

Hebrews Study
Session 2 - 1:1-4

These first four verses of Hebrews form an introduction to the entire sermon. They are similar in nature to Luke 1:1-4 or John 1:1-18. They give the foundation for the entire rest of the book. In the Greek, what we have as four verses is only one sentence. Many Greek scholars (Biblical and secular) have noted that this sentence is the most perfectly balanced and constructed sentence ever written in ancient Greek. It is a masterpiece of linguistics but for those of us of the faith, it is a sweeping mountaintop panorama of God's self-revelation to mankind encompassing His eternal majesty, putting the Son as the centerpiece and source of this revelation. There are two parts to this introduction. The first deals with divine revelation and the second deals with the person, work and status of God's Son.

[Read Hebrews 1:1-4 NASB]

We need to play a little grammar game here. This is a really long sentence. In order to get an accurate handle on it's real meaning, we need to go back to the basics. We need to identify the main subject and the main verb.

Q: What is the main subject of this sentence? (v.1 - God)

Q: What is the main verb of this sentence? (v.2 - has spoken)

Q: What is the direct object of the sentence? (v.2 - us)

The verb tense of "has spoken" is the aorist (our old friend from our study in Colossians). The aorist tense of a verb means the action happened in the past time AND that the action was fulfilled or completed FULLY in the past. It also implies that the action, while completed in the past, still apply or have force or remain in effect as they are ongoing.

Q: With this information about the meaning of the aorist tense, what does that mean concerning the verb "has spoken"? (God spoke in the past and He is now done speaking. God gave us a full and final revelation.)

Q: What was God's method for speaking this full and final revelation? (v.2 - in His Son)

What the author does in the first verse and a half is make a comparison between the old and the new concerning how God spoke. Let's set up a chart to help us see the differences of how God's revelation was given.

Era	in the past	in these last days
Recipients	to the fathers	to us
Agents	through the prophets	by His Son
Ways	in various ways	in one way (implied)

In v.1 - the words “portions” and “ways/manners” are the only times in the New Testament these words are used. When they are used in this manner elsewhere in Greek, they form a figure of speech with the meaning “variously”.

Q: Think back to the Old Testament. What were some of the ways in which God spoke? (burning bush to Moses, still small voice to Elijah, dreams such as Joseph, visions such as Ezekiel and Daniel, theophanies such as the giving of the Law at Sinai, stories as in Isaiah, words of encouragement, etc.)

Q: What was the historical time frame of these communications from God? (from the time of Adam until Malachi - six days after creation until about 450 B.C.)

There is no lack of variety in the manners and places God spoke in the Old Testament. Revelation is not a monotonous activity that must take place in the same way.

Q: What does the fact that the communication came from many different people over a very long period of time tell us about God’s word to us in the Old Testament? (it was fragmentary - it was not the complete package)

There is a continuity between the Old and New Testaments. God is the same God who spoke both revelations. The author is not presenting the old revelation as irrelevant but rather incomplete. It is continuous and harmonious with the new revelation which is the complete picture rather than fragmentary. The author mentions “these last days”. He’s referring to the days of the Messiah, the Son of God. As we’ll see throughout the rest of the book, Jesus’ appearance in human history ushered in the new and final age of human history. When v.2 says “Son”, there is no article or possessive pronoun before it. This means that the essential quality of the Son is being stressed by the author. What it means is that Jesus is not just another prophet in a long line of prophets OR another angel, as we’ll get to later. The way this is spelled out in the Greek lets the reader know that the nature of Jesus is such (and we’ll see in a minute) that there is no turning back from Him. He’s not an optional or additional piece of God’s revelation to mankind. The Son is the full revelation of God to mankind.

Read John 1:1-4, 14-18

Read Colossians 1:13-20

Do you see the similarities between these two passages and the prolog to Hebrews? Notice many of the same things are being said about the Son. No one else is spoken of in these terms in all of Scripture. Jesus Christ is unique among everything because He is God the Son.

Think back to last week. Hebrews was written to a small house church of Hellenistic Jews who became believers but were contemplating returning the Judaism.

Q: Couple this historical setting along with the verb tense of “has spoken” discussed earlier. What conclusion was the author wanting the readers to draw? (That the revelation from the Son was better than that of the Old Testament)

Q: For us, when we look at that verb tense again - full and final - what does this teach us here

2,000 years later? (There are no other revelations from God. Jesus was the full and final revelation of God, thus Mormons, JW's, other cults who alter the Word by adding and subtracting from it, are in error.)

Now the author moves on to the qualifications of the Son. Why is He qualified or worthy to be considered the One through which God spoke His final Word to mankind? Why was Jesus God's decisive Word? There are seven phrases used to answer this question to the original readers. These share with us the person, work and status of the Son.

