

## *The Role of Hebrews 1:1–4 in the Book of Hebrews*

Rick Boyd

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies  
Wesley Biblical Seminary  
rboyd@wbs.edu

### **Abstract**

This essay considers the complex structure of Hebrews, focusing on the role of the opening statement of the book. The study finds causation with parallel instances of particularization, the author providing general statements in both the cause (1:1–4) and effect (10:22–25) which are then subsequently unpacked through the rest of each main unit of material. Emphasis is placed on the role of 1:1–4 in the context of the author’s argument regarding God’s eschatological revelation in the Christ-event. This revelation is made ἐν υἱῷ (1:2a), an expression long undervalued by scholars but one that provides the basis for and understanding of the various themes in Hebrews.

**Key Terms:** Hebrews; Sonship; Superiority; Christ-event; Causation; Particularization

### **Introduction**

The structure of Hebrews remains a subject of interest without consensus, even after millennia of consideration and study.<sup>1</sup> With

---

<sup>1</sup> Many have attempted to explain the intricate arrangement of materials in Hebrews, including: Wolfgang Nauck, “Zum Aufbau des Hebräerbriefs,” in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, ed. Walther Eltester

various major themes interwoven throughout the book,<sup>2</sup> understanding their relationship to one another and to the central motif is a major task. In addition to the convolution of themes, the author alternates between exposition and exhortation in an interchanging pattern, a key feature of the book. In this way, the author provides an explication of the Christ-event<sup>3</sup> and its meaning in

---

(Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1960), 199–206; Albert Vanhoye, *La structure littéraire de l'épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963); George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Cynthia Long Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship between Form and Meaning* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Barry C. Joslin, "Can Hebrews be Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches," *CurBR* 6 (2007): 99–129.

<sup>2</sup> For the theme of "Christology," see D. Friedrich Büchsel, *Die Christologie des Hebräerbriefs*, BFCT 27 (Gütersloh: 'Der Rufer' Evangelischer Verlag, 1922); William R. G. Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes*, WMANT 53 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981); Angela Rascher, *Schriftauslegung und Christologie im Hebräerbrief*, BZNW 153 (Berlin: deGruyter, 2007). For "the High priesthood of Jesus," see Keijo Nissilä, *Das Hohepriestermotiv im Hebräerbrief: Eine exegetische Untersuchung* (Helsinki: Oulu-Oy Liiton Kirjapaino, 1979). For "Melchizedek," see Fred L. Horton, Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SNTSMS 30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). For "the use of the OT," see Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews*, WUNT 2/260 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). For "Perfection," see David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'*, SNTSMS 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; paperback repr., 2005). For "Faith," see Erich Grässer, *Der Glaube Im Hebräerbrief* (Marburger theologische Studien 2 (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1965); Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee, *Faith in Hebrews: Analysis within the Context of Christology, Eschatology and Ethics*, StBibLit 19 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001). For "the people of God," see Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 17. For "eschatology," see Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT 2/223 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 363–93. For "the new covenant," see Susanne Lehne, *The New Covenant in Hebrews*, JSNTSup 44 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990); Knut Backhaus, *Der Neue Bund und das Werden der Kirche: Die Diatheke-Deutung des Hebräerbriefs im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> By Christ-event, I mean the incarnation, birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and ongoing ministry of Jesus. In Hebrews, that equates to the eschatological speaking of God *ἐν ᾧ*

a variety of ways including repeated comparison and contrast, frequent and strategic reliance on OT passages, and unique titles for Jesus including apostle (3:1), high priest (e.g. 2:17), and perfected son (7:28). The combination of content and arrangement make for a significant challenge to anyone who enters the literary world of Hebrews.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I propose a possible solution to address some of the difficulties facing the study of Hebrews by considering the opening verses as a key to unlocking many of the complexities of the book. Specifically, I argue for a qualitative use<sup>5</sup> of the expression ἐν υἱῷ in the general statement in 1:1–4, which is then particularized in 1:5–10:18.<sup>6</sup> This first unit of material constitutes the main argument of the author, providing the cause for the effect expected in believers, or “us” (1:2a; 10:22–25)—to persevere in the reality of the new filial relationship the Father has pronounced and provided through the perfected son (10:22–13:21).<sup>7</sup>

## Overview of the Challenge

In surveying the book of Hebrews, one must be able to follow the author’s development of the discourse, especially considering the numerous themes and their relationship to one another. Themes

---

<sup>4</sup> Barry Joslin concludes, “After a summation of these eight influential proposals, one can see that there is little consensus regarding the structure of Hebrews” (“Can Hebrews be Structured?” 122).

<sup>5</sup> I argue not only that God has spoken by means of His son but also in the form and with the qualities of sonship in the flesh.

<sup>6</sup> The author of Hebrews utilizes ideological particularization as 1:1–4 provides the general thesis for the argument of the book which is then given particular content in 1:5–10:18. See David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 100–3.

<sup>7</sup> I deal with this issue in greater detail in my doctoral thesis: George Richard Boyd, Jr., “Sonship: Central Theological Motif and Unifying Theme of Hebrews” (PhD diss., London School of Theology, Brunel University, 2012).

appear to overlap which make it difficult to break the material into distinct units. Albert Vanhoye observed certain notable aspects of the text including what he labeled *mot-crochet* (hook word), announcement of the subject (anticipating the subject of the next section), and various literary inclusions.<sup>8</sup>

The author appears to be communicating with the reader on multiple levels, especially when considering the interchanging pattern of exposition and exhortation throughout the first nine and a half chapters. The particular type of expression (exposition or exhortation) works with the manifold material content involving the various themes in order to create this “word of exhortation” (13:22), but determining main and subunits of material (structure) as well as discerning the literary devices the author is using (structural relationships) in developing the material into a coherent and consistent message challenges every student of Hebrews.

Over the past half-century numerous scholars have undertaken to analyze and attempt to determine the structure of Hebrews while addressing the unfolding of the message of the book with its various themes. Some have focused primarily on structure, while others on themes, and still others on a variety of issues including the setting for the sermon.<sup>9</sup> However, one key feature that has often been undervalued by scholars is the opening sentence of the book (1:1–4). I suggest that this Christological kernel forms the heart of the complex thematic cohesiveness of Hebrews and the key that unlocks its structure. The author intends this message to communicate encouragement to a weary and struggling people (e.g. 10:36; 12:1–3,

---

<sup>8</sup> Vanhoye, *La structure*, 37–49.

<sup>9</sup> Many scholars see Hebrews as a sermon, based in part on the phrase used in 13:22, “word of exhortation” (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως), which refers to 1:1–13:21. This expression is found one other time in the New Testament (Acts 13:15) in describing Paul’s proclamation of the gospel of Christ (13:16–41). See e.g. Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 13–14; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 25–26; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 11–16.

