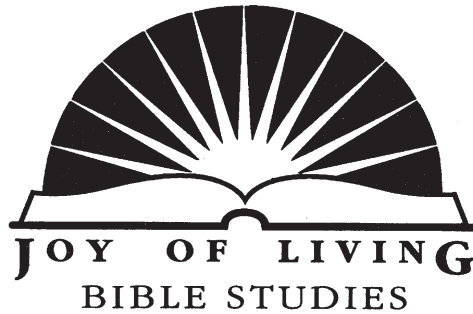


Hebrews Lesson 2



Hebrews 1:1-3

Hebrews 1:1-3 introduces the theme of the letter—the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. The writer begins, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Hebrews 1:1). The Old Testament prophets of Israel were not merely wise men or visionaries, but people who spoke what was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:21). God employed various avenues of communication to convey revelations of Himself—visions, dreams, and even His audible voice.

Revelation in Scripture is progressive. God’s entire purpose for the human race and the world about us was not given all at once. Little by little was God’s way of communicating truths concerning Himself, His plan and purpose for Israel as a nation, and of extending to all people His salvation—that is, the forgiveness of sin and the presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer (see Romans 1:16; John 16:7-14). Like part of a jigsaw puzzle, no one truth was complete in itself.

For example, Genesis 3:15 refers to the coming Savior, and other Old Testament prophecies foretell His birth, death, and resurrection. Yet the fulfillment of God’s plan was not recorded until hundreds of years later by New Testament writers, and the Savior’s return to earth to reign as King of Kings is still in the future (see 1 Timothy 6:12-16).

The Covenants

When we view Scripture as a whole, we see how carefully and lovingly God has revealed Himself and His plan to us. The covenants, or promises, from God to His people progressively reveal His plan.

God alone established His covenants with humanity. He initiated each covenant, determined its elements, and confirmed it. People are the recipients of God’s covenants, and our responsibility is to obey His commands.¹

The Covenant at Creation

God’s first covenant was established at Creation. Walter Elwell writes of this covenant, “[God] created his image-bearers by means of which he placed and kept man and woman in a close relationship with himself and had them mirror (reflect) and represent him within the created cosmos. Humanity was given stipulations or mandates. As im-

1. Elwell, Walter A. “Entry for ‘Covenant’.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. <<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi>>. 1997.

age-bearers they were to maintain an intimate and obedient fellowship with their Creator... God blessed Adam and Eve; he thus gave them ability and authority to serve as his covenant agents... He also spoke of the possibility of disobedience, if they ate of the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:17). The ideas of blessing (life) and curse (death) thus were also included.”²

The Covenant in Eden

Sadly, Adam and Eve believed the lies of Satan, disobeyed God, and thereby broke their covenantal relationship with Him. But God did not in turn break His covenant toward creation and humanity. Instead, He added another dimension to the creation covenant with the Edenic covenant, or the covenant of grace. This was His earliest promise of redemption. The sin and failure of Adam and Eve necessitated a Savior, promised first in Genesis 3:15. Fellowship was restored between God and humanity by God’s assurance that the woman’s offspring would be victorious over Satan and his offspring.

The Covenant to Noah

Next came the covenant God made to Noah following the Flood (see Genesis 9). God determined to wipe out sinful humankind, sparing only Noah and his family because of Noah’s faith. After the Flood, Noah built an altar and sacrificed to God. God responded and confirmed His creation covenant to Noah, his descendants and every creature. Human government was instituted in order that sin might be held in check. Human life was to be protected, and murderers put to death. One of the prophecies in connection with the Noahic covenant indicates that Noah’s son Shem would have a special place in God’s plan. Shem was an ancestor of Abraham. (See Genesis 11:10-27.)

The Covenant to Abraham

God’s covenant to Abraham promised, “I will make you into a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). This was fulfilled in the descendants of Jacob, to whom God gave the land of Israel for an everlasting possession. God promised that through Abraham all the peoples of the earth would be blessed (see Genesis 12:3), another revelation of the coming Savior. This covenant was marked by God’s command that all Abraham’s male offspring were to be circumcised. The promises were accompanied by commands, requiring both faith and obedience.

