

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ref-rev-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ref-rev-01.php)

Reformation  
& Revival



---

A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

---

Volume 2, Number 2 • Spring 1993

---

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He had inherited is superior to theirs (Heb. 1:1-4).

Some years ago E. F. Scott, the well-known New Testament commentator, wrote:

The Epistle to the Hebrews is in many respects the riddle of the New Testament. Among early Christian writings it stands solitary and mysterious "without father, without mother, and without genealogy," like that of Melchizedek on whom its argument stands.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, in spite of its anonymity it entered the portals of sacred Scripture and, since its acceptance, has always been accorded one of the most respected places in the structure.

We may grant that there are many unanswered questions about this grand Epistle, or discourse, but one thing is very clear. The Spirit and the author wish us to hear in it the voice of God. That note appears at the beginning of the letter in the words, "In the past God spoke," and "in these last days He has spoken to us" (vv. 1-2). And then near the end of the letter the same note appears again in the admonition, "See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks" (12:25). That in an Epistle which is filled with citations from the Old Testament no human author is cited<sup>2</sup> is certainly striking, and the avoidance of the mention of human authors in his citations underlines his sense of Holy Scripture as coming from God Himself.

The author believed that his message of an eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:11-14; 9:12,

---

24; 10:19-24) was wonderfully relevant to believers living in Standstillville, knowing little of the heavenly life He came to bring, smug and slumbering in the pleasures of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

#### **The Final Revelation (1:1-2a)**

The beautiful sonorous opening section, a majestic rhetorical piece that would have done Demosthenes or Quintilian, the Roman rhetorician and contemporary of the author, proud, begins the letter. The opening verses contrast the two great revelations, that "through the prophets" and that "by His Son." And that the second is superior to the first is implicit in the elaborate description of the qualifications of the Son for the office of revealer of God.

The paragraph begins in the original with two adverbs, rendered in the NIV text by "at many times and in various ways." The adverbs stress the variety of the older revelation. The phrase, "at many times" (lit., *in many parts*), probably refers to the periods of the magnificent history of the nation Israel, reminding one of the patriarchs, of Moses, of the theocracy, of the kingdom and of the captivity and return. The second adverb rendered by the phrase, "in various ways," refers to the modes of God's speaking, modes that varied with the message and those who were to be "messaged"! There were prophets who prophesied, priests who taught and kings who ruled and prophesied (as David). Sometimes God gave visions, dreams, parables and signs, and sometimes He spoke face to face. He spoke by institution, as by the tabernacle, and by the cultus which pointed forward typically to the Messiah, as well as by events like the exodus, by psalm, and even by the Urim and Thummim (cf. Isa. 28:10).

That which was "partial and piecemeal" became final and complete in the revelation that came "by His Son." And, it should be added, amid the diversity of the Old Testament

and New Testament revelation, there was continuity and unity, for the same God who spoke through the prophets has continued to speak in His Son.

The diversity of the Old Testament revelation may be captured by giving attention to the prophets and their messages. There is Isaiah, the great prophet of the holiness of God, and Amos, whose work has been called "a cry for social justice." Hosea's great theme is the unconditional love of God, and what has been said about these three prophets could be said about the others, who also have their own individualities.

All the prophets and authors gave their listeners and readers a part, a small fragment, of the truth given to them to proclaim, but the whole remained for the Son to unfold and the New Testament writers to celebrate. "They were," Dods says, "like men listening to a clock striking, always getting nearer the truth but obliged to wait till the whole was heard."<sup>3</sup> Anyone who has lived in an older city filled with churches having steeples with large clocks that sound over a wide area has known the experience of awaking in the night and hearing the clock sounding the quarter hours and wondering just what hour it is. Finally, when the clock reaches the sounding of the hour, one knows what time it is! Thus the Old Testament authors never really knew the prophetic time until He finally came.

#### **The Unique Organ of the Revelation**

The revelation is said to be "by His Son," a phrase that emphasizes the identity of the Son. It is, however, the character of the revealer that is most important to the author. The phrase may be translated literally, *in Son*, or a bit paraphrastically in order to underline the lack of the definite article with the noun, *in such a person as a Son*. The revelation is a Son-wise revelation. To the author it is not so much what He, the Son, said in His ministry as what He said

and did.

The New Testament authors of the Epistles make the same point, for they appear to be more interested in His redemptive work than in His preaching ministry. This seems particularly true of Paul. We must not, however, overemphasize the point, for much of our Lord's ministry was ministry about His coming death and resurrection.