12–13) in order that these holy siblings (3:1; 10:19) might respond in faithful perseverance.

While 1:1–4 is recognized by most scholars as an eschatological and Christological declaration, immediately placing the focus of the book on the exalted son,<sup>10</sup> most scholars also tend to overlook the possibility that this relatively small unit of material might involve more than the message of Jesus or his sacerdotal accomplishment or his glorious exaltation to the right hand of God.<sup>11</sup> It might also include both the *mode and objective* of God speaking to his people with the expression ἐν υἱῷ. This is supported by the contrasts made in the first verse and a half (1:1–2a) as God’s former speaking is contrasted with his eschatological speaking—“long ago” (πάλαι) is contrasted with “these last days” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων); the two audiences are contrasted between “the fathers” (τοῖς πατράσιν) and “us” (ἡμῖν); the means of God speaking is also contrasted with “by the prophets” (ἐν τοῖς προφήταις) and “in [a] son” (ἐν υἱῷ).

Perhaps the clue to the significance of the author’s declaration is expressed through the vital initial implied contrast: the former speaking of God (Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως), which initiates the sermon, points to an implied contrasting complement, the eschatological speaking of God. This contrast suggests God’s eschatological speaking ἐν υἱῷ is *complete* and *perfect*, a major theme throughout Hebrews.<sup>12</sup> In other words, that which God has spoken “to us” ἐν υἱῷ is his perfect and complete communication over

---

<sup>10</sup> Guthrie observes, “Throughout the discourse the author keeps his hearers focused on the One first introduced in the book as υἱῷ (1:2)” (*Structure*, 91).

<sup>11</sup> Scholars understand 1:1–4 in various ways; e.g. Attridge (*Hebrews*, 19, 36), Cockerill (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, 63), and Craig R. Koester refer to it as the *exordium* of the book (*Hebrews*, AB 36 [New York: Doubleday, 2001], 174–76). John W. Kleinig refers to it as “a confessional proclamation about God’s speaking to the congregation by his Son,” but also as part of the overall introduction to the book: 1:1–2:4 (*Hebrews*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia, 2017], 23–25).

<sup>12</sup> Perfection is a significant theme in Hebrews, see 2:10; 3:14; 5:9, 14; 6:1, 11; 7:11, 19, 25, 28; 8:8; 9:6, 9, 11, 26; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23; 13:20–21.

against prior partial disclosures.<sup>13</sup> The implication is that when God spoke ἐν ὑμῶν it was no longer “many parts” (i.e., it was complete) and “many ways” (i.e., it was singular, comprehensive, and ultimate) but rather a *perfect* revelation and one the author expected the audience to willingly receive.<sup>14</sup>

## Structure of Hebrews<sup>15</sup>

In reading through Hebrews and attempting to observe the development of the message, including shifts of emphasis, a major break takes place at 10:18–19 where the author transitions from a primarily expository division to a primarily hortatory one.<sup>16</sup> The text reveals the author’s use of *causation* with 1:1–10:18 containing the thrust of the argument (cause) and 10:22–13:21 urging the essential response of the recipients to the argument (effect), with the intervening verses, 10:19–21, briefly restating the cause in shifting the focus to the intended effect.

---

<sup>13</sup> G. B. Caird argues that the main thesis of Hebrews is the full and final divine revelation spoken in a Son, over against the “avowedly incomplete” prior revelation through the prophets (“Just Men Made Perfect,” *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* [1966]: 90). He claims that the author attempts to prove the thesis by “a detailed exegesis of his four main scriptural texts,” which he identifies as Pss 8, 95, 110, and Jer 31. Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 65.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding “the prophets” as a reference to OT revelation, see Fred B. Craddock, “The Letter to the Hebrews: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 12:22; Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, New International Biblical Commentary 14 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 21; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 45–46, 65; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 10–11.

<sup>15</sup> The following section presents my view of the structure of Hebrews. As previously noted, scholars lack consensus on the matter and this proposal is an attempt to better understand the structure and especially the role 1:1–4 plays in Hebrews. See Boyd, “Sonship,” 2–123.

<sup>16</sup> The post-positive particle οὖν, although occurring thirteen times in the text of Hebrews (2:14; 4:1, 6, 11, 14, 16; 7:11; 8:4; 9:1, 23; 10:19, 35; 13:15), signals a major shift of emphasis from cause to effect at 10:19. The significance of οὖν at 10:19 is one of emphasis as argued above.

The author, in 1:1–10:18, lays out in detail the Christ-event and its effect on the relationship between the believer and God. He does so through a recurring contrast between the previously prescribed but ultimately imperfect cult of the Mosaic covenant, including a reference to the importance of the former “commandment” (7:18), the “faults” of the people in their relationship with God (8:8), and the new covenant sealed by the blood of Christ through his once-for-all self-offering (10:10).<sup>17</sup>

Following the reminder that the new covenant transforms the believer and provides perfect forgiveness for sin (10:16–18; cf. 8:8–12),<sup>18</sup> and following the general summary of what Christ accomplished in terms of the access Jesus’s blood offers believers (10:19–21), the author then launches into full exhortation in response to the work of Christ. He offers consecutive hortatory directives to come into God’s presence (10:22), hold on to the confession of hope (10:23), and consider other brothers and sisters with the purpose of love and good works (10:24–25). This is followed by an unpacking of the content of those three distinct hortatory directives (10:26–13:19) followed by a benedictory purpose statement at the end of the message (13:20–21).

The structure appears to involve parallel units of particularization arranged causally where 1:1–4 is unpacked and developed in the rest of the first main unit (1:5–10:18), and 10:22–25 is likewise particularized in the rest of the second main unit (10:26–13:19),<sup>19</sup> with 13:20–21 providing the intention for the entire “word

---

<sup>17</sup> I refer to the author as ‘he’ on the basis of the self-reference in 11:32 and the masculine form of the participle (δηγούμενον).

<sup>18</sup> The author devotes 8:6–13 to the new covenant promised in Jeremiah, then reiterates the inner transformation of the new covenant that characterizes it in 10:16–17, highlighting the significance of the new covenantal relationship between believers and God. The new covenant relationship is not mere formality but actual transformation of the heart and mind (cf. 8:10; 10:16) that corresponds with *knowing* the Lord (cf. 8:11) in relationship with Him.

<sup>19</sup> Of particular note is the parallel use of the construction τὸσοῦτω ... ὅσῳ in 1:4 and 10:25, each one marking the end of a general statement. This construction

of encouragement” (13:22): that the recipients would be “set in order in every good thing in order to do God’s will,”<sup>20</sup> with God doing what pleases him through Jesus (13:21). The concept of transformation with respect to the believing recipient seems to be foremost on the mind of the author, even in the benediction (being “set in order in every good thing”), with the progressive transformation taking place under the discipline of God as Father (12:1–13) as the believer perseveres in the race of faith (12:1) and is healed (12:12–13).

