

Hebrews 1:1-4 – “The Final Word”

Have you ever committed to something and wondered, *Is this really a good idea?* To illustrate this, let me introduce you to Lawnchair Larry...

- Back in July of 1982, Larry Walters bought 42 helium weather balloons, tied them to a regular Sears lawn chair, strapped on a parachute, packed a BB gun (to shoot balloons for descent), a CB radio, sandwiches, and a six-pack of beer.

He expected to float a few hundred feet above his backyard. However, when he cut the rope anchoring him to the ground he shot straight up like a rocket to 16,000 feet.

He drifted directly into the main approach path for Los Angeles International Airport. Two airline pilots radioed the tower reporting a man in a lawn chair holding a gun at 16,000 feet.

For 45 minutes he floated over Los Angeles, freezing, too scared to shoot any balloons in case he fell.

Here was a man regretting a decision he had made.

Eventually he started popping them one by one and slowly came down. He landed tangled in power lines in Long Beach, causing a blackout. Police came and arrested him and the FAA fined him \$4,000.

He ended up becoming a national folk hero – “Lawnchair Larry” – and later inspired the movie “Up”.

It ended ok for Larry, but sometimes we can really wonder, *Is this such a good idea?*

The book of Hebrews is being written to a group of people who were asking this same question. *Are we really doing the right thing? Is this really a good idea?*

Before we get into those questions, let’s first look at the Who, When, What, and Why of this letter.

Who:

The author of this book is anonymous. It’s the only New Testament book where the one who wrote it has remained a mystery.

Several suggestions have been made: Paul, Barnabas (he was a Levite and this book has a lot to do with the temple duties), Apollos (this book is written with

great eloquence and he was an eloquent man – Acts 18:24), Silas, Luke, Philip, Priscilla and Aquilla.

But if I may be so bold today, I'm going to reveal who wrote the book of Hebrews: The Holy Spirit!

- **2 Peter 1:20–21**, *"knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."*
- Because we don't know the writer is no reason to discount the writing. It's been preserved through history as authentic and reliable, finding its rightful place in the canon of Scripture. We know that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable... (2 Tim 3:16).

Now I've often attributed this book to a Pauline authorship, but I'm not so sure it's an easy conclusion to make. It's still possible, there are some arguments to be made for it. Some have wondered if Paul (or whoever the author was) concealed his identity to protect the readers of this letter and to not sway them in a negative way. The fact the author mentions imprisonment and his close connection to Timothy give thought to Paul being the author.

The arguments against Pauline authorship are that this book is written in a very different style than his other epistles. Old Testament references are all quoted from the Septuagint, whereas Paul would quote both the Septuagint and Hebrew Scriptures. He always identified himself as the author in his other epistles, this time he doesn't.

- "Best suggestion for authorship is that given by Origen, Christian leader in the third century, who said, "But as to who actually wrote the epistle, God knows the truth of the matter.""¹

When:

This letter would have been written before 70A.D. There are many references to the temple and the sacrifices as though they were still taking place. A date of around 63-65A.D. is a good suggested timeline of the writing of this letter.

This leads us to the...

What:

¹ Lea, T. D. (1999). *Hebrews, James* (Vol. 10, p. 1). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

It seems that the audience is primarily Jewish Christians. Thus the name of the book: Hebrews. These are Jewish Christians that have been going through difficulty because of their new-found faith in Christ.

“Now when a Jew left the faith of his forefathers, he was looked on as a turncoat and an apostate (meshummed), and was often punished with one or more of the following:

- Disinheritance by his family.
- Excommunication from the congregation of Israel.
- Loss of employment.
- Dispossession.
- Mental harassment and physical torture.
- Public mockery.
- Imprisonment.
- Martyrdom.”²

This was no easy road for these Jewish Christians.

Plus, many believe that the author is writing to a group of believers who are living in Rome (a closing greeting will come from those in Italy in 13:24).

- Around this time Rome had a huge fire and Nero was being blamed. In order to deflect this attention he began to blame the Christians for Rome being set ablaze. Heavy persecution of the Christians at the hands of Nero began to set in after 64A.D.
- So these Christians were wondering if they had made the right decision becoming followers of Christ. Judaism had legal status under Roman law and so there was protection and peace within Judaism.
- Was being a follower of Jesus really the best decision?

So this is what the author sets out to address...

