

Heb 1, 10—12 and the Septuagint Rendering of Ps 102, 23.

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I have not succeeded in finding an adequate explanation of the extraordinary citation made by the author of Hebrews in support of his statement regarding the inheritance by the Son of a "more excellent name" than the angels, 1, 4. After citing two passages in which Israel's king is called the "Son" of God (verse 5, citing Ps 2, 7 and 2 Sam 7, 14), he proceeds in verse 8 to cite Ps 45, 7—8¹ in proof that he is called "God" ("Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever"), and in verse 10 he appeals to Ps 102, 25 in proof that the Christ is addressed by the inspired writer as "Lord" and creator of heaven and earth.

The difficulty that in our versions, as in the Hebrew, no divine name appears, is at once dispelled when we turn to the LXX, the invariable dependence of our author; for here we find his quotation verbatim, κατ' ἀρχὰς τὴν γῆν κύ, Κύριε, ἐθεμελίωσας, κτλ. (So B; A places τὴν γῆν after Κύριε), except that for the sake of emphasis Hebrews places κύ first. That which constitutes the real problem is the author's idea that these words are addressed to Christ and not to Jahve, and that he may therefore employ them in support of his statement in verse 2 that by him God "also made the worlds". It seems to us impossible to misunderstand that the words:

"Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth
And the heavens are the works of thine hands,
They shall perish, but thou continuest,
And they all shall wax old as doth a garment;
And as a mantle shalt thou roll them up,
As a garment, and they shall be changed:
But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail"

are addressed to God in express contrast with the frailty and weakness of mortals. The psalmist has already complained in verse 11—12:

¹ Reading ἐλίξει for ἀλλᾶξει under the influence of Ies. 34, 4.

My days are like a shadow that declineth,
 And I am withered like grass;
 But thou, O Lord, abidest forever,
 And thy memorial is from generation to generation.

In this second strophe the plaint is repeated. But to the author of Hebrews it seems equally impossible to doubt the contrary. He offers no argument; he assumes as self-evident that the words are addressed by Scripture (which to him, verse 6, is identical with the utterance of God), to the Messiah. Lünemann is quite right in designating "a freak of fancy without anything to justify it" Hofmann's supposition that "the author found no address whatever to Christ designed in the Κύριε of the psalm, but only meant to say in Scriptural words what was true of Jesus according to his own belief". The same verdict applies to the almost childish attempts of Delitzsch, Vaugn and others to vindicate the author of Hebrews from the charge of having been "misled by the LXX version". It would be more straightforward with Calvin to say of these quotations that "the apostle by a pious deflection (*pia deflectione*) of their meaning accommodates them to the person of Christ", or with Paterson, in answer to the question: but what have these passages to do with Christ?, to say peremptorily "the authoritative author of Hebrews assures us that they do apply, and that should be enough for us".

On the other hand Lünemann is rightly taken to task by the editors of the American edition of Meyer's Commentary for his assertion that the author of Hebrews "was misled by the Κύριε (of Ps. 102, 25 LXX) into the idea that the words were addressed to the Son." The one conclusive objection is that "his own use and understanding of Κύριος, both in passages which he writes himself and in some which he quotes from the Old Testament, make it clear that he, like the other New Testament authors, recognizes the possibility of the application of the word to God".¹

The matter is not much improved upon by B. Weiss in the edition of 1888, save that the futility of Lünemann's explanation is acknowledged. The substitute explanation offered of the author's application to Christ of "words which in the original are indubitably addressed to God" is that "according to his idea of Scripture God himself is the speaker,

¹ Meyer's Commentary, 4th ed. transl. by M. J. Evans, with additional notes by Timothy Dwight, Professor of Sacred Literature in Yale College, Funk & Wagnalls 1885.

and is here manifestly addressing another, who accordingly must be the messianic Κύριος.¹ Von Soden in the *Handkommentar* takes the same view, merely characterizing the messianic interpretation of passages addressing God' as "a rabbinic practise" (?), and Bruce goes but little further in the generalizing principle "Statements concerning Jehovah as the Savior of the latter days are also to be regarded (in the view of the times) as messianic". Quite inadequate are all these attempted limitations of a principle so obviously excessive in its sweep as the statement that a New Testament writer would have been regarded as justified in taking any passage addressed to God as Κύριος as messianic, if it spoke of him as "the Savior of the latter days". Still it is a gain to be reminded that Ps 102 unquestionably must have been regarded as dealing with the salvation "of the latter days" (cf. vv. 13. 18. 22. 28).

