

Week 51- The High Priest of the Kingdom
December 21-22
Hebrews 1: 1-4

***Note:** Teachers, Hebrews is arguably one of the most significant and complicated books in all of scripture. Admittedly, there is no way we can come close to even scratching the surface of this book in one lesson the weekend before Christmas. So, we are asking you not to even try or attempt doing an overview of Hebrews as the CBT materials suggest. Please use this sample lesson as a springboard for your lesson, focusing on Chapter 1, verses 1-4.*

Introduction:

Throughout history, people have lived with a sense of anticipation. There is a sense of wonder that comes with asking the question, “what comes next?” We have spent 50 weeks reading and studying the Bible chronologically. And as we enter week 51, there is still a sense of anticipation.

We are coming to the end of the year, on the cusp of Christmas. There is a sense of anticipation of what might be awaiting you in a wrapped box with a bow. There is a sense of anticipation of what the new year will bring. There is always a sense of anticipation of what is going to transpire “next.”

We have spent 11 ½ months, 50 weeks beginning in Genesis with the Creation Era looking at how God’s people have lived with a sense of anticipation. Throughout the Old Testament, there was always an expectation of what was to come, namely Jesus, the Messiah.

The prophets of old spoke on behalf of God to His people letting them know that one day someone would come who would change everything.

***Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

***Isaiah 9:6** For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice, From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

***Micah 5: 2** “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me, The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”*

God’s people had been told there would be a Messiah and after 400 years of silence; the silence was broken. An angel spoke to Zacharias in the temple telling him that he and his wife Elizabeth

would give birth to John the Baptist. An angel spoke to Mary telling her that she would give birth to Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. An angel even spoke to Joseph telling him about Jesus.

Matthew 1: 20 *But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”*

The Angels broke the silence of 400 years with the announcement that Jesus was coming and even that John the Baptist would prepare the way.

In this Christmas season, it is appropriate that we look at the book of Hebrews as we experience a sense of anticipation of the baby that was born in Bethlehem.

Hebrews is a unique book in that we do not really know who wrote it; though many scholars have made cases for various authors. Regardless of who the human vessel was that wrote the book of Hebrews, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit is the true inspiration of the author allowing the words to give insight to the writings and teachings of the Old Testament unlike any other book in the New Testament. Hebrews has over 40 Old Testament quotes, which is second only to Romans which has 63 quotes of the Old Testament. But as far as density, the Old Testament quotes in the book of Hebrews account for 15% of the entire book, compared to 9% of Romans.¹

The writer knows his audience is made up of Jews struggling with the person and purpose of Jesus Christ. The author strategically uses Old Testament passages that any Jew in the 1st Century would hold on to as sacred. He makes his case for Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Jesus as the final authority of all things in heaven and on earth, Jesus, the High Priest, and Jesus, the final sacrifice.

The author systematically compares Jesus to the prophets of old, the priests, the sacrifices, and even the angels; and without hesitation, Jesus is superior to all.

The baby that was born in Bethlehem, the one we celebrate this time of year is unlike any other baby that has ever been born.

There is a popular Christmas song written by Mark Lowry, called “Mary Did You Know?” It is a beautiful song that causes you to pause and consider all that little baby was going to do during His lifetime.

These first four verses remind us of the awesomeness and majesty of the baby born in Bethlehem.

Let’s look at Hebrews 1: 1-4

¹ Stephen Voorwinde, *Hebrews’ Use of the Old Testament*, www.rtc.edu.au; pg 60 Vox Reformata 73 (2007).

Hebrews 1:1 *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,⁴ having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. Chronological Bible, December 17th, p.1555*

Notice how the first four verses of Hebrews connects what we have been studying now for 51 weeks. There is an acknowledgment of how God spoke in the lives and writings of those in the Old Testament, “*time past to the fathers by the prophets.*” The foundation had been laid in each of the Eras of the Old Testament from the days of Adam and Eve, through David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, and all the way through the way God prepared the way for Jesus through John the Baptist, as a voice crying in the wilderness.

It is timely that we are reading these verses the weekend before Christmas. It is a season of anticipation. And the world had waited 400 years for the silence to be broken and the long-anticipated Messiah to be born. God’s Son, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and fulfilled all that the prophets had spoken.

Notice in verses 2-4 the writer gives us eight truths of Jesus Christ.

- 1) Heir of all things (v.2)
- 2) Through whom also He made the worlds (v.2)
- 3) Being the brightness of His glory (v.3)
- 4) The Express Image of His person (v. 3)
- 5) Upholding all things by the word of His power (v. 3)
- 6) By Himself purged (*purification for*) our sins (v. 3)
- 7) Sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high (v. 3)
- 8) Become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (v. 4)

For this audience the author wanted them to understand the fullness and authority of Jesus Christ. Creator, Prophet, Priest, and King—Jesus Christ is superior to all the prophets and servants of God who have ever appeared on the sacred pages of the Scriptures. This becomes a theme throughout the book of Hebrews. As we think about a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem, seemingly so innocent and frail as any little baby; yet the Heir of all things, the brightness of His glory, the express Image of His person, upholding all things by the word of His power; knowing He was destined to become the purification for our sins.

All of that is in these first few verses, step by step.

This fall as we have studied the Gospels and the Epistles, we have looked at the life of Jesus. We have seen the ministry of Jesus through healings, miracles, sermons, and parables. We have seen the establishment of the church and how Paul wanted to make sure that all, even those in the uttermost parts of the world, would know Jesus Christ.

Let’s take a closer look at these eight truths; all of which began in a manger in Bethlehem.

