

Introduction

We are studying the section of Hebrews that deals with Christ as the supreme revealer of salvation. The later sections of Hebrews deal with Christ as the great high priest and final sacrifice, all connected to the critical need for us to have persevering faith in Him to be saved.

1. Overview of Verses 1-4

We should notice immediately that the opening words of the paragraph contrast the *before* and the *after* of God’s method of revealing Himself.

	Formerly	Now
Who and what	God spoke	God spoke
How	In many parts	
How	In many ways	
When	In time past	In these last days
To Whom	To the fathers	To us
Through Whom	By the prophets	By his Son

The absence of anything in the second column corresponding the many parts and ways points us to the conclusion that the Son brings all the partial and different methods to a conclusion. He is the final revelation of God beyond the prophets, angels, and Moses. That is why we said in our overview of the book of Hebrews that Christ is the supreme revealer of salvation.

After the opening words, the first verses of Hebrews describe this Son who was the final revealer. A number of descriptions are given, concluding with the fact that He is better than the angels. Some interpreters include verse 4 with verses 5-14 because it contains the subject matter of angels. I chose to include verse 4 with the preceding verses in these notes because it is part of the same sentence with them. Verse 5 begins an explanation of verse 4, so it is a natural division point. In that sense, verse 4 forms a transition between the first unit and second unit of thought.

2. The Point of the Section: God Has Spoken by His Son, v. 1-2a

2.A. The Before: God Speaking Through the Prophets

“In many parts and in many ways long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets; in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son...”

Most English translations have “times and ways” referring to the method of God’s revelation. A better translation would be “parts and ways,” which the New American Standard has. The reason for this is that while it is true that the revelation of God was parceled out over *time* throughout OT history, the word does not say anything itself about time. It is a compound from “many parts” or “portions.” So yes, each portion was given at a particular point of time, since all of God’s interactions with us in this world are circumscribed by time, but the focus of the author of Hebrews is not on the times revelation was given, but rather on the parts of it.

The next word is clearly “in many ways.” These two words are only used in the NT in this verse.

Therefore, God doled out his revelation in portions and by various means. He did this through the prophets in years past. Various revelations through direct speech, mighty acts, and dreams were given throughout the opening centuries of world history (see Genesis and Exodus, for example). This is particularly true for Adam and Noah and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the twelve patriarchs and so

forth. The official office of prophet did not start until Moses, and it was at 1445 B.C. when the Exodus occurred. This means that “in time past” refers mainly to the one thousand years between 1445 and about 400 B.C. when Malachi was written. So we are talking about Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy), Ezra, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the so-called Minor Prophets.

Now as we study this, we must be cognizant of the fact that the Bible is not focusing on parts and ways and times past and fathers and prophets. Those are important to the overall idea, but the focus is on God and His disclosing Himself to mankind. God doled out revelation; God did it in various ways; God interacted with the fathers; God used the prophets.

One implication or application of this text is that it helps you know how to read your Bible today. The concept of “progressive revelation” means that God progressively revealed more and more over the “various times” to His people. As we read it, we must be aware of this increasing accumulation of information from God. We need to be careful not to read backwards from what we know and assume that the same information was known throughout all of OT history, because it was not. The first readers of Genesis through Deuteronomy did not have as much from God as did Isaiah’s audience or Daniel’s readers or Malachi’s audience. And with the benefit of a whole new type of revelation (see next section), we have way more than even Malachi’s audience.

2.B. The After: God Speaking Through His Son

Because of the contrast of before/after, the idea should begin to take form in your mind that God has in a sense obsoleted all the old stuff and has moved on to a new way. That way is not speaking indirectly through prophets, but instead it consists of speaking directly through His Son.

The revelation therefore has a new quality or type about it—it never occurred before in human history. Some people don’t accept it because they like the old better (Luke 5:33-39). But the facts are the facts—God did it and we must fit into it.

The revelation of God through Christ conveys information in a way that could not be conveyed another way. Think of a picture—it is worth, they say, 1000 words. A momentary glance or a prolonged examination allows you to take in a lot more information about the scene than even the most accomplished wordsmith can convey in writing. If that is so, then so much the more a life is worth a *million* words. John 21:25 suggests this very idea. A life lived and recorded provides so much more than a still picture or words on a page. This is true particularly in this case because of the type of person and the quality of the life He lived.

We saw last week that one implication of this is that when God speaks, He expects us to listen. If He spoke through the prophets in all those ways and times, and he expected his people to listen then, what do you think He would want us to do with Jesus? Ignore Him?

Someone might raise a question in light of the fact that I have said Jesus was the final revealer of God. If that is the case, the logical question to ask is, “How then is the New Testament a valid revelation from God since it came after Jesus? If Jesus was the final revelation from God, why was there more revelation after Him?”

In reply to that question, we may note that the NT writers were simply recording everything about Jesus, and what He had revealed. He promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). As such, the written accounts in the New Testament are not a new and separate revelation as much as they are the inspired record of what God did reveal through Jesus (see Acts 1:1-2). The four gospels are accounts of Jesus, by which we know what God revealed through His Son. The book of Acts shows what happened to the early church after the departure of Jesus to Heaven, and how Jesus continued to interact with the early believers.

