

1.

Prologue

(1:1–4)

The book of Hebrews begins with a clear prologue (Heb. 1:1–4). This prologue is fairly short but theologically dense (Heb. 1:1–4).

The prologue to Hebrews is glorious. In fact, ‘glorious’ or any other word does not seem grand enough for this section of Scripture. In one sentence, the author of Hebrews (AH) informs us of the redemptive-historical reality of God’s plan and core aspects of his Son’s person (divine and human natures) and work (creator and redeemer). In addition, these central theological truths are presented with rhetorical flair (e.g., alliteration and parallels) and serve to introduce important themes to be discussed later in Hebrews (e.g., Son, new related to old, spoken word of God, high priest, sin, angels).

Although Hebrews is a letter, it does not begin with a traditional opening like most letters in the NT.¹ Instead, it begins with a theologically and rhetorically rich prologue.²

1. See earlier chapter, Introductory Matters.

2. For those who see the AH as having a closer connection to traditional Greco-Roman oral-rhetoric than I do, the term *exordium* is used instead of ‘prologue’ or ‘introduction’ for Heb. 1:1–4, e.g., Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle of Hebrews*, Subsidia Biblica 12 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), 79; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (London:

The only close parallel in the NT for a letter is 1 John 1:1–4. In non-letters, John 1:1–18 is similarly rich theologically and fairly rhetorical.³ Luke 1:1–4 is certainly rhetorically sophisticated. AH's unusual opening, as opposed to a traditional letter, adds to the impact of the prologue.

As to the grammatical/logical flow of the prologue, Hebrews 1:1–4 is one sentence. All agree that the primary grammatical clause is 'God ... spoke to us in the Son' (1:1–2).⁴ As to the logical order of the remaining six statements about Christ in 1:2–3, there is disagreement. My view is presented below.

Following the primary clause are two relative clauses with the grammatical subject being God the Father:

1:2b: whom [the Son] he [God] placed heir of all

1:2c: through whom [the Son] also he [God] made all ages

Hebrews 1:2b refers to the Son's ascension after his resurrection and 1:2c refers to the initial creation. Hence, 1:2b and 1:2c are presented in reverse historical order. This purposely contrasts for rhetorical effect with the four statements about the Son in Hebrews 1:3. These four statements in 1:3 have as their grammatical subject the Son and are in 'normal' historical order including the Son's essence in eternity past, his work in creation, his work on the cross, and his ascension.

T&T Clark/Continuum, 2006), 24; Harold W. Attridge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 19; and Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, SP 13 (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2007), 21, 35. Note, a few see the *exordium* as extending to 2:4, e.g., Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB 36 (NY: Doubleday, 2001), 174–75. D. F. Watson defines an *exordium* as 'an introduction that strives to make the audience attentive, well-disposed and receptive to the message' ('Rhetoric, Rhetorical Criticism,' *DLNT*, 1041–51, esp. 1042).

3. Although I do not agree to his 'levels of style' emphasis, Dan Nässelqvist sees Heb. 1:1–4 having a 'grand' style and John 1:1–18 having 'aspects of both plain and grand style' ('Stylistic Levels in Hebrews 1:1–4 and John 1:1–18,' *JSNT* 35 [2012]: 31–53, esp. 44, 50).

4. E.g., Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 63.

1:3a: who [Son] being the radiance of his [God's] glory and imprint of his [God's] substance

1:3b: and upholding all things by the word of his [Son's] power

1:3c: after [the Son's] making purifications of the sins

1:3d: He [Son] sat at the right hand of the Majesty on high

As opposed to my view, some explain the somewhat usual order by assuming that the AH is intentionally using a chiasmic structure. For example, Ebert sees a A B C D C' B' A' structure with Hebrews 1:3a–b being the important center D.⁵ Still others believe that the difference between Hebrews 1:2b–c and 1:3a–d is explained by viewing Hebrews 1:3a–d as a hymnic fragment not originally composed by AH.⁶

1:1–2a *[In] many parts and many ways, long ago, God, [after] speaking to the fathers by the prophets, in these last days spoke to us by [the] Son ...*

This opening to Hebrews has rhetorical flair in three ways. First, there is the double use of **many** (πολύς) in the opening words.⁷ Second, the alliteration of the Greek letter π (English 'p') is used for five major words in the opening participial phrase.⁸ Third, there is the wonderful parallel presented here in Greek order:

5. Daniel J. Ebert IV, 'The Chiasmic Structure of the Prologue to Hebrews,' *TJ* 13 ns (1992): 163–79, esp. 168. William L. Lane sees an A B C C' B' A' pattern with C being 1:2c and C' being 1:3a–b (*Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47a [Waco: Word, 1991], 6–7). The supposed exegetical impact of a chiasmic structure is the importance of the center phrase.

