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## HEBREWS 1:10-12 AND THE RENEWAL OF THE COSMOS

Philip Church  
([pchurch@laidlaw.ac.nz](mailto:pchurch@laidlaw.ac.nz))

### Summary

*The suggestion that the author of Hebrews is indebted to Philo sometimes leads to the assertion that he has a negative bias against the creation. One text where scholars have detected this bias is Hebrews 1:10-12, quoting Psalm 102:25-27, seemingly to predict the dissolution of the cosmos. The text is part of a Psalm that predicts the restoration of Zion and the gathering of the nations there to worship, and expresses the confidence that the descendants of the servants of Yahweh will live securely in Yahweh's presence. This makes it unlikely that verses 25-26 predict the dissolution of the cosmos, and exegesis of the verses in question indicates not dissolution, but renewal after the destruction resulting from the exile. Attention to the context of the quotation in Hebrews indicates that dissolution there is also unlikely. The text supports the claim that the exalted Son upholds all things (Heb. 1:3) and sits alongside a discussion of the dominion of humanity over the world to come (2:5-9). A more remote co-text refers to the gathering of the nations to Zion (12:22-24), itself a further echo of the Psalm. The Psalm quotation functions to predict not the dissolution, but the renewal of the decaying cosmos.*

### 1. Introduction

One hundred and twenty years ago, French Lutheran theologian and Sorbonne professor Eugène Ménégoz proposed that Philo of Alexandria was a major influence on the writer of Hebrews,<sup>1</sup> a notion

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<sup>1</sup> Eugène Ménégoz, *La Théologie de l'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1894), 197-219. Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2:17, cites Philo, *De vita*

that dominated studies of Hebrews throughout most of the twentieth century, persisting until today. To be sure, Ménégosz did not see the author as a thoroughgoing Philonist and he argued for other influences on Hebrews, but he did suggest that he received his primary education in Alexandria and finished it off in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> He also suggested that the author of Hebrews was ‘un philonien converti au christianisme’,<sup>3</sup> a suggestion with which Spicq concurs.<sup>4</sup> According to Spicq, Ménégosz speculated that the author of Hebrews probably knew Philo personally and had heard him preach in a synagogue in Alexandria.<sup>5</sup>

One scholar who has consistently argued for the influence of Philo on Hebrews is James W. Thompson. From the 1970s right up to his 2008 commentary and since, this notion has characterised all of Thompson’s work.<sup>6</sup> Like Ménégosz, Thompson does not suggest that the author was a thoroughgoing Philonist; rather, he argues that he simply employs philosophical categories from middle Platonism to make sense of his world.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the author, Thompson argues, operates with a ‘Platonic metaphysic’,<sup>8</sup> and a ‘cosmological dualism’,<sup>9</sup> where there are two spheres, the unchangeable and enduring heavenly world

*contemplativa* 29, and suggests that the writings of ancient men referred to by Philo included ‘some expositions of the ancient prophets, such as are contained in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in many others of Paul’s (sic) Epistles’. See Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christian Fathers. Vol. 1, Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, A Select Library of the Christian Church: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1952), 118-19. For the Greek text see Eduard Schwartz, *Eusebius Werke: Die Kirchengeschichte*, GCS, 10 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), 2:146-48. Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Gabalda, 1952), 1:39, suggests that Hugo Grotius was the first in modern times to suggest the influence on Philo and Hebrews. Grotius does not argue for dependence on Philo, but does make numerous references to supposed similarities with Philo in his interpretation of Hebrews. See e.g. Hugo Grotius, ‘Annotationes in Epistolam ad Hebraeos’, in *Operum Theologicorum* (Amsterdam: Joannis Blaev, 1679), 1011, 21, 22, 23, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 38, 44.

<sup>2</sup> Ménégosz, *La Théologie*, 217.

<sup>3</sup> Ménégosz, *La Théologie*, 198.

<sup>4</sup> Spicq, *Hébreux*, 1:91. Spicq marshals his arguments for dependence on Philo in Hebrews on pages 39-91 of his first volume.

<sup>5</sup> Spicq, *Hébreux*, 89.

<sup>6</sup> James W. Thompson, ‘“That Which Cannot Be Shaken”: Some Metaphysical Assumptions in Heb. 12:27’, *JBL* 94 (1975), 580-87; James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23-26.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *Hebrews*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> James W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, CBQMS 13 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1982), 52.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *Beginnings*, 49.

and the changeable, unstable and transitory earthly world, which will ultimately come to an end.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Thompson also detects in Hebrews what he refers to as ‘anti-worldliness’, suggesting that in two texts the author uses the word κόσμος (‘world’) ‘in a decidedly negative way’.<sup>11</sup> As Edward Adams has pointed out, if this is the case it would put Hebrews ‘at odds with mainstream Christian theology, which has traditionally emphasised the original goodness and ongoing worth of the created order’.<sup>12</sup> This reading hardly does justice to the author of Hebrews, and nor does it do justice to Philo, as Adams has also pointed out.<sup>13</sup>

In this article I examine one text in Hebrews where Thompson appears, at first glance, to be correct.<sup>14</sup> In what follows I discuss Hebrews 1:10-12, a quotation from Psalm 102:25-27, and demonstrate that rather than anticipating the dissolution of the universe as a number

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<sup>10</sup> Thompson, *Beginnings*, 48-50.

