

# Lessons From Hebrews

## Lesson One

(1:1-2)

### GOD AND REVELATION

**1** In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

**1:1 — many and various ways** — The old covenant came in “parts and pieces” over many years, perhaps as many as two thousand years in respect to the written revelation, stretching from the time of the patriarch Job to the prophet Malachi. It is also true that God spoke to those who lived before the actual giving of the law in 1445 B.C., as is clear from the early chapters of Genesis.

**God spoke** — He first revealed himself in a written revelation in the book of Job, written sometime in the Patriarchal age. The great majority of the old covenant in a written form began at Moses’ time, progressing through some one thousand years to Malachi, about 400 B.C.

**to our fathers** — This may indicate that the writer and the first readers were Jewish in nature. However, the fact is that any Christian is a son of

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Abraham (Gal. 3:26-29) and thus has a spiritual heritage within "faith's hall of fame" whether he be Jew or Gentile. As pointed out many times and ways in the new covenant scriptures (Luke 3:8-9; John 8:39-44; Romans 2:25-29; 4:1-22; 9:6ff.; I Cor. 10:1-11; etc.) the children of Abraham were characterized by faith rather than flesh per se.

**by the prophets** — Generally speaking, we think of prophets such as Isaiah or Daniel. However, many were called prophets who are not so commonly considered such, like Moses and others. Note the study at the end of this lesson, which will provide additional information on this word, its usage and meaning.

**V.2 — last days** — The New Testament uses this term in reference to the period of time beginning at Pentecost until Jesus comes again. See 2:5; then Acts 2:17; II Tim. 3:1-5; II Pet. 3:3. A parallel expression is last time(s) as in these texts I Peter 1:20; Jude v. 18; but see I Peter 1:5. Note I John 2:18, "the last hour."

The expression is defined as the time when God spoke in (a) Son, Jesus. Through him God has revealed many things in either a much clearer manner than in the former days or new truth. As Hebrews will show, Jesus is God's last message, since there is none other capable of bringing us to God.

**a Son** — The common impulse is for Christians to say "not a Son but the Son." Some versions translate "his" Son. However the Greek text is clear: it is the quality of God's messenger that is in view, a messenger with the quality of "son" rather than "angel" or "prophet," etc. — that is the point. It is through (a) Son that God is declared and revealed, Matt. 11:25-27; John 1:18; 14:9. He is the messenger who exactly reflects and represents God whom God has chosen to be his messenger. However great the others may have been whom God used — angels, prophets, etc. — none equaled the character of "son." Therefore, as 2:1-4 says, we have a great salvation for the taking. God had spoken before, but the method he has chosen, the content of the message, and the recipients are different than before. Christianity is the message of a crucified and resurrected Lord who is himself the chief speaker, and involves the whole human race — these things are "new."

**God spoke** — There is hardly anything more significant than these two words. That there is a being, God by name, and that said being has in any way chosen to reveal himself, has few statements of equal value for mankind. It is the beginning axiom in Christianity, which posits a God who has revealed himself to mankind in a written revelation. The old covenant (covenant = will or testament) was God's first written revelation, as nearly as we know, and was the foundation for Judaism. That God should even bother with us is astounding, and that he would so clearly speak in an understandable way is but evidence of his love.

Lest the reader be unaware, there have been many in the world, both past and present, who have either denied that God has so revealed himself, or that God could have communicated any message or truth at all. It seems to this writer that the opposite is true: God has spoken, knew to whom he was speaking, fashioned his revelation (first the old and then the new) in exactly the best way to make it possible for man to know God's will well enough to "trust and obey." Any other position makes all our religious motions worse than useless.

God spoke in various ways before Jesus; and then in Jesus his son. The revelation of God in the time prior to Jesus was partial, though adequate for God's purpose. The revelation in Jesus is also partial (God has not told us everything we would like to know) but adequate for God's purpose. That is one of the blessed attributes of God: he is always just, and does whatever he does exactly right and for the good of all.

