

CREATION IN HEBREWS

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The Letter to the Hebrews is certainly an important voice in any discussion on the biblical view of Creation. It holds the second place among New Testament documents in references to Gen 1–2 and creation in general.¹ It probably contains, however, the most famous affirmation on the topic: “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible” (Heb 11:3, NRSV).

The purpose of this article is to study the language and the theology of creation in the Letter to the Hebrews. The paper is, then, both exegetical and theological in nature. I will approach this study with four questions in mind:

1. What does the Letter to the Hebrews say about the creation of our world?
2. What role does the creation of our world play in the broader argument of the Letter to the Hebrews?
3. How did Hebrews’ views on creation relate to the debate on the origin of the world in antiquity (especially to Plato whose views held a prominent position in the intellectual landscape of the ancient Greco-Roman world)?
4. What are the implications of Hebrews’ views on creation for the current debate between creationism and evolution?

Hebrews and Hellenistic Views on Creation

The study of the debate on the origin of the world among ancient Greek philosophers is especially important for the study of Hebrews. The Letter to the Hebrews is the most Hellenistic of New Testament documents. It seems

¹With a total of 11 references. For a list of references in the New Testament to Gen 1–2 and creation in general, see Ekkhardt Mueller, “Creation in the New Testament,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (hereafter *JATS*) 15, no. 1 (2004): 48. In this list, Hebrews is tied with Romans in the second place with 9 references each (Revelation is first with 14). This list does not include, however, Heb 2:10; 3:4.

I want to express my gratitude to the Faith and Science Council for the request to write this paper, the warm fellowship, and the stimulating dialogue of its meetings. The Seminar in Interpretation of Genesis 1–2 at Andrews University in the Spring of 2011 also provided a space for the discussion of an earlier draft of this paper. I owe a debt of gratitude to its instructor, John Reeve, and each member of the seminar for the insightful questions and comments and hospitality. Ekkhardt Mueller and Reimar Vetne went through the manuscript and provided valuable critique and suggestions, which contributed in no small degree to this paper. The shortcomings of the paper, however, are mine.

obvious that its author was well educated and enjoyed rhetorical training.² Both his arguments and style are sophisticated. Its Greek is excellent, “by far the best Koine to be found among New Testament writings.”³ It contains complex sentences of elevated style that were carefully edited to delight and exert varying rhetorical effects in the audience.⁴ The Letter was, however, not only beautifully written, but also carefully argued. In fact, some have considered this book to be the beginning of Christian philosophy.⁵ Thus, insight into the ancient debate on the origin of the cosmos among Greek philosophers together with a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures (no document of the NT quotes the OT as often as Hebrews does⁶) provides the reader with the tools to reconstruct as much as possible the appropriate chamber of resonance that will not distort its music or damp its singular tones.

The ancient debate on the origin of the cosmos was lively and the spectrum of positions wide. Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, Plato, and the Stoics, with differences and nuances, championed the argument from design and found compelling evidence for a creator. Aristotle embraced teleology—that is to say, that the world is and contains purposive structures—yet, he denied an active organizing intelligence (that is, no divine oversight, planning, or enforcement). The atomists, who were strict materialists, appealed to the explanatory power of infinity and accident and proposed the fundamental insight of natural selection.⁷ I will not be able to explore this wider landscape

²Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 5.

³Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 8.

⁴Attridge, 5. See also Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988); David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SBLDS 152 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 30–33; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 92–96.

⁵See James W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, CBQMS 13 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982).

⁶See George H. Guthrie, “Old Testament in Hebrews,” *DLNT*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 841–2. George Guthrie, for example, counts 36 quotations and 37 allusions. Compare with Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context*, SBLDS 156 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 90–91; S. Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam: van Soest, 1961), 16.

The Book of Revelation, however, has more allusions to the Old Testament than Hebrews.

⁷David Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, Sather Classical Lectures 66 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007). See also, Keith Augustus Burton,

but will focus on the most prominent and influential of ancient cosmologies, Plato's *Timaeus*.

The *Timaeus* proved “from the start the most influential of all Plato's works, and probably the most seminal philosophical or scientific text to emerge from the whole of antiquity.”⁸ It became the basic Platonic dialogue for Middle Platonism (ca. 80 B.C.–A.D. 250)⁹ and the only Platonic dialogue in general circulation in the Western Middle Ages.¹⁰

Hebrews' scholars have long argued that Hebrews adopted a Platonic worldview similar to, or mediated through, that of Philo¹¹—a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria from ca. 20 B.C.–ca. A.D. 50.¹² Philo brought together in his writings Jewish tradition and Greek philosophy. He was especially influenced by what is known today as Middle Platonism, which is a blend of Platonist thought with Stoic and Pythagorean ideas.¹³ Gerhard May, in his study on the origin of the doctrine of creation out of nothing in early Christianity, argues that it was not until the second part of the second century that Christianity began to respond to the challenges of philosophical theology and Platonizing Gnosticism by developing a clear doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.¹⁴ Hebrews was written in the previous century but the forces and tendencies that would shape the later debate were already

“The Faith Factor: New Testament Cosmology in Its Historical Context,” *JATS* 15, no. 1 (2004): 34–46; Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Beginning: A Study in the Greek Philosophical Approach to the Concept of Creation from Anaximander to St John* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968).

⁸Sedley, 96.

⁹Gerhard May, *Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of ‘Creation out of Nothing’ in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 3–4.

¹⁰See Jaroslav Pelikan, *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?: Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint*, 21 (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 111–32. Platonism, as a system of philosophy, is “perhaps the greatest philosophical edifice ever erected in the Western intellectual tradition” and helped shape Christian theology in its first centuries of existence, J. M. Dillon, “Plato, Platonism,” *DNTB*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 804–805. For a study of the influence of Plato's *Timaeus* on Christian theology, see Pelikan.

¹¹See, for example, Thompson; Johnson, 17–21.

¹²In *Leg. Gaj.* 1, 182 Philo describes himself among the “aged” and “gray-headed.” It could be inferred from this that he was between sixty and seventy years old in AD 40. See, Ronald Williamson, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo*, Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200 1 part 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.

¹³Ellen Birnbaum, “Philo of Alexandria,” *NIDB*, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009) 4:512–3.

¹⁴May, xiv. He rejects the common notion that the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* had emerged in pre-Christian Hellenistic Judaism (e.g., 2 Macc 7:28–29) and was simply presupposed and absorbed by Early Christians. He suggests that with Irenaeus this doctrine takes a settled form and the debate reaches a specific conclusion.

taking place. By the time Hebrews was written, Plato's worldview had great influence in the thinking of Hellenistic Judaism and was beginning to have influence in early Christian sectors as well.¹⁵ Thus, the question arises with force, what position did the Letter to the Hebrews favor in what would be the later debate? Did Hebrews reinterpret the Genesis account from a Platonic/Philonic point of view and, if so, in what ways and to what extent?

This paper has three main sections. The first section introduces the debate in modern scholarship regarding Plato's/Philo's influence on Hebrews. This includes a summary of Plato's views on the origin of the cosmos. The second section analyzes the references to the creation of the world and what role they play in the argument of their immediate contexts. Finally, in the third section, I will draw some of the implications of this study in terms of the theology of creation in Hebrews.

Did the Author of Hebrews have a Platonic/Philonic Worldview?

The view that the author of Hebrews was influenced by the Alexandrian Jewish Philosopher Philo and the existential dualism of Plato has a long history. Philo was contemporary to Herod the Great, Hillel, Shammai, Gamaliel, Paul, and Jesus. He was as well a prime example of an Hellenization process that occurred especially among Diaspora Jews. His entire work is a gigantic attempt "to show that the Jewish people did not need to be ashamed of their cultural and religious heritage"¹⁶ and endeavors to explain the OT and Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy—especially from the Platonic strand.¹⁷ Philo influenced Christian thinkers such as Clement and Origen, and his philosophical/allegorical exegesis was continued by the Alexandrian Christian church.¹⁸

¹⁵John Turner, "Plato, Platonism," *NIDB* 4:546–7.

¹⁶David T. Runia, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, Collected Studies 332 (Hampshire: Variorum, 1990), 5.

¹⁷It could be said that the Hellenistic literature, from the Septuagint to Philo and Josephus had a "double purpose: to defend the Jews and Judaism from the attacks of pagans and to prove the superiority of the Jews and Judaism over other nations and their religions," Robert H. Pfeiffer, *History of New Testament Times: With an Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Harper, 1949), 197. Philo evidences a broad and penetrating knowledge of Greek culture in his writings. He quotes "some fifty-four classical authors directly and accurately, Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 15. See also Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time*, NovTSup 86 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 3.

¹⁸J. M. Knight, "Alexandria, Alexandrian Christianity," *DLNT* 36–37. Indeed, we owe the survival of Philo's works to the Christian church. Of the more than seventy treatises he wrote—see Gregory E. Sterling, "Philo," *DNTB* 790—the fifty that survived are essentially those in Eusebius' catalogue of Philo's work (*Hist. eccl.* 2.18.1–7). In fact, we could say to some extent that Philo was adopted by the Christian church, David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*, vol. 3 of *Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature*, ed. Y. Aschkenasy et al., CRINT (Minneapolis,

In the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea referred to Plato's *Republic* while commenting on Heb 8:5 (*Praep. Evang.* XII). Hugo Grotius in 1646 suggested, probably for the first time, Philonic influence on Hebrews.¹⁹ In 1894, Eugene Ménégoz was the first to produce a thoroughgoing presentation on Philo's influence on Hebrews. He concluded that "[l'auteur de l'épître] est un philonien converti au christianisme."²⁰ This view dominated the first part of the twentieth century and reached its climax in Ceslas Spicq's massive commentary in 1952. Spicq evaluated vocabulary, hermeneutic techniques, psychology, and parallels with Hebrews 11 and concluded by quoting approvingly Ménégoz' view and even suggested that the author of Hebrews knew Philo personally.²¹ He did not describe Hebrews' author as a thoroughgoing Philonist, however, he recognized that there is a "resolute repudiation" of Philo's allegorical method in the Epistle. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the publication of an article by Barrett in 1956—which stressed that Hebrews' perspective is eschatological and not existential-dualistic—dealt major blows to the ideas championed by Spicq. In 1970, Ronald Williamson wrote the most comprehensive, point-by-point critique of Spicq's case. He concluded that Spicq's case was groundless.²²

The case for Platonic/Philonic influence continues, however, to exert influence in the interpretation of Hebrews to the present.²³ In 1982, James W. Thompson asserted that Spicq succeeded in demonstrating that Hebrews uses "the vocabulary of educated Hellenistic Jews."²⁴ In his opinion, the problem

MN: Fortress, 1993), 3-7, 31-33.

¹⁹For other suggestions of Philonic influence before the 20th century, see James H. Burtress, "Plato, Philo and Hebrews," *LQ* 10 (1958): 54–55.

²⁰Eugène Ménégoz, *La théologie de L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1894), 198.

²¹Ceslas Spicq, *L'épître aux Hébreux*, EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1952), 1:91. Also, Lincoln D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought*, SNTSMS 65 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7 n. 5.

²²"But it is in the realm of ideas, of the thoughts which words and O.T. texts were used to express and support, that the most significant differences between Philo and the Writer of Hebrews emerge. On such fundamental subjects as time, history, eschatology, the nature of the physical world, etc., the thoughts of Philo and the Writer of Hebrews are poles apart." Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ALGHJ 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 576–577.

²³Luke Timothy Johnson argues that Hebrews shares the worldview of Plato (Johnson, 17–21). Kenneth L. Schenck, though rejecting that Hebrews adopts a Platonic/Philonic worldview, speculates that salvation in Hebrews is salvation from the created realm in part on the basis of Heb 9:26, that declares that atonement was needed from the beginning of creation, Kenneth L. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*, SNTSMS 143 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 113–81.

²⁴Thompson, 8.

was that Spicq had claimed too much.²⁵ Thompson argued that Williamson's critique had not been able to refute the idea that Philo and the author of Hebrews belonged to a common conceptual background²⁶ and quite correctly identified the crux of the debate: "The *eschatology of the Epistle* to the Hebrews has been a central issue for debate in discussion of the intellectual world of the author. This debate appears to result from the fact that Hebrews contains both passages which assume the spatial dualism of Plato (i.e., 8:5) and statements which assume the apocalyptic, temporal dualism of the two ages [linear apocalyptic] (i.e., 1:2; 6:4)," (emphasis mine).²⁷ The question, then, continues to be debated. Was the author of Hebrews influenced by Philo's and Plato's views and, if so, to what extent did their views shape Hebrews' views on the creation of the world? It is important that we evaluate the evidence.

Origin of the Universe according to Plato

Plato conceives the earth as approximately spherical and located, motionless, at the center of a greater sphere, which is heaven. The surface rises in different degrees so that some sectors lie under water, others in the air, and others rise to the upper atmosphere known as aether. Below the surface there are underground rivers.²⁸ Souls are assigned to an appropriate region according to the level of their purification. The range goes from punishment at Tartarus to living in beauty and purity in the upper atmosphere near total discarnate state. How did this earth come to exist?

This is described in the *Timaeus*. The discourse on cosmology is in fact just a fragment of the *Timaeus-Critias*, which is a truncated series of monologues that include the Atlantis story told by Critias, the relation of the origin of

²⁵No amount of verbal parallelism can demonstrate that the author of Hebrews is a "philonien converti au christianisme," *ibid.* "The relationship between Philo and Hebrews is probably too complex to be reduced to a matter of literary dependence," *ibid.*, 11.