The Covenant at Mount Sinai

Further enlightenment concerning God’s will and His commands is given in His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. God called Moses

2. Ibid.

to be the covenant mediator. At Mount Sinai, God commanded Israel to obey His covenant. This obedience would keep Israel in covenantal relationship as God's chosen people.

God spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of the people, and then followed this with instruction to Moses explaining and applying these commandments to Israel's daily life. Sacrifices were offered to God, and the people were sprinkled with the blood of the covenant, sealing them as God's precious possession (see Exodus 24:8).

The Covenant to David

The climax of added revelation and expansion of God's covenant came when God addressed David through Nathan the prophet (see 2 Samuel 7:1-17).¹ God had chosen David, a humble shepherd, to be king over Israel. Now God promised, "Your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

The future kingdom of Christ is founded in the Davidic covenant. According to Luke 3:23-28, Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, was a descendant of David's son, Nathan. (Although Luke identifies Joseph as "the son of Heli" in verse 23, the meaning appears to be "son-in-law." Heli was Mary's father, so this genealogy gives Mary's line.) The genealogy in Matthew 1:1-16 shows that Mary's husband descended from David's son Solomon, the royal line. It is through Joseph, "stepfather" of Jesus, that the throne legally passed to Christ.

The New Covenant

The new covenant, of which Jesus is mediator (see Hebrews 8:6-13), is established on the sacrifice of Christ. It is unconditional and irreversible, and secures eternal blessedness for every believer because of the completeness of our redemption in Christ Jesus and the glorious truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. In sending His Son to personally represent Him, God accomplished the ultimate fulfillment of His plan.

So God's plan was outlined step by step through the covenants He has made. We are privileged to have access to all these truths, that we may view the panorama from eternity to eternity.

Christ's Superiority over the Prophets

The writer of Hebrews continues, "But in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:2a). In this statement he lays the foundation upon which all else rests—Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God. God is the Source, Christ the channel through which endless blessings come into our lives, if we will only open ourselves to His forgiveness of our sin (see John 3:16-17) and to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 15:13; 1 Corinthians 2:4).

Consider the fact that God "has spoken" (Hebrews 1:2). Our God is not an impersonal, silent "first cause" or an unknowable deity. From the beginning of creation, He has spoken (see Genesis 1:3). He has issued promises, predictions, commands, and warnings. It wasn't enough that God spoke through angels and prophets; He ultimately chose to speak to us by His Son. We could never know deliverance

from sin or experience a relationship with God, except in the Son, the Word of God who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). It was not possible for Old Testament believers to know God as we may know Him today through saving faith in His Son.

When a person speaks, he indicates that he believes the one addressed is capable of understanding and exchanging thoughts and messages. That God has spoken is proof of His desire for fellowship with His children. He communicates His glory, His love, His blessings through His Word. People's words have influenced nations and changed the courses of history. Words carry weight, measured by what we think of the speaker, his wisdom, his knowledge of his subject, his truthfulness and forcefulness. What then should God's words be worth to us?

When a person speaks, he expects that those addressed will give him courteous attention. God asks that we listen as He speaks to us by His Son. Christ Himself is God's message to us. The Bible is the channel communicating His thoughts and purposes for our lives and for the world. But unless there is a response in our hearts, the fact that God has spoken will be of no effect in our lives. This truth is illustrated in the parable of the farmer recorded in Mark 4:1-20. Unless the "seed" of the Word is accepted—sprouting and producing a crop of faith—it will not be fruitful in our lives.

John 1:1-4, which speaks of Jesus, shows that God's Word is much more than a spoken Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men." Jesus is the Living Word, evidenced in the lives of all who listen and yield to His presence and power.

The phrase, "In these last days" (Hebrews 1:2), refers to the entire period from the birth of Christ until His second coming to earth—so its message is for you and me. The glory of the Lord Jesus and His continued ministry as our high priest are explained in Hebrews. As we study this book, the words, "God has spoken," will become a reality and fill our hearts with joy and adoration. Have you heard Him say, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24)? Have you heard Him urging you to be filled with the knowledge of His will?

Spiritual wisdom and understanding will enable and empower you to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all things. Either you will hear God speaking in His Son, or you will turn an indifferent and deaf ear to His claims. How will you respond?

