the angels (v. 4). Therefore, if the perspective of Christ being exalted and enthroned as the cosmic king is the contextual framework of the catena, then the logic and meaning of the series of OT quotations is best understood as supporting the argument for this reality.

The temporal reference of Ps 8:4-6 (2:6-8) as it is being applied to Christ places him first being made lower than the angels in his life and ministry on the earth, and then above the angels in his exaltation to heaven. Remarking on the author's temporal perspective of Ps 8 as it applies to Christ, "The author of Hebrews has no place in his thinking for preexistence as an ontological concept. His essentially human Jesus attains to perfection, to preeminence, and even to eternity."<sup>10</sup> With this contextual framework of Ps 8 steering our understanding of the catena in ch. 1, we can see that the lists of OT scriptures functions then as a hymn-like celebration announcing the accomplished salvation through the divinely appointed and enthroned Messiah-king, Jesus.

The need to establish the enthronement of Christ as king pertains to the subsequent discourse of the letter regarding the superiority of Christ as the Son to that of the angels, even though after ch. 2 angels are not mentioned in much detail. They nevertheless function in ch. 1 as representatives of the revelation given at Sinai (cf. 2:2), and thereby their authority is connected to the Old Covenant and the whole sacrificial system and Levitical priesthood. So, in order to show that Christ's sacrifice and the New Covenant are superior to and replace the Old Covenant with its commandments and ordinances, the author must show that Christ possesses greater authority than the angels and is above them in rank and function.

#### V. HEB 1:10-12: CHRIST AS THE EVERLASTING LORD (PS 102:25-27)

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth L. Schenck, "A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1," *JBL* 120, no. 3 (2001): 471.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Rhee, "Christology in Hebrews 1:5-14: The Three Stages of Christ's Existence," *JETS* 59, no. 4 (2016): 717-29.

<sup>10</sup> George B. Caird, "Son by Appointment," in *The NT Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. William C. Weinrich (Macon: Mercer University, 1984), 81.

Nestle-Aland 28 <sup>th</sup>	Revised English Version
<p>καί</p> <p><b>σὺ κατ' ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί <sup>11</sup>αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις, καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται, <sup>12</sup>καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἐλίξεις αὐτούς, ὡς ἱμάτιον καὶ ἀλλαγῆσονται σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν.</b></p>	<p>And,</p> <p><b>You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. <sup>11</sup>They will perish, but you continue on, and they will all grow old as does a garment, <sup>12</sup>and you will roll them up like a cloak, and they will be changed like a garment. But you are the same, and your years will never end.</b></p>

The sixth quotation is taken from Ps 102:25-27 (101:26-28 LXX)<sup>11</sup> and follows vv. 8-9 as another argument to demonstrate how Christ has become superior to the angels. It is clear that the LXX is the text that the author is familiar with as it contains the addition of the vocative κύριε (“Lord”) that is absent in the MT. Nevertheless, it is the LXX reading that the author uses to further his argument. However, the argument is not identical to vv. 8-9, which present Christ as the everlasting king who has been anointed by God above all others to rule his kingdom with a “scepter of justice” (*ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς ἐυθύτητος*, v. 8) on a throne that lasts “forever and ever” (*εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος*, v. 8).

It is important to note the μὲν-δὲ construction of v. 7 with vv. 8-12.<sup>12</sup> This syntactical feature provides direction for the points of contact the author is seeking to establish between v. 7 and vv. 8-12. It can be noted that

the initial καὶ (v. 10) which introduces the second quotation (Ps 102:25-27) functions to extend the contrast of the μὲν-δὲ construction. Therefore, two contrasts are intended: one between v. 7 and vv. 8-9, and another between v. 7 and vv. 10-12.

The author’s contrast entails the distinction between the servant status of angels and Christ’s royal status as king (v. 7 & vv. 8-9), and the angels’ servant role in comparison to Christ’s exalted role as cosmic Lord (v. 7 & vv. 10-12).<sup>13</sup> This contrast also includes a differentiation between the nature and character of angels and the exalted Christ. Angels are described in transitory terms that represent changeableness and mutability (v. 7), while the enthroned Christ is depicted as ruling forever (vv. 8-9) and being exalted above the created order as the

