

# THE USE OF PSALMS IN THE SHAPING OF A TEXT: PSALM 2:7 AND PSALM 110:1 IN HEBREWS 1

DAVID WALLACE

Abilene Christian University

In both obvious and unobtrusive ways, the Jewish Scriptures contributed to the literary and theological shaping of the NT. Whether by an explicit quotation or by a faint allusion, early Christians found valuable the communication of their faith through creative appeal to the Scriptures of ancient Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Among the writings of the Hebrew canon exerting the most influence on the NT are the Psalms.<sup>2</sup> The ubiquitous citations, allusions, and echoes from the Psalms suggest the observation that finds near consensus among those who study the phenomenon of the NT's use of the Hebrew Bible: The Psalms have influenced the NT more than any other book of the Hebrew canon.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms "Old Testament," "Hebrew Scriptures," and "Hebrew canon" refer to ancient Israel's Scripture. NT writers, of course, did not regard their scriptural heritage from ancient Israel as an "Old Testament." Nor is reference to the "Hebrew Scriptures" a fully appropriate designation since for textual reasons it is more accurate to say that early Christians' use of Scripture was often "septuagintal." However, these designations and others will be employed to refer to ancient Israel's Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> Listings of Psalm usage in the NT appear in Kurt Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 3d ed. [corrected]; Stuttgart, 1983), 897–911. Quotations from at least forty psalms appear in the NT with some eighty-four different verses cited. Added to these numerous citations are hundreds of NT allusions and verbal parallels to characteristic psalmic words or phrases. Some disagreement arises in delineating between a citation and an allusion. Generally, a citation is identified by an introductory formula or by parallels in diction and form that by reason indicate that the phrases cannot be considered merely an allusion.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Shires, for example, finds at least seventy cases in the NT where a portion of a psalm is quoted with an introductory formula, sixty more quotations with no introduction, and an additional two hundred twenty instances of an identifiable reference to a psalm. Shires concludes: "The New Testament has been influenced by Psalms more than any other book of the OT." Henry Shires, *Finding the Old Testament in the New* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 126.

The Psalms manifest this pervasive impression upon the NT in at least two unmistakable ways. First, they exert a strong imprint upon the literary forms of the NT. Psalmic forms were adapted and imitated as they became congenial to incipient Christian expression. This literary influence undoubtedly shapes some of the hymnic, doxological, and liturgical forms of the NT. The spontaneous and direct use of characteristic phraseology, idioms, and concepts from the Psalms in the NT is particularly evident in the hymns of Luke or the doxologies in the Pauline writings. The book of Revelation, which has no formal citations from Psalms, literally abounds with characteristic psalmic phraseology.

Second, the NT writers employed the Psalms for theological purposes. Theological affirmations made in the Psalms were contemporized in the NT to support its proclamation. The Psalms provided a conceptual and theological framework that aided the task of communicating the Christian message in a language and an exegetical style familiar to its audience. Some of the Psalms were of particular importance for the proclamation of the early church and the creation of a new Christian literature.<sup>4</sup> H. J. Kraus expressed it well in his seminal work on the *Theology of the Psalms*, “Anyone who explores the nuances of the ways in which the OT Psalms are used in the NT will be amazed at the ways in which Israel’s songs of prayer and praise were alive and present in the early church.”<sup>5</sup>

Of the Psalms the NT used for theological purposes, two of the most prominent were Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. As royal psalms, both coronation hymns were employed in the Christian community to reflect on the identity of Jesus, to affirm the relative status of Jesus as the Davidic king, and to exalt Jesus as the very Son of God.

Both psalms originally sounded the theme of triumph over the nations and their rulers by God’s anointed king. As a “son,” the king was portrayed as the heir of God. The two psalms depict potential threats against God’s anointed, the futility of such proposed rebellion, and the defeat of the hostile nations. The NT writers claimed and contemporized these conceptions to describe the work of Jesus and, especially, to formulate language celebrating Christ’s exaltation.

Specifically, Psalm 2 ascribes divine sonship to the Davidic king, makes extensive use of the theology of kingship, and issues the cry of defiance against those who would dare to rebel against Yahweh’s King. The psalm is cited in both Acts and Hebrews (Acts 4:25–26; 13:33, Heb 1:3; 5:5) and is extensively echoed elsewhere in the NT.