The revelation, then, is a Son-revelation. There is continuity in the revelation, for it is God who speaks in both the Old and New Testament witness, but there is discontinuity also. The prophets, God's servants, give the Old Testament witness, but it is the eternal Son of God who in His ministry is "God's decisive and climactic word."<sup>4</sup> As the author puts it, "For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever" (7:28). Dods' words deftly spotlight the difference between the human prophets and the divine Son.

A Son who can be characteristically designated a son, carries in Himself the father's nature and does not need to be instructed in purposes which are also and already His own, nor to be officially commissioned and empowered to do what He cannot help doing.<sup>5</sup>

The three relative clauses that follow the phrase, "by His Son," set forth a series of facts about the Son which illustrate His supremacy and particularly His ability to reveal the Father.<sup>6</sup> The clauses move from His essential glory as the Son through His incarnation and death to His present exaltation at the right hand of God (vv. 2b-3). The facts certainly accent His greatness and qualification for the work of revelation.

The first concerns His appointment as heir of all things. The word "appointed" has been taken as a timeless appointment, referring to His appointment as heir of all things by

virtue of His eternal Sonship. The verbal tense is timeless and is suitable for reference to His heirship by virtue of His Sonship. The two go together naturally (Matt. 11:27). It has been thought by some that the words refer to our Lord's exaltation and assumption of Lordship at His ascension. The order of the clauses, which move from His essential personality and His incarnation to His exaltation and session, argue against a reference to His exaltation here. Even in His pre-death teaching our Lord makes it plain that He is the heir (cf. Matt. 21:38). The author has Psalm 2:8 in mind, which deduces from the filial relation of the King of Zion to God that universal dominion is the Son's by inheritance.<sup>7</sup> All things are eternally His. The entrance upon the inheritance awaits the future (cf. Heb. 2:8; Rev. 11:15).

The second statement, "through whom He made the universe," concerns the ages. The NIV rendering of *aion* here as "universe" may be correct (cf. 11:3), but since the idea of time never really leaves this word, as it does with *kosmos*, or *world*, I prefer to retain the sense of *ages*. The word usually refers to all that exists in the world under the conditions of time. Thus, He made the ages, that is, our Lord is the Lord of History, operating and managing the universe throughout its successive periods within time (cf. 1 Tim. 1:17).

The third of the statements, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory," looks at the coessentiality of the Son with the Father. The word *apaugasma* (NIV, "radiance") has both an active sense, *effulgence* or *radiance*, and a passive sense, *reflection*. The active sense is much better at this point. The Son flashes forth, or radiates, the glory of the Father (cf. Col. 1:15; John 1:14; 14:9).

Philip Hughes comments, "'Who does not see,' asks Athanasius, 'that the brightness cannot be separated from the light but that it is by nature proper to it and co-existent with it and is not produced after it.'"<sup>8</sup> Ambrose, too, said,

“Think not there was ever a moment of time when God was not without wisdom, any more than that there was ever a time when light was without radiance.”<sup>9</sup> Now, what does this mean? It means simply this: just as one cannot have a sun without its radiance, so one cannot have a Father without the Son, the radiance of the Father’s glory. It should be self-evident to us that the sun must have its brightness, just as the Father must have the glorious Son as His radiance. Just as the Son is co-eternal with the Father, so brightness is co-eval with the sun. And just as brightness expresses the essence from which its brightness comes, so the Son expresses the Father, whose being He shares, with all its glorious attributes.

The words, “the exact representation of His being,” the fourth statement, have been thought to express the true personality of the Son. One may certainly claim that such is implied by the words, but they are likely meant to express the same idea as the preceding with a different emphasis. The word *charakter* (NIV, “exact representation”) was used to refer to a tool for engraving, and later it came to refer to the mark or impress that the tool made. “Just as the image and superscription on a coin exactly correspond to the device on the die,” Bruce points out, “so the Son of God ‘bears the very stamp of His nature’” (RSV).<sup>10</sup> Coessentiality is the sense again.

One of the most thrilling of our Lord’s miracles is the stilling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee (cf. Matt. 8:23-27). In the terror of the storm the disciples awakened the sleeping Lord and cried out, “Lord save us! We’re going to drown!” (v. 25). In the following verse is His reply, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” And then Matthew writes—you must pardon me for preferring the Authorized Version at this point—“Then He arose”—what a subject for a master artist. Our Lord stands majestically amidst the cowed men, the lightning, the rushing waves of water, with

the little boat deep in the swells. He arose at their cry. The storm did not awaken Him, but their appeals did.

