

## **JESUS CHRIST IS SUPREME**

### **Hebrews 1:1-4**

Like a good preacher, the author of Hebrews began with a clear statement of what he wanted to say to his audience: Jesus Christ is supreme. In many respects the very first paragraph summarized the whole “letter.” The rest is elaboration.

God’s self-revelation had come through Israel’s many prophets. Not abstract thinkers, the prophets described that revelation as God actually speaking, much as we communicate with one another in words. The process began with the great poem of creation in Genesis 1:3, “God said, ‘Let there be light.’”

We would call that *anthropomorphism*, a Greek word that means “made in human form.” However we may conceive that Transcendent Reality we call God, it may not be possible for us to know how God communicates with us in any other way. That’s our problem, not God’s. Future research may someday reveal to us exactly how that takes place through our human mind and body.

Later this year, the Tony Blair Faith Foundation and McGill University’s Centre for Research on Religion (CREOR) in the Faculty of Religious Studies will hold lecture series on “Religion and the Brain.” I hope the papers delivered in this series will be published.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, the Greek-speaking Jew who wrote this letter used the traditional language of his people to say as clearly as he could that God’s full self-revelation had come in Jesus Christ. More than that, he made the same startling statement that we read in John’s Gospel about Jesus being the Son of God, heir of all things and through whom the world was created.

He didn’t stop there. With carefully composed words, he went on to claim that Jesus was the very “reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.” Elsewhere in the NT only Colossians 1:13-18 and Revelation 22:13 came close to this superb theological statement.

Not forgetting Jesus’ death and resurrection, the author immediately referred directly to with the basic Christian interpretation of the Jewish sacrificial liturgy as the supreme means of purifying us from sin. Later he will elaborate in great detail how he understood this to have happened and what it means for all who believe.

Scholars have long recognized that Hebrews draws on some earlier Hebrew writing known as the wisdom literature. To quote Frances Taylor Gench, “Hebrews draws heavily on the image of Lady Wisdom – or Sophia – a striking female figure who emerges in Israel’s wisdom literature as an expression of God’s own being and gracious outreach to humanity.”

Some of this type of literature is found in Proverbs 8-9 and Job 28. Even more is found in the intertestamental books of Wisdom of Solomon 6-9, and Sirach 1, 6 and 24. Also in Ps. 110:1. No NT author composed a richer imagery of Jesus Christ’s death and exaltation.

Finally, the author introduces angels into his expression of Jesus Christ’s superiority. Angels came relatively late to Jewish thought and predominately only after the return from exile in Babylon (539 BCE). God was deemed to be so transcendent, far removed from human affairs. Angels were spiritual agents that acted at God’s direction to carry out God’s purposes. They were not physical in nature, but an imaginative metaphor for what God was doing. The NT reflected this view so common in later Judaism.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The picture on this folder had no title. Try to give it an appropriate title that represents it to you.
2. Can we ever think of God in any other way than “anthropomorphic” – in human form?
3. Heb. 1:3 presents what is known as “a high Christology” *i.e.* it speaks of the cosmic mission of God in Jesus Christ. Can this view still be held in our materialistic, scientific age when we are so much better educated and informed than when the letter/sermon to the Hebrews was composed?
4. What role do angels have in *your* way of thinking about God’s activity in human affairs?



## CLOSING PRAYER

**Go before us, O Lord, in all our ways, that our living each day may begin, continue and end in you, and be to the glory of your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## OPENING PRAYER

**As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.**