Psalm 110 is one of the references in the OT most frequently used by the NT. The two phrases from Psalm 110 most theologically provocative for NT writings are verse 1, referring to a session at the right hand of God, and verse

---

<sup>4</sup> The Psalms most frequently applied in the NT are 2, 8, 22, 34, 69, 78, 89, 110, and 118.

<sup>5</sup> H. J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 194.

4, which mentions the priesthood of Melchizedek. Psalm 110 is generally regarded as the only literary source from the pre-Christian period that articulates either conception. Citations are found in the Synoptics (Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; Luke 20:42–43; 22:69), Acts (2:34–35), and Hebrews (1:13; 5:6; 7:17, 21), while allusions to the psalm are numerous.

Of the NT writings employing Psalms 2 and 110, the book of Hebrews is conspicuous for its reliance on both. As a “word of exhortation” (13:22), Hebrews consists of a series of reflections on a variety of OT texts. Although the writer of Hebrews also draws heavily from the Pentateuch,<sup>6</sup> primary support for the Christology of Hebrews comes almost entirely from the Psalms, with Psalms 2 and 110 in the forefront.<sup>7</sup>

The first chapter of Hebrews is an exceptional example of the literary and theological significance of both Psalms 2 and 110 for the entire document. As a prelude anticipating the message of exhortation that follows and that argues for the relative superiority of the work of Christ, Hebrews 1 encapsulates many of the themes emerging later in the book.

As invariably acknowledged, this first chapter contains two literary constituents. The first textual unit, commonly designated by a term used in classical oration, “exordium,” consists of verses 1–4 and gives expression to a cluster of christological conceptions. This prologue, or overture, precedes a second textual unit in verses 5–13 consisting of a string of citations from the OT, extensively but not exclusively emanating from the Psalms. This textual unit, often identified as a “catena,” or series of citations, functions to contrast the transcendent dignity of the enthroned son with the subordinate status of angels.

In analyzing the shape and the connection between these two literary units, the exordium and catena of Hebrews 1, interpreters commonly observe that Ps 110:1 assumes the major thematic and connecting role. George W. Buchanan’s commentary, for example, is well known for persuasively advocating this view, suggesting that Psalm 110 was the primary text for Hebrews and that the allusion in 1:3 “sets the stage for the rest of the document,” while the citation in 1:13 “echoes the ‘punch line’ of the introductory section.”<sup>8</sup> Even interpreters

---

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from the Pentateuch include some eleven citations from ten different passages and forty-one other allusions.

<sup>7</sup> See Richard Longenecker (*Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 158–85) for a discussion of the phenomenon of OT quotations in Hebrews as well as the exegetical presuppositions employed. Eighteen quotations from eleven different passages in the Psalms appear in Hebrews. With the exception of references to 2 Sam 7:14, Deut 32:43, Isa 8:17–18, and Jer 31:31–34, christological explanations in Hebrews are drawn entirely from the Psalms.

<sup>8</sup> George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews: Translation, Comments, and Conclusions* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972), 8, 23.

who moderate this view describe Ps 110:1 as the rhetorical frame of Hebrews 1, with allusion and citation forming an inclusio in 1:3, 13.<sup>9</sup>

While the prominence of Ps 110:1 in Hebrews 1 is undeniable, this analysis will suggest that Psalm 2:7 shares an equally conspicuous role in the literary and theological framing of the chapter. Moreover, as used in the first chapter of Hebrews, both Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 serve as precursors for the central theological themes in the epistle as a whole.

#### The Exordium of Hebrews 1:1–4

The consummate rhetorical style of the opening four verses of Hebrews is hard to miss, as the term “exordium” would indicate.<sup>10</sup> Verbal allusions to Psalms 2 and 110 appear in a series of skillfully arranged affirmations concerning Christ. Contemplation of Psalms 2 and 110 prompt the framing of the core of the passage and much of the imagery of the exordium.

The christological reflection in the exordium begins in verse 2a as the writer contrasts the relationship of God’s word in the past to his revelation in the “last days” revealed “in a son.” The appearance of the term “son”<sup>11</sup> in 1:2a is pivotal and provides a major grammatical and theological pause in the passage as it introduces a series of christological affirmations concerning the son that continue throughout the exordium.<sup>12</sup> Scholars differ in itemizing these affirmations, divided principally on the issue of whether 1:4 is a continuation of the string of affirmations or whether it is a transition statement leading to the comparison between Jesus and angels depicted in the catena.<sup>13</sup> Although 1:4

<sup>9</sup> James Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (CBQMS 13; ed. Bruce Vawter et.al.; Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982), 129; David R. Anderson, *The King-Priest of Psalm 110 in Hebrews* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 137–73.

