

Hebrews 1:1-4

God Spoke to Us in His Son Jesus Christ

No book in the Bible focus our attention upon the deity and high priestly work of Jesus Christ like the book of Hebrews.

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:1-4). (All Scripture references unless otherwise noted are from New American Standard Bible NASB95).

Here is the supreme revelation of God to men in the most beautiful language possible. Only on the basis of the Bible as the Word of the Lord can we ever have agreement on Christ, and the way of salvation.

This special revelation of God cannot be understood save by the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of God comes not only from external special revelation, but also from internal insight which is the gift of grace, the true faith of a saved soul. This inner testimony of the Spirit works in connection with the revelation of God which is the instrument of illumination. Both the external and internal witness of the Holy Spirit work together bearing witness to the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ.

In one sentence, the author sums up the whole of the Old Testament: God spoke to the Jewish ancestors from time to time, over many centuries, in many different ways. He revealed Himself bit by bit, part by part over time, but it was not all disclosed at once. "In many parts" (Greek *polumeros*) and "in many ways" (Gk. *polutropos*) God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets.

When we open our Bibles to the book of Genesis, we are reading the Word of God. We are listening to the voice of God. The Bible makes it clear that God communicated truth to man. The fathers heard the voice of God. We read: "And God said . . ." (Genesis 1:28; 3:14; 3:15; 4:5; 6:13; 12:1, etc). As you read through the Bible you see an objective series of events standing behind the record called God's revelation.

It begins with the simple narrative of the creation of the world, man, the flood, the call of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. There is the hand of a sovereign God over the children of Israel in slavery in Egypt, the redemption of His chosen people, and judgment on Egyptian Pharaoh, the thundering of the law, the sweet songs of the Psalmist, the wisdom of Proverbs, and mighty preaching of the prophets, prophetic dreams, dramatic action, the majestic visions of Ezekiel and promises yet to be fulfilled, judgments yet to come in Daniel. God is speaking throughout the Old Testament. The revelation came in many different parts and many different ways. It is

all of God, but it is not complete. It is truth, without error, but it is not the final revelation of God to mankind. We are left waiting, longing, hoping for a final word from God. It had been more than 400 years since Malachi delivered the last prophetic word from God.

Then like a bolt of lightning the author of Hebrews focuses on the finality of the revelation of God in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the prophet *par excellence*, even greater than Moses and Elijah (Deut. 18:18-19; John 8:28; 12:49-50). As we begin reading the New Testament we immediately grapple with the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Suddenly the Old merges with the voice of the Son of God. The types, pictures, symbols, imagery of the prophets find their fulfillment and termination in Jesus Christ. The final form of revelation, however, was in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the eternal Word became flesh, was seen, handled and heard (1 John 1:1-3; John 1:1-18). The words, deeds and life of Jesus were the words, deeds and life of God. There were many prophets in the Old Testament, but there is only one Son. The objective fact is God spoke in the person of the prophets to our fathers, and He spoke in the person of His Son to us. In each case God was the speaker.

Jesus Christ is God's final word to man. There is nothing else to be added. What God has said through the Son is greater than that spoken through the prophets. God revealed Himself fully through the person, character, words, behavior, works of His Son. Jesus reveals God to man by His whole person. B. F. Westcott said, "The Revelation in Christ, is perfect both in substance and in form."

Hebrews 1:1-4 contain some of the most theologically powerful words in the Bible. The four verses are one sentence in the Greek text. Verse 4 is inseparable from verses 1-3.

Scholars for centuries have been impressed with the most perfect Greek sentence in the New Testament. It is a beautiful crafted compact theological statement of clauses and phrases with a majestic ending. No where else in the New Testament do we encounter such a continuous logically developed theological argument of Christology.

It is not exactly an ancient letter as much as it is a homily or word of exhortation to believers with stern warnings and encouragement.

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:1-4).

The same God who spoke in the Old Testament is the same one who spoke through His Son in the New. "In these last days" He has given His final word to mankind. The past tense is used both of God speaking by the prophets and also His speaking by Christ indicating that God has finished speaking in both cases. The God the Hebrews profess to worship has spoken through His Son. The time that He spoke through His Son was when B.C. became A.D. It refers to the outmost extreme, in last in time or place. "In the former times" God spoke through the prophets, now "in this final age" God has spoken through His Son. "At the end of these days" reads the NASB margin. It is the time when God became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14). Two

distinct dispensations are involved, one looking with anticipation to realization of the message, and the other declaring the ultimate fulfillment. The author uses the past tense to teach that God has finished speaking. He has declared His final word. His message is complete. "God has spoken to us by a Son" declares the message and the meaning of the New Testament.

