

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Hebrews 1:1-2a

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...

There were three kids bragging about fathers:

The first one said, “My dad’s so smart he can talk for one hour on any subject.” The second replied, “My dad’s so smart he can talk for two hours on any subject.” To which the third responded, “My dad’s so smart he can talk for 3 hours and doesn’t even need a subject.”

This morning we begin to look in depth at the book of Hebrews. And we find in the opening verses of this letter the idea that God has been in the business of communicating His truth to men for some time. And unlike the dad who can ramble on for three hours without any subject, our God has communicated much to us concerning one topic in particular and that topic is the greatness and superiority of His Son Jesus Christ, especially as it relates to man’s greatest need – deliverance or salvation from his condition of sin.

The author of Hebrews reveals to us the communication of God in two primary ways. He will speak in verse one of the communication of God in the past and then in verse two speak of the communication of God in the present.

I. The Communication of God – in the Past

Our text opens up with the words, “*God, after He spoke long ago...*” It is important that we note the main subject of verses 1-2 as being God, that is God the Father. We learn here that “He spoke” – which in the Greek tense of the verb speaks of some completed action in the past. God has spoken in the past and as we will come to see more fully in verse 2, God also “*has spoken*” - again, the verb tense speaking of some past, completed action, finally and completely in His Son, Jesus Christ. But what we are to readily see from this opening statement is that God has been in the business of making Himself known to men.

Now Scripture teaches us that there are two primary ways by which God has determined to make Himself known to man.

1. General Revelation – that which may be generally known about God from observing the created world (Psalm 19:1-2; Job 26:14; Romans 1:20). This revelation is available to and knowable by everyone and will not lead one to salvation.

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2. Special Revelation – that which may be known about God, including His plan and purpose, only by means of His special communication of such truths to men. The two primary means God has employed by which to communicate such truths include the written Word and the Living Word, the Son of God, that is Jesus. Man cannot be saved apart from “special revelation.”

The author of Hebrews is most concerned about this “special revelation” by which people are able to know the heart of God – His care and concern to redeem to Himself members of Adam’s fallen, sinful race. It has been said that the Bible is a story of redemption. In truth it is “His” story about His work to redeem and repair man from the devastating and destructive effects of sin. The author of Hebrews reminds his readers of God’s communicating His story, His plan by appealing first to the record of the Old Testament. From verse one, we learn some answers to the questions, “When, to Who, How and What” was communicated by God.

1. When God Communicated – “long ago”

This is a reference to the time prior to Messiah’s coming, the Old Testament age. It is important to note that there are no less than 29 quotations and 53 allusions from the Old Testament Scriptures in the book of Hebrews. It had been some 400 years since the last prophet, Malachi, communicated the truth of God to the children of Israel. We tend to think of the documents and writings of our nation’s founding fathers as old. Yet the oldest document of our nation’s inception is less ancient than the “youngest” Old Testament document. There had been a long period of silence. The author of Hebrews now brings the Old Testament to their attention, which shows the validity and necessity of the Old Testament Scriptures. They are indeed ancient and sacred. In 2 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul reminded Timothy to *“continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings [Old Testament Scriptures] which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

Now while the “long ago” Old Testament Scriptures and revelation certainly could “lead” a person to salvation in pointing him to Christ, this ancient revelation was nonetheless incomplete and needed the fulfilling and completing revelation of the New Testament. This is in fact what the author of Hebrews is setting up with this idea of “long ago” in verse 1 in contrast to “in these last days” in verse 2

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– a contrast between Old promises and the New fulfillment. We are being prepared to see the superior claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ over the long ago and ancient rites and rituals instituted in the Old Testament.

2. To Whom God Communicated – “to the fathers”

This is the first group of two sets of people mentioned in these opening verses that the author of Hebrews is going to contrast. In the past, God spoke “to the fathers” that is, to the Old Testament forefathers, as opposed to “us” (v. 2) here in the last days. It was to the forefathers and their children that God had spoken to long ago. This term “fathers” was a clearly identifiable term to the Jewish people as representing the ancient leaders and congregation of Israel. If you would turn to Acts 13:32-33, we see the apostle Paul convey these two ideas of “long ago” and “to the fathers” as well.