<sup>11</sup> Thompson, *Beginnings*, 76. The two texts he refers to are Heb. 11:7, 38. See also David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle ‘to the Hebrews’* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 100: ‘[a]ll material creation is of limited value since it is of limited duration’. Later, he claims, ‘[i]nvesting our lives in ... anything that dies with us or with this world amounts to a poor investment in the eyes of faith’ (127).

<sup>12</sup> Edward Adams, ‘The Cosmology of Hebrews’, in *The Epistle to Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 122. Adams points out (123-24) that Thompson’s claims about Platonic cosmology are unwarranted and actually misrepresent ‘the cosmological data of Hebrews themselves’, although he does acknowledge that some middle Platonists may have taken Platonism in a more radical direction.

<sup>13</sup> In Edward Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul’s Cosmological Language*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 58-64, Adams demonstrates how Philo can be very positive about the cosmos, referring to it, for example, as ‘the most perfect of created things’ (τὸν κόσμον τελειότατον μὲν ὄντα τῶν γεγονότων, *De opificio mundi*, 14, see also *De plantatione*, 131; *De somniis*, 1.207; *De Abrahamo*, 74, *De aeternitate mundi*, 26, 50, 73; *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 199) and arguing that the created world is imperishable (ἀφθαρτος, *Aeternitate*, 19).

<sup>14</sup> For Thompson’s treatment of Heb. 1:11-12 see Thompson, *Hebrews*, 55, where he writes, ‘[t]he contrast between the material creation and the abiding reality reflects the author’s indebtedness to the Platonic tradition, according to which the transcendent world is eternal, while the material creation is subject to change’. Another scholar who has critiqued this text is Jeffrey S. Lamp, *The Greening of Hebrews: Ecological Readings in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 105. Lamp finds in this text ‘a bias against Earth’ and “‘guilt by association” [with angels, that] relegates Earth to a subordinate position with respect to the Son’. He continues, ‘[a]t the very least, consideration of Earth as an entity of intrinsic worth and consideration in itself is a casualty of the author’s concern to demonstrate the superiority of the Son over angels precisely at the point of the transitory nature of angels and Earth’.

of scholars suggest,<sup>15</sup> this text anticipates the renewal of the creation, currently ‘in bondage to decay’ as Paul puts it in Romans 8:21.

The text in question reads (NRSV):<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands;

<sup>11</sup> they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing;

<sup>12</sup> 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.

On the face of it this text proposes that the created universe will ultimately outlive its usefulness and cease to exist. In what follows I argue that this is an inadequate reading. I will first deal with the text in the context of Psalm 102 before turning to Hebrews to examine the quotation in the context of Hebrews 1.

## 2. Psalm 102 in the Hebrew Bible

The superscription to Psalm 102 labels it as a ‘prayer’ (תפלה), or more specifically a ‘lament’ or a ‘complaint’.<sup>17</sup> However, its content defies precise description, for while verses 1-11 and 23-24<sup>18</sup> fit the classification of ‘lament’, verses 12-22 express confidence that YHWH will restore Zion and Jerusalem, and verses 25-27 reflect on YHWH’s

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 100, who refers to ‘the “rolling up” and “throwing away” of the visible, temporal cosmos’, and Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, SP 13 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 50, who suggests that ‘the heavens and earth will perish at an appointed time, having accomplished the purpose for which they were created’. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 76, also uses the language of ‘throwing away’. Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 203, proposes that ‘heaven and earth will be brought to an end by the Lord’. Adams himself (‘Cosmology’, 135-36) argues that this text indicates that the ‘visible heavens and earth ... will be brought ... to a definitive end’. For a fuller statement see Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, LNTS 247 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 183-85.

<sup>16</sup> I give the NRSV here for convenience. My own translation follows in Section 5.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 221. See HALOT 1777, where תפלה is said to be ‘the general word for a prayer, especially for a prayer of supplication, but also apparently especially for the poetically constructed prayer known as the psalm of lamentation’. The early church classified Psalm 102 as one of seven penitential Psalms (Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 14).

<sup>18</sup> I use English versification throughout this section. English Ps. 102:1-28 are equivalent to MT Ps. 102:2-29 and LXX Ps. 101:2-29.

relationship to the cosmos. Verse 28 looks to the future security of the offspring of the servants of YHWH, who will live securely in his presence. The reference to the restoration of Zion and Jerusalem indicates that this part of the Psalm at least is probably exilic, and while it could have stood alone there is no indication that it ever did.<sup>19</sup> In any case, the author of Hebrews would have received it as a single composition, and read it as the complaint of an individual living while Jerusalem was in ruins (vv. 13-14), anticipating the restoration of Zion, which would also entail ‘the nations’ (τὰ ἔθνη) coming to fear the name of the LORD, ‘the kings of the earth’ (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς) fearing his glory (v. 16), and ‘peoples’ (λαοί) and ‘kingdoms’ (βασιλείαι) gathering in Zion and Jerusalem to worship him (vv. 21-22). These are ideas that find expression in Hebrews 12:22-24, the rhetorical climax of the book, where the people of God are said to ‘have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem’ (προσεληλύθατε Σιών ὄρει καὶ πόλει θεοῦ ζῶντος, Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐπουρανίῳ).