²⁶Thompson, 10. He has softened his position, though: "The major debate in scholarship on Hebrews has been the determination of the author's intellectual worldview. We need not choose one over the other, as if the Jewish and Greek worlds existed in isolation from each other. The author lives between the world of scripture and that of Greek philosophy. He is one among many early Jewish and Christian writers who struggled to describe their faith in the language of philosophy. . . . Like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and other early Christian writers, he affirmed Christian convictions that could not be reconciled with Platonism while employing Platonic categories to interpret Christian existence," John W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 24–25.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

²⁸This is described in the *Phaedo's* closing myth, *Phaed.* 107c1–115a8. I will follow in this work the description of Plato's cosmology by Sedley. For further study, see Ehrhardt, 87–106; Thomas Kjeller Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

the world by Timaeus, and a second disposition by Critias, but the document breaks off and we do not get to hear what a third speaker (Hermocrates) was going to say.²⁹ David Sedley summarizes the main highlights of Timaeus' discourse on cosmology in the following way:

First principles. After an opening prayer, Timaeus invokes a strong version of the Platonic "two world" metaphysics, which separates a realm of intelligible being from one of perceptible becoming.

World design. The product of an intrinsically good "maker" or "Demiurge," our world is modelled [sic] on an eternal Form, and is itself a single, spherical, intelligent entity, consisting of the four familiar stuffs, earth, water, air, and fire, plus a soul.

Materials. The Demiurge designed the microscopic structure of the four elementary stuffs imposing beauty and functionality on a substrate called the "receptacle" whose motions had prior to his intervention been more or less chaotic. . . .

The world soul was composed by the Demiurge out of a complex mixture of sameness, difference, and being, arranged in two strips—the circle of the Same and the circle of the Different—and divided into harmonic intervals. This is the structure that underlies the orderly motions of the heavenly bodies.

The human rational soul. The human rational soul, also constructed by the Demiurge, was modelled [sic] by him on the world soul, and was later housed in our approximately spherical heads in imitation of the way the world soul occupies, and rotates through, the spherical heaven. Its incarnation has disrupted its naturally circular motions, but by imitating the world soul it can aspire eventually to restore them.

The human body. Anything the Demiurge makes, including our rational souls, is thereby immortal. To avoid making human beings themselves immortal, the detailed design and construction of the human body, including the mortal soul-parts, had to be delegated to the lesser, created gods. They designed and built the human body as a suitable housing for the rational soul.

Other animals. These were created as deliberately engineered degenerations from the human archetype, designed to imprison ex-human souls for a period of punishment and redemption.³⁰

The interpreters of the *Timaus* have long debated whether Plato considered that there was really a divine craftsman who, in a specific date in the past, had built the world out of chaotic matter or this image was only employed to describe the causal role of intelligence in a world that has existed

²⁹For a study of the internal logic of the different sections of the *Timaus-Critias*, see Johansen, 7–23. The *Timaus* is presented as a continuation of the *Republic*. Johansen argues that "the *Timaus-Critias* can be seen as an extension of the concern in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* with refuting the view that nature supports vice and undermines virtue" (22).

³⁰Sedley, 97–98.

essentially unchanged from past eternity?³¹ David Sedley concludes that Plato believed in an act of creation in time and that Aristotle, the Epicurians, the Stoics, and Galen all favored a literal reading of the *Timaus*.³² Plato's Demiurge is a craftsman. He is not the omnipotent God of the Bible. He models the world on an eternal Form and uses pre-existing matter that existed in a state of chaos. He is limited to some extent, however, by the matter he uses to create so that the world he creates is less than perfect. He structures the world in order "to provide souls, through a system of punishments and rewards, with the possibility of self-purification, divinization, and eternal discarnate bliss."³³ The world is made with the soul in mind. All the animal kingdom was modeled on one Form. The superior species are those that resemble more closely the Form—these are the immortal fiery animals (the star gods) created by the Demiurge. The lower ones are the mortal species associated with air, earth, and water and were created by the immortal fiery animals.³⁴

Does the Letter to the Hebrews Contain Platonic Ideas?

Some consider that Hebrews' use of the terms ὑπόδειγμα and σκία, ἀντίτυπος, εἰκὼν and πρᾶγμα, and ἀληθινός is an evidence of the presence of Platonic ideas in the Letter to the Hebrews. A closer analysis, however, shows that this not the case.

"Ὑπόδειγμα has perhaps played more of a role in the 'Platonizing' of Hebrews than any other factor."³⁵ This word appears in Heb 8:5 and has been translated as "copy" (e.g. RSV) conveying the sense that the earthly sanctuary was a "copy" of the heavenly one. Plato believed that the earthly world (perceived by the senses) is a 'copy' (μίμημα or εἰκὼν) of eternal ideas (*Tim.* 48e–49a). Philo shared this view. According to him God created the earthly world as a beautiful copy (μίμημα καλὸν) of a beautiful pattern (καλοῦ παραδείγματος; for example, *Creation* 16).³⁶ The comparison between the earthly and the heavenly world and between shadow and reality in Heb 8:5 and 9:23 made unavoidable for some the conclusion that the author of

³¹For references to studies on this debate, see *ibid.*, 98 n. 9.

³²The *Timaus* has the outward form of a creation myth but its contents switch repeatedly between myth, fable, prayer, and scientific analysis. See *ibid.*, 97, 107.

³³*Ibid.*, 125–6.

³⁴See *ibid.*, 127–32.

³⁵Hurst, 14.

³⁶"For God, being God, assumed that a beautiful copy [μίμημα] would never be produced apart from a beautiful pattern, and that no object of perception would be faultless which was not made in the likeness of an original discerned only by the intellect" (Philo, *Creation* 16 [Colson, LCL 226, 14–15]) See also, Peder Borgen, Kåre Sigvald Fuglseth, and Roald Skarsten, "μίμημα" *The Philo Index: A Complete Greek Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 226.

Hebrews was influenced by the classical dualism of Plato via Philo.³⁷ There are, however, several problems with this view. First, “ὑπόδειγμα is *not* a word characteristic of Philo.”³⁸ He and Plato preferred παραδειγμα (e.g. *Creation* 16). Second, ὑπόδειγμα does not mean “copy” but the opposite: “something to be copied,” an “example.”³⁹ A better translation in the context of Heb 8:5 and 9:23 would be “sketch” or “prototype.” Third, παραδειγμα in Plato and Philo denotes the world of ideas, while in Hebrews ὑπόδειγμα denotes the earthly tabernacle. Hebrews’ use of ὑπόδειγμα, then, does not actually support the idea that Hebrews has a platonic worldview.

Hebrews’ use of the term ἀντίτυπος has also been understood in platonic terms,⁴⁰ especially where the earthly tabernacle is contrasted with the heavenly one in 9:24. Ἀντίτυπος could mean “copy” as well as “original” and in classical Greek “occasionally means ‘echo,’ ‘corresponding,’ ‘opposite,’ ‘reproduction’ . . .”⁴¹ The immediate context of this verse, however, suggests a prefiguration relationship (type-antitype) rather than a metaphysical one (original-copy; see also discussion above on ὑπόδειγμα). First Peter 3:21—the only other occurrence of the term in the NT⁴²—uses ἀντίτυπος in a type-antitype relationship as well. This same relationship seems to fit better the context of Hebrews. In this sense, Moses’ tabernacle is a prefiguration of something that comes later; thus, ἀντίτυπος does not carry a Platonic sense in Heb 9:24.

The phrase “εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων” (lit. image of the things) in Heb 10:1 has been forwarded as another example of Platonic and Philonic influence on Hebrews.⁴³ Plato (*Crat.* 306e) and Philo (for example, *Alleg. Interp.* 3.96, *Abraham* 3f.) used εἰκὼν (image) to refer to the earthly (perceived)

³⁷William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47a (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), 207.

³⁸Hurst, 13. Ὑπόδειγμα is used only four times by Philo. See, “μίμημα,” *Philo Index*, 226. In fact, “Kenneth Schenck points out that the term ‘is *never* used by *any* ancient author, let alone Philo or Plato, in reference to a Platonic copy,’” *A Brief Guide to Philo* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 84; quoted in Edward Adams, “The Cosmology of Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 133.

³⁹Hurst, 14. In the Septuagint and in Philo is used mostly in the sense of moral example.

⁴⁰For example, in Neo-Platonism by Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9,6 where ἀντίτυπος is contrasted with αὐθεντικόν, Hurst, 18. The term ἀντίτυπος, however, was rarely used in Judaism.

⁴¹Hurst, 17–18. Philo uses it only three times (*Planting.* 133, *Confusion.* 102, *Heir* 181) in the sense of “resistant” or “inimical.”

⁴²It should be noted that the order is reversed in 1 Peter. The baptism, which is the antitype, is the fulfillment while in Hebrews the antitype is what prefigures the fulfillment. This should not have much importance since it is the type-antitype relationship in the context of the history of salvation which is important for understanding Hebrews’ use of the term, *ibid.*, 18.

⁴³See *ibid.*, 19.

world. For Philo, “image” (εἰκών) and “shadow” (σκία) are synonymous⁴⁴ and both refer to the earthly world of perception. For Hebrews, however, “image” (εἰκών) belongs to the heavenly world and is opposed to “shadow” (σκία).⁴⁵ In conclusion, the terms are the same but used differently, evidencing a different conceptual background.

Finally, as Lincoln D. Hurst explains, “it has been assumed by many that ἀληθινός, used by *Auctor* [of Hebrews] in 8:2 and 9:24, relates specially to Plato’s *Rep.* VI.499c, and means the ‘real’ world of the eternal archetypes as opposed to the ‘unreal’ world of earthly copies.”⁴⁶ Hebrews’ comparison in those verses, however, is not between the phenomenal sanctuary (earthly) and the ideal (heavenly); but between the symbol (Mosaic Tabernacle) and the reality (Heavenly Tabernacle). The Greek term ἀληθινός (true) refers in this case to “the reality to which the symbol points,”⁴⁷ namely, the heavenly sanctuary. Further examples in the New Testament of this typological argument may be found in John 6:32, Rom 2:28, and Phil 3:3. Again, Hebrews’ use of ἀληθινός (true) does not evidence that it shares a Platonic/Philonic worldview.

*Should We Understand the Heaven-Earth Vertical Duality
in Hebrews from a Platonic Point of View?*

The presence of “vertical” patterns in Hebrews (for example, a heaven-earth duality) does not necessarily imply a Platonic or Philonic mode of thinking. The idea that Greek thought deals with space (a “vertical” cosmological framework) while Jews think in terms of time (a “horizontal” temporal framework) has been overstated.⁴⁸ Christianity, in fact, merges both frameworks. Christianity’s worldview included the idea of the present and coming ages (horizontal temporal framework), which overlapped with heavenly and earthly domains (vertical cosmological framework). Colossians 3:1–4 is a good example of this phenomenon:

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is

⁴⁴*Alleg. Interp.* 3.96 reads: “Bezaleel means, then, ‘in the shadow of God’; but God’s shadow is his Word, which he made use of like an instrument, and so made the world. But this shadow, and what we may describe as the representation, is the archetype for further creations. For just as God is the Pattern [παράδειγμα] of the Image [εἰκών], to which the title of Shadow [σκία] has just been given, even so the Image becomes the pattern of other beings, as the prophet made clear at the very outset of the Law-giving by saying, ‘And God made the man after the image of God’” (trans. Colson, LCL 226, 364–367).

⁴⁵Hurst, 19–20.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 20, 21.

⁴⁸Hurst, 21.

hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

In this text, the apostle merges vertical and horizontal frameworks. He invites his readers to look for the things above (vertical framework) so that they might be revealed in the future (horizontal framework) with Jesus in glory.

In the same way, Hebrews' view of reality includes the overlap of vertical and horizontal dimensions. According to Heb 8:5, the earthly tabernacle built by Moses was a *ὑποδείγμα* (pattern) and *σκιά* (shadow) of the heavenly sanctuary. Yes, there is here a vertical dimension that involves heaven and earth, but there is also a horizontal dimension in time. Moses' tabernacle was a prototype of an eschatological reality to be fulfilled by Christ when he offered himself as sacrifice and ascended to heaven to minister in our behalf.⁴⁹ Thus, in the argument of Hebrews the earthly tabernacle is not simply a shadow but a foreshadow of the heavenly one. According to Heb 10:1, the ritual of Moses' tabernacle pointed toward the future: "Since the law has only a shadow [*σκιά*] of the *good things to come* and not the true form of these realities . . ." (NRSV, emphasis mine; see also 9:11–14). The contrast between the heavenly and the earthly sanctuary is, then, temporal ("then-now," horizontal) and spatial ("above-below," vertical).⁵⁰

The overlap of vertical and horizontal dimensions in Hebrews is, however, a little more complex. The ritual of the earthly sanctuary pointed toward the new reality achieved by Christ in heaven now but that believers will only enjoy in the future (e.g., Heb 11). Thus, the author of Hebrews sees the future as already happening in heaven. This is frequent in other biblical writers. For example, the future inheritance of Christians is seen as already present in heaven:

⁴⁹Hurst, 16.

