

THE PREACHER'S GREEK COMPANION TO

Hebrews

THE PREACHER'S GREEK COMPANION SERIES

Hebrews

A Selective Commentary for
Meditation and Sermon Preparation



Stephen Witmer



**THE PREACHER'S
HEBREW/GREEK COMPANION SERIES**

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an imprint of Hendrickson Publishing Group

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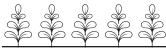
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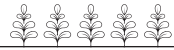
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CONTENTS

<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	xi
<i>Author's Introduction</i>	xix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xxiii



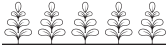
HEBREWS 1:1-4



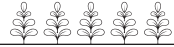
THE SUPREMACY OF THE SON

3

1:1-4	5
From Text to Sermon	16



HEBREWS 2:1-4



WE MUST PAY MUCH CLOSER ATTENTION

17

2:1-4	19
From Text to Sermon	29



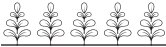
HEBREWS 2:5-18



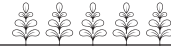
THE SON: GREATER AND LESSER THAN ANGELS

31

2:5-9	33
2:10-13	44
2:14-18	53
From Text to Sermon	63



HEBREWS 3:1-19



HOLDING FAST OUR CONFIDENCE

65

3:1-6 67
 3:7-11 78
 3:12-19 87
 From Text to Sermon 101



HEBREWS 4:1-11



A REMAINING REST

103

4:1-11 105
 From Text to Sermon 127



HEBREWS 4:12-13



THE SHARP AND PIERCING WORD

129

4:12-13 131
 From Text to Sermon 138



HEBREWS 4:14-5:10



HOLD FAST AND DRAW NEAR

139

4:14-16 141
 5:1-4 148
 5:5-6 156
 5:7-10 161
 From Text to Sermon 169



HEBREWS 5:11-6:8



LET US MAKE PROGRESS UNTO MATURITY

171

5:11-14	173
6:1-3	183
6:4-8	190
From Text to Sermon	201



HEBREWS 7:11-28



SUCH A HIGH PRIEST

203

7:11-14	205
7:15-19	214
7:20-22	222
7:23-25	227
7:26-28	232
From Text to Sermon	239



HEBREWS 9:11-28



THE PURIFYING POWER OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

241

9:11-14	243
9:15-22	254
9:23-28	268
From Text to Sermon	280



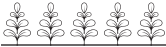
HEBREWS 10:19-31



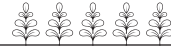
DRAWING NEAR TOGETHER

281

10:19-25	283
10:26-31	294
From Text to Sermon	305



HEBREWS 11:1-12



BY FAITH

307

11:1-3	309
11:4-7	313
11:8-12	324
From Text to Sermon	334



HEBREWS 12:1-17



THE DELIGHT OF DISCIPLINE

337

12:1-2	339
12:3	346
12:4-11	349
12:12-17	365
From Text to Sermon	375



HEBREWS 13:20-25



FINISHING STRONG

377

13:20-21	379
13:22-23	385
13:24	388
13:25	390
From Text to Sermon	391

<i>Works Cited</i>	393
<i>Text-Critical Notes</i>	395
<i>Index of Biblical References</i>	401
<i>About the Author</i>	405




SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Overview

Like many preachers, you may wish you could use the biblical languages in your sermon preparation, but the task seems daunting. Perhaps you lack confidence in your language skills—especially if it's been a long time since you studied Greek or Hebrew—and when you turn to technical commentaries, you feel overwhelmed. Or perhaps you simply don't have the time to do the laborious work of digging into the original-language texts. To help you overcome these challenges, we designed this series, the Preacher's Greek Companion (as well as its Old Testament counterpart series, the Preacher's Hebrew Companion). In collaboration with the series authors, our goal as series editors is to gently guide you, the busy preacher, through the Greek text of select biblical passages in a way that will empower you to integrate original-language exegesis and homiletics. Our prayer is that you will find this book and the other volumes in this series spiritually and intellectually encouraging as well as pleasant to use. We hope your use of the series will make your sermon preparation a more profound and satisfying process and will invigorate your preaching.

Structure


Each volume in this series includes the following three features for a given biblical book (or portion of a book):


-  **a curated selection of passages** we believe many preachers would likely choose to preach on from the biblical book (or portion of the book) in question; **or, for shorter biblical books, the entire book**, broken up into manageable passages
-  all the basic **lexical and grammatical tools** you need (whatever your Greek skill level may be) **to work through and meditate on the Greek text** of these passages in a way that strengthens your sermon preparation and empowers you to preach more effectively
-  **succinct, select comments** intended to help you responsibly and effectively bridge the gap between reading the Greek text and delivering a sermon on it

The Preacher's Greek Companion is not a traditional commentary series, as is reflected in its title and subtitle: "*Companion*" (not "Commentary") and "*Selected Passages for Meditation and Sermon Preparation*." That is, we conceived this series as a *supplement* to the wealth of fine commentaries that already exist, not as a replacement for any of them. We recommend using this series alongside traditional commentaries, which by design include helpful information that is not covered in ours.