The Son Is Described

Hebrews 1:2b-3 continues by describing the Son: "whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

1. "Entry for 'Covenant'". "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology".

The Son was much more than just another prophet through whom God spoke by the Holy Spirit. The verses before us show that Christ in His very nature transcended all that had been previously said or revealed. Seven propositions are outlined here which portray the glories of Jesus. They point up His qualifications as God's spokesman.

The first point is Christ's appointment as "heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). In our everyday experience, a son becomes an "heir" only through the death of the father. But in Scripture the term points to lawful possession without indicating in what way that possession is secured.¹ God has appointed Christ to be Possessor of the universe. (See Revelation 19:6-16; 22:1-21.)

Jesus confirmed His status as heir in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Evidence that He is heir will be realized when all nations are gathered before Him to be judged, and He exercises His right to separate the righteous from the unrighteous (see Matthew 25:31-46). But the greatest fulfillment of Christ's status as heir is seen in Revelation 22, where we read of the Holy City and the throne of God and of the Lamb. Honor and eternal power and authority belong to Him who is the "the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15).

What glory and riches God has given the One who chose to be humiliated for our sake. The Lord Jesus was poor when He lived on earth. He owned no home. His clothing was taken from Him at the cross; His burial place was borrowed. Every being, every angel, all the universe will acknowledge that He is Lord, for this is the reward God has given His Son, the Heir of all things (see Philippians 2:5-11).

The second point is that it was through the Son that God made the universe (see Hebrews 1:2). Christ is creator of time and space, and of all that is in the world as we know it. Colossians 1:16 affirms that all things have been created by Him and for Him. Everything was made according to His pattern, and He has put it all together in an order that surpasses human understanding. It is evident from Genesis 1:1-2, 26 that the three persons of the Trinity were active in creation.

The third point is, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory" (Hebrews 1:3). This expression means, "to send forth brightness or light," as sunbeams shining from the sun. The light we see is shining from the sun itself. We know the sun by its shining light. So Christ is the shining of the revelation of the glory of God (see John 1:14; 8:12; 12:35-36).

The fourth point is that the Son is "the exact representation of [God's] being" (Hebrews 1:3). The thought is of an engraving tool, a die or stamp used to give shape and detail to a coin or other object. The image pressed out by a mold or seal is the very same as the mold itself. None of the prophets of the Old Testament could come close to expressing God's nature. The Son perfectly expresses all that God is, for Christ *is* God. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

The fifth point is that the Son is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3). The creator of all things also sustains all

things. He governs and preserves that which He called into being. He keeps it all from becoming a jumbled mass of confusion. There is no such thing as the "law of nature." The universe was not created to run along without the direction and support of its Creator. All creation is directed by the will and word of its maker and sustainer. One word spoken by the Lord Jesus would dissolve His universe, so great is His power. The Lord Jesus revealed His power when He calmed the sea (see Mark 6:47-51), when He cast out demons (see Matthew 12:22-28), when He fed five thousand (see Mark 6:34-44) and when He brought Lazarus back from the dead (see John 11:1-45). These are only a few examples of His powerful word.

Far greater than the wonders of creation is the sixth point, that the Son "provided purification for sins" (Hebrews 1:3). The writer of Hebrews didn't hesitate to introduce the death of Christ as one of His highest glories, although the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews (see 1 Corinthians 1:23). More than God's spokesman, Christ is now seen as the great high priest who has made the matchless sacrifice for sin.

That Christ has put away our sins, paying for them with His blood, is the pinnacle of His work in the world. His work in making the universe and even in holding all things together is outshone by the wonders of His grace (unearned favor from God), and His exceeding mercy in redeeming sinners from Satan's grip. In His death on the cross, Christ fulfilled what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings: Christ, God's perfect Lamb, died once for all. The apostle John wrote, "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

The seventh point is that the Son "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 1:3). When there's work to do, you cannot "sit down." This position of Christ at God's right hand speaks to us of His finished work. This is in contrast to Israel's priests who daily and continuously brought sacrifices. There was no chair in the tabernacle; their work was never finished. The "right hand" is a place of honor and authority.

