

2. THE DIVINE SON: EXPLORING THE MESSIAH'S DEITY IN HEBREWS 1 ⁽¹⁾

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God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in various portions and in many ways, has spoken to us in these last days in a Son ... through whom also He designated the ages ... (Hebrews 1: 1-2) (My translation for the relevant section we will now examine.)

We are evaluating **David Wilber's** exploration of the Messiah's putative Deity in **Hebrews chapter 1**. We could have chosen any number of 'Deity of Christ' commentators, but I have chosen **Wilber** as their representative spokesperson for a simple reason: A good friend of mine has followed this trinitarian apologist for years and highly recommends him. As stated in the previous article, I guess my friend hopes **Wilber** might convince me of the error of my ways!

A QUICK RECAP

We have seen that the first vital lesson from the introductory sentence in **Hebrews 1: 1-4** is that the subject of the sentence is the single, unitary, and only God of the Hebrew Bible. He is **the God** (with the masculine definite article and the singular third person pronoun 'he'). And He has a personal name, usually pronounced "Yahweh". This is the God whom Jesus confessed saying, **"He is one and there is no one else besides Him"** (Mark 12: 32).

The second major lesson we learned was that the object of this opening sentence is God's **Son**. We saw that this Son did **not** speak *until* **"these last days"** — which plainly means that, contrary to popular opinion, God's Son did not speak in the Old Testament (OT). The reason the Son was silent is that he did not yet personally exist *until* God engendered him in Mary by the supernatural miracle of the Virgin Birth. In the OT the coming Messianic Son is always located in a predicted future. And **Hebrews** announces this prophesied Son has not only recently arrived, but that he has now been **appointed by God as the heir of all things**.

¹ This article continues my critique of **David Wilber's** article under this title at: davidwilber.com/articles

WILBER PLAYS HIS ACE!

It was at this point, at the conclusion of my first article, that I imagined Wilber objecting. He would say I have not treated his article fairly. He would be keen to play the “ace” in his hand. So, here it comes! But first a warning: Wilber is a good player and will keep his “big bird”, his “Joker” in reserve for another day — and another article! (You do remember my grandmother’s lesson about patience, right?!)

The Son is the Agent of Creation

The author of Hebrews begins his letter by announcing that God has appointed his Son as “the heir of all things,” emphasizing the Son’s role as the long-awaited Davidic king.[1] However, the author goes far beyond merely affirming the Son’s role as the Davidic king; [that’s the point we dealt with in article one. From now on we have new material.] he also proclaims that God created the world (τοὺς αἰῶνας) through the Son (Heb. 1:2). The term αἰῶνας (“world”) can mean the physical world that God has created,[2] and according to Thomas Schreiner, “it certainly has that meaning here in Hebrews.”[3] Thus, similar to other New Testament passages (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16), Hebrews 1:2 identifies the Son as the agent of creation.[4]

Wilber asserts Messiah’s Deity because he was God’s agent in the beginning of the Genesis creation: According to Wilber, the Son **did** speak in the OT. Therefore, as the co-creator and sustainer of the universe, the Son *ipso facto* **has** to be God, for it was through him that God **made the worlds (1:2)**. Ace on the table!

A FORTHRIGHT DISMISSAL:

Interestingly, Wilber does realise that his position opens the door for Arians (such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses) who agree with him that Jesus was God’s agent in creation. However, *contra* Wilber, they say the Son was “the firstborn of all creation”, that is, a created being through whom God then worked to bring everything else into existence.

So then, Arians have no problems with Wilber’s belief that God created the world through the Son — they simply disagree with his deduction that the agent of God’s creation is the eternal ‘God the Son’!

With one bold statement Wilber dismisses them by writing, the Son himself is *not* a created being. But you will recall I went into some detail in my first article to show that Scripture clearly does teach **the origin** of the Son. The Son of God had a genesis in time, a beginning in time, a point at which he was “engendered” or “begotten” and it’s called the miracle of the Virgin Birth!

Wilber confusingly lumps Arians and unitarians together, but for the record, one can be a Biblical unitarian without being an Arian. We just disagree as to when the Son began to be — before the Genesis creation or in the days of Caesar Augustus!

THE UNIVERSE OR THE AGES OF TIME?