The argument that the author presents, the sustained contrast between the former imperfect cult of the Mosaic covenant and the perfect work of the new covenant sealed in the blood of Jesus, is an exposition of the two expressions of revelation.<sup>21</sup> This contrast includes the variety of themes contained in the first nine and a half chapters. The intermixing of the various themes becomes apparent as the reader of Hebrews moves through the book following the opening general statement (1:1–4) with the reader encountering theme after theme in the context of contrast. Among the widely recognized major themes are the superiority of the son to angels (1:5–2:18), the superiority of Jesus to Moses (3:1–6) and the warning to not be like those whom Moses led in the wilderness (3:7–4:13), the superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus to the Levitical priests and

---

appears to be used in 1:4 to emphasize the full realization of God’s intention for “son” (cf. 2:6–8; 6:17), perfected in Jesus (the Christ-event), and in 10:25 to emphasize the urgency of the intimate response of “sons [and daughters]” as “the day” draws near (cf. 9:27–28). The only two occasions of this construction in Hebrews are found in 1:4 and 10:25, respectively indicating the established superiority of the son and the need for sons (*ἀδελφοί* in 10:19; cf. 2:11) to endure in the faith of a son (10:32–12:13), pioneered and perfected in Jesus (12:2; cf. 2:10 and the use of *ἀρχηγός*).

<sup>20</sup> Doing God’s will is the very purpose for the coming of the Son (cf. 10:7, 9) and the purpose for God speaking *ἐν υἱῷ*: Sonship as expressed through Jesus’s faithfulness as son (3:6).

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the importance of the beginning of a text to the ensuing discourse in ancient rhetoric, see Klaus Berger, *Exegese des Neuen Testaments* (Uni-Taschenbücher 658; Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1977), 49.



priesthood (7:1–8:6), and the superiority of the new covenant to the first covenant, made possible with Jesus’s self-offering as the superior sacrifice over the imperfect offerings of the first covenant (8:7–10:18). The author presents each of these themes as he develops the discourse. However, the basis for each of these themes in terms of superiority (contrast) is found in the identification of the superior one as son.

The emphasis of the first main unit of material involves both the content and the means of God’s eschatological speaking to “us” ἐν υἱῷ in contrast with the piecemeal and imperfect disclosure of God “long ago to the fathers.” The case the author makes throughout 1:5–10:18 sets the former revelation, sufficient though imperfect as it was,<sup>22</sup> over against the perfect revelation ἐν υἱῷ.<sup>23</sup> The argument the author makes in 1:1–10:18 is still present in 10:19–13:19 but is relegated to a supporting role in the call of the author to the recipients through the hortatory emphasis beginning at 10:22. The recipients are being urged to respond in persevering faith to the revelation of God in the perfected son, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith (cf. 12:2).

The major transition in the book takes place in 10:19–21, which provides a general summary of the author’s contention to this point, moving from cause to effect, such that the necessary response to God’s eschatological revelation ἐν υἱῷ generates new and living

---

<sup>22</sup> See 11:1–40. The former speaking of God was sufficient for those who combined it with faith (4:2), but those who lived “by faith” under the revelation “long ago” did not receive the promise and were not made perfect apart from “us,” we to whom God has spoken eschatologically ἐν υἱῷ. Their faith was forward-looking, awaiting the One referred to as the pioneer and perfecter of the faith (12:2). The perfect comes ἐν υἱῷ.

<sup>23</sup> The contrast is introduced in 1:1–2a, but the finite and therefore controlling verb in the contrast is found in 1:2a ([ὁ θεὸς] ἐλάλησεν) indicating that the real focus is God speaking “in a son.” James W. Thompson writes, “The centerpiece of the author’s persuasive effort is the claim that ‘God has spoken in these last days by a Son,’” asserting the central place of this statement in the argument of the book (*Hebrews*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 20).

relationships with God (10:22), with the “world” (10:23), and with the family of God (10:24–25). The relationships are then addressed in greater detail in 10:26–13:19 before climaxing with the benediction of 13:20–21.<sup>24</sup> The shift at 10:19–21 is one of *emphasis*.

Scholars agree that one of the defining characteristics of Hebrews is the interchange between exposition and exhortation.<sup>25</sup> Some argue that this is a quality of a sermon with the “preacher” moving through his discourse and pausing to exhort the hearers along the way as he makes his argument.<sup>26</sup> However, the overarching emphasis in 1:1–10:18 is exposition, the author describing what God has spoken to us in these last days ἐν υἱῷ. At Hebrews 10:19–21 the author briefly and broadly generalizes the argument he has just made while introducing the causal movement from an expository emphasis to the hortatory emphasis with οὖν in 10:19.

Beginning with 10:22 the emphasis is on the recipients’ response to what God has spoken to “us,”<sup>27</sup> even though the contrast, initially presented in 1:1–2a and emphasized in 1:5–10:18, is revisited occasionally in 10:22–13:19 when necessary for the author’s hortatory purposes (e.g. 12:18–24; 13:10–13). The author stresses exposition in 1:1–10:18 and exhortation in 10:22–13:19 with a generalized causal transition in 10:19–21 and a multi-faceted general exhortation in 10:22–25 which is then particularized in 10:26–13:19, climaxing in the

---

<sup>24</sup> This is really a telic benediction, where the author provides the *purpose* of the “word of exhortation”: that the God of peace/wholeness “set [the recipients] in order in every good thing to do His will, doing in us what is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ...”

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Guthrie, *Structure*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 11–16; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 10; William L. Lane, “Hebrews: A Sermon in Search of a Setting” in *SmJT* 28 (1985): 13–18; Albert Vanhoye, *A Different Priest: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Leo Arnold (Miami: Convivium Press, 2011), 439–40.

<sup>27</sup> Note the consecutive first person plural verbs in 10:22 (προσερχόμεθα), 10:23 (κατέχωμεν), and 10:24 (κατανοῶμεν) addressing the three new relationships for those who receive what God has spoken ἐν υἱῷ.

benedictory purpose statement in 13:20–21.<sup>28</sup> The contrast introduced in 1:1–2a is present throughout the book but is a point of particular emphasis in 1:1–10:18.

