

Theological Conference 2010

Helping the World to Count to One and Believe in the Gospel of the Kingdom and New Creation

Eberhard GRIESEBACH, in an academic lecture on “Christianity and Humanism,” delivered in 1938, observed that “in its encounter with Greek philosophy Christianity became ‘theology’. That was the fall of Christianity.”¹

Anthony Buzzard

May I start with this introductory thought: I would like to encourage the abandonment of the misleading dichotomy which goes like this: “Don’t preach doctrine; preach Christian living.” This can easily be an excuse for never making clear the essential framework of the Christian faith. “Doctrine divides,” so the slogan goes. Yes, but truth and error divide too, and Jesus caused all sorts of divisions with his teaching. He (and Paul) also of course aimed at a solid unity among his followers — a unity based on truth. And Paul uttered these amazing words in 2 Thessalonians 2:10: “Because the *love* of the truth they would not accept in order to be saved, God will give them over to a deluding influence so that they wind up believing what is false.” The only insurance against falling for the spirit of antichrist was, for Paul, a thorough and increasing grasp of truth, the very mind of Jesus, who is the Truth.

Yes, of course we are to be kindly in all of our teaching and living. We are to be “gentle towards all.” But avoiding “doctrine” may simply make us water down the precious truths of the faith. And of course, all teaching is doctrine. So the cry “don’t preach doctrine, preach Christian living” actually amounts to “don’t preach these teachings, but do preach other teachings.” Then of course the awkward reply of Scripture to this point of view is that we are to “live by *every* word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Jesus combined Christian living and “doctrine” so beautifully, concisely and uncomplicatedly (John 17:3). “This is the life of the age to come” — this is how we are to live and eventually gain the immortal life of the future Kingdom fully — by knowing and understanding that You, Father, are the only one who is truly God (*o monos alethinos theos*, the ultimate definition of *monotheism* — Jesus defined it superbly), and that Jesus is your accredited *shaliach*, ambassador, agent, deputy, plenipotentiary. Are we indignant or complacent about the fact that Augustine, highly revered, said that the text ought in fact to read, “This is eternal life: that they know You and Jesus Christ whom You sent, as the only true God”? Have we made our protest against this fraudulent manipulation of Scripture? Indeed are we indignant at the appalling, brutal murder of Servetus by John Calvin, 1553, (for excellent documentation do read *Did Calvin Murder Servetus?* (Stanford Rives, 2009). And of course you must read our modern Servetus’ cry for a return to the God of the Bible, Kermit Zarley’s *The Restitution of Jesus Christ*. Joel Hemphill’s *To God Be the Glory* equally adds to the recovery of truth about God and His Messiah. Joel is now adding to his armory the much needed cry that Greek philosophy is the root of all the trouble in churches.

How *Not* to Make John Contradict the Other Gospels!

Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God, *not* God the Son. This is true of the whole New Testament. Psalm 110:1, with its clear but translator-suppressed distinction between YHVH and *adoni*, has yet to have its day, and I hope revolutionize churches. *Adonai* is 449 times the title for the One God and rhymes with El Shaddai. Sarah called Abraham *adoni* (‘adonee’), and did not think he was God! *Adoni* never means the Lord God. *Adoni* is the proper protocol word for addressing “His majesty King Jesus.”

It is a pity we don’t all live to be 150 years old. I can understand how God did not use Moses until he was well up in years. I think I have learned more about how to help others to see who God and Jesus are in the past several months. I have known of course since about 1970 that God is not a family of two or three, but it takes years for this truth to become clearer and clearer. I did two radio programs with Michael Brown, the leading Jewish Messianic Christian (author of five learned volumes on *Answering Jewish Objections*). His radio program is called “Line of Fire.” Then I was invited to engage with the Calvinist James White (“Unbelievable,” with the British Justin Brierley as moderator). These were for me enlightening, mainly the preparation needed for intelligent defense of our position. I emerge

¹ Cited by Robert Friedmann in *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1973), 50.

nervous about how belief in two or three who are all of them together “Yahweh” can pass muster in the judgment. Dr. James White dedicates pages in his *Forgotten Trinity* to explaining that God is “one What composed of three Who’s.” He tries to simplify the befuddling complexities of Trinitarian theory. He admits that three X’s cannot be one X. But I fear he falls into his own trap when towards the end of the book, he shares his technique for getting Jehovah’s Witnesses to accept the Trinity: He argues that the Father is Yahweh and Jesus is also Yahweh. But there is only one Yahweh.