<sup>11</sup> The author quotes Ps 101:26-28 from the LXX with some slight modifications. First, he places σὺ (“you”) at the beginning of the verse where the LXX has it coming after κατ’ ἀρχάς (“in the beginning”), likely to match the syntax of v. 12c which also begins with σὺ. In v. 11, the LXX future tense verb διαμενεῖς (“you will remain”) is changed to present tense διαμένεις (“you remain”), probably to bring out the unending and enduring quality of the now exalted and enthroned Christ. In v. 12, the author substitutes the LXX verb ἀλλάξεις (“you will change [them]”) for ἐλίξεις (“you will roll [them] up”). Lastly, the phrase ὡς ἱμάτιον (“like a garment”) is repeated

before καὶ ἀλλαγῆσονται (“and they will be changed”), whereas the LXX has it only occurring once just before παλαιωθήσονται (“they will become old”). By repeating the phrase, it appears to be an effort to bring the imagery forward and more in focus: it is the created order of heaven and earth that will grow old and deteriorate like worn out clothing, but they will be rolled up and changed into something new.

<sup>12</sup> The conjunction καὶ (v. 10) functions to extend the μὲν-δὲ to include a secondary quotation that contrasts an additional difference between Christ and the angels.

<sup>13</sup> Schenck, “Celebration of the Enthroned Son,” 474.

everlasting and never changing Lord of the cosmos (vv. 10-12).<sup>14</sup>

But vv. 10-12 carry unique difficulty as Christ is spoken of in connection with the founding of the “earth” and having the “heavens” be the work of his hands. It is true that if Christ (assuming a preexistent form) was the creator of the earth and the heavens,<sup>15</sup> then he is clearly superior to the angels—and a majority of scholars see this as the correct purpose and meaning for the author’s use of Ps 102 in the catena. But ch. 1 has not described Christ in such terms, nor does it fit logically within the perspective that the author has revealed. In v. 2, the author has already presented Christ as the one “through whom” (δι’ οὗ) God made the “world” (αἰῶνας, lit. “ages”). And as such, the author has not ascribed to Christ the role of creator but speaks of him in terms of an agent “through whom” God has made everything.

One question that the traditional interpretation raises is, if the author’s assertion is that Christ is the agent of God in creation, then why is he applying Ps 102:25-27 to Christ and using it to address Christ not as the *agent* but the *source* of creation? Two additional questions about the traditional interpretation can be raised along with this:

1. What role does the quotation play in the broader argument of the catena if Christ is the creator of everything (including angels)? Wouldn’t that completely solve the dilemma between the status of angels and Christ and render all the other quotations and arguments unnecessary?
2. If Christ is the one through whom God has spoken in “these last days” (1:2), and Christ is viewed as the creator, then logically in what way would the readers need to be persuaded to see the message

that Christ came to be superior to the angels, if he is by de facto, the creator?

Viewing Ps 102 as claiming Jesus was personally preexistent as the creator of heaven and earth is fraught with several difficulties unless the quotation is viewed in isolation from the rest of the book and thought of as a standalone proof text. First, the notion that Christ is the creator side-steps and trivializes the entire effort of the author to prove Christ’s superiority to the angels. Secondly, if Christ is the creator, then the author’s exegesis to persuade the reader to listen to the revelation given by the exalted and enthroned Son of God, as the one through whom God has spoken the most recent message about salvation, loses its effect.

When the author begins to develop his argument about Christ’s priestly role and his sacrifice for sin in ch. 2, he speaks in terms of Christ as the “pioneer” of salvation who was made “perfect through sufferings” (2:10). Christ, who was “flesh and blood” like the rest of humanity (2:14), faced death for his “brothers and sisters” (2:11), so that he could make the atoning sacrifice for sin and free people from the “fear of death” (2:15). The author does not address Christ in terms of being the creator but in terms of being the representative human who has become perfect through his death so that he can lead many sons and daughters to glory (2:10).

Based on the contextual framework that the author has indicated with the focus being on Christ’s exaltation and enthronement, there is a more coherent way to view the author’s application of Ps 102:25-27 to Christ that takes into account the creation language of 1:10 and the use of Ps 102 as an argument to support Christ as the one who was made lower than the angels for a time but has now been exalted and appointed by God as the everlasting cosmic Lord.

<sup>14</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 47A, 30.

<sup>15</sup> The idea that Christ is the creator, who was personally preexistent in the beginning and is eternal will be referred to as

the “traditional interpretation,” and is the majority position in scholarship.

