

JESUS IS GOD'S FINAL WORD

Hebrews 1:1-14

Key Verse: 1:2a

“...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”

As the Messiah, Jesus has three offices: Prophet, Priest and King. As prophet, Jesus speaks God's word to people. As priest, Jesus intercedes for people with God. As king, Jesus rules with peace, love and justice. The book of Hebrews uniquely emphasizes Jesus' priesthood. Why is it so important for us to know and understand Jesus' priesthood? It is the key to an intimate relationship with God which can be a source of real strength to us. We are living in a world influenced by Islam, Eastern religions, psychology, and atheism, among other things. We are bombarded by so many different ideas every day that we can easily become confused. Christian values—justice, compassion, generosity, trust—are diminishing rapidly. It is not easy to stand firm with a distinctive Christian identity and live a gospel centered life. In order to do so, we need to know who Jesus really is. This knowledge is not just information; it transforms us and empowers us to live by the gospel truth. In addition to outer challenges, we also face challenges from within, such as strong and sweet temptations through the Internet and social media. We are weak due to our sinful nature and can easily be entangled by it. Then we become frustrated and depressed; we can begin to drift away and shrink back. Through the study of Hebrews, let's come to Jesus, have a distinctive Christian identity, and find the grace and mercy and strength we need.

In 1:1-3, without introduction or greeting, the author tells us who Jesus is. Then, in the rest of the book, the author declares Jesus' superiority to angels, Moses, the Levitical priests, and temple sacrifices. He exhorts us to fix our eyes on Jesus, who is our Great High Priest, and to live by faith in him. In today's passage we learn that Jesus is God's final word, Jesus' identity and works, and that Jesus is superior to angels.

First, Jesus is God's full and final revelation (1-2a). Verses 1-2a tells us how God has spoken to us in the past: **“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son....”** This is a sweeping view of God's redemptive history, which emphasizes that God spoke to his chosen

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people through his words. God gives general revelation of himself to all people through nature, providence and conscience. But these are not sufficient for salvation. God gives special revelation through his words. If God remained silent, the plight of mankind would have been desperate. But now he has spoken, revealing redeeming and life-giving words. Through his words, we see the light of salvation. God's words came to mankind in two stages. First, they were given to Jewish ancestors through the prophets. Finally, they were given fully and completely through his Son, Jesus Christ.

After the fall, God began to reveal his salvation plan in a primitive way to Adam, prophesying the destruction of Satan through the offspring of a woman (Gen 3:15). When mankind was utterly corrupted by sin, God made a covenant with Noah and revealed his judgment through the flood, as well as salvation through the ark (Gen 6:13-14,18). Then God chose Abraham and gave him a covenant promise to bless him and all nations on earth through his offspring (Gen 12:2-3; 22:18). This promise was handed down to Isaac, then Jacob, and then Judah and his descendants, among whom was David. Through Moses God presented a prototype of salvation. God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt through the blood of the lamb; this represents delivering people from the power of sin and Satan through the blood of Christ. God established the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system so that sinful mankind could approach the holy God for the forgiveness of sins and restoration of fellowship. These all pointed to Jesus, who is the temple, the high priest, and the perfect sacrifice. To David, God promised that one of his descendants would be an eternal king who would reign over his people with love, peace and justice (2Sa 7:13,16). Afterward, God revealed his words through the prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others. Especially through Isaiah, the coming of the Messiah: his birth, his character, his suffering, death and resurrection, and his reign were foretold in precise detail.

In this way God spoke through the prophets about his salvation plan at many times and in various ways. God revealed himself through dreams, visions, signs and miracles, and angels' messages. This divine revelation is genuine, but incomplete. This revelation is progressive, and it points to Jesus. Let's see verse 2a again: **"...but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son."** God gave the full and final revelation through his Son. Jesus fulfills all the revelations given in the Old Testament. Without him, the Old

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Testament revelation is partial, preparatory, and fragmentary. But in Christ, God spoke fully, decisively, finally and perfectly. Isaiah expounded the nature of God as holy, righteous and merciful. But Christ manifested it. Jeremiah described the power of God, but Christ displayed it. Ezekiel portrayed the glory of God, but Christ reflected it. Daniel prophesied God's coming kingdom, but Christ revealed it. Jesus' coming inaugurated a new era, which can be compared to the dawn of a new day. The sun approaches the dark world and its rays begin to illumine it. Soon it radiates powerfully over the whole landscape and the thick darkness disappears. Now we don't need any more revelation. Jesus, God in the flesh, came into the world and revealed God fully (Jn 1:14a). God continues to speak the message of salvation through his Son to this present moment. God's salvation comes through Jesus, and only Jesus; there is no other name under heaven given to us that can save us (Ac 4:12). That is why we must listen to Jesus as of first importance.