32 And we preach to you the good news of the promise [Old Testament revelation of “long ago”] made to the fathers [the leaders and representatives of the ancient congregation of Israel], 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'

So again, the term “to the fathers” is meant to point us to the people of the Old Covenant, under the ancient law of God given by Moses and will shortly be contrasted with the “to us” in verse 2.

3. How God Communicated – “in the prophets; in many ways”

This brings us to “how” it is said that God communicated “to the fathers.” Our text actually presents two thoughts here. To begin with, we are told that the first means by which God granted to the fathers His special revelation concerning Himself and salvation was “in the prophets.” The prophets are the first group of the second set of people being contrasted. We first noted that the “fathers” and “us” are to be contrasted, now, when speaking of how God communicated His special revelation, we have “in the prophets” here in verse 1 which will shortly be contrasted with “in His Son” in verse 2.

The use of the term “prophets” would also be a familiar term to the first audience of this book as a reference to the holy men of God who faithfully proclaimed and recorded the words of God. The apostle Peter would make sure

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that his readers understood that such prophets were under the guidance and power of God when they spoke and wrote. In 2 Peter 1:20-21 we read:

20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

God communicated His word to the ancient peoples of Israel through men called “prophets.” And while they did accurately record the message and revelation of God, and while they were certainly men of generally high character and spiritual grit, they were nonetheless men. This is how God chose to reveal Himself “*long ago*” – “*in the prophets.*”

But if you will let us set aside for a moment the phrase, “*in many portions*” – we will come back to it – the last phrase of verse one also tells us how God spoke “*long ago*” as it says He did this “*in many ways.*” While the author does not specifically define for us what he means, this would have been easily discernable to the first readers. How did God communicate His special revelation in the past? The Jewish people certainly knew - for God had communicated His truths via a variety of means including Dreams (like those that Joseph both had and those he interpreted for others; Genesis 37, 40-41); Visions (like Isaiah’s vision of the glory of God in Isaiah 6); Theophanies or Christophanies (which are simply pre-incarnate visitations of Jesus in the Old Testament (like Lord’s visit to Abraham in Genesis 18); Angels (like the Angel Gabriel’s visit to Daniel in Daniel 9); and through the prophets (like Zechariah who had “*the word of the Lord*” come to them – Zechariah 1:1). Glorious and wondrous are the “*many ways*” God communicated His truth to man. But remember these vast and varied ways which reveal “*how*” God had previously communicated His truths are about to be contrasted and *superceded* by something or someone better.

4. What God Communicated – “*in many portions*”

Let us turn our attention then to the phrase “*in many portions*” as this reveals to us the “*what*” God communicated. Again, while the author of Hebrews is not being specific, telling us at this time exactly “*what*” God communicated “*long ago*” - the first readers would clearly know what was meant. The idea of “*in many portions*” may perhaps be more understandable translated “*bit-by-bit.*” This tells us of the progressive nature of God’s previous revelation. As we have already noted, to know anything about God, He must tell us. In the past God

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revealed the truth and fullness of Himself and His salvation progressively, piece by piece, and bit by bit. We call this progressive revelation, the process by which God builds truth upon truth, precept upon precept. The reality is that God has moved man from incomplete truth to more complete truth with the coming of His Son.

II. The Communication of God – in the Present

Having examined what was communicated in the past, the author now turns our attention to what He has done for us in the present. It is important to note that the verb *“has spoken”* is again in a tense that indicates past completed action. But whereas God’s previous communication started and ended with the prophets, this final communication of God started and ended with His Son, Jesus Christ. And like verse one, we find answers to the “When, to Whom, How and What” questions.

1. When God Communicated – *“in these last days”*

In contrast to God having spoken *“long ago”* - verse 2 tells us that *“in these last days”* - that is now, in the present, God has spoken differently. The idea here is of the finality and completeness of the gospel revelation. Another way to translate this is *“at the last of these days”* meaning that the last days have been inaugurated, that is ushered in, with the coming of Messiah. *“In these last days”* then speak not simply of the past week or so of the author, but of a time period. There were the “days of old, the days of the prophets” and now there is *“these last days”* the days of Christ’s message. What is exciting about this is that we learn we are included here, for we are also *“in these last days”* which began when Christ started His Church and will end when He returns to take us to heaven.