A low point was reached by the academy when in *Westminster Theological Journal* (1957, 1, p. 137) Krabbendam wrote: “God is one Person and three Persons simultaneously.” While James White offers us “one What and three Who’s,” Dr. McGrath, leading Trinitarian author at Oxford, says that God is “one Who in three forms.” Millard Erickson, chief evangelical exponent of the Trinity (*God in Three Persons*, 1996) admits that to express the Trinity one must break the rules of grammar and say “he are one, and they is three.” It is a very exhausting and divisive business — trying to make one equal three. The Seventh-Day Adventist PhD’s recently produced a special book on the Trinity to celebrate their “orthodoxy” and on p. 76 spoke of the “inherently plural word *echad* [one] in Deut. 6:4.”

Better just to admit with Luther that he did “not so much believe in the Trinity as find it true in experience.” Or confess with A.H. Newman, “The Trinity is a contradiction indeed and not merely a verbal contradiction, but an incompatibility in the human ideas conveyed. We can scarcely make a nearer approach to an exact enunciation of it than of saying that one thing is two things.”

What if this confusion over God is at the root of the world’s major religious *and other problems*? What if every human being must ultimately know who the Creator is and who the one mediator between man and God is? Is it not highly significant that this topic is currently dividing billions of Christians and Muslims and of course multitudes of Jews? What can we do to help? Can we afford to remain silent?

A major task is for us as a team to be geared up to help others to stop making John’s Gospel contradict the plain teaching of Matthew and Luke and Acts. We will have made real gains when pastors everywhere systematically not only teach their congregations to understand that God is one, and Jesus is a human being, but when they are so excited by this unifying truth that they pass it on at every possibility and learn the art of teaching it to others.

Discussions of who God and Jesus are typically result in the Trinitarian’s production of select verses in John. I soon found this out on the recent radio discussions. So here is some encouragement to provide answers. What is amazing to me is that 100 years ago, in Germany, Professor Loofs, pupil of the prince of church historians, Adolph Harnack, was saying that all his colleague evangelical systematicians believed that Nicene Christology was untenable and unbiblical. He was lecturing at Oberlin College in Ohio in 1911! They knew that reading John’s Son of God *back onto* a preexisting *person* as logos, other than the Father, was the cause of all the centuries-long struggle over Christology.

Loofs’ marvelous statement about the cause of all the difficulties is in the appendix of our *Who Is Jesus?* booklet. It goes like this:

The Apologists [Justin Martyr, Tatian etc. of the second century] used the metaphysical misinterpretation of the concept of Son [as preexisting logos]...This was a *philosophical* new interpretation of John’s logos idea and imported into the church’s theology...They presented Philo’s philosophical logos idea [as a “second God”] as Christian teaching and read it back into Scripture. The Apologists laid the groundwork for the perversion of Christianity into a revealed [philosophical] teaching. Specifically their Christology influenced further development disastrously. They were the cause of the beginning of the Christological problems of the 4th century. They transferred the concept of Son of God onto the preexistent Christ. They took this for granted. They thus shifted the starting point of Christological thinking away from the historical Jesus [the only real Jesus] back into preexistence. They shifted Jesus’ life into the shadows and elevated the Incarnation [of a preexisting Son]. They connected Christology to cosmology and were unable to connect it to salvation. Their Logos [Word] teaching is not a “higher” Christology than the ordinary one. It fell in fact far behind the genuine assessment of Jesus: it was no longer GOD who revealed Himself in Christ, but the Logos, the lesser God, a God who as God was subordinate to the supreme God.²

² Loofs, *Leitfaden zum Studien der Dogmengeschichte*, part 1, pp. 90, 97, 1890, reprinted 1949, translation mine. Loofs died in 1928. A similar warning about the danger of turning Jesus into a being who had an eternal existence before birth comes from Paul van Buren: “There is no clear indication that the priority [of Jesus] was intended in a temporal sense. We may conclude that for the earliest Church, Jesus was accorded the priority in reality that the rabbis assigned to the Torah. If one were to make the claim of priority in a temporal sense, one would be claiming that Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary, had existed with God before the creation of the world. **That claim would be worse than unintelligible**; it would destroy all coherence in the essential Christian claim that

Another German theologian of the early 1900s helped us, as he clarified the standard Trinitarian proof texts, which anyone who engages in a discussion about God will have to face:

Professor Wendt on John 8:58 and 17:5

“It is clear that **John 8:58 and 17:5** do not speak of a real preexistence of Christ. We must not treat these verses in isolation, but understand them in their context.”

