

*Christ, Superior to the
Prophets and Angels
(Hebrews 1:1–3)*

The matchless opening to Hebrews (1:1—2:4) pictures Christ in His divine nature and glory. Indeed, He is superior to the angels and the prophets of ages past. Consequently, one who neglects the great salvation offered through the Son will find himself in everlasting destruction. In fact, the underlying design of the whole treatise of Hebrews is to show that the new covenant towers above and takes the place of the old covenant.

The person of Christ fills the first three chapters as the waters of the ocean fill its bed. Because of the greatness of our Lord, the Christians to whom this book was addressed were urged to persevere in their faith and not let the gospel drift from them (2:1–3). To drift from the message would be to drift from the messenger, for the message and the messenger cannot be separated. According to the author, there is no such thing as “Christ vs. Doctrine,” for Christ and His doctrine are inseparable. The messenger must be held in the highest regard if His message is

to be properly appreciated.

In these beginning sentences, the writer showed the absolute supremacy of the revelation through the Son over the imperfect revelation of Moses and the prophets. God's revelation through Jesus is the final word, the ultimate revelation from God toward which all the other voices of the Old Testament pointed. No message given before the Son's message is to capture our attention like this final voice of God the Father through Christ.

Therefore, the author demonstrated, by implication, that no religious message that has appeared after the New Testament days can be called "divine." This final revelation given through Christ cannot be altered even by an angel from heaven (Galatians 1:6-9). It is "the faith which was once for all" delivered, which means that it is "for all time" (Jude 3; NLT). Christ's revelation is contrasted with the piecemeal revelation that God gave through the prophets in the Old Testament times. "Progressive revelation" occurred throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, but it ended with Christ.

Christ's revelation encompassed the writings of His apostles and other inspired men of the New Testament times. He sent them out, and He sent the Holy Spirit to inspire them; therefore, whoever receives them receives Christ (Luke 10:16). Through Christ, we now have the ultimate "something better" which is never to be replaced while this world stands.

GOD HAS SPOKEN

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2a).

This great book begins by declaring the greatest single fact of the divine revelation: “God . . . spoke” (1:1a). God has spoken to man through His Word in the Bible and through His Son, Jesus, and this truth lies at the very heart of faith. How encouraging it is to our spirits to know that God has spoken to us! He who is the final source of all truth and all revelation has communicated with us. The word “God” (θεός, *theos*) is preceded by the definite article (ὁ, *ho*), which may imply that He is “the God” whom the readers knew from the Old Testament writings and were already professing to worship.

The term *theos* means “a transcendent being who exercises extraordinary control in human affairs. . . .”¹ The gods were supposed to have fixed all things in their proper places.² In the Old Testament God was known as “Elohim” (אֱלֹהִים, *’elohim*), the powerful One, or the One with absolute authority. He later revealed Himself to Moses as “Yahweh” (יהוה, *YHWH*), “the existing One,” or the “Absolute Being,” which means that He is the eternal “I AM” and all else is derived from Him (Exodus 3:14; 6:3).

“Long ago” (Hebrews 1:1b) is “in time past” (KJV). The phrase literally means “of old” or “in ancient times.” We might think of this two-word phrase as a description of the entire Old Testament period.

The Jews did not accept as canonical any book that was written later than Malachi. For example,

¹Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 450.

²Robert Milligan, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentaries (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1876; reprint, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1975), 48.

they rejected the Apocrypha.³

The Old Testament “prophets” (1:1b) wrote as God directed. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20, 21), being borne along by His guidance as they wrote. They did not always understand what they spoke, but they diligently searched or studied what they had written to see what time period was being foreshadowed by their prophecies (1 Peter 1:10, 11).

The Amplified Bible (AB), which is a compilation of paraphrases and versions, has this for verse 1: “In many separate revelations [each of which set forth a portion of the Truth] and in different ways God spoke of old to [our] forefathers in and by the prophets.” Thomas G. Long translated the last part of the verse “In many fragments and in many fashions.”⁴ This phrase is also translated “at sundry times” (KJV), “at various times and in various ways” (NKJV), “at many times and in various ways” (NIV), and “many different glimpses” (Phillips).