⁵⁰An apparent contradiction results, however, from this horizontal (temporal) contrast between both sanctuaries. How do we understand that the earthly sanctuary is the "prefiguration" of the heavenly one (the "good things to come," 10:1) if the heavenly sanctuary was already present in Moses' time and seems to be the basis on which the earthly one was designed (Heb 8:5)? Does not Ex 25:40 imply that the heavenly comes first and the earthly later?

There were four views in Judaism as to when the Heavenly Sanctuary was built: (1) before creation, (2) at creation, (3) when the earthly sanctuary was built, and (4) at the end of the age. Hurst argues that Hebrews should be included in the fourth view and gives several arguments (*ibid.*, 38–41): (1) Heb 8:2 says that the heavenly tabernacle was actually pitched by the Lord; therefore, it is not archetypically eternal in the Platonic sense; (2) Heb 9:8 clearly implies that the heavenly sanctuary is the "second" and the earthly is the "first;" (3) Heb 9:23 says that the sanctuary was "purified" by Jesus' blood which must refer to the Inauguration of the Sanctuary and not to the Day of the atonement (Heb 9:15–22); and (4) finally, Heb 13:14 talks about the future manifestation on earth of this heavenly temple (implied in the "heavenly city"). Hurst offers 1 Enoch 90:28–29 as an example of the view that God would build a Sanctuary at the end of the age.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, *kept in heaven for you* (1 Pet 1:3–4, NRSV, emphasis mine).

Likewise, what is present in God's mind is considered as having already happened or even as being eternal and this is the essence of the Jewish thought of predestination. For example, Rev 13:8 asserts: "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (cf. Eph 1:4–5).

Therefore, the heavenly sanctuary may be eternal in the sense that it was in the mind of God since the beginning; that is, it was predestined by God and prefigured in the earthly tabernacle. In summary, Hebrews' understanding of the Heavenly Sanctuary is eschatological but existed already in God's mind from the beginning of time when he conceived the plan of redemption.

There are other evidences that Hebrews does not share a Platonic view of the universe. Hebrews does not exhibit the slightest trace of discomfort with the idea that God created the physical universe (Heb 2:10; 3:4; 4:3–4; 11:3) and does not accord the Son, who collaborated in Creation, a Demiurgical role (1:2–3, 10–12).⁵¹ The heaven-earth duality in Hebrews hardly agrees with Plato's distinction between the physical world and the realm of ideas. The author describes Heaven as a city populated with angels, and God and Jesus at the center. Heaven and earth do not form in Hebrews an antithetical dualism. They are not polarized.⁵² Finally, Hebrews announces a future destruction of the world (12:25–27), but Plato (*Tim.* 32C, 33A) and Philo (*Eternity* 1–20) argue that the universe will last forever.

In summary, Hebrews uses "Platonic-sounding language" but this use does not suggest its author sees the universe in Platonic dualistic terms.⁵³ Furthermore, the author of Hebrews is at odds on the inherent worthiness of the physical world and the eternal destiny of the present world.

What Does the Author of Hebrews Say about the Creation of the World?

ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας·
(Heb 1:2)

... in these last days he spoke to us in a son, whom he appointed heir of all [things], through whom also [he] made the universe.⁵⁴

This is the first passage in Hebrews to refer to creation. It raises two questions in our mind: "what did God create?" and "how did he create it?" We are going to address them in that order.

⁵¹Adams, 130.

⁵²Ibid., 134.

⁵³Ibid., 138.

⁵⁴Translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

The passage affirms that God made the “*aionas*” through Jesus, which is the Greek term that I have translated here as “universe.” The Greek term αἰών (*aion*) has a long history of evolution and therefore it is not strange that New Testament authors use it in different ways.⁵⁵ Αἰών may refer to prolonged time or eternity both for the future and the past—especially when used with a preposition (e.g., ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος; εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα).⁵⁶ It may refer as well to the time or duration of the world—for example, in the expression “the end of the age [συντέλεια αἰῶνός]” (e.g., Matt 13:39; cf. 28:20; 1 Cor 10:11). A third use of αἰών is to refer to the world itself and not to its time. In this sense the meaning is not temporal but local—making αἰών equivalent to κόσμος—and could be translated as world or universe (e.g., Mark 4:19; Matt 13:22; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6–8 [cf. 3:19; 7:33]).⁵⁷ Finally, this term was also used to refer to the eschatological scheme of this age and the age to come, which is found in apocalyptic and rabbinic texts and in the NT.⁵⁸

The term αἰών appears 15 times in Hebrews⁵⁹ and the author uses it in all the senses mentioned above.⁶⁰ The author of Hebrews is unique in the NT, however, both in the fact that here (1:2) and in 11:3 it refers to the object of the Son’s creation activity with the term αἰών and that it uses it in the plural form.⁶¹ This fact opens several possibilities regarding the meaning of

⁵⁵See H. Sasse, “αἰών,” *TDNT*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976) 1:197–208; J. Guhrt, “αἰών,” *NIDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975–1978) 3:826–33. In ancient Greece, αἰών denoted relative time—or time “allotted to a being” (Sasse, *TDNT* 1:197–8)—in contrast to χρόνος that denoted time itself. Thus, Homer uses αἰών as a parallel to Life (*Il.* 16, 453); Hesiod, to denote a life-span (*frag.* 161, 1); and Aeschylus to denote a generation (*Sep.* 742). Plato, however, used αἰών to refer to timeless, ideal eternity in contrast to χρόνος that is the time created with the world. Plutarch and the earlier stoics adopted Plato’s views and from them the traditions of the mysteries of Αἰών and the speculations of the Gnostics. Finally, the idea of a personal Αἰών—or personified αἰῶνες—became important in Hellenistic syncretism.

⁵⁶See L&N (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 93.615; Sasse, *TDNT* 1:198–202.

⁵⁷The temporal element, though, is not completely lost but only recedes into the background.

⁵⁸E.g., Matt 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 16:8; 20:34; Eph 1:21. See also Str.-B. (Munich, 1922–1961) 3.671–2; 4 Ezra 3.9; 8:41; Midr. Ps. 15[72b]; Sasse, *TDNT* 1:204–7.

⁵⁹Heb 1:2, 8 (2x); 5:6; 6:5, 20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28; 9:26; 11:3; 13:8, 21 (2x).

⁶⁰Prolonged time or eternity: 1:8; 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28; 13:8, 21. The time or duration of the world: 9:26. This age and the age to come: 6:5 (cf. 2:5; 9:9–10). World or universe: 1:2; 11:3 (see discussion below).

⁶¹The plural of αἰών is common in prepositional phrases or as an attributive genitive to refer to prolonged time or eternity. In the LXX and the NT, it appears as the direct object of a verb only in Tob 13:18; Heb 1:2, and 11:3.

our passage. Does this passage refer to the creation of “ages”—that is, the present and coming age⁶²—or the creation of “worlds”?⁶³

What are these “worlds” that God created through the Son? Hebrews does not show any interest in a multiplicity of worlds as was later the case in rabbinical writings.⁶⁴ Ron A. Stewart has suggested that the author refers to the creation of the visible (or sense-perceptible) and invisible (intellectual) worlds that sum up the entire universe,⁶⁵ but as we will see, it is unlikely that the author is using Platonic categories here or elsewhere in the epistle. Others suggest that the author refers to the spheres that comprise the universe.⁶⁶

The context suggests that the author has a spatial meaning in mind; in other words, that he is referring to the creation of “worlds.” In the immediate context, the affirmation that God created τοὺς αἰῶνας through the Son is parallel to the affirmation that the Son inherited “all things” (1:2; τὰ πάντα) and that he (the Son) sustains “all things” (τὰ πάντα) by his powerful word (1:3). The expression τὰ πάντα is commonly used in the NT to express the idea that all creation is God’s work and, therefore, there is no power independent of him in the universe.⁶⁷ Thus, probably the best translation for the expression τοὺς αἰῶνας is “universe.”⁶⁸ In this sense, Heb 1:2 affirms that the Son inherits what he helped create in the first place, that is, “all things.” We should understand that “all things” involves the earthly as well as the heavenly world, or “coming world,” which the Son also inherits according to Heb 2:5 and 8:1–2.⁶⁹ It could not be differently since it is the Son who created the angels who inhabit heaven (Heb 1:7).

How did God create the universe? He created it *through* (διὰ) the Son.⁷⁰ This idea is also attested in other NT writings (e.g., John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor 8:6; cf.

⁶²David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 87.

⁶³See Attridge; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); Spicq.

⁶⁴Ellingworth, 96. Rabbinic writings refer to the creation of עולמים—a word usually translated in the LXX with the plural of αἰών—referring to the creation of other worlds (see Str.-B. 3.671–2).

⁶⁵Ron A. Stewart, “Creation and Matter in the Epistle of the Hebrews,” *NTS* 12, (1966): 288. See also Ellingworth, 96.

⁶⁶Attridge, 41. Note that Gen 1 refers among other things to the creation of the “vault” (רָקִיעַ) referring to the heavens.

⁶⁷B. Reicke, “παῦς,” *TDNT* 5:893–6.

⁶⁸Lane, 5. See BDF (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) §§ 4(2), 141(1). See also analysis of the expression “at the end of the ages” (ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων) in Heb 9:26.

⁶⁹This is further supported by the quotation of LXX Ps 102:26–28 in the very next section (see below), which refers to the creation of the earth (γῆ) and the heavens (οὐρανοί).

⁷⁰Kenneth Schenck has recently argued that the Son’s relationship to creation is

Col 1:16). The author's affirmation that God created the universe "through" Jesus does not mean that Jesus is inferior to the Father as a hammer or a saw is inferior to the builder or as the servant is inferior to the master. The context emphasizes the identification and close relationship between the Son and God (Heb 1:3–4). Jesus is the one who enacts the purposes of the Father. Thus, without contradicting himself, the author may refer to the Son in Heb. 1:10 as the "Lord" who created "the earth and the heavens." The same cannot be affirmed of a tool that is manipulated or a servant who only follows the commands of another. The creation of the universe through Jesus speaks of the "perfect accord of will and activity between Father and Son."⁷¹

The passage has an underlying logic that is worth noting. Before affirming the role of the Son in the creation of the universe, the author had argued that the Son functioned as God's word: "God, having spoken long ago in many parts and in many ways to the fathers by the prophets, in these last days spoke to us in a Son . . ." (Heb 1:1–2).⁷² Thus, the passage affirms that Jesus is both the word of God in "these last days" and the means through which God created the universe at the beginning of time. (There is, then, a consistency in the way God acted at the beginning of time and now at the end of time.) This implicitly agrees with the OT assertions that God created the universe through his word (Gen 1:3, 6; Ps 33:6). The next passage, Heb 1:3, strengthens these allusions by noting that the Son continues to sustain the universe "by his powerful word" (NRSV).

In summary, this passage does not only refer to the creation of the world but also to the creation of the universe, that is to say, of everything over which God has sovereignty. It also confirms the intimate connection between the Father and the Son in the work of creation and an implicit affirmation that God created through his "word" as affirmed in Genesis.

The second reference to creation is found in Hebrews 1:10–12, which quotes—with some modifications—LXX Psalm 101:26–28.

σὺ κατ' ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν
σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί· (Heb 1:10)

You, in the beginning, Lord, founded the earth, and the heavens are the
work of your hands.

not as "creator" but as the goal of God's purposes, Schenck, chs. 5–6.

⁷¹John Webster, "One Who Is Son: Theological Reflections on the Exordium to the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 84.

⁷²The expression ἐν υἱῷ ("in a Son") can be understood as the Son being the messenger (so NRSV) or as embodying the message (so NASB). The argument of Hebrews 2:6–10 implies that Jesus does not only carry a message for humanity but that he himself embodies that message. He is himself "divine speech," Koester, 185. See also Craig R. Koester, "Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity," *CBQ* 64, (2002): 103–23.

Psalm 101 (LXX) is a petitionary hymn in which the distance between the Creator and the creature is emphasized.⁷³ The author quotes this Psalm to support his previous assertion that God created the universe “through the Son” (see above) and to emphasize the absolute superiority of the Son over the angels (1:5–14).⁷⁴ They are created and transient (1:7) while the Son is creator and remains forever (1:10–12). In fact, the author calls the Son straightforwardly “God” in Heb 1:8—by means of the quotation of LXX Ps 44:7–8—and attributes to him in Heb 1:10–12 what was said of God in LXX Ps 101:26. The author plainly attributes full divinity to the Son through these quotations.⁷⁵

Four issues call our attention in this passage. What “beginning” is our author referring to? Does this verse contradict the idea of Genesis that God created the world with his word?

Let us begin with the first question: What beginning is our author referring to? The quotation of LXX Ps 101:26–28 in Heb 1:10–12 is divided in two unequal parts. The first has to do with the actions of the Son regarding the beginning of the world: in the beginning, he “founded” the earth and made the heavens (Heb 1:10). The second part has to do with what the Son will do at the end (vv. 11–12). The Son will “roll them up” and “change” them.⁷⁶ The expression κατ’ ἀρχάς is a classic synonym for the expression ἐν ἀρχῇ, (in the beginning) used in the Old Greek translation of the Gen 1:1.⁷⁷ The juxtaposition of the beginning and the end in the same passage suggests that the author has in mind a merism.⁷⁸ Similarly, the reference to the earth and the heavens is a merism used to refer to the totality of the world. The author refers to “laying the foundation” of the earth (ἐθεμελίωσας) and building the heavens, which are the two farthest point of the totality of the cosmos.⁷⁹ Thus, this passage affirms both that Jesus has created the totality

⁷³Johnson, 80.