The Selection of Passages

Each volume in the Preacher's Greek Companion series provides the Greek text of **approximately ten to twelve passages** from a particular biblical book (or portion thereof):

 In addition to having expertise in Greek and exegesis, our series authors typically have extensive preaching experience or are full-time preachers by vocation. Unless the biblical book in question is short enough to be included in full, they chose **passages** they think **preachers would most likely desire to preach**. In order to encourage preaching through the biblical book in an "expository" rather than a thematic manner, these passages are presented in canonical order. That said, for longer books (such as Isaiah or Matthew), we encouraged authors to choose passages that highlight or represent important themes found in the book; for such books, however, the chosen passages are still presented in canonical order. The curated, limited number of passages in each series volume allows you, if you wish, to use the passages as the basis for a "ready-made" sermon series of whatever length suits your schedule (e.g., for a series consisting of, say, four, seven, ten, or twelve sermons). Alternatively, you might choose to preach a series using some of the passages in a volume and then supplement these with passages from the biblical book in question that are not found in the volume.

 The aims of the series guided our decisions about passage length. On the one hand, we encouraged authors to choose **passages that are not too long**, so that the portions of text won't be daunting to you if your Greek skills are rudimentary; nor do we want you to be overwhelmed by wading through dozens of verses in Greek. For this reason, our ideal length for most passages has been approximately ten verses. On the other hand, in order to do justice to the natural boundaries of longer passages, we have taken care not to artificially truncate such texts. Consider, for example, the account of the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 14–15) or the story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11). Although these texts are far too long to be



included in full in a volume in this series, each constituent part of these texts is vital to understanding their narrative development and message. For such passages, we asked authors to focus—as a preacher might typically do when delivering a sermon on a lengthy passage—on what they consider to be the most salient verses from the passage. Accordingly, we have provided the Greek text for only these verses, with the author summarizing the other verses (in English).

 Finally, when authors deemed it helpful (especially for longer biblical books), they have indicated, on the first page devoted to each passage, the **larger literary unit to which the passage belongs**,¹ thus helping you see the passage in question as part of a larger whole rather than as an isolated pericope. In cases where this larger literary context is indicated, we encourage you to pick up a Bible and read and dwell on this context while using this volume to work through the passage.

The Presentation of Each Passage

This volume helps you work through each passage it contains by presenting the Greek text of the passage along with the lexical and grammatical information you need in order to dig into this original-language text. Designed to be highly accessible, this format is intended (1) to enable you to work through the text in manageable chunks and according to your abilities, regardless of your skill level in Greek; (2) to simultaneously facilitate both study and devotion; and (3) in conjunction with the author's commentary, to help you bridge the gap, as easily and seamlessly as possible, between the original-language text and preaching.

More specifically, this volume contains the following five sections for each passage:

-  A **brief introduction** to the passage—typically comprising only a few sentences—is included in order to set the stage for the passage and highlight its important themes.
-  For ease of reading and to encourage you to slow down and contemplate the text, the passage is typically divided into subunits. For each of these subunits, we provide the **Greek text** of each clause or phrase, along with **transliteration** (as a pronunciation help for those whose Greek is at a rudimentary level) and the author's **translation**.²

1. Occasionally, such a literary unit is coterminous with the passage itself.

2. The Greek text used in this series is that of the 1885 Westcott-Hort edition of the New Testament, as printed in B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The Greek New Testament*,



Next, each clause or phrase from the subunit is presented in an inter-linear fashion, notably with a **contextual gloss (or multiple contextual glosses) and parsing for each word.**³ For example:

3a Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου			
I give thanks to my God			
Εὐχαριστῶ εὐχαριστέω	I am giving thanks/ give thanks <i>Eu·cha·ri·stō</i>	PRES ACT IND 1ST SG	verb
τῷ ὁ	to the <i>tō</i>	DAT SG MASC	article
θεῷ θεός	(to) God <i>the·ō</i>	DAT SG MASC	noun
μου ἐγώ	of me/my <i>mou</i>	1ST GEN SG	personal pron

This formatting allows you to easily analyze each word in the clause or phrase (by helping you on the level of semantics and morphology) and to perceive how the words work together as a whole (by helping you on the level of syntax).



A key feature of each volume in this series is the inclusion of **concise comments** to accompany some clauses and phrases. These have two primary goals: (1) to enable you to understand and exegete the text more deeply than might be possible from reading it in English, and (2) to equip you with insights into the original-language text that will be of direct value for your preaching. To help you focus and not become overwhelmed with too much information, we encouraged our authors to comment only on those clauses and phrases for which they thought doing so would accomplish these two goals. In addition, because the volumes in this series are not only language aids but—ultimately and more importantly—preaching aids, we asked authors to highlight those features in the Greek text that bring out key themes, rhetorical and theological emphasis, narrative de-

with Expanded Dictionary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). For interested readers, text-critical variants for the passages included in the present volume are presented at the end of the volume.

3. The parsings are derived from an unpublished database created by Mark House and Maurice Robinson for Hendrickson Publishers. The glosses are the author's own, though sometimes they are based on glosses from the aforementioned database. The glosses intentionally err on the "literal" end of the spectrum, in order to help you apprehend the basic meaning(s) of each word in context.

velopment, character development, connections with other biblical texts, and the like. Although noting various other features in the Greek text may have been intrinsically interesting from a grammatical perspective or helpful for strengthening your language skills, authors have generally refrained from commenting on such features when doing so would not be likely to aid you in moving from text to sermon in any substantial way.⁴ In short, an author's brief, select comments are intended—in conjunction with the volume's language aids—to provide you both with *focus* and with *space* to slow down, meditate, wonder, and mature in your understanding and experience of the text, as you form your own judgments on it and prepare to proclaim the divine word to your hearers. The author's comments are not intended to circumscribe the possible interpretive options with one single answer (especially for texts whose interpretation is the particular subject of debate among Christian believers). Rather, they are meant to stimulate your thinking, to help you see features of the text (and connections with other texts) that you may not have perceived before, and to prompt you to ask questions that may not have previously occurred to you.