What makes Jesus so great? What makes Him so important? Why should we listen to Him when He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6)? The apostle Peter declared as he gave the invitation of one of his greatest sermons: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Who is this person who is greater than the prophets?

The writer of Hebrews presents seven reasons why the revelation given by the Son of God is the highest that God can possibly give.

THE SON IS "APPOINTED HEIR OF ALL THINGS"

We are carried into the presence of the mystery of the Triune God. The eternal Sonship is simply stated (cf. Heb. 3:6; 5:8; 7:29; John 5:26-27). The emphasis is on relationship, character and nature, as the Messiah of God.

When there was only one son, there would only be one heir. Jesus is the one and only, unique one of a kind, Son of God, and therefore heir, the sole heir of all things.

This "appointment" belongs to the eternal order. There is no indication of time in the appointment here. The Son of God has not been given something that He lacked in the past. All of creation has been His since its beginning. It has always belonged to the Son.

The author of Hebrews hastens back to Psalm 2:8. "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession." In that majestic Messianic Psalm the psalmist is referring to a greater than king David.

God "appointed" the Son "heir of all things" from all eternity (Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 11:27; 28:18; Luke 1:32; 10:22; John 3:35; 5:22; 13:3; 17:2; Rom. 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:27-28; Eph. 1:10, 18-23; Phil. 2:9-10; Heb. 2:8).

The language is figurative here because an "heir" is one who inherits something after the death of the owner. This cannot possibly be applied in this sense to Jesus because the God the Father did not die. In deed, He cannot. The idea here is rank, dignity, sovereignty of the Son of God over all things in the universe.

Christ is a Son, and not an angel as the cults would have us believe. To what angel did God ever say, "Thou art my Son." He didn't. He said to the Son, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession" (Psalm 2:8). The Father to Jesus declared before witnesses, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). There is only one Son and one Heir.

Though Christ owns it all now, He must come into full possession (cf. Romans 8:17; Rev. 11:15; Matt. 21:33ff). In the future God the Father will subject all things to Christ. He is made actual possessor for that which He has the title. He is the heir and owner of all things.

What is this inheritance of Jesus? It is that innumerable host that He has redeemed by the shedding of His own blood. The apostle Paul declared: "For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

Hebrews speaks much of the inheritance of believers, but our inheritance is only because of our vital union with Christ. We are co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7).

THE SON "MADE THE WORLD"

The "world" is literally "ages" (Gr. *aiones*). It signifies the whole created universe of time and space. The Son of God will come into possession of all of His creation. He owns it all. God the Father's agent in creation was Christ, the Wisdom and Word of God. Only in Christ do we have the Wisdom personified fulfilled. Christ is Divine Wisdom incarnate (Prov. 8:22-31).

The Son was God's agent in creation. "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3). To be the creator of the universe requires that He have infinite wisdom and power. He is God.

"For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16).

"Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (1 Corinthians 8:6).

It is obvious from these passages that Jesus Christ is not a created being as the cults teach. The cults teach that God created Jesus and then Jesus created the world. Indeed not, the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ is the Creator of all. The Son of God is one with God. The eternal Son of God is designated as God. The eternal deity of the Son is fully revealed in these Scriptures. The writer of Hebrews applies to the Son the same word (Lord, Gk. *kurios*) addressed to the LORD (Heb. *Yahweh*). He is the eternal sovereign Creator God. The true nature of the Son is one in essence, omnipotence and glory with the Father.

"And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).

THE SON IS "THE RADIANCE OF HIS (GOD'S) GLORY"

Jesus Christ is the radiant light that shines forth of God's glory. The present tense refers to the absolute and timeless existence.

This "radiance" (Gk. *apaugasma*) denotes the radiance shining forth from the source of light. The idea of emitting physical brightness illustrates the infinite purity and holiness of God. The present tense denotes His eternal nature. This is one of His attributes. Moses came into the presence of that light. "And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top" (Exodus 24:17). "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29; cf. Deut. 4:24). Isaiah cried out, "Who among us can live with the consuming

fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?" (Isa. 33:14). Fire is the symbol of the divine presence. When we come into the presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we come into the presence of the Holy One. The shekinah glory of God radiated from Him.

This perfect divine majesty resides in Christ and shines forth from Him. The visible glory was the symbol of God's presence with Moses at the bush, the miraculous cloud that led the people of Israel by day and night, dwelt above the mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies. John Owen said succinctly, "Jesus Christ is the substance of which this natural glory was a shadow. . . The incarnate Son is the bright manifestation of the whole of these excellencies, the perfect harmony of which constitutes His glory." Jesus Christ is the image of the Invisible God. He is God manifest in the flesh.