<sup>10</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC 47a; Dallas: Word, 1991), 5–6; Harold W. Attridge (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 36) even suggests that the rhetorical artistry of the exordium “surpasses that of any other portion of the New Testament.”

<sup>11</sup> The anarthrous use of “*huios*” also appears in 1:5b in allusion to 2 Sam 7:14 following citation of Psalm 2:7. “A son” also occurs in 3:6, 5:8, and 7:28.

<sup>12</sup> J. P. Meier, “Structure and Theology of Hebrews 1:1–14,” *Bib 66* (1985): 171, has noted the change of focus beginning in 1:2a on “son,” which is followed by a carefully ordered list of christological designations. He observes that a caesura, both christological and rhetorical in nature, belongs at the end of 1:2a.

<sup>13</sup> Meier finds seven statements concerning Christ, beginning with 1:2a and including 1:4, although he must encapsulate phrases in both 1:3a and 1:4, describing them as one thought. He strains to find a sevenfold symmetry in 1:1–4 that corresponds to the sevenfold citation of the catena (*ibid.*, 171–87). Both F. F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 3–9) and J. H. Davies (*A Letter to Hebrews* [CBC; London: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 19–20) restrict the

terminates the exordium, it returns to the introductory thought of 1:1–2a by repeating the relative superiority of God’s word in a son. The shift from prophets (1:1) to angels (1:4) and the ensuing concern to show the superiority of the Son over the angels in the catena following verse 4 argue for understanding 1:4 as transitional in character. If so, the sequence of christological affirmations defining the “son” ends with 1:3 and the exaltation of Jesus at the “right hand of majesty on high,” a statement alluding to Psalm 110:1.

Therefore, the literary unit of Hebrews 1:1–4 includes the following structural elements: first, the initial affirmation that God, who has spoken formerly in the prophets, lastly has spoken in a “son” (1:1–2a); second, the series of affirmations demonstrating the exalted status of this son and final agent (1:2b–3); and third, the transitional affirmation introducing the superiority of this “son” over angels (1:4).

The middle segment, or christological core, of the exordium is structurally framed by allusions to Psalms 2:7 and 110:1. Although the latter allusion to Psalm 110:1 is widely accepted, the initial echo of Psalm 2:7 is not commonly observed. However, certain clues indicate the presence of an echo of Psalm 2:7 as the term “son” introduces the core of the exordium.

First is the obvious semantic connection to Ps 2:7 found in the term “son,” although this word alone might not warrant hearing an echo if other evidence proved meager. However, several additional parallels to Psalm 2 resonate in this text. The “appointment” of the son in 1:2b corresponds with the nature of the “decree” in Ps 2:7a as God announces the investiture of royal sonship on the king. This “appointment” corresponds to the protocol bestowing authority on a new king in Psalm 2. Further, the appointment of the Son as the “heir of all things” in 1:2b connects with the same image from Ps 2:8 as the king’s universal dominion is declared.<sup>14</sup> While the inheritance of Psalm 2 involves all nations and “the ends of the earth,” the writer of Hebrews adapts the conception, applying it to the son who is appointed universal heir of all creation.

The case for seeing “son” in Heb 1:2a as an allusion to Psalm 2:7 finds additional support from the wider context of Hebrews 1, which places Psalm 2:7 first in the chain of references following the exordium. Further, the distinctive influence of Ps 2:7 throughout the document would suggest that it is echoed in 1:2a to introduce a core christological affirmation in Hebrews—Jesus as “son.”

The linkage of Ps 110:1 with the end of this sequence (1:3) as Jesus is seated “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” is manifestly recognized. Although the detection of an allusion is warranted, actually less commends this

---

affirmations to 1:2a–3, with 1:4 serving as a transitional verse.

