

4. THE DIVINE SON: EXPLORING THE MESSIAH'S DEITY IN HEBREWS 1

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And he sustains all things by his powerful word (Hebrew 1: 3).

Commenting on this phrase — which still forms part of the rather long introductory sentence to the epistle to the Hebrews — David Wilbur makes the bold assertion that not only did Jesus the Son of God help create the universe, but he is currently holding it all together. His major heading for this section reads ...

The Son is the Sustainer of the Universe (¹)

Here is Wilbur's rationale ... The author of Hebrews proclaims that the Son was involved in not only creating the universe but also, in some way, sustaining it. He writes that the Son "upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). The Greek term translated as "upholds" (φέρων) pertains to the Son's continuous sustaining activity ... the author of Hebrews attributes this cosmic activity to *the Son's* divine word ... Since the author of Hebrews recognizes the Son's work of upholding the universe, an activity that Scripture elsewhere ascribes to God (Psa. 104:24-30; Acts 17:25, 28), the author therefore affirms the Son's divine identity.

Having already determined that the Son was God's agent in initially creating "the universe" (his 'take' on the previous phrase **through whom also He created the universe**) Wilbur now adds that the Son "upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3).

If you blinked you just missed his daring "bait and switch" here, for he imports the word "universe" into **verse 3**. In place of ***all things*** we now have an unabashed interpretive intrusion — "the universe". Translation is indeed the subtlest form of commentary!

The Greek text does **not** read that the Son upholds **the universe** by his mighty word. It says he **upholds *all things* by the word of his power**. There is a world of difference between the two (pun intended).

I am going to show that in this instance the description ***all things* (πάντα)** does not refer to the original universe God created — but rather describes the totality of *the Son's new administrative rule* which was inaugurated when he **sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High (1: 3)**.

¹ davidwilber.com/articles

CONTEXT IS ALWAYS KING!

Remember this epistle was originally written to Jewish Christians who were in danger of denying their new-found faith in Jesus as their Messiah. They were being tempted to go back to the synagogue community, back to the types and shadows portrayed in the Torah — tantamount to having an **evil, unbelieving heart (3:12)**.

They were in peril of denying that Jesus was indeed the hoped-for Son, the Messianic Lord who is the agent of God's saving grace in these last days. To give up on God's accredited Son **who has appeared once at the end of the ages (9: 26)** would be to **drift away** into certain dire consequences for such **disobedience (2:1-3; 10: 29)** to **no longer have a sacrifice for sins (10: 26)** to **fall short of the grace of God (12: 15)** and indeed, to **insult the Spirit of grace (10: 30)**!

Let's recall that **Hebrews** has already introduced the Son as the ultimate agent of God in **these last days**. All other methods of God's communications and spokespersons from Israel's past have done their preparatory work. Eschatology has become the overarching theme. The Son is God's appointed **heir of all things**, which means God has given the Kingdom to the Son **(1: 8)**. This is why God destined **the ages**.

But God's purpose in Christ affects not only planet earth but also the organisation of the heavenly court — the angels. **Hebrews 1** has seven quotes from the OT all marshalled to prove that the God of Jesus has reset how things are to be governed. A new administration under the Lordship of the Son — in the heavens as well as on the earth — has begun.

The human Messiah, now immortalised, has **sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1: 3)**. A new dynasty has been established. A new power-structure has begun. The book of **Hebrews** announces the Son's appointment to an everlasting royal office. It's the fulfilment of God's New Covenant (recall Jesus' own words that **my Father has granted me a kingdom [Lk. 22: 29]**). (²)

This is the perfect segway to unpacking the crucial phrase — used twice in this introductory sentence in **Hebrews 1: 1-4 ... all things...**

The Son is **the heir of all things (1: 2)**.

The Son **upholds all things (1: 3)**.

UPHOLDS

Like any competent writer, the author of this book lays out, in his introduction, what he is about to discuss in the main body of his treatise. He goes on to demonstrate

² Luke 22: 29:- **Granted** or **bestowed** in the Greek is literally **covenanted** (διατίθημι). Interestingly **Strong's G1303** lists its first lexical meaning as "to arrange, dispose of one's own affairs", before its base meaning of, "to make a covenant".

how the Son of God is superior to angels, Moses, the Levitical priesthood, the Temple, the sacrifices, and so forth.