1. "Whom He appointed heir of all things" (v.2)

a. **Read Psalm 2:7-9**

b. The word "heir" is a strange word for us in this context. We think of an heir as a person who inherits the possessions of another person who died. However, that's not the way the New Testament uses the word in some instances. It is better translated "to gain possession of something without notice of the way it is acquired." It indicates lawful possession.

c. The word "appointed" can mean to make or ordain or settle a matter. As this verb is in the aorist, it can have the weight of a matter has been settled once and for all. In **Genesis 17:5**, God made the investiture of Abraham the heir marks the beginning of redemptive history. (God told Abraham, "I have appointed you the father of many nations.") The author of Hebrews connects the beginning of redemptive history in God "appointing" Abraham heir to now the accomplishment of redemptive history by "appointing" His Son as heir of all things. This is not to say that the Son was not already in this position or had to earn it. Rather it means that the Son has now, at this point in history, been revealed as the rightful heir of all things. The matter is now settled based on the completed work which was visible to all creation.

d. **Read Philippians 2:6-11**

e. This shows the unique and special relationship between the Heavenly Father and Son and the royal inheritance has been inaugurated by the coming of the Son, who is the full and final revelation of God. As the heir of all things, the Son knows the fullness of God's communication to mankind. Yet, there is still a consummation of this revelation which will come at the end of the age.

2. "through whom also He made the world" (v.2)

a. The Son was the Father's agent in actually creating the universe. The Father is the source of all creation but He preformed the work through His Son.

b. "world" (universe) - literally is "the ages" To the author (and often in ancient literature) the universe was the sum total of all the ages put together. It wasn't so much dealing with a quantity of unlimited space but rather a quantity of all the times put together.

c. In this sense we see God as not just the creator of the physical world but also of history. The Son is putting the pieces of history together according to God's will.

3. "He is the radiance of His glory" (v.3)

a. radiance means to emit brightness. This is the only place in the New Testament this word is used. "He is" is the present active participle of the being verb. It indicates absolute and timeless existence. There has never been a time when the Son was not the radiance of God's glory.

b. To see the Son is to see the Father. The brightness of the Father is the Son. He is the

glory of God and so when we see the Son, we see God as He really is. God's glory is His majesty and presence. So when Jesus walked the earth and now reigns from on high, He is the presence of God and the display of God's majesty.

4. "the exact representation of His nature" (v.3)

a. "representation" literally is the engraving or stamped image. It was used to describe the artwork on a coin that had been stamped on it. Again, this is the only place in the New Testament that this word is used. (Are you seeing how unique Jesus is just by the descriptions the author is using?)

b. In the same we know that a coin is a quarter is a quarter because it has George Washington's picture on the front of it, we know God is God when we see Jesus. Jesus shows us God's nature, His substance and His family tie to the Father. We often look at a child and notice the resemblance to one or both of the parents. When we look at Jesus, we see He resembles the Father perfectly. The Son provides both a trustworthy and completely accurate picture of the Heavenly Father. (The passages we looked at earlier in John 1, Philippians 2, and Colossians 1 all say the same thing.)

c. Since this phrase is still under the same present active participle of the last clause, it means that there was never a time when the Son was not the exact representation of God's nature either. He has always been what He is now.

Q: Why do you think the purpose of this phrase would be to the original readers? (Jesus is the complete picture of God unlike the Old Testament which was fragmentary pictures of God. Don't go back to the old in order to get the full picture of the Father which is found only in the Son.)

5. "upholds all things by the word of His power" (v.3)

a. "upholds/sustains" - literally to "carry along". We know of the picture of Atlas holding up the world as dead weight on his back. This isn't that picture. Jesus is shown here at carrying creation along to its final goal or destination. This is a dynamic picture of Jesus working in history - going back to the thought of time with "all things" in v.2. This is also a present active participle showing the timelessness of the Son's work. For all time, He has been carrying the world and its history to its God ordained conclusion.

b. "word" - this isn't the usual New Testament word "logos" but rather "rhema" which means the spoken or uttered word. It can also mean an issued command or governmental order. That's the sense of the word here that goes with power. Power usually means force by which something is done but it can also mean miracle or wonderful work. It is the command of the Son which is moving all history to it's appointed end. While this is completely impossible for a human to accomplish, it is something being done now by the Son through miraculous power of His word.

Q: What do you think the original readers of Hebrews would have thought about this phrase? What emotions might it evoke in them? (It might have comforted them as they were worried about the present political climate they lived in and their facing of persecution. God was moving them through history and holding things together despite how things looked to them from the "ground level".)