<sup>14</sup> Compare the same motif from Psalm 2 as employed in the parable of the husbandmen in the Synoptics (Mark 12:1–12 and parallels), where the “son” is also identified as “heir.” In the parable, the son is contrasted to “servants.” Hebrews contrasts the son with angels, who are identified as “ministering servants” (1:14).

echo than hearing Ps 2:7 earlier in the exordium. The justification for identifying an allusion to Ps 110:1 depends on several factors: the similarity of language in describing a session at God's right hand, the citation and allusion to the psalm elsewhere in Hebrews (1:13; 8:1; 10:12; and 12:2), and early Christian tradition in general. Both Heb 1:2a with its association to Ps 2:7 and Heb 1:3d with its association to Ps 110:1 employ the language of exaltation, frequently in view in early Christian uses of these psalmic references.<sup>15</sup>

The allusion to Ps 110:1 in Heb 1:3 entices the interpreter to identify the "more excellent name" of 1:4 as pointing to the designation "Lord." Ps 110:1 is widely recognized as a vehicle through which early Christians could call Jesus "Lord," and probably the use of the christological title "Lord" is associated with the popularity of Psalm 110.

However, Hebrews does not appeal to Psalm 110 for the designation of Jesus as "Lord," although the connection is implicit. Further, the transitional nature of verse 4 introducing the superiority of the "son" over angels makes it likely that the more excellent "name" is to be understood as "son."<sup>16</sup> This is the designation that has been emphatically introduced in 1:2a, emphasized by the citation in 1:5, and featured in the comparison to angels that follows. Moreover, the name has been "inherited"<sup>17</sup> just as all things have been inherited by the "son" in 1:2.<sup>18</sup>

If the core of the exordium is framed by echoes to Psalms 2 and 110 as this analysis proposes, what impetus might have prompted this formulation? Perhaps Heb 1:2–3 introduced a fragment of an early confession<sup>19</sup> or liturgical tradition,<sup>20</sup> although these suggestions seem to have found only limited support. A liturgical connection may be implied by the grammar of the allusion to Ps 110:1 in 1:3, which does not parallel the citation of the same passage in 1:13.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, 11–12, suggests that the reference to "son" in 1:2b alludes to the royal son of Psalm 2, while the echo of Psalm 110 in 1:3c alludes to the royal priest of Psalm 110, based on the phrase preceding the session at the right hand, "he made purification for sins." The connection of Psalm 110 to the priesthood of Jesus becomes apparent in Hebrews 5–7, and the emphasis on Psalm 110 may prepare the reader for acceptance of Christ's eternal priesthood based on appeal to the psalm. The allusion to Psalm 110 in Heb 1:3, however, is clearly to Ps 110:1, not 110:4.

<sup>16</sup> So Attridge, *Hebrews*, 47; Lane, *Hebrews*, 17; Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Compare the cognate noun and verb in 1:2, 4: "heir (*kleronomon*) of all things" with "the name he has obtained" (*kekleronomeken*).

<sup>18</sup> So Attridge, *Hebrews*, 47; Lane, *Hebrews*, 17; Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 42–43.

<sup>20</sup> So J. T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns*, SNTSMS 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 19–20.

<sup>21</sup> David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 35–41, affirms the liturgical connection by noting the use

Although the evidence is not conclusive, the passage surely indicates the kinds of christological conclusions the community may have confessed and also evidence of the probable influence of the royal psalms upon liturgy, especially that part of the liturgy focusing on the exaltation of Jesus.

Whatever the origin of the affirmations in the exordium, the literary shaping seems to reflect a high degree of rhetorical creativity. A writer as skilled as the author of Hebrews could easily have shaped from his own reflection this treatment of the two psalms, which assumes such a central role in the document. Both echoes in the exordium of Heb 1:1–4 to Psalms 2 and 110 may be carefully intended thematic precursors for the use of the two psalms in the catena that follows and to the christological conclusions concerning “son” and “priest” based on the same two psalms later in the document (chap. 5–7).

Whether the language of 1:2a–3 derives from liturgy or the writer’s own rhetorical skill, the writer frames the description of the “son” with references beginning with allusion to Ps 2:7 and ending with allusion to Ps 110:1. Both psalms are employed in accord with the stream of tradition that uses the royal psalms to exalt the son whom God appointed.

In addition to the literary framing, these two psalms also function prominently in the theological formulation of the exordium. In christological terms, the core of the exordium begins and ends with the language of exaltation by means of allusion to these two royal psalms. The affirmations intervening, perhaps connected to Jewish traditions that celebrated Wisdom as God’s agent of creation, glory, and reconciliation,<sup>22</sup> are a series of statements that encapsulate the entire Christ event. The high christology in the affirmations announce the son’s role in creation, eternal nature and glory, and secure role as redeemer.<sup>23</sup>

---

of the dative *ek deksia* in Heb 1:3 in contrast to the use of the genitive “*ek deksion*” as Ps 110:1 is quoted from the Old Greek version in Heb 1:13. Further, all other allusions to Ps 110:1 in Hebrews (8:1; 10:12; 12:2) use the dative, which may suggest that all the allusions are based on a liturgical confession rather than the Greek text of the psalm. However, the formal criteria for recognizing liturgical fragments are inconclusive; thus caution may be warranted in classifying the passage as liturgical.