It seems strange indeed that the attention of critics and commentators having already been directed to the characteristic dependence of the author of Hebrews on the LXX to the exclusion of the Hebrew text, and in particular to his main dependence in this particular quotation on the word Κύριε, which is wholly absent from the Hebrew, that one of the most striking divergences of the Greek from the original, one in which it is followed by the Vulgate, is in just the fact that by a mistranslation of נַעַן in v. 24 (Engl. 23 "He weakened my strength in the way") the whole passage down to the end of the psalm becomes *the "answer" of Jahve to the suppliant*, who accordingly appears to be addressed as Κύριε and creator of heaven and earth. The verb נַעַן is rendered by the primary sense "he answered" (ἀπεκρίθη, Vulg.: *respondit*) instead of the secondary "he afflicted", and αὐτῷ (Vulg. *ei*) is supplied in accordance with the suffix of the *Kethibh* כַּחַ (Engl. "my strength" from the *Qere* כַּחַ). The first two words of verse 25 אֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי (Engl. v. 24. "I said, O my God") are then connected with the preceding verse with the meaning "tell unto me", and the rendering becomes Ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ ἐν ὁδῷ ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ· Τὴν ὀλιγότητα τῶν ἡμερῶν μου ἀνάγγελόν μοι· μὴ ἀναγάγῃς με ἐν ἡμίσει ἡμερῶν μου. Ἐν γενεᾷ γενεῶν τὰ ἔτη σου· κατ' ἀρχὰς τὴν γῆν κύ, Κύριε, ἔθεμελίωσας κτλ., or as the Vulgate

¹ Meyer's *Commentar*, *ad loc.* The whole passage runs as follows: Dass er die im Urtexte unzweifelhaft an Gott gerichteten Worte auf den Messias bezog, kann freilich nicht bloss in dem κύριε, als der gangbaren Anrede Christi, seinen Grund gehabt haben (Lün.), sondern nur darin, dass nach seiner Schriftauffassung Gott selbst redet und hier deutlich einen Anderen (und dann natürlich nur den messianischen κύριος) anredet.

renders, *Respondit ei in via virtutis suae: Paucitatem dierum meorum nuntia mihi; ne revoces me in dimidio dierum meorum. In generationem et generationem anni tui: initio tu, Domine, terram fundasti* etc.¹

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 Vulg. understand the utterance to be Jahve's "answer" to the psalmist's plea that he will intervene to save Zion, because "it is time to have pity upon her, yea the set time is come"² (v. 13). He is bidden acknowledge (or prescribe?) the shortness of Jahve's set time, and not to summon him when it is but half expired. On the other hand he is promised that his own endurance shall be perpetual with the children of his servants.

Fantastic and extravagant as this interpretation must seem to those accustomed to the true, it is scarcely more so than the interpretation of Ps 45, 7 which immediately precedes, or that of Ps 110, 4; Gen 14, 18—20 in 7, 3. Moreover we have evidence from other sources that this author was introducing no novelty of Christian interpretation by this application of "the shortened days" of Ps 102, 23. On the contrary, just as the abrupt form of his citation suggests, this psalm-passage would seem rather to have been a locus classicus of proto-Christian apologetic. Thus in *Barnab*³ 4, 3 we have the citation of a passage from some lost book of the Enoch literature, in which the title of Messiah is "the Beloved", as in the *Visio Isaiae* (cf. Eph 1, 6; Mt 3, 17; 17, 5 and parallels) as follows:—

"The last offence is at hand, concerning which the Scripture speaketh; as saith Enoch: For to this end hath the Master cut short (κυτέμνηκεν) the periods and the days (τοὺς καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ἡμέρας) that his Beloved (ὁ Ἰηραπημένον αὐτοῦ) might hasten, and come to his Inheritance."

