

Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

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Volume 29 Issue 718

Was Jesus Christ Alive Before His Life on Earth Began?

Part 12 of 12

by — Aaron Welch

A Consideration of Passages Thought to Reveal the "Preexistence of Christ"

The Letter to the Hebrews (Continued)

Hebrews 1:10-14

And, Thou, originally, Lord, dost found the Earth, and the Heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish, yet Thou art continuing, and all, as a cloak, shall be aged, and, as if clothing, wilt Thou be rolling them up. As a cloak also shall they change. Yet Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not be defaulting. Now [or "Yet"] to which of the messengers has He declared at any time, "Sit at My right, till I should be placing Thine enemies for a footstool for Thy feet"? Are they not all ministering spirits commissioned for service because of those who are about to be enjoying the allotment of salvation?

In a Nutshell:

Verses 10-12 are a quotation of Psalm 102:25-28, and in these verses the Psalmist was addressing God (*i.e.*, *Yahweh*). The "*Lord*" being addressed in :10 is, in other words, the same person referred to as "*He*" in

in quoting Psalm 102:25-28 before Psalm 110 (which the writer quotes in :13) is to demonstrate that the same transcendent relationship to, and absolute authority over, "the works of [God's] hands" (which God is described as having in Psalm 102:25-28) has been given to the Messiah (Who, in fulfillment of Psalm 102, now "sits at God's right," having

been given all authority in Heaven and on Earth and placed over the works of God's hands).

Expanded Explanation:

This entire passage (*i.e.*, :5-14) is a Scripture-based defense of the claim made in :4 that Jesus, the Son of God, is superior to the messengers of God. The passage also has a certain logical structure, with different verses being linked together to form a distinct argument for the overall position being advanced by the writer of this letter. Below is how I understand the way in which the writer's Scripture-based arguments should be grouped (notice how the first section begins with the word "For" and the last two sections begin with the word "And").

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First Argument Section (:5-6)

For to whom of the messengers said He at any time, "My Son art Thou! I, today, have begotten Thee"? And again, "I shall be to Him for a Father and He shall be to Me for a Son"? Now [or "Yet"], whenever He may again be leading the *Firstborn into the inhabited earth, He is saying:* "And worship Him, all the messengers of God!"

Second Argument Section (:7-9)

And, indeed, to the messengers He is saying, "Who is making His messengers blasts, and His ministers a flame of fire." Yet to the Son: "Thy throne, O God, is for the eon of the eon, and a scepter of rectitude is the scepter of Thy Kingdom. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest injustice; therefore Thou art anointed by God, Thy God, with the oil of exultation beyond Thy partners."

Third Argument Section (:10-14)

And, Thou, originally, Lord, dost found the Earth, and the Heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish, yet Thou art continuing, and all, as a cloak, shall be aged, and, as if clothing, wilt Thou be rolling them up. As a cloak also shall they change. Yet Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not be defaulting. Now [or "Yet"] to which of the messengers has He declared at any time, "Sit at My right, till I should be placing Thine enemies for a footstool for Thy feet"? Are they not all ministering spirits commissioned for service because of those who are about to be enjoying the allotment of salvation?

(It should be noted that :14 can be understood as a conclusion to all three sections/units, and not just the conclusion of the last.)

A few things may be said in defense of this understanding of the structure of the passage. First, the writer used the word "for" (gar) to introduce his first Scripture-based argument (:5-6), and then used the word "and" (kai) to introduce his second argument (:7-9). Moreover, when the writer of Hebrews contrasted a verse or passage with another, he used the word de (which, in the CLNT, is translated as two different words in Hebrews 1: "now" in :6, 13, and "yet" in :8).

Moreover, when the writer quoted an additional Old Testament verse to support the same point being made by the verse previously quoted, he linked the verses with the word "again" (palin) rather than the word "and" (kai) alone (Hebrews 1:5; for other examples of this use of palin, see 2:13; 4:5; 10:30; cf. Romans 15:9-12). Thus, had the author intended his quotation of Psalm 102 in Hebrews 10:10-12 to be understood as another example from the Old Testament of how Christ is superior to the angels, he would've most likely used palin ("again") or kai palin ("and again"), and not merely kai ("and") alone. It can therefore be inferred that, by using kai alone in :10 (rather than using palin or kai palin), the writer is beginning a *new* argument (which, again, means that :10-12 are linked with :13). We should not, therefore,



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understand:10-12 as making the same sort of point, and as serving the same purpose, as:8-9. It's most reasonable to understand:10 as the beginning of a new argument (an argument which includes:13 as well).

