

HEBREWS (Lesson 2)

We now begin the doctrinal portion of the book of Hebrews found in chapters 1-10.

If we had to boil the message of Hebrews down to one sentence it would be: "Christ is better than Judaism."

Judaism had its time and its place. It prepared for Christ. It typified Christ. But it was not Christ. It was a partial revelation of God to man, but it was not that final and full revelation.

Judaism merely foreshadowed Christ. But when Christ came, Christ overshadowed Judaism.

Judaism was a dim light. Christ is that brilliant light in which all other lights are overwhelmed.

Example: At night, we look up into the heavens and we see all kinds of lights. We see the moon, we see stars. Some stars seem rather bright and others are very dim. But when the sun comes up in the morning, all of those lights become invisible because of the great light of the sun. The sun swallows them all up in its brilliance and we forget those dim lights of the night.

And that is the way it was with Jesus. When he appeared his excellence and his brilliance swallowed up all lesser light. He was the consummation of it all. He was that to which everything in the Old Testament pointed. The condemnation of the law gave way to the righteousness of grace. The Old Covenant ran its course and gave way and was swallowed up ("abolished"; 2 Cor.3:13) in the New.

Our Bibles recognize this great turning point in history. Everything before Jesus is called the Old Testament. But when Jesus came, we call it the New Testament.

If I can quote J. Vernon McGee,

“We need to keep in mind that this epistle is written to Hebrew believers who stood at the juncture of two great dispensations. The dispensation of law had come to an end. The sacrifices in the temple that had once been so meaningful were now meaningless. What God had before required was now actually sin for a believer to practice.”

You see, before, it was required that Jews bring their sacrifices to the temple. But, now that the once-for-all sacrifice has been offered, it is forbidden to bring sacrifices to the temple.

The book of Hebrews is written first and foremost to these Hebrew believers who are tempted to fall back to the old ways of Judaism rather than to continue in the new way of Christ.

So, in what way is Christ superior to the Old Way of Judaism?

Christ is Superior to the Prophets

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . .

You are going to notice in the book of Hebrews that Paul continuously holds up Jesus and then brings up some Old Testament feature in comparison to Him. And, you will always be struck with the overwhelming superiority of Jesus. And this will be a powerful argument to prevent Jewish believers from returning to that old, inferior way.

Notice here in verses one and two the first comparison.

In times past God spoke by the prophets.
In these last days God spoke by his Son.

There is quite a contrast here which shows that God's revelation in the last days is superior to his revelation in times past. In the Old Testament, God merely sent human servants. They were godly men, but also weak and sinful men. But in the New Testament, God sent his very

own son. And this would suggest that God spoke in the last days in a better way because a son is better than a servant.

Now let's take a look at the text. And our text begins with two assumptions.

It assumes that God exists.

The book starts with the word God. This is a very similar beginning to the book of Genesis. "In the beginning God . . ."

You will notice that this book and in fact the entire Bible begins with a certain axiom and that axiom is that God exists.

Example: Now some of you may have studied mathematics and particularly geometry. And you know that geometry is founded on certain known truth or axioms. And you begin with those axioms and you build on those axioms logically so that if a is true and b is true then c is true. And your entire system of geometric truth is built on those basic axioms.

And the Bible begins with the most basic axiom of all and that is, God exists. Genesis and Hebrews both start out assuming that God exists and neither book makes any attempt to prove it. The Bible as a whole makes no attempt to prove God's existence. Now if you go to Bible School you will encounter courses that offer many philosophical arguments for the existence of God, but these are utterly unnecessary.

The Bible says,

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

Psalm 19:1

Furthermore, the Bible says,

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.

Ps. 14:1

So, Hebrews assumes that God exists. But also,

It assumes that God has spoken.

So, here in Heb.1:1 we have the testimony that the Old Testament is a result of God speaking. That is, it is divinely inspired.

God spake in time past.

Now this is a most wonderful truth here because we would have only the most general and sketchy knowledge of God if he didn't reveal himself to us. We are, after all, mere creatures. We are his created beings. And we could know very little about Him if he didn't speak to us.

Now he wasn't required to speak to us. He wasn't in debt to us such that He had to speak. And especially after the fall of Adam, he could have left mankind alone in sin and misery. He could have let us die and go to hell without any further communication.

But he chose to speak. And it says in times past he spake. What a wonderful and gracious God we have that he would condescend to speak to worms such as us.

Example: When people offend us, what do we often do? We turn our faces away from them and we refuse to speak to them. Sometimes marriages fall into that rut, don't they? Someone offends the other and then they don't speak for days.

God would have been justified in turning his face from us and never speaking again. But, in verse one it says he spake in times past.

Now when God spoke in times past it says he did so in sundry times and in divers manners.

God spoke at sundry times.

Now when it says that God spoke at sundry times, you might think that this means primarily that God spoke at many different times to many different people in the Old Testament. And certainly that is true. He spoke to Adam and to Cain and to Abraham and Moses and to many prophets. But, this doesn't really convey the main idea here.

