

Hebrews 1:3

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

And He is the radiance of His glory – The Greek word translated “radiance” (ἀπαύγασμα, *apaugasma*) can mean either (1) radiance, i.e., “a shining forth from within” or (2) reflection, i.e., “a shining forth because of a brightness from without.” Both are obviously true of Yeshua. He revealed His own glory on the mountain (Matt 17:1f; Mk 9:2f; Lk 9:28f) but also was the revealer (reflector) of the Father’s glory (cf. 2Cor 3:18-4:6)

the exact representation of His nature – In the Greek, one word represents the phrase “exact representation,” χαρακτήρ (*xaraktēr*, from which we derive our English word “character”). This word is found in non-biblical Greek in the sense of “to mint or stamp a coin,” i.e., to impress the image of a ruler on the metal. Some early Greek fathers used the term to refer to the “image of God” in man (1Clement 33:4). The word is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. It is also found in the Lxx of 2Macc 4:10 –

The king agreed, and, as soon as he had seized the high-priest-hood, Jason made the Jews conform to the Greek way of life.

Clearly the author intended his readers to be reminded that the best representation they could ever have of the Father was to be found in the incarnate Son. He, like the minted coin, was and is an exact representation of the nature or essence of God.

and upholds all things – The Greek word for “uphold” (φέρων < φέρω, *pherō*) is a participle and emphasizes the present, on-going reality of the verbal action. Yeshua is constantly upholding, bearing, or guiding all things, i.e., the entire universe, to its appointed end and purpose. He is not a passive burden-bearer (as the Greek mythological Atlas), but rather guides and sustains the universe. Paul teaches the same truth in Col 1:17.

by the word of His power – The Greek has *ῥῆμα* (*hrēma*, “spoken word”) rather than *λόγος* (*logos*, “communication whereby the mind finds expression,” “thing,” “word”). While the two Greek terms clearly overlap in meaning, the emphasis here might well be upon the providential decree of God which is represented by His speaking a word. Thus, the world was created by a word (“and God said...”) and it is thus sustained by the same active providential care and direct utterance of the Messiah. He “speaks” and it is accomplished: *dictum factum*.

“Power” is the Greek word *δύναμις* (*dunamis*), “ability, strength, power,” which in this case is attributed to Yeshua. He possess the same omnipotence as does the Father with Whom He is one.

made purification of sins – The picture is clearly that of the Tabernacle or Temple, and the purification of the sinner as accomplished by the sacrificial ritual. Purification was the major concern of the 1st Century pious Jew, and is introduced here as a foreshadowing of the detailed study of Yeshua’s own sacrifice expounded later in the epistle. The aorist participle ποιησάμενος (*poiāsamenos*), “made,” stresses that the purification of sin was completed without need for further purification.

He sat down – The picture is clearly that of the Tabernacle or Temple, and the purification of the sinner as accomplished by the sacrificial ritual. Purification was the major concern of the 1st Century pious Jew, and is introduced here as a foreshadowing of the detailed study of Yeshua’s own sacrifice expounded later in the epistle. The aorist participle ποιησάμενος (*poiāsamenos*), “made,” stresses that the purification of sin was completed without need for further purification.

at the right hand of the Majesty on high – In the Semitic cultures, the right hand was understood to be the place of honor and authority. Thus Jacob crosses his hands so that his right hand rests upon Ephraim (Gen 48:14, 17) and Solomon sets a throne for Bathsheba “at his right hand” (1Ki 2:19). The metaphor of the “right hand” and its sense of “authority” and “power” is regularly used of God in the Psalms. Likewise, Aaron and his sons are initiated into their duties as cohenim by having blood placed on the right earlobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe (Lev 8:23–24; 14:14, 17, 24, 28). The use of the “right hand” as a metaphor for power, authority, strength, etc., is found throughout the Psalms:

I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Ps 16:8)

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever. (Ps 16:11)

Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand from those who rise up against them. (Ps 17:7)

You have also given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand upholds me; and Your gentleness makes me great. (Ps 18:35)

Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand. (Ps 20:6)

Your hand will find out all your enemies; Your right hand will find out those who hate you. (Psa. 21:8)

The word “majesty” (the Greek has the article, τῆς μεγαλωσύνης < μεγαλωσύνη, *megalōsunē*) is not infrequent in the Lxx as a periphrasis for God and was used in the rabbinic literature to refer to the Temple (b.Berachot 58a) and to the Messianic Age (Mid. Rab. Genesis 67.5). The only other occurrence of the word in the Apostolic Scriptures is in Heb 8:1.

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. (Heb 8:1–2)