Wilber's Jesus was God's agent through whom He co-created the universe, because it was **through him that God created the world**. Wilber's case rests on the word 'world' — it certainly means the physical world that God has created. But is it as straightforward as this? (²)

Let's look at Strong's definition for 'world'. (³)

- I. for ever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity
- II. the worlds, universe
- III. period of time, age

αἰών αἰὼν ... an age; by extension, perpetuity (also past); by implication, the world; specially (Jewish) a Messianic period (present or future):—age, course, eternal, (for) ever(-more), (n-)ever, (beginning of the, while the) world (began, without end).

Obviously we have a number of viable options, for αἰών/aiōn is translated variously as, age, period or course of time, a Messianic period, world or universe.

Although Wilber acknowledges that the word we know in English as 'eon' or 'age' or even 'epoch' (αἰών/aiōn) can refer to an era or period of time, he plumps for its secondary meaning — physical worlds. He asserts that, "it certainly has that meaning here in Hebrews." He rejects the primary definition which relates to perpetuity of time because, The term αἰῶνας ("world") appears again in Hebrews 11:3 in reference to the "universe" (αἰῶνας) that was "created by the word of God."

But just because the same Greek word appears in two different places, even by the same author, are we bound to translate it the same way both times? Normally yes, unless there is a good local contextual reason to prefer one nuance above the other. And I am now going to show that the contexts of Hebrews 1: 2 and 11: 3 actually do address different subjects.

Hebrews 11:3 certainly does speak about God creating the physical universe: **By faith we understand that the worlds (τοὺς αἰῶνας) were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.**

Wilber would be pleased to know that Sir Anthony Buzzard, whom he cites in his article, agrees when he translates the verse this way: **Because of our faith in God we understand that the whole universe was created by God's command so that what we see was not made out of anything that could be seen before.** (⁴)

But do we automatically read this back into τοὺς αἰῶνας in Hebrews 1: 2? Some of our English translations recognise there is a choice here. For example, the NASB, whilst opting for **through whom also He made the world**, advises the reader in their index notes that the word "literally is ages". So, they admit the primary and "literal" meaning is "ages", even though they also opt for 'world'.

² Some English translations, such as the NIV, support this by saying, **through whom he made the universe**.

³ Strong's definition G165 on: <https://blueletterbible.org>

⁴ **The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation: Testament with Commentary**

So, are we stuck here arguing over semantics that might favour our own agendas?

Well, before making up our minds, let's look at the other essential word in the clause — the verb 'made' ... **through whom he made the worlds/ages**. Incredibly Wilber does not address this critical matter!

GOD 'MADE' OR GOD 'APPOINTED' THE WORLDS/AGES?

Once again we arrive at one of those tantalising translation issues. Here is Strong's listing for the verb ποιέω/poieō ... 'to make' (underlining is mine as will become clear):-

- A. with the names of things made, to produce, construct, form, fashion, etc.
 - B. to be the authors of, the cause
 - C. to make ready, to prepare
 - D. to produce, bear, shoot forth
 - E. to acquire, to provide a thing for one's self
 - F. to make a thing out of something
 - G. to (make i.e.) render one anything
 - i. to (make i.e.) constitute or appoint one anything, to appoint or ordain one that
 - ii. to (make i.e.) declare one anything
 - H. to put one forth, to lead him out
 - I. to make one do something
 - i. cause one to
 - J. to be the authors of a thing (to cause, bring about)
- II. to do
- A. to act rightly, do well
 - i. to carry out, to execute
 - B. to do a thing unto one
 - i. to do to one
 - C. with designation of time: to pass, spend
 - D. to celebrate, keep
 - i. to make ready, and so at the same time to institute, the celebration of the passover
 - E. to perform: to a promise

Note how many of these alternate meanings relate to **preparing, making ready, appointing, ordaining, declaring, executing, carrying out, designating, instituting, performing according to a promise**, etc.

I find it telling to also observe that in none of these definitions is the word "create" (out of nothing) found, unless it's covered by items **B. & D.** "to be the authors of, the cause", or "to produce ...". But note **F.** states "to make a thing *out of something*"! There is a better NT word for "**create out of nothing, call into existence**" and that's **ktizō (κτίζω)** (e.g. **Mark 13:19; Eph. 2:15; 3:9**).