(These verses are used often to promote a Son of God who is essentially non-human, and who has existed as God the Son from forever, or as an angel — Michael according to JW’s.)

Professor Wendt provides the right explanation:

The saying in John 8:58, “Before Abraham came to be, I am” was prompted by the fact that Jesus’ opponents had countered his remark in v. 51 by saying that Jesus was not greater than Abraham or the prophets (v. 52). As the Messiah commissioned by God Jesus is conscious of being in fact superior to Abraham and the prophets. For this reason he replies (according to the intervening words, v. 54f.) that Abraham had “seen his day,” i.e., the entrance of Jesus on his historical ministry, and “had rejoiced to see” that day. And Jesus strengthens his argument by adding the statement, which sounded strange to the Jews, that he had even been “before Abraham” (v. 58). This last saying must be understood in connection with v. 56. Jesus speaks in vv. 55, 56 and 58 as if his present ministry on earth stretches back to the time of Abraham and even before. His sayings were perceived by the Jews in this sense and rejected as nonsense. But Jesus obviously did not (in v. 56) mean that Abraham had actually experienced Jesus’ appearance on earth and seen it literally. Jesus was referring to Abraham’s *spiritual vision* of his appearance on earth, by which Abraham, at the birth of Isaac, had foreseen at the same time the promised Messiah, and had rejoiced at the future prospect of the greater one (the Messiah) who would be Israel’s descendant. Jesus’ reference to his existence before Abraham’s birth must be understood in the same sense. There is no sudden heavenly preexistence of the Messiah here: the reference is again obviously to his earthly existence. And this earthly existence is precisely the existence of the Messiah. As such, it was not only present in Abraham’s mind, but even before his time, as the subject of God’s foreordination and foresight. The sort of preexistence Jesus has in mind is “ideal” [in the world of ideas and plans]. In accordance with this consciousness of being the Messiah preordained from the beginning, Jesus can indeed make the claim to be greater than Abraham and the prophets.

In John 17:5 Jesus asks the Father to give him now the heavenly glory which he had with the Father before the world was. The conclusion that because Jesus possessed a preexistent glory in heaven **he must also have preexisted personally in heaven is taken too hastily**. This is proven by Matt. 6:20 (“Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven”), 25:34 (“Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom **prepared for you** from the foundation of the world”), Col. 1:5 (“the hope which is **laid up for you in heaven** about which you heard in the word of Truth, the Gospel”), and I Pet. 1:4 (“an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, which does not fade away, **reserved in heaven** for you”). Thus a *reward* can also be thought of as *preexistent in heaven*. Such a reward is destined for human beings and already *held in store*, to be awarded to them at the end of their life. So it is with heavenly glory which Jesus requests. He is not asking for a *return*³ to an earlier heavenly condition. Rather he asks God to give him now, at the end of his work as Messiah on earth (v. 4), the heavenly reward which God had appointed from eternity for him, as Messiah. As the Messiah and Son he knows he has been loved and foreordained by the Father from eternity (v. 24). Both John 8:58 and 17:5 are concerned with God’s predetermination of the Messiah.⁴

Note: Things which are held in store as divine plans for the future are said to be “with God.” Thus in Job 10:13 Job says to God, “These things you have concealed in your heart: I know that this is **with** You” (see KJV). “He performs what is *appointed for me*, and many such decrees are **with** Him” (23:14). Thus the glory which Jesus had

Jesus was truly a human being, that the Word became *flesh*...Jesus of Nazareth began his life, began to exist, at a definite time in history: the Word became *flesh*” (*A Theology of Jewish Christian Reality*, 1983, p. 82).

³ Did Jesus ever say he was going to **return** to the Father? Or did he just say he was **going** to the Father? There is a big difference between going and returning! John 13:3, 16:28 and 20:17 should be carefully examined in the King James or RSV as well as in the NIV. You will find a startling difference of translation. Which is correct? You can look in a Greek-English interlinear or check the meaning of the words in Strong’s. It is very illuminating. But remember that this is a rare case of poor translation in the NIV, to push an idea which is not there!

⁴ *The System of Christian Teaching*, 1907, Professor of Theology, Jena. Cp. Professor Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, 1892, pp. 453-460.

