

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 1:1-4:13, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Hebrews

1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)

B. Comments on Hebrews

1. Thomas Constable, *The writer began his epistle with an affirmation of Jesus Christ's greatness to introduce his readers to his subject...It contrasts God's old revelation with the new, specifically by presenting God's Son as superior to all other previous modes of revelation.*
2. Leon Morris, *It is significant that the subject of the first verb is 'God,' for God is constantly before the author; he uses the word sixty-eight times, an average of about once every seventy-three words all through his epistle. Few NT books speak of God so often.*
3. Zane Hodges, *In a majestically constructed opening paragraph, the writer introduced his readers at once to the surpassing greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son, he declared, is the par excellence vehicle for divine revelation.*
4. Ray Stedman, *The epistle to the Hebrews begins as dramatically as a rocket shot to the moon...It is a paragraph daring in its claims and clearly designed to arrest the reader's attention and compel a further hearing.*
5. Warren Wiersbe, *Many people have avoided the Epistle to the Hebrews and, consequently, have robbed themselves of practical spiritual help...To be sure, there are some profound truths in Hebrews, and no preacher or teacher would dare to claim that he knows them all! But the general message of the book is clear and there is no reason why you and I should not understand and profit from it.*

HEBREWS 1:1-3, JESUS IS SUPERIOR IN HIS MESSAGE AND PERSON

- A. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a), *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,*
1. God formerly spoke to the nation of Israel through the prophets.
 - a. *at many times and in many ways*
 - 1) God spoke through visions, dreams, face to face, and by revelation.
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *His ways included supernatural interventions into history as well as natural phenomena such as storms, plagues, and other historical events.*
 - 3) R. Kent Hughes, *The emphasis here is on the grand diversity of God's speech in the Old Testament...God declared himself by Law, by warning, by exhortation, by type, by parable.*
 - b. Prophets were the mouthpieces of God.
 - 1) Numbers 12:6, *And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.*
 - 2) R. Kent Hughes, *Amos gave direct oracles from God. Malachi used questions and answers. Ezekiel performed bizarre symbolic acts. Haggai preached sermons. And Zechariah employed mysterious signs...It was always adequate for the time. It was always progressive, revealing more of God and his ways. It was always in continuity with the previous words of God.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, *He surveys the revelation granted through the prophets in its variety and fullness but implies that until the coming of the Son the revelation of God remained incomplete.*
 - 4) James Moffatt, *The reason why there is no contrast between the Son and the prophets is probably because the writer felt there was no danger of rivalry; prophecy had ceased by the time that the Son came; the "prophet" belonged to a bygone order of things, so that there was no need to argue against any misconception of their function in relation to that of the Son.*

2. Now, God speaks through His Son.
 - a. *these last days*
 - 1) This is the period of time since the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
 - 2) Zane Hodges, ...*Old Testament prophetic revelation has now received its end-times climax through God's Son...However highly the readership regarded that former revelation, the writer implied they must now listen most closely to the Son.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, *The force of the expression in Hebrews is to characterize the Son as the one through whom God spoke his final and decisive word.*
 - 4) Donald Hagner, *The sense in which it is "last" is not chronological but theological. The cross, the death, and the exaltation of Jesus point automatically to the beginning of the end. Theologically we have reached the turning point in the plan that God has had all through the ages, so by definition we are in the last days.*
 - 5) Ray Stedman, *The phrase these last days means more than merely the present time. It looks on to the second appearing of Jesus (9:28) which brings the last days of the present age to an end, to be followed by the new age of the kingdom referred to in 6:5.*
 - 6) Hebrews 9:26b, ...*But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*
 - b. *in Son*
 - 1) Jesus' relationship to the God the Father is unique because Jesus is God's only Son.
 - 2) R. Kent Hughes, *Jesus is God's final word. The Greek here is simply in huios, "in Son"—emphasizing that the person of his Son contains everything. He is the ultimate medium of communication. God has spoken to us in his Son!*
 - 3) Ray Stedman, *God's word through the Son is final and complete. The apostles are but additional spokesmen for Christ, for in their letters they only expand his subject matter and do not add any new teachings or insights.*
 - 4) Thomas Constable, *The writer was not denying divine revelation to the apostles. He was stressing the culminating character of God's revelation in Jesus Christ compared with what He had given the Old Testament prophets. His statement establishes the fact of progressive revelation and strongly suggests the cessation of revelation in the apostolic age. Man has not taken the initiative to discover God, but God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to man.*
 - 5) F. F. Bruce, *Priest and prophet, sage and singer were in their several ways His spokesmen; yet all the successive acts and varying modes of revelation in the ages before Christ came did not add up to the fullness of what God wanted to say.*
 - c. Concerning the relationship of Jesus to God the Father
 - 1) Mark 9:7, *And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."*
 - 2) Matthew 14:33, *And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*
 - 3) Galatians 4:4, *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,*
 - 4) Charles Spurgeon, *Jesus is God's own Son. What do I know about that wondrous truth? ...Deity is not to be explained, but to be adored. The sonship of Christ is to be accepted as a truth of revelation, to be apprehended by faith, though it cannot be comprehended by the understanding...in the most appropriate language of the Nicene Creed, Christ is "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God."*
 - d. Contrasts in verses 1-2a
 - 1) There was partial revelation of the Son but now there is full revelation in Jesus Christ.
 - 2) God spoke to mankind many times and in many ways but now speaks through His Son.
 - 3) God's revelation was through prophets but now it is directly to us.
 - 4) William Pettingill, *From Adam to Moses, through 2500 years, and from Moses to Malachi, through 1100, years, the prophets were speaking for God to man. But at the end of the 3600 years their revelation of God was only partial. Then after a silence of 400 years, when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, and in that Son the revelation of God is perfect.*
 - e. The one constant concerning truth is that God alone is the source.
 - 1) 2 Timothy 3:16, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*
 - 2) 2 Peter 1:21, *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

B. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)

1. Privileges of the Son (1:2b), *whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*

a. The Son's privileges came by appointment.

- 1) *Appointed* means to put, place, assign a responsibility.
- 2) The privileges in verses 2 and 3 were assigned by the Father.
 - a) *the heir of all things*
 - b) *he created the world*
- 3) This was not a selection of Jesus as the Son of God. He has always been the Son of God but now we are informed of the roles of the Son within the Godhead.
- 4) James Moffatt, *...it describes a pre-temporal act, or rather a relationship which belongs to the eternal order...no definite time is necessarily intended.*

b. Privileges of the Son

1) *the heir of all things*

a) Biblical affirmation

- 1] *Heir* means one who inherits possessions, note Mark 12:7, But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'
- 2] Psalm 2:8, *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*
- 3] Matthew 28:18, *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

b) Comments

- 1] Thomas Constable, *All things will fall under His authority. The writer introduced the concept of inheritance here and proceeded to develop it in this epistle...*
- 2] Zane Hodges, *The reference to the Son's heirship anticipates the thought of His future reign, of which the writer will say much.*
- 3] R. Kent Hughes, *Thus Jesus is specifically said to be heir to Planet Earth and its peoples. But the promise also embraces the universe and the world to come (cf. 2:5-9)...Scripture is clear: everything in the physical universe is for him and to him and will consummate in him as heir of a new creation.*
- 4] As noted by Paul in Romans 8:17, Christians are co-heirs with Christ. What a thought that the Creator of the universe has chosen us to inherit all things with Him; that is how much he treasures those who have placed faith in Him alone.
- 5] Charles Spurgeon, *All must willingly, or else unwillingly, submit to His sway, for His Father has appointed Him "Heir of all things."*

2) *he created the world*

a) Biblical affirmation of the Son's creative work

- 1] *World* means not only world but universe, all that is created.
- 2] John 1:3, *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*
- 3] Romans 11:36, *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*
- 4] 1 Corinthians 8:6, *yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*
- 5] Colossians 1:16, *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

b) Comments

- 1] James Moffatt, *...what the Son was to possess was what he had been instrumental in making.*
- 2] R. Kent Hughes, *Jesus was the agent in whom and through whom the entire universe of space and time was created.*
- 3] Donald Hagner, *The Son is God's agent in the creation of the universe of all space and all time—in short, of all that exists.*
- 4] Ray Stedman, *The prophets were God's spokesmen, living out their allotted span of time, circumscribed by the events of earth—but Jesus is the eternal Son, who creates, and therefore owns, all things.*
- 5] Charles Spurgeon, *I love to think that He who created all things is also our Savior, for then He can create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. If I need a complete new creation—as I certainly do—He is equal to the task.*

2. Characteristics of the Son

a. The nature of the Son

1) He is God (3a), ***He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,***

a) *the radiance of the glory of God*

1] *Radiance*

a] It means *to shine with*.

b] It can be translated, *he shines with God's glory or God's glory shines through him*.

c] It is not a reflection but a revelation of God's glory.