Romans through Hebrews are the record of the revelation from Jesus through Paul. The general epistles are similar in their content, containing much about the example and words of Jesus. Even the book of Revelation has as its opening words, “The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave Him to show His servants what must soon take place.”

3. The Description of the Son, v. 2b-4

To show how significant the Divine-Son revelation is, the Bible now describes who this Son is. The long and short of it is that He is Himself shares in the divine essence and has the place of all power and all authority. Thus, he is the ultimate revelation of God.

3.A. The Appointed Heir of All Things

It is God’s will that Jesus inherit the universe. Everything is going to be placed under his feet (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Psalm 110:1). He is obviously someone very important.

3.B. Maker of the Ages = Universe

Verse 2 ends with the statement that God made everything through the Son. This is a quick summary of the teaching in passages like John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:10 and 11:3; and Col. 1:16 that prove that Jesus was the direct agent of creation. No “made thing” came into existence apart from Jesus Christ! That includes everything but God Himself Who had no beginning. This surprises some people at first when they realize it, but let it sink in to your mind. When the Bible says “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” it is referring to the direct action of the Son of God!

Jesus Himself, as a member of the Trinity, was not created, despite all the protestations of “I don’t understand the Trinity so it can’t be true” from the cults.

3.C. Precise Image of God

We have to go no further than this text or Romans 9:5 or John 12 or Titus 2:13 or 2 Peter 1:1 or John 9:38 or John 1:1-3 or John 10:30 or John 8:58 to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus is not only the Son of God, but God the Son. And, if you need more evidence, consider Romans 10:9-10. Unless you confess Jesus as LORD, you cannot be saved. Note the similarities of the following verses:

- Gen 5:6 = Abraham **believed** in the **LORD**, and He accounted it to him for **righteousness**.
- Rom 3:22 = Even the **righteousness** of God, through **faith** in **Jesus Christ**, to all and on all who believe.

In both cases, righteousness is imputed to those who believe. In the one case, the object of belief is God. In the second the object of belief is Jesus. They must be essentially equivalent because belief in them both provides salvation.

This notion of Jesus sharing the very essence of God is what Hebrews says at the beginning of verse 3: “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” When the text says “brightness of His glory” it could mean that Jesus passively “reflects” the glory of God, or that He actively is a producer of that glory, that it radiates out of Him. I believe the latter interpretation is better in light of passages like Matthew 17:2 and Revelation 1:12-17. We can reflect the glory of God produced in us by God; Jesus IS the radiance of God’s glory.

Also, Jesus is the exact representation or imprint of God’s nature. He is a reproduction of the same thing that God is—the very substance or nature of God is what Jesus is. It is admittedly hard to explain this in a nice compact fashion. Perhaps a contrast would be helpful. The pagan’s idol has a basic reality which is material, like wood, stone, or precious metal. The Christian’s Savior has a basic reality which

is the divine substance—not wood or any other material, but the very stuff of God Himself.

3.D. Sustainer of the Universe

When we think of God’s relation to the universe, we should think of a few things. **First**, God is not the universe. God was not created; the universe was. So He is separate from the universe, though He can interact with it. **Second**, God planned the universe and made it the way He wished. **Third**, God created it. **Fourth**, He sustains it. And **finally**, He guides it to His intended goal. We learned that the person in the Godhead directly responsible for creation was the Son. We now learn that He is sustaining the universe as well.

He is “upholding all things by His powerful word.” A text that supports this notion further is Col. 1:17 which says that He holds all things together.

From the physicist’s perspective, a unifying theory is difficult to find, but it is right here. It is elusive to the secular mind because the mindset of the secular establishment has rejected God. The answer is found in the Son of God, who we know as Jesus the Messiah. The mysterious qualities of gravity, magnetism, electricity, the strong and weak nuclear force all come down to the creative and upholding power of the Son of God. I won’t go farther to suggest whether this force has more of an active or passive quality to it, but it should suffice to say that if the Son ceased His upholding power, the universe would fall to pieces.

3.E. Purifier of Our Sins

The KJV and NKJV have “purge” here. Jesus purified or cleansed us in the sense that he provided salvation through his perfect life, death, and resurrection. This purging of sin cleans us from inward pollution and makes us pure in God’s sight through Jesus Christ. The cleansing is provisional for all people; it becomes activated or actualized in an individual’s life when he or she believes in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved.

3.F. Seated at the Right Hand of God

The seat at the right hand is obviously the place of prominence, honor, and authority. By the right hand, God thus signifies that Jesus’ work was accepted. The sitting signifies that the work was completed, in contrast to the ever standing Levitical priests (Heb. 10:11). This right-hand placement was one thing that drove unbelievers mad (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62, and Luke 22:69).

3.G. Much Better Than the Angels

The “become” idea here refers to Christ’s exaltation after His humiliation. After He lowered himself to man’s level and was lower than the angels in that sense, then He was raised back up and His name (person, reputation) is much more excellent than they are. The remainder of Hebrews chapter 1 will explain in detail how this is the case.

Conclusion

For now, it is sufficient to note that the Son is not some angel or human messenger. He is the very Son of God, directly revealing God to us. This is why He is the supreme revealer of salvation—neither the OT prophets nor the angels can compare to Him.