

SESSION SEVEN

THE PROLOGUE TO THE BOOK

Heb 1:1-4

I. THE RELATION OF THE PROLOGUE TO THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

A. The Message of the Book [for an outline of the book, see *Suppl. 4.2*]

Since Jesus is superior in both His person and His priestly ministry in establishing the New Covenant as a replacement for the Old, believers must faithfully endure with Him in order to obtain the promised rewards that await them in His coming kingdom.

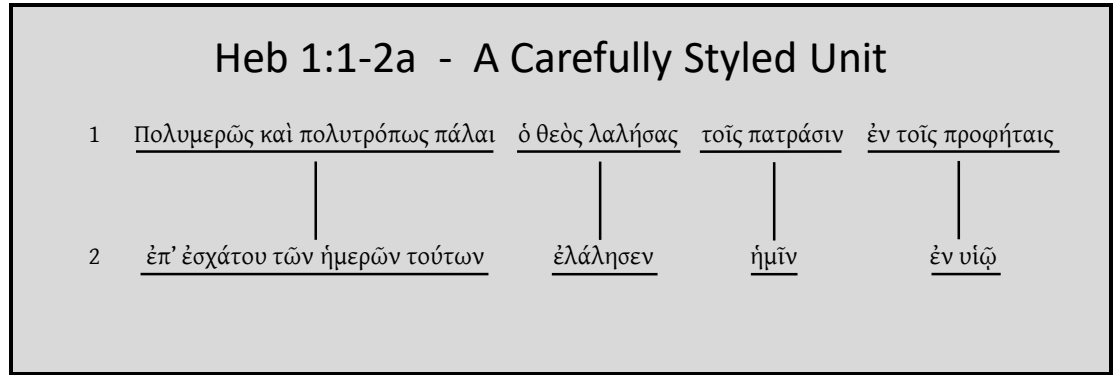
B. The Prologue serves to prepare the readers for the remainder of ch. 1 as well as for the whole book. Notice these elements:

1. God has spoken by the Son 2:1; 12:25
(what God has revealed through Him is supremely important and must be carefully heeded)
2. He is better than the angels developed in 1:5-14; 2:6-9
(sets the stage for the first major point to be made about the superiority of the New Covenant compared with the Old)
3. The Son is heir 1:8 ("Thy throne is forever"); cf. 1:12c,d
4. The Son is Creator 1:10-12 (yet superior to it, as He outlasts it); comp. 12:27-28
5. "sitting at right hand" 1:13 and throughout the epistle (note 8:1; 10:12; 12:2)
(Ps 110 will be the primary background for the book)
6. purification of sin 9:11-10:18 (related to His priesthood; 2:17; 5:6; ch. 7, etc)

II. THE LITERARY STRUCTURING

(note: For the possibility of 1:1-4 comprising a carefully worked chiasmic structure, see Daniel J. Ebert, "The Chiasmic Structure of the Prologue to Hebrews," *Trinity Journal* 13 (1992): 163-179. In his view, the "chiasmic structure draws particular attention to the threefold function of the Son as prophet, priest, and king" [176]. All three are significantly related to the book as a whole [see pp 176-79]. He is uniquely qualified to be the One through whom God has spoken His final word.)

A. 1:1-2a is a unity



B. Implications

1. Heb 1:1-2a gives us the basic assertion:

What God has now revealed through the Son is the climactic revelation that He has made to man.

2. Heb 1:2b-4 gives a supporting assertion:

These verses depict the Son's greatness—the supreme excellence of the One whom God has spoken through.

III. THE BASIC ASSERTION

- A. To say that God has "spoken" means that He has **revealed** Himself and His will to man.

- B. The phrase ἐπ' ἔσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων must be understood in light of the context of the book. The contrast is between God's revelation during the time of the Old Covenant and that which He has now revealed with the inauguration of the New Covenant. "These last days" is a reference to the *days of the New Covenant*, i.e., the coming of Jesus and the establishment of the New Covenant by His blood.

The whole book of Hebrews revolves around the concept of the New Covenant, which will be formally presented in ch. 8 (in which the author will quote Jer 31:31ff.).

When the New Covenant was formally announced in Jer 31:31, it was introduced with the words ἡμέραι ἔρχονται ("days are coming"). Now that those "days" are here (via the crucifixion), the author of Hebrews can look at this period as "the last days." In conjunction with the coming of the New Covenant, we also have the age of the Holy Spirit. Hence, Acts 2:17 quotes from Joel 2:28 ("I will pour out My Spirit") to show that the Day of Pentecost

was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy taking place "in the last days." So with the Day of Pentecost, the age of the Spirit had come!

