

Hebrews 1:1-4

Encountering God's Ultimate Word

In Greek vs1-4 is one sentence. It is a *periodos*, several clauses organised into a well-rounded unity. This is a beauty which the author of Hebrews will use a lot in this book.

The opening words of Hebrews must be seen in the context of the drowsiness that has overcome this community. This is because the author is now trying to restore the spiritual vitality that these believers experienced in earlier days. Thus he has crafted his first 4 verses, engaging himself, hoping that they will also be engaged.

1-2a - God Has Spoken Through His Son!

vs1-2a. *“Long ago.... God spoke to our Fathers by the Prophets... last days... by His Son....”*

God had spoken to Israel by the prophets long ago, but now He has spoken through His Son.

- Long ago = from the beginning till John the Baptist.
- Our Fathers = Their fathers before them reaching back into the OT
- by the prophets = Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua... etc
- last days = since the birth of Christ.
- By (a) Son = Jesus

1. Common Ground

1. The writer first finds common ground with his listeners. He reminds them of something they received and accepted long ago. *God had spoken to their fathers long ago by the prophets.*

2. Reassures

1. He is providing certainty to a people who are not sure about anything. He is giving them a leg to stand on. They know that God spoke to their fathers, that is something which is certain!

3. Contrast/Claim

1. The writer also is making a contrast between God's word in the past and His word in the present. At the same time He is making a claim! God has spoken! God has spoken to you!

1. For the readers this is something which they are beginning to wonder. Did God speak? Did God really give us a word?

1. In the garden of Eden what was the first thing the devil did? He asked Eve if God had spoken! He was trying to get her to doubt God's word...

1. *The devil will begin to lull you asleep when he gets you to doubt Gods word!*

2. The author is now making the claim that *God has spoken!*

1. There are some similarities but differences!

1. Similarities – God did speak in the past to their fathers! God has spoken to them now! They and their fathers both received a word from God! This is going to be an idea the writer is going to develop later.

2. Differences – God spoke in many ways long ago by the prophets. God has now spoken to them in a Son.

1. Time (long ago/ last days – finality)

2. Amount (many various – finality of his work)

3. Quality (prophets – a Son (Jesus' words are God's words).

1. What's the point? Though God spoke to their fathers, God has spoken His ultimate Word to them in a Son. *They have received God's ultimate Word.*

4. Certainty

1. The fact that God has spoken His ultimate word to them gives them certainty. They are disorientated. They are not sure if they have heard right. He first provided certainty by reminding them that God had spoken to their fathers. Now he is providing certainty that God has spoken to them, and this word is the ultimate word! There is not a great word to come.

5. Responsibility

1. Since God has spoken, and spoken His ultimate word to them in a Son, they unlike any other people have the privilege and responsibility to listen/respond to that word!

2b-4 - How God Spoke Through His Son!

The author made the claim in vs1-2a that God had spoken! That they had received God's ultimate word. Now he is showing how God spoke to them.

1. The clauses “whom he made heir of all things”, “through whom He made the worlds”, “having made purification for sins”, and “sat down at the right hand of the majesty in the highest” - with all of their aorist verbs (these things have happened!) elaborate on how God ha spoken in a Son.
 1. Jesus' coming to earth and exaltation, His word and His ways are God's speech to us.

The Author is directing their gaze to Jesus. In vs2b-3, he gives us 7 descriptions of the Son.

1. “...appointed heir of all things...”
 - Jesus is the heir, He will inherit all things. Everything will be given to Him (all of creation). The emphasis of this phrase is upon the future time when Jesus will be recognised and acknowledged as Lord of all. Jesus is the hear, all things already belong to Him in principle, just as they will actually and finally be His at the end.
 - As the Heir, He is the Lord of all creation.
 - Responding to their Crisis – This statement is a response to what is happening in the community. He acknowledges in 2:8 “that they do not see all things in subjection” to the Son. Even though they don't see this, the author is now affirming that Jesus is the Son and is “heir of all things”.
 - Jesus is also heir of the promises. (Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets). All the words that God had spoken to their fathers find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.
 - *Jesus is Lord, the fulfilment of the promises of God.* Luke 24:13-27 – all scripture speaks of Christ. How do you understand the old Testament? Jesus, his suffering and death, and exaltation is the key which unlocks it!
2. “...through whom He made the universe...”
 - Jesus as instrumental in the creation of all that exists. The importance of this phrase is that it sets Jesus apart from all of creation. Jesus, the Son belongs with God who is the source of all creation, Jesus is not to be ranked with the creation as a created being. He was not created, but with God is the source of all creation.
 - Jesus is co-equal with God.
 - Responding to their Crisis – again this statement is a response to their crisis. They don't see Jesus as the king. It looks like Jesus is not the king. Here the author is showing them that Jesus is above creation. No matter how things look here, Jesus is and always will be above them.
 - These 2 clauses use the aorist tense. This is important. It means that it has happened! Jesus is the heir, the one through whom God made the universe! In the next 3 clauses the author switches to the present tense. He is describing the Son's continual relationship to this world (even now!).
 - 3. “...the radiance of the glory of God...”
 - radiance/reflection = “shining forth” as in the rays of the sun. The point is the brightness of God's glory is seen in the Son. To see Jesus is to see the *glory* of God.
 - *Jesus is the way you see God's glory/greatness.*
 - 4. “...the exact representation of His being...”
 - Jesus exactly represents God's essence. Gr. karakter (where we get *character* from) = “stamp” or “impress”. The idea behind the Gr. Word is that of the die and the image it stamps on a coin. As the stamped image on the coin exactly represents the image engraved on the die, so the Son is “*exact representation*” of the Father.
 - “...of his being...” It is not the physical image that is in view, but the “being” or “essence” of God. Similar to Paul's idea of Jesus as the “image of God” or John's assertion that to have seen the Son is to have seen the Father.
 - *Jesus is God's ultimate word! - to receive His word is to receive the very words of God! To see Him is to see God!*