The Son has fully accomplished God's purposes. Christ is God's Prophet, qualified to speak for Him. Christ is God's Priest, who has offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin. Christ is also God's King, and one day He will come again to bring to fulfillment His glorious kingdom (see Revelation 19-22).

The glories of our Lord Jesus Christ, His perfection, and the truths concerning Him should move our hearts not only to worship Him, but also to faithfully serve Him, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4:6; 1 John 4:2,13).

Revelation 5:11-12 says, "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'" Can we not echo these words moment by moment, day by day?

1. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. See notes on Hebrews 1:2.

Luke 1:30-32a

Revelation 19:11-13,16

4. How did the Son “inherit” His name, according to the following verses?

2 Peter 1:17

Philippians 2:9

5. When people realize their inferiority—how huge the gap is between themselves and God—they may be tempted to regard angels or other created beings as intermediaries between themselves and God. What does 1 Timothy 2:5-6 say about this?
6. Personal: Do you ever feel that you need someone to act as a go-between with God? Maybe you feel as if you have failed Him too many times, and you are not worthy to come directly to Him. The wonderful news from Hebrews is that we do have a mediator, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us. Have you allowed Him to mediate with God on your behalf, based on His payment on the cross for all your sin?

Third Day: Review Hebrews 1:4-9, concentrating on verse 5.

1. The writer of Hebrews now begins a series of quotations from the Old Testament, which all stress the superiority of Christ to the angels. What is the first quotation in Hebrews 1:5a? This passage quotes Psalm 2:7.
2. Although there is no explicit reference to the Messiah in Psalm 2:7, the writer of Hebrews considers this psalm to be a prophecy of the Messiah. Read Acts 13:32-33, which is part of a sermon Paul preached in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. How does Paul confirm this interpretation?

4. Read Revelation 5:6-12. How do verses 11-12 fulfill God's command in Hebrews 1:6?

5. Personal: The One the angels worship—indeed, that all of heaven will worship—is clearly superior by far to them. Do you worship the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ? What does it mean to you to worship Him?

Fifth Day: Review Hebrews 1:4-9, concentrating on verses 7-8a.

1. What does the writer of Hebrews quote from the Old Testament about God's angels in Hebrews 1:7?

2. Note that Hebrews 1:8 begins with, "But..." How does the writer of Hebrews contrast the power of the Son in verse 8a with the power of the angels in verse 7?

3. Though God gives His angels the impressive power of wind and fire, yet they cannot measure up to the eternal, divine power of the Son. What do you learn about the eternal reign of the Son from Isaiah 9:6-7?

4. Personal: The power of wind and fire can be frightening and overwhelming to us. Think of wildfires that sweep through homes in a flash, or of hurricanes, tornados, cyclones and typhoons that devastate large areas. Do you fear and respect these powers? How much more do you fear and respect the power of the eternal Son of God?

Sixth Day: Review Hebrews 1:4-9, concentrating on verses 8b-9.

1. a. What will be the supreme characteristic of the kingdom of the Son, according to Hebrews 1:8b?

b. Hebrews 1:8b continues the quotation of Psalm 45:6 from the Septuagint (see Day 4, Question 4). How does your English Bible translate Psalm 45:6 slightly differently?

2. What does the Son's concern for righteousness and justice lead God the Father to do? (Hebrews 1:9)

3. Challenge: Hebrews 1:9 says that God anointed the Son. Anointing was usually a rite of consecration to some sacred function. What are some examples of anointing from the following verses?
Exodus 28:41 (God is speaking to Moses)

1 Samuel 10:1

1 Kings 19:16 (God is speaking to the prophet Elijah)

4. a. When God anointed the Son, He set the Son above His "companions." Read Hebrews 2:11 to see who these companions are.

b. Hebrews 2:11 also tells us the sacred function for which the Son was anointed. What was it?

5. Hebrews 1:9 says that God anointed the Son "with the oil of joy." Read Isaiah 61:1-3, in which Isaiah speaks of the coming Messiah (see Luke 4:18-21, in which Jesus confirms that this passage refers to Himself). How does the Son give "the oil of joy" to all those who believe in Him?

6. Personal: Have you believed in the Son and received "the oil of joy" from Him? Write Isaiah 61:1-3, inserting your name to help you realize what the Son has given to you.