

**The Hebrews Initiative:
It All Starts and Ends with Jesus
Hebrews 1:1-4**

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Text Introduction: As we have said for some time, today we are embarking on a journey together through the book of Hebrews. We are calling our journey the Hebrews Initiative. It is an important journey. Though not exactly the same, our circumstances are similar to that of the original recipients of Hebrews. As such, it is my prayer that this study will provide significant encouragement to us to persevere in this post-Christian and at times anti-Christian world in which we find ourselves living.

Many consider the book of Hebrews to be one of the most complex books in the New Testament. William Barclay called it the most difficult book in the entire New Testament. However, another New Testament scholar, William Lane said, "But if you will press into it, it is one of the most rewarding books in the whole Bible.

Our unfamiliarity with the Old Testament sacrificial system is probably one of the issues that makes this a difficult book. In addition, the "warning" or "apostasy" passages also cause great concern for some.

We can make the book much easier to understand if we understand the context of the original letter. The Book of Hebrews, written by an author unknown to us, was written to encourage Christians to persevere in their faith in the midst of persecution. Even though the recipients of the letter were victims of persecution, the call of the author is for them to persevere in their faith. Nothing, even persecution, should detract them from following Christ. Salvation through Christ is and was so superior to every aspect of their former religion, Judaism, that they would be fools not to persevere in their commitment to Christ.

Another curious aspect of this letter is that the letter is written from an anonymous author. Most every important name of the New Testament has been proposed as the possible author—Paul, Barnabas, Luke Apollos. We simply do not know. Origen, a church father of the third century, summarized succinctly, "God knows." If he didn't know then, the prospects of us knowing are rather slim. What we do know is that from early days, this letter was regarded as authoritative in the sense of being from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That ought to be enough for us.

Well, let's begin and drink deep from this beautiful and bold letter.

Text: Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ²In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. God has appointed Him heir of all things and made the universe through Him. ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. ⁴So He became higher in rank than the angels, just as the name He inherited is superior to theirs.

Introduction: A popular quiz tv game show, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, asks that familiar question: "Is that your final answer?" The contestant locks in his or her answer by declaring, "That is my final answer."

In a sense, here at the beginning, the writer of Hebrews is locking in his final answer. Actually, the better way to put that is that he is locking in the eternal truth that Jesus is God's final answer.

In these opening verses there are several theological truths that we ought to make certain. The Book of Hebrews, though a letter, outlines something like a sermon. As such, the writer began with a theological base before launching into his application. In other words, he built his "so what" upon an eternal theological foundation. What was that foundation?

Jesus Reveals God to man.

We see Jesus' prophetic status in verses 1-2.

Now, we know just from our most recent studies that God spoke in a variety of ways. To Abraham, He appeared and personally spoke. To Jacob, for example, God spoke through a vision and He spoke through an all-night wrestling match. As we move farther into the Old Testament, we know that He spoke to Moses in a burning bush, to Elijah in a still small voice, to Isaiah in a vision in the Temple, to a prophet like Amos in a basket of summer fruit, to Jeremiah through the bud of an almond tree. Then, God spoke through these prophets to the people. When Isaiah, Jeremiah, or any of the other prophets spoke, the words were not the words of the prophets, they were the words of God. Thus, we read throughout the material of the prophets, "Thus says the Lord."

But, now in Jesus, God has chosen to speak through Jesus. Thus, when John in John 1 described Jesus, he did so with the Greek word, *logos*, translated "word." And so we get, "And the *logos*—word became flesh.

This is better. This is a continuing theme of the book of Hebrews. Everything is better in Jesus.

Jesus Represents God to man.

Not only is Jesus the prophet of God, He is the picture of God. I love the old story about this little boy in his Sunday School class drawing a picture. His teacher asks him, "What are you drawing?" He says, "I am drawing a picture of God." She says, "Well, you know, nobody knows what God looks like." Not to be deterred, he answered back, "They will when I get finished."

The truth is we do not know what God physically looks like. Verse 3 reveals a second important theological truth about the relationship of God, the father and the Son, Jesus. If we want to know God and what He is like, we will know Him through knowing Jesus. He is the radiance of His glory and the exact expression of His nature. This word translated exact expression is used only here in the New Testament, but outside the New Testament, it is used both for the instrument that made an impression on something and for the imprint left by the tool.

In Jesus, God gave us the exact expression of His divine nature.

Jesus Reconciles man to God.

Jesus is the prophet of God and the picture of God, but most important He is the means for the purification of sins. The Gospel comes to light in these introductory verses. The writer of Hebrews will develop this thought much more later, but here he introduces the idea of the Gospel.

Let's just glance ahead to make sure we get a taste of the importance of this purification for our sins.

Hebrews 2:9, 14-18

⁹ But we do see Jesus—made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace He might taste death for everyone—crowned with glory and honor because of His suffering in death. ¹⁴ Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the Devil— ¹⁵ and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that He does not reach out to help angels, but to help Abraham's offspring. ¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be like His brothers in every way, so that He could become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tested and has suffered, He is able to help those who are tested.

Hebrews 9:11-14, 23-25

¹¹ But the Messiah has appeared, high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), ¹² He entered the most holy place once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of the Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God?

²⁴ For the Messiah did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that He might now appear in the presence of God for us. ²⁵ He did not do this to offer Himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another.

Hebrews 10:11-12

¹¹ Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. ¹² But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.

Jesus Rules and Reigns with God.

Jesus is prophet, priest, and king! With His reigning with God, we see His eternal nature.

So what?

If Jesus is God's final answer, should he not be our final answer?

This is not the time to shrink back; this is the time to press forward!