1] John 1:9, *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*

2] John 1:14, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

3] Nicene Creed, *God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God.*

2] Comments

a] His divine nature radiates from His human body.

b] William Barclay, *The Son is the radiance of his glory just as the ray is the light of the sun.*

c] R. Kent Hughes, *The translation "radiance" here is proper, as against some others which use "reflection." There is a vast difference between the two, as different as the functions of our solar system's sun and moon. The moon reflects light, whereas the sun radiates light because it is its source. Jesus does not simply reflect God's glory; he is part of it!*

d] Ray Stedman, *As no one can separate the sun's light from the sun itself, so also no one can separate the nature of Christ from that of his Father.*

e] Thomas Constable, *Jesus Christ revealed the glory of God in a veiled way during His incarnation.*

f] Consider the time when the veil covering Jesus' glory was momentarily removed. Jesus identified Himself as *I am* and the guards in the Garden of Gethsemane were knocked to the ground, John 18:4-8.

b) *the exact imprint of his nature*

1] *Imprint*

a] It means *reproduction, representation* and is the Greek word from which is derived the English word, *character*.

b] E. W. Bullinger, *...corresponding exactly with the original or pattern.*

c] The Son is an exact representation of the nature of God. He is the manifestation of the divine nature through humanity. Jesus is fully God and fully man, two natures in one person (the theological term is hypostatic union).

2] Comments

a] Thomas Constable, *Jesus Christ let humankind know exactly what the nature of God, whom no one has seen, is like.*

b] William L. Lane, *...in Jesus Christ there had been provided a perfect, visible expression of the reality of God.*

c] R. Kent Hughes, *Jesus is all God, "very God of very God." When you see him, you see the Father. But he is also a distinct person. This is all bound in with the mystery of the holy Trinity.*

b. The works of the Son

1) He is the Sustainer (3b), ***and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.***

a) *he upholds the universe*

1] *upholds*

a] It means *to bear, carry, move forward, maintain, have firm control*.

b] Jesus was creator and is sustainer of all creation.

c] Colossians 1:17, *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

- b) *by the word of his power*
- 1] William L. Lane, *...by his powerful word.*
 - 2] Thomas Constable, *The idea is not so much that Jesus upholds the universe as a dead weight similar to Atlas shouldering the world. Rather He carries all things forward (Gr. pheron) on their appointed course (Col. 1:17).*
 - 3] Zane Hodges, *His Word is so powerful that all He has made is sustained by that Word.*
- c) Comments
- 1] William Barclay, *These early Christians had a tremendous grip of the doctrine of providence. They did not think of God as creating the world and then leaving it to itself.*
 - 2] Ray Stedman, *This statement of Hebrews is a direct challenge to modern scientific humanism as well as to the older Deism. F. W. Grant states, "There is thus no thought in Scripture of a creation which shall be sufficient for itself, a perfect machine made to run eternally without the Hand that made it" (1903:15).*
 - 3] William L. Lane, *...the Son not only embodies God's glory but also reveals this to the universe as he sustains all things and bears them to their appointed end by his omnipotent word.*
 - 4] R. Kent Hughes, *Just as the universe was called into existence with a spoken word, so it is sustained by the utterance of the Son...He can sustain the universe, and he can sustain the struggling, harried church. Jesus is adequate for everything.*
 - 5] Donald Hagner, *Philosophers of every age are prone to ask what it is that underlies reality—that is, what dynamic sustains and makes coherent all that exists. Our author, further revealing his christocentric perspective, finds the answer in the mighty word of the Son.*
 - 6] Charles Spurgeon, *Surely, if Christ upholds all things He can uphold me. If the word of His power upholds earth and heaven, surely, that same word can uphold you, poor trembling heart, if you will trust him.*