Each passage ends with a brief section titled “**From Text to Sermon,**” in which our authors, building on their comments, suggest ways you can move from working through the Greek text to the task of homiletics, highlighting potential points of emphasis or particular insights you may wish to share with your audience. In this way, the authors provide you with possible ways to bring the text to life for your audience (e.g., types of illustrations you might use). Because individual preachers (and each of our series authors) bring their own particular skills, perspectives, backgrounds, and oratorical approaches to bear on the homiletical task, and because every biblical text has its own unique features, we encouraged our authors to structure the “From Text to Sermon” section as a free-form series of short paragraphs whose content and emphases are guided by their own personal judgment about what is most helpful for a variety of preachers in different places, cultures, and times. The remarks in this section are always grouped according to rubrics (in the form of inline


4. Another way we have kept the presentation streamlined and uncluttered, so that you can achieve maximum focus, is by intentionally keeping source citations to a minimum. Authors' comments on a given passage are the fruit of their scholarly research on the passage, their personal reflection on it, and their experience preaching and teaching it. They cite secondary sources only when they draw a specific insight from one particular source or wish to point you to a particularly helpful resource for further reading. As stated above, we naturally encourage you to also use traditional commentaries (which typically provide more documentation) in your study and sermon preparation.

headers); but rather than restrict authors with a “one-size-fits-all” set of rubrics, we allowed them to create their own rubrics and even, if helpful, to vary these rubrics across passages within their volume in light of the unique features and emphases of each passage.⁵ We view the resulting diversity of approaches and emphases across this series (and even within a given volume) as a strength, and we hope this aspect of the series will encourage you to use your own judgment about how to preach each passage in a way that best suits you and your listeners, being sensitive to the promptings and guidance of the Spirit of God.

Audience and Theological Perspective

Since our hope is that many different kinds of people will find the volumes in this series useful, we have designed the Preacher’s Greek Companion to be helpful to a broad spectrum of Christian preachers:

 Our intention is that the series will be **useful and accessible to a large and diverse group of preachers serving a variety of communities throughout the world**. For this reason, we encouraged authors to exercise sensitivity and broad-mindedness in their comments and particularly when writing the “From Text to Sermon” section, in which they could run the risk of being too culturally specific. In particular, we asked authors that any sermon illustrations they included in this section generally be as universal as possible or that, instead of providing specific illustrations, they point to themes from the passage you may wish to illustrate in one way or another. That said, because specificity is essential for good communication, we also allowed authors to suggest—when they deemed it particularly helpful—concrete, culturally specific examples as springboards to help you think about examples that will be relevant for your own context.




 We asked our authors to express any **theological perspectives** in a way that is **consistent with the beliefs stated in the Apostles’ Creed**. Because this series aims to meet the needs of Christian preachers of various theological viewpoints, we encouraged a diversity of theological perspectives within these bounds across the volumes in the series. In addition, because the series has a joint focus on exegesis (close attention to what a specific text says) and homiletics (how to preach said text), we advised

5. That said, we suggested the following possible rubrics to authors as starting points to consider: theological themes, themes for application and illustration, integrating the broader historical and literary context, learning from the language, and (as deemed helpful and not reductionistic) “the big idea” of the passage.

authors when making any theological comments to let these flow naturally from the text at hand, rather than using the text as a springboard to discuss issues that would more properly fall under the rubric of systematic theology. Although we asked authors to avoid reading any given passage through the lens of a theological system grounded in other biblical texts, we also strongly encouraged them to discuss allusions to other biblical passages or other innerbiblical literary connections if they felt that doing so would help you understand the message of the text at hand and know how to preach it more effectively.

Acknowledgments

We would like to offer our heartfelt gratitude to the following individuals, who have played a central role in the creation of this series:

-  Arley Kangas, Marco Resendes, and Tyler Comer, for their excellent work on various aspects of the making of these volumes, especially transliterating, proofreading, and generating the indexes.
-  Phil Frank, for his expert typesetting and for patiently working with us, in our capacity as series editors, to achieve the desired formatting and aesthetic for these volumes.
-  The series authors, for joining us in this unique project and for sharing our vision and lending their considerable skills to the task. These volumes are the result of a fruitful collaboration between the Hendrickson team and the series authors (with both parties contributing to the content). We are truly grateful for the opportunity to have worked on this project together.

All of us—the series editors, the series authors, and the team at Hendrickson—pray that the volume you now hold in your hands will empower and encourage you to work through the Greek text of the Bible in order to deepen your sermon preparation and strengthen your proclamation of the word of God. We nurture a deep respect and appreciation for the challenging work that you as a preacher do on the “front lines,” and we recognize the many challenges (logistical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and more) that you encounter on a weekly, indeed a daily, basis. We are honored to come alongside you and support you in your important labors, and we pray that your use of this book will bear much fruit for the kingdom of God.