⁷⁴For the relationship between Heb 1:1–4 and the chain of quotations in Heb 1:5–14, see John P. Meier, “Structure and Theology in Heb 1,1–14,” *Bib* 66, (1985): 168–89.

⁷⁵See Richard Bauckham, “The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 24–26.

⁷⁶This passage is the counterpart to the quotation of Hag 2:6 in Heb 12:26. They explain each other. Ellingworth, 126.

⁷⁷Ibid., 127. See also G. Delling, “ἀρχή” *TDNT* 1:478–482; H. Bietenhard, “ἀρχή” *NIDNTT* 1:165–9.

⁷⁸A merism is a figure of speech that lists two or more elements of a thing—usually its opposite extremes—to denote the totality of a thing; for example, the familiar English expression that someone “searched high and low” to mean that he searched “everywhere.”

⁷⁹There is no interest in this passage in stoic doctrines of the foundation of the earth before its actual creation.

of the world (universe) and has acted throughout the totality of time—of the world in this case.

The reference to “earth” and the “heavens” is an allusion to Gen 1:1, though in the opposite order. Hebrews changes the order of the elements with the purpose of emphasizing heaven,⁸⁰ which is the realm where angels live⁸¹ and an important concept in Hebrews. The author will emphasize heaven again in Heb 12:26 when he refers to the final destruction of the world (12:26). Thus, the context suggests that the author has in mind the same beginning of Gen 1:1, the beginning of the world as a whole, which marks as well the beginning of time.

Does this verse contradict the assertion of Genesis that God created the world with his word?⁸² Genesis 2:7 also affirms that “God formed man from the dust of the ground” (NRSV), which seems to imply the use of His hands. The expression “works of someone’s hands,” however, is an idiomatic expression that refers to the activity of a person, not to the manner in which a person does things.⁸³ The strength and energy of a person “are made effective through his hands” (see Heb 2:7 [variant reading]; 8:9; 10:31; 12:12);⁸⁴ thus, the hand of God is a symbol of his power (2 Chr 20:6) to create (Isa 48:13), protect (Ezra 7:6; Job 5:18; Ps 145:16; Isa 49:16), and destroy (Exod 7:4; 9:3; 1 Sam 7:13). In fact, the hands can stand for a person (Acts 17:25). Thus, the assertion “the heavens are the work of your [God’s] hands” means simply that the heavens are the result of God’s activity and power and does not imply a contradiction to the assertion that God created the world through his word.

ἔπρεπεν γὰρ αὐτῷ, δι’ ὃν τὰ πάντα καὶ δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα, πολλοὺς υἱοὺς εἰς δόξαν ἀγαγόντα τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι (Heb 3:4).

For it was fitting for Him, for the sake of whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the champion of their salvation through sufferings.

The phrase “for the sake of whom are all things, and through whom are all things” is a circumlocution for God.⁸⁵ This form of reference to God is significant in two different ways. First, it reminds the readers that the same God who created them is the one who will make everything that is necessary so that they may fulfill the original plan for which they were created. That original plan was described in Ps 8 (which is quoted in Heb 2:5–9) but the author of Hebrews argues that it has been brought to fulfillment only in and

⁸⁰Ellingworth, 127.

⁸¹Attridge, 60. Some consider that the plural refers to several heavens where different orders of angels lived, see Ellingworth, 126–7.

⁸²See also Isa 66:2; Acts 7:50.

⁸³Ellingworth, 127. See F. Laubach, “χείρ,” *NIDNTT* 2:148–50; E. Lohse, “χείρ,” *TDNT* 9:424–34.

⁸⁴F. Laubach, “χείρ,” *NIDNTT* 2:148–50.

⁸⁵Lane, 55; Adams, 125. Similarly, μεγαλωσύνη (“Majesty”) in 1:3 and 8:5.

through Jesus.⁸⁶ Second, this circumlocution for God shows that there is not the minimal reticence on the part of the author to identify God as the agent for the creation of the physical universe. In Plato's worldview, the supremely good god could have not created the universe; instead it was a minor god (a Demiurge), and a series of derivations, who created the physical universe.

πλείονος γὰρ οὗτος δόξης παρὰ Μωϋσῆν ἡξίωται, καθ' ὅσον
πλείονα τιμὴν ἔχει τοῦ οἴκου ὁ κατασκευάσας αὐτόν· πᾶς γὰρ
οἶκος κατασκευάζεται ὑπὸ τινος, ὁ δὲ πάντα κατασκευάσας θεός
(Heb 3:4).

For Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

This passage contains the simple assertion that God is the creator of all things. But this assertion is misleadingly simple.

In Heb 3:1–6, the author develops a comparison between Jesus and Moses. The argument is simple. Both were faithful to God (3:1–2); yet, Jesus has superior glory to Moses because he is a Son over the house of God while Moses is a servant in the house of God (Heb 3:5–6).⁸⁷ The central element in this comparison, the axis on which the comparison turns, is the simple assertions of verses 3–4.⁸⁸ Verse 3 says that Jesus has superior glory to Moses just like the builder of a house has more glory than the house he has built. The comparison of Jesus and Moses to the builder and a house is more than just a comparison. Just like the string of an instrument that is played may produce a number of overtones (higher frequencies) along with the fundamental tone (or frequency), this comparison produces a series of important “overtones.” First, the comparison brings to mind that Jesus is the builder of the universe (Heb 1:3, 10–12) while Moses is a created being and, therefore, part of the house built (Heb 3:5–6). Second, the author's play with different uses of the word house (οἶκος) produces another overtone.⁸⁹ In verses 1–2, the word “house” denoted God's people, Israel;⁹⁰ but the truism

⁸⁶See Koester, “Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity,” 103–23.

⁸⁷Regarding the importance of glory or honor in the Greco-Roman culture of the first century A.D., see deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 134–7.

⁸⁸Lane, 77.

⁸⁹See discussion in Ellingworth, 205–206.

⁹⁰The reference to Jesus as faithful priest in verses 1–2 also brings to mind the prophecy of 1 Sam 2:35 where God promises that he is going to raise a “faithful priest” and he will build him a “sure [πιστός, faithful] house.” In this case, “house” denotes a family lineage or dynasty of priests. Note that in Heb 10:19–23, the author refers to Jesus as a great priest over the house of God, implying that believers are a house of priests (see Heb 13:10–16). The importance of the sanctuary and the author's concern with the inauguration of the new covenant sanctuary in heaven (Heb 9:15–23) also suggest the possibility that the author is referring to the construction of a sanctuary.

in Heb 3:4 (“every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God”⁹¹) raises the stakes. House in this place denotes everything, the universe, and only God can be its builder. The affirmation that God is the builder of “all things” does not deny that Jesus is the builder of the universe (remember that in Heb 3:3 Jesus is clearly compared to a builder); instead, it brings to mind earlier references to the divinity of Jesus (1:2–4, 8–12), who participated with God (the Father) in the creation of the universe (Heb 1:2–3, 8–12).⁹² It also brings to our mind sovereignty over the universe. Jesus is the Son who is “heir of all things.” Thus, the next verses (5–6) describe Jesus as Son “over” the house of God.

In summary, this passage asserts simply that God is the creator of the universe but along with this assertion, it brings to mind that Jesus is co-creator with God, divine like him, and sovereign over the universe with the Father.

There are four references to creation in Heb 4. I will address those references in vv. 3–4 and 10 first.

Εἰσερχόμεθα γὰρ εἰς [τὴν] κατάπαυσιν οἱ πιστεύσαντες, καθὼς εἴρηκεν· ὡς ὥμοσα ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ μου· εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσίν μου, καίτοι τῶν ἔργων ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου γενηθέντων. εἴρηκεν γὰρ πού περὶ τῆς ἐβδόμης οὕτως· καὶ κατέπαυσεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἐβδόμῃ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ (vv. 3–4).

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “As in my anger I swore, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” (Heb 4:3–4, NRSV)

ὁ γὰρ εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς κατέπαυσεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ ὥσπερ ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων ὁ θεός (Heb 4:10).

⁹¹The expression ὁ κατασκευάσας—used to refer to God as the builder of “all things”—may mean to make ready for some purpose (make ready, prepare), to bring a structure into being (build, construct, erect, create), or to furnish/equip something, BDAG (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 526–7. Hebrews uses the verb both to mean the construction of something (e.g., Noah’s construction of the ark, 11:7) and to the act of furnishing something (e.g., the sanctuary for priestly service, 9:2, 6). Here, the previous assertions of Heb 1:3, 10–12 suggest that the author refers to the creation or construction of the universe more than of its furnishing. In fact, the LXX translates the participle בּוֹרֵא (creator), from the verb בָּרָא (to create), with the expression ὁ κατασκευάσας (the builder). The verb κατασκευάζω is also used for God’s creational work in the LXX Isa 40:28; 43:7; 45:7, 9; Bar 3:39; Wis 9:2; 11:24; 13:4, Adams, 126. Craig R. Koester suggests that the author may have both meanings in mind in the sense that God both built the universe and furnished it so that there could be glory (2:10), rest (4:4, 10), and a city (11:16) for his people, Koester, *Hebrews*, 245.

⁹²See Johnson, 109.

For the one who has entered into his rest he also has rested from his labors just as God did from His.

These references to creation appear in the second exhortatory section of Hebrews that is found in chapters 3 and 4.⁹³ In this section, the author uses the language and events of Ps 95 and Num 14 to call the attention of the readers to the danger of disregarding the word of God.⁹⁴ The author describes the readers as in the same situation that the wilderness generation of Num 14 was: the moment of the fulfillment of the promise or, in other words, the moment to enter “the rest.”⁹⁵ According to the argument of Hebrews, the repetition of the promise by David in Ps 95 (LXX 94) shows that the promise had not been fulfilled in the time of Joshua (Heb 4:8). The Psalm’s exhortation “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (LXX 94:7–8, quoted in Heb 3:7–8; cf. 3:15; 4:7) implies that the reason for the failure of the wilderness generation was disobedience (ἀπειθεία) resulting from lack of faith (ἄπιστία, Heb 3:18–19).⁹⁶ The author, then, exhorts the readers to obey the voice of God by entering “the rest.”⁹⁷ In Heb 4:3–10, the

⁹³See discussion in Felix H. Cortez, “‘The Anchor of the Soul that Enters within the Veil’: The Ascension of the Son in the Letter to the Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2008), 284–9.

⁹⁴The author introduces this section with the warning: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (3:7–8). This is a warning he repeats two other times in the section (cf. 3:15; 4:7).

⁹⁵See John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*, SNTSMS 75 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 141–3.

Psalm 95 refers to Meribah and Masah (Exod 17:7; Num 20:13). Hebrews reads Ps 95 in relation to Num 14 (Heb 3:17), where the “rest” implied is the land of Canaan (Deut 3:20; 12:9, 10; 25:19; Josh 1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4). Rabbi Aqiba made also the same connection (b. San. 110b; t. San. 13:10 j. San 9.29c). See Otfried Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970), 41–47; Attridge, 125 n. 33.

⁹⁶The Psalmist’s exhortation refers to God’s incrimination in Num 14:22 “[They] have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice.”

⁹⁷Scholars continue to debate the meaning of “rest” in Heb 3–4. The debated issues include whether rest is a place or a state, a present reality or a promise about the future, the heavenly temple or a Christian Sabbath. For an evaluation of the several views, see Jon Laansma, “*I Will Give You Rest*”: *The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3–4*, WUNT 98 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1997), 276–332; Erhard Gallos, “Σαββατισμος in Hebrews 4” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2011), 112, n. 2. (Gallos understands *sabbatismos* in Heb 4 as a call to literal Sabbath-keeping now, giving the faithful believer a weekly spiritual rest in this world.) In addition, different views regarding the religio-historical origin of the concept of “rest” have produced different solutions, for example: entry into the gnostic pleroma, liberation from foreign oppression (George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions*, AB 36 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 9, 63–65, 71), entry into the eschatological temple (Hofius, 53–54), or entry into the

author, however, makes an important redefinition of the concept of “rest” to which believers should “make every effort to enter” (v. 11). The author basically argues—though in a complex fashion—that the rest to which the desert generation was not able to enter—and to which believers are exhorted to enter—is the rest God enjoyed on the seventh day at the completion of the creation week.⁹⁸ Thus, the author refers to this type of rest as a σαββατισμός converting Sabbath observance into a symbol of salvation—a return to Eden.

The use of the Sabbath of the creation week as a symbol of salvation raises some questions about the author’s understanding of the nature of the creation week. Did the author of Hebrews understand the creation week as a historical event consisting in a period of time equivalent to the week we experience today?

The argument of Heb 4 implies that God’s rest on the seventh day of the creation was the prototypical rest into which he always desired his people to enter. The author calls this rest a σαββατισμός. This term derives from the verb σαββατίζειν which means “to keep the Sabbath”—just like βαπτισμός (baptism) derives from βαπτίζειν (to baptize)—and refers to the Jewish and the early Christian practice of keeping the seventh day of the week as a day of rest for religious purposes.⁹⁹ Erhard Gallos, after analyzing all the references to this term that occur both in Christian and non-Christian literature,¹⁰⁰ concludes that “we can say that σαββατισμός is used always literally, although sometimes pejoratively, with the exception of Origen who uses the term twice figuratively as a time period in the scheme of ages and as a cessation from sin.”¹⁰¹

Is σαββατισμός—and by extension the creation week—understood in Hebrews as a historical or as a mythical event? This passage does not provide a categorical answer. There are some indications, however, that suggest that the author considered the creation week a historical event.