Prior to the coming of Christ, God’s eternal Scriptures were given only in fragmentary revelations. Πολυμερῶς (*polumerōs*) means “many parts,” “portions,” or “piecemeal.” It follows then that whatever was delivered in parts, pieces, or fragments must of necessity be incomplete; but, as Brooke Foss Westcott observed, “the Revelation in Christ, the Son, is perfect both in substance and in form.”⁵ This harmonizes

³Some books in the Apocrypha, such as 1 Maccabees, have historical value; but they are not worthy of the term “Scripture.”

⁴Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 8.

⁵Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1889; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 4.

with the purpose of spiritual gifts, which was to bestow revelation “in part” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). The AB rendering of the passage also claims the loftiest view of inspiration for the prophets—that God spoke to man through them. F. F. Bruce expressed the same truth this way: “Priest and prophet, sage and singer were in their several ways His spokesmen; yet all the successive acts and varying modes of revelation in the ages before Christ came did not add up to the fulness of what God had to say.”⁶

The truth, then, is this: God spoke “in many portions and in many ways” (Hebrews 1:1c) when He gave the Old Testament Scriptures. He spoke sometimes through priests, dreams, events, and history. Sometimes the prophet would write out a message, and sometimes God even spoke through a pantomime of the prophet.

God did not speak to Israel or the patriarchs (“the fathers”; 1:1b) in one long, continuing conversation, but in different times, places, and fragments. There were times when the “word from the LORD was rare” and “visions were infrequent” (1 Samuel 3:1). Nevertheless, when it was all put together, it made one harmonious whole. Why? Because it was inspired by the same “Spirit” who speaks from the one God. Therefore, the Old and New Testaments are one connected revelation to mankind, and there is no need to speak of “two revelations,” even though there are two covenants.

The phrase “in these last days” (Hebrews 1:2a),

⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 3.

or "at the end of these days" (ASV), means much more than "recently." The phrase implies that the beginning of the final age has come. The apostolic writers spoke of their own time as the "last days" (Acts 2:17; James 5:3), "these last times" (1 Peter 1:20), or "the last time" (Jude 18). Clearly, the age in which we now live is the last age. It has been with us since Jesus returned to heaven and sent back the Spirit. These last days spoken of began on the Day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus and will continue until His second coming.

Therefore, the "last days" expression used here refers to the Messianic Age; there will be no millennium to follow it, or these cannot be the last days. Jack P. Lewis noted that, by saying "these" last days, the writer was "identifying the days with his own time."⁷ The contrast is between *former times*, when God spoke through prophets, and *this final age*, the one being "preliminary" and the other "ultimate."⁸ The ultimate message is the final and definitive word from God Almighty. Therefore, we should not expect another. The new covenant, "unlike the old, is final and permanent because its leadership, its priesthood, and its kingdom belong uniquely to him who is the eternal Son."⁹ There is simply no room for a distinctly new revelation after that given through Christ. God is the author of both the old and new covenants, but He spoke in a different manner for the final one.

⁷Jack P. Lewis, "Hebrews 1:1-4: Christ the Prophet, Priest and King," in *Great Texts of the Bible Revisited: Faulkner University Lectures*, ed. M. Floyd Bailey, Mark A. Howell, and Allen Webster (Montgomery, Ala.: Faulkner University, 1993): 332.

⁸Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 37.

⁹Ibid.

By the use of the Greek aorist tense of the verb λαλέω (*laleō*) for God's speaking both through the prophets and the Son, the Epistle to the Hebrews suggests that God is no longer speaking. Bruce appropriately remarked, "The story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ, but there is no progression beyond Him."¹⁰ This is most significant in determining the value of the New Testament as God's final revelation to mankind. To deny this vital truth is to claim that someone has the ability to give us a new Bible or at least to make additions to the one we already have!

Voices of the past are shown to be inferior to Jesus. This includes angels (1:4—2:18), Moses (3:1—4:7), Joshua (4:8—13), and Aaronic priests (4:14—7:28). The author allowed for a human agent, but God was the true speaker in the Old Testament (see 3:7; quoted from Psalm 95:7). This is the same high view of inspiration held by Christ, as He mentioned that an Old Testament passage "was spoken to you by God" (Matthew 22:31, 32). Also, Jesus pointed out the living power of the Scriptures in John 10:35, when He said, "To whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)." God's Word lasts forever. It is always applicable and effective.