JONATHAN G. KLINE
SEAN M. McDONOUGH

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

On September 30, 1673, the great Puritan pastor, scholar, theologian, and author John Owen wrote a prefatory notice to his massive commentary on the book of Hebrews. Owen noted that he had thought for a long time about writing a commentary on the book of Hebrews but had been unsure whether to go through with the project because of the vast amount of research and writing that had already been done on the book. Finally, after closely examining what had been previously written, Owen decided to move ahead with his own commentary. Here's one of the reasons he gave for that decision:

I found the excellence of the writing [in Hebrews] to be such; the depths of the mysteries contained in it to be so great; the compass of the truth asserted, unfolded, and explained, so extensive and diffused through the whole body of Christian religion; the usefulness of the things delivered in it so important and indispensably necessary; as that I was quickly satisfied that the wisdom, grace, and truth, treasured in this sacred storehouse, are so far from being exhausted and fully drawn forth by the endeavors of any or all that are gone before us, or from being all perfectly brought forth to light by them, as that I was assured there was left a sufficient ground and foundation, not only for renewed investigation after rich branches in this mine for the present generation, but for all them that shall succeed, unto the consummation of all things.

(Owen 1991 [1668]:6)

In modern language, Owen is saying, “the truth of Hebrews is so deep, so wide, so vitally necessary for Christians today that no human being will ever be able to see and say everything that's there.” He makes two major claims about the book of Hebrews. First, he says it's inexhaustible. Using the image of digging a mine into the earth to extract precious treasure, he says that Hebrews is so rich in truth that there's more than enough treasure for his entire generation to keep on digging and finding new treasure, and for every subsequent generation to find new treasure, until the return of Christ and the consummation of all things. Every other mine in the world eventually runs out of precious metal or stone, but not this one. Hebrews is inexhaustible because it contains more than merely human truth. It's spoken by God himself. Owen refers to Hebrews (in the paragraph quoted above) as a “sacred storehouse.”

The second claim Owen makes is that Hebrews is indispensable. He says, “the usefulness of the things delivered in [Hebrews is] important and indispensably necessary.” There are treasures in this book that we must have. There are things it tells us about Christ and about ourselves that we must see. There are exhortations and warnings it delivers to us that we must hear. We need this book in the canon of Scripture and in our lives. We can’t do without it. It’s indispensable. We should think of Hebrews not as dessert (it’s great if you can get it, but not the end of the world if you don’t) but like food for a starving person in the desert. Reading and hearing and understanding this book is not a luxury but a spiritual necessity.

As those called and equipped by God to proclaim his inexhaustible and indispensable word to his people, may we approach our holy task with humility, reverence, and overwhelming confidence in God’s living, active, heart-discerning word (Heb 4:12).



My prayer is that this volume will help preachers to proclaim Hebrews with greater confidence and power. Because the logic and grammar/syntax of Hebrews can be quite challenging, I’ve devoted more space to the introduction for each passage than is found in some volumes of the Preacher’s Companion series. I’ve also given more attention to grammatical features in the text. I hope this extra guidance will allow readers (including those whose Greek is rusty) to grow in confidently interpreting and teaching Hebrews. May God’s word be powerfully proclaimed.

I’m thankful to be the Lead Pastor of Pepperell Christian Fellowship and to have the awesome responsibility of regularly preaching God’s word to an eager, attentive, discerning group of Christ-followers. Much of the work for this volume was done in the course of preaching through the book of Hebrews at PCF in 2021. I had a further opportunity to engage and enjoy Hebrews while teaching an Exegesis of Hebrews course at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the spring semester of 2022. Many thanks to my PCF congregation and my GCTS students for their questions, insights, and interaction, and to two groups of local pastors and friends (including the “Gospel Guys”) for your helpful feedback. Additional thanks to Sean McDonough and Jonathan Kline, for their invitation to contribute to this series and for their gracious help and encouragement along the way. Finally, I dearly love my wife, Emma, and our children, Samuel, Annie, and Henry, and am grateful to God for their presence in my life and their consistent support of my ministry and writing.

As a young man, I was deeply formed by my teachers John Piper and Gordon Hugenberger, two pastor-scholars who modeled for me rich engagement with the Bible and passionate proclamation to their local congregations. Listening to

Piper's Hebrews sermons on cassette tape, I marveled at the beauty of the word he proclaimed—and then saw it embodied in his life during our many times together. Later, I would leave Hugenberger's seminary classes with my head spinning and my heart full. How I wanted to know and teach the Bible like that! I dedicate this volume to John Piper and Gordon Hugenberger, with gratitude and joy.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1ST	first person	indef	indefinite
2ND	second person	INF	infinitive
3RD	third person	interr	interrogative
ACC	accusative	MASC	masculine
ACT	active	MID	middle
adj	adjective	NEUT	neuter
adv	adverb	NOM	nominative
AOR	aorist	num	numerical
comp	comparative	OPT	optative
cond	conditional	PASS	passive
conj	conjunction	PERF	perfect
DAT	dative	PL	plural
demonstr	demonstrative	prep	preposition
FEM	feminine	PRES	present
FUT	future	pron	pronoun
GEN	genitive	PTCP	participle
Heb	Hebrew	SG	singular
IMPF	imperfect	SUBJ	subjunctive
IMPV	imperative	translit	transliteration
IND	indicative	VOC	vocative

NOTE: All Old Testament verse numbers in this volume refer to the Hebrew text. Where the English verse numbering differs, it is listed in brackets following the Hebrew numbering, without any special notation. When the Septuagint (i.e., Greek) version of an Old Testament text is cited and the verse numbering differs from that of the Hebrew text, the Greek reference is listed in brackets following the Hebrew reference, accompanied by the notation "LXX".