2) He is Redeemer (3c), ***After making purification for sins,***

- a) *purification*
- 1] Here, it means a *spiritual cleansing* not physical as in purification ceremonies.
 - 2] In Hebrews 1:3 it is literally, *he (Jesus) purified sin through himself.*
 - 3] Hebrews 9:14, *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*
 - 4] 2 Peter 1:9, *For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*
 - 5] William L. Lane, *The defilement of sin erects a barrier to the approach to God which must be removed ...*
- b) Comments
- 1] He alone made payment for sins which was accepted by God. Jesus is the Priest and the Sacrifice.
 - 2] H. D. M. Spence, *There can be no doubt that the cleansing effected by atonement, and not the mere moral reformation of believers, is meant here by purification of sins.*
 - 3] R. Kent Hughes, *Ceaseless cosmic activity, and then boom! his once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins. Actually this is a cosmic achievement because Jesus did something no man or priest could ever do: offer alone the sacrifice that paid for all sins. That had to be the work of a cosmic being!*
 - 4] Donald Hagner, *Only God in the Son can accomplish the sacrifice that makes possible the cleansing and the forgiveness of sins (see Rom. 3:24–26). Thus the cleansing of sins rightly belongs with phrases that describe the uniqueness of the Son in his relationship to God.*
 - 5] Charles Spurgeon, *This, surely, ought to make us sing the song of songs. Before I sinned, He purged my sins away; singular and strange as it is, yet it is so.*
 - 6] Ray Stedman, *Creation rests upon power, but redemption upon the sacrifice of one who was "crucified in weakness."*
 - 7] William Barclay, *The glory of God is not the glory of shattering power, but the glory of suffering love.*
 - 8] John Calvin, *There is, indeed, no book in Holy Scripture which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, so splendidly extols the power and worth of that unique sacrifice which he offered by his death, deals more adequately with the use and also the abrogation of ceremonies, and, in short, explains more fully that Christ is the end of the Law.*

- 3) He is Ruler (3d), *he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*,
- a) *he sat down at the right hand*
 - 1] *Right hand* represents God's ultimate power and authority.
 - 2] The only biblical text that speaks of a person enthroned by God is Psalm 110:1, *The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."*
 - 3] Luke 22:69, *But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.*
 - b) *the Majesty on high*
 - 1] It means *greatness* and is used only of God the Father.
 - 2] It could be translated as *the one who is truly wonderful*.
 - 3] Hebrews 8:1, *Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,*
 - 4] William L. Lane, *Enthronement at "the right hand of the divine Majesty" asserted the supreme exaltation of the Son without compromising the rank and rule of God the Father.*
 - c) Comments
 - 1] William L. Lane, *The concept of enthronement at God's right hand would convey to contemporaries an impression of the Son's royal power and unparalleled glory...That the Son has been exalted to God's right hand means that he lives and rules with the authority and power of God himself.*
 - 2] Jesus is at the place of honor and authority next to the Father, Ephesians 4:10, *He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.*
 - 3] Thomas Constable, *Jesus will begin His rule over Israel on earth as the Davidic Messiah after He returns to the earth at His second advent (Rev. 20:1–6). Presently He rules over the church and the angelic host in heaven (Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:10).*
 - 4] R. Kent Hughes, *It is here, in this supreme exaltation at God's right hand, that Christ intercedes for us...The thought is utterly sublime but true—this glorious cosmic being at the apex of his splendor is praying for you and me! Romans 8:34, Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*
 - 5] Donald Hagner, *The ascension of Christ to the position of power and authority at the side of the Father is the vindication of the true identity of the one who suffered and died in accomplishing the forgiveness of sins.*
 - 6] Charles Spurgeon, *Christ at the right hand of God signifies the eternal certainty of His reward. It is not possible that He should be robbed of the purchase of His blood...He has redeemed His loved ones from among men, and He shall have all those whom He has purchased.*
- 4) These are descriptions of deity.
- a) He can do these works because of His divine nature, fully God and fully man.
 - b) Donald Hagner, *In order for the Son to be the kind of direct, authentic, and compelling expression of the Father described in these phrases—for him to be the radiance of God's glory and the impress of his very essence—he must participate somehow in the being of God itself, that is, he must himself be deity to accomplish the wonderful mission described here.*

CONCLUSION

- Jesus is the superior Prophet: *He has spoken to us through Son.*
- Jesus is the superior Priest: *after making purification of sins.*
- Jesus is the superior King: *He sat down . . . on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*
- Jesus' superiority is based on His deity.
- R. Kent Hughes, *Jesus is a superior revelation of God. When we see him, we know just what the God of the universe is like. We know how he thinks. We know how he talks. We know how he relates to people. God has spoken in his Son. It is his ultimate communication, his final word, his consummate eloquence. Oh, the superiority of the Son!*