2. To Whom God Communicated – *“to us”*

Remember that the author has this theme of contrasts and so he contrasts the *“fathers”* of verse one, who represented ancient Israel under the law of Moses and the prophets, with *“us”* who are under or better said, in the Son. There is something of importance to note here. Although I have not emphasized this to you yet, the Hebrews is an incredibly “Jewish” book. There have been some who question the validity and application of its truths to “Gentile” Christians like ourselves, but I see this book being applicable to all Christians by virtue of this statement - that *“God has spoken to us...”* You see, if the *“fathers”* are those under the law of Moses and the prophets, then the *“us”* here in verse 2 pictures

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those who are under or “in Christ,” in whom there is no Jew or Gentile (Galatians 3:28). So while this book has some pointed things to say to “Jewish” Christians who were being tempted to go back to Judaism, the truths and principles are true for all Christians. God has communicated “to us” in the church age.

3. **How God Communicated – “in His Son”**

I would like you to now see “how” God communicates to us “in these last days.” In the past it was “in the prophets, in many ways” but now it is “in His Son.” If anyone was tempted to go back to and venerate the prophets, these first readers of Hebrews were. Yet the author points out that God *has spoken*, a finished act, completely and finally in His Son, Jesus Christ. What we learn here is that it is impossible to look for God apart from or outside of Christ. The so-called silence of God, whether it was the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, or the time that has past since the giving of the New Testament, is only imagined by the world. For God *has spoken to us* in the past through creation and through His Word via the prophets, but now, in the present, via His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and His special New Testament revelation, God has spoken most completely. In John 15:15 our Lord Jesus said, “All things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” All that we need for life and godliness has been given to us in Jesus. Look at how the apostle John states it in John 1:16-18,

16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

In and through the Person of Jesus Christ, God has perfectly and completely communicated everything that a person needs to know for true life and happiness. There is nowhere else to turn and no one else to trust. The author of Hebrews here wants his readers to think through the implications of this contrast between God’s *having* spoken previously “in the prophets,” but now “in His Son.” I submit to you at least seven such thoughts:

1. The previous conveyors of truth, the prophets were *many* in number, one succeeding the other, in multiple time periods – but now we have Christ, the *One*, who is the final source of truth.

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2. The prophets gave God's revelation "*in many ways*" – but Christ gave us God's revelation *solely* as God incarnate dwelling among us (John 1:14).
3. The prophets, although servants of God, were *sinful* men (Isaiah 6:5; Daniel 10:8) – whereas Christ as perfect and *sinless* (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22).
4. The prophets were not continually filled with the Holy Spirit. The word of the Lord came to them, but *they did not possess the word* of the Lord – yet we are told that *Christ was the Word* in John 1:1.
5. The prophets *did not comprehend* the depth of their own message (1 Peter 1:10-11) – but Christ came to *fully disclose* and perfectly make known God (John 1:18, 14:9; 17:3).
6. The prophets did not comprehend the *fullness* of the message of the Old Testament – but *Christ unveiled and revealed the mystery* (Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:25-28).
7. The prophets had to testify with John the Baptist, "*He was not the light, but he came to testify about the Light* (John 1:8) – yet *Christ was the true Light* (John 1:9) and testified in John 8:12, "*I am the Light of World...*"

So then, while the author of Hebrews certainly validates and defends the authority and importance of the Old Testament and the men who recorded it, he also, in no uncertain terms, pushes the reader to see and contemplate the superiority of the Son and His message over these others. God has spoken to us "*in His Son.*" This is "how" He did it and there is no better way by which He could have spoken.

4. **What God Communicated – "in His Son"**

Our last point is simply "what" God communicated. You may notice in the outline that the same phrase used to speak of "how" God spoke - is being used to tell us "what" God spoke. For "*in His Son*" not only tells us "how" God spoke but it also tells us what He spoke. Although our Bible translations have the word "*His*" in the text, this word is not found in the Greek. It has been placed there to help us understand the text, but verse two literally reads, "*in these last days has spoken to us in Son.*" Now that is certainly an unusual reading. What could this possible mean?