What God said in Old Testament times was read by the writer of this book and the early Christians from the LXX. This fact indicates that when a biblical text is properly translated, that text should be seen as God speaking to His people and the world. However, this view does not claim divine inspiration for the process of translation or for any modern or ancient

¹⁰Bruce, 3.

version! Let us settle upon this all-encompassing statement: There is but one final source of all truth.

What the apostles taught did not add to the teaching of Christ; it was what had already been authorized in heaven and was to be counted as being from the Lord Himself. All apostolic teaching was the same as if it had been uttered by Jesus' own lips (Matthew 10:19, 20, 40). Hugo McCord rendered the Greek of Matthew 16:19 as the apostles binding on earth what had already "been bound in heaven."¹¹ This in no way diminishes the importance of the Old Testament writings; for quotations and references from the Old Testament covenant are scattered throughout Hebrews, with indications that God was speaking through those writings.

Hints of Christ's coming were given in Genesis 3:15; 12:1–3; and 49:10.¹² It became even clearer at Deuteronomy 18:15 (a passage quoted by Peter in Acts 3:22), when the announcement was made that a new prophet would come to replace Moses. Later, the work and nature of the Messiah became even more specific. In Psalm 22:14–18, a prophetic description of the crucifixion was given. Christ's resurrection was foretold in Psalm 16:8–11, a prophecy that was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25–28.

The full revelation of God—His nature, power, and will—is learned only through Jesus Christ (John 10:30; 14:9; 17:3–8). This is why the New Testament, once it was completed, was the end of all revelation. When Christ came, He revealed God to the apostles.

¹¹Hugo McCord, *McCord's New Testament Translation of the Everlasting Gospel* (Henderson, Tenn.: Freed-Hardeman University, 1988). This translation is now referred to as the "Freed-Hardeman" translation.

¹²Paul explained the "seed" concept in Galatians 3:16, 19–29.

After Christ ascended, He sent the Holy Spirit to complete the revelation and to confirm the apostles' words through miracles (Mark 16:20; John 16:12, 13; Hebrews 2:1-4). To say that one needs continual revelation today is to imply that God did not speak finally through Christ!

Miracles and the final revelation go together to achieve the goal of producing saving faith (Mark 16:15-20; John 20:30, 31). In tasting "the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:5), the early saints participated in a partial way with the eternal "age," in which greater powers will be available to us. Notice these contrasts between the old and the new covenants:¹³

THE OLD: THE PROPHETS	THE NEW: CHRIST
Men called by God	God the Son
Many prophets	One Son
A fragmentary and incomplete message	A final and complete message

God has now "spoken to us in His Son" (1:2a). The word here translated "spoken" (*λαλέω, laleō*) is often used in Hebrews for divine revelations (2:2, 3; 3:5; 7:14; 9:19; 11:16; 12:24, 25). Jude 3 refers to the same concept, "the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

The closest one can get to God in this life is through His eternal Son. The only way to the Father is through the Son (John 14:1-6). It is God who spoke through the Old Testament and who still speaks in the New

¹³Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Confident: An Expository Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1982), 18.

Testament. The “word of the Lord” mentioned in Paul’s letters pertains to those things that Jesus had previously taught (1 Thessalonians 1:8; 4:15). The command which “not I, but the Lord” had given was, by implication, the “word of the Lord” as well (1 Corinthians 7:10; see 14:37).

God spoke to Moses, as recorded in Exodus 3:6 (and as later quoted from the LXX by Jesus), saying, “But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (emphasis added). This demonstrates conclusively that God was speaking to first-century people through a proper translation of the Hebrew text.

He speaks to us in the same manner today—through His Son and through the inspired writings of the apostles and their companions. Their words have come to us through adequate translation in a variety of versions. Jesus and the apostles quoted from such a version (the LXX) rather than the original Hebrew. Indeed, God still speaks to us in translations of the Bible!

Nothing should be permitted to corrupt our supreme view of Jesus. The early Christians were in danger of failing to see His significance, and we must take care not to allow the obscuring mists of doubt or unbelief to diminish the stature of Jesus in our eyes.