1. Heir of All Things (v. 2)

Have you ever been listed in someone's will? It usually means that you will inherit what that person had accumulated or accomplished in their life once they pass away. For many, being an 'heir' means being the child of the person who died. For others, it might be an extended family member or a close friend. And when death comes, the deceased's 'will' is for you to gain what they possessed.

When Jesus is described as the 'Heir of all things,' it means that everything is His possession and that He is the ultimate authority over and rightful owner of all things. Just like a child would inherit the 'will' of his father, so Jesus also received the 'will' of His Father.

You look up in the sky at night and see the moon and stars; they belong to Jesus; He is the Heir of all things. You look at the beautiful trees that are decorated with lights this time of the year; they belong to Jesus; He is the Heir of all things. If you go down to Galveston and look at the Gulf, guess what? It belongs to Jesus; He is the Heir of all things.

Because of Jesus' obedience—even to death on a cross—"God has exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians. 2:9-10).

2. Through Whom also He made the Worlds (vs. 2)

John begins his gospel with this truth.

John 1:1 *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. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (Chronological Bible, September 24th, p.1272).*

Jesus was part of the creation process with God, the Father. Everything that was made, was made through Him. John wanted us to know that Jesus was not just the Son of God but was Creator with God. And then John tells us the truth of Christmas.

John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Chronological Bible, September 24th, p.1272).*

The Creator became a baby in Bethlehem as Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us in the manger. John even mentions that "we beheld His glory" which leads us to the next truth.

3. Being the Brightness of His Glory (v. 3)

The Greek word for "brightness" is Apaugasma. This literally means:

- reflected brightness
 - of Christ in that he perfectly reflects the majesty of God
- effulgence
 - shining forth, of a light coming from a luminous body²

Dr. Ray Pritchard says, “If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He is not some grimy, blurry image of the Almighty. He isn’t the sun peeking through the clouds. He is the blazing, magnificent revelation of God himself. Jesus is a clear picture of God. He radiates the glory of God.”³

This Christmas season we are surrounded by lights on houses, in trees, on buildings; none of which even come close to the “*Brightness of His Glory*.” But let those lights be a reminder to you about the radiance of Jesus who was born in Bethlehem.

4. The Express Image of His Person (v. 3)

The “express image of His person” is translated in the NASB as “the exact representation of His nature.” The phrase comes from the Greek word: *charakter*, which we get the English word “character.” This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament.

“The word was used for the impression made by an engraving tool when it was stamped into metal in order to make a coin. The image on the coin was precisely the image on the engraving tool. It did not express a general likeness, but an exact duplication of the original.”⁴

Jesus shares in the character of God; stamped with the image of God. When we see Jesus Christ, we have seen as much of God as it is possible for us to see. The baby born in Bethlehem was the express image, the exact representation of God Himself.

5. Upholding All Things by the Word of His Power (v. 3)

Remember that Jesus was with God “in the beginning” at creation. God spoke the world into existence with the power of His word. Jesus is able to uphold all things by the word of His power. The idea is not that Jesus upholds the universe as dead weight, similar to Atlas

² biblestudytools.com

³ Dr. Ray Pritchard, sermon, “Who is that Baby?” Keep Believing Ministries, keepbelieving.com

⁴ Dr. Thomas Constable, Hebrews; www.second.org/teachers

shouldering the world. Rather, He carries all things forward on their appointed course providentially.⁵

The baby that was born in Bethlehem, being cared for by Joseph and Mary, was the same One who was holding it all together and moving it forward from the beginning of time.

6. By Himself Purged (purification for) Our Sins (v. 3)

The word used here means both “removal and cleansing.” When Jesus was crucified on the cross for our sin, He both removed the penalty of sin and cleansed us from all unrighteousness. He did not have any help from anyone else on this matter.

Though we celebrate His birth this time of year, we cannot forget the purpose for which He was born. He was born, to die. He died, to live again. He gave Himself for you and me, the greatest gift of all; the gift of salvation.

7. Sat Down at the Right Hand of Majesty on High (v. 3)

When Jesus ascended into heaven, (Acts 1: 9-10) He took His place at the right hand of Majesty. It is the place of power and authority, the place of judgment and grace, the place worthy of Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem of a virgin. It is the place He rules, even to this day.

There is no greater place in all creation. Jesus was sent to this earth as a baby born in Bethlehem to live a perfect life, give Himself as a perfect sacrifice, to rise and ascend into a perfect home in heaven. He accomplished all that was set forth for Him to do and is now reigning in Heaven.

8. Become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (v. 4)

The previous 7 truths lead to this ultimate truth. Jesus is better than angels. It sounds almost anticlimactic. But it is significant because so often people will elevate angels even above Jesus.

Angels served as messengers who would come to deliver a message from God to His people.

- In the Old Testament, there are 105-108 references to Angels.
- In the New Testament, there are 165-172 references to Angels.

⁵ Ibid.

However, Jesus does so much more. He would not simply be a messenger and bring a message from God to His people. He would actually *be* the message himself. Jesus would not simply bring a message of salvation and redemption. He himself would be the message.

The writer of Hebrews is declaring that Jesus is “so much better” than the angels. Jesus is beyond compare. All other religious teachers and figures have come and said, “Thus sayeth the LORD to you.” But only Jesus would come and say, “I AM the LORD who has come to you.”

This is why Jesus is better than angels. Angels did not incarnate into our situation. They cannot empathize with us and know our weaknesses. And they did not die for our sin. Jesus, however, did all of these things. He is to us what no one else could ever be—even the angels from heaven.

This is why Jesus is better. And this is what the whole book of Hebrews proclaims -- our infinite need being met in the infinite love of God to us in Jesus Christ.

This time of year we remember that God came down from heaven with skin on, in the form of a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem. His name is above every name.

Philippians 2:9 *For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The baby that changed the world, is the baby that came to save the world.