



You, Lord, in the beginning

Hebrews 1:10-12 and Christology

Date: 3 July 2012

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Foreword

Hebrews 1:10-12 is a remarkable passage of Scripture which is fundamental to the biblical identity of Jesus Christ. In fact it was a catalyst in a paradigm shift in my own answer to the question, “What do you think about the Christ?” (Matthew 22:42). My first serious interaction with this passage was when I was in my late teens and a budding Christadelphian apologist. I had a website entitled, “In Defense of Christadelphian Doctrine” where I presented arguments for Christadelphian theology and against orthodox theology. A particular focus of the website was the pre-existent deity of Christ, a doctrine to which I was zealously opposed. I don’t recall how I first encountered the ‘problem’ of this passage; it may have been on one of the internet discussion forums where I honed my theological debate skills. I do, however, remember feeling puzzled. Many of the classic Trinitarian ‘proof texts’ were easily explained away. However, this one was not so easy to fit into my theological framework, so I consulted a Christadelphian commentary on Hebrews (The Epistle to the Hebrews, by W.H. Boulton), a Christadelphian resource on difficult passages (Wrested Scripture, by R. Abel) as well as fellow Christadelphians personally. Their respective interpretations were radically different, but none of them were satisfactory to me. They seemed forced, and against the grain of the context. They felt wrong in the pit of my stomach. This and other passages caused me to make a more objective inquiry into biblical theology, where for the first time I really allowed the possibility that other frameworks than the Christadelphian one could be correct. Over time and prayerful study, I was led to the conclusion that Scripture teaches the very doctrine I once vigorously contested: that Christ is the divine, pre-existent Son of God.

In this paper I will attempt to discern the true meaning of Hebrews 1:10-12 as originally intended by the inspired writer. I will also interact with all Christadelphian and Biblical Unitarian interpretations of Hebrews 1:10-12 that I know of and explain why I believe them to be flawed. Because Hebrews 1:10-12 played a pivotal role in my own spiritual development, I am hopeful that a thorough discussion of its meaning could prove helpful to others as well.

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1. Surface Reading

It is often useful to begin an exegesis by asking, *what is my first impression?* Or, what seems to be the most natural way of understanding the text at first reading? This approach is highly problematic if it is all we do, but it is useful as a jumping-off point or a working hypothesis that can be confirmed, modified or rejected in light of further investigation. In this case, the text in question reads thus:

“10 And, ‘You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, 12 like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.’” (ESV)

For me, the most natural way to read these words is that the Lord’s power, eternity and immutability are being contrasted with the transience of the creation itself, which is always changing and will be radically transformed in the last days.

2. The Context of Hebrews 1

It is beyond the scope of this work to devote much space to the Book of Hebrews. The debate over its author has little effect on our interpretation. We could broadly describe the book as a letter to a particular group of Christians to encourage them in the face of persecution. The main theme of the work is to position the person of Jesus Christ within the context of Hebrew scripture, history and tradition (which has led most scholars to conclude that the audience were Hebrews as the traditional title implies). The Greek in which this letter was written is polished and sophisticated relative to most other New Testament books, implying that both the writer and his audience were very well acquainted with Greek.

The first chapter of Hebrews is (along with John 1:1-18) among the most detailed Christological statements in the New Testament. It also draws together numerous threads of Old Testament testimony about the person of Christ. For this reason, Hebrews 1:10-12 should be seen as a passage of foundational importance for New Testament Christology. It cannot be marginalized as a ‘difficult passage;’ its testimony ought to contribute to any serious discussion about the person of Christ.

In Hebrews 1 there are several astonishing statements made about Jesus (from a Jewish monotheistic perspective) prior to verses 10-12. He is declared to be God’s Son (1:2, 5, 6, 8). He is said to be both the heir of all things, and the agent by which all things were created (1:2¹; analogous to Alpha and Omega, the first and the last in Isaiah and Revelation). He is said to be the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, who currently sustains the universe (1:3). He is said to have been exalted to God’s right hand and inherited a name and authority far superior to the angels (1:4).

¹ More on this text later.

From 1:5-14, the author elaborates on the Son's superiority to the angels through several comparative statements. His unique Sonship is emphasized. In 1:6 he quotes from the LXX² of Deut. 32:43, a part of the Song of Moses addressed to God, where the angels are commanded to worship Him, and applies it to Christ.³ In 1:7, he quotes one of Scripture's more impressive descriptions of angels: "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire" (Psalm 104:4). This is then contrasted with two far greater descriptions of Christ. In 1:8-9 the Son is explicitly called God, quoting from Psalm 45:6-7, a psalm addressed to the King. Then comes our passage of particular interest, 1:10-12, which is a direct quotation from Psalm 102:25-27.

In 1:13, the final piece of evidence in this particular argument is a quotation of Psalm 110:1, the most oft-quoted OT scripture in the NT, where the Lord invited the Lord⁴ to sit at his right hand until his enemies should be made his footstool. The writer then finishes the section by putting angels in perspective as ministering spirits. The hortative function of this section is to show that if Christ is so much greater than the angels, then the message delivered through him must be much greater than the message delivered through angels (namely the Law of Moses – see 2:1-3).

3. The Context of Psalm 102

Psalm 102 is described in its opening sentence as "The prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD" (Psalm 102:1). The author is a young or middle-aged man who is undergoing a period of intense trial and fears an early death (Psalm 102:23-24). The nature of his affliction is not disclosed, but it keeps him awake at night, takes away his appetite and leaves him feeling alone. He is taunted by enemies and feels that God has lifted him up only to throw him down (which suggests that he occupied some position of influence). He is concerned for the wellbeing of Zion (Jerusalem) and expresses hope that God will ultimately save him and Zion, along with all other destitute people who put their trust in God. A recent Christadelphian author identifies the author with King Hezekiah of Judah. This is plausible but cannot be proven.⁵

² The LXX is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was widely used by first century Jews and Christians. For more discussion on the reliability of the LXX and its influence on the New Testament writers, see pp. 7-8 of my article *Before Abraham was, I am he*, available for download from www.dianoigo.com.

³ Deut. 32:43 reads very differently in the Masoretic Text to the LXX. The LXX reading is vindicated by the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some scholars believe that the writer is actually paraphrasing Psalm 97:7. For a convincing argument that he is instead quoting from Deut. 32:43 LXX, see *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, pp. 930-933). However, even if Psalm 97:7 is the writer's source, he has taken an OT text commanding angels to worship God, and applied it to Jesus.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of this text and its Christological implications, see Michael L. Brown's work *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, Vol. 3, pp. 136-138.

⁵ Perry, Andrew. *Hebrews and Pre-Existence: Creating the Heavens and the Earth*, p. 3. Accessed at <http://www.christadelphian-ejbi.org/extracts/Pre-Existence.pdf>. The biographical details supplied in the psalm do coincide reasonably well with what we know of Hezekiah: he was a faithful man who cried out to the Lord (Ps. 102:1) when he perceived that he was to die young (Ps. 102:23-24). He was also interested in Zion (Ps. 102:13), as we would expect of a King of Judah; and was taunted by enemies (Psalm 102:7). The words of the Psalm bear some similarities to Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 38:9-20. However there is no positive proof that this psalm was written by Hezekiah, or even a king. Hezekiah was surely not the only faithful Israelite in this period to face life-threatening adversity at a young age. The Hezekiah hypothesis is intriguing but cannot be stated factually.

The author's hope in God is based partly in God's benevolent character (Psalm 102:13a, 17), but also in God's eternal kingship (Psalm 102:12) contrasted with the transience of everything else – even the heavens and earth themselves (Psalm 102:26). Nothing is permanent or sure in life except God, so we ought to put all our hopes in him!

The Psalm bears explicit marks of being Messianic. For example, it speaks of an “appointed time” when all the kings of the earth would ultimately fear God's glory (Psalm 102:13-15), which has never yet been fulfilled. The author also writes “for a generation to come...a people yet to be created” (v. 18).

The Messianic nature of the psalm is, of course, confirmed by the writer of Hebrews applying verses 25-27 to the Son. However, there is nothing in the psalm itself to suggest that verses 25-27 are addressed to the Messiah. This is a surprising referent in Hebrews 1:10-12, because in the context of the psalm, it appears that the psalmist is addressing God (“Oh my God...” in v. 24)⁶, namely he whose years are throughout all generations.