Robert Milligan explained at length why Jesus Christ can be called the Son of God: (1) Because of His supernatural conception and birth by the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35); (2) because of His resurrection

from the dead, according to Paul in Acts 13:33 (see Revelation 1:5); and (3) "because of his being eternally begotten of the Father."¹⁴ If Jesus had been "begotten" in the sense of being created by the Father at the beginning, God could not have made all things through Him (Hebrews 1:2a; John 1:1-3).

According to Milligan, Christ became the Son at His incarnation, but He was the "Logos" (John 1:1, 2) before His incarnation and was preexistent with the Father prior to that time. We may apply the phrase "Son of God" to Him, as He existed in His eternal nature, much as we say "Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees" when we know that he was still Abram and not Abraham until a later time. "Son of God" can apply to Christ's divine nature now as well as to His former physical being. In Matthew 4:3, 6, Satan used the expression in speaking to Him with apparent skepticism; in Matthew 14:33 the apostles referred to Christ as "God's Son" in adoration. Paul appears to have used this title in praise in Romans 1:4. The Book of Hebrews understands "Son of God" to mean one with God, so that it means complete oneness in the Father's glory. The name "Son of God" stood for the entire character of Jesus.

The Jews claimed that when Jesus said God was His Father, He was making Himself out to be God (John 10:33). If it was a false claim, then He was indeed worthy of death. To say that "Son of God" means "One with God" suggests a complete oneness in the Father's deity. Because He is the "Son," He is "Lord of all [creation]" (Acts 10:36). Simon J. Kistemaker commented that even though the literal translation

¹⁴Milligan, 52-54.

of the phrase in verse 2a is “by a Son,” “the noun is used in an absolute sense of the word and is equivalent to a proper name.”¹⁵

The first three verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews set the theme for the entire book. The method, the time, and the agents of God’s revelation are mentioned.¹⁶ Verses 1 and 2a specify the theme, while verses 2b and 3 expound on Christ’s divine attributes.

THE NATURE AND THE GLORY OF THE SON

Whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:2b–3).

Seven amazing statements in this brief passage summarize Christ’s divine nature and glory. As we examine these, let us consider what each divine attribute means in regard to our relationship with Him.

Jesus is declared to be “heir of all things” (1:2b). This phrase may echo Psalm 2:8, which says that all things were promised Him, including “the nations.” Christ now is the Supreme Ruler over everything (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22, 23). The writer in Hebrews 2:5–9 elaborated on this truth by explaining that “Jesus, as the last Adam, has all things put under his feet.”¹⁷ He mentioned “all things” (πάντων, *pantōn*, from the word πᾶς, *pas*), which is a broad expression

¹⁵Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), 28, n. 3.

¹⁶Lewis, 332.

¹⁷Bruce, 47.

that may just mean “mankind” or can be inclusive of everything on earth and in heaven. There can be no doubt that “all things” includes the redeemed of the ages. Therefore, we are Christ’s, Christ is God’s, and everything that belongs to Christ belongs to us (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). He is “heir” because God has only one “Son.” For us there is neither sonship nor heirship apart from Christ. Truly, He stands as the open door to the numerous treasures that God has provided for the redeemed. No one can contemplate this glorious truth and not be overwhelmed with amazement and joy.

We cannot state for certain when Jesus assumed His current position, but it had definitely happened by the time He announced that “all authority” had been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). Paul in Philippians 2:5-9 declared that the exaltation of Christ came as a consequence of His death, burial, and resurrection. Though many things in these verses are beyond our understanding, we must keep in mind the truth of the great exaltation of the Son of God.

The writer said, “Through [Christ] also He made the world” (Hebrews 1:2c). Although the term for “world” (αἰῶνας, *aiōnas*) is plural, it may be rendered “world” or “universe,” as the NIV and Moffatt have translated it.

Christ participated in creation, and nothing that was made was made without Him (John 1:1-3). The Alexandrian priest Arius (A.D. c. 250-c. 336) claimed that Jesus was a created being. In refuting him, the Greek patriarch Athanasius (A.D. c. 293-c. 373) replied from the first chapter of John: Since Jesus was involved in the creating of all things, He could not Himself have been a created being! Anyone today

claiming that Jesus was a created archangel would be refuted by the same reasoning. Although many doubt it, the presence of Jesus in the Godhead may be hinted at in the plural noun for God (אֱלֹהִים, *'elohim*) in Genesis 1:1, 26.