6. Koester does not agree to this view, but gives a good explanation of it along with various authors who support it (*Hebrews*, 178–79).

7. Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως, 'many-parts and many-ways.' Note, these are the absolute first words of Hebrews; the Greek text has no 'in.'

8. Πολυμερῶς (many-parts), πολυτρόπως (many-ways), πάλαι (long-ago), πατέρας (fathers), and προφήταις (prophets). David Allen Black states that alliteration with π occurs often in Hebrews. He references 1:1; 2:1–2, 10; 3:12; 9:26; 11:4; 12:11; 13:19 ('Hebrews 1:1–4: A Study in Discourse Analysis,' *WTJ* 49 [1987]: 175–94, esp. 189n27).

Long ago	God after speaking	to the fathers	by the prophets
in these last days	he spoke	to us	by the Son

In the OT, God spoke during **many parts**, which implies different times or sections or occasions throughout OT history.⁹ This speaking in **many parts and many ways** is positive, but it is surpassed by the completeness and finality of the Son.¹⁰ God's **speaking to the fathers by the prophets** is functionally the OT Scriptures.¹¹ The Son's coming is part of the **last days** as he inaugurates the final redemptive period that extends into the New Heavens and Earth.¹²

God **spoke to us by the Son**. As noted above, this is the primary grammatical clause of Hebrews 1:1–4. For the OT, God's **speaking ... by the prophets** is using **speaking** in a straight-forward way. However, the way God **spoke** by the Son is primarily through the Son's actions, although it does include both God's and the Son's words (e.g., Heb. 1:5, 2:12–13).¹³ The theme of God speaking is significant

9. Hence, the translation 'times' is implied. So also John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vols. 17–23 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1991), 19:2; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 26; and many major translations, e.g., KJV, NIV, ESV, CEB. BDAG prefers 'in various parts' (847).

10. Some see an implied 'fragmentary' aspect to the OT revelation, e.g., Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 36. I disagree.

11. OT 'prophets' quoted in Hebrews include Moses (Heb. 1:6; 8:5); Nathan (Heb. 1:5), Isaiah (Heb. 2:13), Jeremiah (Heb. 8:8–12; 10:16–17), Habakkuk (Heb. 10:37–38), Haggai (Heb. 12:26), and David (Heb. 1:13; 2:6–8; 4:7; 10:5–7). Another angle is that Christ is seen to be a speaker in the OT (Heb. 2:12; 10:5–7).

12. For 'last days' used similarly in the NT, see Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:5, 20; 1 John 2:18; and Jude 18. At the word level, this expression (בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים, ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν) is in the OT at Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; Jer. 23:20; 49:39 (LXX 25:19); and Dan. 10:14.

13. The Greek preposition ἐν has a semantic range of instrumental use ('by') and locative/sphere ('in'). Hence, for **by** (ἐν) **the prophets**, the instrumental use is clearly used; for **by** (ἐν) **the Son**, a combination of

throughout the book of Hebrews and is highlighted in 1:5–13.¹⁴

Son and the priesthood of Christ are two important aspects of Christology in Hebrews, and the Son theme is introduced first.¹⁵ In the expression, **by the Son** (ἐν υἱῷ), there is no definite article in Greek, although it is clear to all that the definite Jesus is in mind as the Son. Most translations insert ‘his’ to show this definiteness.¹⁶ So why no article?¹⁷ Most likely the AH is including a *qualitative* aspect of the definite Son.¹⁸ That is, part

instrumental and sphere is used—God **spoke** by and in the actions of the person of the Son. Is Christ here called the Word of God? Not exactly, but it certainly dovetails with other passages that do (e.g., John 1:1). For a good overview of God’s Word being more than words, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010), 63–81.

14. See Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, LNTS 507 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2014). For a good general discussion of God being a speaking God, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), 470–75. For a review of the Word of God throughout redemptive history, see Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters*, Five Solas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 165–220.