THE SUPREMACY OF THE SON



In this first paragraph of the book, the author hits the ground running! Hebrews is not a 747 lumbering down the runway for takeoff; it's a helicopter flying straight up into the air. There are no preliminaries, no pleasantries, no greetings—instead, the author immediately plunges into deep theology expressed with stunning eloquence. A couple factors combine to make this a challenging passage to preach. First, vv. 1–4 contain so much important truth that it can be difficult to know what exactly to focus on. One possible way of ascertaining the main point of the passage is to analyze its grammatical structure. However, this leads to the second challenge. While, in Greek, all of vv. 1–4 is one long, complicated sentence, most English translations break the passage into multiple sentences in order to make it more readable and easier to understand. Unfortunately, this obscures the grammatical structure of the passage.

This is where a working knowledge of Greek becomes immensely helpful. It allows us to get behind the English translations in order to see

that the main verb of the entire sentence is ἐλάλησεν, “he spoke.” God spoke! The means of that divine speech is expressed in the prepositional phrase that follows: ἐν υἱῷ, “by a son.” And after that reference to the Son come three main relative-pronoun clauses that describe exactly who the Son is and what he has done. These three clauses build to a climax with the third and final one, the affirmation that the Son has sat down. Hence, the basic structure of the passage is this:

God spoke by his Son
whom he appointed heir of all things
through whom he also created the world
who sat down at the right hand of the greatness on high

Everything else in the passage hangs upon this basic structure and supports these main points. The benefit of this grammatical analysis is that it immediately helps us to see that God and his Son are central and supreme in the paragraph. It’s all about them and about their relationship with one another.

LARGER LITERARY CONTEXT > 1:1-4



1a

Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι

*Polymerōs kai polytropōs palai***Long ago, at many times and in many ways,**

1b

ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις

*ho theos lalēsas tois patrasin en tois prophētais***God, having spoken to the ancestors by the prophets,**

2a

ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων

*ep' eschatou tōn hēmerōn toutōn***in these last days**

2b

ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ,

*elalēsen hēmin en huiō,***spoke to us by a Son,**

2c

ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων,

*hon ethēken klēronomon pantōn,***whom he appointed the heir of all things,**

2d

δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας·

*di' hou kai epoiēsen tous aiōnas;***through whom also he made the world,**

3a

ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης

*hos ōn apaugasma tēs doxēs***who is the brightness of the glory**

3b

καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ,

*kai charaktēr tēs hypostaseōs autou,***and the exact likeness of his nature**

3c

φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ,

*pherōn te ta panta tō rhēmati tēs dynamēōs autou,***and upholds all things by the word of his power.**

- 3d καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος
katharismōn tōn hamartiōn poiēsamenos
Having made purification for sins,
- 3e ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς,
ekathisen en dexia tēs megalōsynēs en hypsēlois,
he sat down at the right hand of the greatness on high
- 4a τοσοῦτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων
tosoutō kreittōn genomenos tōn angelōn
having become as much better than the angels
- 4b ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ’ αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.
hosō diaphorōteron par’ autous keklēronomēken onoma.
as the name he has inherited is different from them.



1a

Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι

Long ago, at many times and in many ways,

Πολυμερῶς	at many times/ in many parts	---	adv
πολυμερῶς	<i>Po·ly·me·rōs</i>		
καὶ	and	---	conj
καί	<i>kai</i>		
πολυτρόπως	in many ways	---	adv
πολυτρόπως	<i>po·ly·tro·rōs</i>		
πάλαι	long ago	---	adv
πάλαι	<i>pa·lai</i>		

The author of Hebrews begins his book by stacking up three adverbs in a row. This increases the reader’s anticipation of finally hearing what it is that the adverbs are modifying. They’re modifying the participle **λαλήσας**, “having spoken,” which comes in the very next phrase.

1b

ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις

God, having spoken to the ancestors by the prophets,

ὁ ὁ	the <i>ho</i>	NOM SG MASC	article
θεὸς θεός	God <i>the·os</i>	NOM SG MASC	noun
λαλήσας λαλέω	(he) having spoken <i>la·lē·sas</i>	AOR ACT PTCP NOM SG MASC	verb
τοῖς ὁ	to the <i>tois</i>	DAT PL MASC	article
πατράσιν πατήρ	ancestors <i>pa·tra·sin</i>	DAT PL MASC	noun
ἐν ἐν	by <i>en</i>	---	prep
τοῖς ὁ	the <i>tois</i>	DAT PL MASC	article
προφήταις προφήτης	prophets <i>pro·phē·tais</i>	DAT PL MASC	noun

Many English translations render the participle **λαλήσας**, “having spoken,” as an independent verb in order to make the sentence more readable and to bring out the contrast between God’s former way of speaking and his speaking in and through his Son. While this is a viable translation choice, it obscures the fact that the main verb of the sentence doesn’t come until v. 2: “he spoke to us by a Son.” This places the emphasis on God’s climactic revelation through the Son; everything else in the sentence leads up to it.

It’s noteworthy that the author refers to “*the* ancestors” rather than “our ancestors,” which would be a normal way of referring to the Jewish forebears (cf. Luke 1:55). Perhaps the author chooses to say “the ancestors” because he’s writing to a church composed of both Jews and Gentiles, and the latter are not biologically descended from “the ancestors.”

The preposition **ἐν** can be rendered instrumentally, as “by.”

