

Hebrews 1:1–4: The Prologue – Lesson 3

Function of the Prologue

In ancient rhetoric the beginning of a work had to have an appropriate beginning. It needed to grab the reader's or hearer's attention, it needed to preview the topics which would be covered, and it needed to do these things in an artistic, pleasing fashion. The prologue does all of these. It is a single, powerful sentence which highlights major topics of the book. After reading through it we understand in summary fashion the theology the author is going to explain, and we have a basis for the exhortations he will give on how we are to live.

A Few Points on Artistry

The author writes a single sentence which he extends at length with various dependent clauses. His focus is on God's communication to his people, and there are several elements about that communication which he contrasts through parallel arrangements: the time, the recipients, the agents, and the ways. His opening line uses alliteration with the letter π . His description of the Son lists seven different affirmations.

Central Idea

God's full and final communication to his people occurs through his now-exalted Son who perfectly represents his essence, character, and action.

- I. God's revelation to his people through the prophets is finalized by his revelation through the Son. (vv. 1–2a)
 - A. God's prior revelation to his people was through the prophets to the ancestors. (v. 1)
 - B. God's present revelation to his people in the final, eschatological time is in his Son. (v. 2a)
- II. The Son in his exalted place at God's right hand perfectly represents the essence, character, and action of God. (vv. 2b–4)
 - A. The Son is the God-ordained ruler of all things. (v. 2b)
 - B. The Son was the means for God's creation of all things. (v. 2c)
 - C. The Son is the exact representation of God's character in glory and essence. (v. 3a)
 - D. The Son presently sustains the entire creation. (v. 3b)
 - E. The Son accomplished cleansing of sins through his death. (v. 3c)
 - F. The Son in his resurrection and exaltation took his rightful place at God's right hand. (v. 3d)
 - G. The Son on the basis of his exalted place is so far better than the angels. (v. 4)

Application

1. The author clearly wants his readers to understand certain truths about God and Christ as the foundation of his sermon. So we must seek to understand theological truth so we can then live appropriately.
2. The central force of the prologue is that "God spoke." This requires much of us. We must first acknowledge that God has spoken, then we must incline our hearts to hear what he has said and learn from him, recognizing that by virtue of his being God that he has a claim on everything that we are.
3. The affirmation about God speaking is that it has occurred through his Son. The truth is as commonly said as it is right: Jesus, God's Son, must be at the center of all we do. He must receive our complete devotion and worship as God's final revelation.
4. The mention of angels points out competitors for our attention. In our religious thinking we do not usually exalt angels, but there are many other things which compete for center stage. The only one who should hold that place is Jesus himself.