What purpose do :10-12 serve in the writer's argument? In order to answer this question, we first need to identify the person being addressed in these verses. Verses 10-12 are a quotation of Psalm 102:25-28:

Beforetime You founded the Earth, and the Heavens are the work of Your hands. They shall perish, yet You shall stand. All of them shall decay like a cloak; like clothing, You shall change them, and they shall pass by. Yet You remain the same, and Your years shall not come to end.

This Psalm is actually the fourth Psalm quoted in Hebrews 1. The last Psalm that was quoted by the writer of Hebrews is Psalm 45, and (*unlike* Psalm 102, as we'll see below) this Psalm is clearly "Messianic" in its focus and theme.

In Psalm 45:6-7, the Psalmist was clearly addressing and referring to the future Messiah (which likely would've been the opinion of the original recipients of the letter to the Hebrews, and accounts for the author's use of it). The person of elevated status being prophetically referred to in this Psalm was clearly not Yahweh Himself, for He is distinguished *from* Yahweh (Who, we're told, is the God Who would be anointing this future Ruler "with the oil of exultation beyond His partners").

In contrast with Psalm 45:6-7, there is no good, con-

More Excellent

textually-informed reason to believe that the person being addressed in Psalm 102:25-28 is anyone other than Yahweh Himself, and it's highly unlikely that the original recipients of the letter to the Hebrews would've understood it in any other way. That the person being addressed throughout the entirety of this Psalm is Yahweh Himself seems clear from even a cursory reading of Psalm 102 (see :1-2, 12-24).

Unlike in Psalm 45:6-7, there is no indication that the author of Psalm 102 understood himself to have been addressing someone other than the one God of Israel, or that he believed himself to have been referring to the future Messiah or Son of God. From :1 it's evident that the Psalmist believed himself to be addressing his prayer to Yahweh, and he clearly believed himself to be addressing the same divine Being in :25-27.

Moreover, it should be noted that the words "Yet Thou art the same, And Thy years shall not be defaulting" (:12) is simply a way of emphasizing God's inability to die. The fact that God's "years shall not be defaulting" (or "shall not come to end") simply means that God cannot die (and note that this was something that the Psalmist considered to be true of the Person he was addressing when he wrote Psalm 102). In fact, one proponent of the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ has, on several occasions, referenced this very verse from Psalm 102 as scriptural proof of the fact that God cannot die.1

Since this verse refers to the inherent immortality

 For example, concerning the use of the word eonian in Romans 16:26, Martin Zender writes, "This verse isn't trying to tell anyone that God lives forever. Everyone already knows God lives forever. Psalm 102:27 testified long ago that, 'His years shall have no end.' It's old news." (ZWTF, Vol. 1, Issue 14, pg. 3)

The More Excellent Way

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

Reading of the marvelous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, who has not been struck with the last verse of the chapter: "Covet earnestly the best gifts"? That is what we would like to do! But what do the closing words mean: "And yet show I unto you a more excellent way"? Can it be that there is something even better than the best gifts? If so, what is it and how may we enjoy it? This booklet helps us find the answer.

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that God has always had (including when Psalm 102 was written), it cannot be understood as a reference to Christ. For, after being alive on the Earth for approximately 33 years, Christ died and remained dead for three days. In other words, Christ's *years defaulted*. God, on the other hand, has always been immortal; it was just as true when Psalm 102 was written as it is today that His years "shall not come to end."

It should also be noted that, if Psalm 102:25-28 has the original creation of the Heavens and the Earth in view (as I believe that it does), then there is scriptural evidence that undermines the view that anyone other than Yahweh (God, the Father) was involved in this event. We've already looked at this evidence in section two, so the reader is encouraged to read what was said there for a fuller defense of this point.

In Isaiah 44:24, we read,

Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, Who formed you from the womb: "I am Yahweh, Who made all things, who **alone** stretched out the Heavens, Who spread out the Earth **by Myself** ...

I have previously noted that, if Yahweh had wanted to communicate the fact that He created everything directly and without anyone else's involvement, there would've been no clearer and more succinct way of doing so than is stated in the this verse. It is evident that only one person was speaking these words, and the words "alone" and "by Myself" rule out any sort of intermediary agent used by the person speaking

to accomplish the creation of the Heavens and the Earth. If the One speaking is to be understood as Yahweh Himself, then He created everything without the involvement or aid of a "pre-existent Jesus Christ." If it was Jesus Christ speaking, then He created everything without the involvement or aid of His God and Father. Since the latter is clearly impossible, then we must understand that it was *God*, the Father, Who was the sole Creator of the Heavens and the Earth.

That the "Lord" being addressed in Psalm 102:25 is Yahweh, the God of Jesus Christ (rather than Jesus, His Son), is not only evident from the context of Psalm 102, but it is also evident from how the "He" of :13 points back to the "Lord" who is in view in the previous verses:

And, Thou, originally, Lord, dost found the Earth, and the Heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish, yet Thou art continuing, and all, as a cloak, shall be aged, and, as if clothing, wilt Thou be rolling them up. As a cloak also shall they change. Yet Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not be defaulting. Now to which of the messengers has He declared at any time, "Sit at My right, till I should be placing Thine enemies for a footstool for Thy feet"? (:10-13).