Though the revelation in the Old Covenant was partial, and is even but partial in the New Covenant, without these man could know but little of God. As I Cor. 2:11 says, "no one knows the things of God, save the spirit of God." Again, "The world by its wisdom did not know God," I Cor. 1:21. True, the handiwork of God is seen in his universe, Psalms 19; Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-29; but that was insufficient to bring man into a saving relationship with his creator — it only brought condemnation. Hence, man was but lost and undone. God deigned, then, to speak, in words, "whereby we . . . might be saved."

A prominent view of mankind in Jesus' day was that man by searching could find God. The biblical view is this: God must reveal himself. There is none of "I found God" in the Bible; rather "God found me" is the fact that is emphasized. As Paul pointed out in reference to the new covenant in I Cor. 1:18 — 2:16 and Gal. 1:11-12, man could not by his wisdom know God in any adequate way; God had to reveal what was necessary. Hence, the Christian religion rightly understood is built around a revelation directed at man's rationality, so formed that man can both understand and obey it, and adequate for all man's needs. As before stated, any other position makes man but a pawn in an unfriendly environment, without hope and without God in this world.

**he appointed the heir** — For Hebrew people and for us as well, the concept of "heir" is significant. The idea in this verse is that God's son, Jesus, has been "officially" declared to be the heir of all God's things. This idea is to be tied in with all the other points stated about Jesus. The purpose is to enhance our total understanding of the relationship of God and Jesus.

**he created** — as is brought out in other texts such as Colossians 1:16, Jesus was part of the "creation team" (note the "us" in Genesis 1:26) that

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brought the world into existence. This is a significant idea since the Scriptures make clear that God was/is responsible for all the created things in our universe. As John 1:1ff. shows, Jesus was not among the created things. Hence, Jesus is of the nature of deity (= God) and was not created, but creator.

**world** — In other texts, the Greek word is translated "ages." It carried both ideas of time and material depending upon context. The fact is that both time and material were brought into being by God, so either idea is good.

Special study on the word "prophet."

### I. The Old Testament Prophet.

#### A. Those considered as prophets include:

Abraham, Gen. 20:7  
Aaron, Ex. 7:1  
Miriam, Ex. 15:20  
70 elders, Num. 11:25  
Eldad, Num. 11:26  
Medad, Num. 11:26  
Moses, Deut. 18:15  
Miriam, Jud. 4:4  
Samuel, I Sam. 3:20  
Saul, I Sam. 10:10 (cf. 19:18ff.)  
Gad, I Sam. 22:5  
Nathan, II Sam. 7:2  
Abijah, I Kings 11:29  
Jehu, I Kings 16:12  
Elijah, I Kings 22:8  
Micaiah, I Kings 22:8  
Elisha, II Kings 6:12  
Isaiah, II Kings 19:2  
Huldah, II Kings 22:14  
Shemaiah, II Chr. 12:5  
Iddo, II Chr. 13:22 (also called a seer)  
Azariah, II Chr. 15:8  
Eliezer, II Chr. 20:37  
Jeremiah, II Chr. 36:12  
Haggai, Ezra 5:1  
Zechariah, Ezra 5:1  
Noadiah, Neh. 6:14  
Micah, Jer. 26:18  
Habakkuk, Hab. 1:1

Jonah, Matt. 12:39  
 Daniel, Matt. 24:15  
 Joel, Acts 2:16  
 David, Acts 2:30  
 Balaam, II Pet. 2:16

#### B. How they spoke for God.

Many times, the man was commanded to prophesy, as in Ezekiel's case. Their prophecy is often introduced as "The Word of the Lord came to . . . ." Note Ezek. 11:4.

Moses recounts in Numbers 11 the fact that when the 70 were chosen to help him, some of his spirit fell upon them and they then prophesied, though not afterward. Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses in ch. 12:1ff., bringing God's rebuke and this statement: "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream."

Balaam well knew that as God spoke, he must speak, Num. 22:8, 18, 38; 23:12; etc.

