

Hebrews 1:1-3
“The Supremacy of Christ”

Introduction:

In this letter the author admonished his readers that they were not to commit apostasy in the midst of their trials but instead were to hold fast to Christ as the only one through whom they could gain eternal life. As the letter begins, there is no identification of the author or of the recipients to whom this letter was sent. Rather the author began immediately to address his main thesis; that Christ is superior to everything found in the Old Covenant. In these first three verses, the author lists eight things about the person and work of Christ that make Him superior to anyone or anything else that one might turn to in order to find salvation. This was done to demonstrate that the reason his readers needed to persevere in their faith was because Christ was the Divine Savior in whom the entire OT revelation found its fulfillment.

I. As God’s Final Revelation to Mankind: (1-2a)

In these verses we read that *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son”* (vs.1-2a). The opening words set up a contrast between what God had done prior to the coming of Christ, with what He had done through the coming of Christ. It is written that in the past God had spoken *“at various times and in various ways”*. This translation states that one of the characteristics of God’s previous revelations was that He spoke at different times to His people. Although it is true that God did speak at various times to the nation of Israel, that is not what the Greek term used here means. The Greek word translated as *“various times”*, does not actually denote different time periods; rather it refers to something that has many parts. The idea is that God’s revelation during the Old Covenant did not come all at once, but rather various portions of the revelation were disclosed piece by piece, and though the obvious implication was that this happened over a period of time, that was not specifically stated. When the author wrote that God spoke in *“various ways”*, he was expressing that God communicated His revelation through a variety of means or modes of expression. The content of the Old Testament reveals that God spoke to His people through an audible voice, narratives, legal pronouncements, poetry, prophetic preaching, visions, dreams, angelic declarations, symbolism, and predictions about the future, and that these different messages were delivered through several diverse individuals. This was what God had done in the past. In contrast to this, through Jesus Christ and through Him alone, God revealed the entirety of New Testament truth in a relatively short period of time, and in doing so He gave His final and culminating revelation of Himself to His people. The author added that this revelation was given *“in these last days”*. This refers to the Messianic age that began at the first advent of Christ, a period of time that will continue until His return to judge the world and establish God’s Kingdom on earth. The near demonstrative pronoun *“these”* indicates that it was a period of

time that had already commenced. Therefore, here, the expression “*last days*” was not used to designate a time in the far future that would occur a short time prior to the rapture but was used to refer to the entire Church age (which is how this and other similar designations are used elsewhere in the NT-II Tim.3:1; I Pet.1:20; II Pet.3:3; Jude 18).

In verse one, when the author referred to “*in time past*” he was referring to the entire Old Testament period. And when he referred to speaking “*by the prophets*” he did not mean only those who were formally designated as prophets, but all of those through whom God spoke.

Finally, the title “*His Son*” must be understood in an Old Testament context and within the understanding the Jews had of this term in the years prior to the incarnation of Christ. Because of certain distorted versions of Christianity, some have embraced the misconception that the title “*Son*” relates to the incarnation, and that the title “*Father*” relates to His generation of Christ’s humanity. However, the title is actually purely Messianic and comes from God’s promise in the Davidic Covenant that God would make David’s heir, His Son. The title has nothing to do with His birth, it describes a form of adoption where a favored individual is given a position of prominence and is made an heir. This is how the title would have been understood by a primarily Jewish Christian audience in the first century.

II. As Heir of All Things: (2b)

In this portion of the verse, we read that the author elaborated on the identity of the one called “*His Son*” by writing, “*whom He has appointed heir of all things*”. The idea here is that everything that belongs to the Father also belongs to the Son. Therefore, Christ is ultimately the one who owns or possesses all things; and it is His prerogative to do with it, as He sees fit. The Greek word translated as “*appointed*” means to put someone or something in place. It conveys that Jesus the Messiah was given the role of heir by God the Father; therefore, it was God’s sovereign will that all things would ultimately belong to the Messiah. The idea of inheritance was a significant one in the Old Testament. It represented gaining blessing or privilege because of one’s relationship to God. In this case the emphasis is on the idea that everything that exists is under the authority of Christ, because God has entrusted these things to Him. Therefore, if anyone seeks anything from God, they need to appeal to Christ in order to receive it.

III. As Creator of the Ages: (2c)

In the last clause of the verse, we read that not only did God appoint the Messiah as His heir over everything, it was the Messiah “*through whom also He made the worlds*”. The preposition “*through*” conveys the idea that the Messiah was the agent that God employed to accomplish His work of creation. The Greek word translated as “*worlds*” does not have an exact English counterpart. Properly, the word refers to ages or eons, long periods of time. However, it is clear from its usage that the word also related to the physical creation. The idea that the author was conveying by using this term (rather than the more common “*kosmos*”) was that not

only did the Father create the entire material universe through the Son (John 1:2; Col.1:16); He also ordained the various eras of history that were to unfold according to God's providential purpose. This means that everything that was made, and everything that has come to pass, are all the handiwork of the omnipotent Messiah (see Dan.2:21; Acts 17:26 which also speak of God ordaining the course of history).