After affirming the certainty of the restoration of Zion, the Psalmist takes a cosmic perspective. He notes that, in contrast to himself whose days have been shortened (vv. 23-24), YHWH’s years endure throughout all generations (v. 24). A poem on the relationship of YHWH to the cosmos follows (vv. 25-27), elaborating on the statements of verses 12 and 24c that YHWH endures throughout the generations. This poem is about YHWH and his endurance: he created earth and heaven and will outlast them, and consequently, what the poem says about created order is subsumed under the main theme emerging throughout the Psalm: YHWH will endure and will restore Zion and redeem his people.

לְפָנַי הָאָרֶץ יִסְדָּתָּהּ  
וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיךָ שָׁמַיִם:

<sup>25</sup> Long ago you established the earth  
And the heavens are the work of your  
hands.

הֲמָהּ | יֵאָבְדוּ וְאַתָּה תִּעֲמַד  
וְכֻלָּם כַּבְּגָד יִבְלוּ

<sup>26</sup> They may perish but you remain,  
all of them like a garment could wear out.

<sup>19</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90-150*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 149. Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1962), 653, does not entirely rule out a pre-exilic date, as also John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, The Biblical Seminar (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 80.

כְּלְבוּשׁ תַּחֲלִיפֵם וַיִּחַלְפוּ:

Like clothing you would change them and they will change

וְאַתָּה־הוּא וְשָׁנוּתֶיךָ לֹא יִתְמוּ:

<sup>27</sup> But you are the same and your years will not end.<sup>20</sup>

Along with several texts in Isaiah and elsewhere, verse 25 affirms that YHWH laid the foundation of the earth and that the heavens are his handiwork.<sup>21</sup> The Isaiah texts that include the formula ‘laid the foundations of the earth’ (יָסַד הָאָרֶץ) have been connected with YHWH’s victory over cosmic forces and ‘the subsequent ordering of the cosmos’ for human habitation (cf. Ps. 104:1-9, Isa. 51:1-16), as well as YHWH’s rule over the cosmos (cf. Ps. 102:12).<sup>22</sup> Similar language is also used for the establishment of Zion and the building of the temple (cf. Pss. 24; 78:67-72), traditions that Ps. 102:12-22 uses for the re-establishment of Zion, and Isaiah for a new act of salvation.<sup>23</sup> It does seem incongruous that a Psalm reflecting the traditions of the restoration of Zion and a new act of salvation, and concluding that the descendants of the servants of YHWH will live securely and be established in YHWH’s presence, should then deconstruct it with the suggestion that the earth on which those servants live will ultimately disappear.

Verse 26 is a tricolon, with the main statement in line a, followed by two parallel statements in lines b and c. The main statement is a strong contrast expressed with two personal pronouns: הֵמָּה (‘they’) and אַתָּה (‘you’) and two verbs in the imperfect tense form (יִאֲבֹדוּ) (‘they will

<sup>20</sup> This is my own translation.

<sup>21</sup> Isa. 48:13; 51:13, 16; Zech. 12:1. See also Job 38:4; Ps. 24:2; 78:69; 89:11; 104:5; Prov. 3:19. 11QPs<sup>a</sup> reads the Niphal perfect נִיָּסְדָה (‘was established’) rather than the Qal יָסַדָה (‘you established’) of the MT. LXX has ἐθεμελίωσας (aorist active indicative). Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms: Three Volumes in One*, trans. James Martin, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 644, proposes that the Psalmist depends on Isaiah. See also Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, WBC 21 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 23: ‘the collocation of divine enthronement (v. 13), the rebuilding of Zion, and creation in this Psalm is not accidental but an appeal to a composite tradition’. I use the term ‘Isaiah’ rather than ‘Second Isaiah’, on the assumption that ancient readers would not have been conscious of the various parts of Isaiah identified by modern critical scholars.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore M. Ludwig, ‘The Traditions of the Establishing of the Earth in Deutero-Isaiah’, *JBL* 92 (1973), 350-55.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 23.

perish'), and תעמד ('you will endure').<sup>24</sup> Three factors weigh against the suggestion that this means the dissolution of the created order.

In the first place I note that elsewhere where parts of the created order are the subject of verb אבד ('to perish') the verb does not have this sense. In Jeremiah 9:11 YHWH pronounces judgement on Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. He vows to make Jerusalem a heap of ruins and the cities of Judah a desolation. In verse 12 the prophet muses, 'Why has the land perished (על-מה אבדה הארץ) and laid waste like the wilderness, without inhabitant?' Similar themes occur in Jeremiah 48:8, an oracle against Moab, where 'the valley shall perish (אבד העמק) and the plain be destroyed (נשמד המישר)'. The language of perishing expresses the results of the action of YHWH judging his people and the people of Moab, judgement that finds expression in ecological disturbance, which, in the case of Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, was restored after the exile. The verb need not express permanent destruction, and in the Jeremiah texts simply refers to arable land becoming like the wilderness.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, the imperfect tense form does not necessarily imply certainty. Allen translates, 'they may perish, but you will continue',<sup>26</sup> and Goldingay, 'They may perish but you would stand'.<sup>27</sup> Goldingay comments,

EVV [English versions] affirm that they *will* have an end, but there is no need to read the *yiqtol* verb thus, and the OT does not elsewhere make such a statement. The psalm makes a hypothetical statement about the cosmos's nature. There is nothing about the heavens and the earth that means they must last forever; and if they do come to an end, YHWH will outlast them.