For a Jew this was, and is, confronting. After all, Moses was their great founding-leader who delivered them from Egypt and who became their Law-giver. Moses undergirded, or upheld the whole Jewish system! But now the Son is proclaimed as the new founder for the future kingdom for all ages to come. (³)

Thus, immediate context concerns a new dynasty. This must determine what *all things* (πάντα) are being referenced. This context strongly implies that our word *bear, sustain* or *carry* (φέρω) might be better nuanced by some of its other Lexical definitions which include *guide, validate, prove and establish*.

As God's Messianic Lord of the new creation, Jesus is invested with heaven's authority and power to *guide, validate, prove and establish* God's new administration for the ages to come.

We have already noted that the seven OT citations concerning the angels in *Hebrews chapter one* are all designed to show the superiority, the preeminence of the Son's rule. By God's command, all angels are now subject to the authority of the representative man — Jesus the Messiah!

Indeed, God has decreed that *all angels of God will worship him (the Son) (1: 6)*. This does not mean the angels will bow to the Son because he is God. Rather, it means heaven's angels will acknowledge Jesus' universal kingship, his lordship over all powers and authorities. (⁴)

This dovetails perfectly with the final of the seven angelic quotes where we are told that God has instructed His Son to "*Sit at my right hand, Till I make your enemies your footstool*" (1: 13).

This has always been God's purpose which He planned from the very beginning. *Hebrews* goes on to show that, in the newly-coronated Jesus, God has promised to restore to fallen humanity the original *crown of glory and honour*. By setting him *over the works of Your hands* God has *put all things* (πάντα) *in subjection under his feet* (2: 7-8 in fulfilment of *Psalms 2 and 8*).

So, back to our original enquiry. In what sense does Jesus the Son *uphold all things by the word of his power*? We already have enough information to make an

³ *Hebrews 12: 2* actually calls Jesus the ἀρχηγός/*archēgos* which is to say, the author, the predecessor, the example, the pioneer or trail-blazer.

⁴ προσκυνέω/*proskyneō* strictly speaking means to *kiss the hand or to bow the knee in reverence and homage to one's ranking superior*. In the Bible such deference is given to kings, the High Priest, to heavenly beings, to Messiah, and of course, to the Most High God. The corollary is that in the Bible to accept worship does **not** mean one is claiming to be God. Here in *Hebrews 1* God's decree is that when He *again brings His Son into the world*, that all creation will acknowledge Jesus is Lord Messiah *to the glory of God* — angels included.

informed and contextual decision, but I am still going to ask for a little more patience before finally coming to a definitive answer.

CONFIRMATION FROM OTHER NT EPISTLES

Let's see how the preeminence of Jesus Christ in relation to **all things** (τά πάντα) is defined in parallel passages in the New Testament (NT).

1. Ephesians

In **Ephesians 1: 15-23** the apostle Paul prays that the **God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him ... that you may know what is the hope of His calling ... and what is the exceeding greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which to come. And He put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him Who fills all in all** (NKJV).

Observe the obvious parallels with **Hebrews 1:-**

1). In the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, God the Father has demonstrated **the exceeding greatness of His power ... which He worked in Christ when He seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all** supernatural and angelic powers. As per Jesus' own declarations and the entire message of the NT, Christ's authority and power is always *derived* from God his Father.

Jesus is the uniquely empowered human being whom God has exalted to universal *lordship*. God has placed the Son in first place over all other "names" and "powers" in heaven and on earth. The Son's authoritative word is the whole basis for God's promised future Kingdom. And as far as humanity is concerned, Jesus' word will determine who enters that future Glory.

This was Jesus' own testimony when he delighted to say, "**The Father loves the Son, and has given all things (πάντα) into his hand**" (John 3:35). Jesus, in that context, was not claiming that he was running the entire physical universe. No. He was saying God had placed in his authority the destiny of every human being!

2). With the advent of the Son **in these last days**, the book of **Ephesians** also says that we have a new creation, a renovated government, a new power-structure over **every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come**. A seismic shift of the ages has occurred. God through His Son is **guiding, validating, proving and establishing** everything in relation to the coming age(s).

3). Note carefully Paul's repeated expression of "**all things**". And He put all things (πάντα) under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things (πάντα) to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him Who fills all in all. The all things under the Son are **not** said to be the material creation, the universe, but rather that the government, the jurisdiction, the administration of God's affairs are all given to Christ who shares this dominion with his church.

