

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 1:1-4**

To understand how God has formally spoken to us in both the past and present.

Read the Text:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (Hebrews 1:1-4, ESV)

Study the Text:

The God Who Speaks

Hebrews 1:1-4, among many things, is about the revelation of God. Revelation means “to reveal,” a word that is derived from the Latin *Revelare* and the Greek ἀποκάλυψις (apokalypsis), from which we get our English word “apocalypse.” *The Book of Revelation*, for example, is a “revealing” to John the apostle. But all of Scripture, not just *The Book of Revelation*, is God revealing Himself to us. God is a *God who speaks*. Hebrews 1:1-4 unfolds how God has done that in the past, and how He has more fully and finally done so through His Son, Jesus Christ, in these “last days.” Below is a breakdown of key themes and concepts in this passage.

GOD SPOKE LONG AGO

Hebrews begins by acknowledging that God did not *start* speaking in Christ, but that actually God began speaking “long ago” to “our fathers” (Heb. 1:1).

To Our Fathers

The term “fathers” can be understood in at least two ways. For one, it could be a reference to the “patriarchs” of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph). The patriarchs were important individuals in Jewish history and are often referred to as “fathers.” However, there is a more specific term for “patriarchs” in the Greek language

that is not employed here. The Greek term for “patriarchs” is πατριάρχης (patriarchēs), but that is not the term used in verse 1. Instead, we find the Greek term πατήρ (patēr), which more broadly means “ancestors” in numerous other New Testament contexts. This seems more fitting. It would be strange to limit the revelation of God to only the patriarchs, given that God clearly spoke to kings and others well after the patriarchs. The point here is that God has spoken to our ancestors through the prophets, and He has done so in various ways.

At Many Times and In Many Ways

The phrase “at many times and in many ways” can also be understood in several ways, but for the sake of time, let me unfold what I believe is the appropriate understanding. This phrase comprises two very similar Greek terms (Gk. πολυμερῶς [polymerōs] and πολυτρόπως [polytropōs]), which, when combined, present a clear picture. The first term has more to do with “chunks of time,” whereas the second term has to do with “various means of doing something.” Verse 1 conveys the idea that over time, God has chosen to speak in one way at certain moments and in another at other moments. God’s speech, in other words, has not been the same for all of time.

When we appeal to the prophetic literature, this becomes increasingly clear. God has chosen to reveal Himself through various modes of communication. For example, God has revealed Himself through:

1. **Audible Speech** (Jer. 1:4)
2. **Visions** (Is. 1:1; Mic. 1:1)
3. **Dreams** (Matt. 1:20)

God has chosen to speak to different people at different times in various ways.

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE SON

However, the point of Hebrews is not for us to marvel at how God has spoken in the past, but rather to point us to the reality that God speaks now in the present in a fuller, more glorious manner. God spoke “to our fathers,” then, but now He has spoken “to us” through His Son. But who is the Son?

The Heir of All Things

That Jesus is the “heir of all things” points to at least two possible Old Testament allusions. First, it points to the reality that Jesus is greater than even Abraham. In Genesis 17:5, God changes Abram’s name to Abraham and promises to make him “the father of a multitude of nations.” However, Christ is not merely the heir to the Abrahamic promise, because Christ has not become the heir of many nations, but rather “all things.” This points to the fulfillment of Psalm 2:8, a Messianic Psalm that says: “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Your possession.” The Messiah will receive not only all the nations, but even “the ends of the earth.” Even more than that, He will receive “all things,” even those beyond the ends of the earth. Why? Because He is the very source of all things (Col. 1:16-17).

The One Through Whom Came All of Creation

He is the source of creation in that He is also the one “through whom also he created the world” (Heb. 1:2b). Jesus is the source of creation. He is the beginning and end of creation (Rev. 22:13). As such, He can be nothing less than God Himself, which Hebrews claims as well.

The Radiance of God's Glory

The following divine claim is that Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God” (Heb. 1:3). New Testament scholar Peter O’Brien writes: “As the radiance of God’s glory, rather than simply the reflection, there is some sense in which the Son is the twin source of the light of God’s glory.”¹ Jesus is not like the glory of God. He does not reflect the glory of God. He is the radiance of it. To see Jesus is to see the actual glory of God, because, remember: to see Jesus is to see God Himself (Jn. 14:9).