The Hebrew prophet Zechariah wrote, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'After glory He has sent Me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye'" (Zechariah 2:8). John Owen said, "He who had revealed the will of God unto them was none other but He who had dwelt among them from the beginning, representing in all things the Person of the Father, being typically revealed unto them as the *'brightness of His glory.'*" John Brown writes, "He was the true Shekinah, in whom dwelt the Godhead bodily--the real, substantial, adequate representation of the King eternal, immortal, and invisible, whom no eye hath seen, or can see."

Some translations read "reflection," but in this context it is best to translate "radiance." It is the outshining or out-raying from the source of light. We walk out of this dark building into the bright shining sun. The glory is not a halo like you see in the religious paintings during the middle-ages. It is the divine eternal nature itself.

The son of God does not reflect; He radiates from His inner nature the glory of God. Jesus Christ is the effulgence of the whole glory of God. The radiance was veiled during His incarnation and only on a few occasions did He pull back the veil of His flesh and openly manifest that glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus radiated that glory. "And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him" (Matthew 17:2-3). That glory of the Son of God blinded the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-8, 17-18; 1 Cor. 15:8).

This is another way of declaring the oneness of the Son with God the Father. There is no escaping the deity of Christ. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The infinite exaltation and incomparable glory of the Son is declared.

"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). One glorious day we shall bow in His holy presence and see Him as He is. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

As the effulgence or radiance of God's glory, the Son is God in essence and has every divine attribute of God. This is not a temporary, passing radiance of God's glory. It is eternal. Jesus said, "He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me" (John 12:45).

THE SON IS THE EXACT REPRESENTATION OF GOD'S NATURE

"He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature," declares the writer of Hebrews.

He uses the Greek word *charakter* which occurs only here in the New Testament. It comes from a word meaning "to engrave or inscribe," and signifies both the tool for engraving or inscribing and the impression or image made by the tool. The Greeks used the word to describe the emperor's picture on Roman coins and the clear-cut impression made by a seal. His likeness was reproduced on coins and seals. It was not a general likeness, but an exact duplication of the original. I have in my hands a beautiful new one dollar United States coin with the image likeness of George Washington stamped on it. If George walked in the door right now I would be able to recognize him. It is the exact image of the first president. Therefore, if God is represented with the same idea of a seal or image left by the die, then Christ is the exact resemblance of His heavenly Father, as an image is to the stamp or die. He is the expression of the very being, essence and reality of God.

In response to the disciples questions Jesus said to Philip, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9). Jesus Christ revealed to mankind exactly what the nature of God is like. The Son is the very image of God, in Him may be understood clearly the nature of God. Jesus possesses the same attributes or character as the Father. When you look at Jesus you see exactly what God is like. Like Father like Son.

The son is "the exact representation of His nature." The word for "nature" is *hypostasis* which is the substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality. Here is the essential reality of the thing. Jesus is the very essence of God's glory. "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). The whole nature of the Father is in the Son. John Owen wrote, "All the glorious perfections of the nature of God do belong unto and dwell in the Person of the Son. That the whole manifestation of the nature of God unto us, and all communications of His grace, are immediately by and through the Person of the Son."

"And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). The only response that is worthy of declaration are the words of Thomas when he declared, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

THE SON UPHOLDS ALL THINGS BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER

Where is history headed? The conviction of the writer of Hebrews is that Jesus is the summit of all history. He is the reason behind everything that exists. In Him is the consummation of all things. Just as Christ is the commencement of the history, He is also its termination.

The Son of God "upholds all things by the word of His power." As the agent of creation, the Son also moves it forward to its eternal purpose. He sees to it that creation will reach its

intended goal. He carries all things forward (Greek *pheron*) on their appointed course to accomplish and fulfill His will.

How does He accomplish this goal? "By the word (*rhema*) of His power." It is His mighty, enabling word that calls forth the action. It can also mean "His mighty word" or "His enabling word." His power is expressed by the utterance of His command. It reminds us of the opening verses in Genesis where God speaks and it is done. The utterance is a divine activity. It is the simply utterance of His omnipotent divine will, and it is done.

The apostle Paul wrote, "He [Christ] is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). There is no greater power and authority in the universe than Jesus' word.

THE SON MADE PURIFICATION OF OUR SINS

The only person who could possibly qualify to deal with our sin problem is the Son, the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His person. We have redemption through His blood, the purging of our sins, the forgiveness of all our sins by the divine substitute.

". . . He had made purification of sins" (Hebrews 1:3). It is one past historical fact. Jesus Christ offered Himself once-for-all as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. No one else could possibly accomplish this. This is the main thrust of the book of Hebrews. He is the great High Priest who offered Himself as the all sufficient sacrifice as a sin and trespass offering on the cross.