<sup>22</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, 6; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 40–46.

<sup>23</sup> Meier, “Structure and Theology of Hebrews 1:1–14,” 176–88. As noted earlier, Meier does include 1:4 in the sequence of christological designations, the fourth verse being “the result of the exaltation.” However, his theological “ring structure” beginning and ending with exaltation could be described as complete at 1:3 with the reference to Christ enthroned at the right hand of God. Meier has argued convincingly that the theology of 1:2–4 moves from the exaltation as the starting point (through explication of Ps 2:7–8), is followed by the christological affirmations involving creation, eternal existence, death and purification of sins, and then ends with exaltation as the goal (with Ps 110:1 as background.)

Thus the influence of Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 within the exordium of Heb 1:1–4 and particularly the christological core of verse 2a–3 is conspicuous. The allusions provide a literary frame surrounding the affirmations concerning “a son.” Additionally, they provide theological framing for the christology of the exordium as it begins and ends with the exaltation of the Son, appointed heir of all things, seated at the right hand of God.

#### The Catena of Hebrews 1:5–13

The use of Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:1 also is apparent in the catena<sup>24</sup> of Heb 1:5–13, a chain of seven citations listed to demonstrate the superiority of Christ over angels. The scriptural citations in the catena stem from a Greek version closely resembling the Septuagint. The citations include five texts from the Psalms as well as two others from 2 Sam 7:14 and Deut 32:43.<sup>25</sup> The final verse of the chapter (1:14) is not considered a part of the catena as it makes an exegetical comment on Ps 104:4, quoted in 1:7, and provides transition to the warning issued in 2:1–4.

The form of this material resembles the florilegium, or chains of Scripture found at Qumran,<sup>26</sup> and may indicate that the author used a similar traditional collection here.<sup>27</sup> Although evidence is meager to substantiate the existence of a testimonia hypothesis as advanced by Rendall Harris, the Qumran florilegium (anthology) indicates that collections of textual extracts were familiar in the religious milieu of the time. The prospect that early Christians also produced works of this genre seems possible and even likely. If relying on such testimonia, the writer does not seem to have replicated the list without modification and perhaps adaptation to christological concerns.

What is most glaring about the structural ordering of the citations is that they begin with Ps 2:7 and end with Ps 110:1, the same two texts that dominate the exordium. The literary shaping of the exordium is duplicated in the catena by the parallelism of the tandem references to Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:1 beginning and ending both literary units. The two allusions framing the core of the exordium also function through their citation as the borders of the catena. The

---

<sup>24</sup> The term “catena” can refer technically to “chains” of commentary that accompany the biblical text. However, the term is used generally to refer to a series of quotations or sayings, as it is employed here to refer to the list of quotations in Heb 1:5–13.

<sup>25</sup> In order, the passage quotes from Ps 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14 (v. 5); Deut 32:43 (v. 6); Ps 104:4 (v. 7); Ps 45:6, 7 (v. 8–9); Ps 102:25–27 (v. 10–12); and Ps 110:1 (v. 13).

<sup>26</sup> 4QFlor and 4QTestim.

<sup>27</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 50.



fact that both 1:5 and 1:13 begin with the same rhetorical question, “to what angel did God ever say,” suggests that an *inclusio* is intended.<sup>28</sup>

From a theological perspective, the chain of OT citations in Heb 1:5–13 provides support for the relative superiority of the son over angels, as introduced by the transitional verse (1:4). Whatever may have prompted the immediate concern about angels in Hebrews 1,<sup>29</sup> Christ’s preeminence over them is affirmed. A contrast is drawn to show the eminence of the “son” over all beings, especially angels since they were connected with the mediation of God’s word “in the past.”<sup>30</sup>

Although some have attempted to find an exact sevenfold symmetry between the seven citations and the christological affirmations in the exordium, this approach strains to find parallels in the exordium and must resort to phrases outside its core. However, a general symmetry is apparent as the Scriptures cited in the catena at least approximate the christological affirmations of the exordium. The appointment of Jesus as son and royal heir (vv. 5–9) is followed by the description of the son as mediator of the creation (v. 10), the son’s eternal nature and glory (vv. 11–12), and the exaltation of the son to God’s right hand (v. 13).<sup>31</sup>

