

HEBREWS OVERVIEW PASSAGES – SELECTED COMMENTARY

Taken from the ESV STUDY BIBLE

Hebrews 1:1-4; Hebrews 7:26-28; Hebrews 10:11-14; Hebrews 12:1-2; Hebrews 13:20-21

Hebrews 1:1-4 – Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Jesus is God's final and definitive revelation (surpassing the OT, vv. 1–2), for he is the Son of God (v. 2), the agent of creation (v. 2), the very glory of God (v. 3), and the one who purifies from sin (v. 3). In all this he is superior even to angelic beings, especially in his unique sonship (vv. 4–14). This leads to a warning to attend to the words of salvation, since they are from and about the Son (2:1–4).

Heb. 1:1 **Long ago** contrasts here with “these last days” in v. 2. Two similar Greek words (*polymerōs* and *polytropōs*) emphasize the **many times** and **many ways** in which God has spoken. This speaking was through **prophets**, which in Jewish thought included the authors of both the prophetic and the historical books of the OT (even Moses and David; cf. Deut. 18:15; Acts 1:16; 3:22; 4:25; 7:37; 26:22). **Our fathers** are the OT patriarchs (cf. Heb. 3:9; 8:9), whom the author considers his audience's spiritual forebears.

Heb. 1:2 Four points of contrast occur between vv. 1 and 2: time of revelation (“long ago” vs. **these last days**); agent of revelation (“prophets” vs. **Son**); recipients of revelation (“fathers” vs. **us**); and, implicitly, the unity of the final revelation in the Son (cf. the “many times and in many ways” in v. 1, implying, by contrast, that this last revelation came at one time, in one way, in and through God's Son). Since God has spoken finally and fully in the Son, and since the NT fully reports and interprets this supreme revelation once the NT is written, the canon of Scripture is complete. No new books are needed to explain what God has done through his Son. Now believers await his second coming (9:28) and the city to come (13:14). Jesus is **heir of all things** (i.e., what he “inherits” from his Father is all creation) by virtue of his dignity as Son (1:4). The preexistence, authority, power, and full deity of the Son are evident in his role in creating **the world**; cf. John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16.

Heb. 1:3 The greatness of the Son is further exhibited. **Glory** is often viewed metaphorically as light (e.g., Isa. 60:1, 19; 2 Cor. 4:4–6; Rev. 21:23), and here the Son is that glorious light of God. Jesus is the full and definitive representation, the **exact imprint** (Gk. *charaktēr*), of God's real being (his **nature**, Gk. *hypostasis*). Thus the Son is identical in substance to God, being himself fully God. In all attributes and abilities, the Son is exactly like the Father. The Son, who created the **universe** (Heb. 1:2), **upholds** it by his own powerful **word** (cf. Col. 1:17). Jesus deals with the human need of **purification for sins** (see Heb. 9:11–10:18). Jesus ascends to the place of supreme authority (the **right hand** of God); see 1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; also e.g., Mark 14:62; Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; 1 Pet. 3:22. The fact that he has **sat down** there indicates that his work of salvation had been completed. **Majesty** also describes God in Heb. 8:1 (cf. Deut. 32:3; Ps. 145:3, 6; 150:2; Jude 25).

Heb. 1:4 The main theme of chs. 1 and 2 is announced: Jesus is **superior to angels**. Angels were objects of much speculation in first-century Judaism. Certainly they were known to appear in human form, to minister before the very throne of God, to guide and protect humans, and to have revealed the Mosaic law (see 1:7; 2:2; 12:22; 13:2). Yet Jesus is deemed superior to them, in part because his **name** (i.e., his essence) is “Son” (1:5), which points to a more intimate relationship and which speaks of a better family inheritance (all that belongs to the Father belongs to his unique Son).

Hebrews 7:26-28 – For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. 28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Heb. 7:26 fitting that we should have. Jesus’ high priesthood is appropriate and is for the benefit of believers. Several words emphasize Jesus’ excellence in terms of his sinlessness (**holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners**; see 4:15; also 9:14 and Jer. 11:19) and his heavenly position (**exalted**).

Heb. 7:27 Multiple points of contrast are made between the Levitical high priests and Jesus as the one eternal high priest (see chart).

Differences between Levitical High Priests and Jesus the High Priest

Levitical High Priests	Reference	Jesus the High Priest
many in number	7:23–24	one
temporary	7:23–24	permanent and eternal
sinners who had to offer sacrifices for their “own sins”	7:26–27	holy, innocent; offers sacrifice only for others
had to sacrifice “daily”	7:27	sacrificed “once for all”
offered sacrificial animals	7:27; 9:11–14	“offered up himself”
entered the holy places through a man-made tent and by means of the blood of goats and calves	9:11–12	entered the holy place of the presence of God and by means of his own blood

Heb. 7:28 The law in its weakness (vv. 18–19) appoints sinful mortal **men in their weakness** to be a continuous succession of **high priests** (vv. 23–24). God, however, made an **oath** (Ps. 110:4), promising an eternal high priest (Heb. 7:20–22). This oath through David came after the Mosaic law and sets aside the previous Mosaic priesthood by appointing the messianic **Son of God** (1:1–14; 5:5–10) as eternal high priest. **made perfect**. See 5:9 and note on 5:9–10.

Hebrews 10:11-14 – And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Heb. 10:11–13 Previous arguments are summarized, focusing on the efficacy of the **single sacrifice** offered by Christ. The priest **stands**, showing that his work of offering sacrifices never ends. **which can never take away sins**. See notes on vv. 1–4. Christ’s sacrificial work has ended, and now he sits **at the right hand of God** (see esp. Ps. 110:1, cited in Heb. 1:13), showing that the securing of full and final forgiveness of sins has been accomplished.

Heb. 10:14 Perfected for all time does not mean that believers are now already sinless, but that Christ has fully earned their perfection, which will certainly be applied to Christians in God’s good time. The eternal perfection (see 11:40; 12:23) of the saints stems from the once-for-all-nature of Jesus’ sacrifice. Hence, believers look to Christ and not to themselves for a cleansed conscience, full forgiveness of sins, and total flawlessness in the future. **those who are being sanctified** (i.e., those who are made holy; 2:11; 10:10; 13:12). The Greek present participle allows for the idea of progressive sanctification in this life and/or present positional sanctification of the believer as one who from the start is deemed perfectly holy (see 10:10; and “saints” in 6:10; 13:24).

Hebrews 12:1-2 – Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Heb. 12:1–2 Jesus, Founder and Perfecter of Faith. In light of the previous examples of faith (ch. 11), and especially in light of Jesus’ own model of endurance, believers are called to endure as runners in a race.

Heb. 12:1 cloud of witnesses. These are the OT “heroes of the faith” in ch. 11, as is indicated by the **therefore** in 12:1 and by the Greek wordplay between “witnesses” (*martyrs*, v. 1) and “commended” (*martyreō*, 11:39). “Witnesses” may have a double meaning: (1) These OT heroes witnessed to their faith by their words and their faithful lives. (2) Like spectators watching an athletic contest in an arena, they may now be watching or “witnessing” believers’ lives. The first sense is a common meaning for the word, but in this verse the imagery of being **surrounded** by these witnesses gives the sense that they are eagerly watching from heaven, and the image of running **the race that is set before us** might lead one to think of an athletic race in a sports arena, with all these heroes of the faith from ch. 11 watching as present-day believers take their turn in the same race that they once ran. However, nowhere else does the NT envisage saints in heaven watching saints on earth, nor does it encourage Christians ever to pray to these believers in heaven or to ask for their prayers. Christ prays for his people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25) and is the only mediator between them and God (1 Tim. 2:5). The Holy Spirit helps their prayers (Rom. 8:26–27), and all Christians are priests with the right of direct access to God (Heb. 4:16; 10:22; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). **lay aside**. This first exhortation pictures **sin** as a **weight** (or “impediment”) to be discarded, since otherwise it ensnares or obstructs the athlete. **let us run**. A metaphor also found in Paul (1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Tim. 4:7–8), with a focus on **endurance** in the faith (see Heb. 12:2–3; cf. 10:32, 36).

Heb. 12:2 perfecter. Through his atoning work, Christ's perfection leads to the perfection of his people (which will be realized fully on the last day). **for the joy that was set before him endured.** The **cross** of Christ represents the greatest suffering in history, for Jesus not only suffered physically but also experienced God's just wrath in taking upon himself the sin of the world. Still, the promise of future reward and joy gave Jesus strength to suffer. **despising the shame.** Crucifixion, performed naked and in public, and inflicting prolonged pain on the victim, was intended to cause shame as well as death (cf. 6:6). **at the right hand.** See Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12.

Hebrews 13:20-21 – 20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us I that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Heb. 13:20–21 Benediction. Following a common practice in NT letters (drawing on OT examples), the author invokes God's blessing on his readers. **God of peace.** Cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23. **from the dead.** See Heb. 5:7; 7:16. **shepherd.** Cf. John 10:1–18; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4. **eternal covenant.** The new covenant has been established forever. **equip.** The purpose of this equipping is that God's will might be done (cf. 10:36).