## Hebrews 1:1–4: A General Statement<sup>29</sup>

Hebrews begins with an ingressive statement of contrast between God’s former revelation and his full and final revelation.<sup>30</sup> The complete disclosure is given ἐν υἱῷ, the subject of the description in 1:2b–4. The initial contrast is given particular content through a recurring pattern of contrast in 1:5–10:18, reiterating and expounding the perfect revelation of God “in one who is son.”<sup>31</sup> The son is superior as messenger and message (2:1–3),<sup>32</sup> leader (3:2–6),<sup>33</sup> priest and priesthood (7:11–28), promises (8:6), and mediation of the superior covenant (8:6; 9:15). Each of these contrasts can be traced back to 1:1–2a.

---

<sup>28</sup> In further support of the transition at 10:19–21 is the change in subject of the finite verbs in the two main units of material. God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is the subject of nearly half of all finite verbs in 1:1–10:18 (45% in contrast to the audience who are the subject 19% of the time) indicating an emphasis on what God has done in the Christ-event, whereas the recipients are the subject of more than a third of all finite verbs in 10:22–13:19 (35% in contrast to God/Jesus/Holy Spirit who are the subject just 12% of the time) indicating a switch in emphasis to the believers’ response to God’s eschatological revelation in the Christ-event.

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed consideration of the movement from the general-to-particulars in 1:1–10:18, see Boyd, “Sonship,” 48–97.

<sup>30</sup> The practice of the opening words of a text providing orientation and serving as the general statement for the bulk of the writing is not unique to Hebrews. See, e.g., Deut 1:1; Ps 73:1–2; Hab 1:1; Mark 1:1.

<sup>31</sup> See Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 88–90.

<sup>32</sup> The salvation, referred to as “so great” in 2:3, is described in 5:9 as eternal salvation of which the source (αἴτιος) is the perfected son, Jesus (5:8–9).

<sup>33</sup> Jesus is called the “file-leader/pioneer” (ἀρχηγός) of the salvation of many sons (2:10) as well as apostle/sent one (3:1), whereas the generation of Israelites who were being led by Moses (*the one sent* by God to lead his people—Exod 3:10, 13, 14, etc.) and whose bodies fell in the wilderness (3:17), asked for a new leader (ἀρχηγός) in their rebellion (Num 14:4).

“Son” is the focal point of the general statement in 1:2b–4. It is significant that the particular son is not named until 2:9 indicating the primacy of the sonship relationship. The concept of Son, not the specific identity of the son, is the focus of the opening statement. The essence of God’s eschatological revelation is identified by ἐν υἱῷ in 1:2a and described in 1:2b–4, but given historical specificity in 1:5–10:18 as a matter of emphasis.<sup>34</sup>

After setting the contrast between God’s revelation “long ago” and “in these last days,” the author expounds the qualities at the heart of the perfect revelation in 1:2b–4: “son.”<sup>35</sup> The first reference to the characteristics of “son” is the relative clause “whom [God] placed heir of all things.”<sup>36</sup> The relative pronoun refers back to “son” and describes him as the one who will inherit all things. The inclusive substantive adjective “all” seems to connect the inherent nature of son as heir to the use of Psalm 8 in chapter two, specifically the reference to God having subjected the “world-about-to-be” (τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν; 2:5) to the object of the Psalm adaptation (2:5–9). The reference to “all things” is found in 1:2b as well as 2:8a and this appears to be a reference to Jesus who is the one “we see” crowned with glory and honor in fulfillment of the Psalm (2:9). However, according to 2:8b it is to the human (ἄνθρωπος), the indirect object of the Psalm (2:6), the one to whom God subjects all things, that we do *not yet* see all things subjected. This use of the adverb of time “not yet” (οὐπω) suggests a time to come when all things *will be* subjected to the human. Additionally, Jesus is referred to as the pioneer of the salvation of many sons (2:10) whom he leads into

---

<sup>34</sup> Some historical content of the Christ-event and its effects is offered in the second main unit of the book (10:29; 12:2–3; 13:12–13, 20), but only in support of the hortatory emphasis of that particular unit of material.

<sup>35</sup> William L. Lane recognizes the anarthrous use of υἱός as qualitative (*Hebrews* 1–8, 11). Cf. Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 90; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 36; Brook Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (repr. London: Macmillan, 1920), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ὁν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων. SED WITHOUT COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

glory, indicating that Jesus is not the only one entering this realm of glory and honor, but other sons (and daughters) follow him.<sup>37</sup>

This connection to 2:5–10 suggests that, indeed, 1:2b may not be limited to Jesus as the son who will inherit all things, but applies to sons (and daughters) who will follow their pioneer, those whom Jesus is not ashamed to call brothers (2:11). It is “son” whom God has placed heir of all things.<sup>38</sup>

The author continues to describe the attributes of “son” with the second relative clause, “through whom [God] also made the ages.”<sup>39</sup> Although the standard translation points to the son’s role in the creation of the world/universe,<sup>40</sup> the clause could be understood as follows: “he accomplished the ages.”<sup>41</sup> The key term is *τοὺς αἰῶνας*. The noun *αἰών* is found fifteen times in Hebrews and, with the exception of 1:2b and 11:3, it can only be translated temporally in each occurrence. The most common use is as a reference to “forever.”<sup>42</sup> The other occurrences refer to the “world-about-to-be” (6:5) and the completion of the ages (9:26). The author is consistent in his temporal use of *αἰών* with the possible exception of 1:2b and 11:3.

The occurrence in 11:3 bridges the gap between the author’s general statement regarding the testimony of faith by the older ones

---

<sup>37</sup> See L. D. Hurst, “The Christology of Hebrews 1 and 2,” in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 151–57.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 1:14 (in light of 2:3, 6–8); 6:17 (the phrase “the unchangeableness of [God’s] purpose” once again points to the original intent of the text of Psalm 8 for the “human”); 9:15.

<sup>39</sup> Δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας.

<sup>40</sup> Among the translations that interpret *τοὺς αἰῶνας* as “worlds” or “world” or “universe” are KJV, NASB, RSV, ESV, NIV, NLT. Many commentators also agree with the interpretation of *ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας* in terms of the creation of the physical universe including, e.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 40–41; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 93; Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 96; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 66–68; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> The author uses *ποιέω* with the sense of “accomplishing” or bringing something to completion in 1:2; 7:27; 10:7, 9, 36; 11:28; 13:21.

<sup>42</sup> The expression *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* is used in 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28; 13:8; *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος* is found in 4:8; and *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* in 13:21.

(11:1–2) and the particular roll call of the members, the faithful ones through the ages, from Abel (11:4) to the unnamed martyrs (11:33–38), each of whom looked forward to the perfection of the faith that Jesus would bring (11:39–40; 12:2).<sup>43</sup> The author seems to make clear that chapter 11 concerns the divine ordering of the Christ-event, that which required faith by those who, through the ages, had trusted God without obtaining “the promise” (11:39) which would eventually come in the Christ-event.