2a

ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων

in these last days

ἐπ’ ἐπί	in/in time of <i>ep’</i>	---	prep
ἐσχάτου ἐσχάτος	last <i>e·scha·tou</i>	GEN SG MASC	adj

τῶν ὁ	of (the) <i>tōn</i>	GEN PL FEM	article
ἡμερῶν ἡμέρα	days <i>hē·me·rōn</i>	GEN PL FEM	noun
τούτων οὗτος	these <i>του·tōn</i>	GEN PL FEM	demonstr pron

At the beginning of v. 2, the author begins to draw a clear contrast with the former ways of God’s speaking that he has already laid out in v. 1. Specifically, he contrasts the *time*, the *recipients*, and the *means* of God’s speaking:

long ago, at many times and in many ways	in these last days
to the ancestors	to us
by the prophets	by a Son

The phrase “in these last days” is very important. It doesn’t just mean “recently.” Later in Hebrews, we read that Christ appeared “once for all at the end of the ages” (9:26), and that phrase is used several times in the New Testament to refer to the last day, when Jesus returns. Jesus himself repeatedly spoke of “the last day” as the end of the age, when the general resurrection would occur. So, here in Heb 1:2, the author is using well-known language that refers to the end of the world—and crucially, he’s saying that he and his contemporaries are already living in that period (notice that he refers not just to “*the* last days” but to “*these* [τούτων] last days”).

2b	ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ,		
	spoke to us by a Son		
ἐλάλησεν λαλέω	he spoke <i>e·la·lē·sen</i>	AOR ACT IND 3RD SG	verb
ἡμῖν ἐγώ	to us <i>hē·min</i>	1ST DAT PL	personal pron
ἐν ἐν	by/in <i>en</i>	---	prep
υἱῷ υἱός	Son <i>hui·ō</i>	DAT SG MASC	noun

The objects of a preposition don’t need to take an article. However, here in v. 2, ἐν υἱῷ, “by a Son,” contrasts with ἐν τοῖς προφήταις, “by the prophets” (1:1b), which does have an article. Daniel Wallace suggests that

the lack of an article before **υἱῶ**, “a Son,” indicates a qualitative function: “The point is that God, in his final revelation, has spoken to us in one who has the characteristics of a son” (Wallace 1996:245).

It’s noteworthy that the recipients of the revelation by the Son are identified with the pronoun **ἡμῖν**, “to us.” That refers to all Christians. There’s not a special, higher class, a particular subset of Christians, who get to hear from God—the really smart ones, the really godly ones, the Presbyterians or the Pentecostals, the ones who have memorized the names of all sixty-six books of the Bible and can say them in order, the ones who have experienced a “second blessing” and spoken in tongues, and so on.

2c ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων,				
whom he appointed the heir of all things,				
ὃν	whom		ACC SG MASC	relative
ὅς	<i>hon</i>			pron
ἔθηκεν	he appointed/placed/put		AOR ACT IND	verb
τίθημι	<i>e·thē·ken</i>		3RD SG	
κληρονόμον	heir		ACC SG MASC	noun
κληρονόμος	<i>klē·ro·no·mon</i>			
πάντων	of all things		GEN PL NEUT	adj
πᾶς	<i>pan·tōn</i>			

A series of three main pronoun clauses now follows, each pronoun with the antecedent **υἱῶ**, “son,” in v. 2b. Notice that there’s no need for the author to specify the subject of the verb **ἔθηκεν**, “he appointed,” since God is the subject of **ἐλάλησεν**, “he spoke,” the main verb of the sentence. The appointment of the Son as heir fits with his identity as the Son, since first-born sons received the inheritance at this time. However, the noteworthy feature of this claim is that the Son is the heir of *all* things. While **πάντων** could be masculine (referring to “all people”), the parallel with **πάντα** in v. 3 suggests that it is neuter, referring to “all things” (including, but not limited to, people).

2d δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας·				
through whom also he made the world,				
δι’	through		---	prep
διά	<i>di’</i>			
οὗ	whom		GEN SG MASC	relative
ὅς	<i>hou</i>			pron

καὶ καί	also <i>kai</i>	---	conj
ἐποίησεν ποιέω	he made/created <i>e·poi·ē·sen</i>	AOR ACT IND 3RD SG	verb
τοῦς ὁ	the <i>tous</i>	ACC PL MASC	article
αἰῶνας αἰών	world/ages <i>ai·ō·nas</i>	ACC PL MASC	noun

Again, the subject of **ἐποίησεν**, “he made,” is assumed to be God. The verb refers to making or forming something, and in this particular case it speaks of the creation of the world (the exact same word is used in the Greek translation [the Septuagint, or LXX] of Gen 1:1). Though the word **αἰῶνας** is often best translated “age(s),” referring to a period of time, it can also mean “the world,” understood as a spatial concept (BDAG). The prepositional phrase **δι’ οὗ**, “through whom,” identifies the Son as the agent of creation. It’s striking to see how the descriptions of the Son in v. 2c and v. 2d fit together. He created all things at the beginning and will inherit all things at the end. These are *godlike* traits—to be the Creator of the world and the Lord of all, the beginning and the end. From him and to him are all things. This can only be true of God himself (cf. Rom 11:36).

3a	ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης		
	who is the brightness of the glory		
ὃς ὅς	who <i>hos</i>	NOM SG MASC	relative pron
ὢν εἰμί	(he) being <i>ōn</i>	PRES ACT PTCP NOM SG MASC	verb
ἀπαύγασμα ἀπαύγασμα	brightness/radiance <i>ap·au·ga·sma</i>	NOM SG NEUT	noun
τῆς ὁ	of the <i>tēs</i>	GEN SG FEM	article
δόξης δόξα	glory <i>do·xēs</i>	GEN SG FEM	noun

Again, as with the previous two pronouns, the antecedent of **ὃς**, “who,” is **υἱῷ**, “Son,” in v. 2b. It’s important to realize that the relative-pronoun clause that begins with **ὃς** is completed with the verb **ἐκάθισεν** in v. 3e: “who sat down.” All the other phrases descriptive of the Son in v. 3a–d are grammatically dependent on that third and climactic relative-pronoun clause, “who sat down.”