According to the argument of Heb 4, God’s σαββατισμός at the end of the creation week was a prototype of what God wanted his people to enjoy as a result of their faith in Him. Thus, the relationship of God’s σαββατισμός to life in the land of Canaan for Israel’s desert generation is similar to the relationship between a type and an antitype only that in a more complex fashion. Israel’s rest in the land of Canaan is a type of the salvation God wants to provide believers, which is at the same time described as entering the rest that God enjoyed on the Sabbath of the creation week. Thus, rest in the land of Canaan is a type that points at the same time to the future (to

heavenly spiritual world (Thompson, 99).

⁹⁸Harold W. Attridge, “Let Us Strive to Enter That Rest’: The Logic of Heb 4:1–11,” *HTR* 73 (1980): 284.

⁹⁹See discussion in Gallos, 202–9.

¹⁰⁰Plutarch, *Superst.* 2 (166); Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 23.3; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.2.2; *Martyrium Petri et Pauli* 1; *Ap. Const.* 2.36.2; Origen, *Cels.* 5.59; *Comm. Jo.* 2.27; *Or.* 27.16; *Sel. Exod.* 12.289.7; *Exc. Ps.* 17.144.31.

¹⁰¹Gallos, 208.

the salvation of God's people) and to the past (to God's rest on the Sabbath of Creation). The important thing is that the relationship between rest in the land of Canaan and God's σαββατισμός is equivalent to other type-antitype relationships in the book of Hebrews. In the other type-antitype relationships in the book of Hebrews the former or earlier element on which the type-antitype relationship is anchored is always a historical event. Melchizedek's priesthood—a type for Jesus' priesthood (Heb 7), the Mosaic sanctuary—type of the heavenly sanctuary (8:5), the sacrifice for the inauguration of the old covenant—type of Jesus' sacrifice that inaugurates the new covenant (9:15–23), and the animal sacrifices of the old covenant—type of Jesus' sacrifice for the cleansing of sin (10:1–18)—are all historical events. This privileges the idea that the author considered God's rest at the Sabbath of creation a historical event as well.

The description of God's rest at creation as a σαββατισμός happening at the foundation of the world (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου) is significant in this respect. The term καταβολή, as an extension of its original meaning of laying a foundation, is used to refer to a historical starting point.¹⁰² The expression ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (“from the foundation of the world”) marks the starting point of the history of our world (Matt 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Heb 4:3; 9:26; Rev 13:8; 17:8). When biblical authors wanted to refer to events before the beginning of the history of the world, they used the expression πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (“before the foundation of the world”; John 17:24; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). This means that God rested at the beginning of the earth's history and, therefore, his rest on the seventh day of the creation week was the first σαββατισμός (Sabbath observance) in a succession of σαββατισμοί (Sabbath observances) throughout history. Thus, God's Sabbath rest at creation is the historical anchor that makes possible the description of salvation of believers as an eschatological σαββατισμός.

Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργῆς καὶ τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον καὶ διϊκνούμενος ἄχρι μερισμοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος, ἁρμῶν τε καὶ μυελῶν, καὶ κριτικὸς ἐνθυμήσεων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας· καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις ἀφανῆς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, πάντα δὲ γυμνά καὶ τετραχηλισμένα τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ, πρὸς δὲν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος (Heb 4:12–13).

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account (Heb 4:12–13, NRSV).

This passage is the culmination of the exhortation to believers to enter into the rest of God.¹⁰³ In fact, it should be considered a warning to those

¹⁰²For example, Josephus uses it to refer to the date of the beginning of the rebellion (*J.W.* 2.260), H-H Esser, “καταβολή,” *NIDNTT* 1:377.

¹⁰³Note that the passage is introduced with the coordinating conjunction γάρ (Heb 4:12) that effectively connects 4:12–13 with the preceding argument.

who decide to ignore God's word. The passage was written with the intention to produce fear in the readers by emphasizing the power of the Word of God to judge and punish human behavior and intentions. This, of course, made the exhortation to pay attention to God's Word all the more compelling.¹⁰⁴ What gives force to the warning are two things: first, the double meaning of the expression "word of God," and the description of the readers as "creatures."

There is probably a transition in this passage from the message to the person who has given that message. Hebrews 4:12 focuses on God's message or speech. This message is specifically God's invitation to us in Psalms 95:7b–11 to enter into His rest. If we reject this invitation we will incur the judgment of God. In Hebrews 4:13, however, there is probably a transition from the message to the person of God. The NRSV suggests this transition by translating "And before *him* no creature is hidden" (emphasis mine) instead of "before it"¹⁰⁵ This transition is important because it brings into close relationship God and His word. God both created the world (Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6, 9) and acts in history through his "word" (the prophetic word, 1 Sam 15:24; Isa 1:10; Jer 1:4; Amos 5:1; Mic 1:1; etc.).¹⁰⁶ To this word, the author of Hebrews attributes the divine trait of "living,"¹⁰⁷ which is a favorite description of God Himself in Hebrews (3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22).¹⁰⁸

The subjects to God's word of judgment are described as "creatures." This description is important because it provides the rationale for their subjection to judgment: "creatures" are subject to the judgment of their creators (see Heb 1:10–12). In this case, the argument implies that creatures are subject to the Word of God, because He created them.

γῇ γὰρ ἡ πιοῦσα τὸν ἐπ' αὐτῆς ἐρχόμενον πολλάκις ὑετὸν καὶ
τίκτουσα βοτάνην εὐθετον ἐκείνοις δι' οὓς καὶ γεωργεῖται,
μεταλαμβάνει εὐλογίας ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐκφέρουσα δὲ ἀκάνθας καὶ
τριβόλους, ἀδόκιμος καὶ κατάρως ἐγγύς, ἥς τὸ τέλος εἰς καύσιν.
(Heb 6:7–8).

Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over (Heb. 6:7–8, NRSV).

The language of "thorns and thistles" (ἀκάνθας καὶ τριβόλους) is a possible allusion to Gen 3:12–18 where God curses the earth because of

¹⁰⁴deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 170–71.

¹⁰⁵This would mean that God is the antecedent of αὐτοῦ twice ("before *him*" and "in *his* sight") as well as of the relative pronoun ὃν (whom). O'Brien, 177, n. 139.

¹⁰⁶Johnson, 132.

¹⁰⁷See Deut 4:33 (LXX); Ps 83:3 (LXX); Isa 37:4, 17(LXX).

¹⁰⁸Active (ἐνεργής) suggests strength and effectiveness. In the NT, the cognates ἐνέργεια (Eph 1:19; 3:7; Phil 3:21; Col 2:12) and ἐνεργέω (1 Cor 12:6, 11; Gal 2:8; 3:5; Eph 1:11, 20; 3:2; Phil 2:13; Col 1:29) often refer to the work of God in the community. See Johnson, 133.

human sin.¹⁰⁹ The cursing of the land in Gen 3:18 is put as an example regarding the harsh consequences of disobedience. The language of the passage is also reminiscent of the covenantal language of Deuteronomy 30 and the song of the vineyard in Isa 50:1–10.

ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου· νυνὶ δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέτησιν [τῆς] ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ πεφανερωται. (Heb 9:26)

for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Heb 9:26, NRSV)

We have already studied the phrase “foundation of the world” (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου) in Heb 4:3, which refers to the historical beginning of the world; that is, creation. Here, the reference to the foundation of the world contrasts the reference to the “end of the age”¹¹⁰ and together span the whole story of the universe. There is no merism intended, however.

The passage contains a double comparison. The first comparison is between the multiple offering of the high priests every Day of Atonement and the singular offering of Christ. The second is between the priest’s offering “blood that is not his own” and Jesus’ “sacrifice of himself.” The author stresses that Jesus’ sacrifice is of such efficacy that by a single sacrifice it has removed sin. He concludes that if this was not the case, Jesus would have had to die “again and again” since the foundation of the world. The argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*.¹¹¹ no human dies “again and again” and therefore it is absurd that Jesus had to die again and again. This argument contains as well a veiled reference to the story of the fall in Gen 3.¹¹² If Jesus’ sacrifice had been only as effective as animal sacrifices were, Jesus would have had to die at the “foundation of the world” because that was the time when sin entered the world, making sacrifices necessary (see Rom 5:12).¹¹³ This was

¹⁰⁹Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 173; Johnson, 164; Koester, *Hebrews*, 316; Lane, 143. Others emphasize the role of Isa 5:1–5 in the interpretation of this passage, deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 229; George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 963.

¹¹⁰For the importance of the contrast, see Ellingworth, 484. The expression “ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων” is an allusion to Dan 9:26–27; 11:35; 12:13 (Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 264; Ellingworth, 484; Johnson, 244).

¹¹¹See Koester, *Hebrews*, 428.

¹¹²Kenneth Schenck has argued recently on the basis of this passage that the author does not refer to the entrance of sin into the world but to the fact that creation itself, though not fallen, is itself a hindrance to the attainment of glory, Schenck, chs. 5–6. It is not clear, however, why an un-fallen creation would need a sacrifice of purification or atonement (9:15–28).

¹¹³Koester, *Hebrews*, 422.

not necessary, though, because Jesus' single sacrifice is enough to provide cleansing for human sin.

Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγόνειναι. (Heb 11:3)

By faith we understand that the universe was fashioned by the word of God, so that from what is not visible became what is visible.

This is the most important passage on creation in the epistle to the Hebrews and probably the most famous biblical text on the topic in the whole New Testament. It contains an allusion to Gen 1 where Scripture describes how God created the world through his word. It also plays on the concepts of "faith" and "sight," which firmly connects the assertion of the author about creation to the larger argument on faith in the immediate context. According to Heb 11:1, faith has to do with things that we do not see but we hope for. The author affirms that the believer can grasp them through faith.¹¹⁴ Then, the author provides in the rest of Heb 11 a list of heroes of faith that exemplify this fact. By faith, they "saw and greeted" the promises from a distance (11:13). By faith, they looked "ahead to the reward" (v. 26), to a heavenly country and a heavenly city (v. 16).

The first example, however, in the list of notables in Hebrews 11, is not a hero from the past, but the believer in the present. Furthermore, what he does not see but believes is not something in the future, but an event in the past. Faith in this verse does not provide certainty about the "things hoped for" but about the origin of all things. According to the author, believers understand by faith the creation of the universe. They were not able to see it because they were not there at creation but they understand it by faith. The allusion in this passage to Gen 1 implies that the believers' understanding is anchored in Scripture.

The idea that believers should understand *by faith* the creation of the world was as unpopular in the world of the New Testament as it is today in scientific circles. J. W. Thompson has noted that "a catalogue of heroes of πίστις, introduced as patterns of imitation, is unthinkable in any Greek tradition."¹¹⁵ Lane explains that "to the formally educated person, πίστις, 'faith,' was regarded as a state of mind characteristic of the uneducated, who believe something on hearsay without being able to give precise reasons for their belief. The willingness of Jews and Christians to suffer for the undemonstrable astonished pagan observers."¹¹⁶ This passage, then, challenged the original readers to "disregard the shame" and cling to faith in an age of reason.

¹¹⁴Paul makes a similar assertion in 2 Cor 4:18: "because we look not at what can be seen [τὰ βλεπόμενα] but at what cannot be seen [τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα]; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal."

¹¹⁵Thompson, *Beginnings*, 53.

¹¹⁶William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, WBC 47b (Dallas: Word, 1991), 316. See also E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 120–22.

The specific meaning of this passage regarding the creation of world, however, is much debated. I am going to explore the meaning of this passage with two questions in mind: The first question is, what did God create? This question is closely related to whether we should read this verse from a platonic worldview or not. The second question is, how did God create? Or, is there an assertion of creation *ex nihilo* here?

The Greek term I translated “universe” is τοὺς αἰῶνας. It literally means “the ages” but could also have a spatial meaning thus referring to “the worlds” (see above the analysis of Heb 1:2). It has been argued that the plural “worlds” refer to the archetypal (noumenal) and phenomenal worlds of Plato’s worldview. According to this view, the Platonic model of the cosmos—that distinguishes between the archetypal world perceived by the mind and a phenomenal world perceived by the senses—lies behind the formulation of this verse.¹¹⁷

This reading seems to be strengthened by the affirmation in the second half of the verse that “from what is not visible [the archetypal world?] became what is visible [the phenomenal world?].”¹¹⁸ Another observation seems to further strengthen the case of a Platonic reading. According to Plato, the Demiurge fashioned the world from a preexisting mass that existed in chaotic disorder (*Tim.* 52D2–53B5).¹¹⁹ The author of Hebrews uses the Greek term κατηρτίσθαι to describe the work of creation by the word of God. This term literally means “to put in order” or “restore.”¹²⁰ Thus, it is concluded that this verse does not argue that God created the universe out of nothing, but that he used pre-existing matter in chaos to “fashion”—or “put in order”—the universe we are now able to see. In summary, Heb 11:3 may be read from a Platonic perspective in this way:

Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλέπομενον γεγονέναι.