With that context, 11:3 could then be understood according to the following translation: “By faith we understand the ages to have been set in order (*κατηρτίσθαι*) by the word of God so that which is seen would not come about from [things] that are visible.” In other words, the foundation of the life of the human is faith, specifically dependence on and trust in the God of wholeness (13:20). The chapter as a whole involves the witness of faith through the ages, the saints of long ago (1:1) who lived by faith without seeing what was promised.<sup>44</sup>

If 11:3 is understood as a reference to the word of God *setting the ages in order*, then perhaps 1:2b should be understood in terms of God *accomplishing the ages* through [the] son at the end of the ages (9:26). It suggests that “son” may be the culmination of the ages, the promise of the faith that led up to the Christ-event and the ultimate result of what Jesus has accomplished as delineated in 1:5–10:18.

---

<sup>43</sup> Note the articular use of *πίστις* with reference to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of *the* faith (*τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν*).

<sup>44</sup> Of particular note is 11:26, which refers to Moses who “considered of greater riches than the treasures of Egypt the reproach of the Christ, for he looked away (*ἀπέβλεπεν*) to the reward.” At the beginning of the following chapter the recipients are encouraged to run with perseverance their race of faith, fixing their eyes (*ἀφορῶντες*) on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith (12:1–2). Considering 2:8 (*ὀρῶμεν*) and 2:9 (*βλέπομεν*), it appears the two Greek words for “seeing” are used interchangeably. This indicates that perhaps what Moses saw as being of greater riches/value than the treasures of Egypt was Jesus, the one the recipients are urged to focus on as they run their race of faith.

The next pair of qualities of “son” that the author describes are ontological in nature<sup>45</sup> in what may be a hendiadys. The son is defined as being the effulgence of the glory of God and the impress of the essence of God. Both expressions focus on the son *making visible* the ontological reality of God, and this appears to be an essential characteristic of a son, specifically the son of God. The author seems to be emphasizing the nature of the son as making manifest the divine reality and majesty. It is through the son that the glory and essence of God is expressed or revealed, and this further explains the perfect eschatological revelation of God ἐν υἱῷ.

The ontological relationship between God and “son” is in view in the other ontological statement of the son (5:8), made in reference to “the Christ” (5:5). As the author explains, the one who is the essential son<sup>46</sup> appeared in the flesh (5:7) and was described as suffering while being tempted (2:18), sympathizing with human weakness but without sin (4:15), learning obedience from what he suffered (5:8), and being perfected through sufferings (2:10; 5:8–9; 7:28).

The concessive clause in 5:8, introducing the ontological reference to Christ as son, points to the portrayal of “son” in the flesh, explaining how the incarnate son revealed the glory of God and the impress of his essence in a way that human senses could experience. The intrinsic filial relationship to God, the subject of 1:3a, is given particular content and expression in the “days of [Jesus] flesh” (5:7) as he manifested the glory and essence of God through obedient suffering rooted in his reverent awe of God.<sup>47</sup> Even though he is the

---

<sup>45</sup> Whereas 1:2b uses the finite verbs ἔθηκεν and ἐποίησεν to describe what God has done for and through the son, 1:3a uses the present participle ὢν to describe the son ontologically.

<sup>46</sup> The text of 5:8 reads, καίπερ ὢν υἱός, indicating that “the Christ” (5:5) is essentially the son of God.

<sup>47</sup> The ontological son (5:8), in the days of his flesh, is characterized in terms of his εὐλάβεια (5:7). This is the reason given for God hearing his agonizing prayers and supplications. This might suggest a primary quality of a son in the flesh in terms of reverence, specifically reverent obedience in the midst of suffering. This appears to be the incarnate revelation of God’s glory and essence (1:3a).

essential son of God, he makes the glory of God and the reality of God<sup>48</sup> visible in his flesh, learning obedience from the things he suffered, specifically suffering through temptation (2:18; 4:15) and overcoming by faith (2:13; 12:2), with the author referring to the means of victory as reverent awe. Jesus, according to the author, is the embodiment of sonship in the flesh, the very effulgence of God's glory and the impress of the reality of him. The son is the one who makes God's glory and essence manifest in what amounts to worship.<sup>49</sup>

The description of the son in whom God has spoken eschatologically continues in 1:3b with the assertion that he is “carrying all things along by the word of his power.” This statement refers to the apparent sustaining of “all things” by means of the ability of the son,<sup>50</sup> but the author may be using the present participle φέρων to indicate a dynamic rather than static situation. The son is not just sustaining all things, but he is moving them along, carrying them along in a dynamic, perpetual agency of life, and doing so by means of the word of his ability.

The verbal form δύναμαι of the noun δύναμις is applied to Jesus, either directly or indirectly, seven times in Hebrews. All seven are in the first main unit (1:1–10:18) where the author is particularizing God's eschatological speaking “to us” ἐν υἱῷ. The son is described as being “able to help those who are being tested/tempted” (2:18); “able to sympathize with our weaknesses” (4:15), which is once again tied to being tested/tempted;<sup>51</sup> “able to be gentle with those who are

---

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 99.

<sup>49</sup> The author, in the hortatory division (10:19–13:21), exhorts the recipients to worship God with “reverence and awe” (εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους; 12:28). Note, this comes at the end of the chapter focusing on the sonship of the believer and the need for perseverance. Sons (and daughters) live a life of reverent worship of the Father.

<sup>50</sup> The word typically translated “power” in 1:3b, τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, is the noun form of the verb δύνασθαι meaning “to be able.” The noun might be best understood as “ability” indicating that all things are carried along by the word of the son's ability.

<sup>51</sup> The two passages are linguistically connected. Compare terms related to suffering—2:18 (πέπονθεν) and 4:15 (συμπαθῆσαι); being tested/tempted—2:18 (πειρασθεῖς) and 4:15 (πεπειρασμένον); and the declaration of the son's ability to help—



ignorant and deceived” (5:2); “able to save completely those who are coming to God through him, always living to intercede for them” (7:25); “able to perfect the conscience/consciousness of the one worshipping” (9:9), which by implication suggests that it is *not* possible through the Levitical priesthood; “able to perfect those coming to [God]” (10:1); and “able to remove sins” (10:11), another implied contrast between the Levitical cult and the reality of what Jesus has accomplished (cf. 9:26).