“with God” was the glory which God had **planned for him** as the decreed reward for his Messianic work now completed. The promise of glory “preexisted,” not Jesus himself. Note that this *same* glory which Jesus asked for has already been given to *you* (see John 17:22, 24), before you were even born! The promised Christian reward was given as a guaranteed future blessing by Jesus speaking around 30 AD. This is obviously glory and reward as a promise for the future. Your Christian reward was given (past tense) to you and Jesus whom God loved before the foundation of the world (v. 24). You may therefore say that you now “have” that glory although it is glory in promise and prospect. Jesus had that same glory in prospect before the foundation of the world (John 17:5). You can have something “with God,” meaning that you can have something promised by God for your future, and it is laid up in store with God now and will be delivered to you when Jesus comes back. 2 Timothy 1:9 is similar: “grace was given to us before the ages of time began.”

Christians were already “in Christ” (Eph 1:4) before the world began and foreknown by God (1 Pet. 1:2).

Paul can say that we now already “have” a new body with God in heaven — i.e. we have the **promise** of it, not in actuality. That body will be ours at the return of Christ. We now “have” it in anticipation and promise only. “We **have** a building of God,” 2 Cor. 5:1). We do not in fact have it yet. But when we do get that reward in the future, we will be able to say “give me the glorified body” which I *had* with you, i.e., as promised.

Greg Stafford in his *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended* (p. 222) misses this point about the promise of rewards. Not only does he ignore the accounts of the origins of the Son of God laid out explicitly in Matthew and Luke, he does not see that a pre-existing angel cannot be the descendant of David, and cannot therefore be the true Messiah. Stafford does not realize that in the future we will be given a reward which we “had” already. Paul says we “have” it now (2 Cor. 5:1) and in the future we will have it not in promise but in reality. Then we will be able to say “Give me now the reward which I had in your promise.” Jesus says the same thing: “Glorify me, Father, with the glory which I *had* with you.” Jesus said nothing about a restoration of glory, just as he said nothing about *returning* to God (although the NIV misleads us in this respect).

Peter speaks of a day being like a thousand years “with God” (2 Pet. 3:8). This is the proper sense of “with God” in John 17:5. Things which are “with God” are those things which He plans and prepares. Thus Jesus asked to receive at the end of his ministry the glory prepared for him “with God,” that is in God’s plans and in His mind. Revelation 13:8 states that the crucifixion happened long before the birth of the Messiah. The idea is of course that it happened in God’s plan, not in actuality. We must think as Hebrews, and thus with Jesus and John, and not just read our western language forms into the Bible. Of course the word was “with God,” in His mind. “With God” does not imply a Son-Father relationship at that stage. Galatians 2:5 speaks of the Gospel remaining “with” (*pros*) the Galatians, that is in their minds.

Why would you “go to heaven” when the Promised Land, promised to the descendants of Abraham — who are the believers (Gal. 3:29) — is the **land of Canaan** in which Abraham **lived**? (Heb. 11:8-9). Can you **inherit the earth** (Matt. 5:5), as Jesus promised, if you go “to heaven”? Can you rule with Christ “on the earth” (Rev. 5:10)? Can you be in the camp of the saints on earth (Rev. 20:9) if you are not going to be on the earth! Ponder all this carefully and prayerfully. Don’t forget the danger of being “moved away from the hope offered in the Gospel” (Col. 1:23). Love and faith are in fact based on and produced by hope (Col. 1:5). Therefore if hope is vague, love and faith are diminished and weakened. It is vital to know what you are hoping for and where Jesus will be in the future, so that you can be with him.

God promised Abraham and Jesus the Land (Gen. 12, 13, 15, 17; Gal 3:19), and this should prove that the Land is going to be available for Abraham and all the faithful in the resurrection. You cannot inherit a planet which has ceased to exist! The glory promised to the believers will be realized at the future coming of Jesus when he resurrects to immortality the saints of all the ages (1 Cor. 15:23).

Hebrews 1:10, the Hardest Verse

On the recent radio discussion I soon learned how Trinitarians think they can persuade us. They turn to Hebrews 1:10. Here in a catena (chain) of proof texts, the Hebrews writer seeks to prove that Jesus, the Son of God, is superior to angels. This approach ought really to show immediately that the writer did not think Jesus was Jehovah! You don’t need 7 verses to prove that Jesus is better than all angels or better than Moses, if you believe that Jesus is God Himself. All you have to say is “Jesus is God.”

Hebrews 1:10 says of the Son of God that he laid the foundation of the heaven and the earth.

There are three “proof texts” addressed to the Son in Hebrews 1:8-13. There is no hint in the text that they refer to someone other than the Son. Verse 8 begins, “But of the Son He [God] says...” (Heb. 1:8) Then follow three different

quotes. The series ends in verse 13 with a proof that Jesus was not an angel: “But to which of the angels did He [God] ever say...” Psalm 110:1 is then quoted as referring to the Son, Jesus. That Son is the *adoni* of Psalm 110:1 who is *not* Yahweh.