This phrase "*in Son*" speaks not simply of a person, but also of the nature or type of revelation given. Let me illustrate the idea to you this way (no – I am not "speaking in tongues"):

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Dios, habiendo hablado muchas veces y de muchas maneras en otro tiempo a los padres por los profetas, 2 en estos postreros días nos ha hablado por el Hijo...

My poor pronunciation and accent notwithstanding (I beg your forgiveness Mr. Baca), do you know what I just spoke to you? Some of you do not know the words but you know the “what” as I just spoke to you Hebrews 1:1-2a in Spanish. Did you hear what I just said to you? I spoke to you “*in Spanish*” – in a different language altogether from English. To speak to you “in Spanish” is of course neither better nor worse than speaking in English, except that most of us don’t understand it – but you did know that there was something different, there was a different nature or quality in what I spoke to you. This is the idea of the phrase “*in Son*” - the point being that while in the past God spoke “in the imperfect and incomplete language of the prophets” He has in these last days spoken to us in the perfect and complete language of the Son.

God spake
Formerly by the Prophets
Now by the Son
Then to the Fathers
But now to us
Then at various times
Now as at the end of times
- *John Calvin* -

For a group of people who were tempted to go back to an rely upon the imperfect and incomplete revelation of men, even good and godly men like the prophets of old, the author of Hebrews is seeking to show that now God has spoken to us completely and finally in Jesus Christ. And in the verses and chapters that follow, the author will show how vastly superior Christ and His revelation is to all others.

By way of brief application then, let me remind you that we live in a time when there are many in the church who claim to receive revelation directly from God. Yet, if the book of Hebrews is true, then we must not miss the emphasis placed here upon the superiority of Christ and the finality of His revelation of God’s truth. We must not be tempted to think that what we have before us in the Written Word is incomplete or insufficient to address our needs and our

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concerns. For this is the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. It communicates to us our condition, as sinners in need of deliverance, in need of cleansing, in need of healing, and in need for restoration and reconciliation – and it communicates the answer to these issues – faith alone in the greatness, supremacy and sufficiency of the work and person of Jesus Christ. Astrology cannot meet man's need. Materialism cannot meet man's need. Academia cannot meet man's need. Sensuality cannot satisfy man's need. God has communicated to us, in these last days, that we must look to Christ and Him alone for life and life abundantly. We must not come to think that we are not just as prone to wander and regress to old ways of thinking and old ways of living just as these first Jewish readers of this letter were. As the song we sang earlier recorded:

*“Of may Thy counsels, Mighty God my roving feet command,
Nor I forsake the happy road that leads to Thy right hand.”
-Isaac Watts*

Are your feet “roving”? Are you looking elsewhere for happiness, joy, contentment, peace and satisfaction? Could it be that you have subtly lost you first love – the excitement and exhilaration of not only calling Jesus Lord, but also of trusting Him completely as Lord?

Beloved, let us not look back, as Lot's wife, and run the risk of never being able to look toward God. Let us heed the words of Philippians 3:13-14, *“forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead...press[ing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* Are you pressing for the goal? Are you pressing for the perfection and completeness of Christ? Remember the words of 1 Peter 1:14, *“As obedient children, to not be conformed to the former lusts [the old ways] which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior...”*

The only way in which we can fight the temptation to go back to old ways that seem or seemed to satisfy is to fight and strive to know that only Christ is sufficient, that only in Christ has God given us everything we need for life and godliness for He has spoken to us in His Son. He has communicated His truth and we can go to no other place or source to find true and meaningful life.

Let me close with this idea of Christ sufficiency and supremacy in not only communicating the fullness of God's truth but of also finding fullness in Him alone by having you turn to Colossians 2:9-10;

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9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete...

If you are in Christ, “you have been made complete [full].” Perhaps you have not experienced that for some time. Get your eyes focused afresh and anew upon Jesus – for He is life. And if you have never experienced this sense and reality of true fullness, forsake your old ways of thinking and your old attempts for satisfaction, for they are sin and will only lead to your damnation. Rather, confess you are a sinner, broken and in need of healing and restoration. Trust completely on a complete Savior who has paid it all, done it all, secured it all. Call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

And may each of us know and experience in ever-greater fashion, that God has communicated to us – finally and completely in His Son. May we desire to know in ever-greater fashion His Son.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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