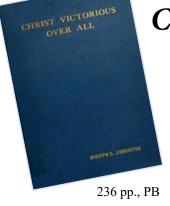
The nearest antecedent of the personal pronoun "He" in :13 is the "Lord" referred to previously in :10-12. Thus, the pronoun "He" should be understood as re-

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by — Joseph Sturge Johnston (1843-1933)

Johnston was an associate of A.E. Knoch and George Rogers.

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ferring back to the person referred to in these verses as "Lord" and "Thou." Since the "He" of :13 is the Father (at Whose right hand Christ is sitting), we can understand the same divine person to be in view in

:10-12.

This is further evidenced from Hebrews 2:6-8, where the writer quotes from another Psalm:

Yet somewhere someone certifies, saying, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, or a son of mankind, that Thou art visiting him? Thou makest him some bit inferior to messengers, with glory and honor Thou wreathest him, and dost place him over the works of Thy hands. All dost Thou subject underneath his feet."

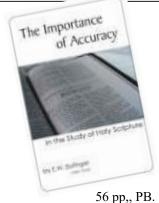
Notice the expression "*The works of Thy hands*" in :7. This same expression was used in the author's quotation of Psalm 102:25 ("And the heavens are the works of Thy hands"). Even apart from what has already been said, it would be reasonable to believe that the person being referred to with the possessive pronoun "Thy" in Hebrews 2:7 is identical with the person being referred to as "Thy" in Hebrews 1:10-12. Since the expression "the works of Thy hands" in Hebrews 2:6-8 refers to the works of God, the Father, consistency would demand that the same expression used in Hebrews 1:10 ("The works of Thy hands") also refers to the works of God, the Father. It is God's "hands" that are in view in both verses, and it is difficult to believe that any Jewish reader of this letter would've thought that Jesus, the Son of God, was being referred to here.

Having provided evidence that the person being addressed in Psalm 102:25-27 (and in the quotation of this Psalm in Hebrews 1:10-12) is none other than God (*i.e.*, Yahweh, the Father), let's return to the question asked earlier: What purpose does Psalm 102:25-28 serve in the writer's argument? Psalm 102:25-28 is a passage that emphasizes God's transcendent relationship to, and absolute authority over, the "works of [His] hands" (*i.e.*, the Heavens and the Earth). Let's look at it again:

And, Thou, originally, Lord, dost found the Earth, and the Heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish, yet Thou art continuing, and all, as a cloak, shall be aged, and, as if clothing, wilt Thou be rolling them up. As a cloak also shall they change. Yet Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not be defaulting.

Notice that we're told that, not only is God the One Who created the Heavens and the Earth, but He's the One Who will be "rolling them up" and changing them at some future time. In other words, the idea being conveyed here (perhaps more so in this passage than in any other passage of Scripture) is that God is absolutely sovereign over the universe. He created the Heavens and the Earth, and when He decides it's time, He will replace the Heavens and the Earth.

Keeping this point in mind, let's now consider Psalm 110:1, which is quoted by the writer of Hebrews in :13. In contrast with Psalm 102, Psalm 110 is clearly a Messianic prophecy revealing that God would give



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by — E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

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some person distinct from Himself (i.e., the Messiah) His authority.

Now [or "Yet"] to which of the messengers has He declared at any time, "Sit at My right, till I should be placing Thine enemies for a footstool for Thy feet"?

For Christ to be invited to sit at God's "right" (or "right hand") means for Him to be given that authority which formerly belonged exclusively to God – *i.e.*, all authority in Heaven and on the Earth.

Thus, the pairing of Psalm 102 with Psalm 110 conveys the following idea: The same transcendent relationship to, and absolute authority over, "the works of [God's] hands" that God is described as having in Psalm 102:25-28 has, according to Psalm 110, been given to the Messiah. This, then, is the connection between the writer's use of Psalm 102 and Psalm 110. Together, these verses constitute what is perhaps the most powerful argument that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews makes for Christ's superiority over the messengers. The quotation of Psalm 102:25-28 right before Psalm 110:1 is the author's "one-two punch," so to speak.