4. Form of the Citation from Psalm 102

We now consider the text in detail. We can infer that Hebrews 1:10-12 is a direct quotation of Psalm 102:25 in the LXX (101:26 in LXX numbering⁷) with slight modifications. The Greek of Psalm 101:26a LXX reads, “*kat' archas su, kurie, ten gen ethemeliosas...*” (In the beginning you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth...). The Greek of Hebrews 1:10a reads, “*kai su kat' archas kurie ten gen ethemeliosas...*” (And you, in the beginning, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth...) These two Greek clauses are identical except for word order and the additional word ‘and’ at the beginning of Hebrews 1:10. Unlike English, word order in *koine* Greek does not affect meaning but is purely stylistic and for emphasis.⁸ Furthermore, the New Testament writers did not, as a rule, quote from the Old Testament verbatim. They often changed word order, words or even paraphrased the text themselves to suit their purposes. Thus the change in word order is by no means surprising here.

In fact, Hebrews 1:10-12 follows the LXX, and not the Hebrew Masoretic Text, in the two other places where these two differ in the quoted part of the Psalm. In Psalm 102:26 MT (102:25 English), “work” is singular, whereas in Psalm 101:26 LXX and Hebrews 1:10, it is plural (“works”). In Psalm 101:27 LXX there is an added “and” before “as a cloak you will change them” which is echoed in Hebrews 1:11 but does not appear in the MT.

Furthermore, there are stylistic explanations for the writer's addition of the word ‘And’ as well as the modification of the word order. The word ‘And’ is added as a connector to associate this quotation with the previous one in verses 8-9. According to Guthrie, the word order of Hebrews 1:10a alters the LXX word order to “accomplish a hookword effect with the ending of the previous quotation (*sou* at the end of 1:9), thus making a smooth transition between the

⁶ In the LXX (Septuagint), there is no “Oh my God” in v. 24. The psalmist addresses his words to “O Lord” (*kyrios*) at the beginning of v. 25. This, as we shall see, is the version from which the writer of Hebrews quotes.

⁷ Versification and chaptering conventions differ by one between the LXX and MT.

⁸ In this case, even in English the meaning remains unchanged.

quotations. We might also add that it also heightens the sense of proclamation accomplished by the quotation as the primary referent, the Son, constitutes the first utterance of the passage.”⁹

We thus conclude that Hebrews 1:10-12 is a quotation from the LXX with minor stylistic modifications.¹⁰ The implications of this is that the writer of Hebrews is not introducing a composite quotation (and by extension, the entire Psalm) into his argument. He is borrowing a specific passage within the psalm for a specific purpose. We should still, to be sure, consider the context of Psalm 102 within our exegesis. However, it does not automatically follow that the entire psalm forms part of the writer’s argument in Hebrews 1.

5. The Text of Hebrews 1:10-12

There is no significant variation in the text of Hebrews 1:10-12 in manuscript evidence. In spite of huge differences on what the text means, all are pretty well agreed on what it says. Let us go clause-by-clause through the text to identify where there are differences on referential meaning.

5.1. “And you, Lord”

As stated above, the word ‘And’ establishes the parallel between this quotation and the quotation from Psalm 45 in verses 8-9. Because the chapter is citing scriptures that contrast the Son’s exalted status with that of the angels, it is plain that it is the Son who is being addressed here as, “You, Lord.” This creates a paradox, however, because in Psalm 102 these words are addressed to God. This can only be satisfactorily resolved by identifying the Son with God.

5.2. “In the beginning”

In Hebrews 1:10, ‘In the beginning’ is *kat’ archas*. The root Greek word, *arche*, can mean beginning or origin, leader, active cause, the extremity of a thing, or principality. Since Psalm 102:25 in Hebrew has a more general word meaning before, it is clear that the temporal meaning is to be preferred here. It refers to a beginning, to be sure. What beginning it refers to will depend on what the heavens and earth are. There are instances of *arche* referring to the beginning of the preaching of the good news, including within our context in Hebrews (John 15:27; Hebrews 2:3¹¹). There are instances where it refers to the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of a new era (Colossians 1:18). There are also examples where *arche* refers to the time of the Genesis creation (Matthew 19:4; 2 Peter 3:4). The phrase ‘in the beginning’ is flexible enough to refer to different beginnings within the New Testament context. A word study of

⁹ Guthrie, George H. Hebrews, in *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, p. 941. He also points out that there are several word order variations in the LXX manuscripts, with almost every possible combination of the first seven words. Perry states that “we cannot be certain that the LXX has not been edited to bring it into line with the NT,” but it is also possible that the NT quotation reflects the original LXX word order. Both are arguments from silence.

¹⁰ Guthrie (Ibid.) mentions three other differences between the LXX and the NT. (1) The writer of Hebrews changes the tense of ‘you will remain’ to be present (‘you remain’). (2) The writer changes the verb *allaso* (‘change’) to *helixeis* (‘roll up’), a more vivid and specific term, perhaps adopted under the influence of Isaiah 34:4 LXX. (3) The writer adds the phrase *hos himation* (‘as a garment’) in 1:12, repeating it from the previous verse whereas in the LXX it does not repeat, apparently to balance the rhythm of the clothing analogy throughout the quotation.

¹¹ However, the grammatical construction of *arche* in Hebrews 2:3 (*archen*) is quite different from Hebrews 1:10 (*kat’ archas*).

arche is not going to give us the correct meaning. The meaning will depend on our interpretation of the rest of the passage.

5.3. “Laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands”

The meaning of heavens and earth here is the most controversial aspect of the passage (at least among unitarians). This issue will yet be examined in more detail. Suffice it here to say that, whatever these heavens and earth are, the passage is unmistakably saying that the Son was involved in creating them. Furthermore, putting “In the beginning” together with these words, there is an obvious connection with Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Whether this relationship is direct (referring to the Genesis creation) or typological (referring to a new creation), the theological importance of the Son’s Creatorship cannot be discounted.

Within the context of Second Temple Judaism, Creatorship was one of the unique and definitive attributes of the God of Israel, and to apply this attribute to anyone else was a breach of monotheism, and therefore blasphemy. As Richard Bauckham explains, “For Jewish monotheistic faith what was most important was who God is, rather than what divinity is. The key features of the unique identity of God are these: (1) God is the sole Creator of all things (all others are created by God)...”¹² Thus even if we are able to put a figurative meaning on “heavens and earth” to remove the Son from the Genesis creation, we still have to explain how fiercely monotheistic Jews could tolerate the ascription of the uniquely divine function of creating to a creature.¹³

5.4. “They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed.”

The referent for ‘they’ at the beginning of this clause is the heavens and earth mentioned in the previous verse. This is just basic linguistics: a pronoun refers to a noun that is understood or has already been mentioned. The only plural noun mentioned so far in the quotation is (collectively) the heavens and the earth. This inference can also be supported by other passages which refer to the heavens and earth wearing out like a garment, such as Isaiah 51:6-8. We are stating the obvious only because, as we shall see, one interpretation of Hebrews 1:10-12 denies that ‘they’ in Hebrews 1:11 refers to the heavens and earth of v. 10.

One of the controversial issues around this passage is that, if we understand ‘heavens and earth’ to be the literal heavens and earth, it is saying they will perish. This is, however, contradicted by passages which declare that the earth will exist forever (Numbers 14:21; Psalm 104:5; Ecclesiastes 1:4; Isaiah 45:18). This can be reconciled, however, when we see that the word ‘perish’ is qualified later in the verse by saying that the heavens and earth will wear out like a

¹² Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 233.

¹³ The creative role ascribed to the Son here obviously goes far above any mere observing role in creation that may have been played by angels (see Job 38:7), otherwise there would be no great contrast made between the Son and the angels.

garment, be rolled up like a robe and be *changed*. The heavens and earth will not perish in the sense of ceasing to exist, but they will go through a violent and radical transformation. As proof of this, the same word for perish (*apollymi*) is used in 2 Peter 3:5-6 which says that “the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.” Of course the Genesis Flood did not completely obliterate the heavens and earth but violently transformed them. Peter goes on to write that “By the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment” (2 Peter 3:7). Thus the fiery destruction described in 2 Peter 3:10 (and the perishing in Hebrews 1:10) does not describe the end of the heavens and earth; they will be thoroughly shaken and rearranged into the new heavens and new earth.

5.5. “But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

This statement to the Son is echoed later in the Book of Hebrews in at least two important places. In Hebrews 13:8 we read, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” The ‘yesterday’ reflects his role in creation expressed in Hebrews 1:2 and 1:10. Hebrews 1:2 could either mean that God created the world through the Son, or set up the ages through the Son. Most commentators prefer the former because ‘world’ is the sense of the words *aionas* in its other usage in this book (Hebrews 11:3). Either way, the Greek word *dia* with a genitive case following requires direct agency, so the Son had to be present either in the beginning of the world or at the beginning of time.¹⁴

In Hebrews 7:3 we read that Melchizedek was “without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.” This text draws a typological comparison between Melchizedek, a king-priest mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20, and the Son of God. The text (following Psalm 110:4) claims that the priesthood of Melchizedek is eternal – past, present and future. Because of this, Melchizedek resembles the Son of God. Note the oddity of saying that Melchizedek, a person from the Book of Genesis, resembles the Son of God, rather than the other way around. Melchizedek could only resemble the Son of God if the Son existed before Melchizedek.