Second, Jesus' identity and his works (2b-3). Who is Jesus, whom we must listen to? The author describes who Jesus is and what he has done in several aspects. **First aspect, Jesus is the heir of all things (2b).** Jesus, the Son was appointed as the heir of the Father God (Ps 2:8). A son is different from a servant. A servant, though he is excellent and works hard, can never become an heir. However, a son inherits his father's estate on the basis of his sonship. As the Son of God, Jesus is the heir of all that God has made. When we believe in Jesus, we become co-heirs with Christ (Ro 8:17). John Trapp, a 17th century Puritan Bible scholar, said, "Be married to this heir and have all."

Second aspect, Jesus is the Creator of the universe. Verse 2c says, "...and through whom also he made the universe." It was through Jesus that God made the universe (Jn 1:3). Colossians 1:16 says, "**In him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.**" These days many people think the universe and their lives are random accidents without meaning. Yet they cannot avoid the inner cry of the human heart, "Who am I? Why do I live? Where did I come from? Where am I going?" They suffer from meaninglessness, loneliness, disorientation and despair. But when we believe that Jesus created the universe, including our lives, we find meaning and purpose in all that God has made. We can see the harmony in God's world

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and find our place in his creation, having a clear identity as God's people. Our lives can be beautiful and very fruitful.

Third aspect, Jesus is the radiance of God's glory (3a). To the Hebrew people, God's glory was an outward and visible expression of the majesty of the presence of God. When the Law was given at Mt. Sinai, the glory of the Lord settled on the mountain. This same glory has been seen in the person of Christ, who radiates God's glory. Psalm 104:2a says, **"The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment...."** Apostle Paul explained that God, **"...lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see"** (1Ti 6:16). We cannot look into the sun directly, or we will go blind. Likewise, we cannot see God. If we see God we will die (Ex 33:20). Some people say, **"Show me God and I will believe."** They do not realize they will die. However, as we can enjoy the light and warmth of the sun as God intended, so we can enjoy God's light through Jesus, who is the radiance of God's glory. This is why the Nicene Creed describes Jesus as **"Light of Light."** Jesus said, **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"** (Jn 8:12).

Fourth aspect, Jesus is the exact representation of God's being (3b). The verbal form of the words "exact representation" means "to engrave." Just as the image on a coin exactly corresponds to its stamp, so the Son of God bears the very stamp of God's nature. Jesus is not merely an image or reflection of God. He is the absolute authentic representation of God's being, because he himself is God. That is why when Jesus was asked, **"Show us the Father," he replied, "Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father"** (Jn 14:8-9). Do you want to see God? Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Fifth aspect, Jesus is the Sustainer of the whole universe. Verse 3c says, **"...sustaining all things by his powerful word."** The Greek mythical figure Atlas held the whole world on his shoulders. It was so heavy that he could not do anything except stand there. However, Jesus dynamically holds together all that has been created through him (Col 1:17). Dr. Charles Kim, a physicist, explained how gravity holds everything in the universe together. Jesus is that gravity which holds everything together through his words. Some people, like Deists, claim that God is like an engineer who wound up his creation and let it run, as he stepped away, disengaged. But Jesus is actively involved in his universe, engaging in sustaining work moment by moment

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through his powerful words. He can intervene to sustain us with a job, a family, or whatever we need. This is "God's providence."

Sixth aspect, Jesus purifies us from our sins (3d). There were many things that Jesus did while on earth. But the author emphasizes Jesus' unique work as our high priest: he provided purification for sins. Purification from sin was extremely important to the Hebrews. The whole book of Leviticus was written to explain how people could be purified from their sins and live a holy life as God's people. Sin was dealt with very seriously, be it intentional or unintentional. It is because sin separates us from the holy God. Sin disfigures the image of God in us, defiling our personality and character and making us dirty. So whenever the Hebrews committed sin, they sought to be purified through animal sacrifices. This was prescribed by the Law as a temporary, outer remedy. But it did not cleanse the conscience. They offered sacrifices again and again. Still, they felt guilt and shame and that they were unclean. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, sacrificed his life once for all to provide effective purification for our sins. How can we be purified from our sins? 1 John 1:9 says, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** Let's come to Jesus to be purified from our sins!