Even if the cosmos should perish, YHWH would endure. Indeed, given the context of the rebuilding of Zion and restoration of God's people and the streaming of the Gentiles to Zion, this seems an appropriate reading of the line. Just as Zion 'perished' when the people went into exile and will ultimately be restored, YHWH could do the same with heaven and earth, should they perish.

<sup>24</sup> For this gloss for תעמד see 'עמד', qal, 3, c, HALOT 841. Cf. Ps. 19:10; 33:11; Qoh. 1:4; Isa. 66:22.

<sup>25</sup> Similar language appears in Qumran. See 4QpsMoses<sup>a</sup> 44 5; 4QpsMoses<sup>b</sup> 3 ii 7 (fragment, column and line numbers from DSSSE).

<sup>26</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 160.

Thirdly, the shape of the tricolon, with lines b and c explaining the statement of line a supports this opinion. These lines contain three verbs in the imperfect tense form. The subject of the first is ‘all of them’ (כלם),<sup>28</sup> the subject of the second is ‘you’ (YHWH) and the subject of the third is ‘they’ (the heavens and earth). The verbs in question are בלה (‘to be worn out, deteriorate’), חלף (Hiph., ‘to change’, transitive) and חלף (Qal, ‘to change’, intransitive). The sense is amplified with clothing imagery. Heaven and earth could wear out like ‘a garment’ (בגד) and YHWH could change them like ‘clothing’ (לבוש) and they would change. Similar clothing imagery is also found in Isaiah (51:6, 8), in the context of a new act of salvation.

However, wearing out and being changed like clothing does not necessarily imply dissolution. The verbs imply the replacement of an old garment with another.<sup>29</sup> As Goldingay notes, חלף can ‘denote a change for the better or for the worse’.<sup>30</sup> Change for the better is the sense in another Psalm where the word appears. In Psalm 90:5-6, the grass that flourishes and renews (חלף) in the morning fades and withers in the evening. Delitzsch argues that this is the sense in Psalm 102, where God ‘changes’ the created order, ‘the *Hiphil* signifies to put on a new condition, 102:27, to set a new thing on in the place of an old one’.<sup>31</sup> So while the NRSV (‘they pass away’) and the 2011 NIV (‘they will be discarded’) assume that the verb means a change for the worse, it is more appropriate in the context of the restoration of Zion and of the lamenting individual, that the Psalm should anticipate not the destruction of, but YHWH’s renewal of, the deteriorating created order. As Tengstrom and Fabry suggest, ‘God ... is the author of creation and all its transformations.’<sup>32</sup>

Heaven and earth are his handiwork, and should they wear out YHWH, who endures, could effect a new creative act, changing them like a garment is changed. The connections with Isaiah bring with them

<sup>28</sup> The antecedent of this expression is the heavens and the earth (v. 26).

<sup>29</sup> For the use of this verb in connection with clothing see ‘חלף’, *TDOT*, 4:433.

<sup>30</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 160. Goldingay continues with the suggestion that the context denotes the exchange of one garment for another: ‘YHWH could decide it is time for a change like a human being deciding to get rid of one set of clothes for another.’

<sup>31</sup> Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 596.

<sup>32</sup> *TDOT*, 4:435. For similar imagery see Isa. 51:6.

the Isaianic hope not only for the restoration of Zion, but also for a new heaven and earth to be created by YHWH (Isa. 65:17-25; 66:18-24).<sup>33</sup>

Verse 27 addresses YHWH: in contrast to the decaying universe, YHWH is the one (וְאַתֶּה־הוּא),<sup>34</sup> and his years never end. This verse forms an inclusio around the poem with verse 24b, which addresses YHWH as the one whose years endure throughout all generations, underscoring in conclusion the main thrust of the poem, and reminding those who sing the Psalm that God is the one who remains and is always there to renew and restore.

There is no sense that God will bring the creation to an end in these verses; there is a sense of ecological deterioration, along with the confidence that God is able to effect renewal. Should it deteriorate, God who created it in the first place is able to change it and renew it, just as he will restore fallen Zion for the returning exiles. Once renewed the earth is fit for human habitation again. There they will live securely in God's presence on the renewed earth.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. Psalm 101:26-28 in the LXX

Since the author of Hebrews quotes from the Jewish Greek Scriptures, I turn now to the Greek Psalter to assess any significant textual or translation issues. The translation is relatively literal, especially in verse 26, where it even reflects the Hebrew word order. In the Hebrew text the verses are part of the lament, addressed to YHWH, while in the Greek text the Hebrew עָנָה ('he afflicted', v. 24) is rendered in LXX as

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 644: '[t]he prayer not to sweep him away before his time, the poet supports not by the eternity of God in itself, but by the work of the rejuvenation of the world and of the restoration of Israel that is to be looked for, which He can and will bring to an accomplishment, because He is the ever-living One'. See also Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 235.

<sup>34</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 160 critiques the translation 'you are the same', pointing to Ps. 100:3: הוּא הוּא אֱלֹהִים ('YHWH – he is God'). He continues, '[t]here is a unique absoluteness about YHWH's being, one aspect of which is that YHWH's years do not come to an end'. Cf. Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 235, 'you are He who is' (italics original). Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews*, WUNT 2, 260 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 167 suggests the possibility that וְאַתֶּה־הוּא has the sense 'but you are God'.

<sup>35</sup> Adams, *Stars Will Fall*, 30-31 has a brief treatment of this text, which he reads as predicting that God 'will cause heaven and earth to be changed and pass away'. He concludes, '[h]ere, therefore, we have a creational monotheism which actually requires the end of the world'. It is more likely that the text postulates that God will renew the deteriorating universe.

ἀπεκρίθη ('he answered'), implying that the following words are spoken by God. Also, in the LXX verse 26 reads 'in the beginning you, Lord, laid the foundations of the earth' (κατ' ἀρχὰς σύ, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας), with the addition of κύριος,<sup>36</sup> a word that also appears in Hebrews 1:10, with God speaking the words in the Psalm to the exalted Son.<sup>37</sup>

I argued with reference to verse 27 that the Hebrew יָבִיחַ ('they will perish') has the sense of the deterioration of the cosmos rather than its dissolution. The LXX renders this word with the future middle of ἀπόλλυμι ('they will perish'). While this word is often used in the sense of permanent destruction, the semantic range also includes situations where this is not permanent.<sup>38</sup> For example, in 2 Peter 3:6 the antediluvian world 'perishes', and Josephus uses the word of Jerusalem 'perishing'.<sup>39</sup>

The structure in the Hebrew text of verse 27 is followed in the LXX, where the notion of 'perishing' is elaborated with the future passive indicative of παλαιόω ('they will become old'),<sup>40</sup> paving the way for the active and then the passive of ἀλλάσσω, ('you will change them' and 'they will be changed'). If anything the clothing imagery is stronger in the LXX, with the created order growing old like a garment and the Lord (κύριος, v. 26) changing them, again like a garment. As in the Hebrew text, the symbolism pictures, not the destruction of the created order, but its deterioration, followed by its eventual renewal in a new creative act of God.

<sup>36</sup> The words σύ, κύριε are omitted from Codex Sinaiticus. Other witnesses have the words in a different order. See the critical apparatus in A. Rahlfs, *Psalmi cum Odis, Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum X* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931), 255.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 125-26; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 30. Ellingworth lists several other factors that could have led the author to read the words of the Psalm with reference to Christ.

<sup>38</sup> See 'ἀπόλλυμι', 1, β, *BDAG* 116.

<sup>39</sup> Josephus, *War*, 2.650. In the synoptic Gospels wineskins do not cease to exist when they have holes in them, they just become useless (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37), and in Luke 15:9 a coin cannot be used because it is lost. See the discussion in Douglas J. Moo, 'Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment', *JETS* 49 (2006), 468-69, 468n77. *LSJ*, 207 includes 'demolish, lay waste' in its definition of ἀπόλλυμι. See Homer, 5.648 for an example of this usage.

<sup>40</sup> For this gloss see 'παλαιόω', 2, *BDAG*, 751.

#### 4. The Context in Hebrews 1–2 of the Quotation of Psalm 102:25-27

This text is the last in a chain of six OT quotations encompassing Hebrews 1:5-13. They provide evidence from the OT for the claims of verses 1-4 that the Son is exalted to the right hand of God, and give further OT background to these claims. This final quotation establishes that the Son is superior to the angels since he founded the heavens and the earth, and will outlast them: he remains the same and his years will never end. It also supports the claim of verses 2-3 that he was involved in the creation of ‘the worlds’ (οἱ αἰῶνες),<sup>41</sup> and sustains (φέρω) everything (τὰ πάντα) by his powerful word.<sup>42</sup>

The context needs to be taken wider than just the introduction to Hebrews and the catena of quotations, however. As George Caird wrote in the middle of the last century, the citation of Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2:5-8,

controls the argument of the preceding chapter, for from the first mention of angels at 1:5 [sic: angels appear in 1:4] throughout the formidable catena of texts in ch. 1 the author’s one aim is to illustrate the theme of the psalm that man has been destined by God to a glory excelling that of angels and that this destiny has been achieved by Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Caird’s point that the theme of Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2:5-8 ‘that man has been destined by God to a glory excelling that of angels’ is well made. In Hebrews 2:5 the author introduces the citation of Psalm 8 with the comment that ‘the world to come’ (ἡ οἰκουμένη ἢ μέλλουσα), about which he has been speaking, had not been made subject to angels. Unfortunately, he does not make clear to whom the world to come has been made subject, and while numerous scholars have argued that it

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 41: ‘the spheres that comprise the universe’.

<sup>42</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 45; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 112.

<sup>43</sup> G. B. Caird, ‘The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews’, *CJT* 5 (1959), 49. Both Lincoln D. Hurst, ‘The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2’, in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament*, ed. Lincoln D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 151-64 and Kenneth L. Schenck, ‘A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1’, *JBL* 120 (2001), 469-85 demonstrate the validity of this claim. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, WUNT 2, 70 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 135-36 suggests that the citation of Ps. 8 is the final OT citation in the set that began in 1:3 with Ps. 110:1.

has been made subject to the exalted Son of God, it is preferable to recognise that his exaltation is as a ‘pioneer’ (ἀρχηγός, 2:10), and that the world to come has been made subject to humanity.<sup>44</sup> And while this is not yet clear, the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God gives assurance that this will eventually take place.