The writer of Hebrews makes a subtle argument. The reason why Melchizedek’s priesthood is eternal, he says, is because Melchizedek had no parents, no pedigree, no beginning or end of life. One would assume that Melchizedek, who seems to have been a human being, did have all of these things. But the writer of Hebrews draws the typology from the fact that (unlike most important figures in Genesis) his origin, parents, birth and death *are not mentioned in Scripture*. How does this resemble Jesus of Nazareth, whose pedigree is thoroughly recorded in Matthew 1 and Luke 1, whose mother was Mary, whose birth is recorded and who died (albeit to rise again)? The comparison only makes sense if we understand the writer to be referring, not to the human being Jesus of Nazareth, but to the eternal Son of God who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁵

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of Heb. 1:2c, see pp. 7-10 of my article *Dia: a small word with big implications*, available for download from <http://www.dianoigo.com/articles/Dia.pdf>.

¹⁵ Jerome H. Neyrey, in his book *Render to God*, argues convincingly that in Hebrews 7:3, the writer is drawing on the language which the ancients used to describe true deities (pp. 228-242).

Thus, putting these passages together, the writer of Hebrews is making the following assertions about the Son of God:

Text	Past existence	Present existence	Future existence
Heb. 1:2-3	“Through whom he also created the world”	“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power”	“Whom he appointed heir of all things”
Heb. 1:10-12	“You, Lord, in the beginning...”	“You remain...you are the same”	“Your years will have no end”
Heb. 7:3	“Without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days...”	“...continues...”	“Nor end of life...continues a priest forever”
Heb. 13:8	“Jesus Christ the same yesterday...”	“...and today...”	“...and forever.”

To summarize our first walkthrough of this passage, we can say that understood within the rest of Hebrews and other relevant Scriptures, and against the background of Second Temple Judaism, this passage unquestionably contains some lofty assertions about the Son of God. He is addressed in terms which the Psalmist originally addressed to God, and to him is ascribed the role of creatorship (which within Judaism was reserved only for God). He is said to have an eternal, unchanging existence in the past, present and future, contrasted with the heavens and earth, which came into existence at a point in time and are destined to be rolled up in the future.

However, in order to develop a full exegesis of Hebrews 1:10-12, we will need to examine in detail the identity of the heavens and earth in verse 10.

6. The Meaning of the Heavens and Earth

The different interpretations of Hebrews 1:10-12 largely hinge on differing understandings of what the heavens and earth refer to in this text. If this is the key to correctly interpreting the passage, we should give it special attention.

6.1. Semantic Range of the Greek words for heavens and earth in Hebrews 1:10

By establishing the semantic range of the Greek words from which ‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ are translated, we can establish some boundaries within which any plausible meaning of heavens and earth must fall. The words heavens and earth come from the Greek words *ouranos* (in plural form here, *ouranoi*) and *ge* respectively. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon gives the following list of definitions for *ouranos*:

- (1) The vaulted expanse of the sky with all things visible in it
 - a. The universe, the world

- b. The aerial heavens or sky, the region where the clouds and tempests gather, and where thunder and lightning are produced
 - c. The sidereal or starry heavens
- (2) The region above the sidereal heavens, the seat of order of things eternal and consummately perfect where God dwells and other heavenly beings

BDAG, the most comprehensive lexicon of ancient Greek ever published, gives the following list of definitions for ouranos:

- (1) The portion or portions of the universe generally distinguished from planet earth (more often singular)
 - a. Mentioned with the earth (forming a unity with it or contrasted with it)
 - b. As firmament or sky over the earth
 - c. As starry heaven
 - d. As place of atmosphere
 - e. The concept of more than one heaven (Semitic idea)
- (2) Transcendent abode (more often plural¹⁶)
 - a. As the dwelling-place (or throne) of God
 - b. Christ is from heaven, of a heavenly nature
 - c. As the abode of angels
 - d. Christians who have died also dwell in heaven¹⁷
 - e. The concept of a heaven in which God, attendant spirits of God, and the righteous dead abide
- (3) An indirect reference to God

Thayer's Lexicon gives the following list of definitions for *ge*:

- (1) Arable land
- (2) The ground, the earth as a standing place
- (3) The main land as opposed to the sea or water
- (4) The earth as a whole
 - a. The earth as opposed to the heavens
 - b. The inhabited earth, the abode of men and animals
- (5) A country, land enclosed within fixed boundaries, a tract of land, territory, region

BDAG gives the following list of definitions for *ge*:

- (1) Surface of the earth as the habitation of humanity
- (2) The inhabitants of the earth

¹⁶ Although BDAG notes that the transcendent meaning is more often plural, he ascribes to *ouranoi* in Heb. 1:10 definition 1e. In fact, the trend observed in BDAG is practically reversed in Hebrews.

¹⁷ We may dispute BDAG's definitions 2d and 2e. An alternative sub-definition would be needed for the passages BDAG cites to support this (such as Matt. 5:12; Luke 10:20; Phil. 3:19; Col. 1:5; Rev. 18:20). One alternative could be that 'heaven' here emphasizes the fact that the reward is currently stored there with God, and will ultimately arrive on earth when heaven and earth are united (Rev. 21:2-3). Heaven takes on definition 2a and no other sub-definition need be added; thus this issue is of little consequence for the interpretation of Hebrews 1:10-12.

- (3) Portions or regions of the earth
- (4) Dry land as opposed to sea
- (5) Earth-like surface that forms the bottom of a body of water
- (6) Earth with reference to limited areas and the material that forms its surface

We could summarize as follows: in Biblical Greek, *ouranos* denotes either the physical universe distinct from earth, or the transcendent realm (the abode of God, angels and spirits) as distinct from the physical universe. By metonymy it can also refer to God as the chief inhabitant of heaven.¹⁸ *Ge* denotes either the surface of the earth or (by metonymy) its inhabitants; it can also take on more limited meanings for regions, etc. BDAG specifically notes that when composing a unity, *ouranos* and *ge* together describe “the totality of creation.”

It is noteworthy that no definition appears in either lexicon corresponding to what we understand by the terms ‘new heavens and new earth.’ This is because the words heavens and earth themselves do not take on a different meaning in this case; it is the adjective new which modifies the meaning, and even then we are not talking about *another* heavens and earth, but the already existing heavens and earth, *renewed and perfected*.¹⁹

6.2. Semantic Range of the Hebrew words for heavens and earth in Psalm 102:25

While bearing in mind that the writer of Hebrews quoted from the Greek Old Testament (LXX), the original form of Psalm 102 was of course in Hebrew, so it is worth looking at the semantic range of the Hebrew words for heavens and earth (*shamayim* and *erets* respectively) in Psalm 102:25.

Shamayim, from Hebrew Old Testament Lexicon²⁰:

1. heaven, heavens, sky
 - a. visible heavens, sky
 - i. as abode of the stars
 - ii. as the visible universe, the sky, atmosphere, etc
 - b. Heaven (as the abode of God)

Erets, from Hebrew Old Testament Lexicon:

1. land, earth
 - a. earth
 - i. whole earth (as opposed to a part)
 - ii. earth (as opposed to heaven)
 - iii. earth (inhabitants)

¹⁸ This use probably reflects the rabbinical practice of avoiding pronouncing God’s name to avoid the possibility of taking it in vain.

¹⁹ This point is in full agreement with Christadelphian theology, which holds dearly to the principle that the Genesis heavens and earth will never be obliterated; that they were not created in vain (Isa. 45:18), but will be filled with God’s glory (Num. 14:21).

²⁰ I used the lexicon provided in the StudyLight.org online resource.

- b. land
 - i. country, territory
 - ii. district, region
 - iii. tribal territory
 - iv. piece of ground
 - v. land of Canaan, Israel
 - vi. inhabitants of land
 - vii. Sheol, land without return, (under) world
 - viii. city (-state)
- c. ground, surface of the earth
 - i. ground
 - ii. soil
- d. (in phrases)
 - i. people of the land
 - ii. space or distance of country (in measurements of distance)
 - iii. level or plain country
 - iv. land of the living
 - v. end(s) of the earth
- e. (almost wholly late in usage)
 - i. lands, countries 1e
- f. often in contrast to Canaan

We do not see anything materially different between the Hebrew lexical definitions of *shamayim* and *erets* and the Greek lexical definitions of *ouranos* and *ge*, so our conclusions are the same. We have not arrived at the meaning of heavens and earth in Psalm 102:25 or Hebrews 1:10, but we have limited the possibilities. No meaning outside of the semantic range of these Hebrew and Greek words is permissible, unless we audaciously claim to be superior lexicographers and invent a special new definition specifically for this case.