This is the only use of the word **ἀπαύγασμα** in the entire New Testament. It refers to brightness or radiance—in this case, to the radiance of the shining glory of God. This is highly exalted language to describe the Son! He is the very radiance of the glory of God.

3b		καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ,	
		and the exact likeness of his nature	
καὶ καί	and <i>kai</i>	---	conj
χαρακτήρ χαρακτήρ	exact likeness/ imprint <i>cha·ra·ktēr</i>	NOM SG MASC	noun
τῆς ὅ	of the <i>tēs</i>	GEN SG FEM	article
ὑποστάσεως ὑπόστασις	nature <i>hy·po·sta·se·ōs</i>	GEN SG FEM	noun
αὐτοῦ αὐτός	of him/his <i>au·tou</i>	GEN SG MASC	personal pron

Like **ἀπαύγασμα**, “brightness,” in v. 3a, the word **χαρακτήρ**, “exact likeness,” is used only here in the entire New Testament. It was sometimes used for the impression made on coins and could refer to the distinctive features of a person that made them recognizable (e.g., their nose or hair or eyes). The idea being conveyed here is that the Son is the visible expression of the very nature of God himself. To see the Son is to recognize the Father (cf. John 14:9).

3c		φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ,	
		and upholds all things by the word of his power.	
φέρων φέρω	(he) upholding/carrying/ bearing <i>phe·rōn</i>	PRES ACT PTCP NOM SG MASC	verb
τε τέ	and <i>te</i>	---	particle
τὰ ὅ	(the) <i>ta</i>	ACC PL NEUT	article
πάντα πᾶς	all things <i>pan·ta</i>	ACC PL NEUT	adj
τῷ ὅ	by the <i>tō</i>	DAT SG NEUT	article

ῥήματι ῥῆμα	word <i>rhē·ma·ti</i>	DAT SG NEUT	noun
τῆς ὅ	of (the) <i>tēs</i>	GEN SG FEM	article
δυνάμεως δύναμις	power <i>dy·na·me·ōs</i>	GEN SG FEM	noun
αὐτοῦ αὐτός	of him/his <i>au·tou</i>	GEN SG MASC	personal pron

It's noteworthy that the Son is said to uphold all things by the *word* of his power. We've already seen an allusion to the creation account of Gen 1, and now here's another allusion—this time to God's powerful, creative word at the beginning (“Let there be”).

3d	καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος		
	Having made purification for sins,		
καθαρισμὸν καθαρισμός	purification/cleansing <i>ka·tha·ri·smon</i>	ACC SG MASC	noun
τῶν ὅ	for (the) <i>tōn</i>	GEN PL FEM	article
ἁμαρτιῶν ἁμαρτία	sins <i>ha·mar·ti·ōn</i>	GEN PL FEM	noun
ποιησάμενος ποιέω	(he) having made <i>poi·ē·sa·me·nos</i>	AOR MID PTCP NOM SG MASC	verb

The verbal form of **καθαρισμὸν**, “purification,” in Hebrews is connected to the death of Jesus, which is a sacrifice that cleanses sins. Here, the genitive **τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν** is a genitive of advantage and can be translated “for sins.”

3e	ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς,		
	he sat down at the right hand of the greatness on high		
ἐκάθισεν καθίζω	he sat/sat down <i>e·ka·thi·sen</i>	AOR ACT IND 3RD SG	verb
ἐν ἐν	at <i>en</i>	---	prep
δεξιᾷ δεξιός	right hand/side <i>de·xi·a</i>	DAT SG FEM	adj
τῆς ὅ	of the <i>tēs</i>	GEN SG FEM	article

μεγαλωσύνης μεγαλωσύνη	greatness/majesty <i>me·ga·lō·sy·nēs</i>	GEN SG FEM	noun
ἐν ἐν	on <i>en</i>	---	prep
ὑψηλοῖς ὑψηλός	high <i>hy·psē·lois</i>	DAT PL NEUT	adj

Here at last we arrive at the climactic, third description of **υἱῷ**, “Son,” in v. 2b: “he sat down.” Because most of us sit in mundane places (a couch, a chair) for mundane reasons (to watch TV, to relax, to read a book), this may seem like an anticlimactic claim to us, rather than the triumphant, climactic description of the Son. We must note *where* the Son sits: **ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς**, “at the right hand of the greatness on high.” That’s a reference to the honored place at the right hand of God himself, in heaven. The author is here surely drawing on Ps 110 [LXX 109], a passage that will be important throughout Hebrews. In Ps 110 [LXX 109] God says to his Son: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” One can sit on God’s throne only by invitation. We should also note *why* the Son sits at the Father’s right hand. The first reason is provided by the preceding participial phrase in v. 3d: **καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος**, “having made purification for sins.” The Son sits down because he has completed his work of redemption. There are four occasions in Hebrews (including this one) where we’re told that Jesus sits down, and in each case he sits after completing his priestly role of providing atonement on our behalf. The second reason the Son sits is related to the fact that he sits on a throne. He sits in order to rule. This is what theologians refer to as the “session” of Christ. The Son is not just relaxing in heaven, waiting until he can again spring into action at his second coming. No, he is actively ruling the universe. This is good news for his followers who may be tempted to panic and grow anxious when it seems that things are spinning out of control. Jesus reigns. Later in Hebrews, we see a third reason why the Son has ascended to heaven, to the presence of God: he continues to plead to the Father on our behalf (Heb 9:24).