Q) where do you go to see God? To learn about God? Where do you look? To creation? To the world? To world events? How about to Jesus? Where do you start your study of God? From the premise of “God is love”? Or how about “God is sovereign”? Or how about “God died on a cross”?

5. “...sustaining all things by His powerful word...”

- Jesus upholds or sustains the whole of creation. Gr. = present participle, “sustaining”. This points to the

Son's *present* and *ongoing* activity in upholding all that exists.

- How is Jesus upholding, sustaining all of creation? By His Word! His powerful word. It is the notion of the “dynamic word of God” in view here. The “word” that “creates” and is “effective” in accomplishing God's will. The same word that *creates* and *accomplishes* the will of God, is the same word that *sustains* and *upholds* everything.
 - Ephesians 1:15-23 – Jesus rules above all creation. His guiding principle is the good of the church! Your good!
 - *The word's of Jesus are the words of God! He is the word of God, His words sustain and create life.* - what does this mean for someone who holds onto God's word?

Q. can God's word fail? No it does exactly what it is meant to do. “Law and Gospel”.

The first 5 statements require us and the readers to identify Jesus uniquely with God. The 3rd and 4th statements indicates the unique relationship between Jesus and God. ==> the author has given the readers a picture of the reality of who Jesus is.

What is Jesus continual relationship to this world? He is reflecting, representing, sustaining. The author now switches back to the aorist tense to speak about Jesus' death and exaltation.

6. “...*provided purifications for sins...*”

- This is the first mention of Jesus' priestly work. This was a definite act performed once and for all (Gr. Uses the Aorist participle). The Gr. Middle voice indicates He did this in Himself. The act of purification was related to His sacrifice. By this one action, the defilement of sins was removed forever. It is objective!, the sins were purged away, by the death of the Son. This implies the unique Son of God is also a priest.

- Jesus' death provided purification for sins *period!*

7. “...*sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high...*”

- this is linked in sequence to *purification*. “after making purification... *sat down*”. After Jesus' sacrifice came His exaltation. (death and life). Now Jesus lives and rules with the authority and power of God Himself. This is an allusion to Psalm 110:1, “the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool”. There is the idea of victory.

- Jesus suffered and rose victorious. He rules and reigns with God Himself!

- We will see this theme of His death and exaltation throughout the book. By uniting the crucifixion with the exaltation the author has indicated that the one who has “made purification for sins” is also the triumphant one. Christ is both a priest and a king.

Vs4 is a transitional verse. It is link with 1-3, but the author uses it to transition from speaking about the revelation of the Son, to introduce his first main argument, Jesus is greater than angels (5-13).

1. “...*having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs...*”

- How is Jesus greater than angels? The author's main point is that Jesus has inherited a better name than them. He is referring to His title as “Son”.
 - The exaltation is the event when the Son became superior to the angels. Phillipians 2:5-11. When God raised Jesus from the dead he received a new name. He became Lord over all creation. According to Hebrews, the name is “son”.
 - Is their some kind of angel heresy? No. In the ancient world, someone would compare something to something great to amplify just how great someone is. It was an act of praise.
 - Think of it like this “you know great the angels are! Heavenly beings who praise the glory of God for all eternity. The crucified Christ has become greater than even them! He has been declared the “Son” of God!”
 - The title “son” puts Jesus above all of creation.

The author in these 4 verses has made a claim. God has spoken his ultimate word to them through His son. Jesus became man, died and was raised to the right hand of God! This is no less than God's ultimate word. This word is an offer of salvation that speaks to the church “today”, offering God's promise of the future, and providing certainty for an insecure community.

The author makes his audience favourably disposed and attentive with the beautiful periodic sentence that suggests the importance of the message. He also introduces the major themes of the homily: God's speaking (1:1-2, 2:1-4, 4:12-13, 12:25), the relationship between the many and the one ("in many various ways.... in these last days"; 7:23-24, 9:26-27, 10:11-14), the purification for sins (9:1-10:18), the exaltation to God's right hand (1:3, 7:3, 8:1, 10:12), and the comparison of the superiority of the exalted Christ to everything on earth ("greater than", in 6:9, 7:7,19, 8:6, 11:16,40, 12:24). In sum: God spoke the final word to us when the Son made purification for sins and sat down at God's right hand, becoming greater than angels (or any other object of comparison). The remainder of the homily will elaborate and draw the implications for this claim as the author recycles these themes.