

The Advent Conversation

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Overview

Many quotations from the first Christmas have been preserved for us:

- the angel to the shepherds;
- the shepherds to one another;
- the wise men to Herod and v.v.
- Anna and Simeon in the temple.

The book of Hebrews preserves two other Advent quotations, one by the Father and one by his Son. Thirteen times the AV speaks of Christ's coming "into the world." Two of these are in Hebrews (chart):

Heb 1:6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten **into the world**, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

Heb 10:5 Wherefore when he cometh **into the world**, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: 6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure. 7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

Both are quotations from the Old Testament. In ch. 10, quoting Ps 40:6-8, the Son expresses his willingness to offer himself obediently as a replacement for the OT sacrifices. In ch. 1, quoting Ps 97:7 and the LXX of Deut 32:43, the Father commands all the angels to worship him.

In 1997, I considered these two texts with you, suggesting that both of them refer to the first advent. As I reviewed them this year, I am persuaded that the second one in fact anticipates the second advent. The big picture is that the Son comes at the first advent in humble obedience to his Father, and as a result is highly exalted and brought back as the one before whom the angels fall when he comes again.

The application to us is straightforward. Our savior was made "in all things like unto his brethren" (Heb 2:17), so that we might be "conformed to [his] image" (Rom 8:29). The history of his attitude at his first advent should be our standard for our submission to the heavenly Father; the promise of his exaltation when he comes again should be our steadfast hope.

Heb 10:5-7, The Son speaks to the Father at the First Advent

This quotation comes from Ps 40:6-8 (chart), in which the Psalmist declares his intention to serve the Lord. v. 6 strikingly rejects explicitly three of the four classes of sacrifice from Lev 1-7) burnt, sin, and peace, represented here by "offering"), and the generic initial term, "sacrifice," includes the trespass offering. How can David put aside the divine ordinance? He declares that God wants his obedience, not sacrifice, but he says he is a sinner (v. 12), and sin needs a sacrifice.

Hebrews differs from the MT in the second clause of v. 6: "mine ears hast thou opened" becomes "a

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body hast thou prepared me.” This change was made by the LXX, which Hebrews follows.¹ To understand the change, we need to understand what the MT means, and a figure of speech known as synecdoche or “part for the whole” (chart).

The meaning of the Hebrew turns on the sense given the word “opened” כרה. An allusion is sometimes asserted to the ritual of binding a slave to a household in perpetuity by piercing the ear with an awl (Exod 21:6), but this is unnatural for two reasons.

1. The verb there is different (רצע). Our verb is frequently used for digging a well, a pit, or a tomb, that is, an open cavity, not a narrow piercing.
2. “My ears” is less than literal. A more literal rendering would be, “you opened ears for me.”

The phrase much more naturally refers to the creation of the opening of the ear than to the piercing of the ear-lobe. That is, the Psalmist is saying, “God, you opened ears in my head. You created the organ of hearing for me.” This claim leads naturally to the assertion in the following verses that he has received the teaching of “the volume of the book” and seeks to obey it.

The creation of the ear was just one part of the creation of the entire person. The LXX translator realizes that other parts of the body are integral to carrying out what the ear hears, and understands the reference to the ear to imply the creation of the rest of the body as well. This understanding of the Hebrew is a figure of speech, “synecdoche” or “part for the whole,” in which reference to one part of something is meant to convey the entire thing. In English, we do the same thing, when we refer to an employee as a “hired hand” (we hire much more than just the hand”), or when we say that somebody has “new wheels” (meaning a new car) or is wearing “nice threads” (a new suit). So the translator interprets the statement. “You digged ears for me” implies “you prepared a body for me.”

The LXX wording recalls to the writer to the Hebrews the wonder of the incarnation. For David to say, “you prepared a body for me,” does not explain how he can do away with the Levitical sacrifices. But when God “prepared a body” for his son, he was producing the fulfillment and replacement for those sacrifices. As the Messiah enters into the world, he does not view his body as his own playground, a tool intended for his pleasure. Instead, God has given it to him for the purpose of doing God’s will,

Heb 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

What did the Son say at the first advent? He entered the world acknowledging that he was sent to die, and surrendering his body to God at the moment he received it.

The Lord Jesus is not just our sacrifice. He is also our example. God wants us to “be conformed to the image of his son” (Rom 8:29, chart). The characteristic term for Christians in Acts is not “believers,” but “disciples,” those who follow the teaching of their master. Paul exhorts the Corinthians,

1Co 11:1 Be ye followers [μιμηται “imitators”] of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.

How do you view your body? Do you consider it your most private possession, and view yourself

¹ Rahlfs follows a small minority of mss in reading $\omega\tau\alpha$ rather than $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$. See van der Brugh, *Neotestamentica* 42.2 (2008) 353-382 (http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/9955/VanDerBergh_Textual%282008%29.pdf?sequence=1) for documentation of the majority LXX reading $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$. But even the minority reading reflects our understanding of כרה.