By faith we understand that the worlds [the archetypal and the phenomenal worlds] were put in order by the word of God, so that from what is not visible [archetypal world] became what is visible [phenomenal world].

This reading would probably not seem strange in antiquity. It is often affirmed that “contemporary Platonism helped to shape Christian theology in the first centuries A.D.”¹²¹ Jewish Hellenistic figures—like Philo—and later

¹¹⁷Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 316; Stewart, 284–293; Thompson, 75.

¹¹⁸For example, Philo refers to the invisible sources of the created universe in *Creation* 16; *Confusion* 172; *Spec. Laws* 2.225; 4.187; *Alleg. Interp.* 2.2. See also Erich Gräßer, *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief*, Marburger Theologische Studien 2 (Marburg: Elwert, 1965), 53–54.

¹¹⁹See also Williamson, 377–81; Adams.

¹²⁰BDAG 526; *LSJ* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) 910.

¹²¹J. M. Dillon, “Plato,” *DNB* 805.

ancient Christian theologians—Justin, Tatian, Clement, and Origen—were clearly influenced by Platonism in varying degrees.¹²²

A Platonic worldview, however, does not fit the text. Hebrews 11:3 would argue from this point of view that God created both the archetypal and the phenomenal worlds. According to Plato, however, the Demiurge did not create the archetypal world of ideas. This world is eternal (*Tim.* 29A). Second, and more importantly, Heb 11:3 affirms that God created the world “out of” (ἐκ) “what is not visible.” Plato says, however, that the Demiurge created the world out of preexistent, visible matter. Preexisting matter is visible though in a state of chaos. Plato states: “the god took over all that was visible . . . and brought it from disorder into order” (*Tim.* 30A).¹²³ Though the archetypes may be visible only to the mind, the phenomenal world is not built “out of” (ἐκ) them but “according” to them (*Tim.* 28C5–29B1).¹²⁴

Furthermore, the verse may not refer to the use of preexistent matter. The term κατηρτίσθαι does not mean only “to put in order,” “restore,” etc. It is also used to refer to the act of “creating,” “making,” “preparing,” or “furnishing” something.¹²⁵ The verb denotes the action of ordering, restoring, making, or creating something, in the sense of making suitable or apt for use.¹²⁶ For example, this verb is used in LXX Ezra to denote the building of the wall and the temple (Ezra 4:12, 13, 16; 5:3, 9, 11; 6:14) but in Ps 73:16 (LXX) and 88:38 (LXX) for the creation of the sun and the moon. In Heb 11:3, κατηρτίσθαι is equivalent to γεγονέναι, which means “has become” or “was made.” In Heb 10:5, καταρτίζω is used to refer to the action of God “preparing” a body for Jesus for him to come into the world and offer himself as a sacrifice. Thus, the verb does not necessarily imply the use of preexistent matter by the creator. It does emphasize that what he created was suitable or apt for use.

Finally, this passage may not refer to the creation of “worlds.” The second half of the verse helps us understand that the meaning of the expression τοὺς αἰῶνας (“worlds”) in the first half is equivalent to what is denoted by the singular τὸ βλεπόμενον (“what is visible”) in the second half. This agrees with the fact that the expression τοὺς αἰῶνας may just mean “universe” as it does in Heb 1:2 (see my discussion there).¹²⁷ Furthermore, the author’s allusion in this passage to Gen 1¹²⁸ helps us understand its meaning. What God created

¹²²Ibid., DNB 807.

¹²³See Adams, 128; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 332; Sedley, 116–8.

¹²⁴Adams, 128

¹²⁵BDAG, 526; LSJ, 910. It is used in the LXX to translate nine different Hebrew verbs, including those meaning “to make,” “to establish,” “to found,” R. Schippers, “καταρτίζω,” *NIDNTT* 3:350.

¹²⁶The verb καταρτίζω is a derivative of the term ἄρτιος that means “suitable, appropriate, useful, apt”; see Schippers, *NIDNTT* 3:349; Ellingworth, 570.

¹²⁷See also Lane, 5. See BDF §§ 4(2), 141(1).

¹²⁸Johnson, 280; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, “The Doctrine of Creation in Hebrews 11:3,” *BTB* 2, no. 1 (1972): 64. Also, Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 331.

is what is visible from the point of view of Gen 1—"the heavens and the earth" or the universe.¹²⁹

In summary, a Platonic worldview does not fit the assertion of the passage. This passage is not talking about the creation of Plato's noumenal and phenomenal worlds but of the universe as conceived in Gen 1. As Edward Adams concludes, "the author's wording seems to exclude any positive influence from Platonic cosmogony; indeed, it may well be a polemic against it."¹³⁰

Hebrews 11:3 simply affirms that what we see (the universe) came from or by¹³¹ "what we do not see,"¹³² but this can be understood in more than one way.

Some see in the expression "so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible" an affirmation that God created the universe out of nothing, a creation *ex nihilo*.¹³³ These interpreters equate "what is not visible" with "nothingness."¹³⁴ Thus, they would understand the passage in the following way:

Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγενῆσθαι.

By faith we understand that the universe was fashioned by the word of God, so that from what is not visible [nothingness] became what is visible [universe].

The Old Greek translation of Gen 1:2 describes the earth before God's creation activity as ἀόρατος ("invisible") and ἀκατασκεύαστος ("not built/prepared"). Jacques Doukhan has recently made a case that Gen 1:2 refers to

¹²⁹Koester, *Hebrews*, 473. See also analysis of Heb 1:2–3 above. The variation between the plural and the singular is only stylistic, Ellingworth, 569.

¹³⁰Adams, 128. William Lane suggests that the author's aim was to correct a tendency in Hellenistic Judaism to read Gen 1 in the light of Plato's views, *Hebrews* 9–13, 332.

¹³¹The preposition ἐκ can denote among other things origin, derivation or cause; thus, the passage can be translated either "what is seen was made *from* things that are not visible" (origin) or "*by* things that are not visible" (cause, emphasis mine). See BDAG 297.

¹³²Since the negative (μή) precedes the preposition, it is possible to read it with the verb (γεγονέναι). In this case the verse would affirm that what is visible did not become from what is visible. That is to say, the verse would deny a visible source for the universe. The order μή ἐκ φαινομένων, however, is normal in classical Greek and occasional in the NT (BDF §433) and has the purpose of emphasizing the negation. Thus, the verse should probably be read as an affirmation of an invisible source for the universe (see e.g., Ellingworth, 569; Hughes, 65.).

¹³³E.g., Chrysostom, *NPNF*¹ 14.465; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 281.

¹³⁴Hughes, 67.

a creation out of nothing.¹³⁵ In this sense, what is “invisible” (ἀόρατος, Gen 1:2) or “not visible” (μὴ φαινόμενον, Heb 11:3), would be equivalent to “nothingness.” In a similar fashion, 2 *Enoch* 25:2 equates the invisible with the non-existent: “Before anything existed at all, from the very beginning, whatever is, I created from non-being into being, and from the invisible things into the visible” (OTP 1:143). Romans 4:17 and some non-canonical works (2 Macc 7:28; 2 Bar. 21:4; 48:8; 2 *En.* 24:2) also refer to this idea of a creation out of non-existence (non-being). It is commonly understood that these assertions of creation out of “non-existence” should be understood as affirming a creation out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. We cannot be entirely sure of this, however. The expression “non-being” did not necessarily mean “nothingness” to the ancient mind. For example, Xenophon asserts that “parents bring forth their children out of non being” (*Memorabilia* II.2.3).¹³⁶ It is clear, that parents bring forth their children out of non-being but not out of nothing.

A second view is that the expression “what is not visible” refers to the earth in an unformed state prior the creation week.¹³⁷ The Old Greek translation of Gen 1:2 refers to the earth as being “invisible” (ἀόρατος) and “formless” (ἄκατασκευάστος) prior or at the beginning of the creation week. This would mean that there was a gap between the time God created the universe, including this earth in a raw state, and the beginning of the creation week. In this sense, “what is not visible” refers not to “nothingness” but to invisible and unformed matter. The passage would be translated in this way,

Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ
ἐκ φαινόμενων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγενῆναι.

By faith we understand that the universe was fashioned by the word of
God, so that from what is not visible [raw, unformed earth, (LXX Gen 1:2)]
became what is visible [earth after creation].

The problem with this view is that an allusion to the LXX translation of Gen 1:2 is not strong. The LXX uses the word ἀόρατος (invisible) but Hebrews uses μὴ φαινόμενον (not appearing).

A third view is that the expression “what we do not see” refers to the “word of God.” It is argued that this passage might contain an inverted parallelism or chiasm¹³⁸:

¹³⁵Jacques Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth,” *Origins* 55 (2004), 12–33.

¹³⁶See other examples and discussion in May, 6–21.

¹³⁷See Adams, 128–9.

¹³⁸E.g., Koester, *Hebrews*, 474.

Πίστει νοοῦμεν
 A κατηρτίσθαι
 B τοὺς αἰῶνας
 C ῥήματι θεοῦ,
 C' εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων
 B' τὸ βλεπόμενον
 A' γεγονέναι.

By faith we understand
 A was fashioned
 B the universe
C by the word of God
C' so that from what is not visible
 B' what is visible
 A' became

There are important similarities between the elements of this parallelism. Both A and A' are verbs in infinitive that function as the main verbs of their respective clauses. The elements B and B' are both accusative directly related to the infinitive verbs. This suggests that C and C' are parallel as well.

The structure suggests, then, that “what is not visible” refers not to “nothingness” but to the “word of God” because it places them as parallel elements.¹³⁹ In this sense, “what is not visible”/“the word of God” is not the material out of which the universe was created but the effective cause. If this is the case, the second part of Heb 11:3 does not offer new information to the reader about how God created the world but explains in different words the same thing said in the first part of the passage that God created the world through his word.

Scripture often associates God with invisibility (e.g., Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17). Hebrews 11:27 says that Moses “endured as seeing Him [God] who is invisible” (NKJV). Romans 1:20, a similar passage to Heb 11:3, affirms that the “eternal power and divine nature” of God are invisible (ἀόρατα) but may be understood (νοοῦμενα) from what he has created. This suggests, in agreement with the structure of the passage, that “what is not visible” in Heb 11:3 is the “word of God,” which is another way to refer to God himself and his power and divinity which are invisible according to Heb 11:27 and Rom 1:20 (see also comment on Heb 4:12–13 above). This view suggests that the preposition ἐκ in Heb 11:3 does not refer to the material “out of which” the universe (“what is visible”) came to be, but to the agent through which creation occurred.¹⁴⁰ This would agree with the fact that the author refers elsewhere to the word of God in connection to the creation of the world (Heb 1:2; 4:12, 13). In summary, Heb 11:3 may also be read in the following way:

¹³⁹See Koester, *Hebrews*, 474.

¹⁴⁰See note 131.

Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ
ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγενῆναι.

By faith we understand that the universe [heaven and earth] was made by
the word of God, so that through what is not visible [word of God/God]
became what is visible [the universe].

This view faces the problem that in the Greek text, “word of God” is singular but “what is not visible” is plural. Furthermore, “word of God” is dative and clearly instrumental, but the expression “what is not visible” is governed by ἐκ plus genitive, which normally identifies source not an instrument. These two elements are, then, not clear-cut parallels.¹⁴¹ These are not insurmountable objections, however. The expression “what is not visible” in the original language is plural but conveys a single idea and therefore can be parallel to word of God. Also, as mentioned above, ἐκ plus genitive can be translated “by” in the sense of an effective cause.¹⁴² Finally, inverted parallelisms or chiasms are not uncommon in Hebrews.¹⁴³ One example is found in the immediate context. Hebrew 11:1 says:

Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις
A ἐλπιζομένων
B ὑπόστασις,
B' πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος
A' οὐ βλεπομένων.

Now faith is

A of things hoped for
B the **assurance**,
B' the **conviction** of things
A' not seen.

Note the similarities. Both A and A' are genitive plural participles whose function is to describe the elements in B and B'. Both B and B' are nouns in nominative singular. It is probable, then, that Hebrews 11:3 is also an inverted parallelism. If this is the case, what the author of Hebrews intends in this passage is to drive home the idea that God created the world through his word and repeats the idea twice. The important thing for him is that we understand it by faith.

In summary, though it is not entirely clear in which of the three ways mentioned above the author meant his assertions in Heb 11:3, it is clear that the author is not indebted to platonic ideas in his understanding of creation.

¹⁴¹The author may well be, after all, making a distinction between the “word of God” as the instrument of creation and “what is not visible as its source,” Adams, 128.

¹⁴²See BDAG 297, Ellingworth, 569; Koester, *Hebrews*, 474; O'Brien, 402. See also, note 132.

¹⁴³E.g., Heb 1:5; 12:6; 13:2, 14.

Hebrews 11:3 also makes clear that Genesis 1 is very important for him and that he understands it to be the basis of faith and understanding on issues of creation. I further suggest, that the probable presence of the inverted parallelisms in Heb 11:3 and 11:1 gives an advantage to the view that this passage speaks only about creation through the word of God according to Genesis 1. Whether this creation was *ex nihilo*, the epistle does not say.

τὸ δὲ ἔτι ἅπαξ δηλοῖ [τὴν] τῶν σαλευομένων μετάθεσιν ὡς πεποιημένων, ἵνα μείνῃ τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα. (Heb 12:27)

This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. (NRSV)

The question that comes to our mind is, does this passage imply that there are eternal entities (i.e., not created) that will survive God’s shaking of earth and heaven?