Why:

This book is being written in response to the Jewish Christians who were second guessing their commitment to Christ. They were still seeing the practices of Judaism taking place and were being pulled back into the comfort of former things. They were doubting their faith and becoming sluggish in their walk with

² MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 2156). Thomas Nelson.

Christ. This letter will center around 5 main exhortations or warnings to encourage these believers to not give up.

1. Don't Drift – 2:1-4
2. Don't Doubt – 3:7-4:13
3. Don't Decrease – 5:11-6:20
4. Don't Disobey – 10:26-39
5. Don't Deny – 12:15-29

This book is about leading us on to maturity. It's so that we will stay connected or anchored to Christ. He's our only hope!

- “But how does one encourage such people in critical and adverse times? The author knows they must be urged to ‘hold fast’, to ‘strive to enter’, to ‘go on to maturity’, to ‘seize the hope’ set before them (3:6; 4:11, 14; 6:1, 18) and so on. Yet he can only make such eloquent and necessary pastoral exhortations because he has already done a far more basic thing. First, as a matter of the utmost importance, he has turned their eyes, not to themselves, hoping for sufficient inward strength, nor to their agonizing troubles, nor to their persecuting contemporaries, but to Christ. No believer can cope with adversity unless Christ fills his horizons, sharpens his priorities and dominates his experience.”³

“C. S. Lewis memorably portrayed the growing Christian’s experience of an ever-enlarging Christ in his *Chronicles of Narnia*. Lucy, caught up in her spiritual quest, saw the lion Aslan—Christ—shining white and huge in the moonlight. In a burst of emotion Lucy rushed to him, burying her face in the rich silkiness of his mane, whereupon the great beast rolled over on his side so that Lucy fell, half-sitting and half-lying between his front paws. He bent forward and touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath was all around her. She gazed up into the large, wise face.

“Welcome, child,” he said.

“Aslan,” said Lucy, “you’re bigger.”

“That is because you are older, little one,” answered he.

“Not because you are?”

“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.””^{1 4}

³ Brown, R. (1988). *The message of Hebrews: Christ above all* (pp. 13–14). InterVarsity Press.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (London: Fontana Books, 1980), pp. 122–124.

⁴ Hughes, R. K. (1993). *Hebrews: an anchor for the soul* (Vol. 1, p. 17). Crossway Books.

That's what we want to do in Hebrews. We want to keep looking unto Christ. And as we grow and mature, Jesus will become greater and greater. He already is, but do we live like He is?

This letter is very much an appeal to endure. Don't look backwards, don't retreat, rather keep looking unto Jesus. He's greater than anything else you can put your trust or confidence in.

That will become a major theme as we go through this letter. We'll see the superiority, perfection, and greatness of Jesus over everything else this audience (and us) may turn to.

We see the evidence of these themes by a couple words we'll see repeated often in Hebrews:

- **Better** is used 13 times in 12 verses: 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24.
- **Perfect** (or similar) is used 13 times: 2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1; 7:11, 19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23.

“Coleridge said that Romans revealed the *necessity* of the Christian faith but that Hebrews revealed the *superiority* of the Christian faith.” ⁵

1:1-3 - God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Right away the author establishes something important for us – God. God is at the beginning of all things. Just as the Bible begins – *in the beginning God...*

And we also see that God is a speaking God. God desires to communicate with us and that communication is for the purpose of communing with us; being in relationship with Him. That's the story of the Bible – God's redemptive plan of saving humanity so that we can know Him and be with Him.

⁵ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 503). Thomas Nelson.

What a blessing!

We read here that God spoke at **various times** (Gk. *polymerōs*). This means He spoke many times. It wasn't all just laid out at once. He spoke often and revealed His will progressively over a period of time.

He also spoke in **various ways** (Gk. *polytropōs*). He could have just shouted down from heaven for the whole world to hear, but you remember the response when He did from Mt. Sinai:

- *"Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'"* (**Exodus 20:19**).

So God communicated to His people in various ways:

- In a visitation to Abraham, a dream to Joseph, a burning bush to Moses, by a donkey to Balaam, a still small voice to Elijah, in a vision to Isaiah and Ezekiel, to Hosea through family hardships. God spoke by an audible voice, or by signs, parables, and different events.

But He spoke mostly through His **prophets**.

Time past spoke of the age prior to His Son coming. It's the Old Testament age where God was sharing His revelation and directing His people.

But the point of showing this is to show how He now speaks to His people in a greater way – **by His Son**.