In recounting the wilderness experience, Moses reminded them that they disobeyed the Lord's word, which came through him, Deut. 1:26; and that they were not to add nor subtract from his words, for they were God's words, 4:2. He outlined clearly the way they would know a true prophet, in contradistinction to many false ones, as revealed in 18:18-22: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die." And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word which the Lord has spoken?' — when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him."

This is the normal understanding of a prophet in Old Testament times: one whose message and authority came directly from God. The evident illumination of Daniel in 2:27ff., and 5:17ff., are good examples of such. Amos wrote, "The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?" (3:8). The thrust of Hebrews 1:1 (God

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spoke . . . by the prophets) and that of II Peter 1:20-21 (. . . no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit from God) clearly outlines the nature of the Old Testament prophet. The prophets were God's spokesmen in many ways, doubtless, and not always in a revelational way, but we dare not divorce this facet from their work. They were spokesmen of Christ's (Rev. 19:10 "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"), and part of the foundation upon which the church was built (Eph. 2:20).

From this viewpoint, then, God punished people who disobeyed the word of the prophet, since it was God's Word through the prophet. No instances are clearer than those of Moses' prophecy in Deut. ch. 28:1ff.; Saul's sentence in I Sam. 15; or that of Hananiah in Jer. 28:17. The countless prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament point out the basic nature of the Old Testament prophet.

People then viewed the prophet (whether of God or otherwise) as one who, among other things, had a revelatory message. Note here I Kings 22:5-28. That they did have supernatural knowledge is seen in such passages as II Kings 6:8-17; though they did not always understand their message, I Pet. 1:10-12.

God often warned the people about the true nature of a prophet, as we have pointed out. Jeremiah 23:21-22 reveals that men claiming to be prophets had been speaking to Israel, but that God had not given them any message.

### II. New Testament Prophets

#### A. People so designated:

John, Matt. 11:9; 14:5; Luke 1:76

Jesus, Matt. 21:11; Acts 3:22

Zechariah, Luke 1:67

Anna, Luke 2:36

Caiaphas, John 11:51

Agabus, Acts 11:27-28

Paul, I Tim. 1:18; 4:14; II Tim. 1:6

Enoch, Jude v. 14

John, Rev. 1:3; 21:9

Others were mentioned as prophets as in Acts 13:1, or prophesying, though some were not named. Cf. Matt. 7:22; Acts 19:6; 21:9; I Cor. chs. 11-14; etc.

#### B. The Work of the Prophet

If this is revealed by word anywhere in the New Testament, the

text in Ephesians 3:4-6 is it. Paul states, "When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." If the New Testament prophet is to be understood by those in the Old Testament, part of his work would be to reveal God's truth to people (as Eph. 3 shows). Additional documentation of this would be seen in Jesus, who spoke as God directed, John 12:44-50; Paul, I Tim. 1:18, etc.; and John in Revelation.

### III. False Prophets

The Bible is full of references to these, some of which we have already mentioned. The god Baal had prophets; Zedekiah and company were opposers of Micaiah in I Kings 22; Shemaiah was such in Jer. 19:30-31; and Elymas in Acts 13:6. Others are alluded to, as in II Pet. 2:1; I John 4:1; Rev. 19:20; etc.

It seems clear that God expects Christians to use the New Testament scriptures, having been given through inspired men (such as apostles), as the standard for all of life. Any so-called prophet, whatever his message, is to be compared with the inspired scriptures. For this writer, God has spoken finally and completely in the New Testament in all things pertaining to life and godliness. Hence, I personally reject any and all prophets. If they say the same thing as is in the scriptures, I don't need it. If they speak contrary to the scriptures, I reject it. Ephesians 4:11-13 implies that God has finished his revelation to us, part of which was given through the prophets. We, then, should use what we possess to become as God expects.

## QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1:

1. Has God "spoken" to humanity before the time of our text?
2. How has he spoken?
3. What message from God, prior to the time of our text, do we have?
4. What age is meant by "last days"?
5. Why is it significant that God has spoken?
6. Were very many people designated as prophets in the Bible?
7. According to the notes, what is the idea implicit in the word "prophet"?