If we could imagine the astounding power exhibited in the Creation, we would not be able to limit God in any sense. Every unbeliever does exactly that, for he cannot conceive of a God who is so great that He created the vastness of space with everything that is in it. The believer should have no problem accepting that Jesus created everything. He should not even be bothered by the discoveries of black holes, novae, and previously unknown stars or planets in space. New pieces of information should cause us to worship with greater wonder and appreciation because we have learned more about God's power, might, and wisdom.

If new discoveries shake our faith, it can only be because we have a limited view of the greatness and majesty of our God. Evidence for a Creator with astounding power and ability is implied in every cell of our bodies. The God who cares so much for each child of His that He knows the number of hairs on our heads is a God who can care for us in even the smallest of matters (Luke 12:6, 7).

F. F. Bruce may have been correct in saying that the phrase "through whom also He made the world" could be a trace of a Christian hymn or a confession of faith in the early church (see John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).¹⁸ The language of verses 1 through 3 is so lofty

¹⁸Bruce, 4. More recent studies have cast doubt on the idea of identifying hymns by the euphony of words.

in praise of Christ that it seems to resonate with voices joined in an early Christian hymn.

The Son is said to be “the radiance of His glory” (Hebrews 1:3a). We see here Christ’s greatness in that He reflects the glory of the Father. “Radiance” (ἀπαύγασμα, *apaugasma*) can mean “shining,” or that which “reflects the glory of God” (RSV). The Jerusalem Bible has “the radiant light of God’s glory and the perfect copy of his nature.” However, to suggest that Christ reflects God’s glory the way the moon reflects the light of the sun would be wrong. A “direct shining” is a better description.

The phrase “the radiance of His glory” finds parallels in “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6). The glory of God was a blinding light in the Old Testament (Exodus 34:29–35). This brightness is reminiscent of the appearance of Jesus at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2, 3; Luke 9:29). At that moment, He glowed with the *shekinah* (literally, “to dwell”), that is, God’s presence as depicted in the Old Testament. The appearance of that glory should have convinced the apostles that they were no longer to heed Moses, but were to receive Jesus as their ultimate authority. God added His “Listen to Him!” to make that truth emphatic.

The glory described here is a demonstration that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ (Colossians 2:9). One evident intention of the author was to show that Jesus’ very nature is that of Deity.

Debate to prove His deity was necessary in the fourth century because to misunderstand the nature of Christ is consequently to undermine the whole nature of the gospel. In fact, our entire lives will be

wrong if we have a wrong concept of Christ and count Him only as a “manifestation” of Deity and not the essence of God. This statement is parallel to John’s declaration that “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Having shown how God communicates His will to us, the author followed with an emphasis on the glory of God which was manifested in Christ. Why was this truth so vital in the first century? The Jews gloried in the beauty of the temple and viewed it as the manifestation of God’s presence with them. Christian Jews had to understand that the glory of Christ far exceeded that of the temple, which would soon (in A.D. 70) be destroyed forever.

Christ is “the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3b). Just as the image on a coin corresponds to the form on the die¹⁹ by which it was made, so the Son of God “bears the very stamp of his nature” (RSV). “Image” (χαρακτήρ, *charaktēr*) is used only here in the New Testament and refers to an exact reproduction. It does not mean what “character” means in English. Elsewhere Jesus is called the *eikōn* (“very image”) of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15). Man is called “the image [*eikōn*] . . . of God” in 1 Corinthians 11:7. *Charaktēr* refers to an exact duplicate, while *eikōn* refers to having representative traits only. Jesus has all the attributes of God, His Father. The ancient writer Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 350–428) said that “the Word was God” (John 1:1) is equivalent to “He is . . . the exact

¹⁹The form used to shape metals into a desired pattern is called a “die.” This is the original meaning of the phraseology here.

representation of His nature."²⁰

According to this language, then, Jesus is a "copy"—but this does not mean something other than the real thing. Chrysostom explained that this term could be used only because "human language is inadequate to describe transcendental truth with precision."²¹ We must not allow translated words to drive us to a wrong conclusion in violation of plain passages elsewhere! Christ is superior to any other being or angel because of His close relationship with the Father. He is divine, though another person distinct from the Father, and is of the same essence as God (John 10:30; 17:20, 21).²² Cults, either ancient or modern, that have proclaimed Jesus to be only a mortal man or the highest angel entirely miss the meaning of Hebrews. Jesus has the Father's nature: This is astounding, but it is a truth clearly announced in the Scriptures! This expression is the greatest and most profound declaration concerning Christ's deity. "Person" or "nature" (ὕπόστασις, *hupostasis*) is one's being or essence. This passage, without question, supports the view that Jesus is of the same nature as God.