These correspondences between **Hebrews 1** and **Ephesians 1** are stunning. For the writer(s) of the books of **Hebrews and Ephesians** the Son's agency sustains and maintains the administration of God's Kingdom-affairs by his recent elevation to Yahweh's right hand of authority.

2. Colossians

The church in Colossae faced the same kind of temptation that the Jewish Christians did in the **Epistle to the Hebrews**. They were in peril of abandoning Christ as their Head and fount of all God's blessings. They were in danger of running after other disastrous influences — whether philosophies or angelic mediators — and thus grasping at mere shadows, and not **the substance which is Christ (Col. 2: 8,17)**.

The Colossians are reminded that God the Father has qualified them **to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (1:12)**. That is, believers look forward to entering into the coming Kingdom-age because (to borrow the same idea from **Hebrews 1: 2**) God has **appointed** His Son as the **heir of all things (πάντων)** and, by virtue of being **seated with him**, believers are joint-heirs about to receive the estate.

In fact, the next verse (1:13) spells out how Christians have been **delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love**. It's all about the future — the coming kingdom of God!

The expression all things occurs **six times** in **Colossians 1: 16-20**. As per **Hebrews** the theme is the new creation, the renovation of the heavens and the earth under the Son's coming world-government. A new dynasty has dawned. All things have been rearranged under Christ's headship. Once hidden from previous **ages and from previous generations** this is no longer a secret mystery but it **has now been revealed to the saints (1: 26)**.

Trinitarian commentators, **Wilber** included, all maintain that **Colossians 1** presents Christ as the agent of the Genesis creation because **by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth ... that he is before all things and that in him all things consist (1: 16-17)**.

Even though these verses are right up there as some of the most often appealed to when defending the Deity of Christ, there are a number of serious difficulties for this trinitarian interpretation. (⁵)

Not least among these challenges is the fact that about fifty times in the NT we are told that it is God the Father Who was the original Creator of the universe. This is not to mention the numerous OT references where we are told it was Yahweh God Himself Who created the universe all “by Myself” (e.g. [Is. 44:24](#); [Rev. 4: 11](#), etc.).

This is a fact which Jesus himself testified to. He never claimed to be God the Creator. He always attributed the material heavens and earth and even mankind’s existence to **He Who created them in the beginning** ([Matt. 19: 4](#)). (⁶)

The argument in [Colossians 1](#) is not that Jesus has the **preeminence** because he is God. Not at all. His preeminence comes because he has been **promoted** to his rulership as the reward for his sacrificial life. God therefore vindicated Jesus and elevated him to the position of being the **firstborn Son of all creation** ([1:15](#)).

Recently, however, some English translations have obscured the text here by rendering that the Son is **the firstborn over all creation**.

[Kegan Chandler](#) (whom [David Wilber](#) quotes) comments regarding this translation **firstborn Son over all creation**: [We easily understand the meaning here: Christ belongs to creation; he is the chief member of all created things.](#) The Trinitarian publishers of the *New International Version* of the Bible also must have recognized this, which is possibly why they felt compelled to diverge from other major translations and render the verse: “*the firstborn over all creation.*” This is, of course, an unabashed attempt at distancing Christ from creation. (⁷)

And ...

When Paul says “in him all things were created” in [Colossians](#), he does not intend to celebrate the man from Nazareth as Creator, but means “because of Jesus all things were created by God, the Father”. (⁸)

True, for [Hebrews 1: 1- 4](#) has already told us that Jesus is **not** God the Creator.

⁵ Due to lack of space here, I will not be entering into why this chapter does not present Jesus Christ as the creator of the universe. There are a number of contextual and grammatical issues which must be carefully examined. For a more thorough exposition of [Colossians 1](#) see my book [They Never Told Me This in Church!](#) (Second Edition pp240)

⁶ Readers of the [King James Bible](#) and the [NKJV](#) might object that [Ephesians 3: 9](#) reads that **God created all things through Jesus Christ**. However, this added phrase **through Jesus Christ** is virtually unanimously admitted by modern textual scholars to be a later scribal corruption and rests on very poor manuscript evidence.