The great Puritan (and Hebrews commentator) John Owen reflected on the striking difference between what the author says here about Jesus and what the high priest did once a year under the old covenant. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would make offerings for the people and enter into the holy of holies in the tabernacle (later, the temple). When he entered into the holy of holies, he would stand there ministering before the Lord, whose presence was between the cherubim on top of the ark. One thing the high priest would never do would be to climb up *and sit*

down between the cherubim! That was God’s place alone. But here, Jesus, the perfect high priest, having made a perfect offering, sits down on the throne of God. This is no ordinary priest, to say the least!

4a τοσοῦτω κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων			
having become as much better than the angels			
τοσοῦτω τοσοῦτος	as much <i>tos·ou·tō</i>	DAT SG MASC	demonstr pron
κρείττων κρείττων	better <i>kreit·tōn</i>	NOM SG MASC	adj
γενόμενος γίνομαι	(he) having become <i>ge·no·me·nos</i>	AOR MID PTCP NOM SG MASC	verb
τῶν ὁ	than the <i>tōn</i>	GEN PL MASC	article
ἀγγέλων ἄγγελος	angels <i>an·ge·lōn</i>	GEN PL MASC	noun


Τῶν ἀγγέλων, “than the angels,” is a genitive of comparison. The demonstrative pronoun **τοσοῦτω**, “as much,” is linked with the correlative pronoun **ὅσῳ**, “as,” in v. 4b with an “as much . . . as . . .” construction. Importantly, the word “become” doesn’t imply that the Son was ever inferior to the angels in his being. He was always God from eternity, as is evident from the mention (in this immediate context) of his role in creation. He did, however, take a lower position than the angels for a while (Heb 2:9). The word “become” refers to this enthronement at the right hand of the Father in v. 3e. He humbled himself but has now ascended and been recognized as superior to the angels.


4b ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ’ αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.			
as the name he has inherited is different from them.			
ὅσῳ ὅσος	as <i>ho·sō</i>	DAT SG NEUT	correlative pron
διαφορώτερον διάφορος	different <i>di·a·pho·rō·te·ron</i>	ACC SG NEUT	adj
παρ’ παρά	from <i>par’</i>	---	prep
αὐτοὺς αὐτός	them <i>au·tous</i>	ACC PL MASC	personal pron


κεκληρονόμηκεν	he has inherited	PERF ACT IND	verb
κληρονομέω	<i>ke·klē·ro·no·mē·ken</i>	3RD SG	
ὄνομα	the name	ACC SG NEUT	noun
ὄνομα	<i>o·no·ma</i>		

What is “the name” that the Son has inherited? It may be the name of “Son,” which is mentioned in the next verse (v. 5). However, in light of the exalted descriptions of the Son in this context, it’s possibly a reference to the Divine Name, the holy name of God, Yahweh, which was so revered by Jews that it was not spoken aloud but was replaced by the title *Adonai*, “Lord.” In either case, the Son is far above even the most exalted angels, the spiritual beings who dwell in the very presence of God himself. The rest of Heb 1–2 is devoted to expounding the superiority of the Son over the angels.



 **Big Idea.** As noted above, one of the challenges of preaching these four magnificent opening verses of the book is their sheer complexity and beauty. It's difficult to know what to focus on! One option in preaching such a passage is to take a "grab-bag" approach, simply focusing on the things that are most interesting to you as the preacher. But a steady diet of that approach won't help the people to whom you're preaching grow in their own understanding of the Bible or in their ability to make sense of it for themselves, understanding the author's intention and the main point of the passage. Thankfully, coming to terms with the grammatical structure of this passage provides clarity and also a helpful sermon structure. One good way to organize a sermon on these verses is by using two headings: "God Spoke" (this is the main verb of vv. 1–4) and "The Son Sat" (this is the third and climactic relative pronoun clause describing the Son). These are the main points of the passage, and they also provide an excellent homiletical structure.

 **Bridge to Theology.** The Bible's teaching on the person of Jesus is known as "Christology," and this passage makes a rich and important contribution to the Christology of Hebrews and of the entire New Testament. Jesus is referred to here as the "Son." Notice that the author alludes to Jesus' death on the cross (in his reference to Jesus making purification for sins) and also exalts Jesus very highly (by saying that Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and the exact likeness of his nature). This recognition of both Jesus' humility and exaltation foreshadows what the author will say throughout the rest of Hebrews.

 **Historical Context.** It's worth pointing out in an opening sermon on Hebrews that this book does not begin like a typical letter, with a mention of the sender and recipient, and a greeting. However, Hebrews' *ending* is more like that of a typical letter, with a benediction, final exhortation, greetings, and a grace-wish. The author refers to Hebrews as a "word of exhortation" (13:22), a term used elsewhere in the New Testament of a sermon (Acts 13:15). Hebrews appears to be a letter/sermon mixture: perhaps it was a sermon later turned into a letter. Its first recipients probably engaged with it mainly through hearing it read aloud in the gathered congregation rather than reading it privately and silently, as many Christians do today. Throughout this volume, I'll often refer to the "readers/hearers" of Hebrews (rather than just the "readers") in order to remind us of its largely oral nature and aural reception.