15. Maybe slightly overstating the case, but Attridge notes that ‘two elements which determine the whole christology of Hebrews [are] the status of Christ as the exalted Son and the sacrificial, priestly act by which he effected atonement for sin’ (*Hebrews*, 36). Donald A. Hagner also sees Son and High Priest as the two most important, but further concludes that Son of God ‘is clearly the central christological designation of Hebrews’ (‘The Son of God as Unique High Priest: The Christology of the Epistle of Hebrews,’ in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker, MNTS 7 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 247–67, esp. 249).

16. E.g., ‘his’ in the Geneva Bible, KJV, NIV, NASB, ESV; although ‘a’ in RSV, NRSV, CEB.

17. An initial option that presents itself is that definite nouns often drop articles in prepositional phrases. However, this option is to be dismissed here as the parallel **by the prophets** (ἐν τοῖς προφήταις) does include the article. For a general discussion of articles dropping out of prepositional phrases, see BDF §255 and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 247. For anarthrous ‘son’, see Heb. 5:8; 7:28; and 11:24.

18. In fact, Wallace uses this text as one of his prime examples of the qualitative aspect of an anarthrous noun (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*,

of the emphasis is that God spoke by ‘Son-ness’ as opposed to speaking by prophets.¹⁹ As Lane states well, ‘The eternal, essential quality of Jesus’ sonship qualified him to be the one through whom God uttered his final word.’²⁰

The theology here is very profound. There is *continuity* between the OT and NT in that God has spoken in both. However, there also is *contrast* in that **in these last days**, God has spoken with finality in the Son.

The theme of contrast-within-continuity is another large theme in Hebrews that is introduced in Hebrews 1:1–2.²¹ God’s covenantal plan and Scriptures extend throughout redemptive history, and the plan includes a progressive escalation of God’s presence and benefits. The Son has come and continues as the mediator of the ‘new covenant’ (Heb. 9:15). This dovetails well with the Reformed covenantal/redemptive-historical hermeneutic.²²

244–45). For another discussion of quality and anarthrous nouns, see Maximillian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples*, trans. Joseph Smith (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), §§171–83.

19. So also Black, ‘Hebrews 1:1–4: A Study in Discourse Analysis,’ 183; and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 44n2.

20. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47a (Dallas: Word, 1991), 11.

21. Lincoln states, ‘The exposition sections are all variations on the theme of the comparison between the previous stage of God’s revelation to Israel and the final and superior stage of that revelation in Christ’ (*Hebrews: A Guide*, 52). As examples of contrast-within-continuity, I. Howard Marshall notes that to understand the new covenant and Christ’s priestly work, one needs to understand the continuity and discontinuity of these analogies from the OT. He also points out that the ‘concept of faith’ provides a ‘strong element of continuity’ (*New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004], 611–13).

22. In a good, brief discussion, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. uses Heb. 1:1–2 and the implications throughout Hebrews as ‘provid[ing] explicit biblical warrant’ for the ‘redemptive-historical’ hermeneutical approach to Scripture (‘Systematic Theology and Hermeneutics,’ in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback [Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016], 39–51, esp. 44–49).

1:2b–3 ... *whom he placed heir of all, through whom also he made all ages; who being [the] radiance of [his]²³ glory and imprint of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, [after] making purification of the²⁴ sins, he sat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ...*

As discussed above, the two phrases **whom he placed heir of all** and **through whom also he made all ages** both have God the Father as their grammatical subject and are in ‘reverse’ historical order. God **placed** the Son as **heir** or owner/inheritor **of all** things. Here, the AH is most likely speaking of this occurring at the Son’s ascension/exaltation in his mediatorial Messianic role (cf. Heb. 1:3, 13; 2:8–9; 12:2; Pss. 2:8; 89:27; Rom. 4:13; 1 Cor. 15:28; Phil. 2:9–11).²⁵ That is, the Son was **placed** or publicly made the **heir** at his ascension with the full inheritance coming at the Second Coming. In the list of six phrases related to the Son, the exaltation is first as it signals the glorious accomplishment of his earthly work. The concepts of ‘son’ and **heir** are clearly related. Later in Hebrews, believers will also be deemed heirs who inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14; 6:11–12).

23. As do most translations, I take **his** (God the Father) following **substance** as distributive and thus to modify also **glory**.