If Caird and others are correct in their claim that the citation of Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2:5-8 controls the entire argument from Hebrews 1:3–2:10, then it is significant for my argument that Hebrews 2:5-8 concerns ‘the world to come’. According to Hebrews 1:6, the firstborn has been exalted into this world (οἰκουμένη).<sup>45</sup> This makes it difficult to see a reference to the dissolution of the cosmos in Heb 1:10-12, unless it also contains the seeds of a reference to the renewal of creation.<sup>46</sup> As Caneday writes,

... the Son has brought the old era ... to a close and has inaugurated the new aeon of the new covenant with its heavenly realities. Heaven has come to the cosmos in order that the cosmos might finally come to its consummation in the world that is to come, the habitable world that will be subject to humans, not to angels...<sup>47</sup>

## 5. Psalm 102:25-27 in Hebrews 1:10-12

There are several differences between the extant LXX text and Hebrews, but only two are substantive. In verse 12a the word ἐλίσσω (‘roll up’) appears in place of ἀλλάσσω (‘change’), a word that appears in some witnesses to the LXX, perhaps influenced by Isaiah 34:4. Secondly, in verse 12b the expression ὡς ἰμάτιον (‘like

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<sup>44</sup> For recent restatements of the arguments for this reading see Craig L. Blomberg, ‘Better Things in This Case: The Superiority of Today’s New International Version in Hebrews’, *BT* 55 (2004), 311-18; Craig L. Blomberg, “‘But We See Jesus’: The Relationship between the Son of Man in Hebrews 2:6 & Verse 9 and the Implications for English Translations”, in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al., LNTS 387 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 88-99.

<sup>45</sup> A. B. Caneday, ‘The Eschatological World Already Subjected to the Son: The οἰκουμένη of Hebrews 1:6 and the Son’s Enthronement’, in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al., LNTS 387 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 29.

<sup>46</sup> Adams, ‘Cosmology’, 137 argues that the author’s use of οἰκουμένη ‘strongly suggests that he has in view a new world ... a new worldly environment to be populated by the people of God, i.e., a new created order’.

<sup>47</sup> Caneday, ‘Eschatological World’, 39.

clothing’) is repeated. While this is omitted from several witnesses, the evidence for its inclusion is strong, and it should be retained.<sup>48</sup>

**LXX Psalm 101:26-27**

<sup>26</sup> κατ’ ἀρχὰς σύ, κύριε, τὴν  
γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας,<sup>49</sup>  
καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου  
εἴσιν οἱ οὐρανοί·  
<sup>27</sup> αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ  
διαμενεῖς,<sup>50</sup>  
καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον  
παλαιωθήσονται,  
καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον  
ἀλλάξεις<sup>51</sup> αὐτούς, καὶ  
ἀλλαγήσονται·  
<sup>28</sup> σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ, καὶ τὰ ἔτη  
σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν.

**Hebrews 1:10-12**

<sup>10</sup> καί·  
σὺ<sup>52</sup> κατ’ ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν  
γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας,  
καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου  
εἴσιν οἱ οὐρανοί·  
<sup>11</sup> αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ  
διαμένεις,<sup>53</sup>  
καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον  
παλαιωθήσονται,  
<sup>12</sup> καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον  
ἐλίξεις<sup>54</sup> αὐτούς, ὡς  
ἱμάτιον<sup>55</sup> καὶ  
ἀλλαγήσονται·  
σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἔτη  
σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν.

<sup>48</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 593, proposes that the author of Hebrews may have added the words to underscore the clothing symbolism. Even though no extant LXX witnesses include the words, certainty is not possible, since we cannot identify the *Vorlage* used by the author. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 61, thinks the change ‘emphasizes the transitory nature of the creation’.

<sup>49</sup> See footnote 36 (above) for a discussion of the textual issues in this line.

<sup>50</sup> Διαμενεῖς is future; some witnesses read διαμένεις (present).

<sup>51</sup> Vaticanus and Alexandrinus and several other witnesses, including the Lucianic recension, read ἐλίξεις (‘you will roll up’).

<sup>52</sup> Σύ is omitted from P<sup>114</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> The second reviser of D and a few minuscules read διαμενεῖς, perhaps assimilating to the LXX. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 49 notes the ambiguity, disambiguated with future accentuation in D (second reviser), 0121b, 365, 529, *pc*, b, v, *vg*. O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 77, following Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 128, notes that in this quotation, ‘future tenses refer to change while present tenses point to a permanent state’.

<sup>54</sup> The original hands of X and D, plus a few other versions read ἀλλάξεις, as in the preponderant reading in the LXX. Subsequent scribes altered the text to ἐλίξεις. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 593.

<sup>55</sup> The words ὡς ἱμάτιον do not appear in the LXX in this line, and are omitted by first reviser of D, K, L, P, Ψ and numerous minuscules. The text is found in P<sup>46</sup>, X, A, B, the original hand of D, 1739 and some MSS of the Vulgate.