Seventh aspect, Jesus is the Sovereign Ruler. Verse 3e says, **"...he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."** God was pleased with Jesus' humiliation and suffering for our sins. So God exalted Jesus to eternal glory at God's right hand. Now Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is worthy of all glory, honor and praise and worship.

The deity of Jesus has been proclaimed through seven aspects of his person and work. He is qualified to be the mediator between God and us. He is the Prophet through whom God has spoken his final word; he is the Priest who has accomplished a perfect work of cleansing for his people's sins; he is the King who sits enthroned alongside the Majesty in heaven.¹

Third, Jesus is superior to angels (4-14). After telling who Jesus is, the author concluded that Jesus became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs (4). The Hebrew people held angels

¹ Bruce, F.F., *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990), p. 50.

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in high regard because the law had been given through them and they served as God's messengers. Jewish rabbis developed an intricate system of angelology. They taught that each person had their own guardian angel (Mt 18:10), and even "every blade of grass has its angel." Among the billions of angels, a few special angels stood in the presence of God: Raphael, Uriel, Phanuel, Gabriel, Michael. People considered them spiritual intermediaries. They prayed to angels to intercede with God for them. Some people even worshiped angels (Col 2:18). These days, people trust and honor spiritual beings without discernment, not knowing that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2Co 11:14). The author wants to make clear that Jesus is superior to angels. This teaching must have challenged his audience. To support this claim, he quotes seven Old Testament references in verses 5-14.

Jesus is superior to angels based on his sonship (5-6). Though angels are spiritual beings, they are created beings and servants. God never called them sons. However, God calls the Messiah "**my Son**" (Ps 2:7; 2Sa 7:14). As the Son, Jesus is in very nature God and shares the same attributes as God. He is not one of the created beings, like the angels; he is the Creator. In verse 6a, we find the word "firstborn." This refers to his preeminence. God the Father and God the Son were both there before the creation of all things. The Son is the very God the angels are created to worship. So God says to the angels, "**Let all God's angels worship him**" (6b).

Jesus is superior to angels based on his everlasting kingship (7-9). In speaking of the angels, God says, "**He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire**" (7; Ps 104:4). Angels are God's servants. But about the Son, God says, "**Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom**" (8; Ps 45:6). God proclaims the Messiah's kingship. He has an eternal throne. While the kingdoms of the world rise and wane, the Messiah's kingdom is everlasting. He is never replaced by another, nor is his reign overthrown. If a wicked king reigned forever, this would be terrible. However, the Messiah's reign is characterized by justice, righteousness and intolerance of evil; his reign brings joy and gladness that never ends (9; Ps 45:7).

Jesus is superior to angels based on his eternal nature (10-12). In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Created things will perish. They will all wear out like a garment. One day God will roll up the heavens

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and the earth and they will be changed. But Jesus remains the same because he is the Eternal Creator God. In the world, everything changes: fashion, technology, ideas, value systems, status, and especially i-phones. Hope in these things leads to disappointment. However, Jesus never changes. Hebrews 13:8 says, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”** When we put our hope in this Jesus we will never be put to shame.

Jesus is superior to angels because he is the Sovereign Ruler (13-14). The author concludes his argument by referring to Psalm 110:1: **“To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”** After Jesus finished his salvation work, God exalted him to a position of privilege and power. Jesus rules over everything, including the angels, and our lives. The angels’ mission is to serve those who will inherit salvation (14).

Jesus is God’s final word. Jesus is the Son of God who is the heir of all things, Creator of the universe, sustainer, the radiance of God’s glory, and the exact representation of his being. This Jesus came into the world to save us from eternal condemnation. He died on the cross to purify us from our sins. God raised him from the dead and exalted him as the Sovereign Ruler. Jesus is worthy of all honor, glory, praise and worship from all creation. When we know this Jesus we can experience heavenly reality and lay a secure foundation to live dynamic, fruitful lives. Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus.