

## **God Has Spoken to Us in a Son: A Sermon on Hebrews 1:1–4**

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“Jesus Is Better.” This is the title we’ve given our new series in Hebrews. In this book, Jesus is better than angels (1:4), brings better salvation (6:9), is better than the patriarchs in his priesthood (7:7), supplies better hope (7:19), and is the guarantor and mediator of a better covenant (7:22; 8:6) that is enacted on better promises (8:6). Jesus provides a context for better sacrifices (9:23), secures a better possession (10:34), gives a better country (11:16), and supplies better life after resurrection (11:35). He creates a better setting for believers (11:40) and has a sacrifice whose sprinkled blood provides a better word—one of forgiveness and hope, not vengeance (12:24). Because Jesus is better than anything else, Christians should keep following him. *Jesus is better, so persevere in your faith.* This is the main idea of Hebrews, and we pray this book will help you savor the superiority of Christ and motivate you to endure in difficult days. As you turn in your Bible to Hebrews 1, please pray with me....

Have you ever heard God speak? A breathtaking reality is that the living God of the universe has spoken in history in ways humans can comprehend. Follow along with me as I read Hebrews 1:1–4 from the English Standard Version.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

I ask again, have you heard God speak?

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. 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, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

In the original, verses 1–4 shape a single sentence. To help us understand the flow, I have divided my sermon into two parts: (1) God climactically spoke to us in a Son (1a–2b) and (2) the identity of the Son in whom God spoke (2c–4).

### **God Climactically Spoke to Us in a Son (1a–2b)**

When did God speak to us? First, we’re told it was after speaking “long ago, at many times and in many ways ... to our fathers by the prophets” (v. 1). “Long ago” takes us back before Jesus to the Old Testament era, in which God was

speaking to “the fathers,” which here refers to the members of the old covenant. In Hebrews the Old Testament fathers are usually negative models for Christian perseverance. It was the “fathers” who tested God and saw his works for forty years in the wilderness (3:9); it was the “fathers” who broke the old covenant (8:9). Yet it is also a remnant from this group who “died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar” (11:13).

Before God spoke to us, he spoke to these fathers “at many times and in many ways ... by the prophets” (1:1). The ESV sees “the prophets” referring to God’s covenant enforcers who received God’s word through dreams, visions, and other means (Num 12:6; 1 Pet 1:10–11). The prophet Moses mediated the old covenant, and then prophets like David and Isaiah enforced the covenant in Israel’s history. But the phrase translated “*by the prophets*” may actually mean “in the Prophets”—that is, in the prophetic writings as shorthand for some or all of the Old Testament (cf. Matt 11:13).

What is most clear is that the era (long ago), recipients (the fathers), and agents (the prophets) of the earlier revelation are now superseded in the new revelation, which has a new era (in the last days), new recipients (to us), and a new agent (in a Son). The ESV views these two groupings of thoughts as contrasting, and at some level this is true. But the original treats the relationship more as progress with the earlier Old Testament revelation climaxing in the new revelation that comes in the one God regards as a Son. The Legacy Standard Bible captures this well: “God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days spoke to us in his Son.”

So, I ask again: When did God speak to us? Not only was it after he spoke to the fathers in the prophets; it was also *in these last days*. God created “in the beginning,” but the Old Testament prophets believed it was “in the last days” that God would right all wrongs. Thus, “in the last days,” a lion king from Judah would rise, overcome his enemies, and receive the obedience of the peoples (Gen 49:1, 8–10). It’s “in the last days” that God’s kingdom would be exalted and that God’s king would lead a new exodus and rise like a star from Jacob to defeat his foes (Num 24:7–8, 14, 17–19). “In the last days” a remnant will repent and seek and obey Yahweh and the new David, their king (Deut 4:30; Hos 3:5), even as God punishes the rebels (Deut 31:29). “In the last days” the nations will stream to God’s elevated presence to hear God’s law and enjoy his justice and peace (Isa 2:2–4). With these texts, building off the vision of the day of the Lord in Joel 2, Peter stressed that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was fulfilling what Joel declared would happen “in the last days” (Acts 2:17; cf. 1 Pet 1:20–21; Heb 9:26).

From the Bible’s perspective, we are even now living in the last days. Thus, the author calls them “*these* last days,” as if he’s participating in them. What was true when he penned the words some thirty years after Jesus’s resurrection remains true today. In Jesus, God has brought a decisive word, igniting a progressive shift in salvation history from anticipation to realization, from promise to fulfillment, from expectation to climax, all focused in Jesus. Yet we still await the last day, and this is why the author later declares, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works ... as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:24–25).

“In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son” (1:1). But what does it mean that the Father “has spoken to us by/in his Son”? It certainly points to Jesus’s teaching as recorded in the Gospels, but it also likely means all that God declares through Jesus’s saving actions and his resulting sovereignty. Here we mean Jesus’s life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, which others have interpreted for God’s people in words that can be understood and appropriated. We thus read about a message of great salvation that the Lord Jesus first declared and that others who heard bore witness (2:3). Moses testified to things that were to be spoken later, things now realized in Christ (3:5). Jesus’s blood purchased forgiveness and by this speaks a hopeful word (12:24–25), and Christian leaders now proclaim God’s word (13:7).

God spoke definitively and finally in One who is a Son. To stress that God spoke to us in one who is a Son is to highlight that he wasn’t speaking to us through something created or distinct from him. To speak through one who is a Son as opposed to a mere prophet or angel is to highlight the true divine nature and elevated priestly and royal status of this figure as mediator of a new covenant and heir to God’s kingdom.

### **The Identity of the Son in Whom God Spoke (1:2c–4)**

#### ***The Ultimate Inheritor and the Agent of Creation (1:2cd)***

The author now supplies a series of statements that clarify the identity of this “Son.” First, he is the ultimate inheritor and the agent of creation. He is the Son “whom [God] appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (1:2cd).

To say that this Son will inherit all things recalls Psalm 2, which the author cites in Heb 1:5. After predicting how the nations will stand against Yahweh and his Messiah, God tells his newly established king, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:7–8; cf. Gen 17:4; 22:17–18; 26:3–4). Similarly, in Daniel 7, the Ancient of Days gives to one like a son of man “dominion and

glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:14). There is not one inch on this planet or sub-atomic particle in the universe that God does not declare as “mine” and that the Son will not rightly claim as his own. This Son is the one the author of Hebrews now envisions—a royal Son who receives all his Father owns.

This Son is also the one “through whom ... [God] created the world,” or more specifically—the “ages” (Heb 1:2d). This is the same term used in 9:26 that Christ “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” The ages include not only the times but also all the events, players, powers, and perspectives that guided them. Thus, through the agency of his Son, God created all phases of history with its time and space and things visible and invisible. Speaking of Jesus as God’s Word, John says, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1).

The implications of this are vast. In Isaiah Yahweh declares, “I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things” (Isa 45:7; cf. Eccl 7:13–14; 11:5). Everything that has been and everything that will be is created by God through the Son. Every king and every kingdom, every life and every death, every seed sown and every wind blown—created through Jesus.

### ***The Exalted Priest-King (1:3–4)***

Next, not only is God’s Son the ultimate possessor and agent of creation. He is also the exalted priest-king. While not fully clear in the ESV, verses 3–4 all work together with every statement in some way pointing to the principal clause, “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” at the end of verse 3. Thus, I translate, “[God] has spoken to us by his Son, ... who, being the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and upholding the universe by the word of his power, after making purification for sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” The Son’s specific posture of sitting and his position at the Father’s right hand elevate his royal status, and his “making purification for sins” signals his priestly status. But we begin at the head of verse 3.

Here we get a series of clauses that clarify the basis, timing, and nature of the Son’s exaltation. First, the basis of his exaltation. Why is the Son to be elevated to the right of the Father? There are two reasons. First, “he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (1:3ab). The Father’s “glory” is the outward expression of his holiness—all that distinguishes him as God. To say that the Son is “the radiance of the glory” means that to see him is to see the Father in all his beauty (John 14:9; cf. Isa 33:17). You can’t separate the light of the sun

from its source; they are one. Jesus is the effulgent manifestation of God to us. The very word that “was with God” and the word that “was God ... became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). The more you know Jesus, the more you know God. Indeed, only through Jesus do we know the Father—we receive “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Christ*” (2 Cor 4:6). In Jesus we learn what God loves and what God hates. We recognize true beauty and value. We recognize that in the Son alone is life and that to come to him is to never hunger and to believe in him is to never thirst.

Matching that Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory is that he is “the exact imprint of [God’s] nature.” This means that Jesus is so impressed by his Father, that all who see Jesus see a display of God’s greatness. This term for “nature” stresses the very essential or basic structure of a thing, so the Son perfectly represents the Father’s essence. Indeed, “in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:19; cf. 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; Phil 2:6). To see Jesus is to see what the Father is like, for this Son perfectly reflects, resembles, and represents his Father. Jesus is the very character of God himself, and this means that one cannot have a personal relationship with the true God yet deny Jesus (John 14:6).

The second reason God’s Son is now the exalted priest-king is because he is upholding “the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3). More specifically, he is carrying all things—material and immaterial, visible and invisible—to their intended ends. This is a massive claim to purposeful sovereignty. It indicates that a dog does not bark and a dandelion does not lose its seeds apart from the Son’s sustaining, even guiding hand. Every experience you and I have takes place in a universe whose every moment and every movement are upheld “by the word of his power.” There are no maverick molecules. From the lost sock under the bed to the lint that collects in the dryer, all things are being carried along by his powerful word. Pandemics and presidents rise and fall within the Son’s purposeful sovereignty. Right now, Jesus is speaking, and because of this you and I are breathing. “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:16). The invisible “rulers and authorities” that Jesus disarmed and triumphed over at the cross (2:15) were created by him and for him (1:16), and through Jesus God is working “all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11). Therefore, this Son is exalted over all.

Next, we learn of the timing of the Son’s exaltation: “After making purification for sins” (Heb 1:3d). What is sin? John Piper helpfully defines sin as

The glory of God not honored,  
 The holiness of God not revered,  
 The greatness of God not admired,  
 The power of God not praised,  
 The truth of God not sought,  
 The wisdom of God not esteemed,  
 The beauty of God not treasured,  
 The goodness of God not savored,  
 The faithfulness of God not trusted,  
 The commandments of God not obeyed,  
 The justice of God not respected,  
 The wrath of God not feared,  
 The grace of God not cherished,  
 The presence of God not prized,  
 The person of God not loved.<sup>1</sup>

That is sin. Sin is that deep seated reality in the heart of every human to prefer anything to God. And part of the Son carrying all things to their intended goal included his cleansing from sin all who are in him—removing sin’s penalty, freeing us from sin’s power, and one day delivering us from sin’s presence. As Paul says, Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession” (Tit 2:14). Or, as seen in Heb 9:14, “The blood of Jesus Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, [will] purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

Cleansing from sin is a priestly task, and within this book Jesus, the divine Son, operates as both high priest and sacrifice to make possible the new covenant relationship with God that we now enjoy. Hebrews 9:22 notes that “under the [old covenant] law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” So, to make “purification for sins” means Jesus came so we might be forgiven of all the violations we have done against God. This was necessary because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23) and because “all have sinned” (3:23).

How did Jesus provide a way for our cleansing? We’re told “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (9:22). Hence, Jesus willingly died in our place, receiving the punishment that was due us. As Yahweh promised through Isaiah regarding Jesus, “By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/sin-prefers-anything-to-god>.

(Isa 53:11; cf. 2 Cor 5:21). “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by [Jesus’s] blood, much more shall we be saved from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:8). If you are in Jesus, the anger of God is no longer against you, for it was poured out in full force against his Son. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1; cf. 8:34).

“After making purification for sins, [the Son] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). To call God “the Majesty on high” is to highlight the Father’s elevated rank and rule in the heavenlies (cf. 8:1). And to place Jesus at his right hand shows that Christ’s exaltation in no way takes glory away from the Father. Throughout Scripture the right hand is both the instrument of strength (Exod 15:6; Pss 20:6; 44:3; 89:13; Isa 41:10; 48:13) and a place of honor (1 Kgs 2:19; Ps 80:17; Jer 22:24), and it is the dual themes of Christ’s atoning work and elevated placement at the right hand of God that stand at the heart of this book’s portrait of Jesus as exalted priest-king. He is better than all created things because he is guiding all things, is the source of all things, and now sits as the exalted priest-king next to the Father overseeing all things. To sit down means that he is no longer working, no longer fighting. He finished the task he came to do, being obedient to the point of death on a cross. Yet because he was himself unblemished and without sin, death could not hold him. “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9).

But he will not remain seated forever, for Hebrews 9 tells us that “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:28), those who are longing to be freed from the evils of this world. The announcement of the Son’s exaltation to the Father’s right hand is a direct allusion to Ps 110:1, which the author cites several times, the first of which is in Heb 1:13: “And to which of the angels has [God] ever said, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?’” (cf. 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2). Christ’s enthronement is hopeful, for he is, even now, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Eph 1:21). When your baby won’t stop crying and you are so weary and worn, remember that your Savior is powerfully present and will never leave you. When family tensions rise, and you long for wisdom, remember that the maker of the moon and the one who conducts the sparrows’ songs is now for you and not against you. Regardless of what happens in the next presidential election and despite the hardships that may come in this age to our church or to our homes, we can persevere, pursuing godliness and loving one another, because we know that our future is secure and that one day the One who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high will conquer and will make all things right (cf. Heb 10:12–13, 34; 11:13). Jesus is better, so we can persevere.

Our passage ends by noting that Christ’s exaltation implies that he is superior to the angels and has inherited a name better than theirs. Angelic heavenly beings have been evident in creation from Genesis 3 with the presence of the Serpent in the garden and the cherubim guarding the way to the tree of life. And since the beginning of history, humans have believed in the spirit world and have struggled to rightly distinguish the One who alone is worthy of worship and those lesser created beings who are merely his servants.

I didn’t highlight this when discussing verse 2, but most English translations add the possessive “his” in front of “Son,” whereas the original only says “*a* Son”—“God has spoken to us through a Son.” I think the reason may relate to why he now mentions Jesus’s superiority over the angels. Angels are at times referred to as “sons of God,” as when in Job we’re told that “the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD” (Job 1:6). Now we learn in Heb 1:4 that Christ is superior to the angels. 2:2 then highlights that Old Testament revelation at times came through angels, so some may have been thinking that Jesus was just one more channel of God’s speech and not distinct. Then 2:9 actually notes that for a little while God made Jesus “lower than the angels.” So, it’s likely that some of the author’s intended readers were questioning whether Jesus was indeed superior to the other “sons of God.” When the author says that God spoke to us “by/in a Son,” he may be using the very language of his opponents, but then he goes on to indicate in the clauses that follow this particular Son is absolutely unique and better in every way. Indeed, he is the priestly-royal Son who is now elevated to the right hand of the majestic One.

To say that the Son has “inherited” a name more excellent than angels does not mean he wasn’t already “Son” before his exaltation. Indeed, it was this Son “through whom also [God] created the world” (1:2). To say that Jesus inherited the title “Son” highlights that as Messiah he came as heir of all things and that he was established as king only after his conquest of evil and destruction of sin’s power. Hence, it was after his resurrection that Jesus declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18; cf. Rom 1:5).

When you envision the throne room of heaven, picture the exalted Father with his Son at his right hand. And when you envision Jesus, picture one who has all authority, who is your advocate, and who has done all that is necessary to secure your future. Because Satan was himself a fallen angel and because Christ is superior to all angels, you never need to fear, for “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, [Jesus] himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has



the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb 2:14–18)

## **Conclusion**

On this day of September 22, 2024, as we launch official Sunday worship meetings associated with Sovereign Joy Baptist Church, we have no greater truth to cherish than that the living God has spoken to us in a Son who now sits enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He is the great priest king who by the sacrifice of himself purchased our pardon, provides us protection, and will place us in his presence forever. There is none greater, none higher, and nothing better than Christ. This morning, hear God's word through this Son and find your heart hopeful. He is carrying you even now, speaking your very life into existence and counting you in his inheritance. He has mediated a new covenant that cannot fail; therefore, let us rest and hope in our all-sovereign Savior. God has spoken in a Son. May we listen and believe.