24. Some Greek manuscripts have ἡμῶν, ‘our.’ Hence, the KJV translates as ‘our sins’. Otherwise, all the Greek manuscripts have the definite article τῶν. However, most English translations do not include ‘the’ as the context makes it clear that the Son died for definite sins and there is no implied contrast to some other category of sins. As usual, my translation is purposely mechanical.

25. As to exaltation, so also Koester, *Hebrews*, 178; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 47; and C. Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 vols., EBib (Paris: Gabalda, 1952–1953), 2:5; contra James Moffatt who sees this as a ‘pre-temporal act’ (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979 {1924}], 5). Calvin and Chrysostom see **heir** as only referring to Christ’s human nature (John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St Peter*, trans. William B. Johnson, eds. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance, Calvin’s Commentaries 12 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963], 7; John Chrysostom, ‘Homily 1 on Hebrews,’ (NPNF¹, 14:366–69, esp. 367). Contra Calvin and Chrysostom, Owen sees Christ’s exaltation related to his mediatorial role as a person in both natures (*Hebrews*, 19:40, 90).

Through (διά) the Son, God the Father **made all ages**.²⁶ The NT often connects God the Father and God the Son (and implied God the Holy Ghost) in the function of creator (e.g., John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16–17; cf. Gen. 1:1–2). That is, the Trinity is the creator, not just God the Father.²⁷ Although the term may not be the best, the Son is ‘instrumentally’ involved in creation as the NT always uses an instrumental preposition to describe the relationship.²⁸ In context, declaring that the Son is the creator is looking to eternity past and affirming the Son’s divinity. The creator-Son will be further discussed in 1:10–12 (cf. 13:8) and the creator-Father in 2:10; 3:4; 4:3–4; 9:26; and the creating word of God in Heb. 11:3.

Starting with **who being the radiance of his glory and imprint of his substance**, Hebrews 1:3 has four statements with the Son as the grammatical subject. As noted above, these four are in ‘normal’ historical order including the Son’s essence in eternity past, his work in creation, his work on the cross, and his ascension.

The Son is the **radiance of the Father’s glory**.²⁹ **Glory** has

26. My translation of **ages** is a mechanical translation of the plural of αἰῶν, which etymologically comes into English as ‘aeon’. LSJ gives the default meaning as ‘period of existence’ (p. 45). The Greek word has a broad semantic range, even in Hebrews itself, from ‘forever’ (Heb. 1:8) to ‘age’ (Heb. 6:5) to ‘world/universe’ (Heb. 11:3). Clearly here it implies the whole universe (that has existed through all periods). In Heb. 1:3, the Geneva Bible and KJV translate as ‘worlds’, NIV as ‘universe’, and ESV and NASB as ‘world’. See BDAG for more nuances (pp. 32–33).

27. ‘It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing, the world’ (WCF 4.1). The Nicene Creed includes Christ as a creator, ‘by whom all things were made.’ For a very good discussion on ‘The Creator is the Triune God’, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008 [2nd ed. 1906–1911]), 2:420–26.

28. John 1:3 διά; John 1:10 διά; 1 Cor. 8:6 διά; Col. 1:16–17 ἐν, διά; Heb. 1:2 διά.

29. 1 Clem. 36 has several direct connections to Heb. 1, including ‘radiance of his majesty’, ‘much greater than angels as he inherited a more excellent name,’ and quotes of Ps. 2:7–8 // Heb. 1:5; Ps. 104:4 // Heb. 1:7; and Ps. 110:1 // Heb. 1:13.

quite a broad semantic range in biblical literature, but here, as can be inferred from **radiance**, it is emphasizing, at least metaphorically, brilliant light. In Scripture, the Godhead is often metaphorically pictured in heaven as radiating brilliant, beautiful light (e.g., Pss. 36:9; 104:1–2; Isa. 60:1; Rev. 4:5; 21:23). In addition, often in theophanies, God appears as light to the humans witnessing the event (e.g., Exod. 16:7, 10; Deut. 5:24; Luke 9:29; Acts 9:3; 22:11; Rev. 21:24; cf. Matt 5:16; Luke 2:32; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6).³⁰ **Radiance** refers to light actively coming from a source.³¹ The Lord Jesus Christ radiates the true glory of the Father in all his aspects, not just light. What a grand thought! Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), and whoever has seen him has seen the Father (John 14:9). Calvin states, ‘The radiance in the substance of God is so mighty that it hurts our eyes, until it shines on us in Christ.’³² Kelly comments, ‘Christ is not merely a reflection of God, but he is the true radiance of the eternal light. As we confess in the Nicene Creed, he is “light from light”.’³³ All the glorious