Many years ago in Dallas, Texas, I lived with my family near railroad tracks (on the right side of them, of course!) upon which trains constantly passed through the night. We learned to sleep through the rumbling of the long freight trains, although the house seemed to be shaking from the weight of the cars. I noticed, however, that, while my wife would sleep through the noise from the trains, the slightest unusual movement from the children in their room down the hall would bring her to a sitting position in the bed immediately. What a difference it makes when we care. He did not hear the storm, but He heard their cry! “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,” Peter reminds us, “and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

There are other marvelous truths in the incident, but I want to point to the response of the men and answer the question they asked of themselves. Matthew writes, “The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!’” Let us just imagine that the disciples had had the knowledge of the author of our Epistle: what would have been their response to anyone who asked such a question? They would have said, “It is no wonder that He is able to calm furious storms and bring immediately a complete calm” (a second miracle, as anyone who lives around large bodies of water knows!), for He is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.” People talk about the weather constantly, but here is the one who can *change* it.

The fifth declaration is that the Son is one who is “sustaining all things by His powerful word.” The word rendered in the NIV by “sustaining” is a verbal form in the present tense and has not always been translated accurately. The Authorized Version has “upholding all things by the word of His

power,” implying the passive support of a heavy burden. But He is not an Atlas holding up the dead weight of the world.<sup>11</sup> Westcott is illuminatingly correct in pointing out that the verb is used of “bearing’ which includes movement, progress, towards an end.”<sup>12</sup> And the present tense of the verb intensifies the thought. The verb is used in the Old Testament Greek translation, the Septuagint, of Moses’ complaint to the Lord over the task of “bearing” the burden of a people weeping over the fact that they had no meat. After asking the Lord why he has been afflicted with the responsibility for them and reminding the Lord that he had not conceived all the people and asking, “Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat,’” the great servant expresses his inability in these plaintive words, “I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me” (Num. 11:14). The word “carry” is a rendering of the same word translated in Hebrews 1:3 by “sustaining” (AV, “upholding”). Moses was thinking of the responsibility of leading the Israelites on to the promised land, the thought of movement and progress toward that goal being uppermost in his mind. Transferring the sense to our passage, the author’s thought suggests the work of the Son in bearing the universe along its divinely appointed course to the end (cf. vv. 10-12). He is its governor. He is also its sustainer, as is suggested by the NIV text here, but that idea is better expressed in the words of Colossians 1:17, “He is before all things, and *in Him all things hold together.*”

All of the preceding would have been futile for us, if He had not “provided purification for sins,” as the sixth statement indicates. The “purification” has been made, as the tense of the verbal form indicates.<sup>13</sup> The word “purification” is a priestly word and introduces clearly the priestly aspects of the Son’s ministry, upon which the remainder of the letter will elaborate (cf. 10:11-12).

The purification, or cleansing, provided by the priests after the order of Melchizedek, our Lord Jesus Christ, may be described as substitutionary, penal, and sacrificial. And, because it is all of these, it is also particular, that is, accomplished for the people of God. The author throughout the letter will establish these points, primarily through an emphasis upon the typical ritual of the Day of Atonement. The climactic passage in 9:23-28 makes each of these points. The putting away of sin makes necessary a sacrifice (vv. 26, 28), which is penal, for shedding of blood is at the heart of it (v.25; cf. 9:12, 14), and substitutionary (9:15, 26, etc.). And the fact that it is substitutionary necessarily involves a particular application, as the Old Testament priestly cultus indicated, for the high priest in his ministry wore on his breast and shoulders the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. It was for them that his work was done.

Forty-seven years ago Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, speaking at the English Keswick conference in Keswick, England, trading upon the Authorized Version’s use of the word “purged” instead of the NIV’s “purification,” stated that the work of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, constituted the only purgatory in the Bible. Then, recalling the claims of the Church of Rome, he said that the Church of Rome claimed these four things: 1) Original sin is removed by the waters of baptism. 2) Daily sin is removed by the non-bloody sacrifice of the mass, reminding his audience of the words of the Council of Trent, “Let him be accursed who saith that sins are not removed by the non-bloody sacrifice of the mass.” 3) Venial sins are removed by the oil of extreme unction. 4) Other sins are removed by purgatory. Then he said, “What is left for the Cross of Christ? Where water, bread, oil, and fire remove sins, what does the blood do? If so much is done by works, little is done by grace.”<sup>14</sup> Calvary is, indeed, the only true purgatory in the Word of God.