Much of chapter 1 of Hebrews compares the Son of God with angels, showing that the Son was never an angel and is superior to them. This proves that the Son cannot be God! It is not necessary to prove God superior to the angels. It is obvious. Equally clear is the fact that the Son cannot be an angel or archangel as maintained by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Both angels and archangels are angels! Jesus was never an angel, because high priests are “chosen from among men” (Heb. 5:1). And holy angels are immortal (Luke 20:36), which would make the death of Jesus the Son of God impossible.

What then of Hebrews 1:10? In what sense is the Son the founder of the heavens and earth? How can this be since Jesus nowhere claimed to be the Creator and it was *not Jesus*, but God who rested on the seventh day (Heb. 4:4)? Did Jesus get to do all the work and yet not rest on the seventh day? “God [not Jesus] made them male and female” (Mark 10:6) and “The Lord God [not Jesus] formed man of dust from the ground” (Gen. 2:7). Fifty texts say that God, the Father, created the heavens and the earth. Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:18, 20 and 1 John 5:18 (not KJV) say that the Son *did not exist* until he was created/begotten in Mary. Was Jesus both six months younger than John the Baptist and billions of years older? Was Jesus thirty years old when he began his public ministry and yet really billions plus thirty years old? What part of Jesus was thirty and what part was billions of years old? Jesus cannot be so divided up, split in two. Mary bore a human being. She did not bear an angel. She did not bear GOD. She did not bear “impersonal human nature,” as Trinitarian theory says. She did not take in a person from the outside. She conceived and bore a baby. Mary bore a lineal, biological son of David. Otherwise Jesus does not qualify to be the Messiah. Romans 1:1-4 says that *God’s Son* was a descendant of David, and he was later installed as Son of God *with power* at the resurrection, but he was not Son of God for the first time when resurrected.

God cannot be begotten, and the Son of God was begotten. Even the Dead Sea Scrolls speak of an expected time when God will beget the Son of God. They too used 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7 to indicate the beginning of the expected Messiah. The immortal God (1 Tim. 6:16) cannot die. The Son of God died (Rom. 5:10). God cannot be tempted (James 1:13), yet the Son of God was tempted. Not to observe these category differences is to throw away precious biblical instruction.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says that God did *not* speak through a Son in the Old Testament times. Verse 2 also says that God made the ages *through* Jesus. This could refer to the ages of the new creation which Jesus introduced or it may refer to Jesus, as Wisdom, being the reason for God’s creation of everything. Hebrews 1:5, quoting the prophecy of Psalm 2:7, speaks of the *coming into existence* of Jesus, the Son: “*Today* I have begotten you” (so also the LXX of Ps. 110:3 and many Hebrew manuscripts). The same verse in Hebrews speaks of 2 Samuel 7:14’s marvelous promise, given a thousand years before Jesus’ birth, that God “*will be* a father to him and he *will be* a son.” That promise was given to David and it referred to the Messiah who was to come. The beginning of Messiah’s existence is the moment when God becomes the Father of the Messiah. Acts 13:33 refers also to the beginning of Jesus’ existence, his raising up (not raising up *again* as wrongly translated in the KJV), and verse 34, by contrast, to his resurrection. The same beginning of the Son is exactly what we find in Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:20 (“that which is *begotten* in her is from the holy spirit”).

Isaiah 44:24 says that God, unaccompanied, unaided, created the Genesis heavens and earth. He was entirely alone. “Who was with me?” At the time of the Genesis creation there was no Son with Him (cf. Heb. 1:1-2).

God did not speak in a Son until the New Testament. So then who said, “Let there be light”? It would be a flat contradiction of Hebrews 1:1-2 to say it was the Son. The God of the Old Testament is quite distinct from His unique Son. The latter had his *genesis* in Matthew 1:18 (“the *genesis* of Jesus was as follows”). The Bible becomes a book of incomprehensible riddles if God can have a Son before He brings him into existence! Luke 1:35 describes how the Son of God *came to exist*. He was begotten. To beget in the Bible and in English is a word which of all words denotes a before and after. Therefore the Son had a beginning. There was a time before he was begotten, before he was. If he already existed, these testimonies in Matthew 1 and Luke 1 are nonsense. Mary bore a human being, not God or an angel. Human mothers bear humans. Mary certainly did not just bear “human nature,” and “human nature” as Mary’s son would not be the descendant of David and thus not the Messiah. (The creeds try to frighten us away from this beginning of the Son, telling us that if we say “there was a time when the Son did not exist” we are heretics and anathematized — see the anathemas at Nicea, 325AD).