The Exact Imprint of God's Nature

Moreover, Jesus is the “exact imprint of the nature of God” (Heb. 1:3). Opponents to Trinitarian theology often try to argue that Jesus being referred to as the “image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) conveys the idea that Jesus is merely an “icon” that symbolizes God. In fact, the term “image” in the Greek language is quite literally εἰκών (eikōn), the word from which we get our English term “icon.” However, εἰκών is not used here in Hebrews 1:3. The author instead employs the term χαρακτήρ (charaktēr), the word from which we get our English term “character.” It means “the exact expression” of something. Jesus is not a symbol for God; He is the exact character of God. And because God is uniquely God and no one is like Him, nor does He give His attributes or glory to anyone, this can only mean that Jesus is God (Is. 42:8). And that He is the One through whom all things come into existence, which, according to Genesis 1:3 is the Word of God, and that John reveals to us that Jesus is the Word of God Incarnate (Jn. 1:1-3; 14), the New Testament confirms the deity of Jesus Christ very clearly.

He Upholds the Universe by the Word

It becomes clear that the divine λόγος (logos), or “Word” of God, is the power not only behind creation, but also in sustaining it. To “uphold” means to “bear or carry,” from the Greek φέρω (pherō), and “universe” is a fine translation, although still perhaps limiting. The underlying term for “universe” is πάντα (panta), and it just means “all or whole.” In other words, everything that exists is upheld by the Word of God.

More Superior

Verse 4 concludes that given the completed and glorious nature of Jesus Christ’s work, He is in fact “more superior” to even angels, beings who were thought to be the highest level of power just under God. Of course, angels cannot carry out God’s divine creative plans as Jesus has. This should be a pretty obvious indicator of who Jesus is. Jesus can do the things God has done because Jesus Himself is God. More will be said about this in the next session, where Jesus is more fully contrasted to the angels.

What About Now?

The primary takeaway of this passage is the supremacy of Christ. In fact, that’s the primary takeaway of the entire book of Hebrews! In light of that, if Jesus is supreme, that should shape everything we do. If Jesus is God, we ought to worship and obey Him. If Jesus is the maker of all things, we ought to fear Him (in a healthy, reverent manner). If Jesus is the final word of God spoken to us, we ought to listen. Others before us have received lesser revelation and lesser insight into the person and work of God, and they rebelled and were disciplined for it. How much more should we, who know Jesus Christ, receive discipline if we disobey?

¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 54-55.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 1:1. How did God speak “long ago?”

2. Read Jeremiah 1:4, Isaiah 1:1, and Matthew 1:20. By what other means has God communicated special revelation to His people?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 1:2. How has God finally spoken “in these last days?”

2. Read Hebrews 1:3. What does the “radiance of the glory of God” mean?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 1:3. What does it mean that Jesus is “the exact imprint of” God’s nature?

2. Read Hebrews 1:3. By what means does God uphold the universe?

Day Four

1. Read John 1:1 & 1:14. What does this say about the Word of God? How does this relate to Hebrews 1:3?

2. Read Hebrews 1:4. Who is Jesus more “superior” to?

Discuss the Text!**Session 1 Discussion: Lord of All**

If Jesus is the Word of God who “upholds the universe” and He is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature,” it is of the utmost importance that we submit our lives to Christ as Lord. Talk as a group about the importance of submission to Jesus Christ as Lord over all things, and discuss what things might need to change in your life for you to obey Him more fully.

1. Icebreaker: Who or what is the highest authority in your life? In other words, how do you decide what is wrong and what is right? How do you determine how you should live your life, and how you shouldn't live it?
2. “If Jesus is Lord, we should obey everything He says, regardless of how we feel about it.” Do you agree or disagree?
3. Read Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” How difficult is it for you to obey this commandment? Do you withhold kindness or tenderheartedness (compassion) from others who have wronged you in some way? If so, how do you reconcile this with submission to Christ?
4. Part of the “Great Commandment” is to love God “with all your mind” (Mk. 12:28-29). How do you love God with your mind?
5. What should you do when you fail to be obedient to the Lord? Use Scripture to support your answer.
6. Kid Talk (For Home): Talk about “who is in charge.” At home, it's mom or dad. At school, it's the teacher, and ultimately the principal. Talk about how God, and specifically Christ, is in charge of everything. With that in mind, we should obey what He has said to do (in the Scriptures).

Takeaways:

1. Jesus is the final Word of God.
2. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory.
3. Jesus is the exact imprint of God's nature.
4. Jesus has made purification for sins.
5. Jesus is superior to even angels.