The framing of the catena with Pss 2:7 and 110:1, showing the consistent application of both psalms to the exaltation of Jesus, suggests the central chris-

<sup>28</sup> Buchanan (*To the Hebrews*, 8, 23) insists that Psalm 110 was the primary text with an *inclusio* formed in Heb 1:3 and 1:13. Similarly, Thompson, in his seminal treatment on the catena (*The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*, 129), has suggested that Ps 110:1 provides the framework of the catena in that the allusion in 1:3 provides the starting point for the reflections contained in the catena and that the citation of Ps 110:1 concludes the catena at 1:13. In contrast, this analysis suggests that the allusion to Ps 2:7 in 1:2a provides the starting point and framework for both the exordium and the catena.

<sup>29</sup> The source of this interest in angels has been the subject of much speculation, ranging from possible involvement of the community in the worship of angels (cf. Col 2:18), to a development of an angel Christology, or to some other angelological tradition. See Robert Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims: A Commentary on the Epistle of the Hebrews* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981), 5-13; Neil Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), 57–58.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Heb 2:1–4; Gal 3:19; Acts 7:53.

<sup>31</sup> Scholars consistently recognize the general sequential parallelism between the christological core of the exordium (1:2a–3) and the theological purpose of the catena:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Heb 1:1–4                                  | Heb 1:5–13                              |
| A Appointment as son and royal heir (2ab)  | Appointment as royal son and heir (5–9) |
| B Mediator of the creation (2c)            | Mediator of the creation (10)           |
| C Eternal nature, pre-existent glory (3ab) | Unchanging, eternal nature (11–12)      |
| D Exaltation to God’s right hand (3c)      | Exaltation to God’s right hand (13)     |

Lane, *Hebrews*, 22.

tological purpose of the catena. Labeled aptly as a “meditation on the exaltation,”<sup>32</sup> the passage ordering these citations seem intentionally ordered to certify the claim of the son’s superiority over angels by virtue of his exaltation.<sup>33</sup> The proclamations framing the catena accord to the traditional royal imagery of coronation establishing enthronement, power, and universal dominion. Hebrews follows Christian tradition in identifying this lofty status of Jesus as attained at the resurrection or exaltation, which Hebrews does not consider as separate events. In the language of the Psalms, Jesus has been exalted to an incomparable position “at the right hand of God,” having been given status far above angels as the very “son of God.”

The implications of the exaltation of Christ develop in the remainder of the epistle. With Hebrews 1 serving as a precursor, or overture, not surprisingly the two psalms, which have functioned so prominently in the literary and theological shaping of the first chapter, remain at the center of this “word of exhortation.” The same texts inform chapters 5–7. In this central section of Hebrews, the twin themes of sonship and priesthood find expression through the coalescence of language from Psalms 2 and 110. Old songs were finding new melodies as early Christians reflected on the exaltation of Jesus.

In summary, Psalm 110:1 has been recognized traditionally as the sole rhetorical frame of Hebrews 1 with echo and citation forming an *inclusio* in 1:3, 13. However, the allusion to Ps 2:7 in Heb 1:2a suggests that both the exordium of 1:1–4 and the catena of 1:5–13 share literary parallelism as Pss 2:7 and 110:1 frame the two literary units. This parallel rhetorical ordering of the exordium and the catena, with Pss 2:7 and 110:1 functioning as borders, also accentuates the parallel theological cores of the texts since phrases from these royal psalms serve to set forth the exaltation of Christ. With an exceptional sense of rhetorical creativity and theological skill, the writer employs Pss 2:7 and 110:1 to shape the literary structure and the theological core of Hebrews 1. The chapter stands as a major contribution to the tradition of christological interpretation from the Psalms and to the christological conclusion that the son has been exalted to the right hand of God as Messiah and Lord.

---

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, *Beginnings of Christian Philosophy*, 140.

<sup>33</sup> The citation of Ps 8:4–6 in Heb 2:7–8 may indicate that it was also a part of a traditional listing of Scriptures on which the writer of Hebrews drew. If so, further evidence of adaptation in the collection is evident. Psalm 8 accompanies Psalm 110 in 1 Cor 15:25–27 and Eph 1:20–22.