- **Matthew 11:13**, *"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."*
- This period here refers to the **time past** we saw in vs. 1.
- John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. He came, like every other prophet to point people to God's will and work.

And now that Jesus is here, we don't need anything else!

Jesus was a greater revelation of God. He wasn't contrary, or in place of previous revelations. He was a more complete revelation of God.

Jesus didn't just come with new revelation about God, He came as the incarnation of God.

We appreciate all these prophets. I particularly appreciate guys like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea who had difficult truths to not only speak but to live out. But nothing they said or did communicated, or revealed to us, God's message as well as Jesus!

- Listen to what **John 8:25-29** says, *“Then they said to Him, ‘Who are You?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. ²⁶ I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.’ ²⁷ They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. ²⁸ Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. ²⁹ And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.’”*

The prophets spoke periodically a revelation for God, but Jesus was a constant and consistent revelation of God.

- Remember when Jesus revealed His glory to James, John, and Peter on the Mt. of Transfiguration, they saw Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus also in glory. Peter wasn't sure what to do, he was just in awe, so he says, let's make three tabernacles and let's camp out here in this glory. But then a voice came from the cloud: *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!* (**Matthew 17:4-6**).

We are to ‘*hear Him*’ above anything else because this is how God speaks to us ***in these last days***.

- This is a term to speak of the period of time from Christ's ascension to His Second Coming. The last days are speaking in a theological sense rather than a chronological sense.

So, to reveal the greatness of Jesus over the prophets and any other potentially rivaling thing, we see 7 statements that reveal the superiority of Jesus.

- 1) He's the ***heir of all things***... This means that all are His. He rules over all things and He rightfully does because...
- 2) ***He made the worlds***... This word for world in the Greek is *aeon*. It can speak of the world, the universe, or a period of time – an age. Jesus wasn't inactive for a time and then burst on the scene at His birth in Bethlehem. He's eternal and not only eternal, He's Creator!
John 1:1-4, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”*

Colossians 1:16–17, *"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."*

- 3) He's **the brightness of His glory**... Jesus didn't just reflect the glory of God, He radiates the glory of God. It's inherent within Him. To look at Jesus is to see God. The glory is the full manifestation of the divine attributes and essence of God.
- 4) He's **the express image of His person**... Jesus represents fully who God is. He is the exact replication of God. This word **image** is the Greek word *charaktēr*. It was a word writers used to describe the Emperor's picture on Roman coins made by a stamp. It was not just a likeness, it was the exact duplication of the original image. In other words, Jesus is not just a likeness of God, He is the exact duplication of Him.
- 5) He **upholds all things by the word of His power**... This means that He is actively maintaining all things. He's holding it all together. He has everything in control and responding to Him – even with a simple spoken word. Jesus showed us this often in His ministry, speaking a word and having storms calm, speaking a word and having people healed.
Are there times where you feel like things are coming apart? Then look to the One who is holding it all together. Since Jesus has the power to keep the very universe from unravelling, He has the power to keep you together too! Lean on Him, set yourself apart to Him, then you won't come a part.
Colossians 1:17, *"And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."* [are held together].
- 6) He's **purged our sins**... Think about this – the Creator and Sustainer of everything we see, has now become our sin-bearer! He stepped into His creation and took upon Himself our sins. He paid the penalty for them so we could be reconciled to God.
- 7) He has **sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**... When Jesus hung on the cross, He said, **it is finished**. It's paid in full. The work of redemption is now complete.
In the tabernacle or temple, there were no chairs for the priests to sit or relax. But now Jesus is at rest. And not in an idle or passive way – for He is seated at the right hand (the place of power and prominence) making intercession for us (Romans 8:34).
And in Christ we too can rest in His finished work on the cross. We are saved by His grace, not our work. Hallelujah for that!!

In these last 2 verses we saw seven facts about Jesus that declares His greatness:

(1) He is the heir of all things (2) He is the Creator (3) He radiates the glory of God (4) He is the image of God (5) He is the Sustainer (6) He is the Redeemer (7) He is seated in heaven. He holds all authority!

So Jesus is infinitely better and superior to the prophets. Though they spoke the Word of God, they could not fully reveal God or do the Work of God – Jesus did! Because Jesus is greater!

And He's not only greater than the prophets, He is greater than the angels...

1:4 - *having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*

Angels may be mighty and glorious, but Jesus is greater. He's the only name by which people may be saved. He bears the name of God – YHWH.

Philippians 2:9–11, *"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*