30. BDAG lists as the first definition of **glory** (δόξα), ‘condition of being bright or shining, brightness, splendor, radiance’ (257, emphasis theirs). See excellent discussions in Silva, ed., ‘δόξα,’ *NIDNTTE*, 1:761–67; Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 592–95; Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018– [1698–1699]), 2:469–79; and Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:252–55. 1 Clem. 36:2 quotes this phrase but interchanges ‘majesty’ from Heb. 1:4 for ‘glory’.

31. **Radiance** (ἀπαύγασμα) could have a more passive meaning such as ‘reflection’; however, virtually all interpret with the active ‘radiance’ or ‘effulgence’ meaning, e.g., BDAG, 99; LSJ, 181; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 13; and Bruce, *Hebrews*, 48 n. 22; *contra* NJB and RSV. Wis. 7:26 possibly uses ἀπαύγασμα with more of a reflection sense, ‘For she [wisdom] is a reflection/radiance of eternal light.’

32. Calvin, *Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter*, 8. Chrysostom, ‘Truly he [Christ] has led them to unapproachable light, to the very brightness itself’ (‘Homily 1 on Hebrews,’ [NPNF¹, 14:367]).

33. Douglas F. Kelly, *The Beauty of Christ: A Trinitarian Vision*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus/Mentor, 2014), 169. Kelly notes that often in Scripture the beauty/light of creation is connected to inner-Trinitarian beauty, cf. Heb. 1:1–3; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6 (p. 30).

attributes of the Godhead exist in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Using the metaphor of brilliant light, the AH moves his reader to first think upon the physical beauty and splendor of brilliant light (e.g., lightning flashes), which then moves the reader to consider the glorious attributes of the Godhead, and then finally the reader considers that these glorious divine attributes are shown in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who also suffered for us.³⁴

Closely connected grammatically to **radiance of his glory** is the phrase **imprint of his substance** (ὑπόστασις, *hypostasis*).³⁵ More or less making the same point as the first phrase, the second phrase declares that the Son is the **imprint** or representation of the Father's **substance**. This phrase combines the ideas of a coin being imprinted from the original stamp with a son being an 'imprint' of his father. Again, this is another remarkable statement of high Christology as the divinity of Christ is affirmed.

Although **imprint of his substance** clearly refers to the divinity of Christ, there is quite a debate as to the exact meaning of ὑπόστασις, which I translate as **substance**.

Option 1: By using **substance**, I conclude that the Son has the same substance/nature/being/essence/*ousia* as the Father. That is, the Son's substance and the Father's substance are exactly the same and are one. The substance/being of the Son from all eternity has had the **imprint** of substance/being of the Father. The emphasis of **imprint** would be an *exactness*.³⁶ To quote the WSC 6, 'There are three persons in the Godhead ... the same in *substance*, equal in power and glory' (italics mine).

34. Zwingli in his 1523 Short Christian Instruction §5 states, 'He [Christ] also embodies the beauty and image of **the father** according to Hebrews 1:3 and has let himself be so miserably spit on, mocked, and beaten for our sakes' (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 4 vols. [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008–2014], 1:18).

35. **Who being** at the beginning of Heb. 1:3 grammatically applies to both phrases.

36. ESV translates as 'exact imprint'; NASB, 'exact representation'; Geneva Bible, 'ingraued forme.'

This option is supported by most modern exegetes and theologians.³⁷

Option 2: This option concludes that ὑπόστασις should be translated here as person/subsistence/personal-properties/*hypostasis*.³⁸ Hence, the text would be confirming that the *person* of Christ properly represents the *person* of the Father. The emphasis of **imprint** would be on a correct representation but not exactness. That is, the Son is not the Father, but the Son is the correct representation and image of the Father. This option has been well supported by the earlier Reformed tradition.³⁹ *Both options are theologically true; the question is, Which one is being advocated by Hebrews 1:3?*

In Hebrews, ὑπόστασις is used several ways: ‘confidence’ or ‘assurance’ in 3:14 and ‘reality’ in 11:5. There is an additional