Some commentators consider that this passage shows how the Platonic worldview has been incorporated into and adapted to the argument of the author of Hebrews.¹⁴⁴ James W. Thompson, for example, argues that this passage contrasts the sense-perceptible world (the material world) from the intelligible world (the non-material world).¹⁴⁵ The first world is transitory and the author of Hebrews also refers to it as “what is seen” (11:3), what can “be touched” (12:18), what is “made with hands” (9:11, 24), what is “of this creation” (9:11). This realm is transitory and corrupt. It is not permanent. The intelligible world, on the other hand, is the world where the “true tabernacle” is (8:2; 9:24). It is the heavenly world where Jesus has been exalted (1:3; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1; 9:24) and where we have access through faith in Jesus (4:14–16; 10:19–25). This realm is “true,” perfect, steady, and eternal. Thompson concludes, then, that the author of Hebrews conceives a dual universe:

[H]e knows two worlds already possessing full reality, one of which is material, and therefore, shakable; the other is not material, and is unshakable. When the material world disappears, only the world that is presently unseen (11:1) and untouchable (12:18), remains.¹⁴⁶

From this point of view, the term πεποιημένων (“created things”) stands in apposition to τῶν σαλευομένων (“what is shaken”) and has the function of explaining what is going to be “removed.” In this sense, creation will be removed because it is transient, imperfect, and corrupt. In summary, those who read Heb 12:27 from a Platonic perspective understand it in the following way.

¹⁴⁴Johnson, 335. Similarly, Erich Gräßer argues that the author of Hebrews distinguishes a lower transient heaven and earth (Heb 1:10–12) from the eternal heavens where God and Christ abide, Erich Gräßer, *An die Hebräer*, EKKNT 17 (Zurich: Benziger Neukirchener, 1990–1997).

¹⁴⁵James W. Thompson, “‘That which cannot be shaken’: Some Metaphysical Assumptions in Heb 12:27,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 580–87.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 586.

τὸ δὲ ἔτι ἅπαξ δηλοῖ [τὴν] τῶν σαλευομένων μετὰθεσιν ὡς πεποιημένων, ἵνα μείνῃ τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα.

This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken [the sense-perceptible world]—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken [the intelligible world / the heavenly world] may remain. (NRSV)

Does the author of Hebrews hold this negative view of creation? Craig R. Koester correctly notes that in the preceding verse (12:26), the author of Hebrews explains that God is going to “shake” both earth *and* heaven. In fact, the author places a clear emphasis on the fact that God is going to “shake” heaven.¹⁴⁷ Thompson responds to this objection that the author of Hebrews distinguishes between the created heavens (cosmological heaven), which belong to the lower, transient realm (Heb 1:10–12), and the heaven where Jesus entered and where God resides and the true tabernacle is located (axiological heaven). This “upper” realm (axiological heaven) is eternal and uncreated.¹⁴⁸ He argues that it is the lower (cosmological) heaven that is “shaken” and removed according to Heb 12:26.¹⁴⁹ But this distinction is not clear in Hebrews, much less in the immediate context.¹⁵⁰ In fact, the closest reference to heaven is found in the immediately preceding verse (12:25) and refers to God warning believers “from heaven.” This heaven would clearly be the “upper” (axiological) heaven. The author makes no difference with the heaven to be “shaken” in v. 26.¹⁵¹ It seems clear, then, that the “shaking” includes the heavenly realm.

Furthermore, the author does not have a negative view of creation. He does make a distinction between “this creation” and the heavenly realm in 9:11–14, but the distinction is qualitative not antithetical.¹⁵² Note that the Son is highly involved in the act of creation, but there is not a hint of discomfort for this fact. The author does not accord the Son a demiurgical role while emphasizing God’s transcendence and distance from the act of creation. In fact, the author positively affirms God’s creatorhood as well (2:10; 3:4; 4:3–4, 10).¹⁵³ Similarly, a negative view of creation and matter does not fit with the reference to Jesus’ resurrection in 13:20. Furthermore, the author does not

¹⁴⁷Koester, *Hebrews*, 547.

¹⁴⁸Thompson, ““That which cannot be shaken,”” 586. Similarly, Gräßer, *An die Hebräer*.

¹⁴⁹If the author refers here to a lower, transient heaven, his emphasis on the shaking of this heaven over the shaking of earth does not make sense.

¹⁵⁰Koester, *Hebrews*, 547.

¹⁵¹The difference in number (οὐρανῶν [12:25]/οὐρανόν [12:26]) is not significant. The author alternates between the singular and the plural for no apparent reason than stylistic variation. For example, he may use the plural to refer both to the created heavens (1:10) and to the realm where God lives (12:25). Conversely, he may use the singular as well to denote the place where God lives (9:24).

¹⁵²Adams, 129.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 130.

have a Platonic view of the heavenly realm where God and the true sanctuary are. He states clearly that the “heavenly things”—the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus entered to appear in the presence of God—stand in need of cleansing needing “better sacrifices” (9:23–24). A Platonic cosmology does not fit the wider argument of Hebrews.

If we want to understand the logic of this passage, we need to understand the meaning of the quotation of Haggai 2:6–7, 21–22.

In the previous passage, verses 18–24, the author had compared believers with the desert generation who heard God speak at (and shake) Mount Sinai and concluded that the believers, who had experienced a greater revelation and benefits than the desert generation (2:1–4), were liable to a greater judgment. He concludes that if the desert generation did not escape judgment, how much less will believers escape the same?

In verses 25–27, the author of Hebrews quotes Hag 2:6–7, 21–22 to make the point that God has announced a judgment.

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, *I will shake the heavens and the earth* and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. . . . Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, *I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade.* (Hag 2:6–7, 21–22, emphasis mine).

Hebrews’ quotation of this passage is very significant. The author makes some changes in his quotations to emphasize the points he wants to make.

First, Hebrews focuses on the shaking of heaven. He does this with three changes to the text of Haggai 2:6 (compare verse 21). He deletes any reference to the sea and the dry land. The only important thing for him is earth and heaven. He also changes the order of the words to put heaven at the end and then adds “not only . . . but” to place a strong emphasis on “heaven.” The author wants us to know that God is going to shake the “earth and the heaven” but especially and most importantly “heaven.”¹⁵⁴

Second, he emphasizes the finality of this event. This is an eschatological event that describes the end of heaven and earth as we know them. The author argues that the expression “once more” (ἐτι ἅπαξ, v. 27) indicates or makes clear the removal of things that are shaken. The author had argued throughout the letter that Christ had died “once” (ἅπαξ) to refer to the finality of his sacrifice (9:7, 26, 27, 28; 10:2). Here, the expression carries the sense of a “once for all” (cf. ἐφ’ ἅπαξ) removal of “what can be shaken” as in 7:27, 9:12 and 10:10. In other words, we could translate this expression as “yet once more and forever.” This means that there will be an event of final consequences in the “earthly” but especially in the “heavenly” realm that is described as a shaking.

¹⁵⁴Compare Matt 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:26.

In the Old Testament, the shaking of the earth is a common figure for the presence of God who shows up to deliver his people.¹⁵⁵ Thus, shaking became a signal of God's judgment over the oppressors.¹⁵⁶ The LXX uses the verb σαλεύω ("to shake") regarding those who experience God's judgment.¹⁵⁷ In the prophets, the shaking happens in the context of the Day of the Lord.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, what is not "shaken" is not a Platonic transcendental realm but the righteous who trusts in the Lord.¹⁵⁹

Haggai 2 was uttered about seven weeks after Haggai had given the leaders and the people the message that it was necessary for them to begin the rebuilding of the temple and four weeks after they had actually begun doing it. The message was delivered during the Feast of Tabernacles.¹⁶⁰ This feast remembered God's care for Israel through the desert, but also the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 8:2). This remembrance, however, made the people think that the temple they were building was not worth the effort because it would not even be nearly as glorious as Solomon's temple had been (Hag 2:3). But Haggai promised that God would "shake the heavens and the earth . . . and all the nations" and fill this temple with glory by bringing their treasures to the temple they were building. He explains this in a following oracle pronounced two months later on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Hag 2:21–23) on the occasion that the foundation of the temple was laid (Hag 2:18). The oracle explains that the Lord will overthrow the kingdoms and their armies and then he will establish his own king in Jerusalem, from the line of David (represented by Zerubbabel), and will give him total authority—like that represented by a signet ring (v. 23). He will be the plenipotentiary of the Lord.¹⁶¹ According to Haggai, then, the "shaking of heaven and earth" (2:6) meant the destruction of kingdoms and thrones (2:22).

What is shaken in Hebrews? What is judged? The point is that the author of Hebrews emphasizes the shaking of heaven.¹⁶² This refers to a judgment that includes the heavenly realm (12:26) or "heavenly things" (9:23). The

¹⁵⁵Ps 68:7–8; 9:27; 46:6; 60:2; 77:17–18; 97:4; 107:27; Mic 1:4; Nahum 1:5; Hab 3:6; Matt 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:26; Acts 16:26.

¹⁵⁶For example, Ps 99:1 (LXX 98:1); 96:10 (LXX 95:10).

¹⁵⁷2 Kgs 17:20; Ps 9:27 (MT 10:6); 45:7 (MT 46:6); 47:6 (MT 48:6); 108:10 (MT 109:10). See Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 481.

¹⁵⁸Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 103. For example, Isa 13:1–22; 24:18; 34:1–17; Ezek 7:1–27; 30:1–9; 38:20; Joel 2:1–11; Hab 3:6.

¹⁵⁹Ps 14:5, 8 (MT 15:5); 15:8 (MT 16:8); 20:8 (MT 21:7); 61:3 (MT 62:2); Ps 111:6 (MT 112:6).

¹⁶⁰The precise date was the twenty-first of the seventh month (Hag 2:1), which would be the seventh day of the feast of tabernacles.

¹⁶¹Verhoef, 148.

¹⁶²Craig R. Koester suggests that the shaking of heaven in 12:26 is related to the cleansing of heaven in 9:23. Koester, *Hebrews*, 547.

“heavenly things” that are judged (i.e., “cleansed” or “shaken”) should include the heavenly powers (angels) and believers who were just described as being with God in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22–24).¹⁶³ Verse 27 explains that they have one thing in common: they are created beings¹⁶⁴ and, therefore, subject to the judgment and scrutiny of God (Heb 4:13).¹⁶⁵ They can be removed because they are created but the text does not say that they are removed on the basis that they are created. Verse 25 had explained that they are removed because they “turn away from the one who warns them from heaven.”

This agrees with the author’s emphasis throughout the exhortatory sections that believers will face a judgment,¹⁶⁶ that “the Day”—probably the Day of Christ” (Phil 1:10)—is approaching (Heb 10:25). Thus, he announces that the enemies of the Son—who has been installed as king and plenipotentiary of the Lord (1:5–14)¹⁶⁷—will be submitted. They will be made a footstool for Jesus’ feet (Heb 1:13–14; 10:11–14). These enemies include those who once received the knowledge of truth but now “willfully persist in sin” (10:26–27; cf. 6:4–8). The result of this judgment is the final removal of what can be shaken. Enemies will be destroyed forever. This same word (metathesis) is used for the removal of the levitical priesthood (7:12) and Enoch from the earth (11:5), which is not temporary. In Hebrews, what remains, that cannot be shaken, is Jesus himself (1:11; cf. 13:8), his priesthood (7:3, 24), and the inheritance of the new covenant (10:34). These three things are the ones that God has invited us not to refuse. If we refuse them, we will be shaken or removed, that is, treated as the enemies of Jesus (10:27).

The next verse, Heb 12:28, explains that as a result of this “shaking,” believers “are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.” This is probably an allusion to Dan 7:14, 18 where the saints receive a kingdom that cannot be

¹⁶³Similarly, Revelation constantly describes believers as standing in heaven before the throne and Paul also describes believers as being seated already with Christ (Eph 2:5–6).

¹⁶⁴Heb 1:7 refers to angels as part of God’s creation.

¹⁶⁵See Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 482.

¹⁶⁶Heb 2:1–4; 4:12–3; 6:4–8; 10:26–31; 12:25–29.

¹⁶⁷The prophecy of Haggai is given in the context of the inauguration of the building of the sanctuary and in conjunction with the promise of a Davidic king who will be God’s plenipotentiary. In Hebrews, both issues are important. The book begins with the assertion that Jesus is enthroned forever at God’s right hand. Jesus is identified as the person in whom the Davidic promises of a son who would sit on the throne forever are fulfilled. He has power over the angels of God. He has become, in fact, God’s plenipotentiary. On the other hand, the inauguration of Jesus’ rule in heaven coincides as well with three other events, the inauguration of Jesus’ high priestly ministry (Heb 5:1–10), the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary (9:15–23; cf. 8:5–6), and the inauguration of the new covenant. Thus, just like in Haggai, the promise of a future shaking is given in the context of the inauguration of the rule of a Davidic king and the inauguration of a sanctuary.

destroyed.¹⁶⁸ The interesting thing is that, according to Dan 7, the saints are given a kingdom as a result of a judgment in heaven. We have here an allusion to a pre-advent judgment that results in the believers receiving the kingdom.