6.3. Other Usage of *ouranos* and *ge* by the writer of Hebrews

By looking at other occurrences of the words *ouranos* and *ge* within the Book of Hebrews, we can try to observe patterns in the writer's use of these words, both thematically (within the topical context of the book) and stylistically (although this is difficult with such a limited amount of material).²¹

The word *ouranos* appears nine times in Hebrews besides 1:10. These are highlighted in the table below:

Text	Key phrases	Lexical Meaning
4:14	"We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens"	Could be physical universe or transcendent realm
7:26	"Such a high priest...separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens"	Could be physical universe or transcendent realm

²¹ We are operating on the principle that Hebrews was not written by Paul and is thus the only available work by its author.

8:1	“Such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven...now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all”	Transcendent realm
9:24	“Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered...into heaven itself”	Transcendent realm
11:12	“descendants as many as the stars of heaven”	Physical universe
12:22-23	“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,”	Transcendent realm
12:25-26	“For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.””	Transcendent realm (v. 25) and physical universe (v. 26) The juxtaposition of the two primary meanings of ouranos shows that there is continuity between them. ²²

Ge also occurs nine times in Hebrews outside of 1:10. These occurrences are described in the table below:

Text	Key Phrases	Lexical Meaning
6:7	“For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop”	Arable land
8:4	“Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all”	Surface of the physical earth
8:9	“I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt”	Portions or regions of the earth
11:9	“By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land”	Portions or regions of the earth
11:13	“acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth”	Surface of the physical earth
11:29	“By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land”	Dry land as opposed to sea
12:25-26	“For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’”	Surface of the physical earth (probably inclusive of the inhabitants of the earth, especially in the final quotation)

²² This is also seen, for instance, in the ascension of Christ to heaven. He rose into the clouds (Acts 1:9-11), but ended his journey in the transcendent realm.

From a review of the above tables, we can say that the writer of Hebrews uses the words *ouranos* and *ge* in various senses, but all of them fall comfortably within the semantic range set out in our lexical sources. We also note that the passage most similar to Hebrews 1:10-12 in its usage is Hebrews 12:23-26. This is the only other passage in which both *ouranos* and *ge* appear. Furthermore, both texts prophesy impending trauma for the heavens and earth. Hebrews 12:23-26 is therefore a very important part of the context of Hebrews 1:10-12, and a close study of the one is likely to shed much light on the other.²³

True to his method, in Hebrews 12:23-26 the writer draws on the Old Testament – not once but twice. In full context, the thought from Hebrews 12:22-29 runs as follows:

“22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken--that is, things that have been made--in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.”

Verse 22 opens with a contrast between Moses and the Israelites' encounter with Mount Sinai (Exodus 19) and believers in Christ's encounter with Mount Zion, 'the heavenly Jerusalem.' The vivid description of the setting identifies it as the abode of spirit beings including God and angels, so there is little doubt that a literal meaning of heaven is in view, even if the believers' arrival there is not literal ('enrolled' in heaven suggests something other than literal presence there). In verse 25-26a there is another allusion to the Mount Sinai encounter, in which God's voice shook the literal earth (Exodus 19:18-19).

This warning on earth is contrasted with the present warning "from heaven" (i.e. God's abode). The substance of this warning from heaven is quoted from Haggai 2:6, which reads: "For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land." The writer of Hebrews focuses on the 'heavens' part to demonstrate that this latter shaking will be far greater in proportion to the earthquake that occurred at Sinai. The heavens and earth in Haggai 2 are literal as seen from the further qualification of sea and dry land. That human institutions such as 'the nations' are included in this universal shaking is made explicit in Haggai 2:7. In Hebrews 12 there is a contrast between the plural heavens, which describe the physical universe, and heaven (singular), the abode of

²³ It is to their detriment that most unitarian exegeses of Hebrews 1:10-12 (including Andrew Perry's) make no mention of Hebrews 12:23-26.

God. So here we find that God warns from heaven of his intention to shake the heavens. Both are literal uses of the word, and number is used to distinguish them.

In verses 27-29, we learn that the shaking (although described in terms of ‘consuming fire’) will not result in the destruction of the created world, but rather in a permanent realignment. This agrees perfectly with our discussion of the meaning of Hebrews 1:11 (and 2 Peter 3:10), where we pointed out that the language of perishing and burning up did not indicate the end of the heavens and earth but rather their transformation (through great violence) into the new heavens and new earth. Out with the old, in with the new.

We have further confirmation that ‘heavens and earth’ in Hebrews 1:10-12 are literal, and that this interpretation agrees with the writer’s other testimony concerning the final judgments on heavens and earth.

6.4. Other Usage of *shamayim* and *erets* by the writer of Psalm 102

We will avoid an exhaustive survey of the use of *shamayim* and *erets* in the psalms. This is partly due to space considerations (*shamayim* occurs 70 times in Psalms and *erets* 188 times), and partly because Psalm 102 cannot be assumed to have the same author as other psalms. *Shamayim* occurs one other time in Psalm 102 outside of v. 25, and *erets* occurs two other times, as described in the following table:

Text	Key phrases	Lexical meaning
102:15	“Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.”	Whole earth
102:19	“that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven ²⁴ the LORD looked at the earth,”	Abode of God (<i>shamayim</i>) Whole earth, inclusive of inhabitants (<i>erets</i>)

Once again, we find that in the rest of this psalm, heaven and earth take on meanings from within the semantic range determined by our lexical sources. A review of usage in other psalms reveals that both the ‘physical universe’ (e.g. Psalm 8:3) and ‘abode of God’ (e.g. Psalm 2:4) meanings are well attested. A review of the use of *erets* in other psalms shows that the ‘whole earth’ (e.g. Psalm 2:8), ‘earth as opposed to heaven’ (e.g. Psalm 2:10), ‘inhabitants of the earth’ (e.g. Psalm 33:8), ‘land’ (e.g. Psalm 44:3) and ‘ground’ (e.g. Psalm 7:5) are all well attested.

We could sum up our investigation into the meaning of heavens and earth so far by saying that we have not hit upon any surprises. Both lexically and contextually, heavens and earth take on the ordinary meanings that most people associate with them.

6.5. Examining texts similar to Hebrews 1:10

Having exhausted all possible angles of the word study approach, we move on to the clause level. What parallels are there in Scripture for Hebrews 1:10, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the

²⁴ Note that *shamayim* is plural here, as in v. 25.

foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (besides the source of the quotation in Psalm 102:25)?

The most obvious parallel that comes to mind is the very first sentence of the Bible: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). This passage is unquestionably literal given the description that follows, and there is unquestionably a connection between this and later Old Testament texts describing God’s creative work (including Psalm 102:25). What is debatable is whether the relationship between these texts and Genesis 1:1 is a direct, literal one or a typological, figurative one.

There are a number of passages in the Old Testament which use very similar language to Heb. 1:10/Psalm 102:25, down to the imagery of foundations and hands at work. The following table lays out some of the closest parallels:

Reference	Text
Job 38:4-7	“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”
Psalm 8:3-4	“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”
Prov. 8:22-31	“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth...before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep...when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.”
Isa. 40:12-22	“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?...Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;”
Isa. 45:8-18	“Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the LORD have created it...I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host...For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other.”
Isa. 48:12-13	“12 Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last. 13 My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together.”

Isa. 51:13-16	"I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the LORD, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth...I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-- the LORD of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in your mouth and covered you in the shadow of my hand, establishing the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, 'You are my people.'"
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These seven Old Testament passages closely parallel Psalm 102:25 in describing God's creation of the heavens and the earth with building and handiwork imagery. The Job, Psalms and Proverbs passages are interesting in that they come from the same broad genre of Scripture as Psalm 102 – the poetical books. We find a lot of colourful imagery in these books, and the passages above are no exception. Nevertheless, all three are unmistakably referring to God's work in the Genesis creation. In Job 38, the question, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" points to the beginning of time, long before Job existed. In Psalm 8, humanity is contrasted with the vastness of the physical universe. In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified and speaks as a participant in God's creative acts of old.²⁵ The elaboration on the earth as including fields and dust and as the inhabited world makes it obvious that the literal Genesis creation is the topic at hand.

The other four passages all occur within a few chapters in the book of Isaiah. Beginning in Isaiah 40, God offers words of comfort to his people Israel concerning their trials at the hands of enemies. God's message in this portion of the book is well summarized by the words, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable" (Isaiah 40:28). God is calling Israel's attention to his intention and power to save them. For this reason, he repeatedly reminds his people that he is eternal, and created the universe and everything in it, including mankind.