The seventh statement follows naturally in its striking

contrast to the activities of the Levitical high priests. The author writes, "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." The list of facts that indicate our Lord's qualifications for the revelation of truth, forming something of a confession,<sup>15</sup> surveys the redemptive work of the Son in its pre-existence through the incarnation and on to the exaltation in supreme dignity. The climax is declared in the finite verb of the third relative clause of the original text, "He sat down." The session of the transcendent Son represents in priestly metaphor the finality of Christianity. No Levitical high priest was ever able to sit down in the sanctuary, for his work was never finished. This priest, however, has finished His work. The author makes the point in some detail later when he writes:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God (10:11-12).

This represents the end of the accomplishment of the atonement, its impetration, to use an old theological term.

He, then, is the Prophet through whom God has spoken finally and completely, the Priest who has offered the last and sufficient sacrifice, and the King who sits in the authority of enthroned omnipotence. That is the climactic significance of the fact that He has taken His seat<sup>16</sup> "at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." The seat at the sovereign's right hand was the seat of honor (1 Kings 2:19), and "it was the prerogative of Davidic kings to sit in the presence of God" (2 Sam. 7:18; Ps. 110:1).<sup>17</sup>

There are two great words that become familiar to the reader of this Epistle. They are the words *better* and *eternal*. The author uses the former word to remind his readers that in comparison with other religions and their leaders the

Christian religion that gathers around Jesus Christ is "better." The author of their salvation is "better" than the angels (1:4). He offers a better "hope" (7:19). He is the guarantee of a "better covenant" (7:22), founded on "better promises" (8:6) that are grounded in "better sacrifices" (9:23) accomplished by sprinkled blood that "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (12:24).

One, however, might at this point reflect that, since better things have come with Christianity, perhaps something still better might come in the future. But the author has another favorite term, the term *eternal*. He speaks of our Lord as the "source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him" (5:9). He also speaks of an "eternal redemption" obtained by the blood of Christ (9:12). He even speaks of called believers receiving "the promised eternal inheritance" from the ransom He paid to set them free from sin (9:15). And if anyone should still think there might be something better lying in the future, such as a still better covenant, he points out that the covenant under which they have these unconditional promises is necessarily the final one, for it is an "eternal covenant" (13:20). Thus, the older covenant and its conditional promises are not only surpassed by the new, but the new can never be surpassed by one coming later. The "New Covenant," founded on "better promises" (8:6), is the final eternal, and perfect arrangement of the relation between God and His redeemed. It is an incomparable provision made by an incomparable High Priest and Savior.<sup>18</sup>

#### The Superiority of the New Revealer

The name that He has inherited is the name of *Son*, as the immediate context indicates. He, however, did not become the Son upon exaltation. The title was His before the creation, as verse 2 necessitates, for, before God spoke to us in the Son, the Father had through Him made the universe (lit.,

ages). It belongs to Him by eternal generation (cf. 5:8), although there is a sense in which His exaltation is an entrance into the full experience of His inheritance in the realm of His glorified humanity.<sup>19</sup> That proposed in the eternal counsels (v. 2) is realized at His resurrection and ascension. The heir, the Son, has inherited (vv. 2, 5)!

### Conclusion

Speech is the vehicle of human fellowship, and the fact that God the Father has spoken to us in the Son indicates, first of all that He believes that we are capable of fellowship and that He longs to enjoy it with us. It is in this way that He instructs us in the knowledge of God, as our Lord said in conversation with the Jews, "It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to Me" (John 6:45).

Andrew Murray is right: "The words of God! Oh, who can express what they ought to be worth to us! Each word carries with it all the life of God, all His saving power and love."<sup>20</sup>

It is true that we measure the worth of words by our opinion and regard for the speaker of them. I know this from my own experience in teaching and writing. When Calvin speaks, I listen. When Owen speaks, I listen. When Hodge speaks, I listen. When Warfield speaks, I carefully listen. We all know this to be true, so who can measure the words of God? They are infinitely blessed, and how much more attention must we give them!