- |  |                   |  |
|--|-------------------|--|
|  | <sup>10</sup> and |  |
| <sup>26</sup> At the beginning it was you, Lord,<br>who founded the earth,<br>and the heavens are the work of your<br>hands.   |                   | It was you, at the beginning, Lord,<br>who founded the earth<br>and the heavens are the work of your<br>hands.   |
| <sup>27</sup> They will perish, but you will remain,<br>and all of them like clothing will<br>grow old,<br>and as a cloak you will change them,<br>and they will be changed. |                   | <sup>11</sup> They will perish, but you remain,<br>and all of them like clothing will<br>grow old,<br><sup>12</sup> and as a cloak you will roll them up,<br>like clothing they will also be<br>changed. <sup>56</sup> |
| <sup>28</sup> But you are the same and your years<br>will not come to an end.  |                   | But you are the same and your years<br>will not come to an end.  |

In verse 10 the exalted Son of God, now called ‘Lord’ (κύριος), is said to have laid the foundations of the earth, with the heavens are the work of his hands (v. 10). This picks up on the statement in verse 3 that God made the ‘worlds’ (οἱ αἰῶνες) through the Son.<sup>57</sup>

Verse 11 compares the temporal nature of the created order with endurance of the Son who made them. As in the Hebrew text this is expressed with a strong contrast using two pronouns: αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις (‘As for them, they will perish, but as for you, you remain.’) As I discussed in connection with this verb (ἀπόλλυμι) in its original context in the Greek Psalter, while it may indicate permanent dissolution, this need not be the case, and as I will show, the elaboration in Hebrews 1:11b-12a indicates that the sense is that of deterioration. Over against the enduring reign of the Son, the created order is subject to decay.

Verses 11b-12a contain three verbs that concern the creation. The subject of the first is the created order, ‘they [i.e., heaven and earth] will grow old’ (παλαιόω), the subject of the second is the Lord addressed in the Psalm quotation, ‘you will roll them up’ (ἐλίσσω), and the third is a passive, probably a divine passive, ‘they will be changed’ (ἀλλάσσω). The addition of ὡς ἱμάτιον (‘like clothing’) in verse 12 turns the three lines into a concentric structure,

- A all of them like clothing will grow old,
- B and as a cloak you will roll them up,
- A like clothing they will also be changed

<sup>56</sup> For the translation ‘also’ for καί in this verse see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 60.

I deal with the A lines first and then the B line.

That the created order ‘grows old’ (παλαιόω) complements the statement of the previous line in the same way as it did in the Hebrew and Greek Psalter. The verb only appears four times in the NT, three of which are in Hebrews.<sup>58</sup> In Hebrews 8:13 the former covenant is growing old and close to ‘destruction’ (ἀφανισμός),<sup>59</sup> an adjective that is not used with reference to the created order in Hebrews 1. While the old covenant will be ‘destroyed’ the created order ‘will be changed’ (ἀλλάσσω).<sup>60</sup> This verb appears six times in the NT, and three of these (including Hebrews 1:12) are divine passives, with the other two in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.<sup>61</sup> There, we will be changed at the resurrection. In the NT, when God changes things he changes them for the better. In the present context, while the created order grows old, it will not be destroyed: it will be changed.<sup>62</sup> And in the context of Hebrews 1–2, the change leads to the world to come, where the Son is exalted in the present, and to which God is leading many to glory through him.

The B line includes the future active indicative of ἐλίσσω, addressed to the Lord, and with the Lord as subject, ‘you will roll them up’. While the Göttingen Septuagint of Psalm 101:27 reads the future active indicative of ἀλλάσσω (‘you will change them’), three important witnesses to the text read ἐλίσσω, the verb found in

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<sup>58</sup> The other occurrence is Luke 12:33 concerned with treasure in heaven, which does not ‘wear out’.

<sup>59</sup> For this sense of ἀφανισμός see *BDAG* 155.

<sup>60</sup> Kenneth L. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*, SNTSMS 143 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 124, makes this connection with 8:13, via the use of παλαιόω, and connects the “‘taking off” of the created realm’ with the end of the old covenant, as does Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 128. But quite different language is used in 8:13 for the end of the old covenant. Adams, *Stars Will Fall*, 184, also makes the connection with Heb. 8:13, noting the appearance in both texts of the verb παλαιόω, with the author ‘plainly associating ageing with perishability and destructibility’. But it is what follows the ageing that is significant. In 8:13 it is destruction; in 1:11-12 it is change.

<sup>61</sup> The other occurrences are Acts 6:14, where Stephen is accused of changing the customs handed down, Rom. 1:23, where humans change the glory of God for images, and Gal. 4:20, where Paul refers to changing his tone.

<sup>62</sup> See Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, NIBCNT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 35, ‘the time is coming when it will be revamped, altered completely’. Contra Attridge, *Hebrews*, 61, who argues that ‘the heavens will not simply be changed, but “removed”’; Koester, *Hebrews*, 196, who argues that “‘change” points to an end’; and O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 76, who refers to the heavens being ‘removed’. Neither *BDAG* 45-46 nor *LSJ* 68 give the sense of ‘removal’ or ‘bringing to an end’ for ἀλλάσσω, although *BDAG* comments, ‘of the change to be wrought by Christ in the heavens when the world is destroyed’.

