

# Christmas Dawn – Epistle

**FINALLY, A SON**

**Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12)**

**Christmas Dawn**

**Analysis by Ron Starenko**

1Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2but in these last days has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. 3He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. [5For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? 6And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." 7Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." 8But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. 9You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." 10And, "In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; 12like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end."]

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## DIAGNOSIS: Long Ago

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Bogged Down With the Past*

A text like this collides with our culture, even with world religions. Christmas 2002 occurs when the vast majority of the world's population is bogged down with the Old Testament. The Judeo-Islamic world communities, existing as if the promise didn't exist or hasn't been fulfilled, represent a religion of law and ritual, preoccupied at best with the oracles of prophets. Whatever God spoke "long ago" is no longer considered a living speech, but rather a word of God reduced to a code of living or spiritual encounters. Our long-standing religious traditions and legends, including some that shape our Christmas celebration, idolize a "speechless" God, as if the promise didn't exist or hasn't been fulfilled. Bogged down with the past, we remain unprepared for the word that is spoken "in these last days."

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Not Hearing the Faith of Our Ancestors*

Actually, the prophets who spoke the word of God long ago were not interested in perpetuating their times or any tradition for that matter. They were preparing their contemporaries and all of us for these last days. Without the promise the Old Testament prophets would have had nothing to say then and nothing worth believing now. To keep the promise alive the prophets found themselves speaking a condemning word of judgment when the nation had forsaken or forgotten the promise and also announcing a comforting word of forgiveness to deliver those who were bogged down in their sin and rebellion. Despite the warnings of trouble ahead and the news of deliverance, by the time the Old Testament period came to an end there was only a remnant left

that held on to the promise through national disasters and long years of dislocation and exile. Was the Old Testament prophetic office coming to an end, the nation of Israel finally suffering a famine of the word of God? Is that not the danger that faces us, that we might miss out on the promise and the faith delivered to our ancestors, no longer hearing or remembering what was spoken long ago?

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Cut Off Altogether***

No judgment could be worse than having no speech from God, cut off, abandoned to a death from which there is no deliverance. As in times long ago and even so now, the world wanders hopelessly in its dead-ended religions. These religions fail to disclose the depth of our predicament before God, who speaks a resounding No to our every attempt to live according to our own terms; consequently, they have nothing to say about how we can be delivered from a God whose Yes lies outside of ourselves. When God turns us over to a “wordless” existence, we cannot survive. No longer in communication with God, we suffer the death of deaths.

## **PROGNOSIS: In These Last Days**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *A Final Yes Nevertheless***

The God of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets who followed them, is not willing to abandon anyone, no matter how undeserving we are, without speaking the final word for the sake of the world through the word and works of a Son, who belongs altogether to “these last days.” The final revelation, announced at Jesus’ birth, would be fulfilled through the everlasting Son, who is “superior to angels” (v. 4), yes, “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (v. 3), who enters our perishable flesh, our worn-out existence (v. 11), and on the cross makes “purification

for sin" (v. 3). Elsewhere in this letter the author affirms God's final Yes when he writes that the Son "appeared once and for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself" (9:26). And we get to see what our ancestors long ago longed for, namely, the revelation of the new, the promise fulfilled in and by the Son, "the firstborn" of the new creation (v. 5), whom "angels worship" (v. 6), whom God has exalted to be King "forever and ever" (v. 8).

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *The Final Response***

"These last days," including this day, the Nativity of our Lord, are for making our final response to the promise that was made "long ago." Now is the time to behold and believe in the word made flesh, seeing that our flesh is growing into the image of the Son, "the appointed heir of all things" (v. 2). What is finally spoken to us by a Son refers not only to the Son but to all who believe in him. To believe in the word and work of the Son is to share in his benefits, to become higher than the angels (v. 4), to become his "righteousness" and share his "gladness" (v. 9). "These last days" are for anticipating by faith that day when every promise of God will be fulfilled in the Son who is the "Majesty on high" (v. 3). These last days are for expecting a time when his "years will never end" (v. 12), when our hope at last is realized.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *The Final Task***

Finally, "these last days" become an opportunity for each of the faithful to be what the Son was in the days of his humiliation, servant of the living God. To be a servant of the Son is to make pure (or, at least, purer) the world in which we live. The author of Hebrews in the concluding lines of this letter knew that the "the last days" were certainly not for getting bogged down into the "old" heresies of wasting our energy in enthroning the law, or seeking refuge in rituals, or looking for salvation

in becoming spiritual. They were, quite simply, for letting "mutual love continue," for showing "hospitality to strangers, for remembering "those who are in prison," for holding "marriage...in honor by all," for living "free from the love of money," for doing good and sharing "what [we] have" (13:1-5). Our final task in worshipping the Son is to act in ways that testify that the worlds were and are worth saving, since finally we know the Son who "created the worlds" and "sustains all things by his powerful word" (v. 3).