

# WHO HAS CREDENTIALS LIKE JESUS?

Hebrews 1:1-4

In the last two hundred years Western culture has been shaped by the ideas of such secular intellectuals as Rousseau, Darwin, Marx, Tolstoy, Hemingway, Bertrand Russell, Sartre, Orwell, Chomsky. But why should anybody listen to Rousseau or Darwin or Marx or Russell? What credentials do they have to tell us what's true?

In his book *The Intellectuals*, historian Paul Johnson examines their lives and makes clear is that these people have no credibility.<sup>1</sup> Their personal lives are characterized by self-centeredness, egoism, arrogance, abuse of others, alcoholism, drugs, sexual immorality, misogyny, financial mismanagement, lying, hypocrisy and on and on the list goes. These were miserable, wicked individuals who didn't live out their own ideas. Yet others, most probably not knowing the personal character of their mentors, listened and acted on their words plunging the West into the darkness of the 20th and 21st centuries.

So who can we trust?

Who has the credentials and character such that we can unconditionally trust what they say to be true?

Hebrews 1:1-4 (ESV)

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

With his opening sentence, the preacher of Hebrews makes his case that, above all, it is Jesus to whom we need listen. We need listen to Jesus because 1) He is God's final and complete revelation to humanity and 2) He is superior to the prophets and angels through whom God spoke in times past.

## JESUS IS GOD'S FINAL AND COMPLETE REVELATION TO HUMANITY (1:1-2a)

Hebrews 1:1-4 (ESV)

**1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

The Old Testament Scriptures were the sacred text of the messianic Jews to whom Hebrews was addressed. In this one sentence, the author sums up the whole of the Old Testament: God spoke to their Jewish ancestors from time to time, over many years, in many different ways. God spoke directly to some, as He did to Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:9-19). He spoke through dreams and visions (Genesis 37:5, 9;

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, Paul (2009-10-13). *Intellectuals* (P.S.) Harper Collins, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

40:8-19), such as those of Pharaoh (Genesis 41) and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2 & 4). He even spoke through Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:21-30). God did not reveal everything at once; this is what we call *progressive revelation* – God spoke “at many times and in many ways” through the Old Testament prophets.

But no longer.

**2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,

Without devaluing the Old Testament, the author declares that God has now spoken, not through a prophet, but through a son. The status of a Son is far superior to the status of a prophet. Therefore, what a Son reveals is far greater than what a prophet reveals. If the Hebrews received as authoritative the Old Testament revelation because it came through the prophets, how much more should they receive as authoritative the revelation that comes through a Son? That will be the application the author makes in 2:1-4.

What does it mean to be “a Son”?

This he explains in 1:2b-4.

## **JESUS, THE SON, IS SUPERIOR TO PROPHETS AND ANGELS (1:2b-4)**

Hebrews 1:2b-4 (ESV)

**2** ...whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4** having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The Son is superior to prophets and angels because:

- God appointed the *Son* heir of all things

An inheritance is passed from father to son. Jesus stands in that unique relationship to God the Father such that He has been appointed to inherit the universe as His possession (cf. Psalm 2:8, Phil 2:9-11). No prophet or angel has been appointed heir of all things.

The Son is superior to prophets and angels because:

- God, through the *Son*, created the world

John tell us:

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

God the Father did not create the world through prophets or angels, He created the world through a *Son*.

The Son is superior to prophets and angels because:

- the *Son* is the radiance of God's glory

- the *Son* is the exact imprint of God's nature

These two go together because they both declare the deity of Jesus. What God the Father is in His nature, Jesus is in His nature. To see Jesus is to see the Father. To hear Jesus is to hear the Father.

What prophet or angel possesses the divine nature? The Son is superior to prophets and angels because He is deity.

The Son is superior to prophets and angels because:

- the *Son* upholds the universe by the word of his power

What He made He sustains. Many commentators interpret this to mean that the Son is directing the universe, but I personally believe that Jesus, the Son, literally holds together the atoms out of which He has made the material universe. The design of the atom is such that it should not be able to hold together. It is a perpetual testimony that the Son made it and holds it together by the power of His word.

Of what prophet or angel can that be said?

The Son is superior to prophets and angels because:

- the *Son* sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (after making purification for sins)

Jesus presently is seated in the highest place of honor and influence. He is there because He accomplished purification for the sins of mankind. He is sitting down because His work is completed; no other sacrifice for sin is necessary or possible. And here, the author of Hebrews subtly anticipates one of the main themes of his sermon – Jesus our High Priest. It is only as a High Priest that Jesus could have accomplished purification for sins.

Which prophet or angel made purification for sins? Which prophet or angel is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High?

I have made reference to both prophets and angels, but angels are not introduced until verse 4.

Hebrews 1:4 (ESV)

**4** having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The author began by contrasting the prophets and the Son. Here, he is contrasting the angels and the Son for the same purpose: to make the point that the Son is God's final and complete revelation to mankind superior to His revelation that came through prophets and angels. We see this in Hebrews 2:2-3.

Hebrews 2:2-3 (ESV)

**2** For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, **3** how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord...

Like bookends, the author begins with the Old Testament prophets and ends with the angels. His point is that God has now spoken by His Son Whose message is superior

to the message of the prophets and angels *because* the credentials of the Son are superior to the credentials of the prophets and angels.

This is relevant and critical to the original recipients of Hebrews who were being tempted to reject the message that came through Jesus and return to the message that came through the Old Testament prophets and the angels who mediated the Law of Moses (Gal. 3:19-20). Why would you reject the message of One with vastly superior credentials?

The same holds true today.

Whose words can we trust?

Who is telling the truth?

Who has credentials like Jesus?

Do the people you are listening to, including yourself, have credentials like Jesus?<sup>2</sup>

Listen to Jesus! You can unconditionally trust everything He says about everything. He is the only sure and trustworthy source of truth and hope in this world. And He loves you.

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<sup>2</sup> Lest anyone dismiss this as religious rhetoric, the evidence for the historical, physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead establishes the rational basis for belief in the person and credentials of Jesus.