37. E.g., Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 80–86; John Webster, ‘One Who is Son: Theological Reflections on the Exordium to the Epistle of Hebrews,’ in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart, and Nathan MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 69–94, esp. 87–88; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 43; Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 30; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 99–100; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, *Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Nashville: Homan Reference, 2015), 57; and the Catechism of the Catholic Church §§241–42

38. The Geneva Bible and KJV translations of ‘person’ follows this option.

39. E.g., Calvin, *Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter*, 8; *Institutes* 1.13.2; William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1983 [1629]), 88; David Dickson, *Truth’s Victory over Error: A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*, trans. and ed. John R. DeWitt (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2007 [1684]), 21–23; Owen, *Hebrews*, 19:85–95; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992–1997 [1679–1685]), 1:254, 299; and Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1992–1995 [1702]), 1:141, 1:165. See discussion in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4:182–86, 233, 254–55. The Belgic Confession 8, 10 and Hungarian Szikszó Synod (1568) 10 interpret *hypostasis* in Heb. 1:3 as referring to person (for Szikszó Synod translation, see *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, 3:150).

linguistic complication from Church history. The AD 325 Nicene Creed used *hypostasis* and *ousia* interchangeably to refer to 'being/essence' in the anathema section. However, by the AD 451 Chalcedon Creed, *hypostasis* was now a technical term for 'person' and *ousia* for 'being'.⁴⁰ Of course, just because Hebrews 1:3 uses *hypostasis* does not mean that the Chalcedon technical meaning of 'person' for *hypostasis* should apply to Hebrews.

As mentioned above, I conclude that *hypostasis* in Hebrews 1:3 refers to the Son and Father having the same **substance/being**. This is primarily based on (1) **imprint** having an 'exact' connotation, (2) better dovetails with **glory**,⁴¹ and (3) the next phrase concerning creation/providence is more related to divine attributes that the Father and Son share (e.g., **power**).⁴²

The second of the four statements with Son as the

40. For Greek and Latin texts for Nicene and Chalcedon Creeds, see Phillip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom: With History and Critical Notes*, rev. David S. Schaff, 6th ed., 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1931), 2:60–62; or Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, eds. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), §§125–26, 300–03.

41. That is, both **glory** and **substance** are referring to the being of the Father that is shared by the Son, thus making the same general point with the two phrases. So also Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 13. Geerhardus Vos disagrees. He sees **radiance of his glory** as referring to the Father's being that is shared by the Son, but the **imprint of his substance** refers to the Father's person. Hence, both the unity of being (first phrase) and distinction of persons (second phrase) are shown in these two phrases. 'Two images were chosen' because 'one image was not able to express these two truths at the same time' (*Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., 5 vols. [Bellingham: Lexham, 2012–2016], 1:58–59).

42. The best argument against my view is well stated by Owen (*Hebrews*, 19:85–95, esp. 90). He sees the whole person of Christ in view (both human and divine natures, not just the divine nature). Given this, the comparison is between the Son's person and the Father's person. He complains that my view assumes that only Christ's divine nature is being considered. Hence, for Owen, if the whole person of Christ is being emphasized, then there cannot be an exact connection between the Father's divine nature and Christ's two natures.

grammatical subject is **upholding all things by the word of his** [the Son's] **power**. This expands upon the Son's being involved in initial creation as discussed above. The Son is also involved in continuing providence.⁴³ Many creeds cite Hebrews 1:3 to show God/Christ's continuing providence (e.g., Heidelberg Catechism 27, Belgic Confession 12, WCF 5.1, WLC 18, WSC 11). The expression **word** (ῥῆμα) **of his power** is, of course, related to Genesis 1 where God 'speaks' creation into existence (cf. Ps. 33:6). Similar wording is used in Hebrews 11:3, 'the ages were prepared by the word (ῥῆμα) of God.'

After noting the Son's being and his providential control of creation, the AH includes the Son's redemptive work in the statement **making purification of the sins**, which is the third statement with Son as the grammatical subject. It is the Son, not man, who atones for the elect's sins. The Son is *both* the priest and the sacrifice (Heb. 9:11–12), which according to Brown, is the 'germ [of] the leading argument for the superiority of Christianity to [an improperly truncated] Judaism.'⁴⁴ This juxtaposition of the Son as divine creator and his having died for sins is jarring—assuming one does not know the glorious redemptive story. The dying clearly reveals the human nature of the Son and foreshadows that emphasis in Hebrews 2:5–18. Having both the divine and human natures of the person of the Son emphasized in Hebrews 1:3 also foreshadows and explains the later emphasis on mediator (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:22).⁴⁵

The fourth and final statement of Hebrews 1:3 with Son

43. In Scripture, when God is referred to as the initial creator, it is implied that he also is active in continuing providence. For examples of explicit statements to this effect, see Ps. 104; Col. 1:16–17; and Rev. 4:11.