Each of these statements helps to fill in the meaning of the “ability” of the son. They all have to do with the ministry of Jesus, his work of cleansing, perfecting, and his ongoing help to those who are coming to God. They suggest that the “word of his ability” that carries all things along is the message of the efficacy of the Christ-event and his ongoing ministry. This particular understanding of 1:3b,<sup>52</sup> the word of his ability, could be expanded to include the time before the incarnation if the Christ-event is understood in some sense as the “good news” referred to in 4:2. The author, in that passage, writes of “good news” that was apparently given to the generation that died in the wilderness due to their lack of faith (3:16–19), good news that is also given to “us.”<sup>53</sup> The author seems to be saying that the good news is not limited to the temporal realization of the Christ-event, but in fact was available going back at least to the Sinai-to-Canaan era, and this opens the door to consider chapter 11 and perhaps the “word of the ability” of the son carrying all things along from Abel to the present. It may be that the “good news” has always pointed to the trustworthiness of God that came to full

---

2:18 (βοηθήσαι) and 4:16 (βοηθειαν). The author even compares the perfected son with the many sons (2:10) in terms of being tested/tempted (τοῖς πειραζομένοις; 2:18).

<sup>52</sup> The typical understanding of this expression is the sustaining of the universe by the sovereignty of the son. See, e.g., Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 95; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 100–101; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 14; Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews*, SP 13 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 42–43.

<sup>53</sup> και γὰρ ἔσμεν εὐηγγελισμένοι καθάπερ κακείνοι. SSION

realization (perfection) in the Christ-event, God speaking eschatologically ἐν υἱῷ.

The author changes focus in 1:3c from the essence of the ontological son (1:3a–b) to what the son has accomplished.<sup>54</sup> The son has made purification for sins and “sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.”<sup>55</sup> The first statement is a dependent clause using an aorist participle (in contrast with the prior two present participial phrases in 1:3a–b) and points to the unique, once-for-all offering of Jesus.<sup>56</sup> The syntax and sense of the phrase indicates that *before* the son sat down he accomplished purification for sins. This simple statement carries a tremendous amount of exegetical weight as it becomes the declaration that is carefully and gradually unpacked, beginning in 2:9b, but then which becomes the focus in chapters 7 and 8, and is fully expressed in 9:10–10:18. Because of this one sacrifice that seals the new covenant (10:29 in light of 9:15–22) and provides for forgiveness and removal of sin (9:22–26), offerings are no longer needed (10:18) other than the offering of praise (13:15).

The author then declares that this son, who has completed his work (accomplishing God’s will, according to 10:5–10), sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. This is the main verb of 1:3.<sup>57</sup> The session of the son takes place after accomplishing purification from sins, which suggests the son would not be seated until he had provided the cleansing from sins. This enthronement is tied directly to two aspects of Christ: his priesthood and his role as son, both of

---

<sup>54</sup> This is another use of ποιέω (ποιησάμενος) with the sense of accomplishing something, in this case the purification of “the sins.” This use of ποιέω may be directly related to the prior use (1:2b) due to the contextual proximity.

<sup>55</sup> καθαρισμόν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς.

<sup>56</sup> Hebrews uses ἅπαξ (9:26, 28) and ἐφάπαξ (7:27; 9:12; 10:10) to describe the unique and comprehensive sacrifice of the son. Once again, all of the relevant uses of ἅπαξ and ἐφάπαξ occur in the first main unit (1:1–10:18), emphasizing the exposition of God’s eschatological speaking ἐν υἱῷ. God’s speaking ἐν υἱῷ has taken place once for all in the Christ-event.

<sup>57</sup> See Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 95.

which are stressed in 1:5–10:21. Christ is referred to as being a faithful high priest over God’s house *as a son* (3:6; cf. 2:17; 3:1–2), and as great priest over the house of God (10:21).<sup>58</sup> As son and priest (note the explicit combination in 5:5–6 and 7:28), Jesus is enthroned. However, in the general statement of 1:1–4 the emphasis is on Jesus as “son.” The author is establishing what God has spoken eschatologically in terms of “son.”

Finally, in 1:4 the author extends the enthronement of the son description to make a surprising claim: this son has become (*γενόμενος*) as much greater than the angels as the name he has inherited is better than them.<sup>59</sup> The use of *γίνομαι* suggests the son became something he had not been previously, something superior to angels and tied directly to the name he now possesses. Many scholars understand this name to be “son,” citing contextual evidence, while others believe this to be the divine name.<sup>60</sup> The evidence from the immediate context, specifically the movement from effect to cause in the transition from 1:4 to 1:5<sup>61</sup> with the author strongly contrasting “son” to angels, provides the strongest evidence in favor of the name “son.”

The concept of the “son” becoming superior to angels and inheriting the name equally superior, which 1:5–14 clarifies as “son,” suggests that the one whose very essence is described in ontological terms in 1:3a–b, actually experiences and becomes something new, yet in accord with the very nature of the son of God as already

---

<sup>58</sup> Recall the function of 10:19–21 as the transitional summary from cause (1:1–10:18) to effect (10:22–13:21) such that the son/priest over God’s house is a part of the author’s expository emphasis in 1:1–10:18, and specifically in 1:3c.

<sup>59</sup> τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ’ αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.

<sup>60</sup> Among those who hold to “son” as the name, see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 47; Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 98; Ellingsworth, *Hebrews*, 105–6; Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 17. Richard Bauckham is the leading scholar to take the position that the name inherited is the Tetragrammaton (*God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 34; cf. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 72–74).

<sup>61</sup> The text of 1:5 begins, Τίτι γὰρ εἶπεν ποτε τῶν ἀγγέλων, with the use of γὰρ signaling the movement from effect to cause (substantiation).

described. The author makes a complex assertion about God’s eschatological speaking but one that he unfurls throughout the remainder of the first main unit of the book.

Hebrews 1:1–4 presents a general statement regarding God’s eschatological revelation ἐν υἱῷ. The author describes what God has done for and through the son (1:2b), the essence of the son (1:3a–b), and both what the son has done (1:3c) and what he has become (1:4). The focus of the perfect revelation of God, as characterized by the author, centers on the Christ-event as expressed *in a son*, and this completion/perfection of incarnate sonship and its efficacy is particularized principally in 1:5–10:18.

## Hebrews 1:5–10:18: Particulars of God’s Eschatological Speaking in a Son

The author utilizes a rich catena of OT quotations in 1:5–14 to begin the particularization of the opening general statement (1:1–4). He begins by giving particular content to 1:4 by contrasting “son” with angels in 1:5–14, the contraposition of which is then carried over to 2:1–18, arguing for the incomparable relationship to God of *son* over *angels*. The author makes this clear through the repeated contrast between what God has said previously in Scripture pertaining to “son” and angels.<sup>62</sup>

Two interesting comparative expressions arise from the text, one in the general statement (1:1–4) and one in the second chapter, which together appear to complicate the argument of the author regarding the superiority of the son going back to the creation of heaven and earth (1:10–12). The first is the declaration that this son in whom God has spoken eschatologically (1:2a) has “become” (γενόμενος) as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is better

---

<sup>62</sup> Cockerill notes the chiasmic arrangement of the structure of 1:5–14 in terms of an emphasis on the position and nature of son over against angels (*Hebrews*, 100–2).

than them (1:4).<sup>63</sup> The statement appears to indicate a development of or transformation into one who is superior to angels, some kind of new position relative to angels.