Next, the writer said that Christ "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3c). This is the same thought as the one found in Colossians 1:17:

²⁰Theodore of Mopsuestia *Commentary on John*; quoted in Hughes, 44, n. 21.

²¹Hughes, 41.

²²"The illustration cannot be [applied exactly], for it must not be supposed that the Son is formally distinct from the Father as the stamp is from the impression it creates" (Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983], 66).

“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” It is a description of providential working. As the world was created by the “word” (ῥῆμα, *rhēma*) of God, so it is sustained by His word—His preserving power. As surely as He created all things, nothing can continue to exist without Him.

The statement made here may also mean that He maintains the order and well-being of the universe. “All things” includes angels, men, suns, moons, and stars (see Genesis 1:14–19). Does this mean that Jesus performs a miracle every day by doing something or speaking a word to maintain the world order? No, for He has simply set in place a material system that continues to behave in an orderly manner. The sun comes up every morning because Jesus has not spoken the word to change that system since the beginning. We call that God’s common providence.

God’s spoken word created worlds out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3). Jesus is the “One who carries all things forward on their appointed course.”²³ The planets are kept in their orbits by His mighty, authoritative, and effective word of power. The concept of God as Creator was well known to the faithful Old Testament Jews (see Isaiah 40:21, 22). We need to dwell more upon these thoughts and believe fully in God’s creative power and providence.

Christ “made purification of sins” (Hebrews 1:3d). The NIV says He “provided purification for sins.” In this simple expression is found the heart of the gospel. Under the law of Moses, moral purification could be made only by sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus supplied the means of forgiving our sins

²³Bruce, 6.

through His blood shed on the cross. The benefit is that we have forgiveness continually available (1 John 1:7). “Had made” (ποιησάμενος, *poiēsamenos*, from ποιέω, *poieō*), being an aorist participle, shows that it was accomplished in the past. This emphasizes that Christ’s redemptive work is complete, which is a main point of Hebrews.

Jesus did not come merely to teach moral correctness or just to be an example or a martyr. He came to remove sins so that we might have eternal life. The great truth here, however, is that by making purification for sins the Son of God has accomplished something which no one else could achieve. He did what the high priest could not do, for the priest’s actions only procured remission for a year. In contrast, Jesus obtained the complete forgiveness of our sins for all time. He continues the work of redemption by ever living to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

The Son is our Redeemer. Having accomplished our purification of sins, “He sat down at [God’s] right hand” (Hebrews 1:3e). When Jesus appeared to Stephen from the right hand of the throne in heaven, He was standing (Acts 7:56)! Hebrews’ emphasis that Christ now “sits” shows that His work of redeeming is over, thereby refuting the doctrine of any kind of continuous offering of Himself as a sacrifice.

The reference made here is to Psalm 110:1, which is a key text quoted repeatedly in Hebrews (1:13; 8:1; 10:12, 13; 12:2). Hebrews 10:11 contrasts the daily standing of Aaronic priests with the sitting of Christ. No provision was made for the Judaic priests to sit; there was no chair in the tabernacle. Jewish priests continually worked to achieve an inadequate salvation. In contrast, Christ has fully brought about our

salvation by His redeeming work performed once for all at the cross!

Psalm 110 was addressed to a prince of the house of David. It was “evidently a prerogative of the house of David to be seated in the divine presence, like David himself when he ‘went in, and sat before Jehovah’” (2 Samuel 7:18).²⁴ The psalm became a favorite proof text of the early church in demonstrating the Messiahship of Jesus. (See Mark 12:37; Acts 2:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20.) It was used to show not only that His work was over and He was resting, but also that He reigned with God while sitting (Acts 2:33–36). He is “a Prince and a Savior” (Acts 5:31) and is enthroned with His Father!

²⁴Ibid., 8.