To assume that 1:10 is referring to Christ's personal preexistence at a time before his birth is to insert a foreign notion into the author's argument. The author's intention in the catena is to focus upon establishing the superiority of Christ to the angels now that he has been exalted and enthroned at God's right hand and having inherited a name far greater than the angels. Thus, it is in accordance with the author's interpretive framework to conclude that in the catena of 1:5-13 he has "no place in his thinking for preexistence as an ontological concept. His essentially human Jesus attains to perfection, to preeminence, and even to eternity."<sup>16</sup>

But if the author is not implying the personal preexistence of Christ in 1:10, then in what way can he speak of Christ as creating the heavens and the earth?

## VI. CHRIST: THE WISDOM OF GOD

Part of the reason Ps 102:25-27 as applied to Christ in 1:10-12 might strike the modern reader as unexpected is because the ancient thought-world was much different than our modern world today, and the way the biblical writers spoke about Christ in connection with God can seem to blur our modern sensibilities concerning personal identity and attribution.

If the author is attempting in 1:3 to draw upon Wisdom (*sophia*) and *logos* motifs common in Jewish thinking by speaking of Christ in these terms, then it suggests that he is likely viewing Christ in connection with God not ontologically but protologically.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the author applies 'hymnic' language to Christ

in 1:3-4.<sup>18</sup> Such language resembles other hymn sections in NT writings (Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20) and is appropriately used for both *sophia* and *logos*.<sup>19</sup>

One must wonder, however, why it is appropriate to conclude that the author would speak of Christ as creator in protological terms in connection with Wisdom and *logos* when no explicit mention is made in the context that points to either of them. The reason is that even though we might unintentionally overlook the allusions that are made by the author if they are not directly stated, they are nonetheless present in the text if we will listen carefully to the words that are used and the imagery that is evoked through them.

As D. W. B. Robinson argues, the author's use of familiar Wisdom affirmations between quotations of Ps 2 and Ps 110 establishes two premises: (1) the royal Son of Ps 2 can be identified as divine Wisdom, the agent of creation, and (2) divine Wisdom who is God's agent in the world and the world's sustainer is also identified as the royal priest of Ps 110.<sup>20</sup>

The author's description of the Son as the "reflection of his [God's] glory" (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης) and the "exact representation of his [God's] nature" (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ) are vital allusions to Wisdom that need to be understood. Both words ἀπαύγασμα ("reflection") and χαρακτήρ ("exact representation") are hapax legomena in the NT. But a related word ἀνιάζω ("shine") occurs in 2 Cor 4:4, "in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, so as to prevent the light of the good news of Christ, who is

<sup>16</sup> Caird, "Son by Appointment," 81.

<sup>17</sup> Protological language addresses Christ as being an ideal expression of God's activity. To speak of Christ representatively as the embodiment of divine Wisdom is to speak protologically about Wisdom's creative function with reference to Christ.

<sup>18</sup> Evidence point to hymnic language are: (1) the opening *hos*; (2) participial predications; (3) using substantive participles without the article; (4) the aforementioned alliteration and rhythm; (5) the parallelism of key phrases (e.g., cf. *charakter tes hupotaseos autou to remati tes dunameos*

*autou*, v. 3 seems to be in meter). Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: the Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 279. Cf. Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth L. Schenck, "Keeping His Appointment: Creation and Enthronement in Hebrews," *JSNT* 66 (1997): 105.

<sup>20</sup> D. W. B. Robinson, "The Literary Structure of Hebrews 1:1-4," *AJBA* 2 (1972): 182-83. Cf. Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, 277.

the image of God, from shining forth.”<sup>21</sup> In an active sense, ἀπαύγασμα means “radiance” in the sense of brightness from a source, while in a passive sense it connotes “reflection” referring to brightness shining back.<sup>22</sup>

This language is reminiscent of how Wisdom is described. In comparing the language that the author uses in 1:3 concerning the exalted Son with the description of Wisdom in the Jewish writing *The Wisdom of Solomon*, we can begin to see the connection more clearly.