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entitled to keep it comfortable? Or do you consider it a trust from God, given you for the purpose of enabling you to carry out his will, even if that will includes suffering? The Lord urged on his followers the same attitude he demonstrated at his first coming:

Mat 16:24 If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

Heb 1:6, The Father speaks of the Son at the Second Advent

This quotation is usually traced to Ps 97:7, one of the royal psalms that begins, “The Lord reigneth.” It describes his majestic advent in clouds, fire, and lightening (vv. 1-4), the sense of despair that grips all the earth (vv. 5-7), and the joy that comes upon the righteous (vv. 8-12). This is a Psalm of the coming millennial kingdom, when God asserts his rule over all the earth against every adversary (chart).

In the midst of the description of the world’s reaction, v. 7 says,

Psa 97:7 Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all *ye* gods.

The “gods” in question are the false gods represented by the idols and graven images mentioned earlier in the verse. In fact, Paul asserts that idols are not just inert statues but are associated with wicked spirits, rebellious angels.

1Co 10:20 the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God:

So one can transition easily from “gods” to “angels” in Ps 97.

But the author of Hebrews is not the one making this change. Deut 32:43 includes our expression as an expansion of the Hebrew verse (chart). This verse concludes the Song of Moses, a comprehensive survey of Israel’s history, past and future (chart).

- It begins with the creation of the different nations and God’s choice of Israel (vv. 8,9)
- It describes his care for them in the wilderness, and the bounty of the land into which he was bringing them (10-14)
- It anticipates their sinful rebellion, and the judgment that will fall upon them.
- It foretells his repentance (v. 36), the return of his favor, and the destruction of their enemies.
- Finally, our verse calls on the Gentiles to glorify God for his restoration of Israel.

The LXX expands this call to praise, including heaven as well as earth, and angels as well as men. The translator recognizes the correspondence between the final victory of v. 43 and the coming of the Lord in kingdom glory in Ps 97. It is he who adapts the phrase from “gods” to “angels.”

Both Ps 97:7 and Dt 32:43 refer to the future return of the Lord Jesus (chart). So does our text, as we can see by three details that our version obscures: the words “again,” “bring in,” and “world.”

The first is the grammatical role of the word “again” at the start of the verse. Our version understands it in the same way as the same word in v. 5, introducing yet another citation supporting his claim that the

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Messiah “hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than” the angels. But a more literal rendering of v. 6 would be, “But when he again brings the firstbegotten into the world ...”

- The conjunction is not “and,” as in v. 5, but “but.” V. 6 is in contrast with v. 5, not a continuation of it.
- The adverb “again” is more naturally associated with the verb “bring into.” This construction makes the quotation refer to the second coming of Christ, not the first. As we have seen, this reference is consistent with the text that he cites, which in both of its settings, Ps 97 and Deut 32, refers to the coming kingdom.

The second detail is the verb “bring in” εἰσαγω. The LXX repeatedly uses this verb of God’s bringing the children of Israel into the land of promise.² It has a “solemn sense of ‘putting in possession of,’ as of an inheritance” [Alford]. As we saw in Isaiah, the return to the land after captivity and dispersion is the ultimate evidence of the return of God’s favor, and the prelude to setting up his kingdom. When God “brings in” the firstbegotten, he is formally introducing him to his kingdom. Again, the reference is not to the first advent, but to the second.

The third detail is the “world” into which the Father brings the Son. The word is not κοσμος (the term used in 10:5 and every other instance of “into the world” in the Greek Bible), but οἰκουμένη. Now, this term can certainly refer to the world, but in Hebrews it appears only one other time, in the next chapter:

Heb 2:5 For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the **world** to come, whereof we speak.

He tells us that he has just spoken of “the world to come,” which would most naturally refer to our verse. So it is consistent with our writer’s usage to understand οἰκουμένη in this same sense in 1:6.

So the statement of the Father to the Son in 1:6 is not at the same time as the statement of the Son to the Father in 10:5-7. It occurs when the Son returns. When the Son came into the world the first time, he declared his willingness to devote to the Father’s will the body that the Father prepared for him. When the Father sets up his earthly kingdom, he will exalt the Son before all the angels of God.

The Relation between the Two

The two events, though separated by more than 2000 years, are closely related. Consider Paul in Phil 2.

Phi 2:7-11 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; 11 And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

“**Wherefore** God also hath highly exalted him.” Because “he humbled himself and became obedient unto death” (Heb 10), “God also hath highly exalted him” (Heb 1:6).

Our Savior’s submission to the will of God is an example for us in our daily lives. His exaltation is also

² See Alford on Heb 1:6 for many references to this effect.

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an example to us. Just as the Father will reward the Son's obedience by exalting him, so will he exalt those who have followed the Son in self-denial and service to him.

2Ti 2:11-12 *It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: 12
If we suffer, we shall also reign with him:*

This Christmas, remember the conversation between the Father and the Son. When you contemplate the babe in the manger, remember the man on the cross, and consider God's faithfulness to reward his obedience. Then resolve to follow his example of surrender to the Father, and rejoice in the promise of God's future glory.