C. The Logic Syllogism

1. The Old Covenant was mediated through angels.
2. Christ is superior to the angels.
3. Hence, the revelation through Christ is superior.

D. The Implications

This basic assertion has practical implications which the author will develop in the progress of the book (see Ebert, p 177-178 for details). In particular, this is emphasized strongly in the first and final warning sections of the book.

1. Heb 2:1-4

"For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."

Point: If the Old Covenant had consequences for failure to heed that revelation, how much more consequential will failure be to heed the greater revelation through God's Son!

2. Heb 12:25-28

"See that you do not refuse him who is speaking . . ."

IV. THE SUPPORTING ASSERTION OF THE SON'S GREATNESS

Introduction: As important as the revelation was under the Old Covenant, what has now been revealed through the Son is even more significant. Vv 2b-4 will substantiate this by highlighting the excellence of the Son.

A. The Son's Destiny

1. The very first thing that He mentions about the Son is the role that He is to have in the future. He is slated by the Father to be "heir of all things."
2. The mention of His heirship anticipates His future reign as king.
 - a. **Support:** Ps 2 is very much on our author's mind (note Heb 1:5). This psalm unites the thoughts of God's Son being king (Ps 2:6) with the expectation of His inheritance (Ps 2:8).
Ps 2:8 - "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations (ἔθνη) as Thine inheritance (κληρονομία), and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession."
 - b. The Biblical Anticipation of the Kingdom Given to the Son

(1) Old Testament Anticipations

- (a) 2 Sam 7:11b-16 - a son of David will have an eternal throne-kingdom
- (b) Ps 2 clarifies that the fulfillment comes at the Second Coming of Christ

Ps 2:9 speaks of the Son's triumph over His enemies ("Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron"). This is quoted in Rev 19 in the context of the Second Coming.

- (c) Dan 7:13-14

Notice that this chapter clarifies the *time* of this bestowal.

It will be after the time of power of the "little horn" and the "10 horns"

(2) New Testament Anticipations

- (a) Fullness of the kingdom still awaits the Second Coming.
 - i)* Lk 21:25-31
 - ii)* Rev 11:14-15
- (b) There is a sense, however, in which Christ's kingdom has already begun (He has been exalted as the Davidic king).

Phases of the Messianic Kingdom:

- i)* Present Phase (Christ exercises His authority in building the Church)
- ii)* Millennial Phase (1000 years in the present creation)
- iii)* Eternal Phase (in the realm of the New Creation)

(3) Clarification

Christ has been inaugurated as the promised Davidic king and exercises His authority in leading His Church in the task of the Great Commission, but the entire world has not yet recognized Him as king and been brought into submission. When the author of Hebrews speaks of Christ as the "appointed heir of all things," he is thinking of the inheritance that will be bestowed on the Son at the 2nd Coming.

- c. Satan's plan is directed at preventing Christ from receiving His inheritance (Mt 21:33-46).

3. Implication

Although the author does not elaborate the implications that the Son is destined for a universal inheritance, this is his first step in developing this motif. As the book

unfolds, the implications will be drawn out: namely, those who faithfully endure with Christ will benefit with Him and share in His inheritance.

B. The Son's Role Regarding Creation (Heb 1:2b)

Having reflected on the greatness awaiting the Son in the future, the second clause of vv 2b looks back to the distant past to consider the Son's greatness at the "beginning." The Son was the very *mediator* of Creation (cf. Jn 1:3,10; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16).

Point: He has the right to be King, since He Himself is our Maker!

Note: The plural αἰῶνας should not be overstressed. The word often means "time, ages" but can be used to mean the "world" (cf. Heb 11:3). The plural is probably following the Hebrew pattern (e.g., *heavens* for Heaven). Note *Bl-D* § 141(1).

C. The Son's Nature as God (Heb 1:3a)

Χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ - The Greek word ὑποστάσεως stresses one's real being, what He is in essence.

Point: All that God is, the Son is! This is a very bold statement of His deity.

Lesson: One of the reasons why the OT has such a strong prohibition against the representation of God *in any form* is that the best of attempts to do so would fail to depict God as He really is. Man simply cannot represent God by inanimate objects. The one and only "representation" of God is the Lord Jesus Christ. He faithfully represents who God is and what He is like. That is what χαρακτήρ means: a faithful representation (used of making the impression on coins).