These reminders use language very similar to that found in Psalm 102:25-27, suggesting that the thrust of meaning is the same. It is thus very important to the interpretation of Psalm 102:25-27 to note that the descriptions of the heavens and earth in this part of Isaiah are unmistakably literal. The earth in Isaiah 40 is described as being round, and containing mountains and hills. Rulers and nations are mentioned in the context, but these are not synonymous with the heavens and the earth; rather they are a tiny portion of the universe. "All the nations are as nothing before him" (Isaiah 40:17), the Lord declares, reflecting the words of Psalm 8. In Isaiah 45:12, 18, the earth is very plainly the habitation of mankind, and not mankind itself or anything else. In Isaiah 48:13, creation is described again in terms almost identical to Psalm 102:25.²⁶ There is one final reminder of God's creatorship in Isaiah 51:13-16, where the hortative message is, if the Creator of the universe is on your side, why fear human enemies?

²⁵ This is a foundational text for Wisdom Christology, which holds the personification of wisdom in the Old Testament to be a framework within which New Testament writers could understand Christ to belong to the divine identity and yet maintain a distinction from God.

²⁶ Within the context of this verse is Isaiah 48:16, which has very interesting Messianic undertones.

In context, the overarching theme of all of these passages (with the exception of Proverbs 8) is to draw a sharp distinction between the eternal God who created the heavens and earth, and the creation itself (inclusive of mankind), which is in subjection to him. Therefore, people ought to be humble (Job 38; Psalm 8) and take comfort, not fearing calamity or any human enemies (Psalm 102; Isaiah 40-51). Since God’s argument in every case depends on the ‘heavens and earth’ under discussion being the literal universe created in the beginning of Genesis 1, we are furnished with further evidence for understanding Psalm 102:25 (and consequently Hebrews 1:10) to be referring to the Genesis creation.

6.6. Examining texts similar to Hebrews 1:11-12

We have already discussed two NT texts with similar content to verses 11-12, namely 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Hebrews 12:25-29 (as well as a cited OT text, Haggai 2:6). However, this discussion only scratches the surface of biblical testimony concerning what is variously described as the changing, shaking, wearing out, rolling up, perishing and renewal of the present heavens and earth.

Reference	Text
Isaiah 13:9-13	“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.”
Isaiah 34:1-4	“Draw near, O nations, to hear, and give attention, O peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that fills it; the world, and all that comes from it. For the LORD is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their host; he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter. Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.”
Isaiah 51:6	“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.”
Isaiah 65:17-18	“17 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.”
Hebrews 12:25-29	Discussed earlier
2 Peter 3:10-13	Discussed earlier

Just as Isaiah was at the forefront of God's declarations concerning his creation of heavens and earth in the past, so this prophet is at the forefront of God's declarations concerning the eschatological judgments on the heavens and earth. Isaiah 13:9-13 describes what will happen in the day of the Lord: he will make the land a desolation and destroy sinners from within it. That is, the judgment is upon the physical earth inclusive of its inhabitants. The language of shaking is very similar to that in Hebrews 12:23-29.

This text further describes the darkening of the sun, moon and stars, and Isaiah 34:1-4 describes the stars as falling from heaven like leaves falling from a fig tree (both of which are echoed by Jesus in the Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24 and parallels). Some might object that these statements cannot possibly have a literal interpretation. However, this skepticism is built on false expectations about what a literal interpretation requires. The Bible is not a science textbook; thus these are not scientific descriptions of cosmic events. They are poetic descriptions of literal cosmic events, much like creation can be described as laying foundations or stretching out curtains, or like Noah's Flood could be described in terms of windows opening and fountains breaking. One could speculate about possible events that could be described in these terms. A massive volcanic eruption (or nuclear explosion) would fill the atmosphere with dust, blocking light from the sun, moon and stars. Incoming cosmic projectiles (meteors, comets, asteroids, etc.) or falling volcanic ash could all plausibly be described like falling stars.

'The earth' is frequently addressed by God as metonymy for its inhabitants in the prophets (Isaiah 1:2; 49:13; Jeremiah 6:19; 22:29; Micah 1:2). This meaning is within the semantic range of *erets*, so there is nothing surprising about its usage in Isaiah 34:1.

Isaiah 51:6 closely reflects the language of Psalm 102:26/Hebrews 1:11: the earth will wear out like a garment, and the heavens shall vanish or perish. This is clearly talking about the physical earth as distinct from its inhabitants, since the inhabitants are mentioned separately: "and they who dwell in it shall die in like manner."

Isaiah 65:17-18 is the source of the famous phrase 'new heavens and new earth' as well as, by extension, new Jerusalem. This language is cited in 2 Peter 3:13. The words 'heavens' and 'earth' themselves do not take on any meaning outside of their semantic range here. The new heavens and new earth are the old heavens and earth, but changed so radically that the former no longer come to mind. As mentioned earlier, this is borne out by 2 Peter 3:5-7, which contrasts "the world that then existed" (at the time of the Flood) with "the heavens and earth that now exist" as if they are completely different entities. It is noteworthy that within Isaiah, the new heavens and new earth are said to be permanent in contrast with the old which have passed away: "The new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD" (Isaiah 66:22). The Hebrew word translated remain here (*amad*) is the same Hebrew word used in Psalm 102:26 ("They shall perish, but you will remain").

7. Summing up the exegesis

We could summarize the study by saying that we have come full circle. We started with a simple, straightforward, natural reading of the text – the most obvious meaning that occurred to us. After a thorough, meticulous study of the key words, the text, the immediate context and the biblical context, we have arrived back at the same conclusion: Hebrews 1:10-12 teaches that the Son was involved in the Genesis creation of the heavens and earth. These heavens and earth will pass away, but the Son will not; he is an eternal being.

The author of Hebrews is laying the groundwork for a dichotomy that he expands on throughout the letter: the difference between the transient, temporary Law of Moses, and the transcendent, eternal new covenant. The Law of Moses was delivered by angels and played a significant role in the history of the world. But it belongs to the present heavens and earth, whose eternal Creator will roll them up. Therefore, the way to eternal life (in the new heavens and new earth) is not through the Law, but through the Son.

While the Christological implications are a means to an end within the context of Hebrews 1-2, they still offer us unmistakable biblical testimony to the pre-existent deity of the Son.

8. Alternative Interpretations Examined

It may seem redundant to have gone through all this study only to arrive basically back at the interpretation that first occurred to us. However, the study has not been in vain, since we can now confidently defend this interpretation against alternative views. None of these other views can claim support from key words, the text, the immediate or wider context. Rather, they have been contrived by Bible students unable to accept the Christological implications of Hebrews 1:10-12.²⁷ Before refuting these incorrect interpretations, let us review the positive case for our interpretation (which happens to be the orthodox one):

- A. It is the most natural surface reading of the text; the first interpretation that comes to mind.²⁸
- B. It agrees with the textual background of ‘And you, Lord’ which strongly implies that the Son is being addressed here.
- C. It follows a normal lexical meaning of the Greek words translated ‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ in Hebrews 1:10 and the Hebrew words translated ‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ in Psalm 102:25.
- D. Other uses of these words in Hebrews 1 and Psalm 102 follow the normal semantic range; there are no surprising meanings.
- E. There is a well-established biblical precedent for this interpretation in other Old Testament passages which use very similar language.

The teaching about the heavens and earth conveyed under this interpretation agrees with the testimony of the whole of Scripture.

²⁷ This is not to say that those holding alternative viewpoints are purposely twisting Scripture. Rather, they feel justified in taking liberties with the text because they view the doctrine of the pre-existent deity of Christ as *a priori* inadmissible. In their way of thinking, any interpretation – however implausible – is to be preferred to an interpretation that would imply this doctrine.

²⁸ This is not positive proof, but a fair rule of interpretation is ‘literal until proven figurative.’

8.1. The Son-addresses-Father Interpretation

Some claim that the words are spoken by the Son to the Father as part of a dialogue. Thus in Psalm 102:23-27, the Psalmist (typifying the Messiah about to be crucified) pleads with God:

“He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days. "O my God," I say, "take me not away in the midst of my days-- you whose years endure throughout all generations!" Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you.”

When we consider only Psalm 102, this appears to be a very reasonable interpretation. It does appear that a human is addressing God here, rather than the other way around. However, this interpretation is untenable in light of how the passage is quoted and used in Hebrews 1. The opening word “And” in Hebrews 1:10, combined with the speaker using the second person, puts the quotation in parallel with the one in Hebrews 1:8-9, which opens with, “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God...’” That the addressee has not changed is further corroborated by the fact that there is yet another quotation about the Son in Hebrews 1:13.