The notion that the Son of God was in fact God would make a charade out of his whole struggle in obedience to God and on our behalf as Savior and model. The whole point of a High Priest is that he must be “selected from among

men” (Heb. 5:1). He is the “man Messiah Jesus” in contrast to his Father (1 Tim. 2:5). The Father in John 17:3 is “the only one who is God.” If God is the only one who is God, no one else is God except the Father, which is exactly what Paul declared when rehearsing the creed in 1 Corinthians 8: “There is no God except the one God the Father” (combining vv. 4 and 6). He added, not “splitting the Shema or expanding it” as Tom Wright and others say, that Jesus is the one Lord Messiah! All that had been well said by Luke, who agreed with Paul when he spoke of the Lord Messiah (Luke 2:11) who is “the Lord’s Messiah” (Luke 2:26).

If the Son were God, there would be two Gods. To call Jesus God and the Father God is not strict monotheism, however much the label may be applied. The Bible nowhere uses “God” to mean a triune or biune God.

In **Hebrews 1:10**, there is a complication *due to the fact that the writer quotes Psalm 102 from the Greek version (LXX) and not the Hebrew version*. The LXX (Septuagint) has a different sense entirely in Psalm 102:23-25. It introduces thoughts not found in the Hebrew text. It introduces God’s reply to the suppliant. The LXX, quoted in Hebrews 1:10, says: “He [God] *answered* him [the suppliant]...Tell me [God speaking to the suppliant]...Thou, lord [God addressing *someone else* called ‘lord’].” But the Hebrew text has “He [God] *weakened* me...I [the suppliant] say, ‘O my God...’”

Thus the LXX introduces a second lord who is addressed by God: “At the beginning you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (v. 25). The writer to the Hebrews had open before him the LXX and not the Hebrew (rather as today someone might quote the NIV instead of the KJV). The New Testament often cites the LXX Greek. F.F. Bruce in the *New International Commentary* on Hebrews explains:

In the Septuagint text the person to whom these words [“of old you laid the foundation of the earth”] are spoken is addressed explicitly as “Lord”; and it is God who addresses him thus. Whereas in the Hebrew text the suppliant is the speaker from the beginning to the end of the psalm, in the Greek text his prayer comes to an end with v. 22, and the next words read as follows: “He [God] answered him [the suppliant] in the way of his strength: ‘Declare to Me the shortness of My days: Bring Me not up in the midst of My days. Thy [the suppliant’s] years are throughout all generations. Thou, lord [the suppliant, viewed here as the Messiah by Hebrews], in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth.’”⁵ This is God’s answer to the suppliant; He bids him acknowledge the shortness of God’s set time (for the restoration of Jerusalem, as in v. 13) and not summon Him [God] to act when that set time has only half expired, while He [God] assures him [the suppliant, called lord by God] that he and his servants’ children will be preserved forever...

Bacon suggested that the Hebrew, as well as the Greek, text of this psalm formed a basis for messianic eschatology, especially its reference to the “shortness” of God’s days, i.e., of the period destined to elapse before the consummation of His purpose [the arrival of the yet future Messianic Kingdom on earth]; he found here the OT background of Matt. 24:22, Mark 13:20 and *Ep. Barn.* 4.3 (“as Enoch says, ‘For to this end the Master [God] has cut short the times and the days, that his Beloved [Jesus] should make haste and come to his inheritance’”)...

But to whom (a Christian reader of the Septuagint might well ask) could God speak in words like these?

And whom would God himself address as “Lord,” as the maker [or founder] of earth and heaven?⁶

Reading the LXX the Hebrews writer sees an obvious reference to the new heavens and earth of the *future* Kingdom and he sees God addressing the Messianic Lord in connection with the prophecies of the rest of Psalm 102 which speak of “the generation to come” (v. 18) and of the set time for Yahweh to build up Zion and appear in His glory. The fact that the One YHVH addresses another “lord” proves that the second lord cannot *be* YHVH.