In summary, once we have understood the meaning of the quotation of Hag 2:6 in Heb 12:27, we are able to read the passage in the following way:

τὸ δὲ ἔτι ἅπαξ δηλοῖ [τὴν] τῶν σαλευομένων μετάθεσιν ὡς πεποιημένων, ἵνα μείνῃ τὰ μὴ σαλευόμενα.

This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken [enemies who reject God both in heaven and earth]—as created things [as subject to God’s judgment]—so that what cannot be shaken [the believer who trusts God] may remain.

This passage is, then, parallel to Heb 4:12–13 where the author warns the readers that the word of God will judge them, the readers need to pay attention (Heb 3:7). Here, the author warns the readers that they need to pay attention to Him who warns from heaven, otherwise, they will face the judgment, or shaking, of God.

Now, I would like to make some brief comments regarding what I understand are some of the implications of this study in terms of the theology of creation in Hebrews.

The Interchangeability of Roles between the Father and the Son

The analysis of Hebrews’ assertions regarding creation shows that the roles of God the Father and the Son regarding creation are interchangeable. Unwittingly or not, the author assigns them the same roles.

First, the Father and the Son are creators. Several passages clearly identify God the Father as the creator of the universe;¹⁶⁹ Heb 1:10, however, clearly ascribes to the Son the creation of the universe. In this passage, the Father says to the Son: “In the beginning, Lord, *you* founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (emphasis mine).

Second, the Father and the Son are both the agents and the beneficiaries of creation. We often note the affirmation in Heb 1:2 that God created the universe “through” (διὰ followed by genitive) the Son and that the Son will inherit “all things” (τὰ παντα). We often forget, however, that Heb 2:10 affirms the opposite.¹⁷⁰ There, the author says that everything exists “through” (διὰ followed by genitive) God, the Father, and that “all things” (τὰ παντα) are “for” (δι’ ὅν) Him.

Finally, the Father and the Son are both sovereign over creation and judge it. Hebrews 12:26–27 affirms about God:

¹⁶⁸ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 382; Otto Michel, *Der Brief und die Hebräer*, KEK 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 475–6; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: McMillan, 1892; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 442.

¹⁶⁹ God as creator: 1:2; 3:4; 4:3–4; 11:3.

¹⁷⁰ Koester, *Hebrews*, 227.

At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Thus, God’s sovereignty and power over creation are evident in the fact that God will “shake” in the future “heaven and earth.” Hebrews 1:10 affirm the same about the Son but in different words:

And, “In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end.”

According to this passage, the Son has the power of “rolling” the heavens and the earth “like a cloak” so that they will perish. Thus, just as God can “shake” the universe, the Son can “roll them up.” In both cases the result is their total destruction. The Son, then, has the same sovereignty over creation that the Father has.

This interchangeability of roles should not come as surprise to the reader of Hebrews.¹⁷¹ The author of this letter had already affirmed at the very beginning of his work the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son, not only in terms of their work for the salvation of believers but in terms as well of the homogeneity of their essence or being (Heb 1:1–4). Thus, the Son is called straightforwardly God (Heb 1:8) and attributed the characteristics that only God possesses (Heb 7:3; 13:8).¹⁷²

Creation and Sovereignty

Creation in Hebrews has to do with God’s sovereignty. The implicit logic of Hebrews is that God judges what he first created and then sustained. Both Christians and Jews shared this notion. According to them, two characteristics of YHWH, the God of Israel, identified him as unique or different to all other reality.¹⁷³ YHWH was the sole creator of all things¹⁷⁴ and the sole ruler of all things.¹⁷⁵ There is a small but important difference between these two

¹⁷¹The same phenomenon occurs in Paul. The doxology found in Rom 11:36 affirms that “all things” are “through” God (διὰ followed by genitive), but 1 Cor 8:6 affirms that “all things” are “through” Jesus (διὰ followed by genitive). Similarly, Rom 11:36 and 1 Cor 8:6 affirm that “all things” are “for” God (εἰς followed by accusative), but Col 1:16 affirms that “all things” are “for” the Son (εἰς followed by accusative).

¹⁷²See Jerome H. Neyrey, “Without Beginning of Days or End of Life (Hebrews 7:3): Topos for a True Deity,” *CBQ* 53 (1991), 439–55.

¹⁷³Richard Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 9.

¹⁷⁴E.g., Isa 40:26, 28; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12, 18; 48:13; 51:16; Neh 9:6; Hosea 13:4 (LXX); 2 Macc 1:24; Sir. 43:33; Bel 5; Jub. 12.3–5; Sib. Or. 3:20–35; 8:375–6; 2 En 47:3–4; 66:4; Apoc. Ab. 7:10; Jos. Asen. 12:1–2; T. Job 2:4.

¹⁷⁵Dan 4:34–35; Bel 5; Add Esth 13:9–11; 16:18, 21; 3 Macc 2:2–3; 6:2; Wis 12:3; Sir. 18:1–3; Sib. Or. 3:10, 19; 1 En. 9:5; 84:3; 2 En. 33:7; 2 Bar. 54:13; Josephus *AJ.* 1.155–6.

conceptions. Jewish theology asserted that God had no helper, assistant, or servant in his work of creation. Simply, no one else had any part in it.¹⁷⁶ Jews believed, however, that God employs servants as part of his rule over the universe, in fact, myriads of them. Thus, God is portrayed seated on a very high throne while the angels stand before him, in the position of servants, in lower heavens, awaiting his command.¹⁷⁷ Non-canonical Early Jewish writings refer to several exalted figures—principal angels and exalted patriarchs—that played an important role in God’s rule of the universe. There is, however, a conscious clear difference between them and God, however exalted they may be: when the human seer mistakes the glorious angel for God and begins to worship him, this figure forbids it and directs the human to worship God only.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, these exalted figures never sit in God’s throne but stand before him ready to serve. God alone rules. This defines who God is and cannot be delegated to a creature.¹⁷⁹ In view of all this, YHWH alone can and must be worshiped. This explains why “Judaism was unique among the religions of the Roman world in demanding the *exclusive* worship of its God.”¹⁸⁰

The author of Hebrews unabashedly refers to God’s sovereignty over the universe. He introduces the letter by affirming that God created and sustains “all things” (τὰ πάντα) through his Son and that he has given “all things” (τὰ πάντα) as inheritance to the Son. This is why he sits in the throne over the universe and the Son sits at his “right hand.” This affirmation of God’s sovereignty at the beginning of the letter is essential for the argument of Hebrews and repeated throughout the letter (Heb 1:13–14; 2:5, 8; 8:1–2; 10:12–13; 12:1–2). In fact, the author will explain that this is the main argument of his work (8:1–2). It is essential because it is the rationale for God’s and the Son’s superiority over the angels or spirits. Right after affirming the role of the Son as creator, sustainer, and co-ruler of the universe in Heb 1:1–4, the author devotes the next section to affirming the Son’s superiority over the angels (1:5–14). They are created (1:7) and, therefore, the angels

¹⁷⁶Isa 44:24; 2 En. 33:4; 4 Ezra 33:4; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.192. For example, in explaining Gen. 1:26, Philo argued that the creation of humanity was the sole exception (*Creation* 72–75; *Confusion* 179).

¹⁷⁷Dan 7:10; Tob 12:15; 4Q530 2.18; 1 En 14:22; 39:12; 40:1; 47:3; 60:2; 2 En. 21:1; 2 Bar. 21:6; 48:10; 4 Ezra 8:21; T. Ab. A7:11; 8:1–4; 9:7–8; T. Adam 2:9. See also, Bauckham, *God of Israel*, 10.

¹⁷⁸Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 46–47. Some of the examples he gives are Tob 12:16–22; Apoc. Zeph. 6:11–15; Jos. Asen. 15:11–12; 3 En. 16:1–5. The same case is found in Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9.

¹⁷⁹Richard Bauckham, “The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 17. I will follow his analysis here.

¹⁸⁰Richard Bauckham, “Jesus, Worship of” *ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 3:816; N. T. Wright, *People of God*, 248–59; Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 29–53.

worship the Son (1:6) and serve him as ministers in favor of believers (1:7, 14). Since the Son is sovereign he can both deliver and judge. This is why the readers are exhorted to “hold fast” to their confession of Jesus (3:1; 4:14–16; 10:19–25), even in the face of persecution and suffering (10:32–39; 12:1–4).

It is important to note that references to creation in Hebrews are part of an affirmation of majesty/dominion (1:1–4; 1:10–12; 3:4), judgment (1:10–12; 4:3, 4, 10, 12–13; 12:27) or salvation (2:10; 9:26).¹⁸¹ The author of Hebrews is not interested in the event of creation per se. He does not try to prove that God created the world or describe how he created it. He just assumes that God did. What is important for the author of Hebrews is that God can rule the universe, judge the wicked, and save the believers because He is sovereign and this sovereignty has an indispensable foundation in the fact that He created “all things” (τὰ πάντα).

Gerhard May has argued that this notion became central in Christianity’s later argument that God created out of nothing. According to him, the doctrine of creation out of nothing was not clearly articulated in Hellenistic Judaism before Christianity.¹⁸² It was not until the second century A.D. in the face of the Gnostic challenge that Christian thinkers felt obligated to articulate in clear terms that the all powerful God that is above all was the one who created the world out of nothing and not the ignorant Gnostic creator who originated in the fall of a higher heavenly being.¹⁸³ It became very clear to them that what God did not create was finally not under its power. Thus, in their view, a creation ex nihilo was an essential element of God’s sovereignty.

Vocabulary and Presuppositions

It is important to note that the vocabulary referring to God’s act of creation in Hebrews is diverse. He uses the verbs ποιέω (to do, make), θεμελιόω (to found, establish), κατασκευάζω (to prepare, build, furnish), and καταρτίζω (to put in order, restore); the nouns καταβολή (beginning), ἔργον (work), κτίσις (creature, creation); and the participle πεποιημένων (what is made). Many of these terms were used by Greek philosophers in their discussion about the origin of the cosmos with very different presuppositions. As I have shown, however, the fact that Hebrews uses some of the vocabulary philosophers used does not mean that he shared their worldviews.

Another difficulty we encounter as we study Hebrews in the context of a debate about the origins of the world is the fact that its author had very different concerns from the ones we have. As I mentioned above, the author of Hebrews is not concerned with either proving that God created the world or explaining how he did it. He assumed that God did and used this assumption as an important theological foundation for the argument of his this work.

¹⁸¹ Hebrews 11:3 is the exception. In this case, the author refers to the relationship between creation and faith.

¹⁸² May, 1–38.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 177.

This fact helps us understand a second phenomenon. Some of the passages relating to creation in Hebrews provide room for a limited amount of different views on creation. One example is Hebrews 11:3, which can be read in at least three different ways. While it is true that in my view the context privileges one reading above the others, the fact is that the text is less conclusive than we would like it to be. This happens, again, because the author was not concerned with the questions we are concerned with today. Otherwise, he would have made sure that his views were communicated clearly in his work.

All of this, however, does not make Hebrews irrelevant to the biblical debate on origins. Hebrews provides a worldview—and in some cases more than this—that should inform our conversation. Every theory or conviction presupposes and has an effect on the way we understand who God is and what His function is. For the author of Hebrews, the conviction that God created everything was foundational for his argument that He rules and judges everything.

Faith and Creation

Hebrews argued that faith was the basis for understanding the origins of the world (11:3). This affirmation invited derision in the ancient world. From the point of view of classical Greek philosophy, faith was the lowest level of cognition. “It was the state of mind of the uneducated.”¹⁸⁴ Galen, who was relatively sympathetic to Christianity, said that Christians possessed three of the four cardinal virtues. They had courage, self-control, and justice; but they lacked *phronesis* (intellectual insight), which was, in his opinion, the rational basis for the other three.¹⁸⁵ Others were less favorable. Celsus accused them of being enemies of science. In his opinion, Christians were frauds who deceived people by saying that knowledge is bad for the health of the soul.¹⁸⁶ Porphyry repeated Celsus’ accusation protesting “an irrational and unexamined *pistis* [faith]”¹⁸⁷ and Julian blurted out, “there is nothing in your philosophy beyond the one word ‘Believe!’”¹⁸⁸

Hebrews, however, commends faith and devotes a chapter to praise heroes of the past because of their faith. It is significant that in the list of heroes of Heb 11, the author referred to the believer, who accepted the assertion of Scripture that God created the world by His word, as the first exemplar of faith. In his view, this conviction based on faith would gain him approval (Heb 11:2) just as Noah’s building of the ark before rain existed (11:7), Abraham’s leaving his inheritance for a land he did not know (11:8), Abraham’s offering of Isaac believing God would resurrect him (when that had never happened; 11:17–19), and Moses’ refusal to be called “son of

¹⁸⁴Dodds, 121.

¹⁸⁵Walzer, *Galen*, 15; quoted in Dodds, 121.

¹⁸⁶*Cels.* 3.75; quoted in Dodds, 121.

¹⁸⁷Porphyry, *Christ.* 1.17; quoted in Dodds, 121.

¹⁸⁸Julian *apud* Greg. Naz., *Orat.* 4.102 (PG 35, p. 637); quoted in Dodds, 121.

Pharaoh's daughter" choosing instead "ill-treatment with the people of God" (11:23–26), gained them approval.

For the author of Hebrews the path of faith required "being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction" (10:33); but he also argued that those who took this path followed the steps of Jesus, who "endured the cross" and despised its "shame" (12:2).