44. John Brown, *Hebrews*, Geneva (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1961 [1862]), 34.

45. Lincoln argues for the AH's Christology 'the key concept, though by no means the dominant title, ... [is] mediator.' This explains how both the divine and human natures exist 'side by side in this epistle ... both aspects of this portrayal have to be held together and taken equally seriously if the true nature of Christ as intermediary is to be appreciated' (*Hebrews: A Guide*, 85).

as the grammatical subject is **he sat at the right hand of the Majesty on high**. The exaltation of the Son is clearly stated here and elsewhere in Hebrews (1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Of course, the sitting at the throne of God is understood metaphorically.⁴⁶ The expression **right hand** emphasizes the power of the Son. Calvin comments that in context this power shows that salvation is not temporary despite present appearances.⁴⁷ Putting the third and fourth statements together is the humiliation/exaltation scheme that often describes Christ in Hebrews and the NT (e.g., Luke 24:46; Acts 2:23–24; 5:30–31; Phil. 2:6–11; 2 Cor. 13:4; Heb. 2:7; 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13; WSC 27–28).⁴⁸ With this exaltation statement, the AH assumes the resurrection, but it is curious that resurrection is not explicit in Hebrews except for the benediction (Heb. 13:20–21).⁴⁹

1:4 ... [after] becoming so much better than the angels, he has inherited a name much superior in contrast to them.

This verse is somewhat of a transition between Hebrews 1:1–3 and 1:5–14 as much of 1:5–14 relates explicitly to **angels**.⁵⁰ Why bring up **angels** here? Many see Hebrews 2:2 as the answer where angels are mediators of God's message (cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).⁵¹ Hence, both angels and prophets

46. For a good discussion, see Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:369–73. This is not to deny, however, that Christ's body is currently in heaven.

47. Calvin, *Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter*, 9.

48. Attridge argues that both the humiliation and exaltation of Christ are 'essential and Hebrews will develop each with equal insistence' (*Hebrews*, 47). Georg Strecker sees a larger pattern matching Phil. 2: preexistence (Phil. 2:6 // Heb. 1:1–3b; humiliation (Phil. 2:7 // Heb. 1:3c); exaltation (Phil. 2:9 // Heb. 1:3d–5); and parousia (Phil. 2:10–11 // Heb. 1:6–13) (*Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000], 610).

49. Thomas R. Schreiner argues that the resurrection is important to the AH and is implied often. See *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 399–400.

50. So also Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 103.

51. So, e.g., Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 17; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 104; and

were mediators of God’s revelation. Hebrews 1:2 already declared the Son greater than prophets, and here, the Son is greater than the **angels**. Another option dovetailing with this is simply to see the ‘internal logic of the Epistle’s argument’ as a lesser-to-greater argument.⁵² The Son is greater than the prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, and priests. It would be appropriate to include angels in this as they are presented in the OT as especially gifted beings. A final option, based on mirror reading, might be that in the congregation or in those influencing the congregation there is an unhealthy interest in angels and/or improper exaltation of angels that the AH is implicitly counteracting. In any event, it is clear that the AH exalts the Son above **angels**.

Similar to the last clause in Hebrews 1:3, **he has inherited** refers to the Son’s exaltation. The Son receives his name in a more public way at the completion of his earthly mediatorial work.⁵³ The Greek verb for **inherited** is the cognate of ‘heir’ in Hebrews 1:2.⁵⁴ In some sense, this is an *inclusio* for the several wonderful statements about the Son. Of course, the Son was always **better**⁵⁵ **than the angels**, it is just at his exaltation this became more public.

Exactly what is the **name**? Apparently, it is ‘Son’ as this is the emphasis of the prologue and Hebrews 1:5–8.⁵⁶ Obviously,

Mitchell, *Hebrews*, 39. Of course, there may have been other angel issues related to the congregation that we do not know about.

52. John P. Meier, ‘Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations of Heb. 1, 5–14,’ *Bib* 66 (1985): 504–33, esp. 522.