¹ The only passage in which Philo has made any use of this psalm is a fragment preserved only in the Armenian, which Aucher in his edition of the fragments (Vienna, 1826, 605) renders: Non legisti in lege: "Nonne manus mea fundavit terram et dextera mea ut manufacturam fecit caelum?" The change to the first person from the masoretic second might seem to imply that the preceding verses were understood as also the utterance of God, as in LXX, Vulg.; whereas it was clearly seen that the work of creation must necessarily have been attributed to God.

² Perhaps the reflection that these words in the literal sense had proved untrue may have had an influence in suggesting the strange interpretation of "the half of my days" in verse 24.

³ The relation of *Barnabas* to Hebrews is well-known.

Here the application is the same as in Mt 24, 22 = Mc 13, 20; for in both the Enoch passage and the gospels the fundamental passage can scarcely be other than Ps 102, (13) 23. Only here not the LXX reading known to us is followed, but the Hebrew, or one similar; though rendered, it would seem, in some parts, much as the LXX render. Thus the דרך which Wellhausen¹ regards as "doubtful", is certainly taken by LXX and Vulg., and probably by Enoch and Mt, as the "way" of the coming Messiah, LXX and Vulg. putting it in the construct with כח = ἐν ὁδῷ ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ = *in via virtutis suae*. ימי צר is correctly rendered συντέμηκεν τὰς ἡμέρας by Enoch, ἐκολόβωσεν τὰς ἡμέρας by Mc 13, 20, which thus appears more primitive than Mt 24, 22 κολοβωθήσονται. The suffix is taken by both Enoch, and gospels as referring to Messiah, which suggests the interesting query whether the succeeding clause, "I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days" has not a connection with the pre-Christian doctrine of the withdrawal of Messiah (Apc 12, 5; cf. *Pesikta* 49^b "Messiah like Moses will first appear then be withdrawn 45 days").

Thus instead of the application of these verses of Ps 102 to Messiah being an audacious innovation on the part of the author of Hebrews, we find evidence (1) that the psalm itself was a favorite resort of those who sought in even pre-Christian times for proof-texts of messianic eschatology². This is a result which might have been anticipated from the suggestive reference to "the set time" for Jehovah's deliverance and glorification of Zion, v. 13, and the challenge to cryptographic interpretation of v. 18, "this shall be written for the generation to come: and a people which shall be created shall praise the Lord." (2) We have specific evidence of the application of verses 23—24 to the Messiah by those who employed the Hebrew or some equivalent text. (3) Finally in the LXX and Vulg. rendering of ענה by ἀπεκρίθη, *respondit*, we have the explanation of how, in Christian circles at least, the accepted Messianic passage could be made to prove the doctrine that the Messiah is none other than the preëxistent Wisdom of Prov 8, 22—31, "through

¹ *SBOT* ed. Haupt, Heb. text and note.

² Note the "people which shall be created", v. 18, in connection with the Pauline doctrine of the "new creation" καὶνὴ κτίσις 2 Cor 5, 17; Gal 6, 15 in the "second Adam", Rom 5, 14, 18; Eph 2, 15; and compare Barn 6, 11—14. Also "to hear the sighing of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death" as the aim of the redemption in v. 20, in connection with Heb 2, 15 "to deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage".

whom" according to our author, v. 2, God "made the worlds". Indeed we shall not be going too far if with Bruce we say: "It is possible that the writer (of Hebrews) regarded this text (Ps 102, 25—27) as messianic because in his view creation was the work of the preëxistent Christ. But it is equally possible that he ascribed creative agency to Christ out of regard to this and other similar texts believed to be messianic on other grounds".

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