It must not be forgotten, also, that it is our glorious Lord who has taken the initiative in speaking to us. This is the story of the Bible from its opening chapters to its close. It was God who came down in the cool of the evening to talk with Adam and Eve before the Fall, not they who called Him down. And after the Fall it is the Lord God who again assumes the initiative in speaking to His fallen creatures

and giving them a message of good news, the *protoevangelium*, the first preaching of the gospel (cf. Gen. 3:15). Our first parents certainly did not cry out for Him in their misery. They rather did their dead level best to avoid Him (Gen. 3:8). And so it has always been. In marvelous love He stoops to our frailty and darkness, and any yearnings we have for deliverance are born of His love and mercy.

There is much more that could be said here, but let me come to one final point. It is striking, is it not, that our author has begun his Epistle by telling us that God has spoken to us in His Son (1:1-2). When we look for the *words* that are spoken in the Son, what do we find? We find emphasis upon His work (1:3). We can only conclude that all of Christ's work is God's word to us. Our Lord said, "He that is of God heareth God's words" (John 8:47). Those who are "of God" will come to Him and hear His words about His work.

That work is in two parts. As Priest He effected the cleansing of sins here below. As Priest-King He sits to apply His work, to dispense its blessings, and to maintain within His people the heavenly life forever. May He plant in our hearts a longing to know Him more intimately. The veil has been rent (10:19-25)! The Holy of Holies has been thrown open. Enter, and with boldness!

## End Notes

- 1 E.F. Scott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 1.
- 2 4:7 is no contradiction, for there the words "through David" simply mean "in the Book of the Psalms."
- 3 Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, IV, pp. 247-48.
- 4 William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 47, Hebrews 1-8*, I, p. 11.
- 5 *Ibid.*, Dods, p. 249.
- 6 Bruce writes, "Seven facts are stated about the Son of God which bring out His greatness and show why the revelation given in Him is the highest God can give." Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 3.
- 7 *Op. Cit.*, Dods, p. 249. G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 268.
- 8 Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 42.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Op. Cit.*, Bruce, p. 6.
- 11 Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 14.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 The aorist middle participle emphasizes the note of finality in His saving work, as well as His personal interest in it. The indirect middle voice is sufficient justification to render the verbal form by *having made by or for Himself purification*. The majority of the manuscripts, including some ancient ones, include the prepositional phrase *di' heautou*, "through," or "by Himself," which clearly states the personal interest of our Lord and His sole agency in the provision of cleansing.
- 14 From the printing of the messages of the conference of 1946, titled *Keswick, 1946*, pp. 31-32.
- 15 *Op. Cit.*, Lane, p. 14.
- 16 The aorist tense is ingressive and may be rendered "has taken His seat."

- 17 Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 38-39.
- 18 Cf. James Denny, *Jesus and the Gospel*, pp. 40-42.
- 19 The perfect tense may refer back to the aorist "appointed" in vs. 2, yet retaining its perfect force in vs. 4.
- 20 Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 32-33.

## Author

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., was a professor of New Testament and systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary for many years and later at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is the author of *The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), and served for many years as a teaching elder at Believers Chapel, Dallas, TX. In retirement he resides in Dallas, TX, and still speaks widely in conferences and writes for numerous journals. In 1988 the valuable festschrift, *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway) was published in honor of Dr. Johnson.

---

**W**e tend to think of “Christ” as a name, just as “Jesus” is a name. In fact “Christ” is not a name, but a title.

The Greek word is *christos* (“anointed”). In the NT, *christos* is intimately linked with OT anointing and with the thread of OT teaching that hints that a special Anointed One would come and set the world right.

Where the Gospels read “Christ,” or speak of the Christ, they give Jesus the title of God’s Anointed One. The word “Christ” affirms that Jesus has been specially commissioned by the Father to an important office.

**Lawrence O. Richards**

*Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*

**I**n Acts 4:27 the holy servant of God is said to be anointed by Him. Peter tells Cornelius that God anointed Jesus (10:38). As Lord and Christ (2:36) Jesus is the one who is risen (v. 31) but who was also crucified (3:18). Conversion to this Christ brings remission of sins (3:19) and is the presupposition of the actualizing of eschatological salvation with His return. God has appointed Jesus as the Christ (3:20), and heaven must receive Him until the time of consummation. The eschatological prophet is the royal Messiah—all according to Scripture (vv. 22ff.). When the apostles preach and teach Jesus as the Christ they have the whole of His person and work in view (5:41; cf. 8:5, 12).

**W. Grundmann**

*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*  
(Abridged)

---