The context of Hebrews 1:4-14 is to establish the Son’s superiority over the angels. All of the quoted passages either introduce testimony about the angels or the Son. It would be incongruous to have a quotation in the midst of this argument where the Son addresses the Father. A statement about the Father’s creative role and eternal existence would add nothing to the argument.

The Son-addresses-Father Interpretation fails to take into account the context of Hebrews 1 and the way the quotation from Psalm 102 is introduced. Therefore it must be rejected.

8.2. The Mosaic Order Interpretation

Some claim that, while the Son is being addressed in Hebrews 1:10-12, the heavens and earth referred to are not the literal heavens and earth (i.e. the physical universe inclusive of mankind), but are a figurative reference to the Mosaic Order (the old covenant) with all its institutions and regulations. The Christadelphian website Wrested Scripture is one proponent of this view.²⁹ According to the argument in Wrested Scripture, we can rule out a literal interpretation of the heavens and earth immediately since other biblical testimony affirms that these will remain. We addressed this point earlier, noting that ‘perish’ here refers to a radical transformation, the destruction of the universe in its present form. We noted that according to 2 Peter 3:5-6, the

²⁹ Accessed at <http://www.wrestedscriptures.com/b08trinity/hebrews1v10-12.html> on 23 May 2012. Wrested Scripture is a Christadelphian resource which seeks to explain scriptures used in support of non-Christadelphian doctrines.

heavens and earth that existed at the time of the Flood also ‘perished’ (same Greek word, *apollymi*). The heavens and earth that exist now are different and yet there is a continuity as well.

The main argument to be made in favour of this interpretation is that the displacement of the old covenant (Mosaic order) by Christ is a central theme of Hebrews, and its obsolescence is described in Hebrews 8:13 in language similar to what we find here: “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” The same Greek verb, *palaios* (to become old or worn out) is used in both Hebrews 1:11 and 8:13. However, a single verb in common does not establish that the heavens and earth in Hebrews 1 and the old covenant in Hebrews 8 are one and the same. The heavens and earth and the old covenant are two separate things that are both growing obsolete. There is a connection, however, in that the old covenant and the present heavens and earth are both tied to this present age. The Mosaic order is but one of the many aspects of the present heavens and earth that are destined to perish.

Having seen that the main argument in favour of this interpretation is unconvincing, let us look at the significant liabilities that it also bears. Firstly, there is no meaning within the established semantic range of the Greek words *ouranos* or *ge*, or the Hebrew words *shamayim* or *erets*, that could allow for these words to be used to refer to the old covenant or Mosaic order. Either the writer of Hebrews invented an entirely new meaning for these words (and expected his readers to pick up on it without a word of explanation), or, more likely, modern interpreters are trying to force an unfounded meaning upon them. Wrested Scripture makes no attempt to justify ‘Mosaic order’ or ‘old covenant’ as a legitimate lexical meaning, but relies entirely on vague similarities between Hebrews 1:10-12 and other passages in Hebrews which do refer to the old covenant.

Secondly, the Son is said in this passage to be the Creator of the heavens and earth that would wear out. If the heavens and earth are the Mosaic order, then the Son must be the Creator of the Mosaic order! This is a chronological impossibility for those who deny the Son’s pre-existence.³⁰ Again, Wrested Scripture makes no attempt to address this self-contradiction.

These two serious problems, combined with the weak positive case to be made, render this interpretation utterly unsupportable.

8.3. The New Creation Interpretation

8.3.1. Boulton’s ‘Rulers and People of the Kingdom’ Interpretation

One case of the New Creation Interpretation is elucidated in the Christadelphian commentary on Hebrews by W.H. Boulton, who writes the following about Hebrews 1:10-12:

“The quotation is from Psalm 102. A reference to this Psalm will show that it was a prayer to God for deliverance. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the quotation

³⁰ All Christadelphians deny the personal pre-existence of the Son; thus this problem is a real one for all Christadelphians who prefer the Mosaic Order Interpretation (and I am not aware of any non-Christadelphians who prefer it).

has been looked upon as evidence in support of the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ³¹, for if the Psalmist prayed to him it must follow that he was then in existence...It is to be noted, first of all, that the terms 'heavens' and 'earth' do not necessarily refer to the heavens in which the starry orbs revolve and the globe on which we live. Frequently in the Scriptures they are used in a figurative sense. Thus Isaiah exclaims: 'Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,' which he later parallels by, 'Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom, give ear to the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah' (Isa. 1:2, 10). Jeremiah, too, in a very expressive way, said, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord' (Jer. 22:29). It is evident that in these instances the words are used in a figurative sense. The basis of this use is found in the relationship that exists between the heavens and the earth. The former are exalted and are over the earth. Hence they become naturally associated in their figurative application with those who rule...It is in this sense that the words 'heavens' and 'earth' are used in the passage before us, the heavens referring to the rulers, and the earth to the ruled...If we read through the Psalm, it will be seen that it has to do with future developments in relation to Israel and Jerusalem...We may conclude that the standpoint of the Psalm is the Kingdom of God, from which it may be inferred that the heavens and the earth of that Kingdom are those which are referred to" (The Epistle to the Hebrews, pp. 41-43).

Boulton's interpretation again sees the "heavens and earth" as figurative but the referent is radically different: not the obsolete Mosaic order, but the new kingdom introduced by Christ! It first sees "heavens and earth" as a figure of rulers and peoples. It then understands the particular rulers and peoples under consideration here to be those of the kingdom of God, founded during Christ's ministry but to be realized upon his return.

Boulton makes a stronger effort than the author(s) of *Wrested Scripture* to support his understanding of the referent of heavens and earth. He first makes a statement which is entirely justifiable: that heavens and earth do not always refer to the literal starry orbs and globe. Biblically, heavens and earth can be personified. Examples of this can be found in Psalm 19:2, 96:11-12, 97:1-6 and Psalm 148:4. The earth can also be used as metonymy for its inhabitants (cf. Psalm 33:8; Micah 1:2); this usage is so well established that it was mentioned as a separate definition in our lexical source. Heaven can similarly be used as metonymy for God (Luke 15:18), and heavens for heavenly beings (Psalm 89:5-7; Revelation 12:12).

In Isaiah 1:2 (as elsewhere in the prophets), God uses poetic language to address his creation. Heavens and earth are likely both mentioned in order to emphasize the universal magnitude of God's call to attention. It does not follow that there is a parallelism with Isaiah 1:10 in which "heavens" correspond to "rulers of Sodom" and "earth" to "people of Gomorrah" respectively. If we are justified in looking for specific and distinct referents of 'heavens' and 'earth' in Isaiah 1:2, then we might as well also look for another specific and distinct referent of 'mountains' in Isaiah 49:13. We might further ponder the actual identity of the sun, moon and stars who are called

³¹ Boulton's mention of pre-existence so early in his discussion of this text is a case in point of the theological consequences driving the exegesis. His statement is surprising, since it is the Son's role in creation, rather than the Psalmist having prayed to him, which furnishes a significant argument for pre-existence. Nevertheless, from the outset his implicit objective is to discredit pre-existence.

upon to praise God in Psalm 148:3, and the trees of the field which will clap their hands according to Isaiah 55:12. When we try to squeeze precise referential meaning out of poetic language, we are bound to end up with wild interpretations.

There is no biblical basis for Boulton's contention that heavens and earth are used to contrast rulers and populations just as heaven is above earth. Isaiah 55:9 uses the analogy of the height of heaven above earth to illustrate the superiority of God's ways and thoughts to those of mankind. It would be inappropriate within the same book to use this analogy to illustrate the superiority of human rulers to those they rule over.

Coming to Hebrews 1:10-12 and Psalm 102:25-27, there is nothing like a vocative case to suggest a figurative application of heavens and earth. Furthermore, all other instances of heavens and earth in Psalm 102 and the Book of Hebrews are literal.

Coming to the kingdom of God (i.e. new heavens and new earth) aspect of the interpretation, the main argument advanced in its favour is that the context is eschatological. This portion of Psalm 102 was written for "a generation to come...a people yet to be created" (Psalm 102:18), and Hebrews 2:5 indicates that the writer is speaking about "the world to come." However, the Genesis Creation Interpretation of Hebrews 1:10-12 is equally at home in this context, since verses 11-12 are also eschatological under this interpretation.

In terms of positive evidence for the New Creation Interpretation, we have almost nothing; and what we do have is also consistent with the Genesis Creation Interpretation. What about the problems that this interpretation creates?