Hebrews.<sup>63</sup> It is impossible to tell whether this is a change introduced by the author of Hebrews, or whether it was in his *Vorlage*, or even whether these readings arose due to the influence of Hebrews, since they long postdate Hebrews.<sup>64</sup> The answer to the question is somewhat academic, however, since an alert reader the Greek Psalter would likely hear an echo of another occurrence of this word, Isaiah 34:4, where the heavens are rolled up like a scroll.<sup>65</sup>

Isaiah 34–35 concern God’s judgment on the nations for the sake of Zion (34:8), and with a view to its restoration and the return of the redeemed there. An allusion to Isaiah 35:3 in Hebrews 12:12, where they are to ‘lift their drooping hands and strengthen [their] weak knees’ and persevere, and the claim that the readers have come to Mount Zion in 12:22–24 strengthens the identification of an intertextual echo of Isaiah 34:4 in Hebrews 1:10, especially since the entire Psalm breathes the atmosphere of the restoration of Zion.<sup>66</sup>

In Isaiah 34 the rolling up of the heavens is a prophetic hyperbole, with the prophet depicting God’s judgement on the wicked in cosmic terms.<sup>67</sup> The outcome of God’s fierce judgment is the return to the primeval chaos as the heavens rot away and are rolled up, and the earth becomes formless and empty once again.<sup>68</sup> As Marlow points out, God ‘executes judgment on human behaviour ... and the effect on the heavens is portrayed as a reflection of this’.<sup>69</sup> But this is not the end, for a scroll is not rolled up to be destroyed. It is rolled up to be stored

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<sup>63</sup> See note 51 (above).

<sup>64</sup> Lucian is 3rd century AD, Vaticanus 4th century AD and Alexandrinus 5th century AD.

<sup>65</sup> The word also appears in Job 18:8, where (in the LXX) the wicked are ‘entangled’ in a net. There is an allusion to Isa. 34:4 in the only other NT occurrence of the word, Rev. 6:14, where the sky vanishes like a scroll being rolled up. NA<sup>28</sup> notes an allusion to Isa. 34:4 in Heb. 1:12. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 61, notes that even if the author was not influenced by Isa. 34:4, the use of ἐλίσσω recalls that text.

<sup>66</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 37–38, refers to ‘recurrence or clustering’ as one of the tests used to identify an intertextual echo. NA<sup>28</sup> notes allusions to Isa. 50:9 (LXX) and 51:6 in Heb. 1:11, further strengthening the case for an echo of 34:4 in 1:12.

<sup>67</sup> The identity of the objects of God’s judgement is debated. See Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 227.

<sup>68</sup> The terms תהו and בהו appear in 34:11.

<sup>69</sup> Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, 199.

until reused.<sup>70</sup> In Isaiah 34 the wicked are judged and removed and human dwellings depopulated. Then, after being laid waste, the earth is re-inhabited with wild animals and birds (34:9-17). What is removed then, is what is displeasing to God, so that what pleases God can remain, and the earth can be re-created. If this echo is correctly heard, then, this context can be brought into Hebrews 1:10-12, indicating not the dissolution of the created order, but the removal of the old to make way for the new as the created order is ‘changed’.<sup>71</sup>

The quotation concludes as it began with statements about the exalted Son of God, who, in contrast to the changeable created order, remains the same and whose years will not come to an end.<sup>72</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The author of Hebrews places the Psalm text in the new context of his discussion of the exaltation of the Son of God ‘in these last days’ in the world to come. He is depicted as the changeless one who laid the foundation of the earth, and, though it is subject to deterioration and decay, he will roll it up like a garment and transform it, ushering in the ‘world to come’ (2:5), where all that is displeasing to God will have been removed.

Contrary, then, to some readings of Hebrews there is no disparagement of the created order in this text, and there is no suggestion that God will discard it.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Anne Gardner, ‘Ecojustice or Anthropological Justice? A Study of the New Heavens and the New Earth in Isaiah 65:17’, in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, The Earth Bible 4, ed. Norman C. Habel, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 217. See also Adams, *Stars Will Fall*, 38.

<sup>71</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 532-33, commenting on the influence of Isa. 34:4 in Mark 13:24, notes that ‘God is redrawing the map of world politics, and the familiar structures of international affairs will never be the same again. But the dramatic collapse of the power structures is not the end of world history, but the beginning of a new and better phase, in which God’s purpose will be worked out.’

<sup>72</sup> ἐκλείπω appears four times in the NT, three times in Luke and once in Hebrews. In Luke 16:9 it refers to money ‘running out’, in Luke 22:32 it refers to Peter’s faith “failing” and in Luke 23:45 the light of the sun fails when Jesus dies. ‘Come to an end’ seems to be an appropriate gloss in Ps. 102:28 and Heb. 1:12.

<sup>73</sup> See Footnote 14 (above).

Rather the Son, who upholds all things by his powerful word (1:3), will outlast the creation that grows old and will transform it and renew it, and place it under the dominion of redeemed humanity (2:5-9).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> I have argued that this text predicts the renewal of a universe that is deteriorating (as in e.g. Rom. 8:21). It is not entirely clear whether the verb ἀπόλλυμι in Heb. 1:11 refers to this deterioration or to the reduction of the cosmos to nothing and its re-creation. It is, nevertheless, clear that the text does anticipate the renewal of creation. Adams, 'Cosmology', 137, suggests, 'there is good reason to think that a re-creation of the cosmos after its dissolution is anticipated, even though there is no overt reference to it'. The language of 'change' (ἀλλάσσω) in v. 12 provides such a reference.