53. So also Kistemaker, *Hebrews*, 32; and Owen, *Hebrews*, 19:125.

54. ‘Heir’ (κληρονόμος) and ‘to inherit’ (κληρονομέω). The English translation also uses cognates.

55. This is the first of thirteen times ‘better’ (κρείττων) is used in Hebrews (e.g., Heb. 8:6). It matches the pattern of contrast within continuity. The AH uses an unusual amount of comparatives. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, ‘Jesus, the Mediator of a “Better Covenant”: Comparatives in the Book of Hebrews,’ *Faith & Mission* 21 (2004): 30–49, esp. his listing of all comparatives on pp. 40–42.

56. So also Bruce, *Hebrews*, 50–51; Koester, *Hebrews*, 182; and Mitchell, *Hebrews*, 39. Contra Johnson who prefers ‘Lord/kyrios’ (*Hebrews*, 73) and

the second person of the Trinity is the Son before his exaltation as Hebrews 1:2–3 and 5:8 show. Interestingly, ‘Jesus’ is not mentioned until Hebrews 2:9, and ‘Christ’ not until 3:6.

Reflections

As mentioned above, the prologue to Hebrews is glorious. If one assumes, as I do, that these four verses present the reality of Christ, my confidence to live for him increases. No matter the difficulties or attractions of this world, they are put into proper perspective by the Son, who is the creator and redeemer, the God-man, and the one humiliated and then exalted.

Although not especially emphasized by the flow of Hebrews 1:1–4, the Son is presented as prophet, priest, and king, which of course relates to the three major offices of the OT.⁵⁷ The *prophet* aspect is shown as God the Father ‘spoke by the Son’ and in comparison to the OT ‘prophets’ (Heb. 1:1–2). The *priest* aspect is related to ‘making purification for sins’ (Heb. 1:3) The *king* aspect is included in the Son’s being ‘heir of all things’ (Heb. 1:2) and ‘at the right hand of the Majesty on high’ (Heb. 1:3).⁵⁸

Eusebius (AD 260–340) discusses Christ’s three offices in the context of a variety of quotes from Hebrews, including Hebrews 1. He notes that OT prophets, priests, and kings were anointed and were a ‘type’ of Christ, *the* anointed one, the ‘only and true Christ.’ He was the ‘only High Priest of

Richard Bauckham, ‘YHWH’ (‘The Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews,’ in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, 15–36, esp. 20–22).

57. Hughes also notes the prophet-priest-king triad in Heb. 1:1–4 (*Hebrews*, 49). Calvin emphasizes these three offices of Christ (*Institutes* 2.15). Also see WSC 24–26, WLC 43–45, and Richard P. Belcher, Jr., *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2016).

58. The Reformed tradition sees Christ functioning in his three offices as mediator in both his state of humiliation and his state of exaltation. See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 356; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:333; and WLC 42.

the whole [universe], the only King of all creation, and only Archprophet of the Father of the prophets.⁵⁹

The *Geneva Bible: 1602 Edition's* summary of the whole book of Hebrews includes the three major offices. 'The drift and end of this epistle is to show that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, both God and man, is that true eternal & only *Prophet, King, and high Priest*, that was foreshadowed by the figures of the old law, and is now in deed exhibited of whom the whole Church ought to be *taught, governed, & sanctified*.'⁶⁰

The Heidelberg Catechism 31–32 connects the three offices of Christ to the same three 'mini-offices' for Christians. (1) Prophet. Christ is 'our chief Prophet and Teacher, who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption.' We respond in faith to 'confess his name.' (2) Priest. Christ is 'our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of his body has redeemed us, and ever liveth to make intercession for us with the Father.' We respond by being 'a living sacrifice of thankfulness to him.' (3) King. Christ is 'our eternal King, who governs us by his Word and Spirit and defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us.' We respond to 'fight against sin and the devil in this life, and hereafter, in eternity to reign with him over all creatures.'

59. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.3.8–9, translation mine. He quotes from Ps. 2:7 // Heb. 1:5; Ps. 45:6–7 // Heb. 1:8–9; and Ps. 110:1, 3–4 // Heb. 1:13; 5:6; 7:17, 21 in the same section (1.3).

60. *The Geneva Bible: The Annotated New Testament 1602 Edition, With Introductory Essays*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1989), folio 109, italics mine, English is slightly updated.