The other expression is found in 2:7 with the author's use of *βραχύ τι* in the quotation from Psalm 8. Many translators and scholars understand this expression as temporal rather than qualitative or positional, translating 2:7 as follows: “[God has] made him *for a little while* lower than angels.” While nearly all interpreters construe this as a Christological reference to the incarnation of Jesus (2:8–9),<sup>64</sup> the one “we see crowned with glory and honor,” yet the antecedent of “him” (“you have made ‘him’ for a little while lower than angels”) is *ἄνθρωπος* and the parallel reference *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* (2:6).<sup>65</sup> The declaration is a reference to “the human” having been made *for a little while* lower than angels. If understood Christologically, it is a reference to the incarnation, the son being lower than angels for a little while as a human.<sup>66</sup>

Both passages present a challenge to the superiority of the son to angels, especially with respect to the son as the agent of creation (1:2b, 10–12). If the son was present and active in creation (1:10–12) and the son is incomparably superior to angels, which are created

---

<sup>63</sup> *Γίνομαι* occurs twenty-nine times in Hebrews, but only one time such that it must be translated “to be” (6:12). The other twenty-eight occurrences can, should, or must be translated “to become,” including 1:4. This suggests a new state of superiority of the son over angels. See, e.g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, 47; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 105; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 72–73; D. Eduard Riggenbach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), 14–15.

<sup>64</sup> The first mention of Jesus by name is 2:9.

<sup>65</sup> Many scholars see the anarthrous quote from Ps 8, *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου*, as primarily a parallel reference to “human” and not the christological title of Jesus as Son of Man. See, e.g., Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 128; Harald Hegermann, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, THKNT (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Berlin, 1988), 66–67; Koester, *Hebrews*, 214–16; Lane, *Hebrews*, 46–47.

<sup>66</sup> For more see Rick Boyd, “The Use of Psalm 8 in Hebrews,” in *Listen, Understand, Obey: Essays on Hebrews in Honor of Gareth Lee Cockerill*, ed. Caleb T. Friedeman (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 1–16.

beings (1:7), by nature of the filial relationship (1:5–14), how, in what sense, and at what point did he become superior to them?

The answers may be found in understanding the difference between the argument the author is making in 1:5–14 and 2:5–18. Clearly, 1:5–14 sets the *nature* of the filial relationship to God in contrast to that between God and angels. However, in 2:5–18 the author appears to not only argue for a temporary subordinate relationship of humans to angels, but also of the greater concern God has for humans than for angels (2:16) and for the eventual superior relational position of *sons* (2:10) to angels (2:7). This relational superiority also includes the “world-about-to-be,” which God did not subject to angels (2:5). It is the son in whom God spoke eschatologically who is the one crowned with glory and honor (2:7, 9) and who leads many other sons into glory (2:10). Something appears to have taken place that actualized a positional, relational change between the human Jesus, for a little while lower than angels, and the angels. The event appears to be the son having been *perfected* through sufferings (2:10) and having been crowned with glory and honor (2:9).

The mystifying statement in 1:4 regarding the son *becoming* superior to angels and inheriting a name better than them is brought into focus and given specificity in 1:5–2:18. The author emphasizes the superiority of the messenger in 1:5–14 with the son proven to be greater than angels. He then elucidates the superiority of the message itself by contrasting the “word spoken through angels” (2:2) with the context of the eschatological speaking of God ἐν υἱῷ, referred to as “so great a salvation” (2:3). In fact, it is the perfected son who is identified as the pioneer of that salvation, leading many sons into glory (2:10). It is Jesus who is crowned with glory and honor, identified as the one to whom God has subjected the world-about-to-be (2:5).<sup>67</sup> Jesus, in the crowning with glory and honor, has become

---

<sup>67</sup> Note 2:5 states that God has *not* subjected the world-about-to-be to angels, which indicates the superior position of the one (or ones) to whom the realm is subjected.

superior to angels as *the perfected son*, but he is also called the pioneer of the salvation of many sons including those “about to inherit salvation,” those to whom angels are sent to minister (1:14).<sup>68</sup> Even though Jesus was lower than angels “for a little while,” he is so no longer, having been perfected as “son”<sup>69</sup> and having become the pioneer of the glorious realm of salvation for many sons (and daughters).<sup>70</sup>

The author appears to be giving particular content to 1:4 in 1:5–2:9, but in 2:5–10 he gathers in other human sons, referred to as Jesus’ brothers, those he helps in fraternal relationship in 2:11–18. The combination of Jesus as son with his followers as sons<sup>71</sup> in 1:5–2:18 adds another dimension to 1:4 and strengthens the understanding of the assertion of superiority: son is the superior name, available to followers of Jesus, and this appears to be encompassed and realized by the eschatological word spoken by God ἐν υἱῶ.

The crowning with glory and honor is also subtly echoed in 3:1–6 with reference to the superiority of *son* to *servant* as it relates to fidelity. The author refers to both Jesus and Moses as having been faithful (3:2). However, the author makes it clear that Jesus is worthy of as much more glory (δόξης) than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor (τιμὴν) than the house itself (3:3). Jesus is worthy of

---

<sup>68</sup> The use of μέλλω is found in 1:14 and 2:5 as well as other key verses to indicate an urgency regarding the need for perseverance of the recipients. The reader/hearers apparently needed to know that they are on the verge of the full realization of the world to come and they must keep running with perseverance (cf. 12:1). See also 6:5; 9:11; 10:1, 27; 13:14.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. 2:10; 5:8–9; 7:28.

<sup>70</sup> The use of the adverb οὐπω, translated “not yet” (2:8), is significant because it indicates that it is the human (ἄνθρωπος) and not just the pioneer who is crowned with glory and honor and to whom the about-to-be realm is subjected by the Father. Yet Jesus is consistently and repeatedly referred to as being preeminent over his brothers. Cf. 1:9; 2:3 where He is referred to as “Lord”; 3:6; 4:16; 5:9; 8:1; 10:12, 21; 12:2; 13:6, 20–21.