⁷ [The God of Jesus In Light of Christian Dogma ; The Recovery of New Testament Theology](#). Restoration Fellowship, 2016. P.355 (Underlining and boldface mine for emphasis) [I note that the [NKJV](#) also has this unfortunate error.]

⁸ Ibid. p.302

Has he not said that the Son is the one who shed **his blood** to **make purification for sins** (1: 3) — God is Spirit, incorporeal, so has no blood, is immortal by nature, and cannot die (Col. 1:14)?!

Has he not said that the Son is **the image of the invisible God** — or, as Hebrews 1: 3 puts it, the Son is **the radiance of God's glory and bears the very stamp of His nature**? Thus, the Son of God is **not the invisible God** himself, but is rather **the image** of **the invisible God** (1:13- 15). (⁹)

Another strong reason why we know it's not the old Genesis creation of the universe being referred to in this context is because the **all things** are defined as things **in the heavens and upon the earth** ...**not** the heavens **nor** the earth as such. Read it carefully!

The things that are **in the heavens and upon the earth** are delineated as **visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers** (1: 16). The general description we would use to cover all of these supernatural rankings is *angels*.

But what about the **on the earth** part? Where is Christ's lordship and authority seen and felt in the world now? Well, we go on to read that included in this new dynasty under the headship of the Son of God, but ruling with him, is the Church. Paul speaks about the saints, the redeemed, "**you**" believers.

This is exactly what the parallel passage in **Ephesians 1** says: When God the Father **raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenlies** — far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come, **and He put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church** (Eph. 1: 20-22).

Therefore, I conclude that the **all things** of **Colossians 1**, **Ephesians 1** and **Hebrews 1** consistently refer to Christ upholding God's new creation. **The repeated phrase all things in the introductions to these three epistles refers to the far-reaching and all-comprehensive new Kingdom-administration under the Son.**

When **Wilber** and our trinitarian commentators transpose **the universe** for **all things** they commit contextual *Hari Kari* — which is Japanese for suicide!

The Son **upholds all things** because he has become the foundation upon which God the Father has established the new universal hierarchy through which all future ages shall be governed. Christ sustains, not the old Genesis universe, but **guides, validates, proves and establishes** everything in relation to the coming age(s).

⁹ An image is not the original. When I look at my image in the mirror I know it is a reflection of the real me.

The NT epistles have one consistent message: **God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2: 36).**

As the head of the new creation, the Son is at the centre of God's cosmic rescue operation. Through his obedience to the Father's eternal purposes, Jesus Christ has won his deserved preeminence in God's new world order. **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"** was our Lord's triumphant declaration (Matt. 28: 18).

The Bible's message is consistent: Jesus' authority and status as heaven's plenipotentiary is because God's absolute diplomatic power has been bestowed on him.

AN OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENT

Let's close this article by giving an OT example where the word **uphold** refers to administering the work of God — to governing.

Faithful as he was, Moses was unable to carry the People of Israel who were constantly complaining, rebelling, criticising and carping against his God-given authority. This elicited from Moses his exasperated cry of anguish, **"I am not able to bear (LXX = φέρω) all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me"** (Num. 11:14). The administrative load was too heavy even for Moses' broad shoulders!

That word **bear (φέρω)** is the same word used here in **Hebrews 1: 3** of the Son who is now **upholding, sustaining, or bearing all things**. This word carries (!) a wide range of possible meanings. As well as 'carry' and 'sustain' or 'uphold' it can also be translated as, to 'bring along', 'yield', 'produce', 'guide', 'validate', 'prove' and 'establish'. The question therefore arises as to which nuance best conveys the author's intent?

What is it that Jesus is bearing, upholding, sustaining, guiding, validating, proving? The material universe of sun, moon, earth, all the planets, indeed the endless galaxies? Or is the context referring to the Son's powerful new administration now inaugurated, and being validated, guided and sustained **by the word of his power?**

The entire theme of the epistle concerns the massive reset of the powers of heaven and earth which God has mightily brought about through His Son. Under his lordship our future destiny is assured. **All things** are being made ready for the next age — God's long-awaited kingdom is what **we are speaking about (2: 5).**

We must therefore reject **David Wilber's** anachronistic assertion that: **The Son is the Sustainer of the Universe**. We must affirm that **the Son** of God **upholds all things** in the new creation which God the Father has placed under him.