Hebrews 1:3 (REV)	Wisdom 7:25-26 (NETS)
<p>...who is the <u>reflection</u> of his glory, and the exact representation of his nature, and is upholding all things by his powerful word. After he had accomplished the cleansing for sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,</p>	<p>For she is a breath of the power of God and an emanation of the pure glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. <sup>26</sup>For she is a <u>reflection</u> of eternal light and a spotless mirror of the activity of God and an image of his goodness.</p>
<p>ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμόν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς,</p>	<p>ἀτιμίς γάρ ἐστιν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεω καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινῆς διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲν μεμιαμμένον εἰς αὐτὴν παρεμπίπτει. <sup>26</sup>ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστιν φωτὸς αἰδίου καὶ ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ.</p>

The parallel imagery and language about Wisdom and Christ is striking and cannot be dismissed lightly. The author in Hebrews is not setting forth a personification about Wisdom as the author of *The Wisdom of Solomon* does but is establishing the reality that the Son is the full embodiment of divine Wisdom.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the author asserts that Christ is the very χαρακτήρ (“exact representation”) of God’s ὑποστάσεως (“nature”). Χαρακτήρ refers to the “impress, representation, or distinctive mark” of something or someone. In Wisdom 7:26, Wisdom is said to be the “spotless mirror of the activity of God” (ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας).

In like manner, Christ is described as the one who carries the χαρακτήρ, i.e., exact impress and resemblance, of God’s ὑποστάσεως (“nature”). Therefore, in contrast to the servant status and changeable nature of angels (1:7), Ps 102 is seen by the author as a text which “addresses an ideal human (royal) figure, who, as Israel’s representative, possesses and enshrines in this world the divine, creative wisdom. [According to the LXX] God could then be seen as addressing his own wisdom in its earthly receptacle, the Messiah-king.”<sup>24</sup>

This line of reasoning—to interpret the author’s application of Ps 102 addressing Christ as the creator as a way of identifying him as the full expression and embodiment of God’s creative Wisdom—might seem

<sup>21</sup> Original translation  
<sup>22</sup> BDAG, s.v. ἀπαύγασμα  
<sup>23</sup> Cf. Prov 8:22-31 for Wisdom as a personified attribute of God in the OT.

<sup>24</sup> L. D. Hurst, "The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2," in *The Glory of Christ in the NT: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 162.



strange to modern conceptions, but it was commonplace in the ancient world and would have been seen as proceeding along acceptable and even expected ways of thinking. William Lane affirms this conclusion and offers an explanation for why the author would make this connection for his readers.

“The presentation of the Son in the categories of divine Wisdom in the opening lines of Hebrews is initially surprising...The writer’s decision to present Jesus as God’s Son who performs the functions assigned to Wisdom may have been motivated by a pastoral concern to achieve a hearing for what he had to say. The categories of divine Wisdom were apparently current and meaningful for his readers. The concentration of unusual and distinctive vocabulary in v. 3 suggests a congregation for whom the tradition preserved in Wis. 7:24–27 was normative. This Christian assembly has been significantly influenced by the hellenistic synagogue in terms of theological concept and vocabulary.”<sup>25</sup>

As Christ is the man in whom God appointed to have his creative Wisdom dwell, he is seen as the bearer of the whole purpose of creation and the full embodiment of God’s Wisdom, which affords the author the means to speak of him as not only being an agent in creation (1:3) but being attributed with the creative power to bring it forth, as Wisdom was said to have done (Wis 7:21; 8:4-5; 9:1-2, 9).

## VII. CONCLUSION

Heb 1:5-13 is best viewed in connection with the context of ch. 2, and particularly in light of the author’s use of Ps 8 as the climax of his argument concerning the acquired superior role and status of Christ as the exalted and enthroned Son. Christ was appointed as God’s Messiah-king after becoming perfect through his suffering, because Christ was made lower than the angels

for a time but has now been raised to God’s right hand and given glory and honor. This is how Christ has become greater than the angels and has inherited a name that is far above any of theirs. Therefore, the catena of 1:5-13 should be interpreted within this context and according to the motive of the author to substantiate this reality from Scripture.

Within the catena, vv. 10-12 supports the author’s endeavor to establish the superiority of Christ over the angels as part of a contrast with v. 7 regarding the subservient status and changeable nature of the angels. According to the language of 1:1-4, the background of the well-known Jewish Wisdom tradition is likely in the author’s view as it appears he is intentionally making allusions to the creative power of Wisdom and associating Christ with them as the enthroned Son.

Therefore, what the author means when he speaks of Christ as creator in v. 10 is not to insinuate his personal preexistence and possession of ultimate power in the universe but to prove that he is the one in whom God chose for his creative Wisdom to dwell—which was active in creating the heavens and earth. And so, the author correlates that creative power of God’s Wisdom now operating in his Son so that he can speak of Christ protologically as being the one who created them.

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