To make this point as clear as possible, consider again Hebrews 2:8-8 (which we quoted earlier). Christ is the representative/ideal "Man" and "Son of Mankind" who is destined to fulfill (and has already begun to fulfill) the words of the Psalm quoted in these verses. It is under the feet of the "Man, Christ Jesus" that God will eventually "subject all" (I Corinthians 15:24-28), and it is the "Man, Christ Jesus" Whom God has already

placed over "the works of [His] hands." This took place when, in accord with Psalm 110:1, God gave Christ "all authority in Heaven and on the Earth" and sat Christ at His "right hand." Thus, keeping in mind the fact that Psalm 102:25-28 emphasizes God's transcendent relationship to, and absolute authority over, "the works of His hands," we can conclude that, by quoting these verses just before quoting Psalm 110:1, the writer of Hebrews was simply setting the stage to deliver a final, knock-down argument in defense of the truth that Christ is superior to the messengers of God.

Hebrews 10:5-7

Wherefore, entering into the world, He is saying, "Sacrifice and approach present Thou dost not will, yet a body dost Thou adapt to Me. In ascent approaches and those concerning sin Thou dost not delight." Then said I, "Lo! I am arriving - In the summary of the scroll it is written concerning Me - To do Thy will, O God."

In a Nutshell:

Christ entered into the world (in the sense referred to in :5) when He was dispatched into the world by God, and the sense in which Christ was dispatched into the world by God is found in John 17:18 (where we're told that Christ dispatched His disciples into the world just as He was dispatched into the world by God). In other words, the "entering into the world" by Christ referred to in Hebrews 10:5 took place at the beginning of His public ministry. It is at this time that Christ declared the words quoted above and fulfilled this particular prophecy.

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Expanded Explanation:

Some – but not all – who believe that Christ pre-existed His conception understand this passage as supporting their position. It's believed, when we're told that Christ was "entering into the world," that this involved a pre-human being "incarnated" as a human, and being provided a human body. However, I don't think the language of this passage commits us to a view that essentially involves a pre-existent, celestial spirit-being declaring the words quoted above while being transformed into a human zygote. Instead, everything said here is perfectly consistent with the view that Christ's life began when He was generated in His mother's womb.

First, it should be noted that the words "entering the world" don't necessarily involve being conceived. In John 17:4 and 16 we read that Christ's disciples were "not of the world" in the same sense that Christ is said to have been "not of the world." Then, in :18, Christ declared the following concerning His disciples:

According as Thou dost dispatch Me into the world, I also dispatch them into the world.

In other words, Christ's disciples – who, like Christ, were "not of the world" – were dispatched into the world in the sense in which Christ was dispatched into the world by His Father. Of course, none of this language used by Christ implies or presupposes that Christ's disciples pre-existed their conception.

Thus, in whatever sense we are to understand how Christ dispatched His disciples into the world, it is in this sense that we are to understand how Christ was dispatched into the world by His Father. The former involved Christ's (adult) disciples being dispatched into the world in order to do the public ministry to which they had been called and appointed (and their being dispatched into the world by Christ would've involved their "entering into the world" to begin their ministry). This, then, is how we should understand Christ's being "dispatched into the world" by His Father. In other words, Christ's being "dispatched into the world" (which resulted in His "entering into the world") referred to the time at which He commenced the work on Earth to which His Father appointed Him, and which culminated in His sacrificial death on the cross.

It is, therefore, at the start of Christ's public ministry that He is said to have declared the following words of Psalm 40: "Sacrifice and approach present Thou dost not will, yet a body dost Thou adapt to Me." Christ declared these words in full recognition of the fact that the body which God had "adapted" to Him (i.e., when He was being formed in His mother's womb; cf. Psalm 139:13-15) would eventually be sacrificed in an act of perfect obedience to His Father (Hebrews 10:10).

(to be continued)

About the Author, see part 1, <u>Bible Student's Notebook #707</u>, page 6077.

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Major: Jesus Christ (Pre-Existence of); Trinity



258 pp., PB

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by — James Campbell

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Paul Our Guide - Christ Our Goal

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union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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ABBREVIATION KEY

Scripture Version

CV: Concordant Literal Version

DAR: Darby Translation DT: Dabhar Translation FF: Ferrar Fenton Bible KJV: King James Version **NET:** New English Translation RE: Rotherham's Emphasized Bible

WT: Weymouth Translation *YLT*: Young's Literal Translation

Reference Sources

AA: Analytical Analysis (Welch)

BDB: Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon CB: Companion Bible Notes & Appendixes (Bullinger)

CC: Concordant Commentary (Knoch)

CKC: Concordant Keyword Concordance (Knoch)

CL: A Critical Lexicon and Concordance

(Bullinger)

CWS: Complete Word Study Dictionary (Zodhiates)

FoS: Figures of Speech (Bullinger) SEC: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance TGL: Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon

UR: Unsearchable Riches

VED: Vine's Expository Dictionary YAC: Young's Analytical Concordance

Reference Notations

cf. – compare *e.g.* – for example et al. - and others

etc. – et cetera (and so on) ff. – and the following

i.e., – that is