D. The Son's sustaining power of creation (Heb 1:3b)

φέρων means "bear, carry", but it can also mean to "bear something up," i.e., to uphold it (see BAG 855a 1b). That is the sense the word has here: the Son upholds or sustains EVERYTHING by His word. It is not enough that the Son made the world . . . He also sustains it.

The word δυνάμις in the phrase τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ -

this is probably a *genitive of attribute*, and hence could be rendered "by His powerful word" (cf. *Sir.* 39:6 ῥήματα σοφίας αὐτοῦ).

Point: Everything in the created order is upheld/sustained by the Son's powerful word! This is just as powerful as the word which brought creation into being. This implies on the one hand that we had best obey His word, but on the other hand that He is able to sustain those going through a trial of their faith.

E. The Son's atoning work for mankind (Heb 1:3c)

1. The πτε ποιησάμενος is best understood as a temporal circumstantial participle. Hence, "when He had made purification of sins . . ."

2. This statement looks to the Son's work as priest, and in fact He Himself is the sacrifice that made purification from sins possible.¹
 Notice that in the prologue, the Son is depicted as both king and priest, a fact that the author will wish to emphasize later in the epistle (e.g., Heb 5:5-6 where two quotations are made, one depicting the Son's kingship and the other His priestly role).
3. Notice the connection which each of the three participles has:
 - ὢν - relates the Son to God the Father
 - φέρων - relates the Son to creation
 - ποιησάμενος - relates the Son to mankind (i.e., to us!)
4. These three participles lead up to the statement in 1:3d "He has sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high."
Significance:
 - a. Alludes to Ps 110! His priestly ministry of dying for sins is complete, perfect, and acceptable to the Father. This idea is quite significant to our author (compare 8:1; 10:12; and 12:2).
 - b. He has been given a place of supreme authority and highest honor (cf. 1 Kgs 2:19). This is in view of His resurrection and ascension. Hence, He is in a royal position.
 - c. "on high" - stresses that it is a heavenly enthronement, not a mere earthly one.

V. THE CONCLUSION TO THE PROLOGUE (Heb 1:4)

- A. The Son "has become as much better than the angels . . ."
 1. The connection with "angels" (a hook-word) links 1:1-4 with 1:5-14.
 2. Why the comparison with angels?
 The argument is building toward Heb 2:2 and the tradition of angels as mediators in the giving of the Law (hence, the Old Covenant). Note Acts 7:53 and Gal 3:19!
 3. How can the Son be said to "have become" better? Was He not always so?
 Certainly, the Son has always been superior to angels. But our author is thinking of the Son in His role as High Priest and His redemptive work. The completion of that redemptive work is the capstone to His superiority. With His resurrection and

¹The MT adds the words δι' ἑαυτοῦ to the beginning of this statement, which is reflected in the *NKJV* "when He had by Himself purged our sins."

ascension, He is in a superior position in regard to angels. Now He is exalted as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) and entrusted with "all authority" (Mt 28:18).

B. "Inherited a more excellent name"

The author is not just thinking of the word "son" alone, but all that is implied in His status as Son. The role of "son" implies a significantly greater status, including His role as High Priest (note the uniting of ideas in Heb 5:5-6). He will use other terms for the Son, including θεος and πρωτοτοκος.

Note that the verb "inherited" is perfect tense. The Son is eternal, but there is a unique occasion upon which He enters into the fullness of this role. This is probably looking at the Son's crucifixion-resurrection-exaltation. With this event, He inherits the "son" role fully.

VI. LESSONS FOR OUR LIFE

This passage reminds us that God has gone to great lengths to communicate with us and to reveal Himself to us. Had God wanted to do so, He could have continued to "speak" through prophets. But that was not enough for Him. He loves us so deeply, that He was willing to take the form of a man and come among us . . . even though He would be abused and humiliated in the process. If God was willing to undergo all that in order to reveal Himself and His will to us, shouldn't that motivate us to make the study of His Word one of the top priorities of our life. Let's commit ourselves afresh to always be men and women of the Word. Let's learn all that He has revealed.

VII. SUMMARY OF THE PROLOGUE

Summary: God has spoken His ultimate word through the exalted Son of God, who as high priest has atoned for our sins and as royal king awaits His full inheritance.

Implication: We must carefully heed what God has to say through Him.

[see Ebert, pp 177-78, on the significance of this in relation to all five warning passages]