

Text: Heb 1.1-2a

We turn to Hebrews, a book I have long wanted to preach through, though I thought for years, “I’m not old enough.” So... now I am, I guess.

We spent three weeks on Introducing Hebrews. I won’t go back over that ground, but if you missed it, you can check out those lessons on our website.

What is Hebrews about? It’s about loyalty to Jesus Christ. William Farrar put it this way:

“The author does not begin, as St Paul invariably does, with a greeting which is *almost* invariably followed by a thanksgiving; but at once, and without preface, he strikes the keynote, by stating the thesis which he intends to prove. His object is to secure his Hebrew readers against the peril of an apostasy to which they were tempted (α) by the delay of Christ’s personal return, (β) by the persecutions to which they were subjected, and (γ) by the splendid memories and exalted claims of the religion in which they had been trained.”¹

The author’s Hebrew Christian readers were wavering. They *thought* that if they went back to Judaism, they could gain security of their persons. Three things tempted them:

1. The delay of the second coming
2. The troubles they earned for identifying with the first coming (*i.e.*, persecution)
3. The “golden age” memories of their former times in Judaism

The biggest problem was #2. My dad used to say, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

These Christians were saying, “Yeah, let’s go on out of here.” (That is not a response of “toughness,” in case you were wondering.)

As we go through the book, it seems that some of their number *had* abandoned Christianity, hoping for safety.

Hebrews is written to counteract that.

¹ F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 24.

But the author doesn't simply say, "don't do it." He provides a reason – the supreme reason – why they should "stay by the stuff."

The reason is the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

And the reason we know of Christ's supremacy is because *God Has Spoken*.

Our loyalty to Christ depends on the reliability, the truthfulness of God's word.

- We will experience difficult times.
- We will get weary.
- We will suffer *similar* temptations (not exactly the same).

We need something to hang onto. That something is God's word. That's where Hebrews starts, without any preliminaries, it jumps right into the proposition for the whole book, based on what God has said.

Read Heb 1.1-4, text 1-2a

Proposition: The ground of all truth is God's speech. We cannot understand our world or any part of reality without hearing (and obeying) God's word.

I. God's speech in the past

A. The intriguing opening to the book

πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως — *polumerōs* and *polutropōs*

1. I give the pronunciation so you can catch the word figure
2. Moffatt's translation tries to catch this in English with "forms and fashions"

B. God's past speech came in "many portions" (NAU) ["sundry times"] (KJV)

1. The word can refer to something that occurs "in many parts" as if in *fragments*.²
 - a. Or, the word can refer to something that occurs in many manners, different modes³

² Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 613.

³ Louw and Nida, 787.

- b. Second word definitely carries the alternate meaning, so we would think the “fragmentary” idea is prominent here

2. The OT records

- a. We have a message through the OT about the Messiah that is fragmentary
- b. Starts with Genesis 3.15, the seed of the woman
- c. Proceeds through many different contributions from Moses, Samuel, the other prophets

“It has never been God’s method to reveal all His relations to mankind at once. He revealed himself ‘in many portions.’ He lifted the veil fold by fold.”⁴

C. God’s past speech came “in many ways”

1. Lexicons are quite definite here

- a. “pert. to a variety of modes of expressing someth., *in many ways*”⁵
- b. “pertaining to that which occurs in many kinds of ways”⁶

2. What were the ways? Farrar tells us:

“The ‘many manners’ of the older revelation were Law and Prophecy, Type and Allegory, Promise and Threatening; the diverse individuality of many of the Prophets, Seers, Warriors, Kings, who were agents of the revelation; the method of various sacrifices; the messages which came by Urim, by dreams, by waking visions, and ‘face to face’ (see Num. 12:6; Ps. 89:19; Hosea 12:10; 2 Pet. 1:21). The mouthpiece of the revelation was now a Gentile sorcerer, now a royal sufferer, now a rough ascetic, now a polished priest, now a gatherer of sycomore fruit. Thus the separate

⁴ Farrar, *Hebrews*, 24.

⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 588.

revelations were not complete but partial; and the methods not simple but complex.”⁷

D. God in the past spoke to the fathers

1. We sometimes talk about “the word of God” – the thoughts, the mind, the thinking of God
2. Here we mean the “speech of God” – the things the fathers heard *through the prophets* —
 - a. There were “speaking prophets” (Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, others)
 - b. And there were “writing prophets” (Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.)
3. The last “writing prophet” was Malachi (ca. 450 BC)
4. God’s speech is called “The central assertion of the Prologue.”⁸
5. Even more, F. F. Bruce says:

“‘*God has spoken.*’ This initial affirmation is basic to the whole argument of this epistle, as indeed it is basic to Christian faith.”⁹

6. Last point here: it is *God* who spoke (through men)

What God said was *true, comprehensive, anticipatory*, but ... *incomplete*.

II. God’s speech in the last days

A. The speech of God is now “in these last days”

1. There is a parallel structure between v. 1 and v. 2
 - a. “in the long ago” vs. “in these last days”
 - b. “in the prophets” vs. “in [the] Son”

⁷ Farrar, *Hebrews*, 25.

⁸ Hodges, “Hebrews in BKCNT,” 780.

⁹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 45.

2. The meaning of “last days”

a. The term references OT eschatology (as well as NT eschatology)

1) The first prophetic mention of the term is in Dt 4.30

Dt 4.30 “When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.”

2) Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all speak of the “latter days”

Jer 30.24 The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back Until He has performed and until He has accomplished The intent of His heart; In the latter days you will understand this.

Jer 48.47 “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab In the latter days,” declares the LORD. Thus far the judgment on Moab.

Ezek 38.8 “After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, *whose inhabitants* have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.

Dan 2.28 “However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind *while* on your bed.

Dan 10.14 “Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet *future*.”

- b. From our perspective, we think of the “last days” as *not here yet* — from the Bible perspective, the last days begin with Messiah

Heb 1.2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...

- 1) The coming of the Son initiates the last days
- 2) The coming of the Son *concludes* God’s speech

“His word was not completely uttered until Christ came; but when Christ came, the word spoken in him was indeed God’s final word. ... The story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ, but there is no progression beyond him.”¹⁰

- 3) Revelation ceases when the spokesmen of Christ (the apostles) cease speaking

“His statement establishes the fact of progressive revelation and strongly suggests the cessation of revelation in the apostolic age.”¹¹

B. God’s spokesman is the Son

1. Interestingly, he is referred to here as “Son” not “the Son”
2. This construction occurs seven times in Hebrews, along with the more conventional “the Son” several times
3. This speaks to the quality of his spokesman here: on a different level than “the prophets” (more on this in a later message)

C. The emphasis here is on who is speaking, not dividing between his spokesmen

1. God spoke in the prophets
2. God has spoken in the Son
3. The point is: God has spoken — everything God says is true

¹⁰ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 46.

¹¹ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Heb 1.1.

III. God's speech today

A. As noted, the speech from the Son culminates God's speech

1. The Son appointed apostles to follow him and speak for him
2. The Son only speaks through the apostles

thus the apostolic test for the canon — Bible writers must either be apostles or closely connected to the apostles

B. All God's speech has authority

1. We must understand it in its context
2. We must not impose our opinions on it, allow our prejudices to read our interpretations into it

This is the most challenging part of Bible study.

3. We must allow God to speak to us, to hear what he says, allow his speech to form our minds, and obey His commands

As I think about God speaking, I am reminded of the Mount of Transfiguration.

- Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain

Mt 17.2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

- With Jesus, Moses and Elijah appeared: the representatives of the prophets
- Peter spoke a little foolishly, then God himself spoke

KJV Mat 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him.**

Conclusion:

Here is the question: do you hear him?

Proposition: The ground of all truth is God's speech. We cannot understand our world or any part of reality without hearing (and obeying) God's word.

How would we know if you hear him?

You *must* obey him.