Boulton's line of reasoning creates a blatant self-contradiction. He finds that, biblically, the figurative meaning of heavens is rulers, and the figurative meaning of earth is peoples. He further finds that the context of Hebrews 1:10-12 is the kingdom of God, from which it follows that the heavens and earth of Hebrews 1:10-12 are the rulers and peoples of the kingdom of God. However, if the rulers of the kingdom of God are to perish and be changed, this would imply that Christ himself (as the principal ruler) is to perish and be changed! Yet the passage is precisely saying that Christ would endure in contrast to the heavens and earth.

8.3.2. The Millennial Heavens and Earth Interpretation

Boulton's self-contradiction could be avoided by interpreting heavens and earth as the new creation more broadly – the kingdom of God itself. However, this view still raises difficult questions. Firstly, how could the writer of Hebrews, writing in the first century A.D., say that the Son had created the new heavens and new earth in the beginning? Secondly, how could he say that the new heavens and new earth were destined to perish, wear out and be changed? Some, such as the authors of a recent Biblical Unitarian work, defend the view that Hebrews 1:10-12 refers to the founded-but-not-yet-realized millennial heavens and earth which will subsequently give way to the post-millennial heavens and earth.³²

³² Graeser, Lynn and Schoenheit, *One God and One Lord*, pp. 524-525. These writers also put forth the Son-addresses-Father Interpretation as an option although they do not prefer it.

This Millennial Heavens and Earth Interpretation solves some of the logical and chronological problems posed by other versions of the New Creation Interpretation, but suffers from a lack of biblical support. The whole doctrine of a thousand-year millennial kingdom is derived almost entirely from one passage of Scripture in Revelation 20. The meaning of this vision is one of the most debated in the whole subject of eschatology, with different schools of prophetic thought being named according to their view of Revelation 20 as postmillennialists, premillennialists, amillennialists, etc. A detailed exegesis of this chapter is far beyond our scope at the present; in any case, this vision had not yet been seen or written down at the time the Letter to the Hebrews was written. How could the author of Hebrews expect his immediate audience to correctly interpret Hebrews 1:10-12 when the additional revelation necessary to its correct interpretation would not be available for decades?

However, let us briefly consider Revelation 20 in spite of this anachronism, since Scripture must still agree with Scripture. There are at least two points about which all should be able to agree. One, the scene of the new heavens and new earth described in Revelation 21:1-4 is chronologically after the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20. Two, Revelation 21:1-4 describes the realization of the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17-19.

What this indicates beyond any doubt is that the “new heavens and new earth” of Old Testament prophecy (which was available to the readers of Hebrews) are established *after* the thousand years. When we compare this with 2 Peter 3:10-13, we find that the present heavens and earth were to be destroyed in the day of the Lord which believers then awaited, and then the new heavens and new earth would be established. It is possible that an unmentioned thousand years could pass in between, but there is certainly no indication of this.³³ We read in Revelation 21:1, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” The Greek word for ‘first’ here is superlative, not relative. It was the original heaven and earth that had passed away to give way for the new heaven and new earth, not a thousand-year intermediary heaven and earth.

The language of Revelation 20-21 therefore does not allow for, much less suggest, a heaven and earth that were created by Christ only to pass away at the close of the millennium. This reflects all of Old Testament Scripture, especially the prophecy of Isaiah, which teaches that the present heavens and earth which will ultimately perish (Isaiah 51:6; 65:17) and give way for the new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 65:17-19), which will remain permanently (Isaiah 66:22). The prophets know of no intermediate or transitional heaven and earth.³⁴

³³ The principle of 2 Peter 3:8 that “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” could be cited in support of this interpretation, but this is speculative. In context this principle seems rather to be directed at the long period of time that Jewish believers had waited for God’s salvation to be realized.

³⁴ As noted before, the language of 2 Peter 3 refers to the heavens and earth of Noah’s day as if they were a different heavens and earth than those present in Peter’s day. This shows that there is room for some language of distinction between the heavens and earth of different eras, just as there is room for language of continuity between even the original heavens and earth and the new. However, the point remains that the Scriptures nowhere describe a ‘heavens and earth’ as passing away or being established between the time of Isaiah and the end times.

Returning to Hebrews 1:10-12 with these observations in mind, it requires much imagination and little regard for biblical precedent to interpret “heavens and earth” here as a transitional heavens and earth between the original and the new, which had never yet been mentioned in Scripture.

This is coupled with the problem that in Hebrews 1:10, these heavens and earth are described as though their creation is complete³⁵, not as something still in embryonic form or being established gradually. Could the millennial heavens and earth be plausibly described as finished work around AD 66, when Christianity was a fledgling movement scattered in a few corners of the Roman Empire?³⁶

The Millennial Heavens and Earth Interpretation introduces a great deal of confusion into the prophetic word, whereby we must discern between a series of at least three different heavens and earths.

8.4. The Hybrid Interpretation

Andrew Perry is a Christadelphian writer who recently published an exegetical article about Hebrews 1:10-12 on the homepage of the Christadelphian E-Journal of Biblical Interpretation website.³⁷ Perry rejects the literal, orthodox interpretation on the same basis as the Christadelphian resource *Wrested Scripture*: namely, that the Genesis creation will not perish (we have already shown this objection to be unfounded).

Perry also rejects the Son-addresses-Father Interpretation, the Mosaic Order Interpretation and the Millennial Heavens and Earth Interpretation, for some of the same reasons we identified earlier. He then proceeds to offer a new interpretation which is a hybrid of the Mosaic Order Interpretation and the New Creation Interpretation. As he explains, “Our proposal is that ‘the Lord’ (Jesus) did lay the foundation of the new heavens and earth in his ministry ‘in the beginning,’ and that this is spoken to ‘the Lord’ at his return. At that time, when the new heavens and new earth are brought to completion, they will replace an old order which will perish. This old order is...the Mosaic order.”³⁸

There are a number of insights that lead Perry to this conclusion. Firstly, he argues that the citation in Hebrews 1:10-12 is not restricted to Psalm 102:25-27 but is a composite quotation from the whole of Psalm 102. This is because the opening phrase of Hebrews 1:10, “You, Lord” (in the Hebrew) is not found in Psalm 102:25 but rather in Psalm 102:12.

Secondly, Perry’s interpretation requires that we reject what would seem to be one of the most obvious inferences from Hebrews 1:10-12, namely that the words “they shall perish” at the beginning of v. 11 refer back to the heavens and earth of v. 10. Perry claims, “The author of

³⁵ Hence the aorist tense of the verb *themelioo*.

³⁶ To get a bit more technical, references to the already existent kingdom of God in the NT are references to the embryonic form of the eternal kingdom, not an intermediary millennial one. Therefore, such references are not relevant to the creative acts described in Hebrews 1:10, which refer to a kingdom that is not eternal.

³⁷ Perry, Andrew. Hebrews and Pre-Existence: Creating the Heavens and the Earth. Accessed at:

<http://www.christadelphian-ejbi.org/extracts/Pre-Existence.pdf>

³⁸ Perry, Andrew. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Hebrews expects his readers to understand the whole of Psalm 102 and to use the references in that Psalm for the pronouns in his quotation.”³⁹

Thirdly, Perry relies on the insight that Psalm 102 is about Hezekiah and applies typologically to Christ. Just as Hezekiah established a new order in Jerusalem, so will Christ.

The balance of Perry’s paper is devoted to developing connections between the wider context of Psalm 102, Hebrews and other Scriptures which he believes strengthen his case. We will deal with some of his points as they come up in our exegetical discussion.

Perry’s Hybrid Interpretation resolves some of the logical problems which he admits are faced by the Mosaic Order and New Creation Interpretations. The Mosaic Order Interpretation is difficult to reconcile with v. 10, which states that the heavens and earth were laid by the Son in the beginning. The New Creation Interpretation is difficult to reconcile with v. 11-12, which state that they will perish. But what if v. 10 refers to the new creation and v. 11-12 to the Mosaic order? It is logically very convenient, but textually it is extremely weak.

Firstly, in Section 4 we defended in detail the view that Hebrews 1:10-12 is a direct quotation from the LXX Greek of Psalm 102:25-27 (101:26-28) with minor stylistic modifications. Psalm 101:26 LXX does contain the words “You, Lord” (*su kyrie* in Greek).

Secondly, it is beyond farfetched to claim that the pronoun ‘they’ at the beginning of v. 11 refers to anything other than the heavens and earth of v. 10, never mind something that has not even been mentioned yet in Hebrews 1! What is more, Perry claims that ‘they’ refers to the Mosaic order, and that the reader must carefully read Psalm 102 to reach this conclusion. However, the Mosaic order itself is not mentioned in Psalm 102 by any turn of phrase. Perry claims that “The rhetorical flow of the Psalm identifies the ‘they’ of ‘they shall perish’ as the ‘they that are mad against me’ (v. 8).”⁴⁰ Psalm 102 mentions the author’s enemies only once – here in v. 8. Yet Perry would have us believe that these enemies are suddenly re-introduced in v. 26 with only a pronoun to indicate the change in subject. He would further have us believe that the writer of Hebrews expected his readers to deduce, without a word of clarification, that ‘they’ in the quotation from Psalm 102:25-27 refers to the enemies of Hezekiah, who symbolically represent the Mosaic order. All of this while a much more obvious referent for ‘they shall perish’ – namely the heavens and earth of the previous verse – stared them in the face.