That said, I do not deny that, 'to make' is certainly used in reference to God creating the physical universe out of nothing. (⁵) But I do not concede that this is the best translation in **Hebrews :1.2**.

The same verb 'to make' appears shortly after in **Hebrews 3: 2** where **Jesus** has been **appointed** (ποιήσαντι = has been made) by God to the position and destiny of being **the apostle and high priest of our heavenly calling**. God **made** Jesus our apostle and high priest in the sense of appointing him, designating him for this status.

Remember, this is the very same idea we saw in the previous phrase in **Hebrews 1: 1** where God "appointed" ie. **set, fixed, or ordained** His Son as the **heir of all things**. So then ...

Does **Hebrews 1: 2** say, a). God **created the worlds (material universe)** through the agency of the Son, or, b). God ordained, appointed, designated, the future ages (i.e. of destined time) with His Son in mind?

Does **Hebrews 1: 2** teach Jesus co-created the material worlds, or does it teach God designated the flow and progress of the ages for His Son?

Does **Hebrews 1: 2** look back to a done-and-dusted physical creation, or look forward to a destined purpose or, we might even say, career for the Son?

The Expositor's Greek Testament (⁶) naturally recognizes the various arguments which favour "the worlds" or "the ages". This trinitarian commentary accordingly prefers to translate, as **Wilber** does, that God made the material universe through His Son. However, their commentary goes on to make this inspired observation:-

The [Hebrews'] writer perhaps has it in his mind that the significant element in creation is not the mass or magnificence of the material spheres but the evolution of God's purposes through the ages. The mind staggers in endeavouring to grasp the vastness of the physical universe but much more overwhelming is the thought of those times and ages and aeons through which the purpose of God is gradually unfolding, unhasting and unresting, in the boundless life He has called into being ..."

Bravo! For, as awe-inspiring as God's creative power in bringing the universe into existence is, the more remarkable thing that "staggers" the mind "is the thought of those times and ages and aeons through which the purpose of God is gradually unfolding, unhasting and unresting, in the boundless life He has called into being..."
Wow. Why not read that full quote again?

⁵ E.g. LXX in **Gen. 1: 1,7,11,12,16,21,25,26**, etc. And in the NT **Matt. 19: 4; Acts 4: 24**, etc.

⁶ *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Vol. IV) Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1956. Unfortunately, the quote goes on to say that it is Jesus who is the heir and aim of all things is "also their creator". I am staggered at how so erudite a scholar has not observed the lesson we did in the first article ... that the God who is the subject of the sentence is not two persons — and that God cannot be His own heir!?

A LITTLE STORY

If I might use a pale comparison by way of illustration, it's a bit like a very clever and motivated man who decides to build a boat to circumnavigate the oceans of the world. He does his homework thoroughly researching everything relevant to his task. He drafts his plans and drawings. He puts an incredible amount of time into testing the materials most suitable for his craft. He spends years carefully making sure each and every component is to measurement, the exact proportions. Every rivet and every stress-point is tested and approved. All provisions and emergency equipment are installed. Every eventuality is covered with his aim in mind.

Meantime, he studies all the ocean currents, prevailing winds and seasons to maximise the success of his once-in-a-lifetime venture. And, to cut short what could easily be a long story, from our vantage point we learn his dream was finally fulfilled: Decades after his project first began, we see the day of total satisfaction, the day of unbounded exhilaration, the day of unbridled joy as he safely returns to dock at his home harbour.

Which do you think was his greatest achievement? Building his vessel all those painstaking years or mooring it back home safely after utilising all his navigational skills to overcome all that the elements threw at him? The boat, without achieving his planned destiny, is a nicety but would fail to fulfil his dreams. His dreams, without the physical boat, would have remained unfulfilled in his head!

That little story perfectly illustrates what the Bible is all about. God has had a dream, a purpose from before time began. This is not a rudderless, meaningless universe. Creation has a mind-blowing purpose, and we who are in Christ Jesus are privy to His grand design, and invited to join in. As **Ephesians 1:10** puts it, **God has a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ ...**

God wants each of us to “jump on board” and willingly participate in His thrilling adventure of the ages. He **has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure of His will which He purposed in Himself, that in the administration of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in him.** God the Father has **predestined this according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will ...** (Eph. 1:3-11).