The word “sundry times” is actually one word in the greek - polumeros.

And this word is composed of poly (many) and meros (parts). And the idea is that God spoke in bits and pieces in time past. He didn't just come right out and tell man everything at once.

I suppose he could have dictated the entire Scriptures to Adam and we would have had the entire Word of God from the beginning. But, in time past, God spoke in polumeros - in bits and pieces; a little here, a little there.

God spoke to Abraham. But God never gave the law to Abraham. Abraham had a little bit of revelation. The law came later through Moses. And then, after Moses, God spoke to prophets in little bits and pieces.

And so, God spoke at sundry times, or, in bits and pieces in times past. And,

God spoke in divers manners.

There was no one way of speaking. God spoke in many ways. God spoke in dreams as he did with Abraham and Joseph. God spoke with an audible voice as with Moses. Sometimes God spoke through angels. God spoke through types and through rituals that had deep, significant meaning behind them. God spoke through poetry and prophecy which he divinely inspired through the pen of Solomon and David and others. God used all these different ways over a long period of time in times past. God used about 45 different writers and communicated his word over a period of about 1,500 years. But, in particular,

God spoke through prophets

Now all of these prophets were mere human beings, sinful human beings, imperfect human beings. They occupied a place of great honor among the people simply because God spoke to them and through them. But, God would speak to a prophet for a period of time and then there were long periods of silence or perhaps God stopped speaking at all to that prophet.

So, God spoke in bits and pieces. And, he spoke in various ways in

times past. And he spoke through human instruments.

Now all of this is designed not to show the glory of revelation in olden times, but to show the relative imperfect state of divine revelation in the Old Testament. Remember, Paul is not trying to show how glorious revelation was in the Old Testament. (although anytime God speaks it is glorious) But he is showing the relative inglorious nature of it.

1. It was only bits and pieces. (polumeros)
2. It was incomplete.
3. It was complex rather than simple.

Under the Old Testament, revelations were made *polumerwv kai polutropwv*, in bits and pieces and at various times, by various persons, in various laws and forms of teaching, with various degrees of clearness, under various shadows, types, and figures, and with various modes of revelation, such as by angels, visions, dreams, mental impressions.

4. It was given to servants, not a son.
5. It was given over a long period of time (1000 years from Moses to Malachi)

Now, it says, this revelation in times past was given to the fathers. And the question is, "Who are the fathers?"

And the answer is that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and Joshua and David and Isaiah and all the prophets of Israel - they are the fathers. And so, God spoke to and through the nation of Israel.

You know, God chose the nation of Israel partly to be the conduit of His Word. God didn't speak to other nations. But he spoke to Israel.

What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

Romans 3:1,2

So, in times past, God spoke:

In many bits and pieces,
In different ways, including
By the prophets
Unto the fathers (that is, to Hebrews)

But now we come to the contrast in verse two.

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son

By way of introduction to this verse, I want you to notice the great divide of history. In verse one the reference is to times past. In verse two, the reference is to the last days. These are the two great historical divisions. There are former days and latter days.

This is how your Bible is divided. There is the Old Testament and the New Testament. Now the Old Testament was not called old in times past. When they read the Scriptures in the temple on the Sabbath Day they didn't say, "Now open your bibles to the Old Testament." And in fact, it was not old to them.

It was quite new when Moses walked down from the mountain with the tables in his hands. It was in full force when Moses read it to the people. And when the prophets in times past spoke the word of God it was not old at all. It was fresh and new and appropriate for the times.

But, by and by, when something better came along, when that brighter light shone, then that revelation in times past became old.

Example: When I was a kid I got a baseball glove for Christmas. And it was a wonderful glove. It fit my little hand perfectly and I was so pleased with it. And I played catch and played in little league with it and I made some great catches with that glove. But a couple of years later I opened a Christmas package and it was a bigger, better glove. And all of a sudden, that first glove was my old glove and it was useless because I had a better glove. The usefulness of that first glove had faded away in comparison to the superior usefulness of the new glove.

See Hebrews 8:6-13

Now we want to notice the contrast that is evident between verse 1 and verse 2.

1. One is time past and the other is these last days. There is an implication here and that is that revelation is obviously and naturally more complete now than then. Information builds on information and knowledge builds on knowledge. And it is quite obvious that in the past times they did not have the information that was later spoken in the last days. Therefore, in past times, information was less complete than in the last days.

Also, if these are the last days, then there is no more revelation to follow. There is a finality to the words spoken by Jesus. This is the final word. There are no more ages to come. These are the last days. And when God speaks in the last days it is the complete story of redemption. There are no more building blocks of information. The words of Jesus are final and complete.

2. The messenger was far superior in the last days. It was formerly prophets. It is now a son who brings the message.

See the parable in Mt. 21:33-37

Jesus is the only begotten son. The prophets were not sons like Jesus. They were mere servants. But Jesus, is the one in whom the Father is well pleased.