⁵ The reason for the completely different translations, between Greek and Hebrew, lies in the Hebrew vowel points. The sense can be altered if the vowel points are changed, and sometimes it is not clear which of the possible senses is the right one. Thus the Hebrew takes *INNaH* to mean “He [God] afflicted” (v. 23) but the LXX repoints the verb (i.e. understands the vowel points to be different from the Hebrew text we now have). The LXX uses the same Hebrew consonants but changes the vowels to read *ANaH* (cp. English shipping/shopping, stepping/stopping) which means “He [God] answered [him].” So then in the LXX God is answering the one praying and addressing that person as “lord.” The LXX adds the word “lord” in v. 25. Next the Hebrew has *OMaR eli* (“I say, ‘O my God,’ v. 24). But the LXX reads these consonants as *EMoR elai* (“Say to Me,” v. 23b; i.e. the person praying is commanded by God to tell God). The idea is that God is asked to cut short the days which have to elapse before the Kingdom comes (cf. Matt. 24:22). Ps. 102 is largely about the age to come and the restoration of Israel in the future Kingdom and so was entirely appropriate as a proof text for Hebrews 1 in regard to what the Son *is destined to do in the future*, indeed his role in the new, not the Genesis creation. This sense is reversed when it is made to support the unbiblical idea that Jesus was the Creator in Genesis! Orthodoxy is looking backwards, while Hebrews looks forward.

⁶F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews (New International Commentary on the New Testament)*, Eerdmans, 1990, p.62-63.

The important article by B.W. Bacon (alluded to by Bruce above) stresses the fact that “The word ‘lord’ is wholly absent from the Hebrew [and English] text of Psalm 102:25.” But it appears in the LXX cited by Hebrews.

[With the translation in the LXX “he answered him”] the whole passage down to the end of the psalm becomes *the answer* of Yahweh to the suppliant who accordingly appears to be addressed as *Kurie* [lord] and creator of heaven and earth...Instead of understanding the verse as a complaint of the psalmist at the shortness of his days which are cut off in the midst, *LXX and the Vulgate understand the utterance to be Yahweh's answer* to the psalmist's plea that he will intervene to save Zion, because “it is time to have pity on her, yea, the set time is come” (v. 13). He is bidden acknowledge (or prescribe?) the shortness of Yahweh's set time, and not to summon him when it is but half expired. On the other hand he [the Messianic lord] is promised that his own endurance shall be perpetual with the children of his servants.⁷

This is exactly the point, and it can only be made clear when we see that 1) the Hebrews writer is reading the LXX, *not* the Hebrew text, and finding in the second half of the psalm a wonderful prophecy of the age to come (Kingdom, restoration of Israel) which fits his context exactly and that 2) there is a Messianic Lord addressed *by* Yahweh and invited to initiate a founding of the heaven and earth, the new political order in Palestine, exactly as said in Isaiah 51:16. This is precisely the message the Hebrews writer wants to convey about the superiority of Jesus over angels. Jesus is the founder of that coming new Kingdom order. The Hebrews writer in 2:5 tells us expressly that it is about “the inhabited earth of the future that we are speaking.”

The important points are these: 1) Psalm 102 is about the new creation and the “generation to come.” It is a Kingdom psalm and points to the Messianic future. The psalm speaks of the time coming to build up Zion, when the nations will fear God's name, and when God's glory will appear, what we know as the Parousia of Jesus. Verse 19 of the LXX speaks of a new generation, and a people who are going to be created. This is all about the new creation in Christ, of which we are now already a part.

All this is really not so difficult when this difference in the LXX is explained. Both Psalm 102 and Hebrews 2:5 and indeed the whole of Hebrews 1 refer to the new order of things initiated by Jesus and it would not matter whether we think of the new order as initiated at the ascension (“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me,” Matt. 28:18), or at the second coming. The new creation was initiated by Jesus even in this present age and it will of course be brought to a new stage of perfection in the coming age of the millennium, which is the first stage of the manifested Kingdom of God.

Psalm 102 is all about the coming age of the Kingdom and the restoration of Jerusalem in the millennium (see vv. 13-22). The writer looks forward to the restoration of the city when God appears in His glory (v. 16). The Psalm is written for the “generation to come” (v. 18) and a newly created people of the future Kingdom on earth. Hebrews 1-2 is speaking not of the Genesis creation but the “economy to come” (2:5).