I am not sure a word less strong than preposterous would convey the quality of this line of argument. That Perry would go to such lengths to avoid the basic meaning of sentences shows the desperation to avoid at all costs the conclusion that the Son pre-existed.⁴¹

Much of Perry’s argument rests upon the fact that language similar to that in Psalm 102:26-27/Hebrews 1:11-12 is used in other parts of Scripture to describe the wearing out of (variously)

³⁹ Perry, Andrew. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Perry, Andrew. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴¹ Perry states that it is a “corollary” of his study to show that Hebrews 1:10-12 does not presuppose the pre-existence of the Son. Based on the farfetched nature of his argument, however, we might be forgiven for suspecting that this idea is actually the major premise of his study.

those who rebel against God (Isaiah 50:9), the earth (Isaiah 51:6), and the old covenant (Hebrew 8:13). However, the use of similar language does not imply that these three are identical, or that any one of them is a possible referent of 'they' in Psalm 102:26. What it does imply is that the old covenant and those who rebel against God are among the aspects of this present world that will pass away when it passes away and be remembered no more. The heavens and earth of Psalm 102:25-27 are the literal universe, inclusive of humanity and human institutions. All of these will be violently shaken, and only those things that cannot be shaken will remain (Hebrews 12:27).

Besides the outlandishness of the claim that 'they' in Hebrews 1:11 does not refer to the heavens and earth from v. 10, there are a number of other liabilities to the Hybrid Interpretation. Perry's proposal holds that Jesus laid the "foundation" of the new heavens and new earth in his ministry, where foundation implicitly refers only to its embryonic phase. However, in Hebrews 1:10 "foundation" is used only with respect to the earth. The heavens are described in present tense as the (apparently complete) work of his hands. It is more reasonable that Hebrews 1:10/Psalm 102:25 is using poetic language (similar to that found in other Old Testament texts like Psalm 8:3-4 and Isaiah 48:13) to describe the creation of the world.

Perry also introduces some confusion toward the end of his study. Early on he maintains that 'they shall perish' in Psalm 102:26 do not refer to the heavens and earth of v. 25, but to the enemies of Hezekiah from v. 8. Yet later on, he states that these enemies are metaphorically 'the earth'.⁴² Thus, 'they that shall perish' in Psalm 102:26 apparently do refer to *an* earth, only not the same earth mentioned in v. 25. Alternatively, if the earth that shall perish (v. 26-27) is the earth of v. 25, then Perry's interpretation reduces to the standard Mosaic Order Interpretation.

In my view, Andrew Perry has resorted to a 'phrase mining' method of biblical exegesis, grabbing words and phrases from many different parts of Scripture without regard to context, rather than a careful reading of Hebrews 1:10-12 and Psalm 102:25-27 in context. He warns against applying a 20th century meaning to the terms heavens and earth, while at the same time assigning meanings to these terms that are outside the semantic range of the original Hebrew and Greek words.

8.5. Summary of Alternative Interpretations

We have done a thorough exegesis of Hebrews 1:10-12, and proposed what we believe to be a sound interpretation. It happens to follow the straightforward meaning of the words, and also happens to be the interpretation accepted by most Bible students and commentators through the ages (although these are not the reasons why we accepted it).

We then examined several alternative interpretations of Hebrews 1:10-12 which have been proposed by Bible students from the Christadelphian and Biblical Unitarian communities. All of these alternative interpretations have been shown to be deeply flawed. However, they all contain elements of truth.

⁴² Perry, Andrew. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Proponents of the Son-addresses-Father Interpretation note rightly note that God is the addressee of the words of Psalm 102:25-27, which begs the question of how the writer of Hebrews can apply the words to the Son, unless he is himself God.⁴³ They conclude, in opposition to the context of Hebrews 1, that the words of Hebrews 1:10-12 therefore cannot apply to the Son.

Proponents of the Mosaic Order Interpretation rightly observe that the Son is the addressee of Hebrews 1:10-12 (and therefore assumes the divine prerogative of Creatorship), and that Mosaic Order is an important component of the heavens and earth that were to pass away according to Hebrews 1:10-12. This is particularly true within the context of the Book of Hebrews, written to a predominantly Jewish audience shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. However, they take this observation too far by concluding that the heavens and earth of Hebrews 1:10-12 are *synonymous* with the Mosaic order, which is lexically impossible and does not agree with the similar passage of Hebrews 12:23-29. Their Interpretation also implies the Son's pre-existence, a point of which they seem unaware.

Proponents of the New Creation Interpretation (in its two separate forms) rightly observe that the Son is the addressee of Hebrews 1:10-12 (and therefore assumes the divine prerogative of Creatorship), and that the Mosaic Order cannot be the sole referent of 'heavens and earth' in this passage. They err, however, in concluding that the heavens and earth pertain to the new creation (either the rulers and peoples of the kingdom of God, or the millennial heavens and earth) since this destroys the contrast drawn between the transient heavens and earth and the eternal Son. It also creates confusion among the prophets who know of no intermediate heavens and earth.

Andrew Perry rightly rejects all the Christadelphian and Biblical Unitarian interpretations of Hebrews 1:10-12 that came before. However, he then proposes a new reading which is unprecedented in its implausibility. He would have us ignore basic rules of syntax by which a pronoun relates to a preceding noun within the context.

We could summarize the alternative interpretations by saying that they vary greatly. They disagree with one another about the meaning of the two key nouns in the verse: the personal subject ("You, Lord") and "the heavens and earth." In fact, just about the only thing they can agree on is that this text does not presuppose the pre-existence or deity of the Son. These doctrines have been rejected *a priori*, so even the most fanciful interpretation is to be preferred to one which would drive us toward them.

9. Conclusion: Christological implications of Hebrews 1:10-12

Once we accept that the Son is being addressed in Hebrews 1:10-12 and that the heavens and earth under consideration are actually the heavens and earth, we can squarely face the Christological implications of this passage, of which there are several.

⁴³ This, of course, is precisely what the writer of Hebrews has just stated in Hebrews 1:8!

Firstly, this passage ascribes Creatorship to the Son.⁴⁴ This is a prerogative which the Old Testament repeatedly identifies as belonging exclusively to the God of Israel. It is, in fact, one of his defining attributes (Nehemiah 9:6⁴⁵; Job 9:8⁴⁶; Isaiah 44:24; Isaiah 45:5-8, 18); the cornerstone of Jewish monotheism. With that in mind, it is very difficult to explain how someone else could assume this prerogative unless that someone else is fundamentally not someone else at all.

Secondly, the writer of Hebrews takes an Old Testament passage which, in its original context, was plainly talking about YHWH God, and applies it to the Son. This is a phenomenon seen elsewhere in the New Testament⁴⁷, and it is unthinkable within Jewish monotheism if the Son is not himself God in a real sense (as Hebrews 1:8 asserts just prior to this text).

Thirdly, the writer defines the Son's existence as eternal in the past, present and future, a theme reflected in other passages of Hebrews, as we discussed earlier (1:2-4; 7:3; 13:8). This establishes the Son's personal pre-existence and true deity beyond any doubt, as eternity is also an attribute belonging exclusively and definitively to the One God, in contrast to the transient nature of created things and beings (Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 43:10-13; 44:6; 46:3-4; 57:15).

A careful study of Hebrews 1:10-12 therefore leads us to some remarkable inferences about the person of Christ, which challenge us to think more deeply about our answer to his enduring question, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).

⁴⁴ This is in fact true under any of the alternative interpretations except for the Son-addresses-Father Interpretation.

⁴⁵ The last clause of this verse also bears out the Christological implications of Hebrews 1:6, in which the angels of God worship the Son.

⁴⁶ In the LXX, the wording of Job 9:8b ("walks on the sea") bears a striking resemblance to the wording of Mark 6:49, in which Christ came to the disciples "walking on the sea."

⁴⁷ For example, Philippians 2:10-11 cf. Isaiah 45:21-23; Romans 10:9-13 cf. Joel 2:32; Revelation 2:23 cf. Jeremiah 17:10; 1 Corinthians 8:6 cf. Deuteronomy 6:4; Titus 2:14 cf. Psalm 130:8; Revelation 1:17, 2:8, 22:13 cf. Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12.