We can learn something from this as well. When our circumstances seem out of control

or overwhelming, the truth that Jesus is upholding all things by His word of power - moving things along the tracks of history to where His intended end can be comforting. God is not going to allow anything to derail history or thus us and our faith. Our victory is secure in Him.

6. “He made purification of sins” - now we are getting to the heart of the matter. (v.3)

a. God’s Son came first and foremost to deal with man’s problem with sin. His sacrificial death on the cross provided a way for mankind to be forgiven for his sins and this would allow access to the very heart of God. This is what God had wanted in the creation of mankind - the ability to have eternal, unfettered fellowship with him for eternity. The word “made” is an aorist participle meaning that the purification was made or fully completed in the past tense but that the results of that purification still are in force in the present time.

b. The Son is a priest. Only priests deal with sins. The fact that the Son’s work was to put away sins shows us He was a priest. But since He is also heir of all things, He is royalty, a king which makes Him a royal priest. But since He proclaims the final and full revelation of God, He is also a prophet. This makes Jesus the only holder of all three offices: prophet, priest and king. Throughout the book, the author makes many such references to Jesus and His priestly role.

Q: In the following verses, describe what Jesus does with sin.

1. **Hebrews 2:17** - propitiation for sin
2. **Hebrews 8:12** - remember their sins no more
3. **Hebrews 10:12** - offered Himself as a sacrifice
4. **Hebrews 9:26** - annulled sin/ put away sin
5. **Hebrews 9:15** - made redemption for sin

Our sin had many sides to it yet, the grace of God given through our great high priest, Jesus, offered a many-sided salvation. Whatever had to be done to secure our salvation was done. Purification was provided in full by Jesus.

“Made/provided” - this verb is in the aorist tense as well.

Q: What does that mean about the purification from sins that Jesus made? (it was full and final and done in the past tense.)

Q: What are the implications of this purification of sin having been fully done on our behalf? (we get to live in the freedom of grace and don’t need to strive to do other works to secure our salvation)

7. “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (v.3)

a. sitting down is the posture of rest. It is only done by a priest when all their work had been accomplished. **Hebrews 10:11** - the posture of the Old Testament priest is standing - that’s how they do their work. When a priest sits, it means the work is completed. “Sat down” is another verb in the aorist tense. Once the Son sat down, there was no reason for Him to ever stand up again (do another work of purification from sin) because it was completed on the cross.

b. Majesty - greatness - in this sense, of God’s ultimate greatness. It often described God’s power and often was a reverential way to mention “God” in Jewish circles. On high is heaven. The Son occupies the privileged position.

c. The right hand was a symbol of the ultimate honor, superior power and greatness of favor. When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, He has been revealed as the One who has completed His work fully by making purification from sin and has now been restored to heaven, but not just heaven but the actual right hand of God, to be shown for all eternity as being in his rightful position.

d. Psalm 110:1

e. Now that this position of Jesus has been fully revealed to us, His children, we can know Jesus as a multitude of other roles such as judge, intercessor, and Lord because they all flow from this position of the great high priest who has completed His work.

Lastly, the author makes an unexpected statement from our viewpoint about the Son. He says that “having become as much better than the angels”. Wasn’t Jesus already better than the angels or did He only become better after He rose from the dead?

While this is clunky in the English, in the Greek it makes better sense. The main idea of this phrase is to describe what the Son did in becoming a man to put away the sins of man. He was eternally superior to the angels but that wasn’t evident fully until He became a man, died for the sins of mankind and put them away and then sat down at the right hand of God. Before mankind would see angels as God’s mighty representatives but now they see the Son as God in flesh among us revealing God to us perfectly. Another way to see this is that the work of the Son was greater in God’s will than the work given to the angels. Like the discussion of the word “heir”, Jesus did not inherit the more excellent name through the Father’s death. Rather, his legal or rightful possession of a better name than the angels is seen through the role of the Son and His completion of His role in making purification for our sin.

“Inherited” is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense is used to describe an event that happened in the past and was perfectly completed. There is never a reason to return to that act because it was fully finished in the past. As the Son’s name is associated with deity and holds all three offices of prophet, priest and king, His name, is completely superior to the name of any Old Testament prophet or any angel in heaven. This didn’t come upon the Son but has always been His true state. It’s just that now, in these times after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the superiority of His name has been made evident and visible to all creation.

In the Old Testament, angels were the counterparts to the prophets and often seen as the ones given the message to give to the prophets. Now the Son, by His completed work and by His status as God, is seen as much greater than both the prophets and the angels. This verse provides the bridge to the next section which is Jesus is superior to the angels. He’s not just a little better but “more excellent” which is literally “much superior”. Christ is preeminent among everything.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?