<sup>71</sup> Jesus is referred to as the pioneer of the salvation of many sons, leading them into glory (2:10). This implies the other sons, whom Jesus is not ashamed to call “brothers” (2:11), are followers as he leads.

greater glory and honor than Moses because of the superior relationship of a being a *son* (3:6) over God’s house to a *servant* (3:5) in God’s house. Once again, in the context of comparing Jesus to Moses in their faithfulness, the author draws the distinction in terms of relationship to God (servant versus son) and position with respect to the house of God, with the son over God’s house. The author provides particular content to God’s two epochs of revelation, with the former revelation in the prophets (1:1) set over against filial revelation (1:2a), again highlighting son as the superior relationship. Whereas the son has been shown to be superior to angels, now the son is shown to be superior to servants, even the faithful servant Moses through whom God spoke long ago.<sup>72</sup>

The author then conditionally declares, “we are [God’s] house, but only if we continue to hold fast to the confidence and boasting of the hope” (3:6b).<sup>73</sup> As the passage (3:1–4:13) begins with the faithfulness of the son (3:2, 6a), so the faithfulness of sons (and daughters) becomes the issue of the warning in 3:7–4:13. The recipients are urged to listen to the voice of God (3:7) and make every effort to enter into God’s rest (4:11), something done through faith (4:3; cf. 3:19). The journey to which the author refers and which the recipients must complete, avoiding the unbelief and disobedience of the wilderness generation (3:7–4:11), further particularizes the contrast between the former piecemeal revelation of God (and the tragic results as recounted in 3:7–4:11) and the eschatological

---

<sup>72</sup> Moses refers to himself as a prophet in Deut 18:15 (προφήτην).

<sup>73</sup> This is the first mention of “hope” in Hebrews, a concept further addressed as requiring/characterizing faith (11:1). The specific hope to which the author seems to refer is lying before the believer (6:18) and requires making every effort (6:11), culminating in the very presence of God (7:19; cf. 10:19–20, 22; 4:16). Given the context of Hebrews as a whole, the “hope” appears to demand perseverance to the very end of the “race,” being fully realized in the eternal celebration of the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22–24; cf. 6:4–5; 4:3, 9–10). This hope is proleptically experienced here and now but ultimately entered into at the completion/perfection of the race, and this realization appears to be what Jesus has pioneered and perfected as son.



revelation of God ἐν υἱῷ (and the perfect, ultimate outcome: entering God's rest).

The author provides another transitional passage, 4:14–16, in a movement from cause (the faithfulness of the great high priest and son of God) to effect (the sympathetic ministry of the son). Just as the word of God must be received into the heart (3:7–8), which it then uncovers (4:12–13), the effect is the realization of the need to approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace at the time of need (4:16). This extension of the ministry of help offered by Jesus (2:18; 4:16) is then developed further in 5:1–10 and 7:1–28, although even the interruption of the exposition for a strong word of admonishment (5:11–6:20) includes the gracious priestly ministry of Jesus as forerunner (6:19–20).

The background of Jesus' sympathetic ministry is provided in 5:1–10 through an emphatic reminder of Jesus' filial relationship as his primary identity.<sup>74</sup> Jesus' high priestly ministry, the main subject of 7:1–10:18, is established through Jesus' designation as son, specifically as perfected son (5:8–10; 7:28), and is clearly a substantial feature of God's eschatological speaking ἐν υἱῷ. The Christ-event, both in occurrence and consequence, is described as God speaking ἐν υἱῷ and given further illumination through his high priestly ministry. Jesus' eminent priesthood, including the superior order/quality (6:20–7:1–28), the better covenant (8:1–13), and his supreme offering (9:1–10:18), is based on his perfected sonship (2:9–10; 5:7–10; 7:28). God speaking eschatologically ἐν υἱῷ includes all that Jesus accomplished as high priest<sup>75</sup> according to the order of Melchizedek, but his priesthood is that of the son who was perfected.

---

<sup>74</sup> Note the reference to Jesus as "son" preceding his appointment to the priesthood in 5:5–6, and the declaration of his sonship in the flesh, perfected through suffering, also preceding his priestly appointment in 5:7–10. His priesthood is established upon his filial relationship to God as the son who was perfected (5:8–10; 7:28).

<sup>75</sup> It is worth noting that, according to 7:25, his intercessory ministry continues.

In 1:5–10:18 the author focuses on unpacking his general statement through a carefully constructed explanation of the superiority of Jesus as son. The emphasis is not merely on Jesus and his accomplishment, but also on “son” and the establishment of that relationship through a new covenant. It has been sealed by the blood of the perfected son who has been appointed high priest, able to sympathize with our weaknesses, to help in our time of need, and to lead brothers (and sisters) into glory as they follow him into God’s rest, their inheritance. The author provides a unique perspective of the Christ-event in 1:5–10:18, but the entire argument is a delineation of God speaking ἐν υἱῷ.

## Conclusion

The perfect/complete revelation of God has been given ἐν υἱῷ, and while it has come in the person of Jesus Christ, the author of Hebrews asserts that the revelation has appeared in the *form* of sonship. The Christ-event is God’s eschatological revelation and the author introduces this disclosure under the heading of “son.” Both message and messenger fall under that category as does the intended outcome. This is the fulfillment of God’s promise<sup>76</sup> going back at least as far as Abel: sonship.<sup>77</sup>

The author does not merely present the perfected son as the perfect offering and perfect priest. He also presents Jesus as the perfected son, the pioneer of many sons (2:10–11) and the forerunner for “us” into the presence of God (6:19–20; 10:19–21).<sup>78</sup> In essence the

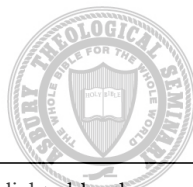
---

<sup>76</sup> See 10:23 (the exhortation to the recipients to “hold fast to the confession of the hope without wavering because faithful is the one who promised,” one of the key exhortations of the second main unit) and 11:39–40 (joining the former and the eschatological revelations with the promise of perfection established in the Christ-event).

<sup>77</sup> See Boyd, “Sonship,” 32–245.

<sup>78</sup> The brief transitional unit of material (10:19–21) from cause (1:1–10:18) to effect (10:22–13:21) places emphasis on what God has accomplished in His

perfected son has offered himself as the sacrifice that removes sin (9:26 in contrast with 10:4, 11) and establishes a new covenant relationship (8:6; 12:24), as well as the high priest who offers the sacrifice and the pioneer who blazes the trail for all believers to follow. It is this last aspect of God’s filial speaking, in particular, that is generally marginalized when considering the function of 1:1–2a in Hebrews. God has not only provided forgiveness and purification through the Christ-event, but He has done so in the form of perfected sonship who acts as a paragon for every believer. The author makes his argument that God has provided full and final revelation through the Christ-event involving both equipping and exemplar in the perfected son, an argument declared in 1:1–4, elucidated in 1:5–10:18, and exhorted in 10:19–13:21.




---

eschatological speaking, highlighted by the new and living way Jesus inaugurated. That way is referred to as entry into the presence of God (εἰς τὴν εἰσοδὸν τῶν ἁγίων; 10:19).