

Hebrews: Part 3 (1:1-4)

The Superiority of the Son-High Priest

The author expresses that Jesus surpasses all previous forms of God's communication and that He is the ultimate expression of God's nature and power. The preamble begins with contrasts to God's previous communication to the Jewish ancestral fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in the prophets with His final and ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ, whom He appointed heir of all things and created the ages. The preamble also emphasizes Jesus' preeminence over the angels because of His exalted position as the Son-high priest who sat down in heaven.

Literal Translation

¹In many parts and many ways long ago, **God**, **having spoken** to the fathers in the prophets, ²upon the last of these days **spoke** to us in Son, whom He **appointed** heir of all things, through whom He **made** the ages, ³**who** (Son), **being** the radiance of His (God's) glory and the exact representation of His (God's) nature and **upholding** all things by the word of His (God's) power, **having made** purification of sins, **sat down** at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, ⁴as much **having become** better than the angels as a more excellent name than they **He has acquired**.

- The translation generally reflects the Greek word order that helps the English reader to understand the author's authorial syntactical hierarchy as a single complex sentence.¹
- Finite verbs are highlighted as **red** and participles in syntactical subordinated clauses in **blue**.
- The chart on the next page only concerns Hebrews 1:1-2a: "In many parts and many ways long ago, God, having spoken to the fathers in the prophets, upon the last of these days spoke to us in Son."

¹ A complex sentence contains two things: (1) a main (independent) clause which can stand on its own as a full sentence; and (2) a dependent or subordinate clause which cannot stand on its own as a full sentence. A sentence's length, vocabulary, and other elements such as verbal aspect play absolutely no role whatsoever in a complex sentence.

The Son's Superiority of God's Revelation

Chart 2.1

Hebrews 1:1	Hebrews 1:2a
GOD	
"having spoken" (dependent clause) (syntactically inferior)	"spoke" (independent clause) (syntactically superior)
"in many parts and in many ways" (fragmentary; progressive)	"in Son" (singularity; Complete)
"long ago" (Hebrew Scriptures)	"upon the last of these days" (Greek Scriptures)
"to the fathers in the prophets" (only to the Jews)	"to us" (both to the Jews and Gentiles)

Abrahamic Covenant 

Old Covenant (obsolete)	New Covenant (perpetual)
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Davidic Covenant 

The Many versus the One

Chart 2.2

Old Covenant	New Covenant
• Many high priests who died	• One high priest who lives forever
• Many animal blood sacrifices	• One blood sacrifice of Himself
• Many high priests have entered the earthly tabernacle multiple times on the Day of Atonement	• One high priest, the Son, entered the heavenly tabernacle once-for-all for propitiation
• Many unfaithful and merciless earthly high priests	• One faithful and merciful heavenly high priest
• Many kings died	• One King lives forever
• Many high priests who only functioned as high priests	• One King-High Priest
• Many angels mediated the Old Covenant	• One mediator between God and men of the New Covenant

The next page illustrates by way of a block-flow an English literal translation of the syntactical hierarchical arrangement for Hebrews 1:1-4 of the Greek text.



The block-flow diagram follows the Greek clausal order and illustrates the syntactical hierarchy of Hebrews 1:1-4 as a single complex sentence. “**God**” is the subject of the finite verb “**spoke**” for the independent clause of 1:1-2.

The subordinate relative pronoun “**who**” (Son) becomes the subject for the finite verb “**sat down**” in the subordinate relative clause of v. 3, to which all the participles and their modifiers are further subordinated in vv. 3-4.

Finite verbs are highlighted in **red** and subordinated participles in **blue**. All indentations indicate degrees of subordination. Reading order is from top to bottom and left to right.