These words remind us of the Jewish High Priest on the Day of Atonement who made atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 17:11). The writer of Hebrews devotes much of his writing to the Great High Priest who accomplishes the purification by His blood for His people on the cross at Calvary.

"Purification" (Greek is *katharismos*) means both removal and cleansing. Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14).

The main emphasis on "sin" for the author of Hebrews is unfaithfulness to God. It is rebellion against God (Heb. 2:1-2; 3:1-19; 10:26-31).

THE SON SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF MAJESTY ON HIGH

After Jesus Christ in His own person made the purification for our sins, He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

"Majesty" denotes the infinite, omnipotent glory of God. For the first century Jews it was another way to speak of the LORD God. "Your right hand, O Lord, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy" (Exodus 15:6). "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'" (Psalm 110:1). Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64).

"He sat down" (Gk. *kathisai*) expresses the solemn taking of the seat of authority and supremacy. Christ doesn't just sit down, He is exalted in active power and rule.

The "right hand" is not a literal location, but the seat of honor. His work of redemption is completed and the resurrection is the evidence that God the Father has accepted it. The

resurrection of Jesus Christ, His ascension and session is clearly in mind. The "right hand of the Majesty on high" is the place of honor, authority, power and rule. After His extreme humiliation in death, God highly exalted Jesus to the highest possible exaltation. The apostle Paul declared in Philippians 2:9, "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name." This is why "every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11; cf. Luke 22:69). Jesus is seated on the throne in the place of highest honor ruling as King of Kings. He is our sovereign Lord!

The excellencies in majesty, glory, power and might of the Lord Jesus Christ is above everything you can name. Whatever it is you name, Jesus is greater in glory and power. Name any person, any position, any thing and Jesus is greater. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews ends his first sentence saying, "having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:4).

Being seated at the right hand of Majesty on high makes Jesus superior to the angels. His name is more excellent than theirs.

To say that He "inherited" the name does not imply that He did not have it before His exaltation. It was His during His incarnation and the days of humiliation because His inheritance was by the Father's eternal appointment. He has a better name than the angels. In deed, His name is equivalent to LORD, *Yahweh*. There is unequalled greatnesses in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is as to be one with His Father; He is equal with God.

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This introduction to Hebrews declares the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as our prophet, priest and king.

Prophet--Jesus is God's final word.

Priest--Jesus is our great High Priest who has made perfect purification of our sins.

King--Jesus is enthroned, seated, reigning sovereign King. Christ is placed on in highest honor alongside the Majesty on high.

Because the fullness of God is revealed to us in no other way than in the person and work of Jesus Christ we need to believe on Him as our own savior.

John Calvin well said, "God is revealed to us in no other way than in Christ. . . We are blind to the light of God unless it illumines us in Christ." There is absolutely no one beyond the incarnate Son whom God might use for speaking to us. Many false prophets and church leaders claim to have the latest revelation from God, but God has spoken His final word when He spoke through His Son. We have the ultimate Word and revelation of God to man in what He has revealed through His Son. God will not send another prophet. Those individuals and cults that look for more new revelations will never find it. They look in vain. God spoke and He did not stutter. In the person of Jesus Christ, we have God's final word to lost mankind.

Every promise in the Old Testament of redemption has been fulfilled by the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ.

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Because of its depravity human nature tries to go beyond Christ.

It is only in vain that men overstep this last, final Word of revelation from God. Human wisdom is limited. Sinful man cannot add one thing to the finished work of Christ.

Because Jesus Christ is heir we are made wealthy by His riches.

Without Him we are destitute of all that is good. He provides out of His infinite riches in glory.

Because Jesus Christ is the creator of all things He has existed from eternity.

Whatever belongs to God alone, is common to the Father and the Son. Yet, the person of both is distinct. He sustains everything by the word of His power.

The Creator is the Redeemer. He has purged us of all our sins when He died on the cross.

Because Jesus Christ is the radiance of the glory of God the glorious light of His grace shines into the hearts of men.

The illumination of the Holy Spirit causes us to see Him in all His glory as the unique one of a kind Son of God who came to save our souls from an eternal hell. In His death and resurrection we see the reason for His incarnation

Because Jesus Christ is exalted over the universe all things belong to Him.

Without exception ultimately every person must answer to Him. He upholds the whole world by His will alone. The kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of the LORD God and His Christ.

The Messiah and His reign in glory is an everlasting kingdom. "The throne of Jehovah is the throne of Jesus. It is the same throne, the throne of God and the Lamb," declared John Brown.

Because Jesus Christ made purification of sin we have the assurance that all of our sins have been forgiven and we stand right in the sight of a holy God.

Because Jesus Christ sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high He has a name that is above every name.

"There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

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