IV. As the Radiance of God's Glory: (3a)

In this portion of verse three, as the author continues to write about the Messiah, He wrote "*who being the brightness of His glory*". The Greek word translated as "*brightness*" refers to the stream of light or the beams of light that radiate from a light source. The word can refer to the original source of light, or it can refer to light that reflects off another object. So, one might think that the author was saying that as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so Christ reflects the glory that emanates from the Father. However, that does not seem to be the author's intent. The author's main purpose throughout the letter was to show the incomparable superiority of Christ to everyone and everything that preceded Him. If the author were saying Christ merely reflected the glory of God, then he would be indicating that in that way He was simply identical to Moses, because for a time, in his face, Moses reflected the glory of God (Ex.34:29-35). Doing that would undermine the author's argument. Therefore, he was expressing that Christ radiated the same glory as God Himself. The word "*glory*" refers to the brilliant splendor of God's perfections, and since Christ radiates this as well, He is as glorious as the Father.

V. As the Perfect Representation of God: (3b)

Next, the author of Hebrews wrote that the Son is "*the express image of His person*". The Greek word translated as "*express image*" was used literally to refer to the impression made by a press or stamp upon metal, or upon a wax seal. For instance, this word was used to refer to making an impression of an image onto a moldable surface such as a coin. The word then came to be used in a figurative way to describe anything that had an identical appearance to something else. The likeness that the Messiah was said to share with God lay in what the translation labels as God's "*person*". The Greek term that the author used refers to the essential nature of a person or thing. Thus, the author was saying that the Messiah was identical in nature to God the Father.

VI. As Sustainer of All Things: (3c)

Next, the author wrote that the Son was "*upholding all things by the word of His power*". The Greek participle translated as "*upholding*" means to bear or carry something from one place to another. The idea then is that Christ not only created all things, He also continues to sustain them as well (expressing the same idea that Paul conveyed in Colossian 1:17, when He wrote that "*in Him all things consist*"). The idea is that the Messiah continually holds the universe together so that it does not fall apart. So, here we read of yet another Divine work accomplished through

the mediation of the Son. There are two things that are helpful to understand about this participle. First, it is in the present tense, indicating that the stress of the word is upon the idea that this is an action that is continual and ongoing (i.e. the Son is continually sustaining the creation). Second, the basic meaning implies that the object of the upholding is being taken somewhere; and thus, the point is that in addition to Christ holding things together, so the creation does not fall apart, He also is making sure that history reaches the goal that God has ordained for His creation.

The means by which the Messiah holds everything together is “*by the word of His power*”. This statement indicates that the way that Christ sustains the universe mirrors the process of the original creation, He does it through the agency of His word, just as we are told that God spoke creation into existence at the beginning (Gen.1). The specific Greek term translated as “*word*” refers to a spoken word, and this strengthens the association with the original creation narrative. Then the author modifies the term “*word*” with the genitive expression “*of His power*”. This modifier obviously stresses the idea of the awesome power that the Son possesses in His word.

VII. As Savior from Sin: (3d)

Then the author of Hebrews added “*when He had by Himself purged our sins*”. There is actually no temporal adverb in the original Greek clause, the word “*when*” was added to make chronological sense of the sequence. This may or may not be legitimate, but it is certainly not an idea that was specifically expressed by the inspired author. In addition, the words “*by Himself*” do not represent any actual words in the original Greek text. It represents an unnecessary and distracting addition, since the actual statement does not stress that Christ acted alone. Instead, the stress was on what Christ accomplished on behalf of believers. The idea of purification came from Old Testament imagery regarding how God accomplished the forgiveness of sins. The imagery pictured the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement removing the guilt of sin from God’s people. Forgiveness was thus metaphorically compared to the idea of cleansing something. Sin was pictured as a moral stain upon one’s person that made one unacceptable to be in God’s presence, and the blood of the sacrifice was pictured as the cleansing agent. This imagery ultimately pointed to Christ’s redemptive death that removes a believer’s moral guilt before God by paying the penalty for sin, which was death, a penalty required by the justice of God.

VIII. As Co-Regent of the Universe: (3e)

The author concluded His description of the Messiah by writing that He “*sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*”. The title, “*the majesty on high*” was a reverent way of referring to God that stressed His position of authority by picturing Him sitting on a throne in Heaven as the ruler of all creation. The imagery of being at someone’s right hand reflected the custom in the ancient world where a king would place his son on a throne next to him on his right side. In that

culture it conveyed that the son was vested with his father's authority and would inherit the throne when His father died. And finally, to sit down was imagery in that setting that indicated that whatever action the given ruler was engaged in had been completed.

The overall phrase conveys two things: first, the redemptive work spoken about in the previous clause was understood to have been completed; second, the Son was in the position of being co-regent with the Father and thus sovereign over the entire universe.

Conclusion:

These eight realities about the Son are listed here to make it clear that the Son, by virtue of His nature and work, is above everything else, and thus there could be no one or nothing that could compare with Him. No one or nothing was capable of doing on the reader's behalf what Christ could do. The author then expanded on this basic truism by showing that Christ was superior to everything that the Old Covenant offered. The point, as the epistle will eventually make clear, is that there was no hope to be found in retreating to Judaism. This was because everything in Judaism ultimately pointed to the redemptive work of the Messiah, and therefore, without Him, there was no hope of receiving the salvation that was promised in the Old Testament.