This is the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints ... (Colossians 1: 26). It's the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested ... according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations ... (Romans 16: 25).

A QUESTION OF LOGIC!

So, back to our conundrum. Does **Hebrews 1: 2** say,

- a). God **created the worlds (material universe)** through the agency of the Son, or,
- b). God **appointed, (i.e. designated) the ages** with His Son in mind? Or do both nuances carry equal validity?

Whilst admitting that either translation is grammatically possible, I am ‘sticking to my guns’ and saying option **b)** is what the writer in **Hebrews 1** intends. Here’s why. To suggest, as **Wilber** and many trinitarian commentators do, that the original Genesis creation of the heavens and the earth is what’s in the author’s introduction, *breaks the logical flow of his sentence*.

Recall that he has introduced to us the **Son** who has only recently come in **these last days**. Eschatology, the study of the last things or, end times, is his mindset. (⁷)

He has just said God has appointed His Son to be **the heir of all things**. An heir has not yet entered into his estate. The Son of God awaits that **future** day when he shall return from his far journey to receive all that his God has destined for him. Heirship anticipates what’s up ahead — not what’s behind!

Now, doesn’t it seem incongruent for the author, who is introducing things about end times, to suddenly jolt us back to the start of the world and to suggest the heir himself created the universe?

I propose our author is not jerking our necks backwards to fix our gaze on that **old long ago**. No, his gaze is fixed on the coming fulfilment of God’s purposes in Messiah. He’s forward-looking to the designated horizon. **He’s concerned about eschatology, not palaeontology.**

He’s looking forward to when God **gathers up, sums up, all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (Eph. 1: 10)**. God has designated **the ages** with the Son and his coming worldwide kingdom in mind. **Hebrews** is not introducing the original Genesis creation, at least here and not yet. He’s talking about the Son being the heir and the reason for all created things. (⁸)

However, the trinitarian interpretation, as championed by **David Wilber**, requires coming to a shuddering halt where all forward movement is suddenly jammed into reverse gear. In this sudden 180 degrees’ change of direction we sustain a painful case of exegetical whiplash!

⁷ ‘In these last days’ is literally “in these eschatological days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων).

⁸ Like all good authors, **Hebrews** states this as his purpose for writing, not only in his introduction, but also in his conclusion when he is finally summing up his theme. There he says, “**Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude ...**” (Heb. 12: 28). Be faithful and be worthy to receive that **coming new world** — when God finally brings His eternal plan to fulfilment. Introduction & Conclusion harmonise.

CONFIRMATION.

If you doubt my exegesis so far, the author of the book of **Hebrews** a few verses later states precisely that this is indeed what he is thinking about — the unfolding purpose for the coming age — not about the initial creation of the universe:-

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels... (2: 5). So, our inspired author *is speaking about the future world*, the coming Kingdom of God. He *is* future oriented, not craning his neck backwards!

Now, to be fair, **Wilber** does acknowledge this verse is referring to the future world, but he dismisses it as having any relationship to what's gone before in chapter one.

So, how and why does he fly in the face of the author's plain statement in **2:5** that he has been writing about the future age(s) which God prepared for His Son? I will let **Wilber** himself explain. He says;

“...the author explicitly attributes YHWH's work of creation “in the beginning” to *the Son* (Heb. 1:10). Thus, it is entirely implausible that the author refers to the forthcoming “age to come” when speaking of the creation of the world in Hebrews 1:2. He is referring to the Genesis creation.

Wilber plays the “Joker”!

It's **Hebrews 1: 10** where God says to the Son, “**And you Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands ...**”

There we have it. The “Joker”, the “Big Bird” is on the table! The Son is the agent of the original creation of the universe because **1:10** says the Son “**in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands ...**”

Many, if not the majority of commentators, agree with **Wilber** when he says, *it is entirely implausible that the author refers to the forthcoming “age to come” when speaking of the creation of the world in Hebrews 1:2. He is referring to the Genesis creation.*

Is he right? Will his “Joker” carry the day?

Stay tuned when next we look at these crucial verses starting at **Hebrews 1: 10 ...**