The *Oxford Bible Commentary* (2000) is helpful when it notes that right up to Hebrews 2:5 the topic is the **new creation** in Christ. Hebrews 1:10 is included in that main subject:

The text at the center of Heb. 2:5ff. is Ps. 8:4-6 and it exhibits thematic connections to the scriptural catena [chain]⁸ of the first chapter [i.e. Heb. 1:10 is all part of the same reference to the new creation]...Heb. 2:5 [“the inhabited earth to come of which we speak”] is an introductory comment continuing the contrast between the Son and angels. Its reference to the “world to come” reinforces the notions of imminent judgment and cosmic transformation **intimated by Ps. 102, cited at 1:10-12.**

Isaiah 51:16 confirms this explanation. It speaks of an agent of God in whom God puts His words and whom He uses “to **plant** the heavens and earth.” The *Word Biblical Commentary* says:

Yahweh introduces Himself again, but this time in terms of His control of the raging *sea*. He addresses the one He is using to put His words into his mouth and protecting him very carefully. The purpose of this care is to allow him to plant heavens and earth. That makes no sense if it refers to the original [Genesis] creation. It uses the word NaTaH [Jer. 10:12 + 10 times], stretch out, while the verb here is NaTA, plant [establish people]. In the other instances God acts alone, using no agent [Isa. 44:24]. Here the one he has hidden in the shadow of his hand is his agent. *Heavens* and *land* here must refer metaphorically to the totality of order in

⁷B.W. Bacon, “Heb. 1:10-12 and the Septuagint Rendering of Ps. 102:23,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 3, 1902, p. 280-285.

⁸Compare interestingly our use of “chain reference,” and Sean Finnegan's refs to a “hub of verses.” Bible study is done best by “joining the dots” or cross-referencing the data bases. Thus the whole meaning of the Bible is found by connecting the various pieces of information.

Palestine, *heavens* meaning the broader overarching structure of the Empire, while *land* is the political order in Palestine itself. The assignment is then focused more precisely: to say to Zion, you are my people.”⁹

Thus both in Psalm 102 (LXX) and in Isaiah 51 the Messiah is the agent whom God will use to establish the new political order of the age to come. Hebrews 1:10 is a prophecy, written in the past tense (as customarily prophecies are), but referring to the “inhabited earth of the future about which we are speaking” (Heb. 2:5). That is the concern in Hebrews 1:10. Jesus is the “father of the age to come” (Isa. 9:6, LXX).

Finally, in Hebrews 9:11 the writer speaks of “the good things to come” as the things “not of *this* creation.” By this he means that the things to come are of the new, future creation (see Heb. 2:5). That creation is under way since Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God where he is now co-creator, under the Father, of the new creation, and has “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matt. 28:18). Even the millennial age of the future will be replaced by a further renewed heaven and earth (Rev. 20:11; 21:1).

Once again, eschatology is the great factor in revealing the truth. The Gospel of salvation is based on eschatology, what God has done and is doing and is yet going to do in Christ and in the saints of all the ages, the new community of the New Covenant, addressed as those who go by the canon of love, the Israel of God of Galatians 6:16. In this community there are no differences in nationality but all are “one in Christ.” God has a new creation in Jesus and we are to be new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). We are to join the one “new man” of the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:12-13). The presently unconverted Israel will itself be renewed, at least a remnant (Mic. 2:12; Rom. 11), through the great tribulation and Jesus’ deliverance at his post-tribulation Parousia (Matt. 24:29-31). The saints of all the ages will be immortalized at the resurrection after the end of the Great Tribulation which is still ahead. There is of course no **pre**-tribulation gathering. Nor has the Great Tribulation been going on continuously since AD 70. The Great Tribulation is a future short period of agony just before the return of the Messiah to the earth. This event is not a drive-by episode. Jesus is coming *back* to the earth where as son of David he belongs installed on the throne of David.

Dan. 8:14 even tells us that the time for the temple to be finally set in order will be some 2 years, 8 months and five days into the millennium.

The world is going to be reborn and it will come under the supervision of Jesus and his followers (Matt. 19:28, Rev. 5:10; I Cor. 6:2, etc.) We must resist the temptation to be looking backwards to Genesis when the whole book of Hebrews bids us look forward to the “inhabited earth of the future” (Heb. 2:5). Note that in several places Hebrews speaks of the eternal redemption, inheritance, covenant, judgment, salvation and spirit “of the age [to come]” (*aionios*). *Aionios* refers to the Kingdom age to come and not just to eternity. Christians receive now the “holy spirit of the promise” (Eph. 1:13, NJB). We are to experience something of the future Kingdom age even now in the midst of trials and in a hostile world. Christians should not give away their inheritance to unconverted Jews! The church will inherit the land (Matt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13) and those who bless “the seed of Abraham” (Gen. 12) are those who bless the believers. “If you belong to Christ [and only then] you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:19). What a heritage is in store for those who endure to the end. Meanwhile should we not have a heart for the billions of human beings who have not been exposed to the great truths about God and the Messiah and the Kingdom in process of restoration? Who will tell them if you don’t?

⁹Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66, Word Books, 1987, p. 212.